

Viability Review Report Town of Granum



SEPTEMBER 2019

Alberta ■

Town of Granum Viability Report

September 2019

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Executive Summary

Major Implications for Residents

This report was developed by Alberta Municipal Affairs following initial interviews with members of Town of Granum (town) council, and analysis of information from both the town and the Municipal District (MD) of Willow Creek. It has been reviewed by officials and administration of the town and the MD, and officials representing four Alberta municipal associations. The report considers two options for the future of the Granum: 1) the Town of Granum remains a corporation and council implements the recommended actions in this report according to the direction of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, or 2) the municipal corporation dissolves and Granum becomes part of the MD of Willow Creek.

The viability report highlights some of the major similarities and differences for residents under these two options, based on information available at the time of writing.

Life Continuing as a Town

If Granum remains as a town, residents will continue to elect five councillors to govern the municipality. A chief administrative officer (CAO) and staff will implement the decisions of council.

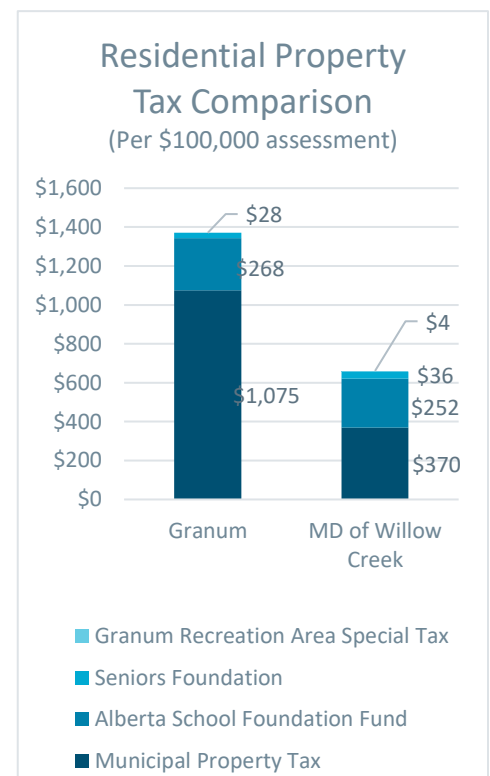
Residents can anticipate that the current levels of service will be maintained. The town's council will need to address the question of office and council meeting space for continued operation, whether by renovation of the current town office or relocation elsewhere. Taxation and utility rates will need to accommodate operational and capital costs.

Fire services will continue to be provided, subject to the ability to maintain a sufficient number of trained volunteers.

Life as a Hamlet within the MD of Willow Creek

If Granum becomes part of the MD, residents will participate in the election of a resident from Ward Two to represent them on the MD council. The municipal office will be closed in Granum and the administrative functions will be provided through the MD office in Claresholm.

The MD has indicated little change is expected in the services provided in Granum. The MD has a high level of staff expertise, knowledge, and operational capacity due to the number of employees. The MD has its own bylaw enforcement and development officers.



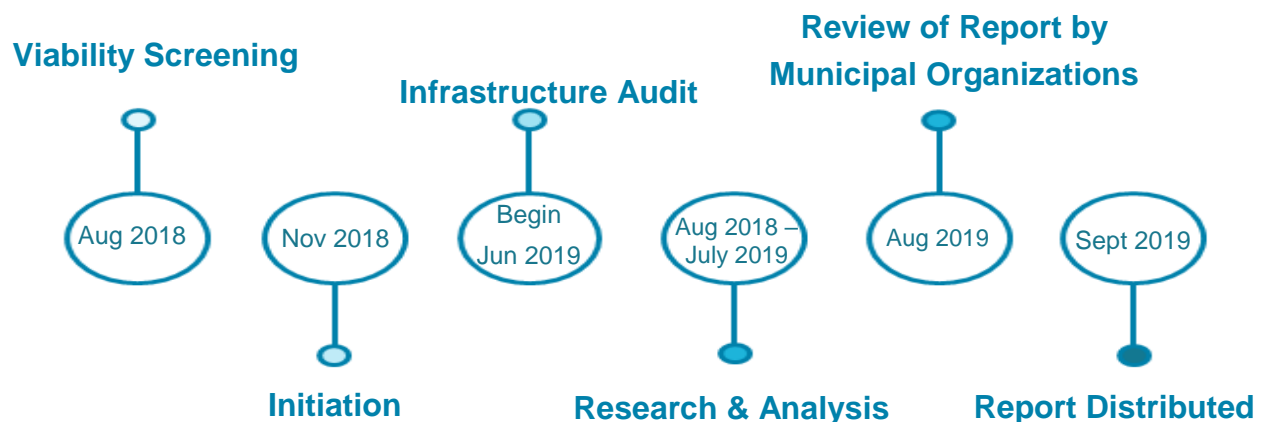
The base municipal residential and non-residential property tax rates will decrease. As they are now, property owners and residents will be responsible for local improvement taxes and utility costs.

The fire hall will continue to function as long as there is an operating volunteer fire department.

Continued operation of the library needs to be explored, as the MD does not operate any libraries. This is governed under the *Alberta Libraries Act*.

Viability Review Timeline

The following timeline shows the steps that have been taken so far in the viability review.



Next Steps

Vote of Residents

The next step of the viability review will be a vote of the electors of the Town of Granum on the question of dissolution. Residents of Granum will have the opportunity to vote on either remaining as a municipality or becoming part of the MD of Willow Creek. If the majority vote is to dissolve and become part of the MD, the Minister is required to recommend dissolution to Cabinet. If the majority of residents vote to remain a municipality, the Minister must keep Granum as an incorporated municipality and issue directives. The directives will be a set of actions the Minister feels are necessary to ensure the viability of Granum. The town will be required to report its progress on the directives for five years. Failure to implement directives would lead to Ministerial intervention.

A community information meeting will be held 7:00pm, Wednesday, October 23 at Granum School to review the viability report in advance of the vote of electors. Residents, businesses, property owners, and other interested stakeholders are invited to receive an overview of the report and ask any questions about it or about the vote itself.

The vote will be held November 6 and 7, 2019 at the Granum Drop In Centre. A special ballot has been authorized to provide a mail-in option for residents who will be unable to attend the polling station. Special ballots must be returned according to the instructions by 4:00pm, November 5, 2019. See Appendix E for details on the vote of electors.

The vote of electors is governed by the *Local Authorities Election Act (LAEA)*, including voter eligibility. Only eligible electors of the Town of Granum are permitted to vote on the question of dissolution of the Town of Granum. Property owners who are not residents are not able to vote.

The vote question will ask electors:

Based on the findings of the Town of Granum Viability Review, which one of the two options below do you support for the future of Granum? (Select one only)

Option 1. The Town of Granum remains a town and implements changes to achieve viability.

Option 2. Dissolve the Town of Granum and Granum becomes part of the Municipal of Willow Creek No. 26.

Review & Findings

Municipal Background

The Town of Granum is located within the Municipal District (MD) of Willow Creek (population 5,179). The 2016 federal census identified the population of the town as 406, down from 447 in 2011, and 415 in 2006. The town is a bedroom community, with residents primarily working in Claresholm, Fort MacLeod, Lethbridge, and other communities.

The community is located east of Highway 2, mid-way between Fort Macleod and Claresholm, a location considered as a strength.

Municipal Affairs Involvement

Municipal Affairs has been required to intervene in the Town of Granum with several formal processes over the past nineteen years.

In November 2000, electors petitioned the Minister for a dissolution study. The petition contained the required number of signatures, and a dissolution study was conducted. Following the study, a vote of the electors was held on the question of dissolution. The town electors voted 84 per cent to remain a town.

In October 2010, electors petitioned the Minister for a dissolution study. The petition did not contain the required number of signatures, and no dissolution study was conducted.

In February 2011, electors petitioned the Minister for a dissolution study. The petition did not contain the required number of signatures, but the Minister decided to conduct a dissolution study. Following the study, a vote of the electors was held on the question of dissolution. The town electors voted 60 per cent to remain a town.

In September 2013, electors petitioned the Minister for a viability review (the process that replaced the previous dissolution study process). The petition did not contain the required number of signatures, and no viability review was conducted.

In September 2015, town council requested that Municipal Affairs conduct a municipal corporate review of the town. The review was conducted, and the resulting report made 22 recommendations regarding council orientation and development, council meetings, meeting minutes, bylaws, policies, council/public relationship, and strategic planning.

In August 2016, electors petitioned the Minister for an inquiry into the affairs of the town. In September 2016, town council requested that the Minister conduct an inspection of the town. Based on the petition and council request, the Minister ordered an inspection of the town. The inspector determined that the town was being managed in an irregular, improper and improvident

manner, and made 65 recommendations to the town regarding training for council and administration, bylaws, record keeping, financial records, land use, infrastructure, regional collaboration and committees. As a result of the inspection findings, the Minister ordered the town to complete 12 directives. Municipal Affairs acknowledged the directives as complete in May 2018.

In May 2018, electors petitioned the Minister for a viability review. The petition contained the required number of signatures, and following a preliminary screening, the Minister decided to conduct a viability review which is the subject of this report.

A petition of residents was submitted in December 2018, requesting the Minister conduct an inquiry into the affairs of the town for the dismissal of the CAO. The petition was deemed not valid under the *Municipal Government Act*.

In April 2019, the department was advised that two councillors had resigned. A third councillor resigned in May 2019. With three of the five council positions vacant, council was no longer able to form quorum and make decisions. In order to maintain the function of town government, the Minister appointed an official administrator to assume the powers and duties of council. The Minister decided to postpone a by-election to fill the vacant council positions until after the outcome of the viability review is known.

Viability Review Process

The viability review process is intended to assist residents of Granum in evaluating the best form of municipal government to meet the community's current and future needs. The options for the future of Granum explored through the viability review process are:

Remain a distinct municipality with an action plan to improve its viability. Should the Town of Granum remain, this report contains recommended actions to be implemented by council and administration to promote future viability.

Dissolve the municipal corporation and become part of the MD of Willow Creek, while still maintaining its name and community spirit as a hamlet. The MD would be the governing body for the purpose of municipal operations and services.

Regardless of which municipal government model is chosen through this process, the people, business, and community spirit will continue to be what defines the community of Granum.

Initiation of Review

The viability review for the Town of Granum was initiated by a petition of electors in June 2018. An initial screening was conducted involving analysis of information, and interviews with all council members, the CAO, and representatives of petitioners. Based on the screening, the Minister directed the ministry to undertake the viability review in November 2018.

Infrastructure Study

The provision of municipal public works, such as roads, water and wastewater lines, and emergency response, requires significant physical infrastructure. Understanding the condition of the infrastructure and the future financial investments that will be needed to continue to provide these services is key to municipal viability. For this reason, an infrastructure study was funded by Municipal Affairs through the Alberta Community Partnership grant program. Council and personnel issues delayed the start of the study.

The study recommends capital projects totaling \$14.7 million over the next ten years. Additional details are provided in the Infrastructure section below.

Viability Report

The Town of Granum and MD of Willow Creek provided information in order to develop this report.

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators Association (ARMAA), Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA), and the Local Government Administration Association of Alberta (LGAA) have also reviewed and provided input to the viability report.

This report assesses the municipality's viability by considering seven broad areas:

- **Sustainable governance** - addresses council practices and procedures, compliance with legislation, citizen engagement, and strategic planning.
- **Administration and Operations** - addresses the capacity of the municipality to operate on a daily basis and implement council decisions.
- **Finances, Assessment & Taxation** - addresses the municipality's capacity to generate and manage revenues (including property tax assessment and collection of taxes) sufficient to provide for necessary infrastructure and services now and in the future.
- **Infrastructure** - addresses the municipality's capacity to effectively and efficiently manage its infrastructure.
- **Services** - addresses the capacity of the municipality to provide essential services that meet public expectations and applicable regulated standards.
- **Regional cooperation** - addresses the municipality's approach to collaboration with neighbours for the benefit of the community and the region.
- **Community well-being** - addresses characteristics that contribute to the vitality of the community and the long-term viability of the municipality.

For each of the seven areas, the report provides: 1) a general introduction to the topic, 2) a description of the current state of Granum in that area, 3) recommended actions for council and administration to foster viability, and, 4) an idea of what may change or stay the same if Granum became part of the MD.



Sustainable Governance

Sustainable Governance

Municipal governments consist of a council as the governing body of the municipal corporation and the custodian of its legislative powers under the authority of the MGA. Council sets the overall direction of the municipality, exercising the powers of the municipality through decisions at council meetings to create and review policies and programs.

Council is comprised of councillors that represent the electorate in the municipality. The chief elected official (CEO), also known as the mayor or reeve, may be elected at large by the electorate or chosen by the councillors at the first organizational meeting following the election, as is done in Granum. Councillors are expected to work together for the good of the community, consistent with the MGA and council's own code of conduct.

Council defines the policies and direction that municipal administration will put into action. To do so, council passes bylaws, adopts policies, and establishes budgets; raises revenue through property and business taxes, borrowing, and setting fines and fees for services; adopts plans for the use and development of land; and provides services required or desired by residents. In addition, council is responsible for anticipating challenges and recognizing the opportunities that the municipality may face through the development and implementation of long-range plans.

Current State & Progress to Date

The Minister decided that an expedited conclusion of the viability review process prior to a by-election would better serve the residents of Granum, based on the recent situation of the town:

- The May 2017 municipal inspection report noted “There has been an excessive number of by-elections in the past three plus years with the most recent by-election taking place March 27th, 2017.”
- The inspector’s May 2017 report noted concluded “There has been a long history of political unrest, politicians interfering in the administrative role of the town, and a continual turnover of Chief Administrative Officers in the Town of Granum. Despite the efforts of some local politicians over the years to make things better, it is in fact not getting any better.”
- Five councillors have resigned since the 2017 general election.
- With the three council resignations in April and May 2019, council no longer has quorum.
- A by-election was postponed until the outcome of the viability review is known.
- In order to maintain town governance, the Minister appointed an official administrator to assume the powers and duties of council.

Did you know?

The legal framework and authority for local government in Alberta is primarily set in the *Municipal Government Act* and the *Local Authorities Election Act*.



Options Comparison



Option 1: Remain a Municipality



Option 2: Become a Hamlet

<p>Council Representation Residents will continue to be represented by 5 councillors.</p>	<p>Council Representation Residents of Granum would be represented by the Division 2 councillor (1 of 7 councillors)</p> <p>The MD would review ward boundaries prior to the 2021 municipal elections.</p> <p>Residents would be eligible to run for the MD council.</p>
<p>Council Functions Council must operate in alignment with the <i>Municipal Government Act</i>, and its own bylaws to effectively govern the town.</p>	<p>Granum Bylaws Existing Granum bylaws would continue to be in effect until the MD could review and replace by existing MD bylaws or repeal.</p>
<p>Council Collegiality Elected council members must understand the roles and responsibilities of council and administration, and work together in the interests of residents.</p>	<p>Legal Matters The MD would be responsible for any legal matters in process.</p>

Recommended Actions for Option 1

- Council members should all participate in a roles and responsibilities workshop.
- Council should review and revise its code of conduct to ensure all members determine how they will collaborate for governing the Town of Granum.
- Council should develop a comprehensive strategic plan, inclusive of service review, infrastructure/asset management, and public engagement.
- Council should provide information to public regarding service delivery and where tax dollars are spent.
- Council and council members should conduct an annual self-evaluation to assess and improve effectiveness.



Administration & Operations

Administrative Capacity

Municipal administration implements the policy and directions of council. Councillors, including the mayor or reeve, are not permitted to undertake administrative functions. All municipalities in Alberta must appoint a chief administrative officer (CAO) who has overall responsibility for the operations of the municipal corporation.

The CAO advises and informs the council on the operations and affairs of the municipality and implements, or directs staff to implement, policies and programs. Many administrative functions require specialized training, skills, or certification. Investing in professional development and training of the CAO and staff is central to effective municipal operations and service delivery.

Diverse functions for the administration of a municipality include: general administration (implementing policies and procedures), governance processes (supporting council), property assessment and taxation, budgeting and accounting, payables and receivables, audit and legal functions, risk management, occupational health & safety, public relations, election processes, and public works (such as maintaining water and wastewater systems).

Current State & Progress to Date

The town office is open Monday to Thursday, operating with a CAO position (0.8 FTE), and two office staff positions (1.2 FTE). Accounting services are contracted.

Additionally, there are two fulltime public works positions. A public works foreman requires knowledge and expertise in a broad range of subjects, from water and waste water systems, HVAC systems, pumps, and other equipment, and occupational health and safety requirements.

Water quality services are contracted, as are engineering and planning services.

The May 2017 municipal inspection report stated, “council has continually interfered in the administration of the town, to the point where municipal employees were resigning due to interference.”

Residents submitted a petition to the Minister in December 2018 seeking an inquiry into the town operations that would lead to the dismissal of the CAO. The Municipal Government Act makes no provision for such a petition to be actioned.

The 2017 inspector’s report noted, “There is a small group of individuals within the community that collectively work against council and this is only adding to the problems that are facing Granum. The residents need to understand that councillors are elected to govern and manage

Did you know?

Council members are obligated not to undertake any municipal function that has been delegated to the CAO & administration by the *Municipal Government Act*.



Administration & Operations

the community through the establishment of policies and that the CAO’s mandate is to implement the policies.”

In August 2018, Council authorized its lawyer to pursue legal actions or processes regarding defamation and/or harassment of council members and town employees, and remedies for social media bullying. This resulted in legal action against three residents in January 2019. The matter is ongoing.

At the time of this report, all town staff employed at the beginning of 2019 are on leave.

The town has had to contract for Chief Administrative Officer services and hire temporary administrative and public works staff.

Options Comparison



Option 1: Remain a Municipality



Option 2: Become a Hamlet

<p>Administration Council must ensure a qualified chief administrative officer (CAO) is in place to manage all day-to-day operations of the town.</p> <p>The CAO must ensure all employment standards and occupational health and safety standards are implemented.</p>	<p>Administrative and Public Works Operational and administrative functions would be conducted by the MD.</p> <p>Some services may be contracted (i.e., water quality services).</p> <p>Municipal Buildings The fire hall would continue to be used for Granum and area.</p> <p>The office and public works buildings in Granum would be sold.</p>
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Recommended Actions for Option 1

- Council should review and revise the CAO bylaw to ensure it reflects their intentions and expectations of the role.
- The CAO should develop a respectful workplace policy to establish standards of behavior and compliance procedures to ensure employees have a safe and healthy workplace.
- Council should establish a public engagement policy that addresses how council will engage with residents, inclusive of how residents can provide input on issues of services and services delivery.



Finances, Assessment & Taxation

Finances, Assessment & Taxation

Annual financial statements must be audited by an independent auditor appointed by council and are publicly available in May of the following year. Municipalities must prepare three-year operating and five-year capital plans. Municipalities must also adopt annual operating and capital budgets that show their expected expenditures and revenues. Municipal revenues must be sufficient to cover expenditures for that year.

Municipal Expenditures. Overhead municipal costs include per diems and salaries of council and administration, as well as a number of general administrative costs such as postage, telecommunications, advertising, memberships, audit, legal, consulting, insurance, property assessment, office maintenance and utilities, and bank charges. These baseline costs are required for effective local administration. However, even with prudent cost management, baseline costs can consume a significant proportion of revenues, particularly in smaller municipalities where the costs cannot be spread out among a larger base of residences and businesses.

Core services such as utilities and roads are a significant expense due to the cost of required infrastructure. Significant one-time costs to replace failing infrastructure for core utility services may impact the ability to fund other municipal services such as fire suppression, snow removal, parks and recreation, and community events.

Municipal Revenues. Each year, municipal council determines the desired level of services and the revenues required for municipal services and operations. Revenue sources may include non-tax sources such as user fees (including utility fees), franchise fees paid by utilities providers to access municipal land, and federal and provincial grants. Unexpended grants are reported as deferred revenue and must be expended for the purpose they were received. After non-tax revenues are deducted, the remainder is the revenue required through property taxes.

Property assessment is the process of assigning a dollar amount to property, based on the market value of the property, and is used to determine the proportion of taxes to be paid on each property. The tax rate is set annually and generally expressed as the amount of taxes per \$1,000 of assessed value of the property (mills). Municipalities are also required to collect education property taxes on behalf of the province. Unpaid property taxes are a concern as municipalities rely on these revenues to finance municipal operations, programs and services. Municipalities can also choose to impose special taxes and local improvement taxes on property in any area of a municipality to fund a service or project that will benefit that specific area.

Municipalities may borrow up to their debt limit, as determined by the *MGA*, which is set at two times the amount of municipal revenue.



Finances, Assessment & Taxation

Current State & Progress to Date

Granum is in a reasonable financial position having experienced operating surpluses in 2017 and 2018, following deficits in 2015 and 2016. The town had net financial assets of \$1 million as of December 2018.

In 2018, council increased utility rates, beginning to budget for full-cost recovery for water and wastewater. This represented a significant increase in utility rates for residents, but the rates are comparable with other small municipalities. No existing MD hamlets have a comparable water/wastewater system and utility rate structure.

The town's December 31, 2018 financial statements indicate the town had unused grant funds, including Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) capital funding of \$480,377 and Federal Gas Tax Fund (FGTF) of \$159,587.

The 2019 residential municipal property tax rate in Granum is 10.75019 mills. The 2019 non-residential municipal property tax rate is 18.00000 mills.

The town has two minimum taxes rates: \$600 for residential property; and \$900 for non-residential property.

The town has no long term debt.

Did you know?

Municipal utilities rates (for water, wastewater, and garbage removal) should include some savings for future major repair and replacement of utility infrastructure.



Finances, Assessment & Taxation

2019 Town of Granum Approved Budget

	<u>2019</u>
REVENUE	
Net Property Taxes	\$414,746
User fees/Sale of Goods	\$265,772
Government Transfers- Operating	\$254,077
Government Transfers- Capital	\$0
Investment Income	\$3,000
Penalties and Costs on taxes	\$18,600
Franchise and Concession Contracts	\$27,000
Rentals	\$500
Other	<u>\$16,800</u>
Total Revenue	<u>\$1,000,495</u>

EXPENSES	
Legislative	\$48,060
Administration	\$302,418
Protective Services	\$33,600
Roads, Streets, Walks, Lighting	\$237,800
Water Supply and Distribution	\$165,150
Wastewater Treatment and disposal	\$56,650
Waste management	\$30,200
Family and community support services	\$72,707
Subdivision and land development	\$8,400
Parks and recreation	\$30,350
Library, museum, halls	<u>\$15,160</u>
Total Expenses	<u>\$1,000,495</u>

Excess of revenue over expenses \$0
 (Budget includes a transfer to reserves of \$35,718)

Granum Municipal 2019 Budgeted Legislative and Administration Expenses

Council – wages, benefits, travel, training, donations, election, mediation	\$ 51,060
Administration –wages, benefits, travel, training	\$ 69,300
Administration – Fees – accounting, audit, legal, assessor, memberships, insurance, bank, computer support (includes interim CAO services contract)	\$198,350
Administration – Building costs – equipment, maintenance, power, heat, phone, internet, goods & supplies	\$ 27,768
Advertising, community hall expenses	\$ 4,000
Total Legislative and Administration Expenses	\$350,478



Finances, Assessment & Taxation

Options Comparison



Option 1: Remain a Municipality



Option 2: Become a Hamlet

<p>Property Taxes Council will continue to ensure tax rates reflect the costs to provide municipal services.</p>	<p>Property Taxes Granum residents would pay the same property tax rates as other MD property owners. The minimum property tax is \$20.</p>
<p>Utility Fees The utility rate model would continue to apply.</p> <p>Grants Granum would remain eligible for MSI and FGTF grant funding.</p>	<p>Utility Fees The MD would review utility fees in Granum to ensure they reflect full operating and capital cost recovery.</p> <p>Other Fees and Improvement Taxes Service levels and associated costs beyond current levels in the MD would be the responsibility of Granum residents and property owners.</p>
<p>Corporate Planning Council will need to meet the <i>MGA</i> requirements for long term operational and capital financial planning,</p>	<p>Grants The MD would receive MSI and FGTF grant funding based on the combined MD and town statistics. Upon dissolution, the MD may be eligible to apply for one-time funding for infrastructure projects in Granum.</p> <p>Granum Financial Assets Current Town of Granum financial assets would be expended on capital projects to benefit Granum residents.</p>

Recommended Actions for Option 1

- Town Council should ensure that adding to funding reserves are included as line items within operating budgets for future major repairs and replacement of infrastructure.
- Town councillors should take municipal finance and budgeting training offered through the Elected Officials Education Program.
- The 2020 Town of Granum property tax bylaw must have only one minimum tax.



Infrastructure

Infrastructure

Municipal infrastructure includes the water system, wastewater system, roads and sidewalks, storm sewer drainage, parks, campgrounds and recreation facilities, and municipal buildings, such as the municipal office or fire station. A municipality's ability to fund infrastructure costs for core services expected by residents is a crucial aspect of whether a municipality is financially viable.

Ideally, infrastructure is maintained and gradually replaced over time. Many municipalities across Canada have not historically invested in the lifecycle of assets and are now facing high replacement costs for aging infrastructure. Replacing infrastructure can be funded from municipal reserves if the municipality has been saving for these costs as part of annual budgets. If not, the municipality may choose to fund infrastructure with long term debt, paying financing costs annually, rather than using reserves saved in the past. Funding infrastructure through debt usually requires that the municipality have a sufficient tax base that can absorb additional costs of debt financing. Municipalities may also apply for provincial or federal grants to help subsidize costs of replacing infrastructure.

Current State & Progress to Date

The Government of Alberta provided grant funding to conduct an infrastructure audit in order to determine the current state of Granum's roads, water and wastewater, buildings and other assets, and provide a ten-year capital plan. Council approval of contracting the infrastructure study was delayed by the governance and administrative situation of the Town of Granum. The infrastructure study summarized below and in Appendix C was received by town administration at the time this report was written, but has not yet been received at a council meeting.

The town has previously noted both the structural and access concerns of the town office. Town council began to explore options for relocating meetings and administrative functions from the town office prior to the viability review due to building conditions. Since the review was undertaken, the town office has required remediation to restore structural integrity. The engineering firm conducting the infrastructure study has raised immediate health and safety concerns arising from the discovery of 3 feet of water in the basement.

The water treatment plant is new and fully funded.

Significant overland flooding occurred in 2018. The town received a quote of \$1.6 million to address the concerns. This is not included as part of the infrastructure study.

Did you know?

According to a 2016 report¹ by Canada Infrastructure, municipalities own 60% of Canada's core public infrastructure, and one-third of that is in fair, poor, or very poor condition. A decline in spending on public infrastructure through the 1970s and 80s means that municipalities now face higher costs to replace infrastructure.

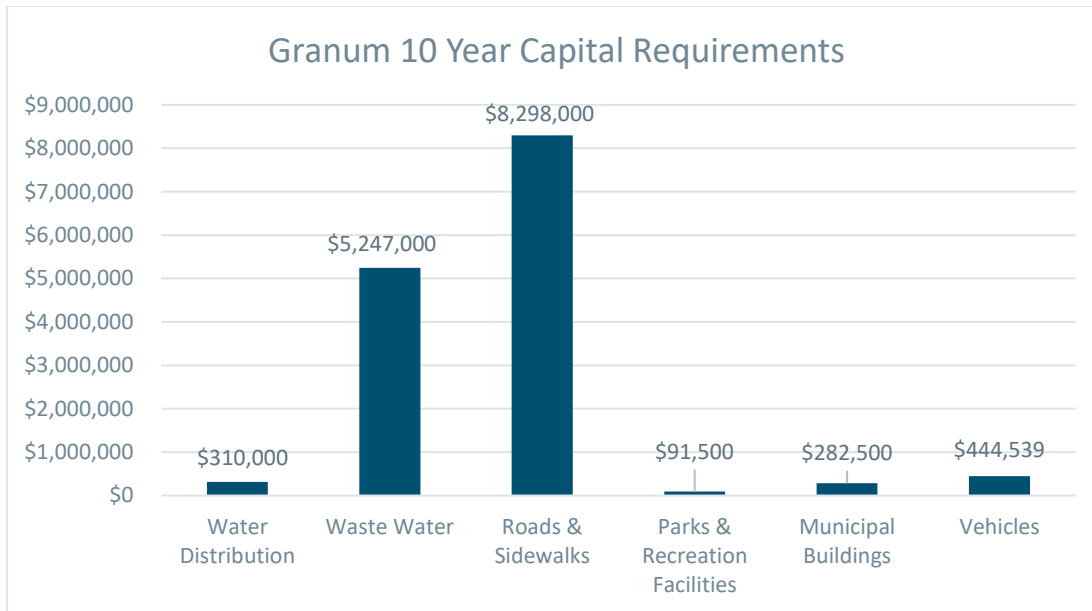


Infrastructure

Summary of Infrastructure Study

The town contracted ISL Engineering Ltd to undertake a comprehensive assessment of Granum's municipal infrastructure. The detailed assessment will enable the Town to plan and budget for capital rehabilitation and replacement in order to meet the Town's needs into the future.

The infrastructure study assesses the current state of municipal infrastructure and contains a 10-year capital plan of infrastructure maintenance and replacement costs in order to maintain current levels of services. Costs of the recommended projects over a ten year period total approximately \$14.7 million.



See Appendix C for the summary of the 10-year capital plan for projects identified through the infrastructure study.

Funding Infrastructure Projects

The cost of projects recommended in the capital plan to be undertaken over the next ten years total \$14.7 million, or an average investment of \$1.47 million per year.

Over the past ten years, the town has reported average capital provincial and federal grant revenue of approximately \$0.49 million per year. Assuming that provincial and federal grant funding remains constant in the future, just under \$1 million per year will need to be raised locally through additional taxes, utility fee increases, or borrowings to pay for the recommended projects. For comparison, the town's reported total operating revenues for 2018 were just over \$0.8 million.



Infrastructure

Options Comparison



Option 1: Remain a Municipality

The town will need to determine what it will do with the town office.

Town council will need to determine a funding model for capital projects. This could include tax and utility rate increases, improvement taxes, special levies, or borrowings.



Option 2: Become a Hamlet

The MD may be eligible for one-time infrastructure funding to complete projects in Granum after dissolution.

The MD has indicated that local capital projects will be the paid for using grants, improvement taxes and special levies, according to the situation. The MD will also use funds from town assets at the time of dissolution towards local capital projects.

Going forward, infrastructure projects in Granum will be considered and prioritized along with all projects in the MD.

Recommended Actions for Option 1

- The town should develop an implementation plan to address the critical projects identified in the infrastructure study, including a proposed funding model.
- The town should develop an asset management plan, inclusive of documentation regarding maintenance of systems and equipment.



Services

Services

Under the *Municipal Government Act*, each municipality determines what services, such as water or paved roads, to provide. Council may consult residents in making decisions about what constitutes necessary or desirable services. Council must also consider the costs, including infrastructure and replacement costs, and the available revenue sources (e.g. utility fees and taxes) to finance those services.

Municipalities are not required to provide any specific services, but often provide services such as water and wastewater management, roads, fire protection, and waste management. Services such as water or waste management are provided more often in urban than in rural municipalities. Municipalities may also join with one or more municipalities to create a regional service commission that jointly provides water, wastewater, waste, emergency, or other services to its municipal members.

The effective delivery of services and the setting of utility rates (fees for service) based on a full-cost recovery model are crucial to the operations of a municipality. In addition to utility services, the municipality may also provide such services as emergency and fire, bylaw enforcement, and snow removal. These costs are often accounted for in the general municipal property tax rate rather than an associated fee-for-service.

Current State & Progress to Date

The Town of Granum provides water (purchased from the Town of Claresholm), wastewater, residential garbage pickup, and roadway services to residents. Fire and emergency services are provided by the Granum Fire Department, which is managed by the MD's Fire Department as of July 2019.

The town is a member of the Oldman River Regional Services Commission, which provides planning, GIS and subdivision services, and the Willow Creek Regional Waste Management Services Commission, for landfill oversight.

Bylaw enforcement has previously been contracted to the Town of Fort McLeod for limited service. Currently, no bylaw enforcement is conducted. Unsightly and neglected premises are a cause of concern for residents.

The MD informally provides snow removal of main roadways. Residents are responsible for sidewalks.

Did you know?

Each municipality determines the types and levels of services they will provide. Water/wastewater systems, road maintenance, garbage collection and fire services are common and costly core services.



Services

Household garbage removal is provided weekly. Local businesses (two) take their garbage to the garbage truck weekly. MD residents take their garbage to the garbage truck weekly, by agreement with the MD. A recycling trailer is used and emptied in Lethbridge bi-monthly.

The Rocky View Utility Corporation is contracted to monitor the water distribution system. Granum’s public works staff are responsible for ongoing maintenance of the water and waste water systems.

Options Comparison



Option 1: Remain a Municipality



Option 2: Become a Hamlet

<p>Bylaw Enforcement The town will need to determine how it wants to provide bylaw enforcement, including enforcement to address unsightly premises.</p> <p>Snow Removal The town should establish and communicate standards of service including prioritizing and timeframes for road clearing following a snow incident.</p>	<p>Bylaw Enforcement The MD would enforce Granum bylaws until they are repealed and replaced by MD bylaws.</p> <p>Snow Removal Main transportation arteries are the priority. The service currently provided by the MD to the town would continue. Residents would be responsible for sidewalks adjacent to their property.</p>
<p>Garbage Removal Household garbage removal will continue to be provided, paid for through utility fees.</p> <p>Emergency Services The fire department will continue to be managed by the MD of Willow Creek Fire Department.</p>	<p>Garbage Removal Residential collection would be provided at cost to residents.</p> <p>Emergency Services The fire department would become a part of the MD, and would remain while there is an active roster.</p>

Recommended Actions for Option 1

- Town council should complete a service capacity review to align service levels and council and resident expectations with available funding and human resources.



Regional Cooperation

Regional Cooperation

Municipalities may work in partnership to provide efficient and effective services through formal agreements, including intermunicipal service or mutual aid agreements. For example, two municipalities may share the cost of a bylaw enforcement officer that provides part-time enforcement in each municipality. Residents may benefit from these partnerships by having lowered costs, increased efficiency, and/or increased capacity of their local government.



Municipalities are required to develop Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (ICFs) that list services provided by each municipality, shared intermunicipal services, and services provided by third parties. Similarly, municipalities are required to create Intermunicipal Development Plans (IDPs) with neighbouring municipalities to identify mutually acceptable land –use practices along shared boundaries.

Current State & Progress to Date

The Town of Granum has a positive relationship with the MD of Willow Creek. It is also a member of two regional services commissions, which provide cost-effective service delivery to their members.

The town is a part of an intermunicipal fire services agreement that is nearing expiration.

The town is required to develop an Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework (ICF) with the MD, to identify and formalize areas of efficiency in sharing service delivery.

Did you know?

Alberta municipalities are interdependent, and often work with each other through a variety of partnership agreements, sharing of services, and formal collaboration activities.

Options Comparison



Option 1: Remain a Municipality

Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework (ICF)

The town will need to develop an ICF with the MD.



Option 2: Become a Hamlet

Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework (ICF)

The MD has ICFs with its neighbouring municipalities.

Regional Service Commission

The MD is a member of the same regional service commissions.

Recommended Actions for Option 1

- Complete the Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework and Intermunicipal Development Plan within the legislated timelines.



Community Well-Being

Community well-being addresses local community characteristics that contribute to the vitality of the community and the long-term viability of the municipality. Vibrant and strong communities may be fostered through the programs and services offered, public participation in community events and activities, and connections between residents.

Municipalities may provide a range of community assets such libraries, seniors or youth centres, early childhood programs and seniors and/or affordable housing facilities. Additionally, recreation is often a sought-after amenity by residents. Recreation infrastructure may include recreation facilities, parks, programs, and activities and may involve partnerships with local volunteer organizations and community groups.

Municipalities may also provide funding to community groups and organizations to enhance community well-being through events that provide opportunities for connection. Social supports may be provided through Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) by the municipality, or in partnership with other municipalities in the region.

Current State & Progress to Date

The Town of Granum owns historical and recreational facilities currently operated by local organizations under lease agreements, such as a – campground/park, golf course, museum, and drop-in centre.

During the viability review, councillors identified the need to develop a shared council vision for the town-owned recreations facilities and the relationship with the community groups that manage them.

The library is a member of the Chinook Arch Regional Member Libraries. The board includes representatives from both the Town of Granum and MD of Willow Creek councils.

FCSS are provided by the Claresholm and District FCSS, which includes board membership from Granum.

In 2019, the Town of Granum provided matching funds to community groups as follows:

Claresholm Health Foundation	\$ 2,000
Foothills Special Needs Association for Parents & Siblings	\$ 1,200
Granum & District Canada Day Society	\$ 2,000
Granum Drop-In Centre	\$ 5,000
Granum Historic Board	\$ 1,000
Granum Lutheran Church	\$ 1,000
Granum & District Recreational Society	\$ 2,000
Ranchlands Victims Services Society	\$ 5,000
Willow Creek Community Adult Learning Society	\$ 1,400
Total Grants	<u>\$20,600</u>

Did you know?

Family and Community Social Services (FCSS) is a unique 80/20 funding agreement between the Government of Alberta and participating municipalities to provide early intervention and prevention social services.

Options Comparison



Option 1: Remain a Municipality



Option 2: Become a Hamlet

Option 1: Remain a Municipality	Option 2: Become a Hamlet
<p>Community Organizations</p> <p>The town and local groups would need to develop a shared understanding of their roles as property owners, funders, and service providers.</p>	<p>Museum, Campground and Golf Course</p> <p>Historical and recreation facilities would likely remain, subject to local volunteers and self-sufficiency.</p> <p>FCSS</p> <p>The MD would continue to fund FCSS programs in Granum.</p>
	<p>Library</p> <p>Operation of a library will need to be reviewed in light of the <i>Libraries Act</i> and operational decisions.</p> <p>Community Group Support</p> <p>The MD funds community projects on the basis of written applications.</p>

Recommended Actions for Option 1

- Council should review its membership agreements with community service providers to ensure they are aligned with municipal goals and expectations.
- Council should develop a policy and procedures on funding support to community organizations and events.

Financial Impacts

Property Taxes

If the Town of Granum is dissolved, residents can expect their municipal property tax rate to decrease. The school foundation and seniors foundation rates will be comparable. The MD also collects a Granum Recreation Area Special Tax. Non-residential properties will see a similar decrease in the municipal property tax rate.

Local Improvement Taxes and Special Taxes

The MD is able to levy local improvement taxes for major repairs and replacement of infrastructure, as well as special taxes for costs for services not available to all residents of the MD.

COMPARISON OF TOWN OF GRANUM AND MD OF WILLOW CREEK 2019 PROPERTY TAX RATES

	Town of Granum		MD of Willow Creek	
	Residential	Non-residential	Residential	Non-residential
2019 Municipal Tax Rate (Mill Rate)	10.75019	18.00000	3.700	7.793
Alberta School Foundation Fund	2.68040	3.57730	2.515	3.702
Seniors Foundation	0.27500	0.27500	0.356	0.356
Granum Recreation Area Special Tax			0.035	0.035
Total	13.70559	21.8523	6.606	11.886
Assessed Property Value Example	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Total Taxes	\$1,370.56	\$2,185.23	\$660.60	\$1,188.60

MD of Willow Creek tax rates are provided for information, and do not necessarily represent the total of taxes paid by residents.

Residential Utilities

Municipal utilities (water, wastewater, garbage & recycling) are provided on a cost recovery basis, including capital requirements, through utility fees. While the MD may need to examine the current financial model, it is anticipated that utility fees in Granum would be similar to the current level.

2019 Residential Utility Fees (There are no comparable utility services provided within the MD.)

	Granum
Water – Monthly connection	\$30/month
Water – Consumption Fee	\$1.25/m3
Waste Water	\$25 - \$250 (Based on water line size)
Solid Waste/Garbage	\$15.00/month (residential) & \$5.00/month Recycling

Appendix A: Recommendations

Sustainable Governance

- Council members should all participate in a roles and responsibilities workshop.
- Council should review and revise its code of conduct to ensure all members determine how they will collaborate for governing the town of Granum.
- Council should develop in a comprehensive strategic plan, inclusive of service review, infrastructure/asset management, and public engagement.
- Council should provide information to public regarding service delivery and where tax dollars are spent.
- Council and council members should conduct an annual self-evaluation to assess and improve effectiveness.

Administration and Operations

- Council should review and revise the CAO bylaw to ensure it reflects their intentions and expectations of the role.
- The CAO should develop a respectful workplace policy to establish standards of behavior and compliance procedures to ensure employees have a safe and healthy workplace.
- Council should establish a public engagement policy that addresses how council will engage with residents, inclusive of how residents can provide input on issues of services and services delivery.

Finance, Assessment, and Taxation

- Town Council should ensure funding reserves are included as line items within operating budgets for future major repairs and replacement of infrastructure.
- Town councillors should take municipal finance and budgeting training offered through the Elected Officials Education Program.
- The 2020 Town of Granum property tax bylaw must have only one minimum tax.

Infrastructure

- The town should develop an implementation plan to address the findings of the infrastructure study, including a proposed funding model, and rationale for undertaking specific projects.
- The town should develop an asset management plan.

Services

- Town council should complete a service capacity review to align service levels and council and resident expectations with available funding and human resources.

Community Well-being

- Council should review its membership agreements with community service providers to ensure they are aligned with municipal goals and expectations.
- Council should develop a policy and procedures on funding support to community organizations and events.

Appendix B: Performance Indicators

Alberta Municipal Affairs has established a set of indicators intended to measure specific aspects of municipal governance, finance and community. Each indicator has a defined benchmark. The benchmarks are rules of thumb that set a general level of acceptable risk. However, each municipality may have unique circumstances or alternative strategies that justify a different result.

If a municipality does not meet the criteria for being “not at risk”, it does not necessarily mean there is any cause for concern; however, the municipality is encouraged to review the circumstances giving rise to the indicator results to ensure it is not exposed to potential or emerging risks. An exception to an indicator benchmark does not indicate fault or mismanagement on the part of the municipality; an indicator may be triggered by events that are beyond the control of council and administration, or may result from circumstances that are being effectively managed by the municipality.

Indicator	Description	Expected Result and What It Means	Granum Actual Result – 2018
Audit Outcome	Audit report in the municipality’s audited annual financial statements.	The audit report does not identify a going concern risk or denial of opinion.	OKAY – no exception The municipal auditor has been able to complete the audit and express an opinion, and has not identified a specific concern about the ability of the municipality to meet its financial obligations.
Legislation-Backed Ministry Interventions	Interventions authorized by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in accordance with the <i>Municipal Government Act</i> , such as a viability review, or where directives have been issued pursuant to an inspection.	The municipality has not been the subject of a Municipal Affairs intervention.	Exception – viability review in process
Tax Base Ratio	Tax base ratio is the proportion of the total municipal tax revenue generated by	The municipality’s residential and farmland tax revenue accounts for no more	OKAY – no exception Residential and farmland tax revenue accounts for

Indicator	Description	Expected Result and What It Means	Granum Actual Result – 2018
	residential and farmland tax base, regardless of whether it is municipal property taxes, special taxes, or local improvement taxes.	than 95 per cent of its total tax revenue.	75.2 per cent of total tax revenue. The municipality is able to rely in some measure on its non-residential tax base to generate a portion of its tax revenues. These properties are typically taxed at a higher rate than residential and farm properties.
Tax Collection Rate	The ability of the municipality to collect own-source revenues, including property taxes, special taxes, local improvement taxes, well drilling equipment taxes, and grants-in-place-of-taxes.	The municipality collects at least 90 per cent of the municipal taxes (e.g. property taxes, special taxes) levied in any year.	OKAY – no exception The municipality collected 98.8 per cent of the municipal taxes. The municipality is able to collect its tax revenues and use those funds to meet budgeted commitments and requisitioning obligations.
Population Change	The change in population of the municipality over the past ten years based on the Municipal Affairs Population List.	The population has not declined by more than 20 per cent over a ten-year period.	OKAY – no exception The population decreased by 9.2 per cent over a ten-year period. The population of the municipality is stable..
Current Ratio	The ratio of current assets (cash, temporary investments, accounts receivable) to current liabilities (accounts payable, temporary borrowings, current repayment obligations	The ratio of current assets to current liabilities is greater than one.	OKAY – no exception The ratio of current assets to current liabilities is 1.86 to 1. The municipality is able to pay for its current financial obligations using cash or near-cash assets.

Indicator	Description	Expected Result and What It Means	Granum Actual Result – 2018
	on long-term borrowings).		
Accumulated Surplus	The total assets of the municipality net of total debt, excluding tangible capital property and debts related to tangible capital property.	The municipality has a positive (above zero) surplus.	OKAY – no exception The municipality has a surplus of \$1,002,603. The municipality has more operational assets than liabilities, which generally provides the municipality with cash flow to meet ongoing obligations and manage through lean periods of the year where costs may exceed revenues.
On-time financial reporting	Whether the municipality has completed submission its annual financial statements and financial information returns to Municipal Affairs by the legislated due date.	The municipality's financial statements and financial information returns for the preceding calendar year are received by Municipal Affairs no later than May 8. Financial reporting is an important aspect of municipal accountability to its residents and businesses.	OKAY – no exception The town's financial statements and financial information returns were submitted on time. The municipality is preparing its audited financial reports on a timely basis.
Debt to Revenue Percentage	The total amount of municipal borrowings, including long term capital leases, as a percentage of total municipal revenues.	The municipality's total borrowings represent less than 120 per cent (160 per cent for municipalities with a higher regulated debt limit) of its total revenue.	OKAY – no exception The town has no borrowings.
Debt Service to Revenue Percentage	The total cost of making scheduled repayments (including	The municipality's total costs for borrowing	OKAY – no exception The town has no debt repayments.

Indicator	Description	Expected Result and What It Means	Granum Actual Result – 2018
	interest) on borrowings as a percentage of total municipal revenues.	repayments do not exceed 20 per cent (28 per cent for municipalities with a higher regulated debt limit) of its total revenue.	
Infrastructure investment – asset sustainability ratio	The total cost of current year additions (through purchases or construction) to tangible capital assets (vehicles, equipment, buildings, roads, utility infrastructure, land) relative to the current year's amortization (depreciation) on all tangible capital assets.	The municipality's current capital additions exceed the current year's amortization (depreciation). This measure does not account for the effects of inflation; typically, replacement costs for new assets exceed the historic cost of existing assets.	OKAY – no exception The municipality is replacing its existing tangible capital assets and investing in new assets and infrastructure at a rate of 3.1 to 1 in relation to the estimated wear or obsolescence of its existing assets.
Infrastructure age - net book value of tangible capital assets	The net book value of tangible capital assets as a percentage of the total original costs. Net book value is the original purchase cost less amortization (depreciation).	The net book value of the municipality's tangible capital assets is greater than 40 per cent of the original cost. If the municipality is adding new services or expanded facilities and infrastructure, it would be expected that the ratio would be higher than 40 per cent.	Exception – net book value is 45.3 per cent of original cost. The municipality may not be replacing existing assets on a regular basis.
Interest in Municipal Office	The number of candidates running in the most recent municipal election relative to the total number of councillor	The number of candidates exceeded the number of councillor positions. The ratio of candidates to total	OKAY – no exception

Indicator	Description	Expected Result and What It Means	Granum Actual Result – 2018
	positions up for election.	council positions measures the willingness of electors to run for municipal office.	

Appendix C: 10 Year Capital Plan

The draft 10 year capital plan recommended by ISL (engineering firm) is provided to identify the staging of projects that will need to be completed based on the condition of the infrastructure.

Recommended 10 Year Capital Program	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Water Distribution										
	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 75,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 75,000.00
Wastewater Treatment										
	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 35,000.00	\$ 200,000.00	\$ 200,000.00	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00
Sanitary System										
	\$ 375,000.00	\$ 500,000.00	\$ 875,000.00	\$ 700,000.00	\$ 375,000.00	\$ 375,000.00	\$ 375,000.00	\$ 375,000.00	\$ 375,000.00	\$ 375,000.00
Roads and Sidewalks										
	\$ 917,000.00	\$ 809,000.00	\$ 892,000.00	\$ 999,000.00	\$ 899,000.00	\$ 820,000.00	\$ 753,000.00	\$ 790,000.00	\$ 609,000.00	\$ 810,000.00
Buildings										
	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 5,500.00
Parks and Public Spaces										
	\$ 29,000.00	\$ 34,000.00	\$ 24,000.00	\$ 34,000.00	\$ 24,000.00	\$ 34,000.00	\$ 29,000.00	\$ 24,000.00	\$ 24,000.00	\$ 26,500.00
Vehicles										
	\$ 15,450.00	\$ 21,697.50	\$ 264,777.38	\$ 17,516.24	\$ 18,392.06	\$ 19,311.66	\$ 20,277.24	\$ 21,291.10	\$ 22,355.66	\$ 23,473.44
Subtotal:	\$1,398,450.00	\$1,425,197.50	\$2,281,277.38	\$1,976,016.24	\$1,441,892.06	\$1,332,811.66	\$1,204,777.24	\$1,237,791.10	\$1,057,855.66	\$1,317,473.44
10 Year Subtotal	\$14,673,542.28									
10 Year Annual Average	\$1,467,354.23									

Appendix D: Financial Information

Source: Town of Granum 2018 Audited Financial Statements

Financial Position

Financial Assets (cash, receivables, land for resale)	\$1,870,449
Liabilities (payables, deferred revenue)	\$867,846
Net Financial Assets	\$1,002,603
Non-financial Assets (prepaid expenses, inventory, capital assets)	\$6,393,946
Accumulated Surplus	\$7,396,549

Revenue and Expenses

Revenue	
Property Taxes	\$400,727
User Fees/Utilities	\$239,750
Government Transfers (Operating)	\$89,047
Investment Income	\$6,793
Franchise & Concession Contacts	\$21,470
Penalties on Taxes	\$27,125
Rentals	\$4,580
Other	\$19,605
	<u>\$809,097</u>
EXPENSES	
Legislative/Council	\$20,164
Administration	\$335,232
Protective Services	\$27,617
Roads, Walks, Lighting	\$279,058
Water Supply & Distribution	\$248,101
Wastewater Treatment & Disposal	\$57,771
Waste Management	\$30,141
Family and Community Support Services	\$10,573
Subdivision & Land Development	\$5,832
Parks & Recreation	\$40,202
Library, museum, halls	\$18,194
	<u>\$1,072,885</u>
Operating Surplus or (Deficit)	(\$263,788)
Government Transfers (Capital)	\$898,862
Net Operating Surplus or (Deficit)	<u>\$635,074</u>
Acquisition of Tangible Capital Assets	(\$860,204)
Amortization of Tangible Capital Assets	\$ 269,432
Net Change in prepaid assets and inventory	(\$ 5975)
Increase in Financial Assets	\$ 36,327

Appendix E: Vote on a Question

In accordance with the *MGA*, the Minister of Municipal Affairs has determined a vote of the electors of the Town of Granum on the question of dissolution will be held on November 6, 2019, from 4-8 p.m., and on November 7, 2019, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Granum Drop In Centre, 306 Railway Avenue.

The vote will be conducted in accordance with the *Local Authorities Election Act* (LAEA) under which all municipal elections are conducted.

A special ballot (mail-in) option is available for residents who are unable to attend the polling station in Granum. Mail-in ballots must be returned with all required documentation by the established deadline. See the Notice of Vote on a Bylaw or Question for full information.

The Vote Question:

Based on the findings of the Town of Granum Viability Review, which one of the two options below do you support for the future of Granum? (Select one only)

Option 1. The Town of Granum remains a town and implements changes to achieve viability.

Option 2. Dissolve the Town of Granum and Granum becomes part of the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26.

Voter Eligibility and Identification

The *LAEA* stipulates that to be eligible to vote, a person must be:

- A Canadian citizen over the age of 18 years
- A resident of Alberta and the municipality on the day of the vote

Voter identification must be presented that clearly identifies the person with an address within the Town of Granum. See the list of voter identification options for full information.

Scrutineers

The Returning Officer, if requested in writing by 2 or more electors, shall appoint, in writing, those persons named in the request as scrutineers to attend at the voting station on behalf of the persons interested in promoting the voting for either response. There is a limit of one scrutineer for each side of the question to be within the polling station at any one time, including during the vote count.

The Outcome

If a majority of voters choose to dissolve (50 per cent plus 1), the Minister will recommend to Cabinet that the town be dissolved at a suitable time to allow for a smooth transition of services. Until such time, the town will continue to operate.

If a majority of voters choose to remain a town (50 per cent plus 1), the Minister will provide specific directives on the council to ensure the future viability of the municipality. The town will need to conduct a by-election to fill the vacancies on council.

Contact Information

Municipal Sustainability Unit

Alberta Municipal Affairs

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