



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
August 5th, 2025 @ 7:00 PM

MINUTES

The Regular meeting of the Council on 08-25 was held on
Tuesday, August 5th, 2025, @ 7 pm within the Town Hall Council Chambers.

Present: Cr. Benwell, Cr. Heaton, Cr. Karasiuk, Cr. Bathe, D/M Keizer, Mayor
Fergusson, Cr. Tuckey, Cr. Cox, and Cr. Couvrette

Regrets:

Staff Present: Tracy Thomas, Senior Administrative Officer
Raveena Brown, Executive Secretary
Adam McNab, Director of Protective Services
Jim Hood, Director of Corporate Services

1. CALL TO ORDER

- a. Mayor Fergusson confirms quorum and reads the Acknowledgment of First Nations.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

# 25-186	Moved by: Cr. Couvrette Seconded by: Cr. Cox
That the agenda be adopted as presented.	
PASSED	

3. DELEGATIONS

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. Regular Meeting of Council 07-25

# 25-187	Moved by: Cr. Cox Seconded by: Cr. Bathe
That the minutes of the Regular Meeting 07-25 of July 22nd, 2025, be adopted as presented.	
PASSED	

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

6. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTEREST

- a. Statement of Disclosure of Interest.

7. ADMINISTRATION

- a. Protective Services
 - i. Minutes from the Protective Services Standing Committee Meeting on July 8th, 2025 – For Information
 - ii. Director’s Report



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Director McNab reported that recent statistics are consistent with previous months, with enforcement activity at or above the five-year average for responsible lands enforcement. Proactive enforcement is lower due to a focus on clearing and following up on existing files.

By-law enforcement remains at average levels, with a balance of proactive measures and responses to public concerns.

He highlighted a new deployment opportunity for structural fire departments through MACA to support ECC in wildland urban interface (WUI) firefighting in other communities. This mutual aid arrangement allows the department to use its own equipment, gain experience alongside other structure protection specialists, and generate revenue through daily rates for personnel and equipment use.

This was the first deployment of its kind in the North, similar to programs in Alberta and BC. Director McNab and Lands Officer Carbery were deployed for approximately six days, with the structural protection unit remaining in Jean Marie River for an additional five to seven days as conditions improve. The deployment provided valuable real-world experience, strengthened intercommunity cooperation, and helped retain resources and funding within the North. Lessons learned will be reviewed in an after-action report.

Director McNab added an update on Simpson Street parking, noting that he and Director Grenier had taken measurements and placed orders for the necessary items discussed, including signage and barricades to prevent vehicles from parking on sidewalks. Once the equipment arrives, it will be installed on-site.

D/M Keizer asked what liability or risk the Town would face if any equipment were lost or damaged does Fort Smith face during this exchange. He also inquired about the process and projected turnaround time if the Town suddenly needed the equipment returned.

Director McNab acknowledged that liability for lost or damaged equipment is a valid concern and will need to be addressed as part of the process, noting that the daily rate for equipment use would more than cover normal wear and tear or minor losses. He said this topic will be discussed further in the upcoming after-action review.

Regarding the return of equipment, he explained that the Town's current structure protection resources were acquired in 2023, with additional wildfire resiliency funding recently applied for to purchase a Type 2 structure protection trailer similar to those used by ECC and other jurisdictions. He emphasized that deployments are not mandatory and that equipment would never be sent if there were any risk to the community. The Town would retain enough resources to protect approximately 50 homes, ensuring local readiness, and only deploy surplus equipment when it would not compromise community safety.

b. Corporate Services

- i. Minutes from the Corporate Services Standing Committee Meeting on July 8th, 2025 – **For Information**
- ii. Director's Report

Director Hood reported that the Director of Corporate Services position remains vacant, but noted that the Manager of Human Resources has been in the role for nearly a month and is already having a positive impact. She has been assisting with insurance, pension, and group benefits administration, as well as supporting employees on long-term and short-term disability by coordinating with providers and assessing accommodation needs



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for their return to work. Her involvement is helping address human resource challenges across all departments.

Utility bills for June were issued on July 23, later than usual due to staff annual and medical leave. The July bills are expected to go out in early August as normal. Efforts to collect overdue utility accounts are ongoing, with initial notices sent to customers more than three months in arrears. The next step will be disconnection notices, delivered both by mail and door hangers.

Accounts receivable billing was also delayed this month, but is expected to return to normal in August. Work continues on upgrading payroll processing by integrating the financial software with the bank to upload payroll records, although technical issues between the software provider and the bank are still being resolved. Pricing has also been obtained for a customer portal, and discussions will take place with the SAO to determine whether to implement it mid-year or include it as a capital project for next year.

Director Hood concluded by thanking Council for the opportunity to assist the Town and expressed hope that the search for a new Director of Corporate Services will be successful.

Cr. Cox noted that it appears no one in Canada can be found to replace Jim and asked if the search has been extended to other locations. SAO Thomas reported that many resumes are received, a large portion come from overseas through platforms like Indeed, where international applicants are common. She recently shared an immigration statement related to this process. She met with recruiters earlier today to explore different options for filling the position, which has remained vacant for a year. These options will be reviewed with the HR Committee to consider more creative approaches, with a proposal expected within the next week.

- iii. Accounts Paid List
- iv. Correspondences

Mayor Fergusson asked if there is any money remaining in the donations budget. SAO Thomas noted that she does not have the budget amounts on hand, but is aware that the Public Relations budget is currently over.

- v. Briefing Note – Miscellaneous Revenue and Expense Lines from the Audit – **For Information**
- vi. Briefing Note – Variance Roll-up – **For Information**

c. Briefing Note – Guardrail Along McDougal Road

CORPORATE	# 25-188	Moved by: Cr. Bathe Seconded by: Cr. Cox
	That Council accepts this update for information and affirms that the Town holds operational jurisdiction over municipal roads, access points, and associated safety infrastructure, including the installation of guardrails. Council supports the Town’s continued operational authority to implement safety measures, manage access, and maintain the integrity of its infrastructure in accordance with applicable bylaws, transportation plans, and public safety considerations.	
		FOR: 4 AGAINST: 5 DEFEATED



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Cr. Heaton asked for clarification on the final location of the signage within the triangle of the guardrail. She noted that while the presentation of the briefing note highlighted hazards such as steep slopes, utility poles, and signage, she felt the proposed placement could create an additional hazard. She expressed concern that vehicles leaving the road in that area could be redirected by the guardrail into oncoming traffic, particularly in slippery conditions. She also questioned what specific future repair needs would be prevented, noting that the area still appeared accessible to ATVs and regular vehicles, with only the triangle in the middle potentially excluded from repairs.

SAO Thomas explained that the intent is to direct traffic away from municipal access roads, making this clear through visible signage. However, she noted that once the signage is installed, it could itself become an obstruction that vehicles might collide with, therefore, although the signage is required, the guardrails serve a multi purpose of addressing this and directing traffic.

Cr. Benwell commented that she had not heard of any accidents or vehicles leaving the road at the location in question and questioned the need for the construction. She expressed concern that the project could create a hazard where none previously existed, noting that residents have voiced similar concerns and believe it may cause more problems than it resolves.

Cr. Bathe offered a counterpoint, noting that while some residents view the structure as an obstruction, he sees its visibility as a benefit. He explained that it serves as a visual cue that prompts drivers to slow down, potentially improving traffic safety. The sense of restriction it creates may cause drivers to be more cautious, which could be seen as a positive outcome.

Cr. Benwell suggested that a sign or lights might be a safer alternative to the current barrier, which she fears could cause serious harm if struck by a vehicle. She noted that she has never heard of accidents occurring at that corner and observed that drivers typically slow down there on their own. While acknowledging that there may be data she's unaware of, she reiterated her concern that the structure could lead to a serious accident.

D/M Keizer commented on the appearance of the structure, noting that the current photos are somewhat misleading. He explained that the posts have not yet been cut down to their final height, which makes the barrier look more dramatic and visually unappealing than it will be once completed. He clarified that the finished structure will be shorter and less visually intrusive.

Cr. Tuckey questioned the changing rationale behind the barrier, noting that it originally focused on a distant power pole but now cites ATV damage, which he does not find convincing. He expressed concern that the project was not included in the Master Transportation Plan and criticized the process for proceeding without prior Council approval. He believes the structure poses a safety risk and warned that Council could be held liable if someone is injured. He suggested exploring a safer, alternative road layout instead.

Cr. Cox emphasized that Council should avoid interfering in operational matters, noting that the ongoing discussion risks blurring those lines. However, he acknowledged that if legitimate concerns exist, it is Council's responsibility to address them. He expressed concerns about liability, suggesting that once the motion has passed, Council is not responsible for operational decisions like barrier placement.

Cr. Cox pointed out that there is space available on the opposite side of the street that could have been used instead. He also raised a more pressing concern about ATV and dirt bike traffic using the multi-use trail near his home. He frequently sees riders, including



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children, speeding through without slowing or checking for traffic, particularly when heading to the gravel pit. He warned that without intervention, someone could be seriously injured or killed—either a pedestrian on the trail or a rider at a blind corner. If the guardrail remains, he believes additional enforcement or physical measures, such as posts or narrowing the trail, are necessary to improve safety.

SAO Thomas stated that the briefing note clearly outlined the purpose, rationale, and details behind the installation. She acknowledged she wasn't involved in earlier stages but emphasized that this is an operational decision, not a strategic one. She noted the project includes a sign and serves as a traffic-calming measure. Referencing comments by Cr. Cox and Cr. Bathe, she urged Council to consider whether they want to become involved in operational matters or maintain focus on higher-level strategic and long-term community planning.

Cr. Karasiuk expressed that he is conflicted on the issue, acknowledging points made on both sides. After viewing the site, he felt the structure appeared unfinished and too close to the road edge, raising questions about whether it meets road safety guidelines. He clarified that he does not believe the barrier was ever officially intended to protect a power pole, suggesting that may have been an incorrect assumption by Council.

While he shares concerns about the potential hazard a sign might introduce, he also recognizes the project as an operational matter and is inclined to defer to staff expertise. He suggested there may be ways to improve the appearance of the barrier and noted that if it acts as a deterrent to speeding, it could enhance safety. He also emphasized the need for public education on driving responsibly around that corner.

Cr. Couvrette commented that the wording of the motion simply reaffirms that the Mayor and Council do not engage in the day-to-day operations of the Town, as those are operational matters. He questioned the need for a motion to restate something that is already established.

Cr. Tuckey clarified that his intent is not to interfere in operational matters but to uphold Council's responsibility under the approved Transportation Master Plan. He noted that the current installation is not included in that plan and, as such, Council should not ignore its oversight role. He expressed concern that approving something not outlined in the plan could expose Council to legal liability if someone were injured, as Council members not administration, could be named in a lawsuit.

He shared that many residents have expressed safety concerns, particularly around the lack of enforcement at night and off-road vehicles using sidewalks. While enforcement isn't Council's role, he stressed that endorsing infrastructure that may pose a risk could make Council complicit. He reiterated that he cannot support anything he believes could endanger the public and suggested exploring a safer alternate route instead.

Cr. Heaton questioned the choice of location for the installation near the entrance of the water and wastewater treatment facility. She noted that there appears to be ample space on both sides of the entryway and asked why the triangular area was selected, especially since it introduces a potential hazard.

Mayor Fergusson stated that, given the circumstances, it fell to her to break the tie vote. She expressed alignment with the view that a better location could have been chosen for the installation. While she emphasized that she does not wish to interfere with the operational responsibilities of the Town, she acknowledged that the matter has raised significant concern among community members. She also noted the need for appropriate signage and compliance with Bylaw 642 regarding civic addressing. Ultimately, she felt that



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a more aesthetically suitable option could have been pursued and voted against the motion.

25-189

Moved by: Cr. Heaton
Seconded by: Cr. Benwell

That Council direct Administration to reconsider the current plan regarding the guardrail on McDougal and see if there are other options or considerations that can be taken.

FOR: 7
AGAINST: 2
PASSED

Mayor Fergusson asked whether the Town could revisit the project with an improved sign placement. She acknowledged that several guardrails have been installed around town without issue, but noted this particular installation has raised concerns due to its location and visibility. She suggested that the sign's placement may be contributing to the public's reaction and agreed that a more aesthetically pleasing solution may be possible. Referring to Cr. Cox's comments, she pointed out that placing the sign on the opposite side of the road could have been a viable alternative, especially if the intent of the guardrail was to protect the signage.

SAO Thomas said she is willing to take the matter back for further consideration but emphasized that the issue extends beyond just sign placement. She cautioned that if Council chooses to interfere in operational matters, she will respond accordingly, though she made it clear she stands by the original decision. She noted that the reasoning behind the installation had been explained and believes it should be allowed to proceed. Thomas added that traffic calming measures are commonly used around the world in similar situations. She also questioned the approach of making decisions based solely on the actions of individuals who are breaking the law, such as speeding or riding bikes unsafely, suggesting that this is not an appropriate basis for policy decisions.

8. COUNCIL BUSINESS

- a. Bylaws and Policies
- b. Appointments
- c. Mayor and Council / Board Representatives
 - i. Cr. Tuckey noted that both graveyards look great
 - ii. Cr. Cox raised concerns about the rapid spread of yellow clover, which he identified as an invasive species that wasn't common in the area a decade ago. He suggested it may be contributing to overgrown ditches and emphasized that changing weather patterns could be influencing vegetation growth. He proposed that this issue might be linked to climate change and suggested exploring funding opportunities related to fire management or climate adaptation.
 - iii. Cr. Couvrette reported that the NTPC Intervention Committee has filed again for intervenor status in response to a new policy proposal from the Northwest Territories Public Utilities Board (NWTPUB), developed in cooperation with Power Corp. The policy will address how renewable energy sources are integrated into the system. He emphasized the importance of ensuring the community is heard during government policy development and noted they are awaiting the draft policy and upcoming consultation sessions.



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He also highlighted three upcoming festivals: one from August 14–17, the Dark Sky Festival from August 18–21, and Fire Week from August 22–24. He expressed hope that the 10 days of events will bring visitors and economic activity to the community and thanked the Town for supporting all three festivals.

- iv. Cr. Benwell had nothing to report
- v. Cr. Heaton shared that the Canoe River Race was a fun and successful event, with D/M Keizer assisting with safety and Cr. Couvrette helping at the bun-wrapping station. She thanked Daniel and Emily Prescott for organizing the race, along with the supporting groups and sponsors.

She gave special recognition to Starr Wolki for her hard work in organizing the upcoming Whooping Crane festival, encouraging everyone to attend and show their support. Cr. Heaton also expressed excitement about the new Salt River First Nation subdivision, calling it a long-awaited development and a great reason to celebrate.

- vi. Cr. Karasiuk noted that the Communications Committee will provide an update at the next meeting. He also raised a concern that, in his nearly nine months on Council, there has been little progress on reviewing or updating bylaws and policies. He stressed the importance of starting that work, suggesting Council begin addressing at least one bylaw or policy per meeting or per month, rather than waiting indefinitely, even if staff capacity is limited.
- vii. Cr. Bathe thanked Town staff for their work on the River Run and Paddle Fest, noting it was a great event that showcased strong community spirit.

He also addressed recent discussions around bylaws, stating that some of the criticism directed at staff was unfair and uncomfortable. He emphasized that it is Council's responsibility to catch issues with bylaw wording and ensure these matters are addressed. He expressed concern that a lack of Council involvement has led to misunderstandings in the community and placed undue blame on staff.

- viii. D/M Keizer shared that he participated in the River Run event and also took part in a “Summer Santa” activity during Fireweed Festival to support the community. He expressed concern about troubling headlines he saw while away for a friend’s funeral, noting they suggest a disconnect with local law enforcement. He acknowledged that the RCMP are short-staffed and often busy, but emphasized the need to re-engage with them, as Council hasn't met with them in about two months.

He also reminded Council that a Pine Point Mine meeting is scheduled for the following morning from 9 to 10 am. He encouraged any interested members to attend and take part in the conversation.

- ix. Mayor Fergusson reported that RCMP staffing is being addressed by combining resources from Fort Smith, Hay River, and Fort Simpson, which should result in a stronger police presence locally. She emphasized the need to maintain communication with the RCMP.

She noted that *Coffee and Conversation with the Mayor* was well received and is part of ongoing efforts to improve public engagement. She also shared that advocacy continues around the Thebacha Campus, with plans to meet the



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Chair of the Board of Governors to push for improved programming and use of local infrastructure.

Lastly, she highlighted the Prime Minister’s recent visit, calling it a positive moment for the community. She delivered a letter requesting federal support for major infrastructure projects.

d. NTPC Proceeding 2025-004

SAO Thomas explained that the ongoing hearing is an unfunded expense and has already been costly. In 2024, it totaled \$21,000, and as of now in 2025, it has reached \$16,200, with no reimbursement yet since the hearing has not concluded. For the past two years, Council has been charging the expense to the Public Relations budget, which is \$18,000 annually. In both years, the budget was exceeded — reaching \$20,000 in 2023 and \$49,000 in 2024. She noted that there is currently no designated budget to continue covering these costs moving forward.

Mayor Fergusson asked whether there is any budget available from unfilled positions, such as the student position that was not staffed. SAO Thomas noted that went towards the HR position.

Cr. Heaton recalled that the Town had been keeping track of damages caused by NTPC, such as brownouts, with the intention of recovering associated costs. She expressed doubt that NTPC would proactively address those claims and emphasized the importance of the accounting that has been done over the past year to support potential recovery. SAO Thomas clarified that those costs are spent, and even when reimbursed that there wouldn’t be any additional funds available.

Cr. Couvrette stated that all of the funds in question are fully refundable through the Public Utilities Board. However, he noted that, as with other expenses such as insurance, the Town likely needs to account for carrying costs since the funds must be paid upfront before any reimbursement is received. While the internal handling of these costs falls to administration, he emphasized that the Town's involvement in the PUB process is necessary to ensure the public interest is represented. Without the Town’s voice, Fort Smith residents would be left without representation in the face of NTPC’s rate increases and policy decisions, which are often made in Yellowknife without local input and could have long-term effects on the community. He concluded by stating that the administration will need to determine how to manage these costs as part of the upcoming intervention.

Cr. Cox believes the intervention costs should be refundable under law or agreement. He raised concerns about the Town carrying the financial burden over multiple years and suggested pushing for clearer commitments from relevant authorities. If refundability isn’t confirmed in writing, he recommended considering an internal committee instead of hiring external experts to avoid further debt.

9. PROCLAMATIONS

10. DATE OF NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

Regular Meeting of Council (Community & Municipal)	August 19 th , 2025 @ 7 pm
Regular Meeting of Council (Protective & Corporate)	September 9th, 2025 @ 7 pm
Regular Meeting of Council (Community & Municipal)	September 23rd, 2025 @ 7 pm

11. EXCUSING OF COUNCILLORS

12. ADJOURNMENT



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25-190

Moved by: Cr. Karasiuk

Seconded by: Cr. Bathe

That the meeting be adjourned at 8:27 pm.

PASSED

13. QUESTION PERIOD