

Subject: Municipal Census 2021**APPROVALS:****Jamie Doyle**_____
Director_____
Chief Administrative Officer**Recommended Motion:**

THAT Administration be authorized to conduct a municipal census in 2021, with enumeration beginning April 1, 2021.

Summary:

A municipal census is recommended in 2021 to update the population and demographic information of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (the Municipality). The goal of the census is to update the region's permanent and shadow population.

The last municipal census was conducted in 2018 and showed that the population of the region has changed in recent years. To monitor these changes, it is beneficial to count the population at regular intervals to provide relevant and timely information.

The detailed demographic information collected is valuable to municipal departments, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, schools, utilities, and emergency services. These stakeholders use the census information for service and resource allocation planning throughout the Region.

In recognition of the COVID-19 pandemic, the approach to administering the 2021 census will differ from previous years in that there will be no in-person enumeration. Two enumeration methods, including self-enumeration (online) and a telephone interview, will be used, with enumeration proposed to begin on April 1, 2021.

Background:

The Municipality conducts a census every two to three years, with the most recent being in 2018. Preparations were underway to conduct a census in 2020; however, due to provincial guidelines to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, the 2020 census did not proceed.

Over the past three years, the region has experienced significant change. To capture these changes, a new census is proposed to begin on April 1, 2021. Every person living

or working within the Municipality's boundaries on that day is eligible and must be enumerated to get an accurate population count.

Two enumeration methods, which include self-enumeration (online) and a telephone interview, will be used. Should Council authorize conducting a census in 2021, the Municipality will endeavor to achieve high response rates and public awareness. Planning and Development will collaborate with internal departments and external stakeholders to enumerate the population of the Region. The COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to test the Municipality's capability to conduct an entire census using non-physical contact methods. If successful, the Municipality will be able to continue to use this approach, thereby decreasing cost and improving efficiency in future censuses.

Note: The Federal Census is slated to begin mid-May 2021. The main difference between each census is that the municipal census gathers information about non-permanent residents (i.e. those living and working in the Region but do not have a permanent address), while the federal census does not. This is a critical distinction as non-permanent residents are important for the Municipality to capture, making a municipal census valuable.

Budget/Financial Implications:

Funding for the municipal census was approved in the 2021 Operating Budget.

Rationale for Recommendation:

Accurate and up-to-date population data is critical for emergency management preparedness, community projects and initiatives, and municipal programs aimed at improving economic growth and social conditions in the region. Conducting a census separately from the Federal Government will allow the Municipality to have continued access to more refined datasets that accurately reflect local conditions, thereby aiding local decision-making.

Strategic Priorities:

Responsible Government
Regional Economic Development