



**Council of the Town of Fort Smith
December 16, 2025 @ 7:00 PM**

MINUTES

The Regular meeting of the Council was held on
Tuesday, December 16th, 2025, @ 7 pm within the Town Hall Council Chambers.

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

Regrets:

Staff Present: Jim Hood, Senior Administrative Officer
Raveena Brown, Executive Secretary
Lauren Howes, Director of Community Services
Andrew Grenier, Director of Municipal Services
Cassandr Gbbons, Director of Corporate Services

1. CALL TO ORDER

- a. Mayor Fergusson confirms quorum and hands the Chair to Cr. Cox. Cr. Cox reads the Acknowledgment of First Nations.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

25-308

**Moved by: Cr. Couvrette
Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey**

That the agenda be adopted as presented.

PASSED

3. DELEGATIONS

- a. RCMP Monthly Policing Report for November 2025.

In November, the Fort Smith RCMP responded to 158 calls for service and remained actively engaged in both enforcement and community policing. Members conducted regular patrols, increased their presence in local schools, participated in Remembrance Day events. They executed a significant search warrant that coincided with an impaired driving crash, which remains under active investigation and involved a large amount of cash and suspected crack cocaine.

Compared to last year, assaults increased slightly while sexual offences declined, with many calls related to disturbances involving intoxicated individuals and driving complaints. Police also handled nine intimate partner violence-related files, resulting in five charges before the courts. The prolific offender management program continues, staffing levels are gradually increasing with additional members expected, and relief resources are used for high-demand events. Public engagement remains a priority through school activities, informal community interactions, Crime Stoppers promotion, and ongoing efforts focused on community policing, reconciliation, and youth engagement.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

25-309

**Moved by: Cr. Couvrette
Seconded by: Mayor Fergusson**

That the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 9th, 2025, be adopted as amended.

PASSED



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Cr. Couvrette noted that portions of the minutes required clarification and correction. He indicated that under Section F, Administration, comments attributed to him regarding Uncle Gabe's Friendship Centre should instead be placed under Section E, as those remarks related to the seniors program and the significant contributions seniors make to the community, which were discussed before the item on Uncle Gabe's. He also clarified that under the item concerning Uncle Gabe's Friendship Centre, the minutes should clearly reflect the \$1,000 donation that was referenced. Additionally, under the Mayor and Council section, he corrected the final sentence of his comments regarding Power Corp, noting that the major retrofit referenced was \$100 million, not \$10 million.

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- a. Attendance at the NWTAC 2026 Annual General Meeting

6. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTEREST

7. ADMINISTRATION

- a. Community Services
 - i. Director's Report

Director Howes highlighted the strong level of community collaboration over the past month, noting the Santa Claus Parade as a particularly successful example of a large team effort involving Community Services, Municipal Services, the Seniors Society, the Anglican Church, the Fire Department, TDC, and many other partners. She expressed appreciation to all contributors and acknowledged that the list of supporters was extensive. Director Howes also noted that it was a hectic month for programming, with the library delivering several highly successful programs and receiving positive community feedback, crediting staff for the significant planning and attention to detail required. In addition, she reported that the arena was operational throughout the month and hosted a range of activities, including the HOBOGO event, which was well received.

D/M Keizer sought clarification regarding the status of the hot tub. Director Howes explained that the hot tub closures are largely related to the chemical balance required for the hot tub, noting that its depth creates additional challenges in maintaining appropriate chemical levels. She advised that work is underway with Municipal Services to arrange training for the aquatics lead and herself so they can be more directly involved in maintenance and respond more quickly when issues arise. She noted that this training is planned for the coming weeks in the new year and is expected to support quicker reopening and more effective treatment of the hot tub when problems occur.

Cr. Karasiuk noted that the Seniors are very appreciative of the revised exterior entrance/exit, noting it is a big improvement from what they've had in the past.

Cr. Heaton raised a question regarding messaging and communications for Recreation Centre activities. She noted that the Town currently maintains an official Facebook page, while the Recreation Centre and Protective Services each have their own separate pages. Cr. Heaton asked whether it would be possible to better align or sync recreation-related messaging through the Town's main Facebook page to improve visibility and ease of communication, as not all residents follow the Recreation Centre page.

Director Howes responded that this is something Administration can explore further. She noted that Community Services currently shares information through the Town's main Facebook page, the Recreation Centre page, and the community bulletin board and



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these channels often generate strong engagement. However, she acknowledged that some activities, such as senior walking programs, can occasionally be missed. Director Howes advised that this feedback will be taken into consideration as staff look at ways to improve and better coordinate messaging to the community.

b. Municipal Services

i. Director's Report

Director Grenier provided an update on several operational items, noting significant progress at the water treatment plant, with actions underway for nearly all identified issues, including engaging a contractor to repair the backup boiler in the near term. He also addressed the garbage truck project, explaining that an initial approach was discontinued after unsuccessful adjustments, and that staff are now working with an experienced consultant to develop a revised program. Options for purchase are expected to be presented at the next meeting, with an estimated implementation timeline around spring cleanup, approximately three to four months away, and more detailed information to follow in future meetings.

Director Grenier also acknowledged an ongoing chemical issue related to the hot tub system, which is being addressed in collaboration with Community Services and is expected to stabilize over time. He gave a strong commendation to Public Works staff for their efforts during heavy snowfall, noting positive feedback from the public, and advised that a tender for sidewalk work is anticipated to be ready in early January, with further details to be brought forward.

D/M Keizer asked for clarification regarding the Facility Maintenance section of the report, specifically the reference to the air handler system and surge protection system. He noted that the required part has not yet been received and asked whether there is any risk of losing pool operations again this winter, or if the issue can be managed as it arises.

Director Grenier advised that he has been awaiting an update, as the air handling unit was scheduled to be installed this past Sunday. He will update Council once he has an answer.

c. Briefing Note: Purchase of Electric Olympia Ice Resurfacer and Ice Edger

25-310

Moved by: Mayor Fergusson

Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey

THAT Council approve the following:

1. The purchase of one 2025 Olympia Millennium Model E electric ice resurfacer from Big Hill Services Ltd. in the amount of \$222,579.00, inclusive of batteries, charger, GST, and freight to Cochrane, Alberta.
2. The purchase of one Olympia battery-powered ice edger from Big Hill Services Ltd. in the amount of \$8,748.00, plus applicable taxes.
3. Authorization for Municipal Services to proceed with an infrastructure assessment and any required electrical upgrades, including charging infrastructure, to support the new equipment, with associated costs to be brought forward to Council separately following completion of the assessment.

AND FURTHER THAT the total equipment cost be approved in the amount of \$242,893.35, inclusive of GST.

PASSED



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Cr. Couvrette noted that the briefing note references the need for infrastructure upgrades, primarily electrical, with the possibility of additional work, but does not provide any indication of potential costs. He expressed concern about the lack of even a general estimate and indicated that having a rough cost range would provide greater comfort in considering the matter, whether the upgrades are relatively minor or could be significantly more substantial.

Director Grenier responded that the work would be completed by a local contractor, with estimated costs ranging between \$5,000 and \$10,000. He noted that the contractor still needs to review the equipment, which will be supplied by the same vendor.

Mayor Fergusson asked whether, given that the Olympia equipment is battery-powered, local contractors are equipped and trained to handle mechanical breakdowns, repairs, and

ongoing maintenance. She sought clarification on whether the system functions similarly to gas or propane-powered equipment and whether local contractors would be able to service it if issues arise.

Director Grenier advised that the electric unit is simpler to maintain than gas or propane-powered equipment, as it consists of an electric motor and a battery.

d. Briefing Note: Donation Request – Fort Smith Girl Guides

25-311

Moved by: Cr. Bathe

Seconded by: Cr. Couvrette

That Council consider providing funding support to the Fort Smith Girl Guides to assist with youth programming, subject to budget availability.

That Council approve in principle a short Town Hall tour for the Fort Smith Girl Guides in the new year, to be coordinated with the Administration for an appropriate date and time.

TABLED

Council discussed a donation request and expressed concerns about insufficient detail to support an informed decision. Cr. Karasiuk noted discomfort with supporting the motion without a clearly stated funding amount and requested clarification on how many Girl Guides would benefit. SAO Hood advised that this information was not included in the original request but could be obtained by Administration, and that Council could choose to table the motion pending receipt of additional details. He confirmed that the request is new and not recurring.

Several members, including D/M Keizer and Cr. Couvrette, questioned whether requests for youth programming should be addressed through the regular budget process rather than through ad hoc donations. Cr. Couvrette emphasized the need for consistency and suggested that youth programming be identified as an annual budget item aligned with Council's strategic priorities. SAO Hood later confirmed participation data, noting that 35 participants were recorded in November.

Mayor Fergusson raised concerns about the scale of the request relative to the number of participants served and questioned whether the request meets the threshold of providing broad community benefit, particularly when compared to other organizations that serve larger or more diverse groups. While expressing personal support for Girl Guides, she indicated uncertainty about whether the request aligns with the Town's typical donation criteria.

Council members repeatedly highlighted the need for a clear and standardized donation policy. Cr. Couvrette, Cr. Cox, Cr. Bathe, and Cr. Tuckey all referenced the importance of having defined criteria to assess value, community impact, and consistency across



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donation requests. Cr. Tuckey cautioned that national organizations may already receive support through other means and emphasized careful scrutiny of municipal donations. Cr. Cox noted that the requested amount is significant for a relatively small group and suggested a smaller contribution may be more appropriate without further justification.

SAO Hood agreed with Council's direction and advised that, following budget approval, a committee could be formed to develop a formal donation policy, including application requirements, justification criteria, and consideration of whether certain organizations should receive annual funding through the Community Services budget. He clarified that in-kind donations have the same impact on the donations budget as cash contributions and must be accounted for accordingly.

Council acknowledged that the request could be tabled to allow Administration to gather additional information, including clearer cost breakdowns and intended use of funds, before further consideration.

8. BUDGET

a. Briefing Note: 2026 Budget 1st Draft

SAO Hood advised that over the past few months, Administration and departmental directors have been working on the 2026 budget. While the budget is normally required by December 31, a 30-day extension was requested due to a late start, setting the new deadline at January 30, 2026. He noted that the proposed budget reflects an increase in total expenses from \$13.3 million in 2025 to \$14.45 million in 2026. The draft budget also includes a projected \$304,000 increase in taxation revenue, representing a 7 percent increase over the previous year. In addition, the Administration is reviewing existing fees under the current fees bylaw to identify opportunities for adjustments, including proposed increases to ambulance recovery fees. He explained that most ambulance recovery costs are paid by the territorial government and that the proposed rates would align Fort Smith more closely with communities such as Hay River and Fort Simpson. Some of these anticipated fee increases have already been factored into the draft budget. SAO Hood reminded Council that a budget workshop is scheduled for December 29, where a more detailed discussion can take place, and encouraged Councillors to submit questions in advance so Administration can prepare responses.

Cr. Karasiuk suggested that detailed questions be held until the budget workshop, but asked whether the draft budget reflects the roundtable discussions Council held one to two weeks earlier, particularly around communication priorities, or whether those items have not yet been incorporated.

SAO Hood confirmed that Administration has taken into account the priorities set by Council, including those related to communications and levels of service. He noted that the budget document includes a section outlining the levels of service for each department, which is intended to help Council better understand the work being done and the constraints Administration faces, such as legislative and regulatory requirements. He added that these considerations have been incorporated into the budget for Council's information and review.

Cr. Couvrette stated that he does not believe a 7 percent increase in revenue would be well received by residents. He suggested that a more realistic and palatable range would be closer to half of that amount. He acknowledged that some level of increase is likely unavoidable, given rising costs associated with operating as a municipal corporation, including increases in the cost of services, heating, and electricity, which are affecting everyone. He indicated that he is looking forward to a robust discussion on the proposed



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figures during the budget workshop and noted that, in his view, an increase in the range of 3 to 3.5 percent would be more acceptable to the community.

- b. Budget Presentation
- c. Summary – Levels of Service

A note was made to change all entries regarding Smith Landing’s name to Tthebatthie Denesųtiné Nation (TDN). An apology was made regarding the error.

D/M Keizer commented that the budget document is detailed and requires careful review, noting that it took multiple readings to fully understand. He indicated that while the document is not suitable for release to the public in its current format, it contains valuable information that could be repackaged into clear communication materials to help residents better understand the work of municipal departments. He referenced feedback from the pre-budget community survey, where concerns were raised about the perceived growth of Town staff, and suggested that these concerns may stem from a lack of understanding of the services being provided. He noted that, even from his perspective as Deputy Mayor, the document was insightful in highlighting the scope of departmental responsibilities. He recommended that the Administration work with the communications team, including Director Grenier and the Mayor, to share this information in a more accessible way, as it may help the public better recognize the level and quality of services being delivered by Town staff.

9. COUNCIL BUSINESS

- a. Bylaws and Policies
 - i. Third Reading Jim Hood SAO Appointment Bylaw No. 1073

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| # 25-312 | Moved by: Cr. Karasiuk Seconded by: Cr. Bathe |
| That the Jim Hood SAO Appointment Bylaw No. 1073 be given third and final reading. | |
| PASSED | |

- ii. First Reading Land Disposal Bylaw No. 1074

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| # 25-313 | Moved by: Mayor Fergusson Seconded by: Cr. Couvrette |
| That the Land Disposal Bylaw No. 1074 be given first reading. | |
| PASSED | |

- iii. Second Reading Land Disposal Bylaw No. 1074

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| # 25-314 | Moved by: Cr. Couvrette Seconded by: D/M Keizer |
| That the Land Disposal Bylaw No. 1074 be given second reading. | |
| PASSED | |

- b. Mayor and Council Round Table
 - i. Cr. Tuckey noted that he has not been around much recently but has heard that events have been going well and expressed satisfaction with how things were going.
 - ii. Cr. Cox extended his wishes for a happy holiday season and safe travels to those who would be travelling.



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- iii. Cr. Couvrette offered a special thank you to the volunteers who continue the long-standing Santa Claus tradition throughout the community. He acknowledged that conditions would be extremely cold but noted that the volunteers would carry on regardless, providing a meaningful and positive experience for residents. He encouraged community members to acknowledge them as they pass by, even if only with a wave. He emphasized the value of their efforts and expressed appreciation for the work they do. He concluded by wishing everyone a safe and festive holiday season, a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year.
- iv. Cr. Benwell stated that she is keeping those who are less fortunate in her thoughts and prayers, particularly the local young family who were involved in a truck accident while returning from a shopping trip.
- v. Cr. Heaton followed up on earlier comments by acknowledging fellow Cr. Amy Harris for TDN and her family, noting that her partner and two children are currently hospitalized. She recognized community fundraising efforts underway to support the family during the Christmas season. Cr. Heaton also highlighted Cr. Harris' role as Executive Director of the Friendship Centre and expressed appreciation for the staff and volunteers who have supported youth programming throughout the school year, particularly Michelle McNeill for providing consistent care and warm meals to children since September. She noted that these meals are sometimes the only meal children receive in a day. She also recognized volunteers for their contributions to keeping children supported, fed, and engaged in learning. Cr. Heaton advised that the food bank will be closed until January and asked the community to be aware. She also mentioned the upcoming JBT Christmas concert, noting that fundraising through premium seating is ongoing and could potentially be expanded to increase participation.
- vi. Cr. Karasiuk extended season's greetings and New Year wishes, noting that this was the last regular meeting before the new year. He thanked the Town for the in-kind donation supporting the seniors' event and expressed appreciation to the Rec Centre staff for their assistance with setup and cleanup. He noted that the event was very successful, with approximately 110 people served and many meals taken home. He also offered thanks to Santa for helping spread holiday cheer among the seniors and emphasized that the support from the Town was greatly appreciated by those who attended.
- vii. Cr. Bathe continued the discussion regarding the family injured in the recent car accident, advising that an art sale will be held in the seniors' room on Thursday from 5 to 8 p.m., with the family donating pieces from their own collection as a fundraiser to support those affected. He noted that this provides another opportunity for the community to assist. Cr. Bathe also extended season's greetings and New Year wishes, expressed appreciation for the return of longer daylight in the coming months, and thanked Town staff for their continued work in keeping services running smoothly while many others are on holiday.
- viii. D/M Keizer encouraged Council to continue advocating for resolutions through NWTAC, noting that discussions with the association are planned for January. He emphasized the importance of recognizing that certain service pressures are GNWT responsibilities and encouraged residents to share ideas in the new year so they can be explored further. He extended Christmas wishes to the community, acknowledging that it has been a difficult week globally with several tragic events. He expressed his condolences and support to Fort Smith's Jewish community and concluded by wishing everyone in Fort Smith a Merry Christmas and well wishes through the holiday season.



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- ix. Mayor Fergusson extended season's greetings and New Year wishes and encouraged residents to check in on others during the Christmas season, particularly those who may be alone or hesitant to ask for help. She suggested simple acts such as visiting or sharing a meal to support community members. She also invited residents to participate in the Town's Christmas home decorating contest by posting photos and nominations on the Town's Facebook page, noting that the winner will be selected on December 22. Mayor Fergusson concluded by thanking Town staff for their dedication and hard work throughout the year and expressed appreciation for their efforts, as well as looking forward to working together in the new year.

10. DATE OF NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

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| Regular Meeting of Council (Protective & Corporate) | January 13 th , 2026, @ 7 pm, chaired by Cr. Tuckey |
| Regular Meeting of Council (Community & Municipal) | January 20 th , 2026, @ 7 pm, chaired by Cr. Couvrette |

11. EXCUSING OF COUNCILLORS

12. QUESTION PERIOD

13. ADJOURNMENT

25-315 **Moved by: Cr. Karasiuk**
 Seconded by: Cr. Bathe

That the meeting be adjourned at 8:07 pm.

PASSED

Minutes adopted this 13th day of January 2026.

Dana Fergusson Certified Correct by Jim Hood
 Mayor Senior Administrative Officer