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Happy New Year to one and all – I hope everyone had a very Merry Christmas and a safe and happy holiday season.

CITY OF CALGARY CHRISTMAS TREE RECYCLING PICK-UP PROGRAM

The City of Calgary is introducing house-to-house pickup of Christmas trees for recycling. The City's annual Christmas tree recycling tree program has operated since 1992 with multiple temporary drop-off depots. The new service is expected to increase the number of trees recycled and enhance customer service at no additional cost. Trees are mulched and used to improve city green spaces and parks.

Over two weekends in January 2010, collectors will pick up Christmas trees from Calgary households that currently receive City residential garbage collection. The dates are:

Saturday, January 9, 2010 to Monday, January 11, 2010
Saturday, January 16, 2010 to Monday, January 18, 2010

Eight depot locations (two in each quadrant) will also be open from December 26 to January 18, 2010.

COUNCIL'S 2010 BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

Council approved the budget for 2010 on November 24th, 2009. During budget deliberations, we were successful in eliminating the \$3 parking fee at all the BRT Park & Ride lots which I believe is one step in the right direction. I tried to persuade Council to also reduce the fee at LRT Park & Ride lots from \$3 to \$1 but that motion failed. We also approved the addition of \$2 million over two years for snow removal. We will be hiring private contractors to supplement the City's crews for snow removal on secondary routes and local priority areas. Over the two years, we should be able to get a good idea of how effective an additional \$1 million per year can be in relieving some of the problems many residents experience year after year. I think this is a good idea and supported that expenditure. I also voted in favour of eliminating 125 full-time equivalent positions, most of which had not yet been filled, were seasonal positions or are currently vacant. Included in this number, there are going to be 31 current permanent employees laid off. This was not a decision that Council wanted to make but with the current economic downturn, it is what we had to do.

As always, I welcome your calls and emails so if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact my office.

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