



TOWN OF
PEACE RIVER
ALBERTA

Community Update 2023



TOWN OF PEACE RIVER

Welcome to our 2023 Community Update

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Beautiful by nature

Diverse by culture

Vibrant by choice

In a year dominated by unprecedented forest fires, Peace River demonstrated its strength and adaptability, serving as a reliable host for evacuees and a driving force for regional progress.

Mayor Elaine Manzer

Mayor's Address

A host to families in good times, a host to all in bad

We are a proud, hardworking, diverse, and welcoming community – and this was exemplified by our response to wildfire evacuations in the Northwest Territories last year.



More than 1,000 people came through our registration centre during the summer, while town staff worked round-the-clock for six weeks to make sure everyone was taken care of and knew where they had to be. That experience garnered the town many positive reviews and words of thanks for our calm, committed work in a challenging time.

As part of the emergency response, we also hosted firefighters from around the world, as Peace River became known as a friendly and supportive host community.

Town administration hit its stride last year with three critical leaders now in place: Chief Administrative Officer Barbara Miller, Director of Corporate Services Samuel Mugford, and Director of Engineering and Infrastructure Patrick Fisher. The above, in addition to Director of Community Services Tanya Bell, are passionate, detail-oriented, and experienced professionals who are working hard to make our town more financially efficient while maintaining or increasing services.

With 12 parks and playgrounds, we are truly a perfect place to raise a family. The Baytex Centre was fully used in 2023, as was the Peace Regional Pool. Our Neighbourhood Improvement Program started up last year, with work completed around the Co-op store and more to be done in 2024.

Our council had previously committed to the purchase of a ladder truck for the Peace River Fire Department at a little over \$1.4 million, and that resource paid off last year as the truck was sent into service soon after it arrived for a rescue of a construction worker on the old Highway 2 bridge.

We responded to major slides on 101st Street and 103rd Street, which led us to start planning how to prevent those incidents in the future. In light of the circumstances we see with river breakups, slides, and wildfires, our Town has redoubled our emphasis on emergency preparedness and safety initiatives, regularly training staff of all levels so we are ready to take action for whatever comes our way.

In the fall, political advocacy became necessary to address the challenges of homelessness and social disturbances, especially with regards to people being dropped off downtown from the Peace River Correctional Centre. We initiated a campaign with the Province of Alberta requesting further resources or a change in policy at the correctional centre.

Going forward, we hope our community's social challenges lessen, and that there are routes and opportunities for those experiencing homelessness to find a better place in life.

We will continue to look at all grant opportunities to reduce the weight on our ratepayers, as well as working with the Peace Regional Healthcare Attraction and Retention Committee to attract and retain healthcare workers, along with the Peace River Economic Development Committee to grow our business community.

As a few more key staff are slated to join the Town, we are positioned well to keep our finances lean while progressing the beautiful community we call home.

We know that cost of living is top of mind for Canadians in the current economic climate, and I'm proud to have an administration behind our council that is focused on keeping life affordable.

We want to bring more people to Peace River, host more events, and show the rest of the country everything we have to offer.



Chief Administrative Officer Barbara Miller

The CAO's Desk

Building sustainability within

Accepting the Chief Administrative Officer appointment and relocating to Peace River in 2023 has been a significant journey of discovery, learning, and development.



Throughout the year, I delved into the collective strategic priorities of the Mayor and Councillors, gaining insights into their individual passions and how they align with the Town's vision. Familiarizing myself with the Town's bylaws, policies, and financial position, including our operating and capital budgets and debt levels, has been an integral part of this process.

This year also involved a deep focus on current and future operational and capital projects. I have grown to appreciate the unique beauty and challenges of our valley, such as the landslides, which require ongoing attention.

Recruitment has been a key priority, as well as getting to know the senior leadership team and administration staff. Understanding their individual strengths and personalities has been rewarding and essential for building a cohesive team.

I was particularly impressed by the Town's response to emergency social services, notably in accommodating evacuees and supporting firefighters from across Alberta and beyond during recent emergencies. We are committed to enhancing our focus on emergency education, preparedness, and response, including setting new training requirements in the Incident Command System for our staff.

Building regional partnerships with adjacent municipalities is crucial and creates possibilities for exploring potential efficiencies, savings through economies of scale,

and opportunities for shared expertise. Enhanced lobbying efforts are ongoing to bring attention to the unique challenges faced by the Town of Peace River to provincial decision makers, as is the continued search for funding mechanisms to stabilize our millrate and help move our strategic plan forward.

Communication is set to be a key priority for 2024, with a focus on continuous improvement, efficiency, customer service, and economic development.

My priorities for 2024-2025 are outlined in the mandate letter available online. My focus word for 2024 is Fulfillment: ensuring our staff feel valued and fulfilled in their work and contributions to our residents' quality of life, the livelihoods of our business owners, and the enjoyment of our visitors.



Find your peace

Our Town our community

A scenic gem in the heart of northern Alberta



Nestled in the Peace River Valley, the Town of Peace River is a community known for its natural beauty and rich history. Located at the confluence of the Peace and Smoky Rivers, this town is surrounded by lush landscapes, rolling hills, and striking riverbanks.

Peace River is home to about 6,600 residents who enjoy a mix of rural charm and modern amenities. The town's economy is diverse, with industries such as agriculture, oil and gas, forestry, and tourism providing a stable foundation for growth while maintaining a close-knit community feel.

The town offers many recreational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts. Peace River itself is a hub for activities like kayaking, fishing, and boating. Parks and trails, including Twelve Foot Davis Events Park and Riverfront Park, are perfect for picnicking and biking. An extensive trail

network brings you all around town to enjoy our many playgrounds and amenities. In the winter, residents and visitors can enjoy snowshoeing, ice fishing, and skiing – both cross-country and downhill.

Peace River also has a vibrant cultural scene. The town hosts annual events and festivals, such as the Peace River Pow Wow and Gold Cup Jet Boat races, celebrating the area's Indigenous heritage and diverse backgrounds. The Peace River Museum, Archives, and Mackenzie Centre delve into local history, showcasing artifacts and stories.

With its natural scenery, cultural heritage, and welcoming community, Peace River is a hidden gem offering a high quality of life for residents and a memorable experience for visitors.

About the town

Building a life



Peace River is the perfect place to build a career, a home, and a family.

6,662

Population
as of 2022

163

New businesses
incorporated
10.9% rise over 2022

4,475

Working
population
Higher than provincial
average

\$122K

Median family
income
Well above provincial
average



What drives us

Mission & Vision

Our Mission

We will strive to be an ambitious, prosperous, and supportive community. To achieve our vision, the Town of Peace River is committed to providing exemplary services and fostering a collaborative environment that encourages growth and development.

Our Values:

Courage

Health and Wellbeing

Integrity

Synergy

Vitality

Our Pillars

High-Functioning Local Government

We aim to ensure Peace River remains a sustainable and vibrant municipality through effective governance, strategic planning, and sound financial management. By advocating for sustainable funding models and fostering partnerships, we seek to enhance municipal operations and services.

Robust and Sustainable Economy

We will promote investment and employment opportunities, supporting local businesses and attracting new enterprises. By diversifying our economic base and enhancing our infrastructure, we aim to create a resilient and thriving local economy.

An Environment in Which People Want to Live

We are dedicated to making Peace River an attractive place to live by focusing on urban beautification, housing, and environmental stewardship. Our efforts include revitalizing downtown areas, promoting sustainable practices, and ensuring everyone can find a home in our community.

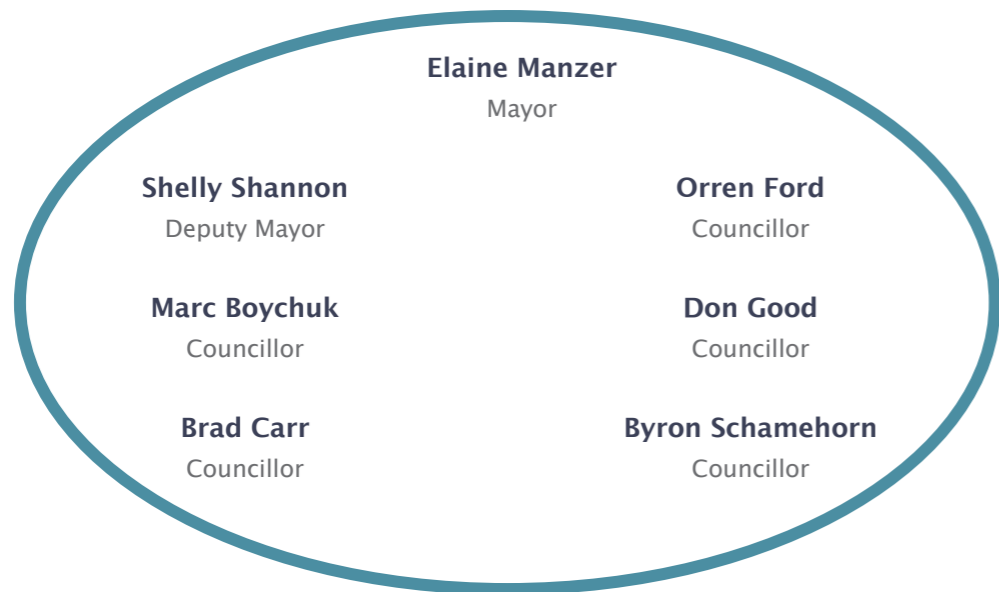
A Strong, Safe, and Connected Community

We strive to foster a safe, connected, and inclusive community by supporting social services, enhancing public safety, and promoting cultural and recreational activities. Building relationships with local Indigenous partners and other stakeholders is crucial to our efforts.

Peace River, the Future of the North

Political Leadership

The people elect the council; the council employs the CAO; the CAO and senior leadership administer the Town's services.



The Town of Peace River is governed by a dedicated Town Council composed of seven members, including the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and five Councillors. Elected in the fall of 2021, the current council will serve until the next municipal election in the fall of 2025.

The Council is responsible for developing town policies, overseeing their implementation through the Chief Administrative Officer, who is the only employee of Council.

Council meets regularly on each second and fourth Monday of the month, with additional Governance and Priorities

meetings as established during the annual organizational meeting in October. These meetings are open to the public, providing residents an opportunity to engage with their elected representatives. They are also livestreamed to allow the public to view from anywhere.

The council members work collectively to address community needs, enhance municipal services, and ensure sustainable development. Their efforts are focused on improving the quality of life for all residents, fostering economic growth, and maintaining Peace River as a vibrant and welcoming community.

Administrative Leadership

Barbara Miller, CPA, CGA, CLGM
Chief Administrative Officer

Barbara Miller is the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the Town of Peace River. With a strong background in municipal management, finances, and community development, she leads with dedication and vision, fostering growth and sustainability. Barbara is committed to enhancing the quality of life for all residents.

Samuel Mugford, CPA, CA
Director of Corporate Services

Samuel Mugford is the Director of Corporate Services for the Town of Peace River. With expertise in financial management and strategic planning, Samuel oversees finance, HR, IT, and risk management. His focus on cost-saving initiatives and resource optimization ensures enhanced services and a stable cost of living for residents, contributing to the town's sustainability and growth.

Pat Fisher, P. Eng
Director of Engineering and Infrastructure

Pat Fisher is the Director of Engineering and Infrastructure for the Town of Peace River and joined the organization in late 2023. With a background in municipal operations and construction management, Pat oversees the Town's infrastructure, including transportation, water systems, and public works. Pat is also a registered engineer who has worked extensively on water and wastewater infrastructure in Alberta. His dedication to sustainable development, asset management, and operations excellence will significantly improve public safety and service delivery in Peace River.

Tanya Bell
Director of Community Services

Tanya Bell, the Director of Community Services for the Town of Peace River, manages programs and services that improve residents' quality of life. She oversees recreational facilities, cultural initiatives, and social programs, fostering a vibrant and inclusive community. Tanya's leadership in promoting health, wellness, and active living has made Peace River a great place to live and play.

In 2024, we initiated the search for our next Director of Protective Services to lead public safety, including community policing, fire, and emergency management. That key piece will round out our leadership team.



Organizational Chart

January 1, 2024


Council

Chief Administrative Officer (1)

Contracted Communications

Communications Coordinator (1)

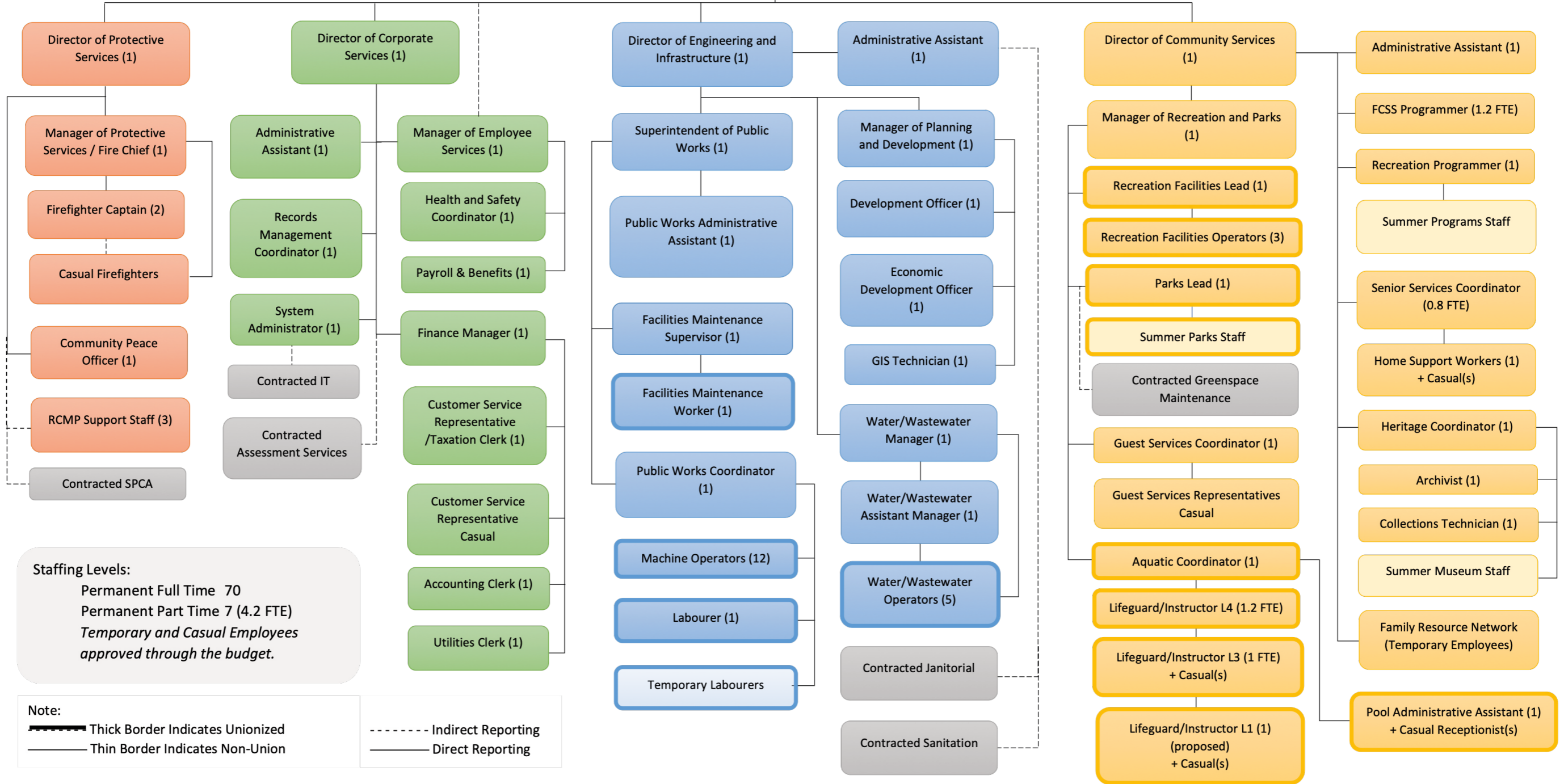
Legislative Services Coordinator (1)

Approved: 

Barb Miller, CAO

January 11, 2024

Date



Staffing Levels:
 Permanent Full Time 70
 Permanent Part Time 7 (4.2 FTE)
 Temporary and Casual Employees approved through the budget.

Note:
 Thick Border Indicates Unionized
 Thin Border Indicates Non-Union
 Dashed Line Indicates Indirect Reporting
 Solid Line Indicates Direct Reporting



Highlights from

CAO and Legislative Services

Governance and Administration

Community Forum

Held a Council Community Forum on March 2, 2023, to engage with the public.

Council Portal

Launched a web portal for Council-related information, allowing residents to subscribe for notifications and access meeting agendas.

Public Disclosures

Posted and promoted Council timesheets and expense claims for transparency, as well as CAO Mandate Letters.

Live Streaming

Initiated and maintained live streaming of Council Meetings for public access.

New Director

Pat Fischer, P.Eng., joined in September and immediately tackled engineering concerns and a major water break on 103 Street.

Communications and Public Engagement

Weekly Communications Package

Introduced a package to keep Council and the public informed on various issues and opportunities.

Catalyst Communications Engagement

Maintained external communications and managed platform transitions after hiring Catalyst Communications.

Enhanced Communications Strategy

Launched to assist employers in hiring foreign workers, with adjustments for better service delivery.

Risk Communications

Executed strategic communications during river ice breakup and wildfires, ensuring transparency and preparedness.

Evacuee Information

Provided ongoing information to evacuees from the Northwest Territories and kept residents informed.

Voyent Alerts

Increased registrants for local alerts by 1,700 through concerted efforts.

Social Media Growth

Achieved 1.3 million social media impressions, a

60% increase from 2022, and improved public sentiment analyses.

Economic Development

Investment Attraction Strategy

Retained Ballard Group to develop a strategy with local business engagement planned.

Rural Renewal Stream Program

Launched to assist employers in hiring foreign workers, with adjustments for better service delivery.

Business Grant Program

Launched the program and awarded the full \$50,000 budget across nine applications.

Annual Job Fair

Hosted at the Riverdrive Mall with 37 employers and over 230 attendees.

Economic Development Officer

Secured funding for a full-time position, with recruitment beginning in 2024.

Advocacy

Support Letters

Supported Sagitawa Friendship Centre's Winter Emergency Funding grant application, Peace Regional RCMP's pilot project request, Friends of the Shepherds Society's grant for an accessible playground, and Woodland Cree First Nation's economic development initiatives.



Highlights from

Community Services



Department Reorganization

The Community Services Department restructured in 2023, promoting the Recreation Facilities Coordinator to Manager of Recreation and Parks and creating a new Parks Lead position to enhance park services.

Capital Projects

Peace Regional Pool Hot Tub

Initiated reconstruction of the hot tub in 2023, facing challenges like additional leaks and compliance with flow standards, with tendering planned for 2024.

Ski Hill Condition Assessment

A comprehensive infrastructure and building condition assessment was completed at the ski hill to aid in future capital and maintenance planning.

Grant Programs

Peace Region 55+ Games Legacy Grant

Over \$40,000 in surplus funds from the 2022 AB 55+ Games were distributed as grants to various community organizations for equipment and programs.

Family and Community Support Services

Four organizations received grants for student supports, mental health awareness, childcare, and youth center programs.

Emergency Social Services

Regional Wildfires – May

Community Services staff prepared and implemented the Emergency Social Services Plan during a record-breaking wildfire season.

Little Buffalo Fire – June 30

Community Services assisted evacuees from Little Buffalo, setting up a Reception Centre at Athabasca Hall

Northwest Territories Fires - Aug. 13 – Sept. 24

The Town provided registration and information services for evacuees, eventually expanding to lodging and food services for Yellowknife and other areas, with significant community support. A total of 1,260 evacuees were registered in Peace River during this event.

Taxi Pass

Program Review

An extensive review of the Taxi Pass Program

was conducted, resulting in updated policies and an increase in active users to 186 by the end of 2023.

Peace River Museum, Archives and Mackenzie Centre

Roof Repairs

A new roof was installed in July 2023 to address leaking issues, with further repairs planned for 2024.

Summer Programming

The museum had a busy summer with various events and guided tours, also supporting the Evacuation Centre during fires.

Exhibits

New exhibits showcased uniforms and aviation history in Peace River, with interactive elements from the Canada Aviation and Space Museum.

Outreach and Partnerships

The museum partnered with community groups for events and classes, supporting First Nations peoples and cultural activities.

NAR Station and Tourist Information

The Tourist Information Centre operated seasonally, hosting educational tours, summer teas, and Dungeons and Dragons events, while removing a deteriorating railway caboose.

Recreation Programs

Summer Fun and Camp Adventure

Popular summer day camps provided unique recreational experiences for children, with high attendance and waitlists.

Outdoor Concert Series

Three outdoor concerts showcased local talent

in community parks, attracting approximately 200 attendees.

Light Up the Park

The November 24 event at Riverfront Park attracted approximately 1,000 people with volunteer support.

Baytex Energy Centre

Concession Operator

CK Next Generation was awarded the concession contract for 2023 and 2024.

Facility Usage

Overall the ice and fieldhouse saw increased use in comparison to the previous year, with more than 2,700 hours of ice use and more than 5,200 hours of courts use.

Parks and Outdoor

Saddleback Playground

The playground's plastic border was replaced with a wooden border due to deterioration and safety concerns.

Athabasca Hall

Main Events

Hosted various events, including performing arts, dance festivals, farmers markets, children's productions, and a Christmas dinner theatre, resulting in more than 2,770 hours booked at the facility.

Peace Regional Pool

Staffing and Training

The pool is a major training center for the North, providing required training for local organizations.

It was a busy year

Community Services

Programming

New programs like the Mermaid Club and Adult Mermaid Fitness were introduced, with positive feedback.

Marlin Moore National Lifeguard Recognition Award

The pool was awarded for its large National Lifeguard program in a small community.

Family and Community Support Services

Seniors Program

The Home Support Program saw an increase in clients and service hours, while the Meals on Wheels Program delivered more meals compared to the previous year.

Volunteer Income Tax Program

Assisted low-income individuals with income tax filings.

Seniors Week

Celebrated with a luncheon, live music, dance, and prizes, attracting more than 160 seniors.

FCSS Programmer

Active Bystander Training

Participated in creating an Anti-discrimination Response Training program unique to Alberta.

Action Coalition on Human Trafficking – ACT Alberta

Partnered to provide a workshop on anti-

trafficking, receiving positive feedback.

Family Resource Network

Peace River Family Day Event

Expanded Family Day celebrations with various activities, upping attendance from previous years to more than 900 people.

Teddy Bear Picnic

Connected families with resources through a free event with high participation.

AHS Public Health Partnership – Welcome Baby Visits

Partnered with public health nurses to provide welcome visits and resources to families with newborns.



Highlights from

Corporate and Protective Services

Finance

Evacuee Assistance

Assisted with the Evacuation Centre and managed invoicing for meal vouchers, totaling over \$185,000.

Utility Billing

Converted to end-of-month utility billing for improved efficiency and better information for ratepayers.

Protective Services

Equipment Upgrades

Converted two Town-owned pickup trucks into Fire Department Command and Squad Units.

ICS Training

Provided Incident Command System training to Town staff and regional partners.

Calls Increased

Major increase in wildfire responses and alarm calls. Call volume increased by 29% compared to the previous two years, with 414 calls in 2023.

Ladder Truck

Purchased a new ladder truck, providing firefighters increased tools to deal with emergencies.

Northern Hands-on Education and Awareness Training (HEAT) Fire Conference

More than 60 firefighters participated in 23rd annual event in Peace River.

Systems Administration

Help Desk Support

Addressed 480 tickets in 2023, with an average resolution time of 30 minutes.

Dark Web Monitoring

Set up dark web monitoring, with the first scan scheduled for January 2024.

Server Patching

Completed server patching to update underlying software, as well as full inventory and condition assessment of IT networks and equipment for asset management planning.

Employee Services

Health and Safety Audit

Conducted an internal audit to maintain COR status, with planning starting in September and audit work in October and November.

Safety System Rollout

Purchased and started utilizing Salus Pro electronic safety system to centralize records.

Four-Day Workweek Pilot

Finance staff participated in a pilot program for a four-day workweek.



Highlights from

Engineering and Infrastructure

The Engineering and Infrastructure Department employs 31 permanent positions under three major divisions: Public Works, Planning and Development, and Water/Wastewater Treatment.

In addition to providing services within these major areas, the department also handles capital planning and projects and administers the waste management contracts on behalf of the Town of Peace River. In 2023 we experienced a leadership change in the department and are expecting the new director, Pat Fisher, to help implement a more robust asset management program and modernize our operations functions.

Capital Projects

Neighbourhood Infrastructure Renewal

This \$2.8M project was a major refresh of municipal infrastructure on 95th Avenue that was to be constructed over two seasons. Water, sewer, and stormwater improvements on 95th Avenue in Peace River were completed by our hired contractor in 2023. Full completion is expected in 2024 when new roadway and sidewalk will be installed on this block and the streetlights will be installed.

Town Hall Main Entrance Accessibility

This federally funded project was completed in 2024 to install new ramp handrails and new doors with electronic operators to improve access to the front offices of Town Hall for residents who have mobility challenges.

Asphalt Overlay and Sidewalk Replacement Program

Tendered late in 2023, this project was to complete a number of road patches throughout town and replace a significant amount of curb and sidewalk along 91 Street in Lower West Peace. Due to some delays getting started, the work will be finished early in the construction season of 2024.

Main Street Concrete Repair

Completed installation of the first year of a multi-year program looking to replace the paving stones, which have begun to shift and create tripping concerns, with a properly placed concrete sidewalk.

Planning and Development

Our planning and development consists of four permanent staff and a manager. As a department, we process development permits for properties, stickhandle legislated planning documents, are the subdivision authority for the Town of Peace River, and run an accredited safety codes program for building permits. In 2023, we issued 47 development permits and 28 building permits worth a construction value of over \$10.8M. *Did you know our average time to issue a development permit for a complete application is less than 5 days?*

Active Transportation Plan

Initiated the Active Transportation Plan, which provides a framework for planning active transportation (trails, bike routes, and sidewalks) into the future.

Business Grant Funding

Launched the Business Grant Funding program, which budgeted \$50,000 for local businesses to



receive assistance in facility upgrades.

Land Use Bylaw

Restarted work on our Land Use Bylaw to re-write and make it easier for citizens and businesses to navigate the development process.

Public Works

Our public works team consists of 12 machine operators, two facility maintenance staff, and two supervisors. It is responsible for road maintenance, road sweeping, sidewalk repairs, snow clearing, ice control, water distribution, and sewer collection, in addition to providing maintenance assistance for all of our Town-owned facilities.

Did you know that we have someone on call 24/7 with our public works department? If you are experiencing a utility emergency afterhours our public works phone (780-264-3085) is transferred to a call center which will dispatch one of our staff to look into the issue.

CityWorks

Implemented a new system that integrates with our utility maps and allows our team to track both internal and external calls for service, assign and track resources, and maintain a better history so we are less likely to miss a request that comes in. The department has widely adopted this and we look forward to rolling this out in other areas of the organization in 2024 and 2025.

Water and Wastewater Treatment

Our water and wastewater treatment team has 6 staff and manages 2 treatment facilities, 6 sewage lift stations, 4 water reservoirs, and all of our utility metering to provide service to local residents, businesses and multiple water co-ops. These facilities run 24/7 in a heavily regulated environment requiring daily testing.

2023 Expenses Breakdown

From a high level

At the Town of Peace River, budgeting plays a critical role in guiding our financial decisions and ensuring the sustainable management of our community's resources.

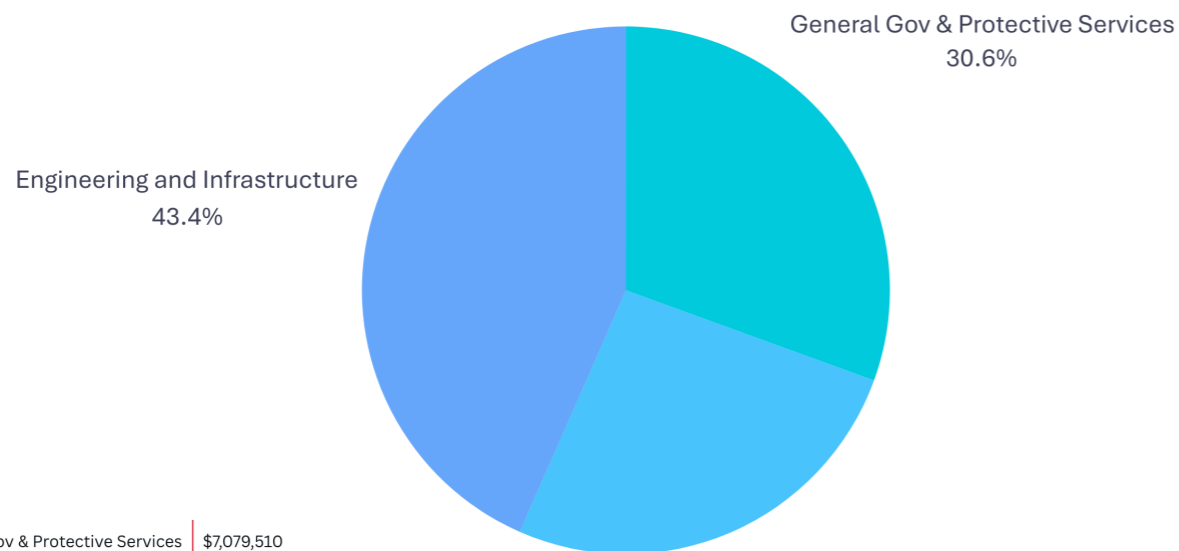
Our commitment to fiscal responsibility drives us to allocate funds strategically, prioritizing essential services and community development projects that enhance the quality of life for our residents.

By carefully balancing expenditures with anticipated revenues, we aim to create a resilient economic framework that supports long-term growth and prosperity.

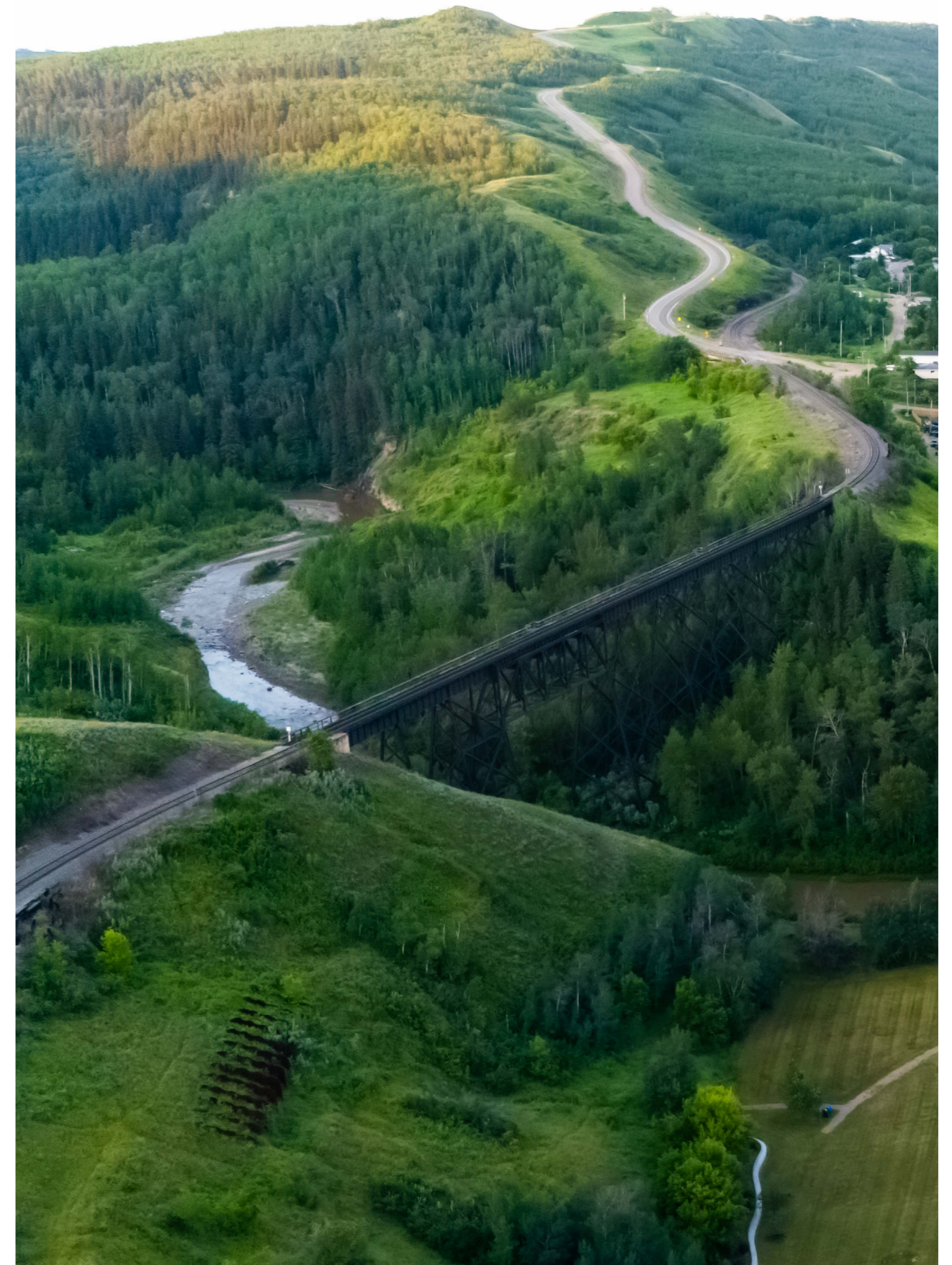
You can find a detailed breakdown of our revenues and expenditures in the 2023 Consolidated Financial Statements.

Total Expenses by Category

- General Gov & Protective Services
- Community Services
- Engineering and Infrastructure



General Gov & Protective Services	\$7,079,510
Community Services	\$6,033,310
Engineering and Infrastructure	\$10,059,730



Stay in touch

Thank you for reading our 2023 Community Update. Stay informed with the latest news and events by following us on social media.

Town of Peace River:

Facebook: [facebook.com/peacriverab](https://www.facebook.com/peacriverab)

Instagram: [instagram.com/PeaceRiverAB](https://www.instagram.com/PeaceRiverAB)

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/company/town-of-peace-river](https://www.linkedin.com/company/town-of-peace-river)

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/@townofpeacriver8959>

Peace River Museum, Archives, and Mackenzie Centre:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/prmuseumarchive>

Peace Regional Family Resource Network:

Facebook: [facebook.com/PeaceRegionalFamilyResourceNetwork](https://www.facebook.com/PeaceRegionalFamilyResourceNetwork)

Peace River Family and Community Support Services:

Facebook: [facebook.com/PeaceRiverFCSS](https://www.facebook.com/PeaceRiverFCSS)

Peace River Economic Development Committee:

Facebook: [facebook.com/PeaceRiverEconomicDevelopment](https://www.facebook.com/PeaceRiverEconomicDevelopment)

Baytex Centre:

Facebook: [facebook.com/BaytexCentre](https://www.facebook.com/BaytexCentre)

Peace Regional Pool:

Facebook: [facebook.com/PeaceRegionalPool](https://www.facebook.com/PeaceRegionalPool)