



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
August 25, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

MINUTES

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

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

Regrets:

Staff Present: David Henderson, Senior Administrative Officer
Raveena Brown, Executive Secretary
Lauren Howes, Director of Community Services
Awa Mbacke, Director of Corporate Services

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

26-173 **Moved by: Cr. Couvrette**
Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey

That the agenda be adopted as presented.

PASSED

Cr. Couvrette declared a conflict of interest under Item 7(c), Administration.

3. DELEGATIONS

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. Regular Meeting of Council August 11, 2026

26-174 **Moved by: Cr. Karasiuk**
Seconded by: Cr. Bathe

That the minutes of the Regular Meeting of August 11th, 2026, 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

Director Howes presented the Community Services report for July, noting that the department dedicated significant resources to supporting the Wrigley evacuation from June 29 to July 29. Despite this, the department supported several successful community events and programs, including Canada Day, TDN Treaty Day, Northern Lights Care Home



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activities, and the Farmers Market, which continued to see increased community and vendor participation.

Aquatics staff received additional swim instructor training, allowing swim lessons to begin in the coming weeks. The Library hosted Freddie the Turtle's birthday celebration and popular STEM robotics programming. The Daycare had a successful month, received funding for a kitchen renovation, accommodated increased drop-in demand, and successfully completed an NWT health inspection. Summer Camp operated at approximately 90 to 100 percent capacity and offered activities including paddleboarding, tennis lessons, visits to Conibear Park, and water activities with support from Protective Services.

Our Economic and Tourism Development Officer supported Canada Day celebrations and operated a successful pop-up merchandise shop with extended hours to accommodate visiting fire crews. Town Hall also received a fresh coat of paint. Director Howes noted that the Museum Stewardship Survey received approximately 37 responses, with the results shared with Council.

Cr. Couvrette expressed support for the continued growth of the aquatics program and asked whether the Town, through the Recreation Division, could advocate for and support the development of a local swim club.

Director Howes confirmed that developing a swim club is a goal for the department. She explained that re-establishing swimming lessons is an important first step in building swimming skills and increasing participation in the community. As more children become confident swimmers, the department hopes to build sufficient participation to support a swim club. She noted that there has been significant interest from parents in seeing a swim club return.

b. Municipal Services

SAO Henderson advised that the Director of Municipal Services was away for the month of August and would return the following week, with a departmental update to be provided in September. He highlighted the raw water intake and main lift station project as the most significant ongoing project, noting that biweekly meetings continue with the project manager and contractor. While progress is taking longer than anticipated, staff remain actively engaged in addressing timelines and moving the project forward.

SAO Henderson also highlighted the sidewalk repairs currently underway throughout the community, noting that Council's decision to proceed with the partial funding allocation has allowed the work to move forward.

Cr. Bathe asked whether a map identifying the areas targeted for sidewalk repairs was available or could be prepared and shared with the public. He also asked who residents should contact regarding areas of concern that may not be included in the current sidewalk work, particularly while the Director of Municipal Services is away.

SAO Henderson confirmed that a map of the sidewalk repair areas could be prepared. In the interim, residents with concerns were encouraged to contact Town Hall until the Director of Municipal Services returns the following week.

He reminded Council that sidewalk repairs are intended to be addressed annually in smaller phases, with the highest-priority and most critical areas being completed this year. Staff intend to bring additional sidewalk work forward for consideration in next year's budget to avoid further deferrals and increasing repair costs.



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Cr. Cox requested that the next Municipal Services update include a status update on the capital project for the installation and beautification of garbage cans throughout the community.

c. Briefing Note: Museum Stewardship Agreement Recommendation

26-175

Moved by: Cr. Tuckey

Seconded by: Cr. Bathe

That Council authorize the Town of Fort Smith to enter into the Museum Stewardship Conveyance and Management Agreement as a member of the Thebacha Leadership Council, subject to satisfactory clarification of individual member financial liability, the process to be followed if NACS is unable to continue operating the museum, and the financial consequences of withdrawal or dissolution of the TLC.

PASSED

** Cr. Couvrette excused himself for the discussion.*

Cr. Benwell sought clarification on the financial arrangements under the TLC, specifically how expenses would be paid and whether costs would be managed directly through the TLC or divided among the four participating groups.

SAO Henderson explained that, based on the agreement, NACS would continue to operate the museum, including receiving revenues, paying expenses, applying for grants, and managing day-to-day financial operations. If NACS experienced a financial shortfall, it would bring the matter to the TLC for review and discussion on how to proceed.

He described the arrangement as a tiered structure, with NACS responsible for operating the facility and the TLC providing oversight. The TLC would hold ownership of the property and collection. He noted that further details regarding banking, assets, securities, and other financial arrangements would need to be worked out between the NACS and TLC boards.

Cr. Cox reiterated that he had initially had concerns about the proposed arrangement but felt more comfortable after reviewing the draft agreement, as it clearly outlines the responsibilities of the parties involved. He expressed support for the museum as an important community asset and indicated his willingness to proceed with the agreement. However, he noted that any significant future financial obligations, such as major capital repairs, would require further discussion and consideration by Council.

Cr. Karasiuk sought clarification on the role of the NACS Management Board and asked whether it would be required to submit an annual budget to the TLC for review and approval.

SAO Henderson advised that staff recommend requiring the NACS Management Board to submit an annual budget to the TLC for approval. He noted that additional steps remain before the agreement is finalized and that, as the Town's signing authority, the Mayor would need to be satisfied that the requirements and outstanding matters have been addressed before signing.

Mayor Fergusson clarified that she would require satisfaction of Council's concerns and conditions before signing the agreement, confirming Council's support to proceed once the outstanding matters and conditions have been addressed.

Cr. Heaton raised concerns regarding the potential repatriation or rematriation of Indigenous artifacts in the museum's collection, particularly those originating outside the South Slave region. She suggested that the agreement or related documentation address how these artifacts would be managed, including what would happen to the collection if



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the museum were to close and how ownership or claims to the artifacts would be determined.

Mayor Fergusson agreed that if the museum holds artifacts belonging to other Indigenous communities or regions, they should be returned to their place of origin in the event that NACS dissolves. She noted that this matter could be addressed through a future policy rather than the current agreement.

SAO Henderson noted that the agreement includes language regarding the control and management of the museum collection but does not address the matter in detail, recognizing that further work is required. He added that Salt River First Nation, TDN, the Métis Council, and the Town of Fort Smith would be the four primary partners involved in those discussions.

D/M Keizer noted that during his more than 20 years on the museum board, the museum had actively explored opportunities to return collections to their places of origin, including efforts to repatriate the Nunavut collection. He advised that repatriation discussions were ongoing when he left the board and supported including appropriate language regarding repatriation in future documentation.

Cr. Heaton noted that the Royal Alberta Museum has also been working to repatriate or rematriate Indigenous artifacts. She referenced artifacts originating from the Thebacha Fort Smith area that were taken to Edmonton and expressed support for exploring opportunities to have those items returned to the community. She acknowledged that this may fall outside the scope of the TLC agreement but felt it was an important consideration for the future.

8. COUNCIL BUSINESS

- a. Bylaws and Policies
 - b. Appointments
 - i. Expression of Interest Brenda Dragon – Development Appeal Board
- | | |
|---|---|
| # 26-176 | Moved by: Cr. Bathe
Seconded by: Cr. Benwell |
| That Brenda Dragon be appointed to the Development Appeal Board for a two-year term ending August 25, 2028. | |
| PASSED | |
- c. Mayor and Council Round Table
 - i. Cr. Tuckey had nothing to report.
 - ii. Cr. Cox acknowledged the difficult week experienced by the community and extended his thoughts to everyone affected. He encouraged anyone needing support to reach out and speak with someone, noting that the situation had hit close to home.
 - iii. Cr. Couvrette expressed appreciation to the first responders who responded to the incident over the weekend and acknowledged the community for taking a strong stance against activities that cause harm within Fort Smith. He noted that the Thebacha Leadership Council had discussed how community leadership could help address the issue.



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While recognizing that criminal enforcement falls primarily under federal jurisdiction and the RCMP, Cr. Couvrette identified reducing the local demand for illicit drugs as

an area where the community could take meaningful action. He advised that the TLC intends to explore proactive measures and mitigation strategies aimed at reducing demand and the resulting impacts on the community.

Cr. Couvrette highlighted two upcoming events taking place over the long weekend: the third annual Whooping Crane Festival and the 14th annual Dark Sky Festival. He encouraged residents to attend and enjoy the events.

- iv. Cr. Benwell commended the Fort Smith community for coming together following a frightening and difficult incident. She expressed interest in the TLC's plans to address issues related to illicit drugs entering the community and their impacts.

Cr. Benwell also thanked the organizers of the Fireweed Festival for hosting a successful event that brought visitors to Fort Smith and provided an opportunity for the community to come together and enjoy themselves despite the difficult circumstances.

- v. Cr. Heaton reflected on the difficulty of being away from Fort Smith during much of the summer, particularly during challenging events such as the evacuations and the recent incident. She emphasized that the strength of Thebacha Fort Smith is its community and the way residents come together to support one another during difficult times.

She expressed hope that those who were injured are receiving the care and support they need and acknowledged the fundraising efforts underway within Fort Smith and the broader NWT. Cr. Heaton wished those affected a continued recovery and expressed her anticipation of returning home.

- vi. Cr. Karasiuk commended the festival organizing committee for adapting to the difficult circumstances and continuing to deliver a successful event. He also expressed appreciation to all first responders and the RCMP for their response.

With students returning to school, Cr. Karasiuk reminded motorists to watch for children travelling to and from school, observe the new speed limits, and use extra caution. He wished students, families, and school staff a successful school year.

- vii. Cr. Bathe reflected on the strong sense of community demonstrated throughout the weekend. He shared his family's positive experience attending the festival and activities at the Northern Lights Special Care Home and noted how meaningful it was to see residents come together following the weekend's tragic events. He expressed appreciation for the welcoming and supportive nature of Fort Smith and thanked everyone who contributed to creating such a strong sense of community.
- viii. D/M Keizer reflected on his personal experience during the weekend's incident, noting that it gave him a greater understanding of the stress and uncertainty residents experience during emergency situations. He expressed hope that this experience would help inform how he supports the community during future challenging situations.



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He commended residents for coming together in the days following the incident and expressed pride in the community's resilience and support for one another, referencing the message of "Fort Smith Strong."

- ix. Mayor Fergusson reflected on the positive atmosphere in the community on Sunday and the opportunity to see families and residents enjoying the festival, supporting vendors, and participating in activities. She acknowledged the significant amount of time, planning, and coordination required to organize an event of this size and noted that preparations are already underway for next year. She thanked the community for coming out and supporting the festival and its organizers.

9. PROCLAMATIONS

10. DATE OF NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

Regular Meeting of Council (Protective & Corporate)	September 1 st , 2026, @ 7 pm to be chaired by Cr. Karasiuk
Regular Meeting of Council (Community & Municipal)	September 15 th , 2026, @ 7 pm

11. EXCUSING OF COUNCILLORS

12. IN-CAMERA

13. QUESTION PERIOD

14. ADJOURNMENT

26-177

Moved by: Cr. Karasiuk
Seconded by: Cr. Bathe

That the meeting be adjourned at 7:35 pm.

PASSED

Minutes adopted this 1st day of September 2026.

Dana Fergusson
Mayor

Certified Correct by David Henderson
Senior Administrative Officer