



March 28, 2024

Dear Residents of Fort St. James,

As we move forward into the new fiscal year, I am pleased to present to you the draft 2024 -2028 budget and financial plan for our municipality. This document reflects our ongoing commitment to responsible stewardship of our resources while striving to meet the needs and aspirations of our community.

I am particularly excited to highlight how our capital expenses align with the strategic focus areas laid out in our district's strategic plan. Our strategic plan serves as our roadmap, guiding us towards a future that is sustainable, inclusive, and resilient. Through prudent investment and strategic decision-making, we aim to enhance the quality of life for all residents of Fort St. James.

### **Managing our Assets**

Effective management of our municipal assets is fundamental to ensuring the continued growth and prosperity of Fort St. James. As such, we are committed to ongoing investments in key infrastructure projects that support the needs of our community.

In Phase 1 of the ongoing upgrades to our airport, we successfully completed the extension of the runway and installation of lights, enhancing safety and accessibility for air travel.

Moving forward into Phase 2 of the project, contingent upon securing grant funding of \$2,000,000, we plan to undertake significant improvements. This includes the construction of fueling facilities, the installation of an Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS), implementation of security fencing, and other minor operational enhancements. These developments are critical for bolstering medivac, emergency services, firefighting support, connectivity, ensuring the safety and efficiency of air travel, and supporting economic development opportunities within our community.

One such priority is the continued upgrade of our waterline infrastructure. Building upon previous efforts, we will persist in enhancing water pressure, reliability, and longevity throughout the town. These upgrades not only ensure the delivery of safe and reliable drinking water but also contribute to the overall resilience of our community in the face of changing environmental conditions.

Additionally, we recognize the importance of maintaining our road network to facilitate safe and efficient transportation for residents and visitors alike. In 2024, we will pave and restore roads, including Heathmont, Elm, Fir, and Grove Street, following the necessary watermain and service line upgrades carried out last year. Furthermore, the extension of the waterline down Stones Bay

Road signifies our commitment to expanding access to essential services and supporting the continued development of our community.

### **Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation**

Our commitment to fostering positive relations with Indigenous communities goes beyond mere rhetoric; it is a cornerstone of our values as a municipality. In line with this commitment, we are proud to announce our collaborative efforts with Nak'azdli Whut'en in enhancing emergency response capabilities. Together, we have established a joint Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and Emergency Support Services (ESS), underscoring our shared dedication to community safety and well-being. This partnership not only strengthens emergency preparedness but also signifies a meaningful step towards reconciliation, built on mutual respect and cooperation.

As part of our ongoing efforts, we are also undertaking projects aimed at revitalizing community spaces and fostering inclusivity. The plans to revitalize the lots beside Spirit Square will provide opportunities for Indigenous engagement and cultural expression, enriching the fabric of our community and honoring the rich heritage of the Nak'azdli Whut'en people.

Furthermore, through grant funding, we will be hosting Indigenous workshops at the Visitor Information Centre in the summer. These workshops will serve as platforms for dialogue, learning, and cultural exchange for residents and visitors alike. In addition, we are working closely with Nak'azdli Whut'en to offer numerous joint events for the community, further promoting understanding, collaboration, and celebration of our community.

### **Adapting to a Changing Climate**

As our community faces the challenges of climate change, we are steadfast in our commitment to adaptation and resilience. We recognize the importance of proactive measures to mitigate the impacts of climate-related hazards and safeguard the well-being of our residents.

In line with this commitment, we are dedicated to following and improving upon our Community Wildfire Resilience Planning (CWRP). This comprehensive plan serves as a vital framework for identifying and addressing wildfire risks within our region.

Furthermore, we are pleased to announce that we will be utilizing funding from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) Community Resilience Investment (CRI) program to complete wildfire fuel mitigation in Treatment Unit #1, located east of the hospital. This initiative is a proactive step towards reducing the risk of wildfire in our community and enhancing the safety of our residents and infrastructure.

Additionally, we are making significant strides in promoting sustainable transportation options through the implementation of our Active Transportation Network plan. Partially funded by a grant, this plan aims to enhance walking trails and bike paths throughout our town, making it more accessible for residents who choose to bike or walk rather than drive. By investing in active transportation infrastructure, we not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also promote healthier lifestyles and strengthen community connectivity.

By leveraging available resources and collaborating with regional partners, we aim to strengthen our resilience to climate-related challenges and ensure the long-term sustainability of Fort St. James.

**Organizational Effectiveness**

A well-equipped and efficient municipal organization is essential for delivering quality services to our residents. Investments in essential services, such as the upgrades to the Fort St. James Fire Department equipment and the revitalization of the Fire Training Centre, demonstrate our commitment to public safety and emergency preparedness.

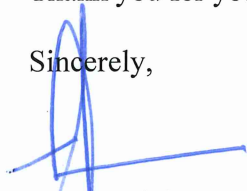
Furthermore, the District is investing in itself to ensure that we are fully staffed and trained to handle the challenges that arise. We have implemented new staffing positions, such as the Asset Management Specialist, which will allow the District to become proactive in repairs and maintenance rather than reactive. This strategic investment reflects our commitment to improving organizational effectiveness and maximizing the efficiency of our operations.

Additionally, ongoing upgrades to public works equipment and water line infrastructure will ensure the reliability and efficiency of essential services for years to come.

As we embark on these endeavors, I encourage all residents to engage with us, provide feedback, and share your vision for the future of Fort St. James. Together, we can build a community that is resilient, vibrant, and inclusive.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Sincerely,



Martin Elphee  
Mayor of Fort St. James