



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
November 4, 2025 @ 7:00 PM

MINUTES

The Regular meeting of the Council was held on
Tuesday, November 4, 2025, @ 7 pm within the Town Hall Council Chambers.

Present: Cr. Benwell, Cr. Heaton, Cr. Bathe, D/M Keizer, Cr. Tuckey, Cr. Cox, and
Cr. Couvrette
Regrets: Cr. Karasiuk and Mayor Fergusson
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. D/M Keizer confirms quorum and hands the chair to Cr. Couvrette. Cr. Couvrette reads the Acknowledgment of First Nations.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

25-258

Moved by: Cr. Bathe
Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey

That the agenda be adopted as amended to remove the third reading of the Zoning Bylaw and add an in-camera session.

PASSED

3. DELEGATIONS

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. Regular Meeting of Council October 21st, 2025

25-259

Moved by: Cr. Cox
Seconded by: D/M Keizer

That the minutes of the Regular Meeting of October 21, 2025, be adopted as presented.

PASSED

**Chair transferred to D/M Keizer at 7:04 pm.*

25-260

Moved by: Cr. Couvrette
Seconded by: Cr. Bathe

That Council direct the Mayor to write to the responsible Ministers requesting a prompt resolution regarding the Safe Room at the Fort Smith Health Centre. The letter should ask for an explanation for the delays, and for clear timelines for when the Safe Room will be properly repaired and fully operational for use by both the Health Centre and the RCMP.

PASSED

Cr. Couvrette reiterated concerns raised during the RCMP delegation about the condition of the safe room at the health center. He stated that the issue remains unacceptable and should remain a high priority for Council. He noted frustration that two government departments continue to defer responsibility back and forth, resulting in delays.



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Cr. Couvrette highlighted that the current state of the room is causing the RCMP to waste important resources because they cannot use the space as intended. He requested that the Mayor either write a letter or contact the responsible ministers to demand a prompt resolution, along with an explanation for the delay and clear timelines for when the room will be properly repaired and operational for both the health center and the RCMP.

25-261

Moved by: Cr. Heaton

Seconded by: Cr. Couvrette

That Council direct the Mayor to write to the Honourable Jay Macdonald, Minister of Environment and Climate Change for the Government of the Northwest Territories, outlining Council's serious concerns regarding the proposed release of tailings water into the Athabasca River system. The letter should request that the GNWT formally raise these concerns with the Government of Alberta and its regulatory bodies, and advocate for the protection of downstream communities, including Fort Smith. The letter should also request that the GNWT require that Alberta's regulatory authority provide a clear explanation of the rationale, risk assessment, monitoring plan, and long-term stewardship measures associated with the release, and request that these officials attend a public meeting in Fort Smith, either virtually or in person, to answer questions directly.

PASSED

Cr. Couvrette spoke in response to comments raised by Cr. Heaton regarding concerns about tailings water being released into the Athabasca River from the Alberta Oil Sands. He stated that the situation is unacceptable and emphasized the potential long-term impacts on the environment and on communities downstream, including Fort Smith and others throughout the Mackenzie River Basin.

He suggested that the Town take a firm stance, beginning with Council and extending to other local governments, to ensure the issue is addressed. He recommended that Council contact the appropriate regulatory authorities in Alberta and request a delegation to come to Fort Smith to explain why the release of tailings water is being considered, and to outline what assurances can be provided regarding the long-term health and safety of the river system and affected communities.

Cr. Heaton spoke to the need for direct communication with Alberta's energy regulators regarding their decisions on releasing tailings water. She stressed that the Northwest Territories should present a united position and join with communities in Fort Chipewyan and the Athabasca Delta, who are already voicing strong opposition.

She noted that the Athabasca River system connects to Great Slave Lake and continues north, meaning any contaminants from the tailings ponds will affect communities and traditional land users throughout the Northwest Territories. She emphasized that this is an issue that impacts everyone who relies on the water system.

**Chair transferred back to Cr. Couvrette at 7:12 pm.*

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

6. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTEREST

7. ADMINISTRATION

a. Protective Services

i. Director's Report



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Director McNab reported that October was a busy month for Fire and Ambulance, with 31 calls, which falls around their usual average. The department also carried out extensive public outreach for Fire Prevention Week, visiting schools and daycares and hosting an open house. In total, there were 12 training and outreach events, bringing their overall activity for the month to 43 separate callouts and engagements.

The recruitment drive held during Fire Prevention Week was very successful. It was the first time the department used a single intake with a firm deadline, which will help with onboarding and training. Fourteen people applied for seven available openings. Seven new members have been selected and will begin orientation this Sunday. The remaining applicants will be kept on file for future opportunities.

On the bylaw side, officers are seeing an increase in animal control concerns, including loose and neglected animals. This is putting pressure on the volunteer-run animal shelter, where capacity and volunteer availability continue to be stretched. He noted the importance of working with the Animal Society to find longer-term solutions.

He also attended the Fire Chiefs Association Conference with the Deputy Fire Chief. The conference provided strong training and networking opportunities. The Association continues to work in partnership with Wounded Warriors Canada to support mental health for first responders, and arrangements are being made to bring training to the community early in the new year.

Finally, he and the Hay River Fire Chief continue to sit on the territorial committee focused on wildland urban interface response. Both were re-elected to their roles with the Fire Chiefs Association and will continue to represent the region in that work.

b. Corporate Services

i. Director's Report

# 25-262	Moved by: D/M Keizer Seconded by: Cr. Cox
That Council direct Administration to contact MACA to request a 30-day extension for budget submission.	
PASSED	

ii. Accounts Paid List

iii. Correspondence

# 25-263	Moved by: D/M Keizer Seconded by: Cr. Heaton
That Council direct Administration to prepare a briefing note outlining various options and potential concerns regarding how the Town of Fort Smith could best provide support to the Fort Smith Animal Society. The briefing note should include an overview of possible budgetary implications and reference how other municipalities have approached similar support arrangements.	
PASSED	

Cr. Cox noted that it is important for volunteers to know they have the Town's support. He acknowledged the dedication and passion shown by both volunteers and community members and expressed optimism for the work ahead. He added that the bylaw related to



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animal control was one of his top priorities when he joined Council, and he is pleased to see progress being made.

D/M Keizer shared that he had spoken with several residents about the situation and reflected on similar past discussions regarding childcare in the community, which had once divided Council. He acknowledged the valuable work done by the previous Council on daycare matters but expressed concern about the Town potentially overextending its responsibilities. He emphasized the importance of having a broader discussion about where the Town's role ends and where individual responsibility begins when it comes to pet care. He clarified that he was not seeking an immediate answer but wanted to highlight the need for thoughtful consideration as Council moves forward.

Cr. Heaton informed Council that PetSmart Charities offers an Incubator Program currently being piloted in Katlodeche First Nation in Hay River. The program provides a three-year grant that communities can apply for, with funding substantial enough to cover a full-time position, fencing, dog food, and other necessary supplies such as straw. She explained that while capacity challenges prevented participation at the time, she had already contacted PetSmart Charities and received a positive response indicating that, if the community were to apply in the future, funding could be available to support this type of initiative.

c. Briefing Note: Policy and Bylaw Review Project – Mid-Project Update

SAO Thomas provided an update on the project's progress, noting that the deliverables had been scaled back due to the significant amount of preliminary work required. She explained that the Town's existing records were disorganized, with incomplete and fragmented policy documents, which created considerable cleanup work at the outset. As a result, much of the initial effort focused on sorting and organizing all available materials into a usable database that identifies which policies still need review. She added that the project team prioritized enforcement-related areas, including animal control, municipal enforcement, and administrative bylaws, in line with the scope outlined in the original proposal.

Cr. Couvrette sought clarification as to what the timeline was for this particular project.

SAO Thomas noted that the remaining Phase One kickoff has been completed and that the comprehensive review and development of the internal bylaw database will continue through November 2025. The goal is to have Track One finalized and presented to the Bylaw Committee by the end of this phase, with Track Two addressing the remaining bylaws and policies to be completed between late 2025 and early 2026. She added that the project remains aligned with the original timeline as planned.

Cr. Couvrette suggested that Council consider discussing this project further during the upcoming budget process to determine whether it should be extended or continued. He noted that if the project is only completed halfway, there may be issues with materials that remain unaddressed or outdated.

SAO Thomas stated that she would provide an updated project substantiation, including her observations and takeaways from the project to date. She noted that this update would outline areas where fine-tuning or alternative approaches could be considered and confirmed that it will be included as part of her project closeout.

d. Briefing Note: Christmas Eve Office Closure

25-264

**Moved by: Cr. Heaton
Seconded by: Cr. Bathe**

That all Town facilities be closed for the full day on Wednesday, December 24, 2025.

DEFEATED



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D/M Keizer noted that, as a unionized workplace, time off is subject to negotiated agreements. He explained that the Town already provides time off for community events throughout the year and that a full day off represents a significant additional cost. He pointed out that historically, only a half day has been given and questioned whether granting an extra half day could set a precedent that might impact future collective bargaining.

SAO Thomas explained that the proposal is intended as part of a broader wellness approach, recognizing the importance of family time and acknowledging staff efforts over the past year. She noted that while it may not necessarily set a precedent, it could be framed as a one-time motion. She emphasized that the gesture reflects Council's appreciation for staff who have worked through short staffing, taken on multiple roles, and supported one another during a challenging year.

Cr. Cox noted that after calculating the time, the proposed additional half-day off amounts to roughly 0.3 percent of annual work hours, which he felt was a minimal impact. He added that, given Fort Smith's status as a government town where many already receive similar "Donny days," the request seemed reasonable, provided there are no union conflicts. He also asked for confirmation that the closure would not disrupt programming at the Recreation Centre or the Arena, especially during the busy Christmas period.

SAO Thomas clarified that the final section of the proposal specifies that if operational requirements necessitate employees working on that date, they will receive equivalent time off in lieu at a mutually agreed-upon time. She explained that this applies to staff required to work events such as tournaments or other activities during that period.

**Chair transferred to D/M Keizer at 7:40 pm.*

Cr. Couvrette noted that the Christmas season can be a particularly difficult time for vulnerable community members, especially youth affected by issues such as evictions. He observed that during extended holiday closures, many have nowhere to go, and suggested that Council consider, through the upcoming budget process and future collective agreement discussions, a mechanism to keep facilities like the Recreation Centre or Arena open in the evenings as safe spaces. He acknowledged the additional demands this would place on staff but emphasized that a community is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members. He added that, with higher levels of government reducing their involvement in social programming, municipalities have a responsibility to help fill that gap.

D/M Keizer called a point of order, asking Cr. Couvrette, that in relation to the motion on the floor, about half paid off. It's a wonderful speech he's making, but how does that relate to this issue?

Cr. Benwell noted that Cr. Couvrette's point highlights the reality that some children come from troubled homes and rely on community facilities as a safe space. She expressed concern that closing early for the additional half day could leave those youth vulnerable or put them in harm's way.

Cr. Tuckey shared that in his experience supervising staff, good performance is generally recognized through regular pay and acknowledgment rather than additional time off. He expressed concern that granting extra leave could create unnecessary administrative work to track who works and who receives time in lieu. He added that many organizations in town only receive a half-day off, and also have staff deserving of recognition. He felt council already does well in acknowledging employee efforts and cautioned that closing facilities could negatively impact community members who rely on them for warmth and social connection during the holidays.



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SAC Thomas clarified that the discussion specifically concerns granting the morning of Christmas Eve off, as the afternoon was already scheduled as time off. She noted that this would effectively extend the existing holiday period by a few hours and would not add any new evening closures. She also stated that the change would not create additional administrative work beyond normal time-off tracking. Thomas added that council could choose to amend the motion to a half day if preferred, or proceed with the current motion and revisit the matter through a future briefing note if needed.

Cr. Cox stated that he was unsure how much the facilities, such as the Recreation Centre, are used on Christmas Eve morning. He suggested that if attendance is typically low, closing might not cause an issue, but if there is regular use, the Town should avoid inconveniencing residents. He proposed that council consider a second motion to grant staff the additional half-day off while keeping facilities open, allowing employees to take that time later in lieu of operational needs requiring them to work. He also recommended reviewing last year’s usage data before making a final decision and asked whether deferring the discussion to the next council meeting in mid-November would be appropriate.

Cr. Benwell emphasized that relying on last year’s statistics would not capture the realities of crises as they occur. She explained that during situations where youth need to leave unsafe environments, such as homes affected by parties or substance use, having public spaces available can make a difference. She acknowledged that substance abuse remains a serious but often unspoken issue in the community and expressed concern that closing facilities, even for half a day, could leave vulnerable youth without a safe place to go.

Cr. Tuckey added that Fort Smith’s social environment has changed significantly over the past two decades, noting that many support services once available to youth are no longer in place. He explained that the community no longer has a treatment center or an emergency group home, leaving few resources for teenagers in crisis. He agreed with Cr. Benwell, that substance abuse remains a serious issue in the community and that the holiday season often heightens these challenges. He stressed that some youth may need a warm, safe space and the chance to connect with peers during this time, and suggested that the Town should be prepared to help fill that gap, especially given the lack of territorial government support for youth services.

**Chair transferred back to Cr. Couvrette at 7:43 pm.*

8. COUNCIL BUSINESS

a. Bylaws and Policies

i. Briefing Note: Land Administration Bylaw No. 1065 – Council Direction on Two Items

# 25-265	Moved by: Cr. Cox Seconded by: Cr. Bathe
That Council direct Administration to adjust the draft to allow calls for proposals for all Town lands and to rely on the Underutilized Land Bylaw for the definition of vacant or underutilized land.	
PASSED	

ii. Briefing Note: Corporate Seal Bylaw No. 1070



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iii. First Reading of the Corporate Seal Bylaw No. 1070

25-266

Moved by: Cr. Cox

Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey

That Bylaw No. 1070, the Corporate Seal Bylaw, be given first reading.

PASSED

iv. Second reading of the Corporate Seal Bylaw No. 1070

25-267

Moved by: Cr. Bathe

Seconded by: Cr. Heaton

That Bylaw No. 1070, the Corporate Seal Bylaw, be given second reading.

PASSED

v. Third Reading of the Zoning Bylaw No. 1063

25-268

Moved by: D/M Keizer

Seconded by: Cr. Cox

That Bylaw No. 1063, the Zoning Bylaw, as amended, be given third and final reading.

PASSED

Council discussed Section 7.13.2 regarding paving requirements for new developments. The current bylaw requires hard surfacing for off-street parking and access areas in institutional, commercial, and Town Centre zones, with gravel permitted only where adjacent streets or lanes are not paved. Concerns were raised that this could impose high costs and discourage development, particularly in areas outside the Town Centre.

Suggested Revision:

Every off-street parking space and its access in the Institutional and Town Centre Zones must be hard surfaced if the access is from a street or lane that is hard surfaced. If the access street or lane is not hard surfaced, the parking area must be surfaced with a gravel mixture in accordance with applicable Town engineering standards.

Administration noted that allowing broader language based on feasibility or cost could lead to inconsistent enforcement if not clearly defined. Council generally supported allowing durable, dust-free gravel alternatives and acknowledged that strict paving requirements have seldom been applied in residential zones. The consensus was that some flexibility is appropriate, but the final wording must support clear and consistent application by the Development Officer.

b. Mayor and Council / Board Representatives

- i. Cr. Benwell thanked all community members who helped make Halloween safe for local children. She also noted that drivers throughout town were cautious, keeping their speeds down, which she appreciated. Additionally, she praised Salt River's Halloween display, calling it "awesome," and said her grandson especially enjoyed it.
- ii. Cr. Heaton shared that she attended the graduation ceremony for the *Empowering and Building Better Futures Program*, hosted by Uncle Gabe's Friendship Centre in



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partnership with Workforce Canada. She congratulated the group of 12 youth who completed the program, which taught life skills, first aid, wilderness first aid, and traditional skills such as hide skinning.

She also helped at the JBT canteen during the Lawrie Hobart tournament and gave a special shout-out to Quinn Heron for co-running the canteen and recently celebrating her birthday.

Cr. Heaton mentioned that she volunteered at the animal shelter for a month and echoed earlier comments about the shelter's challenges, noting it is entirely volunteer-run and needs extra help, especially over the holidays. She encouraged residents to donate time or visit to walk the dogs.

She also reminded the public that the Food Bank is preparing for the holiday season and welcomed donations of money or non-expired food items, suggesting that monetary donations may be made to the Episcopal Society.

In closing, she offered gratitude to all members of the community who have served in the Canadian Armed Forces, thanking them in several languages, and invited residents to attend the upcoming Remembrance Day ceremony at the Salt River First Nation Conference Centre at 10:30 a.m. next week.

iii. Cr. Karasiuk: excused

iv. Cr. Bathe expressed appreciation to Town staff and the many volunteers who helped make the Lawrie Hobart Memorial Tournament a success. He said it was wonderful to see the community come together to create a safe, positive environment for youth, emphasizing the important role that sports play in providing healthy outlets and connections.

He also mentioned seeing Sparky out greeting children on Halloween and thanked the volunteers who participated, along with the EMS and Fire Department members who continue to respond to difficult calls at all hours. He recognized their ongoing commitment and thanked them for keeping the community safe.

v. D/M Keizer provided a briefing on his recent trip to Ottawa with the Association of Communities, summarizing key meetings and discussions with federal ministers and deputy ministers.

He reported meeting with the Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Housing, where they discussed federal housing programs and the challenges of balancing new construction with the need to renovate or replace existing units. He noted that officials were surprised to learn that Fort Smith and other northern communities have empty government housing due to issues such as fire damage, black mould, or asbestos. The Deputy Minister took notes and expressed interest in following up.

In a meeting with the Department of Environment, Keizer raised concerns about water levels in Great Slave Lake and shared findings from the recent retrofitting of Fort Smith's water intake system, which revealed extremely low water levels. He said the officials appeared engaged and took notes, suggesting they would look into the issue further.

He also met with the Department of National Defence, where he thanked the Minister for the ongoing support of the Canadian Rangers in northern communities, noting that several Fort Smith residents were travelling for training at the same time.



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Discussions with Aboriginal Affairs focused on the Batch Leadership Committee, which is entering a funding wind-down phase. Keizer emphasized the importance of the committee’s work and the need for continued support. Officials were unaware of the funding challenges and committed to looking into it.

Keizer noted that the newly released federal budget emphasizes long-term, investment-based “nation-building” projects rather than smaller, community-specific infrastructure requests such as roads or landfills. He said it was clear that budget cuts are expected across Canada, but the North remains a stated priority for the government, with some targeted investments anticipated in areas like radar systems and highway projects.

He concluded that it was an intense but productive week, with six to seven meetings per day that felt like “job interviews.” He described the reception from federal officials as very positive and said the northern delegation made a strong impression in Ottawa. He will provide further updates as developments unfold.

- vi. Mayor Fergusson: excused
- vii. Cr. Tuckey wished the community a safe and happy Halloween.
- viii. Cr. Cox reminded residents to drive carefully as the darker months set in, noting that the current season often brings freezing rain and slippery roads. He encouraged drivers to slow down, clear their windshields, and stay alert in school zones, especially since many pedestrians wear dark clothing despite the lit crosswalks. He also highlighted that volunteers recently cleared and mowed the entire Locker Trail from end to end, likely for the first time, and commended their efforts.
- ix. Cr. Couvrette noted that he had no committee meetings to report but extended congratulations to all athletes who participated in the Lawrie Hobart Memorial Volleyball Tournament. He highlighted the event as a strong economic driver for Fort Smith, noting the positive financial impact of visiting teams and families on the community.

9. DATE OF NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

Regular Meeting of Council (Community & Municipal)	November 18, 2025, @ 7 pm
Regular Meeting of Council (Protective & Corporate)	December 2, 2025, @ 7 pm.

10. EXCUSING OF COUNCILLORS

# 25-269	Moved by: Cr. Cox Seconded by: Cr. Bathe
That Cr. Karasiuk and Mayor Fergusson are excused from the Regular Meeting of Council on November 4, 2025.	
PASSED	

11. QUESTION PERIOD



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12. IN-CAMERA

25-270

**Moved by: Cr. Benwell
Seconded by: Cr. Cox**

That Council move in-camera at 8:32 pm in accordance with the Cities, Towns, and Villages Act, Section 23(3)(b and c), information received in confidence that, if disclosed, would be prejudicial to the municipal corporation or the persons involved; and personal information, including personal information about employees.

PASSED

25-271

**Moved by: Cr. Heaton
Seconded by: Cr. Cox**

That Council move out of camera at 9:10 pm.

PASSED

13. ADJOURNMENT

25-272

**Moved by: Cr. Cox
Seconded by: Cr. Bathe**

That the meeting be adjourned at 9:10 pm.

PASSED

Minutes adopted this 18th day of November 2025.

Dana Fergusson
Mayor

Certified Correct by Tracy Thomas
Senior Administrative Officer