



FORT MCMURRAY

Chamber of Commerce

2025
Council Candidate
Business Guide

About This Guide

To give every candidate a voice on issues that matter to local businesses, the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce invited the 2025 Council candidates to contribute to this Council Candidate Business Guide.

What We Asked Candidates

Each candidate was invited to submit:

- A short platform statement: 2–3 paragraphs outlining their approach to business and economic issues.
- A high-resolution headshot (if not already provided).
- A campaign link to their website or most relevant social media page.

Please note that all answers are presented as submitted, and have not been altered in any way by Chamber staff, except to limit the answer to one page. For fairness, candidate responses appear in the order submitted..

Guiding Themes

The questions were shaped by Chamber member surveys and summer business roundtables, reflecting the areas where local government decisions most directly affect business. Candidates were asked to address:

- Keeping taxes, fees, and utility costs competitive while ensuring responsible infrastructure investment.
- Cutting red tape by streamlining permitting and licensing processes.
- Supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs, while encouraging growth in key commercial areas and filling storefront vacancies.
- Building a safer, more vibrant community that attracts and retains businesses and talent.
- Driving economic diversification and transparency to ensure long-term growth, accountability, and stronger engagement between business and elected officials.

Closing Note

The Chamber believes that strong local government and a thriving business community go hand in hand. This guide is part of our effort to ensure businesses have clear insight into the priorities of those seeking to serve on Council.

We thank you for taking the time to read through the candidate responses and for engaging as an informed voter. Your voice matters.

Advance voting begins October 3, 2025. Election Day is October 20, 2025.

Funky Banjoko



My commitment is to ensure a competitive, fair, and transparent environment where businesses can thrive. This means keeping taxes, fees, and utility costs stable while making smart, responsible investments in infrastructure that benefit both businesses and residents. I will advocate for streamlining permitting and licensing processes, cutting unnecessary red tape, and creating a business-friendly environment that encourages entrepreneurs to start, expand, and remain in our region.

Equally important is strengthening our local economy through diversification and workforce development. By attracting new industries, supporting small business innovation, and ensuring residents are prepared for tomorrow's jobs, we can build long-term stability. Public safety and inclusive community spaces will also remain priorities, as they are essential to attracting and retaining both talent and business investment. Above all, I will ensure open communication and accountability between Council and the business community, working together to secure Wood Buffalo's prosperous future.

I will explore the possibility of engaging our small business support organizations – Startup YMM, Community Futures etc. to find a more effective way to support them so they can support existing and future entrepreneurs in Fort McMurray and especially our rural communities.

My website is funkybanjoko.com

Jennifer Vardy



As the wife of a local business owner, I have seen firsthand the challenges and opportunities that entrepreneurs face in Wood Buffalo. I am aware of how rising costs, the speed of permitting, and vacant storefronts directly impact families and the health of our economy. That perspective, combined with my experience in government relations and community development, drives my commitment to continuing to grow incentive programs, such as the Downtown Revitalization Incentive Program (D.R.I.P.), while ensuring our investments in infrastructure are responsible and forward-looking. Small businesses are the backbone of our community, and supporting them means supporting the people and families who call Wood Buffalo home.

In my role as Vice Chair of the Wood Buffalo Development Advisory Committee and Chair of the Red Tape Reduction Working Group, I have worked closely with business leaders and municipal administrators to eliminate unnecessary barriers, streamline licensing processes, and foster commercial growth in key areas. I continued to champion the draft Indigenous Procurement Policy, which was presented to council in the summer of 2025. I have been an active participant in the RMWB Process Review, which examines every aspect of the licensing and permitting process, including the analytics of wait times. I work closely with the administration and provide recommendations on improvements.

I have held executive-level portfolios in economic development, government relationships, and external affairs, among many others. This work has shown me the importance of transparency, collaboration, and listening to those most affected by municipal decisions. I will continue to advocate for policies that reduce bureaucratic red tape, foster economic diversification, and enhance engagement between businesses, RMWB administration and elected officials. By fostering a safer and more vibrant community, we can attract and retain the businesses we want, while also growing the talent we need for long-term prosperity. My support for our local economy is not based on hypotheticals; I have been actively involved by showing up, listening, advocating, and making meaningful changes that have helped me develop the necessary skills to make me a strong councillor.

Link tree: <https://renderrush.digital.vistaprint.io/s/GwOoRmuQ1GuxnCGG7heNx>

Verna Murphy



Verna Murphy believes that local businesses are the backbone of the community. But if we want to see change moving forward it is time to put ideas into actions. Keeping utility costs low while ensuring responsible investment in infrastructure is a topic that has been talked about time and time again. But there are some simple solutions. It is vital that a stable environment is created within the municipality again. Plans are often made, and then changed six months later, and then changed again a year later. It is imperative to keep costs down by creating a strong long term plan and actually following through on it.

Another important thing that Verna believes is that administration should have to report back about all grants that they apply for every quarter on various projects—are we leveraging them as much as possible? Doing these types of things will help keep costs down on vital infrastructure. For small businesses, Verna proposed during her last campaign, and will continue to propose putting a moratorium on licensing fees for 2 years. She also would expand the Downtown Redevelopment Plan, which she also brought forward as an idea during her first term on council. For safety concerns, we could use that program for more lighting, and to help businesses offset costs for security cameras. She also believes there just needs to be more conversations between the RCMP and business owners so that both sides are aware of what is going on in each part of town.

And finally, Verna has been a strong advocate of building better relationships with both levels of government above us, and with industry. When everyone is at the table solutions are often easier, and cheaper. For too long Fort McMurray did not need to have good relationships, as we didn't need any help—but times have changed, and so too must the politicians. They need to start setting the example of strong leadership, and reliable government. Especially with diversifying the local economy, solutions are available, we just need to get on board and pull in the same direction as the provincial and federal governments, or industry, whatever may be the case. We need to prove that we are stable and open for business and investment here in our entire region.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/verna.murphy.39/>

Rene Wells



Through the RCMP, most of my career has been in public service. I also bring private-sector leadership experience, where I led teams, solved problems, and listened closely to the people I served. Those skills, combined with a deep commitment to volunteerism and community, are what I will bring to Council. My focus is on transparent, accountable decision-making that ensures taxpayers' dollars are invested wisely. We must keep municipal taxes, fees, and utility costs competitive, while maintaining the infrastructure our families and businesses rely on every day.

For local businesses, I will advocate to cut red tape by streamlining permitting and licensing processes, while ensuring clear and timely communication from municipal administration. Small businesses and entrepreneurs are the backbone of prosperity, and we must support them by fostering commercial growth in key areas and addressing long standing storefront vacancies. By modernizing our transportation networks, encouraging smarter land use, and promoting a safer, more vibrant community, we can attract and retain the people and talent our region needs.

I believe Wood Buffalo can be a leading economic hub for Northeastern Alberta. That means working toward diversification alongside our energy sector, engaging openly with both labour and industry, and strengthening collaboration between business and local government. Together, with responsible leadership and genuine collaboration, we can create the conditions for business success and community well-being – moving Wood Buffalo forward, for positive change.

My website link is: www.renewells.ca

My Facebook page is: [@ReneWellsforCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/ReneWellsforCouncil)

Tiffany Bennett



As an elected official, we can bring motions forward to keep taxes, fees, and utility rates competitive by benchmarking against other municipalities and ensuring fairness for families and businesses. To prioritize responsible infrastructure investment through multi-year planning, smart use of developer levies, and strict adherence to debt limits so growth does not come at the expense of taxpayers. Most importantly, we will make decisions based on real data, transparency, and community input, building the confidence businesses need to invest, grow, and thrive in Fort McMurray.

We will bring motions forward to cut red tape by simplifying business licensing, modernizing permitting systems, and setting clear service standards that save time and money for local businesses. By delegating routine approvals to administration and adopting efficient digital tools, we can speed up processes while increasing predictability for entrepreneurs and developers. Most importantly, we will do this without sacrificing transparency or fairness, giving businesses the confidence to invest, grow, and create jobs in Fort McMurray.

We will bring motions forward to reduce barriers for small businesses by creating internal processes that streamline approvals, cut wait times, and improve efficiency across our business sector. By supporting entrepreneurs with mentorship programs, free marketing for startups in their first three months, and subsidized rental spaces that make it easier to get established. By fostering business connection services and partnerships, we can strengthen relationships, fill storefronts, and build a more vibrant, resilient economy in Fort McMurray.

We will bring motions forward to strengthen public safety through smart bylaws, peace officer programs, and strong emergency services while revitalizing our commercial areas to make them safer, cleaner, and more welcoming. It is wise to use the tools in the Municipal Government Act to drive economic diversification through smarter zoning, supportive bylaws, and targeted programs that attract new industries, while ensuring accountability through transparent budgets, audits, and open public engagement. By strengthening collaboration between businesses and elected officials, we can build long-term growth, trust, and opportunity for Fort McMurray.

I am committed to being a councillor who listens, acts, and partners with our business community to create a resilient, prosperous future for everyone.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/tiffany.bennett.for.ward.1.council>

Allan Grandison



Business is a cornerstone of our community. It is essential that the Municipality partner with all business to support their success thereby supporting the success of the entire region and their residents. The Businesses in this region have historically been strong supporters of social profit organizations, art and culture, sport teams, and multi sport events in the region. The Municipality can recognize these impactful contributions by assisting in areas they have control over, such as keeping taxation, licencing fees, and utilities at a competitive rate so this does not put undue stress on business. The Municipality needs to continue its efforts at streamlining permitting, licensing, building codes approvals, and reducing the processes required to ensure businesses can open and begin operating as quickly as possible. For example, when an infraction is minor and not safety related a temporary occupancy permit can be issued with a follow up verification that the infractions have been resolved. To achieve these goals, we first must ensure that we develop and maintain strong fiscal management using the existing tax base to ensure maintenance of our existing infrastructure and future infrastructure needs. This can only be achieved by taking an in-depth look of the actual costs associated with all municipal services including existing infrastructure. We need to consider creative ways to reduce the tax burden for infrastructure by creating partnerships with Indigenous groups and with Industry to support and maintain existing infrastructure. By creating safe environments more businesses and entrepreneurs would potentially be willing to invest and fill vacant spaces. Public safety is a multi faceted problem that requires creative solutions to address. From a Municipal point of view, environmental controls can be included in planning, controls such as appropriate lighting, open sight lines, and strategic building designs. An increase in police and bylaw presence in higher crime areas is essential. As well as including the use of drones to monitor heavily wooded access points. We also need to diversify our business approach so that we are not solely focused on the oilsands alone. A prime example of this would be pursuing one of the new datacenters that are being proposed for Alberta. This could be accomplished through collaborative efforts with Industry by making available back up electrical and water access. As an elected official I could very strongly support and champion these initiatives with enthusiasm and confidence.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AllanGrandisonWard1/>

Jared Sabovitch



As a Ward 1 candidate, my focus is on building a business climate that is competitive and sustainable. We can keep taxes, fees, and utility costs in check while still investing responsibly in the infrastructure our community relies on. Businesses succeed when they know what to expect, and I support transparent, long term financial planning that balances affordability today with growth opportunities tomorrow.

Cutting red tape is also critical. By streamlining permitting and licensing, we can help small businesses open their doors faster and reduce unnecessary costs. Supporting local business means more than just cutting paperwork, it means creating vibrant commercial spaces where storefronts are filled, not sitting empty. I want to see our downtown and neighborhoods thrive with activity, whether that's through business friendly zoning, community events that draw people in, or partnerships that strengthen our small business network.

Finally, safety and vibrancy go hand in hand. A safer community is one where businesses can grow and where talent wants to stay. That means supporting smart public safety measures while addressing root causes like mental health and addiction. To secure our long term future, we must also invest in diversification so our economy is not reliant on one sector. I want to work with industry, entrepreneurs, and organizations like the Chamber to build transparency, accountability, and stronger engagement between business and elected officials. Together, we can create a resilient economy and a more vibrant RMWB for everyone.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61581448730882>

Uche- Ezeala Ij



It is essential to acknowledge that there is no single magic bullet to address this pressing concern, which has been a significant burden on the people of our region. To remain competitive, we require a disciplined, multifaceted approach that emphasizes efficiency, strategic planning, diversification, growth, and transparency. The goal is not to have the absolute lowest taxes, but to maintain taxes and fees that are competitive and perceived as good value for the quality of life and infrastructure provided. This balance is vital for attracting and retaining residents and businesses, ensuring the community's long-term vitality. Families and businesses are already under pressure due to rising costs of living. I will advocate for keeping taxes, fees, and utilities competitive so Fort McMurray stays affordable and attractive. Additionally, responsible investment in infrastructure is necessary, making sure every dollar is spent wisely and with clear accountability. Diversifying revenue streams is essential: over-reliance on a single source, such as property taxes, puts undue pressure on that source. Diversification can stabilize revenue and lessen the burden on taxpayers. Moving beyond traditional incremental budgeting to zero-based or priority-based budgeting is crucial: each department should justify all expenses from a zero base, rather than simply adjusting last year's budget. This encourages regular evaluation of whether services are still needed and are being delivered efficiently. Implementing clear, public-facing performance metrics for key services—such as road repair response times and park maintenance standards—creates accountability for both spending and service quality. Debt should be used strategically for significant, long-term assets like recreation centers or water treatment plants. Spreading costs over the lifespan of these assets, instead of funding them entirely in a single year, helps keep annual tax rates stable. However, debt levels must remain sustainable and within the municipality's means.

Streamlining permitting and licensing is one of the most potent ways a municipality can stimulate economic activity, attract investment, and improve resident satisfaction. For our region, reducing bureaucratic hurdles is crucial for diversification and resilience. I've faced permitting and licensing hurdles myself – and I know how frustrating delays and red tape can be for small businesses. Therefore, we require a more efficient and business-friendly process that enables entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses without unnecessary barriers...

Website: www.vote4ij.ca

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/share/1Bx4xPtDHb/>

Nathalie Lefebvre



I'd implement an electricity grid sharing plan with those that generate electricity in town; the wastewater plant, the waste treatment, the landfill, recycling depots, the big oil companies. We'd centralize the excess electricity, and would devise a plan to share it with small business owners and entrepreneurs and residents. If we could generate enough to run the whole city, we'd save individuals the utility fees, and keep that money local. To ensure responsible investment in infrastructure, we could hire a building inspector to present the priorities and options, and build the materials required, and have the work done by vetted people in town. To minimize red tape by streamlining permitting and licensing, we would ensure that all the steps could be carried out in one location, and each applicant could be supported by an advisor to guide them.

For transparency, I'd like to see commercial rent prices listed publicly in a document, next to the pros and cons for each location, as well as work or building updates required, to support the reason for the prices quoted. I wonder if we could put a challenge to the store owners; if the space is not rented out within x number of months, the city would require the rent price be decreased by x percent.

In regards to public safety measures that would attract and retain businesses and talent, we could propose a SafeWalk program, patrolled parking lots with good lighting, and good visibility from peace or police officers. Locally made bollards could be artistically placed in front of businesses. Covered sidewalks would be looked into to lessen ice build up, and minimize slips trips and falls.

To ensure stronger engagement between businesses and elected officials, ensure businesses continue to present about themselves regularly at Chamber of Commerce meetings, and require the elected officials each attend x number of meetings per year.

My name is Nathalie Lefebvre, and I am running for City Council, Ward 1. My background is in Social Sciences (UVIC) and Project Management (NAIT).

LinkedIn profile: www.linkedin.com/in/talielefebvre

KC

Hutchins



As resident of Fort McMurray for over the last 30+ year's, I've seen the highs and lows of our region. After natural disasters, the municipality has faced unique challenges with balancing infrastructure for the changing community and responsible investment & development.

Ensuring that taxes, fees, and utilities are affordable for all our residents. Community programs that support all generations is important to me & my family. As a small business entrepreneur, I have come to appreciate the streamlined permitting & licensing process that encourages local business and drives development.

With community dedication & collaborations we can expand on community projects & development that are much needed. Fort McMurray is the edge of the Wild & a vibrant diverse region. Some people say it's just an Oil town but it's much more than that. Rich in Indigenous heritage, history and wonderful people that care about one another.

Building community connection through programs & volunteering is valuable to our "local" community member's safety, happiness & success. In recent years, there has been an increase in crime & strain. I hope to see more police presence on foot in areas of the community where vulnerable citizens are. Enhanced school zone safety patrols before & after school to ensure the rules of the road and safety of kids/youth. Seniors affordable housing progress & supporting programs for young, youthful & aging population is ideal for a thriving city. I'm committed to working collaboratively to ensure Fort McMurray continues to grow as a safe, inclusive, and prosperous community.

Deborah Moses



In order to attract and keep old and new businesses in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo we have to look at a number of areas.

First of all, we want to have small businesses and entrepreneurs to operate from a commercial location in Fort McMurray we need to provide incentives. What kind of incentives? Currently, the downtown section of Fort McMurray has a large number of vacancies. This is due to landlords charging large rental amounts for square footage of retail space. The RMWB can offer reduction of tax incentives to the commercial building owners if they provide lower rental agreements for new businesses. Or introduce a Vacancy Tax after a building has sat empty for a certain period of time.

In order for new businesses to operate we need to look at the licensing issues and see what areas can be removed in order for licenses to be issued faster. Another area to assist new businesses access the "Hire a Youth Incentive" program just recently announced by the Province of Alberta.

The downtown RCMP office location on Franklin has RCMP officers as well as Peace Officers which has helped the downtown core. RCMP foot patrols would be beneficial so that they can interact with pedestrians and businesses on their patrol beat. Possible other office locations in Thickwood and Timberlea would be beneficial as well in order to help promote community safety.

How can we support economic diversification and transparency to ensure long-term growth? Currently our main industry is Oil & Gas. What can we do? We can look at other uses for land development within the municipality.

Indoor agriculture operations are possible. We can grow vegetables 365 days a year and sustain families within the RMWB. A young entrepreneur out in Fort McKay is already doing this. Can the RWM invest in him and his business? The cost of groceries is taking its toll on all our citizens and this is one way that would benefit the citizens of Fort McMurray.

I mentioned the cost of energy distribution fees for our monthly utility bills. These fees go towards: the delivery cost of electricity, which includes transmission and distribution charges, administrative charges, and other expenses. The Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) is to hold rate meetings to ensure consumers safe and reliable services at a reasonable cost...

Website: <https://www.DeborahMoses.ca>

Facebook: [Deborah – Deborah Moses for Ward One Council](#)

Irfan Bangash



Fort McMurray's business community requires foreseeable costs and reliable infrastructure to remain competitive in today's market. As a Councilor, I will support policies that keep municipal taxes, fees, and utility costs aligned with regional competitiveness, while ensuring that revenues are invested responsibly in core infrastructure such as roads, water, waste management, and broadband. My goal is to create stability and efficiency in municipal spending so that businesses can plan with confidence and residents can see value in how their tax dollars are managed.

A key priority is reducing administrative barriers that slow growth. I will work to streamline permitting, licensing, and compliance processes by introducing clear timelines, digital solutions, and greater accountability in service delivery. By cutting red tape, we can encourage entrepreneurs to launch and expand more quickly, while also reducing costs associated with delays. Filling storefront vacancies in commercial districts will require targeted collaboration between the municipality, landlords, and business associations to offer incentives, pilot programs, and flexible zoning solutions that make these spaces attractive again for small businesses and service providers.

Public safety is directly tied to business confidence, employee retention, and community vibrancy. I will advocate for enhanced partnerships between law enforcement, municipal departments, and the business community to address safety concerns in commercial corridors, particularly around crime prevention and urban cleanliness. Beyond safety, economic diversification remains critical to our long-term resilience. I will promote policies that support emerging industries, encourage local procurement, and strengthen workforce development initiatives in partnership with post-secondary institutions and trade organizations. Finally, I believe that transparency and open data should guide decision-making. By improving reporting on economic outcomes and municipal performance, we can hold ourselves accountable, build trust with the business community, and ensure that economic development strategies are aligned with real results.

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