

## ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

<b>TO:</b> Shane Bourke, City Manager	<b>DATE:</b> March 24, 2025
<b>FROM:</b> Danielle Whiteway, Chief Financial Officer	<b>MEETING:</b> Council Meeting
<b>REPORT WRITER:</b> Kim Pinnock, Director, Legislative and Executive Services	
<b>SUBJECT:</b> 2025 Advocacy Priorities	

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
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1. That Council approve the 2025 Council Advocacy Priority list:

Key Advocacy Priorities

- Electricity Distribution Costs
- 911 Levy
- Northwestern Polytechnic Support
- Seniors Housing and Long-Term Care
- Economic Corridors
  - Highway 40X Connector
  - Improved Rail Service
  - Air Service

Other Advocacy Priorities

- Medical First Response Funding
- Health Care Supports
- Dedicated Regional Funding:
  - Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)
  - Rural Preventative Programming and Addictions Recovery
  - Housing and Homelessness
  - Recreation, Arts & Culture Infrastructure
  - Enhanced Transportation Connectivity

2. That Council direct Administration to prepare a resolution for the 2025 Alberta Municipalities Fall Convention for submission before June 30, 2025, for: a) dedicated Regional Service Centre Funding, identifying key services provided in regional hubs that benefit the wider region and require additional funding to support sustainable service delivery and b) Electricity Distribution.

## PREVIOUS COUNCIL / COMMITTEE DIRECTIONS

### MOVED by G. Blackmore

Council approve the 2024 Advocacy Priority List:

Key Advocacy Priorities - Electricity Distribution Costs; Health Care Supports; Medical First Response Funding; Northwestern Polytechnic Support; and Provincial and Federal Funding for Housing Needs. Other Advocacy Priorities - Improved Rail Service; Provincial Changes to Automated Traffic Enforcement; and Immigration Biometric Scanning.

## BACKGROUND

Since 2021, City Council has published an annual list of its advocacy priorities. These priorities outline the actions Council would like other orders of government to take to improve the lives of City residents.

2023 and 2024 Advocacy priorities are identified below:

2023	2024
Electricity Distribution Costs	Electricity Distribution Costs
Attraction and Retention of Health Care Professionals	Attraction and Retention of Health Care Professionals
Provincial Support for Industrial Attraction Grant Programs	Improved Rail Service
Improved Rail Service	Provincial and Federal Funding for Housing Needs
Daycare Shortages	Northwestern Polytechnic Advocacy Support
Provincial and Federal Funding for Housing Needs	Provincial Changes to Automatic Traffic Enforcement
Local Government Funding Framework	Immigration Biometric Scanning

Throughout 2024 and early 2025, many initiatives were undertaken to relay the City's advocacy priorities to municipal neighbours, the Province and the federal government. Successes through action taken by the provincial and federal government on Council's advocacy initiatives include:

- The Government of Canada informed the city that Biometric Services would be offered at the Service Canada location in Grande Prairie starting in March 2025.
- The Government of Alberta appointed Shannon Davis as a Justice of the Court of King's Bench of Alberta. Justice Davis will serve as the second justice in Grande Prairie.
- The City continued to advocate for support for health care, and was pleased to see the Northern Alberta Medical Program, a partnership between the University of Alberta and Northwestern Polytechnic officially launched, with plans to welcome 30 medical students to the Grande Prairie campus in August, 2025.

On February 27, 2025, the Province released Budget 2025 identifying the following items, that if passed, impact City advocacy priorities:

- \$1M is allocated to support the design phase of the Skilled Trades Expansion Project at Northwestern Polytechnic.
- Grants in Place of Taxes (GIPOT) allocation will be increased from 50% to 75%, resulting in an increase from \$38M to \$57M. 2026/27 will see GIPOT restored to 100%. Largely due to

advocacy from Alberta Municipalities and member municipalities. Local impact realized an increase of \$125K in 2025, \$250K in 2026.

- As part of the \$126M allocated over three years in last year's announcement, \$44M will be used for the Physician Training Expansion Program in 2025 increasing access to medical education with the intent of increasing the number of family medicine and generalist physicians in regional and rural communities across Alberta.
- Increase in funding for Physician Compensation and Development, includes \$15M annually for recruitment and retention of physicians who practice full time in underserved areas.
- Affordable Housing Partnership Program will increase from \$62M to \$157M.
- An additional \$7M for 911 call centres offset by the 911 levy.
- The Family Justice Strategy is being expanded to Grande Prairie and five base court locations surrounding Edmonton.

In March, the City was informed that we were unsuccessful in our application for the Phase II Housing Accelerator Fund intake. The incentive program administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) aims to increase supply of housing across Canada. The City's application had requested \$13.6M in funding from the \$400M Phase II fund. Securing affordable housing for all residents continues to be a priority for Council and will be advanced through additional focus on seniors housing and regional services funding for housing and homelessness.

## ANALYSIS

Evaluating the pressures facing the city, it is recommended that the following items be maintained or adopted as Council's new advocacy priorities for 2025:

### Key Advocacy Priorities

- **Electricity Distribution Costs:** Alberta's electricity distribution system is facilitated through various service areas which are serviced by different companies. The ATCO service area, in which Grande Prairie is located, sees the highest electricity distribution rates in the province with annual residential charges averaging over \$1,274 per household in 2025. This compares to an average between \$379-\$390 in the larger urban centres. Continue advocacy for more equitable electricity distribution across the province.
- **Northwestern Polytechnic Advocacy Support:** Continue to support and advocate for post secondary priorities identified by NWP to meet the education and training needs of residents and businesses. Priorities to be confirmed once NWP Board of Governors approves their 2025 Advocacy Priorities later this spring.

**Economic Corridors:** Increasing efficiencies in the regional transportation network to enhance connectivity, enabling economic growth and investment and improve safety. Advocacy will focus on construction of the Highway 40X connector, improved rail and air service.

- **Seniors Housing and Long-Term Care:** Grande Prairie's population is growing. The 2024 Municipal Census demonstrated that residents continue to stay and age in-place. Advocate that adequate funding is provided for seniors housing and appropriate long-term care options are available to residents.

## Other Advocacy Priorities

- **Medical First Response Funding:** Request that the Province provide sustainable funding for Fire Medical Response services provided by the Grande Prairie Fire Department and other municipal departments across the province.
- **Health Care Supports:** Advocate for attraction and retention of health care professionals through provincial funding and supports, including operational funding for a fully functioning cardiac care unit, a catheterization lab at the Grande Prairie Regional Hospital and continued funding for local health care training.
- **Dedicated Regional Service Funding:** A suite of services is provided by Grande Prairie as a regional hub and requires ongoing advocacy to secure funding for Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), Rural Preventative Programming and Addictions Recovery, Housing and Homelessness, Recreation, Arts & Culture Infrastructure and Enhanced Transportation Connectivity.

## Resolutions

In 2021, the City submitted a resolution to garner support for a dedicated funding stream for municipalities who serve as regional service centres. Regional service centres provide a suite of services to residents and the surrounding region, from health care and addictions supports, to recreation and culture. Regional service centres serve as key hubs for passenger and industry transportation through rail, air and road networks.

Administration will work with Alberta Municipalities to update a resolution for dedicated Regional Service Centre Funding for consideration at the 2025 Fall Convention, including a focus on sustainable funding that reflects the important services that regional hubs provide to both the local community and the wider region. Additionally, Administration will update and re-submit the Electricity Distribution resolution, working with fellow municipalities for support.

## **Relationship to City Council's Areas of Focus / Strategic Priorities**

Aligns with Council's Engaging Relationships strategic priority: Developing and nurturing key relationships with stakeholders and other levels of government; supporting economic readiness and ensuring quality of life for all residents.

## **Environmental Impact**

No impacts identified.

## **Economic Impact**

Reducing utility costs and improving economic corridors will support investment attraction and retention efforts and support workforce development through local post-secondary training and programming.

## **Social Impact**

Improving housing, health care and education outcomes for residents improves local quality of life and ensures adequate services to support residents in all stages and circumstances of life.

## **Relevant Statutes / Master Plans / City Documents**

None identified.

## **Risk**

Failing to have an advocacy priority list established would result in a less strategic and coordinated approach to the City's advocacy efforts.

## **Alternatives (Optional)**

### **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

The City continues to engage with ATCO Electric, Northwestern Polytechnic, and several local and regional stakeholders in developing the advocacy priorities.

### **BUDGET / FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

No impacts identified.

### **SUMMARY / CONCLUSION**

Establishing an annual list of advocacy priorities provides clear direction to both Council and Administration, ensuring a strategic and consistent approach when engaging with other levels of government. This structured framework helps align advocacy efforts with the municipality's key objectives, maximizing the potential for positive outcomes. It is recommended that Council adopt the six (6) primary and two (2) secondary advocacy priorities outlined in this report as the official 2025 advocacy priorities.

Additionally, it is recommended that Council support Administration's preparation of the resolutions detailed within this report to be brought forward to the 2025 Alberta Municipalities Fall Convention to emphasize the need for dedicated funding that reflects the essential services regional hubs provide, benefiting both local communities and the broader region and equitable electricity distribution in the north.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

None.