

**Subject: Municipal Census 2015****APPROVALS:**

Brian Moore, Executive Director  
Elsie Hutton, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

**Administrative Recommendation:**

THAT Council authorize Administration to (1) conduct a municipal census in 2015, and (2) request that the Minister of Municipal Affairs approves the Shadow Population count be undertaken in the winter of 2015.

**Summary:**

A municipal census is required in 2015 to ensure that the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo has full access to per capita provincial grant funding. The goal of Municipal Census 2015 is to update the Municipality's population statistics with credible results that will be accepted by Alberta Municipal Affairs as the Municipality's updated official population.

Provincial regulation allows the Municipality to include a count of its shadow population as part of its official population. However, recent amendments to the regulation mean that if the shadow population is not updated pursuant to the Regulation, the Municipality's access to provincial grant funding may be impacted. Based on the 2012 census and a 2014 estimate of the shadow population, the amount of funding related to the shadow population is estimated to be \$8,402,324 annually.

Since the Federal Census is scheduled for 2016, it is not feasible for the Municipality to conduct a municipal census in 2016. The next opportunity to conduct a municipal census after 2015 would be in 2017. Delaying a municipal census until 2017 could result in a loss of nearly \$17 million of provincial grant funding for the Municipality.

Alberta Municipal Affairs requires Council to authorize the conduct a census by a resolution of Council.

**Background:**

The Municipality aims to conduct a municipal census every two to three years. The most recent census was conducted in 2012. The *Determination of Population Regulation* enacted pursuant to the *Municipal Government Act* governs the conduct of a municipal census. It provides that a census must be conducted between the months of April and June and the results must be submitted to Alberta Municipal Affairs by September 1.

In 2014, the Minister of Municipal Affairs indicated that the past practice of only submitting an update of the shadow population would no longer be accepted. Amendments to the Regulation provided that if a municipality wanted to include a shadow population count as part of its official population, it required Ministerial approval. A count of a shadow population must be verified every three years and the count must be made between April and June. If a municipality wishes to conduct a municipal census that is not in accordance with the Regulation, the municipality must obtain the written approval of the Minister prior to conducting the census.

In accordance with the regulation, Administration will choose a reference date for the 2015 census upon council approval to conduct the census in 2015. Efforts will be made to have every eligible individual living and/or working<sup>1</sup> within the Municipality on the Census Day enumerated to get an accurate count of the official population.

The challenges with conducting a census of the Municipality's population are considerable and range from public awareness and cooperation to difficulties hiring and retaining enumerators. Another significant challenge is the timing of the enumeration in project accommodations. Occupancy varies considerably throughout the year and requires enumeration at various times of the year to get an accurate count. Specifically, higher occupancy rates are more common in the winter months compared to the regulated census count period of April to June.

Lessons learned from previous years include the need for more time spent on planning activities and logistics, reducing the length of the questionnaire and improving the payment models for enumerators. Should Council approve Municipal Census 2015, Administration will work to increase awareness of the benefits of an accurate population count through more effective advertising in the hopes of increasing participation and reducing enumerator turnover.

### **Methodology and Considerations**

The project logistics and enumeration processes will be undertaken in the Urban Service Area, the rural hamlets, and project accommodations. The census team will use various methods to enumerate individuals including online enumeration, door-to-door interviews and telephone interviews.

Administration will collaborate with public and private stakeholders to enumerate the population in project accommodations, help to engage the public through awareness and education, and improve access to rural residential communities, highly occupied residences and other areas to improve response rates. Enumerating the shadow population in the Urban Services Area (mobile workers and people who share rooms and suites in single family homes) represents the main challenge of data collection for the census. Considerable research and effort will be put into improving the accuracy of the urban enumeration.

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<sup>1</sup> Individuals eligible for the municipal census count include individuals whose usual residence is in the Municipality and the shadow population which is defined as the temporary residents of the Municipality who are employed by an industrial or commercial establishment in the Municipality for a minimum of 30 days within the census year.

### **Budget/Financial Implications:**

The 2015 Operating Budget provides a budget of \$1.1 million for Municipal Census 2015 shared between the Planning and Development Department (\$900,000) and the Communications and Stakeholder Relations Department (\$200,000). The budget contemplates costs related to enumeration services, recruitment, temporary staff, training, advertising, supplies, printed materials, mailing, means for data collection and technical support. All expenses related to Municipal Census 2015 will be tracked and reported at completion.

If a municipal census including a count of the shadow population is not conducted in 2015, the Regulation provides that the shadow population will no longer be included in the Municipality's official population. Since grant funding is based on the official population as published by Alberta Municipal Affairs, the consequences of failing to conduct Municipal Census 2015 are as follows:

- The Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) is based on the official population (permanent and shadow). In 2014 the Municipality received \$108.64 per capita. If Municipal Census 2015 is not conducted, this would result in a funding reduction of \$4,514,318.
- The Gas Tax Fund is also based on the official population (permanent and shadow). It allocated \$54.35 per capita in 2014. If Municipal Census 2015 is not conducted, this funding would be reduced by \$2,258,406.

A survey of the shadow population in 2014 shows an increase of over 10,000 people. This could increase the funding to the Municipality by \$1,629,600 annually. Therefore, the net financial impact of not conducting Municipal Census 2015 would be \$7,302,324 annually.

### **Rationale for Recommendation:**

In addition to the significant financial implications to the Municipality, current population data is essential to a number of projects and initiatives that relate to economic growth and training, culture and quality of life enhancements, municipal programming, and improvements to municipal infrastructure and capital projects. Accurate population data is also required to update municipal socioeconomic databases and to improve social programs in the Municipality.

The census information is not only critical for validating population forecasts; it provides the Municipality with an historical context for planning and administrative purposes. It is also important to note that other local organizations use the census information to support their initiatives.

### **Next Steps:**

Should Council authorize Administration to conduct a municipal census in 2015 which would include a count of the shadow population, Administration will:

- Submit a request to the Minister of Municipal Affairs for approval to enumerate the shadow population as part of Municipal Census 2015; and

- Submit a request for written approval to allow the enumeration of the shadow population during the winter months (February to March) to capture the winter occupancy rates at the work camps.