



**Council of the Town of Fort Smith
February 17, 2026 @ 7:00 PM**

b. Municipal Services

i. Director's Report

Director Grenier noted that lead testing in the Town's facilities has now begun.

Mayor Fergusson asked for clarification on the lead testing process, specifically whether samples are being taken directly as the water comes out of the tap or if the water is being tested from the facility itself, and requested details on how the testing is being conducted.

Director Grenier explained that the lead testing is being conducted in accordance with the required instructions. He noted that for accurate results, the water must sit for a period of time before sampling so that any potential lead can leach into the water being collected. He also confirmed that the testing is being carried out in-house.

Cr. Karasiuk asked whether there is any update on the Town's water licence renewal. He inquired if the current timeline is typical for this process and requested an update on where the application stands. Director Grenier confirmed that the process can take up to a year.

D/M Keizer asked about the missing component for the pool and sought confirmation on whether the part that was recently received is the one that had been outstanding.

Director Grenier confirmed that the part received is the one that had been missing last year. He advised that it arrived a few weeks ago, and they are now waiting for the surge protector to be installed before proceeding.

Mayor Fergusson asked whether lead testing is conducted on an annual basis or if this is a new initiative. Director Grenier noted that this is testing that is conducted annually within all town facilities.

ii. Briefing Note: Water Plant Filter #3 Refresh and Repair Project

26-027

Moved by: Mayor Fergusson

Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey

That Mayor and Council approve the award of the contract to Anthratech Western Inc. for the Filter #3 refresh and repair project for the cost of \$73,280 (plus GST)

PASSED

c. Briefing Note: Housing Accelerator Fund – Development Fee Refund
- For information

Mayor Fergusson referred to questions raised by a member of the public at the previous meeting and requested clarification from Administration on how the process applies in this case. She specifically referenced the project that was discussed and noted that the Town does not yet have development approval and does not currently have access to the land in question.

SAO Hood explained that the question from the gallery at the previous meeting related to the development permit fees for the fire centre being constructed at the airport. He noted that Director McNab could provide further explanation as to why the GNWT department is required to obtain development approval.

Director McNab advised that he received the question earlier in the day and reviewed the Zoning Bylaw, including provisions that were carried forward from the previous bylaw. He explained that the airport is designated as a specific zone, and the bylaw recognizes the



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The Government of the Northwest Territories' authority to develop that land under the Airports Act.

He noted that the land is under GNWT jurisdiction and, as such, they are not required to adhere to the Town's Zoning Bylaw provisions or obtain a development permit for projects on airport lands. While they may choose to share plans or documents with the Town for comment, they are not obligated to do so. He further stated that developments at the airport are not subject to the Town's development approval process and that he does not believe this is something the Town has the authority to change.

Cr. Couvrette stated that the situation raised concerns for him. While he acknowledged that the provisions may be set out in legislation, he questioned whether the Department of Environment and Climate Change consulted with the Town before determining the location of the facility.

He suggested that, in the interest of good government relations, there should have been a discussion with local leadership about where the building would be situated, particularly since the project has been described as an asset to the community. He noted that the Town has been anticipating the development of this structure for some time, dating back to earlier discussions about fire services and maintenance operations at the airport.

Cr. Couvrette also expressed concern that he does not see significant direct benefits to the local business community arising from the project. While there may be some contractor involvement, he questioned whether the broader economic benefits that could have remained in the community are instead going elsewhere, noting that this appears to be a recurring issue with other projects. He concluded by stating that the Town should ask the department whether it engaged with local leadership regarding the decision on the building's location.

Mayor Fergusson asked whether the department pays any fees in relation to its use of airport property. She also asked whether there is a Municipal Services Agreement in place and how the Town recovers costs, if at all, for the services provided, such as water, sewer, fire protection, and ambulance services.

SAO Hood explained that the airport pays a grant instead of taxes, which is equivalent to what other properties in the same classification pay within the community. He added that they also pay for water and sewer services at the standard commercial rate, consistent with other commercial properties in town.

He clarified that the only fee they do not pay in this case is the development permit fee, as development on airport lands is not subject to the Town's permitting requirements.

*point of order called by D/M Keizer

Mayor Fergusson clarified that she was referring specifically to development permit fees that the Town would otherwise collect and that are not related to housing incentives. She noted that if a project is built within Town jurisdiction and subject to a development permit, but the fee is waived, the Town would not realize that revenue.

She questioned whether the project in question has dedicated funding to cover associated costs and whether the Town is recovering appropriate fees when large commercial, industrial, or institutional developments occur in the community. She asked whether development permit fees should still apply in those cases and whether any waivers should be limited strictly to projects that are directly related to housing initiatives.



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SAO Hood explained that under the motion passed in 2025, all development permit fees were waived. He clarified that this applies across the board, including commercial projects, home occupations, and developments that are not housing-related.

He advised that the Town submitted its annual report in January and that CMHC is currently reviewing it. To date, no concerns have been raised regarding the waiver of development permit fees.

However, he noted that waiving fees for commercial development reduces the overall amount available within the broader 2.6 million dollar program. As a result, funds that could otherwise support residential development or other eligible initiatives may be impacted. While the funding agency has not expressed concerns, the practice does limit what is available under the program as a whole.

Cr. Karasiuk stated that the confusion arises from the use of the phrase "waived" regarding the development permit fees; in fact, the Town is still receiving the fees, but they are paid through the housing program rather than by individual contractors. He added that his understanding is that development permits are still required, even if the fees have been "waived".

He added that his understanding is that development permits are still required, even if the fees have been waived. As such, he expressed concern that Council may not have full awareness of the size, scope, and code compliance details of certain developments if the permitting process is not being clearly tracked or communicated.

Cr. Cox noted that he had previously raised concerns about the issue and acknowledged that he may not have emphasized them strongly enough at the time. He expressed relief that the fire centre project did not significantly impact the housing program budget.

He indicated his willingness to bring forward a motion to amend the current approach so that fee waivers would apply only to projects that directly support residential housing. He suggested this could include new residential construction or demolition of existing residences. Alternatively, he proposed that non-residential projects could be considered on a case-by-case basis, with applicants required to explain why a fee waiver should be granted. He noted that this approach could be considered if it is administratively feasible and ensures the program remains focused on supporting residential housing.

SAO Hood suggested that it would be preferable to establish clear criteria in advance rather than determining fee waivers on a case-by-case basis. He noted that a case-by-case approach could lead to inconsistent interpretation or place too much emphasis on how well an applicant is able to articulate how their project relates to the housing program.

He recommended that Council consider defining eligibility more clearly, such as limiting waivers to residential properties or to the residential component of a project as permitted under the Zoning Bylaw. He indicated that this would provide greater clarity and consistency, rather than leaving the decision open to interpretation.

Mayor Fergusson asked whether this would be an appropriate time to revisit and revise the motion. She inquired if Council could amend the existing motion related to the Housing Accelerator Fund before the start of the construction season, in order to clarify how development permit fee waivers are applied.

SAO Hood confirmed that Council has the authority to amend the existing motion or to pass a new motion clarifying that development permit fees would apply to commercial and industrial projects that do not include a residential component, should that be Council's direction.



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He suggested that Administration could draft a proposed motion for consideration at the next meeting, allowing Council time to review the wording and supporting context before voting, rather than attempting to craft the amendment during the current meeting.

Cr. Couvrette recalled that at the September 23 meeting, he raised concerns about how the proposed waiver would be applied. He supports bringing forward background notes along with a draft motion to amend the policy, but said he would like additional clarification as part of that process.

Specifically, he suggested seeking written confirmation from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation regarding whether any fee waiver could extend beyond residential housing to include industrial or commercial development. Based on his experience with federal funding programs, initial guidance can appear flexible, but audit reviews often apply stricter interpretations. He noted that programs intended for residential housing may not support waiving fees for commercial or industrial projects.

He recommended requesting formal clarification from CMHC in the short term to confirm whether the proposed waiver could legitimately apply to commercial or industrial development.

D/M Keizer suggested that, if Council is considering a revised motion, it would be beneficial to consult the advisory committee that reviews incoming development proposals before finalizing any wording. He recommended seeking their input to ensure alignment and to confirm they are comfortable with how changes may affect the review and approval process.

He noted that the committee has committed to supporting the established process and emphasized the importance of keeping them involved as discussions move forward.

Mayor Fergusson asked whether Administration requires formal direction from Council to proceed. She sought clarification on what Council would like Administration to do next and what specific guidance is needed to move the matter forward effectively.

Cr. Karasiuk noted that the briefing indicated 26 permits have been waived since the original motion was passed, with costs covered through HAF funding. Of those, three were commercial, and 23 were residential.

He said that while the number of commercial permits appears relatively small compared to residential, he would like to see the associated dollar amounts. He questioned whether the financial impact is significant enough to warrant changing direction at this stage. He indicated that having that information would help him make a more informed decision.

Cr. Bathe explained that, as a member of the Housing Accelerator Fund working group, the decision was made to implement a blanket waiver on permits. He noted that CMHC had indicated this approach was acceptable, as the administrative savings from not managing individual fees would offset the costs.

He added that, given the relatively small number of commercial permits compared to residential, the group determined it was simpler and more efficient to waive all eligible permits rather than manage exemptions on a case-by-case basis.

Cr. Cox suggested that Council could consider implementing a cap on development permit fee waivers to protect the Housing Accelerator Fund from being significantly impacted by large-scale commercial projects. He expressed concern that a major project could consume a substantial portion of available funding, particularly if it already has its own capital budget.



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He noted that setting a cap, for example, on projects up to a certain value, could help limit exposure while still supporting smaller developments. At the same time, he cautioned that any change in wording should continue to support mixed-use developments, such as commercial buildings with residential units above.

Cr. Cox also raised a related question about tax assessment at the airport, asking how the Town tracks development and assesses taxes if development permits are not required, particularly in light of anticipated infrastructure changes.

SAO Hood clarified that even where there is no development permit fee involved, Administration notifies the assessors when development is taking place in the community. Each year, assessors review properties where development permits have been issued or where they are aware that construction is underway.

He explained that if a project is only partially complete, it is assessed based on its stage of completion at that time. This review is conducted annually, and the assessed value is adjusted as development progresses.

He emphasized that assessments are not based on the value stated in a development permit application. Instead, they are determined through the assessors' independent, on-site evaluation of the property and its level of completion. As a result, there is no need to wait for a future general reassessment cycle for updated values to be reflected.

- d. Briefing Note: Capital Project Update
 - For information

SAO Hood advised that the briefing note provide a general update on the status of capital projects approved in last year's capital plan, including any additions made during the year. He noted that financial details were not included, as year-end processes are still underway. The update is intended to give Council an overview of where the projects currently stand.

Cr. Karasiuk asked for an update on the TLC's plans for the cemetery and whether the matter has progressed. Mayor Fergusson noted that it has been communicated that the Town has secured the necessary materials and is seeking the TLC's partnership for labour and installation of the fencing. She indicated that they were receptive to the proposal. The next step is determining the appropriate timing, likely in the spring, and she advised that she will forward an update once additional information is received.

Mayor Fergusson advised that she has sent an email and received a response. She recently followed up and is awaiting further information. She noted that it was clearly outlined that all materials are in place and that the Town is seeking their partnership for the labour and installation of the fencing. She indicated that they appeared agreeable to the proposal. The next step will be determining the appropriate time to reconnect with them regarding spring scheduling, and she will provide an update once more information is available.

Mayor Fergusson inquired why there is no description included under the Conibear Park upgrades. She noted that the project had been in progress and that funding had been allocated, and asked for clarification on the current status and next steps.

SAO Hood advised that a design had previously been completed for Conibear Park and described it as ambitious in scope. He noted that, based on the funding available at the time, including municipal contributions and external funding sources, there was concern that the full design could not be delivered within the approved budget.



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He further indicated that limited information was provided during the handover from the previous SAO, and he will be speaking with his Directors to confirm the background and obtain additional details. His understanding is that further consideration is required to

determine which elements of the original design can realistically be completed within the available funding. He also noted the need to confirm whether the CanNor funding remains available, given that the project has been ongoing for several years, and whether that funding can still be applied to the project.

**chair transferred to Mayor Fergusson @ 7:34 pm*

Cr. Benwell noted that she previously sat on the board and recalled that three different design options were presented at the time, with one ultimately selected. She added that the plans for those options should still be available and suggested that it may be possible to revisit the alternatives and consider a different, more feasible approach based on the current funding situation.

SAO Hood advised that he will look into the design options that were previously presented, as well as confirm the current status and availability of the associated funding. He will bring that information forward at the next meeting.

**chair transferred back to Cr. Benwell @ 7:35 pm*

Mayor Fergusson noted that she had a few questions regarding the Centennial Arena upgrades. She observed that the work has been deferred multiple times, previously during her time on Council and now during her term as Mayor. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that the planned repairs, including board replacements and other maintenance items identified for the arena, are completed this year, as they were not undertaken in prior years.

SAO Hood advised that Administration will be bringing forward the capital plan in March, at which time detailed justifications will be provided for all proposed capital projects, including those that have not yet been actioned, as well as any new initiatives. He noted that each project will be evaluated against the funding available and presented to Council for consideration.

He further explained that if the arena project remains a priority relative to other competing needs, it will move forward. However, if higher priority items such as water and sewer infrastructure require attention, the arena upgrades may be ranked lower and potentially deferred within the 2026 capital plan.

Mayor Fergusson referenced the Community Services report and noted that the arena has the highest level of community use among municipal facilities. She expressed concern that continued deferral of upgrades could result in the asset deteriorating, similar to other facilities where investment had been delayed.

While acknowledging that water and sewer infrastructure may take priority, she emphasized that heavily used community assets should not be allowed to decline to the point where significant reinvestment is required simply to restore them to a basic standard. She encouraged Administration to consider the high level of community use and overall involvement at the arena when evaluating and prioritizing future capital projects.

Cr. Couvrette acknowledged that his comments may be slightly premature, but noted that previous Councils had discussed the possibility of dedicating specific resources to project management within the capital budget process. He requested that Administration provide recommendations on how capital projects should be managed moving forward.



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He recognized that Directors are already managing significant workloads and expressed concern that adding multiple capital projects at once may not be sustainable. He suggested that overextending staff could result in delays and impact service delivery to residents. He encouraged Administration to provide insight and practical recommendations to ensure capital projects are effectively managed.

SAO Hood advised that several current capital projects are being managed by external firms. However, he noted that even with outside project management support, there remains a significant time commitment required from Directors and from himself to coordinate with contractors, engineers, and oversee overall progress.

He explained that most projects already include a project management component, but Administration will review the types of projects being brought forward to determine which may require additional project management resources. He emphasized that, regardless of external support, advancing capital projects continues to require considerable involvement from senior Administration.

D/M Keizer commented that the list was impressive and thanked Administration for the update. He noted that a significant number of items appear to be completed or nearing completion, with few projects listed as pending or awaiting action. He acknowledged the strong progress reflected in the report and commended staff for their efforts, stating that, based on the information provided, Administration appears to be on a positive track.

Cr. Cox reflected that when Council first reviewed the capital project list last year, it felt overwhelming for a new Council. He noted that significant progress has since been made, with many projects completed or well underway.

He observed that capacity within the Town could potentially be strengthened and suggested examining the amount spent on external project management consultants over the past year. He indicated that if consultant fees are substantial, it may be worth discussing whether those funds could support an in-house senior project management position instead. He suggested that having a dedicated resource locally could improve coordination and communication and encouraged further discussion on the feasibility of that approach.

SAO Hood advised that the upcoming capital plan in March will place a stronger emphasis on maintaining and improving existing assets, rather than prioritizing new development unless required for essential services such as water and sewer infrastructure.

He indicated a particular focus on enhancing the water distribution system to ensure it meets appropriate standards and allows for ongoing improvements. In addition, he proposed developing an inventory of critical components across municipal facilities and infrastructure, so that essential parts and equipment are readily available in the event of a failure. This approach would help avoid extended service disruptions and ensure continuity of programming and community services.

He noted that while this maintenance-focused approach will guide the next capital plan, Administration will also revisit previously proposed and ongoing projects as part of that review.



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e. Briefing Note: Capital Budget Request – Dispatch Hardware

26-028

Moved by: Cr. Cox

Seconded by: Cr. Couvrette

That Council approve a 2026 capital budget commitment of \$15,000.00 for communications equipment, and that this capital budget be used to install necessary hardware and software for the procurement of fire and EMS dispatch services.

PASSED

Cr. Cox questioned the timing of the item, noting that with capital budget discussions scheduled for March, he was unsure why this matter was being brought forward ahead of the broader capital planning process.

Director McNab explained that Council recently approved an operations and maintenance budget that includes funding for this year's procurement and the ongoing cost of the dispatch service. He noted that, rather than waiting several months for the broader capital budget discussions and supporting documentation, Administration is seeking to move this project forward now.

He advised that this is an existing budget line for Evergreen and added that, over time, it is expected to generate savings by reducing future capital requirements for communications equipment. Although the item is being brought forward ahead of the full capital review, he clarified that the project is primarily related to hardware procurement already accounted for in the approved budget.

Cr. Couvrette asked whether acquiring the new dispatch system would enhance the Town's ability to communicate with the public during emergencies.

Director McNab advised that the new dispatch service will significantly improve the Town's ability to communicate directly with individuals calling for emergency services. He clarified that it will not substantially change the broader emergency notification systems already in place, which are functioning well. However, it will enhance direct caller communication, reduce the time between receiving a call and dispatching services, and improve overall response coordination.

Cr. Cox acknowledged that the current dispatch system has functioned over the years, largely due to the efforts of individuals who stepped in to assist. However, he characterized the change as another example of the Government of the Northwest Territories shifting responsibilities onto municipalities.

He noted that while there may now be an agreement in place, the cost associated with assuming this responsibility is significant and should not be overlooked. He emphasized the importance of holding the territorial government accountable for these added pressures, particularly when municipalities face criticism over tax increases. He stated that Council should ensure residents understand the broader context of rising costs and the transfer of responsibilities to the municipal level.

Director McNab advised that 911 will remain available for residents in Fort Smith. He explained that calls placed to 911 will continue to be answered through the territorial system and, where fire or ambulance services are required, will be immediately transferred to the new dispatch service. While callers will still dial 911, their calls will be redirected to the appropriate call centre and routed to local responders without going through the previous dispatch questioning process.



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He further noted that the Town will continue operating its local emergency number. Calls made to that number will go directly to the new dispatch service, ensuring efficient routing to local emergency services rather than reaching the fire department line directly.

Director McNab added that Administration is considering whether the separate ambulance number remains necessary, given that both 911 and the local emergency number will connect callers to the same dispatch service. He indicated that any changes to public-facing numbers would require further discussion and clear public communication.

8. COUNCIL BUSINESS

- a. Bylaws and Policies
- b. Mayor and Council Round Table
 - i. Cr. Heaton noted that Maureen Mercredi, who had been operating the thrift store, had left town, describing her departure as a significant loss to the community. She also acknowledged Kim, Sam, Ryan, and their young staff at the Northern for their generous donation to the food bank. In addition, she advised that the Animal Shelter's AGM is scheduled to take place in March.
 - ii. Cr. Karasiuk, speaking in his capacity as part of the Seniors Society, noted that the community has recently lost several senior members. He extended his condolences to the families of those individuals.
 - iii. Cr. Bathe, reflecting on the earlier discussion regarding volunteers, noted the positive work being carried out throughout the community. He highlighted the strong volunteer involvement in local hockey programs and expressed appreciation for the level of community engagement he has observed.

He also extended condolences to those who have recently lost friends or family members. In particular, he spoke about his neighbour, Brenda, describing her as a bright presence in the neighbourhood who regularly connected with others and shared kind words. He noted that she will be deeply missed in their part of the community.

- iv. D/M Keizer noted that the AGM is scheduled to take place in two weeks and indicated that a few members will be attending. Before that, he and Cr. Couvrette will be participating in a meeting with the Power Corporation to receive an update on current operations and management matters.

He also requested that a future discussion item be added to the agenda, referencing prior correspondence from a resident regarding the status of the advisory board committee and whether it would be reinstated or utilized moving forward.

- v. Mayor Fergusson referenced the earlier comments regarding advisory boards and reminded Council that on January 20, she had requested feedback on the future of the Town's community advisory boards. She noted that she has not yet received responses and indicated she will follow up again. She emphasized that she does not want to lose the advisory boards, as they serve as important community connections and provide valuable input on local matters. She encouraged the Council to consider how they wish to utilize them moving forward.

She also noted that the Animal Shelter AGM had already been mentioned. In addition, she spoke positively about a recent meeting with the RCMP, stating that it helped open lines of communication and fostered a constructive working



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relationship. She expressed confidence that continued collaboration between Protective Services and the RCMP will benefit the community.

It was noted that TLC recently met with the Board of Governors and the President of Aurora College. The meeting was described as noticeably different from previous discussions, with a stronger sense of listening and collaboration. There was a more positive tone overall, and cautious optimism about future engagement.

It was also noted that a one-on-one meeting is scheduled with Caitlin Cleveland to specifically discuss TLC’s open letter, with the hope of achieving constructive outcomes.

In addition, the community will be hosting the Snowboard Canada Games trials at the end of February. Residents were encouraged to attend and support the event.

- vi. Cr. Tuckey expressed his deepest condolences to those who have lost a loved one recently.
- vii. Cr. Cox noted that the days are getting longer and commented on how noticeable the additional daylight was on his way to the meeting. He observed that a busy season is approaching, with events such as the dog races, the Winter Frolics, the Loppet, and the fishing derby taking place. He encouraged residents to get out and support the many activities happening in the community.
- viii. Cr. Couvrette expressed his condolences to those who have lost family or friends recently.
- ix. Cr. Benwell expressed her appreciation to the crews who keep the roads clear and safe. She noted that she drives frequently throughout the community and on the highways, and has observed the effort that goes into maintaining not only the streets but also the sidewalks. She extended her thanks for the work being done to keep conditions safe for residents.

9. PROCLAMATIONS

10. DATE OF NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

Regular Meeting of Council (Protective & Corporate)	March 3 rd , 2026, @ 7 pm, chaired by Cr. Karasiuk
Regular Meeting of Council (Community & Municipal)	March 17 th , 2026, @ 7 pm, chaired by Cr. Tuckey

11. EXCUSING OF COUNCILLORS

12. QUESTION PERIOD

13. ADJOURNMENT

# 26-029	Moved by: Cr. Karasiuk Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey
That the meeting be adjourned at 8:03 pm.	
PASSED	



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Minutes adopted this 3rd day of March 2026.

Dana Fergusson
Mayor

Certified Correct by Jim Hood
Senior Administrative Officer

