

Vise tightens on regional taxpayers

But Sidney holds the line on property taxes

While the ability of many regional taxpayers to pay their property taxes is under stress, Sidney taxpayers got some good news from their town council.

In Sidney the draft financial plan for 2016 started out with a general tax increase of 2.72 per cent. This was a starting point for budget deliberations but after hearing from the public and business, council decided to **reduce the tax impact to 0.81 per cent. There was no increase in utilities.**

Meanwhile most other regional taxpayers face tax rate increases of two or three or four hundred per cent more than current inflation of 1.9 per cent.

In some jurisdictions steep increases in the draft financial plans around the region are under consideration while various studies and reports suggest taxpayer's ability to pay is under considerable stress.

SENIOR POVERTY TIME BOMB

- The vast majority of Canadians retiring without an employer pension plan have totally inadequate retirement savings, says a report by the Broadbent Institute. Among all Canadians ages 55 to 64 without pensions, half have only enough savings to last for one year. Income trends suggest the percentage of Canadian seniors living in poverty

will increase in the coming years, especially for single women who already face a higher than average rate.

MEDICAL SERVICE PREMIUMS UNPAID -

B.C. is waiting on \$462-million worth of unpaid Medical Service Plan payments, according to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. The Liberals have doubled the rates since elected and in the past five years rates have gone up 40 per cent. The CTF says 850,000 bills are at least 31 days overdue, and the bulk of that, \$418 million, comes from payments that are more than 90 days overdue. The government has conceded there's room for improvement in the collection system.

TAX ASSESSMENT HIKES -

Nearly 1,900 home owners in Greater Victoria received letters from B.C. Assessment warning of higher than average increases to their property values this year (15 per cent or more). The assessed value reflects what the organization believes a property is worth as of July 1, 2015 and so do not reflect increases since then.

SHORT OF MONEY -

Incredibly, almost 40 per cent of Canadian homeowners say they have found themselves short of money to cover their monthly mortgage expenses at least once in the past year, turning to debt, cashing in savings or borrowing from family to pay the bills, according to a Nov. 2015 survey by Manulife of Canada. This is of particular concern in the Victoria region considering housing costs are among Canada's highest. Mortgage rates may be close to historical lows now, but interest rates are broadly predicted to start increasing in 2016.

LESS CHARITY GIVING -

British Columbians have become less generous in the last five years, continuing what has been a decades-long trend, according to the Fraser Institute in their annual survey released in December. Fraser's most up-to-date figures show the number of B.C. tax filers who donated to charity - as high as 30 per cent a generation ago - has dipped to 20 per cent.

PAYDAY LOANS SOARING - Vancity is worried that the payday loan industry is thriving in B.C., and use of the high-fee loans has climbed 58 per cent between 2012 and 2014. The credit union notes B.C. has a soaring cost of living, along with the highest rate of working-age people living in poverty, and says those factors may contribute to the sharp increase in the loans. According to the study, 198,000 people - about 5.5 per cent of adults in B.C. - used payday loans that are restricted to service charges of 23 per cent of the amount borrowed. \$

SOOKE STONEWALLS ON SETTLEMENTS

With proposed property tax increases of 2.35 this year, escalating sharply to 4.57 per cent in 2017 and another 5.59 per cent in 2018, many District of Sooke taxpayers are wondering how much of the increase is due to any severance payments earlier this year to four senior staff. If you're a business owner - paying a multiple of these rates - you wonder even more. Last year there was a zero increase in property taxes.

On Dec. 14, 2015, Teresa Sullivan was appointed the new chief administrative officer for the District of Sooke and its 11,500 residents. She replaces Gordon Howie who completed a three-year contract. Since then three key managers departed in a matter of weeks: the corporate officer, finance director and city engineer.

Grumpy Taxpayers of Greater Victoria, a citizen's advocacy group dedicated to accountable government, lower taxes, and less waste, has filed a freedom of information request asking for details about any severance pay. To date that information has not been released, due to objections by one or more of the senior staff.

The proposed five-year financial plan tabled at council March 14 shows however a major increase in salaries for corporate services for the District of Sooke, increasing substantially from \$510,638 (2015) to \$780,477 (2016). The benefit packages also jump from \$81,298 (2015) to \$134,873 (2016).

The questions remain, how much of the district's consolidated budget of an estimated \$18.3-million is severance payout and were the expenditures necessary?

[I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it any more >>](#)

Which way to Victoria?

MUNICIPAL MATTERS

The **provincial government is moving forward with its response to calls for municipal amalgamation** in the region, reports CFX 1070. "The government has issued a call for bids, from consultants, to take on the job of gathering information about municipal service delivery and governance in the region. Minister Peter Fassbender has promised to be in contact with local mayors once again once the consultant is hired, and he sets out an autumn 2016 target for final findings"....**Oak Bay property transfer taxes are now available and amounted to \$6,045,860 from 587 transactions** in 2004-05 fiscal year, bringing the Victoria regional total to \$63.8-million....

NO SIGN OF SPRING BIRDS !

The City of Victoria has scored a runner-up Teddy Government Waste award from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation shaming it for wasteful government spending. It was awarded at the 18th annual event during a recent news conference on Parliament Hill. The City got a nod for its music sensors placed on stairwell railings in a municipal parking garages at Bastion Square parkade for **\$10,000 of taxpayers money**.

The railings will be equipped with sensors that, as people's hands run over it, trigger sound and light effects for each of the six floors. There will be bird songs in the spring, jazz during the Victoria International Jazz Festival and seasonal music at Christmas. There will also be sampled drum sounds, allowing people to trade rhythms back and forth.

There's hope for the taxpayers though, expected completion was Dec. 31, 2015 but as of the start of April, there's no evidence the art installation had started.

MORE >> <http://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/bastion-square-parkade-stairwell-sensors-will-trigger-songs-lights-1.2048706#sthash.T6GcQTTb.DGIGZ2qd.dpuf>

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WHAT'S COMING UP

OPEN BOARD MEETING - 60-% GOAL REACHED - Donations have ranged from \$25 to \$450. With your help Grumpy\$ has now **reached the 60% mark** of our start-up goal of \$5,000. To make it easier for our supporters we've added a PayPal button at the bottom of this page that accepts all major credit cards. Thank you for your generous support. Join us **Tuesday, Apr. 19 from 12 to 2 pm** for lunch and meeting at location TBA. Partners and interested supporters are welcome to sit in, but please RSVP to grumpytaxpayers@telus.net ...

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Sincerely,

The Grumpy Taxpayer\$ Team

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A non-profit, unaffiliated, non-partisan, citizen's advocacy group dedicated to accountable municipal government, lower taxes and less waste.

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