



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
September 1st, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

MINUTES

The Regular meeting of the Council was held on
Tuesday, September 1st, @ 7 p.m. in 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
Adam McNab, Director of Protective Services
Awa Mbacke, Director of Corporate Services

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

26-178 **Moved by: Mayor Fergusson**
 Seconded by: Cr. Couvrette

That the agenda be adopted as amended to remove the delegation from the RCMP.

PASSED

3. DELEGATIONS

- a. Fort Smith Animal Society

Alana McGrath, representing the Fort Smith Animal Shelter, provided an overview of the shelter's ongoing challenges with volunteer capacity and long-term sustainability. She explained that she became involved with the shelter following the 2023 wildfire evacuation, when the shelter cared for 26 animals and supported the care of residents' animals for approximately six weeks. Since that time, the shelter has continued to rely heavily on a small number of volunteers, with much of the operational responsibility falling on one individual.

McGrath noted that a previous request for funding for a paid shelter position was presented to Council in December 2025 but was not included in the budget. While the shelter currently has sufficient members to maintain its Board, it continues to struggle to recruit enough volunteers to operate consistently. In August, 16 volunteers were available to cover 93 shifts, with McGrath personally covering 19 shifts in addition to orientations, adoption and foster meetings, behavioural assessments, veterinary coordination, and other shelter responsibilities.

McGrath advised that 38 animals have come through the shelter so far in 2026. This includes 14 adoptions, 14 dogs returned to their owners, animals placed in foster care, animals temporarily cared for following the death of their owners, and six dogs and ten puppies cared for during the evacuation period. The shelter's spay and neuter program has also assisted 16 community members and supported one euthanasia.

McGrath recommended that the Town provide funding for a paid position to support shelter operations. She outlined options including hiring a Town employee or entering into a contract similar to the model used in Hay River. The proposed contract would be



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
September 1st, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

approximately \$54,000 annually for a six-hour-per-day, Monday-to-Friday position, with volunteers continuing to cover evenings and weekends.

She stated that a paid position would provide stability and consistency in animal care, improve coordination with Bylaw, support adoptions and fostering, increase public education, and potentially allow for initiatives such as obedience training to help keep animals in their homes. She also expressed concern that changes to the Animal Control Bylaw could increase the number of animals entering the shelter.

McGrath advised that without sustainable staffing or Town support, she intends to stop personally coordinating volunteer shifts as of November 1. In that event, animals brought to the shelter by Bylaw would need to be cared for and managed directly by Bylaw. She expressed concern that without active adoption and shelter programming, this could result in increased euthanasia of unclaimed or abandoned animals.

McGrath emphasized the importance of the shelter to animal welfare and public safety and encouraged the Town to consider funding the position for a two- to three-year period while efforts continue to reduce the number of unwanted and abandoned animals in the community.

Mayor Fergusson expressed appreciation for the SPCA and the work undertaken by its volunteers. She noted that the presentation was timely as Council is preparing to enter the budget process and would have an opportunity to consider the funding request. She advised that follow-up questions or requests for additional information may be brought forward through the SAO at Council's direction.

Mayor Fergusson also acknowledged the significant efforts of the SPCA during the 2023 wildfire evacuation, noting that volunteers worked extensively to care for both shelter animals and other animals in the community. She thanked the organization for its continued dedication and service.

b. Marion Berls

Marion Burrows spoke as a concerned citizen and former Town Councillor, noting that she served three terms from 2000 to 2009 and was involved in developing the original Dog Control Bylaw. She acknowledged the ongoing challenges faced by the animal shelter, particularly volunteer shortages and burnout, and expressed appreciation for those who continue to provide animal care services in the community.

Burrows emphasized that animal control is a core municipal responsibility and encouraged Council to prioritize essential services, referring to the municipal responsibilities of "dogs, dumps, and ditches." She stated that too much responsibility has been placed on a small group of volunteers and that the Town needs to provide greater support to ensure the shelter can continue operating.

She also questioned what the Town's plan would be if the shelter could no longer operate, noting that Bylaw staff already have significant responsibilities and that allowing stray animals to remain uncontrolled would create potential public safety concerns. Burrows encouraged Council to consider the shelter's needs during the budget process and advised that residents would be interested in Council's eventual decision on the matter.



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
September 1st, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. Regular Meeting of Council August 25th, 2026

26-179

Moved by: Mayor Fergusson

Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey

That the minutes of the Regular Meeting of August 25th, 2026, be adopted as presented.

PASSED

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

6. DECLARATION OF FINANCIAL INTEREST

7. ADMINISTRATION

- a. Protective Services

- i. Director's Report

Director McNab provided an overview of Protective Services activities for August. EMS experienced its busiest August in at least the past five years, responding to 37 ambulance calls, while the Fire Department responded to one fire call.

Training activities are increasing following the summer months. New and recently recruited members will participate in EMR training this fall. A three-day NFPA live-fire training course is also planned following the arrival of the new live-fire trainer, with preparations underway for NFPA 1001 professional firefighter training in the new year.

Director McNab acknowledged a challenging community incident that resulted in EMS responding to several difficult calls and supporting the RCMP. Debriefing and counselling supports have been provided to responders to support their well-being following the incident.

Land and Development continued reviewing active files, with no new applications received under the Zoning Bylaw during August. Bylaw Enforcement remained active with animal control, proactive traffic enforcement, and community outreach.

Emergency Management is conducting after-action reviews of recent response activities, including activation of the Emergency Management Plan, the wildland-urban interface deployment, and the Wrigley evacuation reception centre. Findings will help inform updates to the Emergency Management Plan for 2027.

Director McNab also advised that an Occupational Health and Safety meeting is scheduled for September and provided an update on capital projects.

Cr. Couvrette noted the significant increase in first responder calls and asked whether it could be attributed to a specific incident or reflected a broader trend.

Director McNab advised that a significant portion of the increase could be attributed to the recent shooting incident and the subsequent response to support the RCMP. However, even excluding those calls, August was still a particularly busy month for EMS. He noted that it is difficult to identify a specific trend, as call volumes tend to fluctuate from month to month and year to year.

Mayor Fergusson sought clarification regarding the incidents identified in the Occupational Health and Safety report, including near misses, workplace violence, workplace injuries,



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
September 1st, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

and illnesses. She specifically asked whether the workplace violence incidents involved interactions between employees and members of the public or incidents occurring internally between employees.

Director McNab advised that the Occupational Health and Safety report provides the same incident category breakdown each month and reflects incidents reported through the Town's OHS Incident Reporting System over the previous 30 days. He explained that workplace violence incidents often involve interactions between Town staff and members of the public.

Director McNab noted that the reported workplace violence incident did not occur within his department and, therefore, he could not provide specific details. He advised that directors and supervisors follow up with affected employees to ensure appropriate supports and corrective measures are put in place. Based on the information available to him, he did not believe the incident was extremely serious.

Mayor Fergusson sought further clarification regarding the OHS report, noting that workplace violence and public interaction are listed as separate categories. She asked whether the reported public interactions represented positive or negative incidents.

Director McNab clarified that the public interaction category refers to negative interactions, typically involving verbal incidents between staff and members of the public, as opposed to incidents involving physical violence.

Cr. Cox requested an update on the Animal Control Bylaw, specifically whether it had been circulated for consultation and when Council could expect to receive it for review.

Director McNab advised that the draft Animal Control Bylaw was circulated for consultation approximately three weeks ago. Feedback has been received from the Animal Society and a local kennel operator, with additional follow-up planned to confirm whether there are any further comments.

In accordance with the Municipal Services Agreement with Salt River First Nation, the Town also has a duty to consult on proposed changes to Town bylaws. The SAO has provided the draft to the CEO of Salt River First Nation, and the Town is awaiting feedback. Once consultation is complete, the feedback will be compiled, and the draft bylaw will be brought forward to Council with recommended notes for consideration, with the intention of proceeding to first reading shortly thereafter.

Mayor Fergusson asked whether the Town considers the country of origin when evaluating RFPs and making significant purchases, particularly for large, high-value items.

Director McNab advised that procurement within Protective Services is conducted in accordance with the Town's Procurement Policy, with preference given to sourcing locally within Fort Smith where possible. He noted that there is currently no requirement related to a specific country of origin. However, the majority of purchases are sourced within Canada or through Canadian suppliers, with only one recent significant Protective Services purchase identified as originating from the United States.

Cr. Heaton sought clarification regarding the recent posting for the Coordinator position, noting that the position had been filled relatively recently, and asked for an update on its current status.

Director McNab advised that the Town has been able to provide significant training and professional development opportunities within the department, which can also prepare employees for new career opportunities. He confirmed that Deputy Porter has accepted a



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
September 1st, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

new employment opportunity outside the community and expressed his support for Deputy Porter as he moves forward in his career.

Mayor Fergusson thanked Director McNab and the Protective Services team for their work throughout the month. She specifically acknowledged their professional and timely response to the major incident in the community, as well as their support for approximately 30 additional support staff and investigators who arrived afterward. She noted that the group spoke highly of the assistance they received and expressed her appreciation to the entire team for their efforts.

b. Corporate Services

i. Director's Report

Director Mbacke provided her first formal update to Council since assuming the Director role, including updates on Corporate Services staffing, financial matters, and upcoming reporting.

Final interviews for the Payroll Officer position were completed on August 24, with the team finalizing paperwork to extend a formal offer to the preferred candidate. The initial recruitment for the Receptionist position did not result in a suitable candidate, and the position will be re-advertised to ensure an appropriate fit for the public-facing role.

Director Mbacke advised that she is reviewing the Town's current financial systems, processes, and long-term planning as part of her onboarding. The revised audited financial statements have been completed by the auditors and are being prepared for publication on the Town's website. The Finance team is also reviewing the statements in preparation for the 2027 budget process.

Data related to capital projects is currently being migrated into the financial system and monitored. Director Mbacke expects to provide Council with a comprehensive capital project summary and regular variance reporting in the coming weeks as she completes her onboarding and system orientation. Further details regarding the 2027 budget timeline and parameters will be provided by the SAO.

Mayor Fergusson noted the ongoing recruitment challenges and high turnover associated with the Receptionist position. Given the public-facing nature of the role, she suggested reviewing the position's job description, workload, and expectations to determine whether adjustments could make the position more sustainable and attractive to potential candidates.

SAO Henderson advised that administration has identified the same concerns and is currently reviewing the Receptionist position. He acknowledged the repeated turnover in the role and noted that improvements may be needed in how new employees are onboarded and how responsibilities are introduced.

He explained that administration is considering a more gradual approach that would allow a new employee to become comfortable with the front-facing responsibilities before additional duties and processes are assigned. SAO Henderson acknowledged that the current approach has not been successful and advised that changes are being considered to improve retention and support employees in the position.



ii. Accounts Paid List

Cr. Benwell referred to the Dezron Inc. rental listed in the accounts and recalled previously being advised that the Town would continue renting the residence between occupants to ensure it remained available for employees. She sought confirmation as to whether the residence is currently vacant while the Town continues to pay the rent.

SAO Henderson clarified that he currently occupies the residence and reimburses the Town for the rent charged by Dezron Inc.

c. Briefing Note: 2027 Operating and Capital Budget Parameters

# 26-180	Moved by: Cr. Couvrette Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey
That Council approve the 2027 Operating and Capital Budget parameters as presented and direct Administration to proceed with preparation of the 2027 Operating and Capital Budgets in accordance with the budget process schedule previously accepted by Council.	
PASSED	

SAO Henderson provided an overview of the proposed parameters for developing the 2027 budget. He advised that the starting point will be maintaining the Town’s current levels of service unless Council provides direction otherwise.

The draft budget will also incorporate additional costs resulting from Council direction, regulatory requirements, staff recommendations, and established strategic priorities. Known and anticipated increases, including inflationary pressures on goods and services and increased labour costs, will also be considered. Any labour matters related to collective bargaining will be discussed with Council in camera as appropriate.

SAO Henderson advised that administration is proposing a maximum property tax increase of 3.5%, similar to the previous year and generally consistent with projected cost-of-living increases of approximately 3% to 4% across the territory. He noted that some areas, particularly construction-related costs, may experience higher increases.

Administration will use these parameters to prepare the first draft of the budget for Council’s review in accordance with the previously established budget schedule.

Cr. Couvrette referred to the operational efficiency review previously approved by Council, noting that one of its key recommendations was to establish methods for measuring the Town’s levels of service across its various operations. Recognizing the administrative changes that have occurred since the report was accepted, he requested an update on progress toward implementing a process for measuring service levels.

Cr. Couvrette also suggested incorporating service-level measurements into the budget process to provide Council with a clearer understanding of the relationship between the cost of a service and the level of service being delivered. This would allow Council to better evaluate potential adjustments to service levels when considering increasing costs and budget decisions.

SAO Henderson agreed that service levels are an important consideration and advised that administration will work to better incorporate them into both the budget presentation and public communication. He noted that the budget should provide context around the types and levels of services the Town delivers, using measurable indicators and numerical data where appropriate.



Council of the Town of Fort Smith

September 1st, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

He acknowledged that numerical measures, such as kilometres of roads or sidewalks maintained, may not always fully demonstrate the value or impact of a service. Administration will therefore consider other meaningful measures and ratios where appropriate. SAO Henderson advised that Council's expectations regarding service levels will be recorded and considered as administration develops the budget.

Cr. Benwell referred to the earlier discussion regarding the animal shelter and suggested exploring available government wage subsidy programs to help offset the cost of a paid shelter position. She noted that funding may be available for up to one year and encouraged administration to consider this option when exploring ways to support the continued operation of the animal shelter.

Mayor Fergusson expressed support for the proposed budget parameters, noting that they provide a reasonable starting point for the first draft of the budget. She supported the proposed 3.5% property tax increase as an initial target, with the understanding that Council can make further adjustments once actual costs, service levels, staffing requirements, and other budget considerations are presented.

Mayor Fergusson also welcomed the earlier start to the budget process, noting that in previous years the process has often occurred later than desired. She stated that beginning the process earlier will better position the Town to plan upcoming projects, issue RFPs, and prepare for the construction season. She expressed her support for the parameters as presented and viewed them as a positive start to the 2027 budget process.

SAO Henderson advised that the proposed budget parameters are intended to provide an initial framework and may need to be adjusted as new priorities or costs arise. If Council directs administration to add programs, services, or other expenditures during the budget process, administration will assess the financial impact and advise Council if the proposed tax increase target can no longer be maintained.

Using the animal shelter as an example, SAO Henderson noted that Council has received both the current presentation and information on potential options during previous budget discussions. If Council wishes administration to further explore or include funding for the shelter, clear direction or a motion from Council would be required. Any direction received would then be incorporated into the budget process in accordance with the established parameters.

8. COUNCIL BUSINESS

- a. Bylaws and Policies
- b. Mayor and Council Round Table
 - i. Cr. Bathe expressed appreciation to the evening's delegations for their presentations and the passion they demonstrated. He thanked them for attending and assured them that Council had heard and would consider the concerns and information they brought forward.
 - ii. D/M Keizer noted his personal connection to the animal shelter, having adopted several pets from there. He thanked the delegation for their efforts and for bringing their concerns forward, and advised that Council would continue discussing the matter and consider how to move forward.



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
September 1st, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

- iii. Mayor Fergusson advised that she would follow up on the concerns raised by preparing a letter inviting the Director of MACA and the Minister of Finance to meet with the Town to discuss municipal funding shortfalls. She expressed concern that insufficient funding for essential municipal services, including water, sewer, roads, animal control, and other infrastructure, places additional financial pressure on local taxpayers. She advised that the letter would be brought forward for Council's support before being sent.
- iv. Cr. Tuckey thanked the delegations for their heartfelt presentations and noted that the matters raised would require further discussion by Council. He also expressed support for Cr. Couvrette's suggestion to invite the Ministers to Fort Smith in a timely manner and welcomed the early start to this year's budget process.
- v. Cr. Cox thanked the delegation and requested that the animal shelter provide Council with any available financial statements, annual reports, or other financial information to assist with future discussions, noting that similar information had been requested in December.
- vi. Cr. Couvrette did not have anything to report.
- vii. Cr. Benwell expressed appreciation for the strong community turnout in support of the animal shelter and emphasized the importance of finding a sustainable solution to keep the shelter operating. She also recognized the organizers of the recent festival for keeping the event running smoothly despite challenges and thanked Protective Services for their response and support.
- viii. Cr. Heaton shared that the Uncle Gabe's Friendship Centre lunch program will begin September 15, with registration available for parents and guardians. She noted that volunteers are also being sought to assist with the program.

Cr. Heaton also highlighted the upcoming Northern Movement Crane Festival, running Thursday through Sunday. Events will take place at the Northern Life Museum, Aurora College, the Salt Plains, and Fitzgerald. She also noted the Ernie Kuyt Pancake Breakfast at Uncle Gabe's Friendship Centre and Bannock on a Stick at Queen Elizabeth Territorial Park. She encouraged residents to review the full festival schedule and participate in the weekend's activities.

- ix. Cr. Karasiuk reminded residents that the Fort Smith Seniors Society will resume its regular meetings following the summer break, with the first meeting taking place Friday at 1:30 p.m. in the Seniors Room at the Recreation Centre. He encouraged seniors to attend and have their voices heard.

Cr. Karasiuk also reminded members to renew their memberships, noting that memberships are available at the door for \$10. He added that individuals under the age of 55 may also join as associate members.

Cr. Karasiuk, as Chair, advised that adding an item to the agenda after its approval requires a two-thirds majority vote. He invited a motion to add Item 8(d), Council Direction to Administration regarding the Animal Shelter, to the agenda for discussion.



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
September 1st, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

26-181 **Moved by: Cr. Couvrette**
 Seconded by: Mayor Fergusson

That Mayor and Council direct Administration to explore options and provide potential solutions to support the continued operation of the Fort Smith Animal Shelter.

PASSED

c. Appointments

i. Expression of interest – CSAB Rebecca Pumphrey

26-182 **Moved by: Mayor Fergusson**
 Seconded by: Cr. Couvrette

That Rebecca Pumphrey be appointed to the Community Services Advisory Board for a two-year term ending in September 2028.

PASSED

ii. Expression of interest – CSAB Jessica Cox

26-183 **Moved by: Mayor Fergusson**
 Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey

That Jessica Cox be appointed to the Community Services Advisory Board for a two-year term ending in September 2028.

PASSED

9. PROCLAMATIONS

10. IN-CAMERA

11. DATE OF NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

Regular Meeting of Council (Community & Municipal)	September 15 th , 2026, @ 7 pm, chaired by Cr. Cox
Regular Meeting of Council (Protective & Corporate)	October 6 th , 2026, @ 7 pm, chaired by Cr. Couvrette

12. EXCUSING OF COUNCILLORS

13. QUESTION PERIOD

1. Winston Fitzgerald, President of the Fort Smith Animal Society, sought clarification on the potential timeline should Council approve funding for a paid position at the animal shelter. He asked whether implementation could be expected within six months, one year, or another anticipated timeframe.

Mayor Fergusson advised that, should funding for the position be approved through the upcoming budget process, it would take effect beginning January 1, in accordance with the Town's fiscal year.

2. Ryker Lonehardt asked what animal control measures the Town would consider if funding for a paid animal shelter position could not be included in the budget. He expressed concern about the potential additional strain on Protective Services and emphasized the importance of maintaining public safety, particularly for children, elders, and residents walking throughout the community.



Council of the Town of Fort Smith
September 1st, 2026 @ 7:00 PM

Mayor Fergusson advised that it would be premature to speculate on what specific animal control measures may be required. She noted that these matters would be discussed at future public Council meetings as decisions are made, and that any resulting plans would be communicated once determined.

14. ADJOURNMENT

26-184

Moved by: Cr. Couvrette

Seconded by: Cr. Tuckey

That the meeting be adjourned at 8:04 pm.

PASSED

Minutes adopted this 15th day of September 2026.


Dana Fergusson
Mayor
Certified Correct by David Henderson
Senior Administrative Officer