



Council of the Town of Fort Smith September 23, 2025 @ 7:00 PM

MINUTES

The Regular meeting of the Council on 10-25 was held on
Tuesday, September 23, 2025, @ 7 pm within the Town Hall Council Chambers.

Present: Cr. Benwell, Cr. Heaton, Cr. Karasiuk, Cr. Bathe, D/M Keizer, Mayor Fergusson, Cr. Cox and Cr. Couvrette
Regrets: Cr. Tuckey
Staff Present: Tracy Thomas, Senior Administrative Officer
Daniel Wiltzen, Economic and Tourism Development Officer (Acting Recording Secretary)
Adam McNab, Director of Protective Services

1. CALL TO ORDER

- a. Mayor Fergusson confirms quorum and reads the Acknowledgment of First Nations. Mayor Fergusson handed off the chair to Cr. Karasiuk.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

25-213 Moved by: Cr. Bathe
 Seconded by: Mayor Fergusson

That the agenda be adopted as presented.

PASSED

3. DELEGATIONS

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. Regular Meeting of Council September 9th, 2025

25-214 Moved by: Cr. Cox
 Seconded by: Cr. Couvrette

That the minutes of the Regular Meeting of September 9th, 2025, be adopted as presented.

PASSED

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

6. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTEREST

7. ADMINISTRATION

a. Community Services

i. Director's Report

SAO Thomas commended the team for pulling the report together despite the absence of both a director and an aquatics coordinator. She noted that with the recreation coordinator away for medical reasons, the team has stepped up and shared the additional responsibilities effectively.

Cr. Karasiuk noted that the new Director of Community Services will begin in early October and asked for clarification on the start date of the new Aquatics Coordinator. SAO Thomas



confirmed that the Aquatics Coordinator will begin on September 26 and will immediately begin training.

Cr. Couvrette commended Town staff for their strong support of the August festivals, noting that the events were demanding for both volunteer groups and the community. He encouraged the Town to connect with the Thebatcha Leadership Council to help bring volunteer groups together and discuss scheduling events more spread out rather than all together as its very demanding on volunteers.

Mayor Fergusson echoed the comments made, emphasizing that Town staff did an excellent job supporting the recent festivals. She noted that the events were successful because of the strong efforts and resources provided by everyone involved. She also shared that she is looking forward to attending craft night at the library this Thursday to learn crocheting. Mayor Fergusson highlighted the value of having adult evening activities available, especially heading into the winter months, and commented on how engaging and enjoyable the community’s programs are.

b. Municipal Services

i. Director’s Report

Mayor Fergusson inquired about the pool, asking whether it is currently operating at reduced capacity due to the missing unit. She noted that the same unit had been awaited even after the pool reopened and observed that staff are still managing the air despite its absence.

SAO Thomas explained that the biggest challenges with the pool’s air system have typically occurred in the winter, when it either runs at full blast and becomes too cold, or is turned off and ice begins to form. She noted that while these issues have been managed in the past, a positive development is that the replacement part is now on its way. The supplier has confirmed its shipment, and it is expected to arrive within the next few weeks. Once installed, it should not impact pool operations.

Cr. Cox asked whether an additional spare part had been ordered along with the required one. SAO Thomas said she was unsure if a spare part had been ordered but would follow up, adding that she may consider ordering one depending on the cost. Deputy Mayor Keizer noted that a surge protector was also on the way for the pool equipment.

D/M Keizer recalled that a motion had been passed a few meetings earlier to activate the sewer system for Salt River and noted a concern mentioned in the report. He asked the SAO for an update on the status, whether the issue had been resolved, and if the cause of the problem was known.

SAO Thomas reported that we had met with the CEO of Salt River First Nation earlier that day and confirmed they are still looking into the issue and working to address it.

c. Briefing Note: DPA-044-25 Conditional Approval

# 25-215	Moved by: Mayor Fergusson Seconded by: Cr. Couvrette
That DPA-044-25, submitted by CAB Construction, for the pouring of footings for the proposed development at 90 Portage Street be granted conditional approval subject to proof of adequate parking, submission of required engineering and drainage plans, and approval of final building drawings by the Office of the Fire Marshal, with no further construction permitted until final development permit is issued.	



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PASSED

Cr. Couvrette noted that, pending the vote, conditional permission would be issued to proceed with pouring the footings. He then asked if, in the event construction on the building could not continue, the property would need to be returned to its original condition or if the footings would be allowed to remain.

SAO Thomas deferred the question to Director McNab but emphasized that it would likely follow the same conditions as any other development permit. If the project could not continue due to lack of funding, the same requirements would apply.

Director McNab agreed with SAO Thomas, explaining that if a conditional permit cannot be met, it is treated like any other permit. Should the work not be completed or the permit expire, a stop work order would be issued, and the property would be required to be returned to its original condition.

D/M Keizer, referring to the briefing note, observed that Council was being asked to choose between option A or B, along with several sub-criteria numbered two to five. He asked the Director if he would be addressing those points in more detail, noting that he would like to hear his perspective beyond what was written.

Director McNab provided an overview, explaining that the contractor is requesting conditional approval to proceed without meeting the standard requirements of a development permit. He noted that only a building footprint has been submitted, which does not allow for the 30 parking spaces required by zoning bylaws. Currently, only 25 spaces are available.

He stated that temporary approval was previously granted for formwork, as it was not permanent, but this request for footings is more significant. Conditional approval would require proof of adequate parking, either through a long-term lease or other agreement, or by submitting a proposal to Council to create additional parallel parking along the frontage.

Other required conditions include: submission of engineered building drawings with floor plans and elevations, a drainage plan, and review by the Office of the Fire Marshal, which could require changes that affect the footprint. No further construction beyond footings would be permitted until full compliance is achieved and a final development permit is issued.

D/M Keizer asked if it was common practice for a development application to include only a floor plan without a full building design, and whether this had been seen in past projects. Director McNab stated that this situation is new to him and expressed surprise that a footprint was submitted in the report without any engineered building drawings.

Cr. Cox noted that the proposed use of the property is listed as a Parks Canada office building, but shared that in unofficial conversations, Parks staff seemed unaware of the project. He expressed concern that while the intended purpose of a building can change over time, there is currently uncertainty about its actual use. He pointed out that if it were strictly office space, fewer parking spaces might be needed since many staff could walk or bike. However, if the building later became a visitor center, larger accommodations such as RV parking would be required, which would complicate the situation. He concluded that there does not seem to be enough information at this stage.

Director McNab agreed and noted that if the visitor experience portion of Parks Canada were to relocate, some visitors would likely still come through the area, depending on whether the Town continues to host its tourist information there. He also asked Council to consider that the parking lot would need to accommodate not only staff vehicles but also Parks Canada fleet vehicles, which currently take up a significant number of spaces behind



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the federal building. He added that this demand could nearly fill the lot and suggested that D/M Keizer may know the exact number of fleet vehicles present on a given day.

Cr. Cox noted that while it is not Council's role to decide how Parks Canada allocates its staff or operations, the proposed building appears to have substantially less square footage than their current facility. He suggested this likely means not all staff would be moving to the new location. He added that the main question remains whether or not there will be enough parking spaces to support the building's use.

Cr. Couvrette stated that his main concern was ensuring the site would not be left in poor condition if the contractor's plans did not move forward. He noted that Director McNab had assured him the current processes would require the land to be remediated if construction did not proceed. With that assurance, he expressed support for granting conditional approval to allow the contractor to move ahead, acknowledging the likely need to pour concrete this fall under a tight timeline. He added that new development and a large building on the lot would generate more tax revenue for the Town than leaving it vacant.

d. Briefing Note: Housing Accelerator Fund – Development Fee Refund and Waiver

25-216

Moved by: Cr. Bathe

Seconded by: Cr. Couvrette

That Council approve refunding all development fees collected since January 1, 2025, and waiving development fees for the remainder of the Housing Accelerator Fund program, with costs recovered through HAF funding, and direct Administration to incorporate a cost recovery fee model in the Rates and Fees Bylaw review.

PASSED

Cr. Couvrette proposed a slight amendment to the motion to make it explicitly clear that development fees would apply only to projects under the HAF funding. He expressed concern that if the wording referred to "all development fees," it could create confusion or be misinterpreted in the future.

SAO Thomas explained that one of the requirements of the HAF program is to streamline the overall development fee structure. She noted that this timeline will not be met this year due to delays in moving that part forward. She clarified that when data on development fees is collected, HAF requires information on all fees, not just those tied to new builds. She added that the intent is to create a comprehensive development fee structure that reviews all related fees and cost recovery mechanisms, making it all-encompassing rather than limited to new units.

Cr. Couvrette stated that his concern was ensuring clarity around which development fees are included. He noted that between January 1, 2025, and now, other development permits may have been issued for commercial or industrial projects. He emphasized that the intention should be clear—that only residential units under the HAF program would qualify, and that fees from other types of development, such as industrial or commercial, would not be refunded.

Cr. Bathe asked for confirmation that the program is intended to cover all development fees, not just those related to housing. SAO Thomas explained that the project requires a review of the entire development fee model, not just specific portions. She added that if Council preferred to limit it to residential builds, she had no objection, noting that it would simply result in a different figure.

Mayor Fergusson sought clarification that the \$19,000 referenced represents all development fees collected since January 1 and that the HAF funding will cover all of those fees. She stated her support for the motion as written, noting that it encourages



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development and benefits the community. She added that the Town should not limit the coverage unless the funding requirements or reporting expectations change. She concluded that the original wording does not need amendment and should be approved as stated.

SAO Thomas added clarification, noting that she had already reviewed the matter with the HAF project administrator at CMHC. She explained that during the last reporting round, when she submitted a report showing only new build units, the administrator advised that all development activity needed to be included. She confirmed that the program requires capturing all related data and reassured Council that this approach had already been validated with the project consultant.

Cr. Cox acknowledged Cr. Couvrette's concern, noting that his initial reaction was similar. However, he stated that since the funding simply shifts costs from one source to another, it ultimately benefits local developers and helps encourage development. He added that increased development also builds community capacity by creating more opportunities for tradespeople to gain certifications and experience. He expressed support for the program, provided it is clear that it is a one-time initiative and that development fees will eventually return as a Town responsibility.

Cr. Couvrette withdrew his amendment to the motion.

e. Briefing Note: Update Metis Land Swap Proposal and Water Sewer Assessment

25-217

Moved by: Mayor Fergusson

Seconded by: Cr. Cox

THAT Council direct Administration to inform the Fort Smith Métis Council that, following the completion of the Water and Sewer System Assessment and the confirmation that additional land for future water reservoir needs will not be required, the Town will not be proceeding with the proposed land trade at this time;

AND THAT Administration convey Council's appreciation for the cooperative discussions to date and its commitment to working with FSMC on future opportunities of mutual benefit.

PASSED as amended

Mayor Fergusson noted that when the Town undertook the water and sewer assessment project one of the considerations was potential growth in areas such as Border Town, Smith Landing, or other new developments. The SAO met with the engineers conducting the assessment and they have confirmed that the existing system could support additional subdivisions with the current water supply.

SAO Thomas clarified that the engineer indicated there is more than sufficient land beside the water plant to allow for future expansion if needed. However, it does not project future need for additional water reservoirs. The recommendations will likely focus more on upgrading the existing technology within the water plant, which would increase capacity without requiring additional reservoirs.

Mayor Fergusson asked whether the Town had other land that could be considered suitable for trade, beyond what had already been proposed as there is indication that the other party was still seeking land and wondered if there were alternative options available that could be offered for trade. Director McNab noted that would be a discussion between both parties.

Cr. Couvrette recalled that this matter had also been discussed by the previous council. At that time, part of the conversation focused on how the land identified for a potential trade



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would allow the Métis to pursue significant developments, including housing within the town center area. He expressed hope that by deciding not to proceed with a land swap,

Council would not jeopardize the ability of the Fort Smith Métis to move forward with their proposed development.

Mayor Fergusson suggested that the discussion be tabled until Council could determine whether other land might be more suitable for development. She pointed out that the parcel currently under consideration, located next to the water treatment facility, is low-lying and not ideal for housing or other development, though it might serve better as a pond. She noted that this land belongs to the Métis and acknowledged their concern that it offers limited development potential. She emphasized the importance of identifying land that could better support development, since both the Town and the Métis share that goal, and proposed that Council revisit the matter once alternative options had been reviewed.

SAO Thomas noted that this is actually two separate discussions. She clarified that the matter at hand was not about trading the parcel being discussed for the proposed land swap. If the other party wished to approach the Town for further discussions, that would become a new and separate conversation. She cautioned that combining the two could lead to mixing up distinct issues.

Cr. Cox stated that Council is certainly supportive of development. He added that if another development proposal were to arise, it should be brought forward to Council in the form of a briefing note so that it could be properly considered and discussed.

- f. **Briefing Note: Guardrail installation on McDougal Road**
 - For information purposes only.

Cr. Benwell observed that the guardrail had been removed from the area and a large new sign had been installed. She asked if that was how it was going to remain moving forward. SAO Thomas confirmed.

8. COUNCIL BUSINESS

a. Bylaws and Policies

i. First Reading – Excluded Employee Employment Bylaw No. 1064

# 25-218	Moved by: Cr. Bathe Seconded by: D/M Keizer
That Bylaw No. 1064 – Excluded employee Employment Bylaw be introduced and given first reading.	

PASSED

Cr. Couvrette raised a point of order, noting that during the first reading of a bylaw, the entirety of the preamble and where as's are required to be read out.

SAO Thomas noted that she had looked into this matter, as she had never run into this requirement in the past. She explained that she had spoken with other communities, reviewed the CTV Act and the Town's procedural bylaw, and consulted with MACA. Her findings confirmed that bylaws do not need to be read in full, even at first reading. Instead, they may be read by name only, provided that the bylaw is made public and all required steps are followed.

b. Appointments



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c. Mayor and Council / Board Representatives

- i. Cr. Bathe commented on the many festivals held recently and expressed appreciation for both Town staff, who provided support, and the volunteers, whose efforts made the events possible. He emphasized that both groups deserved recognition for their contributions to the community.
- ii. D/M Keizer noted that the Carnival was a great success. He mentioned that he attended the event and spoke with many young people who shared how much fun they were having. He expressed hope that the community of Fort Smith enjoyed the opportunity.
- iii. Mayor Fergusson reported that she met with the hospital CEO to discuss several issues, including the safe room. The hospital advised that the project is still awaiting Infrastructure and remains about a year away, which continues to strain policing, mental health, and community services. She plans to send a strongly worded letter to Infrastructure. She noted positive news from the hospital: two new locum physicians are on site, one with dual capability in lab work and X-ray, with hopes they will accept indeterminate positions.

She highlighted last week's TLC celebration at Salt River First Nation, which was well attended by territorial leaders and community representatives. She also attended a joint leadership dinner with the Métis, Salt River First Nation, and other councils to discuss TLC's future and funding. There was broad support to continue the partnership, which she believes strengthens advocacy with bodies such as the RCMP, the Justice Minister, NTPC, and the Royal College.

She has circulated the second draft of the zoning bylaw to local leaders and administrative staff for review. She reminded everyone that September 30 is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and encouraged participation in community events and engagement with Elders and survivors.

- iv. Cr. Tuckey – excused
- v. Cr. Cox- noted that Aurora College has a busy schedule of Truth and Reconciliation events, which is positive, and added that many other activities are also taking place in the community. He encouraged participation and involvement. He also remarked on the smoke he noticed while driving to the meeting, saying it was not a concern for the community at this time but served as a reminder that spring is approaching. He stressed that now is an ideal time for FireSmart practices, such as clearing grass and debris around buildings, since conditions will soon be dry and preparation in the fall is important.
- vi. Cr. Couvrette- followed up on the Mayor's comments regarding September 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. He added that PWK High School was also marking Truth and Reconciliation Week with an impressive lineup of activities and encouraged the community to take part in those events.



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He also picked up on Councillor Cox’s remarks about smoke, noting that forestry crews have had to respond to two grass fires in the past two days, one outside of Providence and another near Hay River. He stressed that this highlights the fact that the region remains in fire season. He reminded residents that grasses can ignite quickly, campfires must be fully extinguished until snow is on the ground, and that ongoing drought conditions make the risk of fire even greater. He urged everyone to be especially careful while out on the land.

- vii. Cr. Benwell - shared that for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, an event is planned in partnership between Fort Smith and Salt River First Nation. The event will include a walk from the recreation center to the lookout, followed by a feeding of the fire ceremony, drumming, and speeches. She invited everyone to join at 1:00 p.m.
- viii. Cr. Heaton - reported that Uncle Gabe’s Friendship Centre lunch program is back in full operation, with many children registered. She noted the program is always in need of volunteers, as even 30 minutes of help goes a long way in ensuring children receive a healthy meal before returning to school.

She also shared some of her recent activities, including making her first Dene drum at the TLE, helping with the \$10,000 bingo, and participating in the community garden harvest where more than 400 pounds of produce were collected. Aurora College donated the harvest to community partners and the food bank, which was gratefully received.

- ix. Cr. Karasiuk - remarked that many points had already been covered but added several updates. He noted that both PWK and JBT schools have Truth and Reconciliation activities planned throughout the week and encouraged residents to check their websites and Facebook pages. He welcomed returning college students and new staff at both schools, especially the new principal at JBT, and highlighted that JBT has reintroduced a supervised lunch program.

He provided an update on the DEA, noting their Facebook page is now institutionally managed rather than owned by an individual, and that a new website is being developed to host minutes and policies.

On infrastructure, he mentioned an MLA meeting on September 29 at the constituency office, describing it as a good opportunity to apply political pressure to advance projects such as the safe room. He also shared an article from BC about a community addressing doctor shortages by hiring physicians directly as town employees, suggesting it as an example of thinking outside the box.

Wearing his seniors’ committee hat, he announced an Elder Abuse Prevention Workshop scheduled for October 4 from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. in the seniors’ room at the rec center.

9. DATE OF NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

Regular Meeting of Council (Protective & Corporate)	October 7th, 2025 @ 7 pm. To be chaired by Cr. Heaton
Regular Meeting of Council (Community & Municipal)	October 21 st , 2025 @ 7 pm



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10. IN-CAMERA

25-219 **Moved by: Mayor Fergusson**
 Seconded by: Cr. Bathe

That Council move in-camera at 7:52 pm.

PASSED

25-220 **Moved by: Cr. Couvrette**
 Seconded by: D/M Keizer

That Council move out of camera at 8:37 pm.

PASSED

25-221 **Moved by: Mayor Fergusson**
 Seconded by: Cr. Cox

That Council approves the reallocation of \$25,000 from the 2025 Centennial Arena upgrades capital budget to fund the Municipal Services Department functional review by Municipal Management Advisors, as outlined in the proposal dated September 22, 2025.

PASSED

11. EXCUSING OF COUNCILLORS

25-222 **Moved by: Mayor Fergusson**
 Seconded by: D/M Keizer

That Cr. Tuckey be excused from the Regular Meeting of Council on September 23rd, 2025.

PASSED

12. ADJOURNMENT

25-223 **Moved by: Mayor Fergusson**
 Seconded by: Cr. Cox

That the meeting be adjourned at 8:39 pm.

PASSED

13. QUESTION PERIOD

Minutes adopted this 7th day of October 2025.


Dana Fergusson
Mayor


Certified Correct by Tracy Thomas
Senior Administrative Officer

