

Frequently Asked Questions

Impact of New Service Alberta Fee

City Mill Rate Affected

Q: Why is the city raising taxes to cover the new Service Alberta fee being charged for vehicle electronic search requests by the Medicine Hat Police Service?

A: The Medicine Hat Police Service operating budget is funded by the City of Medicine Hat. The Service, Police Commission and the City believe the new imposed fee will be a significant hardship to the current Police budget and possibly create a negative impact on police operations that will consequently affect public safety. To prevent this from occurring, City Council approved a mill rate increase of 1.0% and will use the funds to offset the budget impact. The funds will be held in reserve and would only be accessed if required.

Q: What will the City do with the funds if the Province withdraws the new fee?

A: The funds held in reserve will be used to offset any property tax increases in 2012 and beyond.

Q: Why should all taxpayers have to cover the cost of this new fee? Can the City add the fee to the ticket, so those getting the ticket pay instead of all taxpayers?

A: All traffic fines and related charges are regulated and legislated by the Ministry of Alberta Justice. Any changes to the fine schedule would have to be made by the Government of Alberta.

Parking in the City of Medicine Hat is regulated by both City of Medicine Hat Bylaws and the Traffic Safety Act of Alberta. The parking fines outlined in City of Medicine Hat Bylaw 2434 can be amended at the direction of City Council, but those parking fines account for a relatively insignificant amount in the total impact.

Q: Is the new \$15 fee added to all tickets?

A: The \$15 fee applies to all electronic queries of license registered owner information completed through the Provincial Government online interface. The fee will not apply to operational policing queries.

Q: Does the Medicine Hat Police Service have to use Service Alberta for vehicle electronic search requests? Is there an alternative?

A: The Medicine Hat Police Service is investigating alternative solutions relating to the query capabilities, but at this time they are unsure if the temporary solutions have long term sustainability. The temporary solution which involves intense manual input by clerical staff may not be sustainable. The costs associated with this solution were also not budgeted for but would likely be significantly less than the fee impact.

Q: Is the \$15 fee charged every time a vehicle electronic search request is done for the same license plate (repeat offender)?

A: *Yes. The fee is charged for every electronic query of license registered owner information, regardless of the number of times that information is queried and whether the query results in a ticket for the offense being issued or if the ticket revenue is ever received.*

Q: Was there a fee for this service before April 1, 2011?

A: *Previous to this recent decision, the Alberta Government has never charged municipalities and police agencies for accessing this information.*

Q: When did the City of Medicine Hat and the Police Service find out about the new \$15 fee?

A: *The City of Medicine Hat's first notice of the new fee was by way of a letter received on March 22, 2011 by the Medicine Police Service copied to Chief Administrative Officer Ray Barnard. The letter from Service Alberta advised that effective April 1, 2011 municipalities would be invoiced \$15 for information provided for each vehicle electronic search request. There was absolutely no consultation or advanced warning that a change may occur up until receiving the letter from Service Alberta on March 22, 2011.*

Q: What did the City and the Police Service do when they found about the new \$15 fee?

A: *Upon receipt of the letter, the Medicine Hat Police Service contacted the author for clarification of the fee changes. Chief McGrogan sent CAO Barnard a briefing note outlining the changes and the budget impact. Chief McGrogan and the other members of the Alberta Associations of Chiefs of Police (AACP) held a teleconference to discuss the issue and collectively wrote the Minister of Service Alberta requesting a postponement of the decision until stakeholders had an opportunity to examine the full impact to their municipalities and joint consultation had occurred. The Mayor, Police Commission Chair and Chief McGrogan also wrote letters to the Province requesting the same. Service Alberta Minister Klimchuk provided the AACP a letter of response on March 31, 2011 stating there would be no change in the decision.*

Q: What is the impact to the 2011 Medicine Hat Police Service budget?

A: *If fully realized the negative impact of this fee on the 2011 Medicine Hat Police Service budget is estimated at \$525,000 and for a full year (2012) it would be \$700,000.*

Q: Is there a chance the Province will reconsider and withdraw the fee?

A: *Since the letter dated March 31, 2011 was received, Minister Klimchuk has agreed to a meeting with the AACP, but at this time there is no indication that the Province will reverse the decision.*