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Millions allocated to EMS despite planned provincial takeover

By [SHAWN LOGAN](#)

Despite a provincial plan to take over municipal ambulance services, the city has included three more years of funding for its own EMS, adding millions to the operating budget that may not be needed.

Mayor Dave Bronconnier said the city is opting to play it safe and continue to fund EMS through the entire 2009-2011 budget and even expanding it by 55 paramedics, even though the province has said it will take over the program on April 1, 2009.



But after the government mused about taking over ambulance services in 2005 and backed out at the last minute, Bronconnier said the city shouldn't take any chances.

"We have seen this before, where the province has committed towards funding and not delivered," he said.

In 2009, the city will pay \$19 million to operate EMS and Bronconnier said if the province comes through, he will suggest council use that money to reduce the proposed 25.1% tax increase that homeowners are facing.

"My advice to city council would be if the province of Alberta comes forward with complete funding required for EMS, that those new dollars should go to reduce the property tax rate," he said.

If the ambulance funding is used to scale back proposed tax hikes, it could drop them by about 2.5% per year.

But some aldermen question whether any dollars saved from the EMS takeover would be returned to taxpayers.

"I don't believe for a minute that if we do a tax grab that this council has the will and determination to give any money back once it's been approved and EMS funding comes through," said Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart.