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# The Press

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

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Vol. 15 - Issue 3 | Wednesday, January 21, 2026

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## Woodlands County is updating its tracking software for resident service requests



Woodlands County utilizes a data entry system to keep track of service requests from residents, such as road or facility concerns. It has grown in popularity over the years and will get a significant upgrade this year as the municipality changes its provider. (Left) Councillor Deane wants to see more "how to" support for residents. (Right) Councillor MacNeil asked how the administration uses the tracker system.

| By Serena Lapointe

The Woodlands County Service Tracker Program will be upgraded in the new year as the municipality will be swapping software platforms. Woodlands County Council re-

cently had the chance to provide feedback on the service. The Service Tracker provides residents a means to send service requests at any time by either completing a short form on the County's

website or calling the office during business hours. The program is not meant for emergencies or issues needing immediate attention. Residents can call the

continued on page 10



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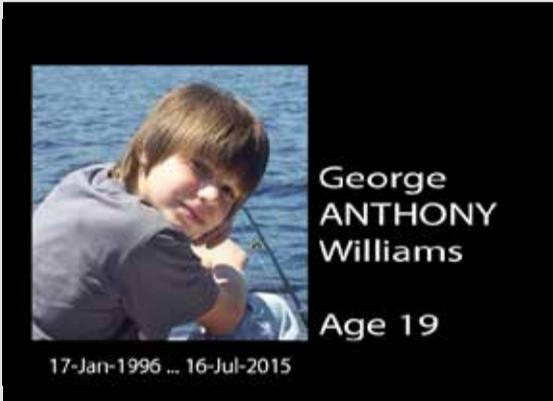
If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, you need to know that you're not alone. You can also call if you are not in crisis, seeking additional information. The new Canada Suicide Prevention Service (CSPS), by Crisis Services Canada, enables callers anywhere in

Canada to access crisis support by phone, in French or English: toll-free **1-833-456-4566** Available 24/7  
Crisis Text Line (Powered by Kids Help Phone) Canada Wide free, 24/7 texting service is accessible immediately to youth anywhere

in Canada by texting TALK to **686868** to reach an English speaking Crisis Responder and TEXTO to **686868** to reach a French-speaking Crisis Responder on any text/SMS enabled cell phone.  
KidsHelpPhone Ages 20 Years and Under

in Canada **1-800-668-6868** (Online or on the Phone). First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness 24/7 Help Line **1-855-242-3310**  
Canadian Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line **1-866-925-4419**  
Trans LifeLine – All Ages **1-877-330-6366**

**Putting a face on suicide**



*Every 40 seconds somewhere around the world someone dies by suicide, that's 99 people every 66 minutes. Every day, that's almost 100 people in the United States alone, and over 2160 worldwide. Putting a Face on Suicide (PAFOS) is a suicide awareness project that creates posters and videos to pay tribute to those we have lost to suicide with dignity and respect. PAFOS humanizes the daunting statistics; lovingly replacing numbers with faces.*

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If you or someone you know has been affected by bullying, your voice can make a difference. We are looking to hear your story and raise awareness about the impact of bullying in our community. By sharing your experience, you can help others understand they are not alone in their struggles, and together, we can take a stand against bullying.

**How to Share Your Story:**

- Reach out to us at [thepresswtc@gmail.com](mailto:thepresswtc@gmail.com)
- Your submission can remain 100% anonymous if you prefer.
- Every story shared helps bring us one step closer to ending the cycle of bullying.

We believe in the power of raising awareness. Your story could be the one that helps someone find hope and strength. Let's take a stand together.

My name is Tana, and most of my life, school wasn't a place of learning. It was a place of survival. It started in Junior Kindergarten. While other kids were learning to share, I was learning that my body was a target. I was a "bigger kid," so I was called "fat." I was asked if I was pregnant before I even knew what that word meant. By Grade 4, the few friends I had were gone, and I was mostly alone. Middle school is when survival becomes suffering. I was trapped in a cycle that lasted exactly 8 hours and 35 minutes every single day. That is the time from when I stepped onto the bus in the morning until I stepped

off in the afternoon. For 8 hours and 35 minutes, a group of boys told me I should kill myself. They told me no one loved me. They told me the world would be better if I were gone. At 11 years old, I didn't just hear them; I believed them. I tried to end my life for months because I was told daily that I wasn't worth the air I breathed. I did what we are told to do: I asked for help. I went to teachers, the bus driver, and the principal. I pleaded for someone to make it stop. It never did. The system only noticed me when I finally broke. After years of torment, I threw a chair and slapped my bully to make him stop. I was the one punished. I was

deemed "a danger." I was suspended and reduced to two hours of school a day. While my bully stayed in the French Immersion class with his friends, I was falling behind. Because of the isolation and the way the school handled my "punishment," I couldn't read properly until the 10th grade. I still struggle with math because I was never given the chance to learn. I was moved to classes where I didn't know the language properly as I was in French from Kindergarten to grade 5, and even worse, mocked for shaving my head for a cancer donation. The trauma of school followed me home and online. Because my

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Primary Care Alberta

self-esteem had been ground into the dirt, I was vulnerable. I developed an eating disorder that I still fight today. When I finally left for the outreach program to save my own life, the rumors followed me, claiming I had dropped out to

have a baby with a 30 year old. Bullying isn't just "mean words." It is a wrecking ball that destroys a child's education, their safety, and their sense of self. Today, I am standing here. I am confident. I have loving parents, a

boyfriend, family, and friends who actually care. I am heading to college for animation in the fall. But I didn't get here because the school system helped me. I got here because I had to **continued on page 3**

**JESUS AND MARY SPEAK TO THE WORLD AT BAYSIDE**

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--Our Lady, June 12, 1976

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[www.smwa.org](http://www.smwa.org)

This ad paid for by Richard Mestdagh

continued from page 2

rebuild myself, piece by piece, from the rubble the system left behind. I am sharing this because no 11-year-old should ever feel that a

noose or a blade is the only way to stop the clock on those 8 hours and 35 minutes.

The system failed me. It's time we make sure it stops failing everyone else.

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or visit your community newspaper



**Money Matters**

One Canadian Dollar = **0.71 US Dollar** at an exchange rate of **0.7186** (using nominal rate).



Dollar Values as of January 21, 2026

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Idea

**A look at the local weather**

P.O.P.	
High	
Low	
Wind	
24-Hr Rain / Snow	

	<b>Wed., Jan. 21</b> Mainly cloudy 30% -6°C -12°C W 16 km/h <1cm
--	--

	<b>Thu., Jan. 22</b> Chance of flurries 20% -11°C -22°C N 14 km/h <1cm
--	--

	<b>Fri., Jan. 23</b> Cloudy with sunny breaks 40% -22°C -31°C N 16 km/h
--	--

	<b>Sat., Jan. 24</b> Chance of flurries 20% -28°C -35°C E 10 km/h <1cm
--	--

	<b>Sun., Jan. 25</b> Partly sunny 20% -27°C -32°C S 7 km/h
--	---

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He will be ready to go home once he has fully recovered and been cleared by the veterinarian. With an old soul and a calm nature, Olafur prefers quiet companionship over constant cuddles. He enjoys walking beside his people, following them from place to place, and accepting gentle head pets. He walks well on a leash and would do best in a home with plenty of space to roam.



If you would like to meet Olafur, please contact the **Whitecourt Pound** at: **780-778-5767**



Napa Auto Parts photo

Tubing fun at East Link Ski Hill on January 10, sponsored by Napa Auto Parts. Families and friends enjoyed the fresh snow and sunny skies.

**HELP WANTED**

Tim Hortons in Whitecourt is looking to fill the following positions:

**Food Service Attendant**  
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**Food Service Supervisor**  
Full Time / Shift Work

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Please apply in person at the restaurant.



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The Press

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# Bridge dollars to support post-secondary students in Whitecourt now open for application

| By Serena Lapointe

A collaboration between the Town of Whitecourt, Town of Drayton Valley and the University of Alberta, as well as two other municipalities in the region, has resulted in the Regional Tuition Assistance Bursary Program, where municipalities are provided seed money to offer a municipal bursary. Whitecourt residents interested in post-secondary education and training opportunities in high-demand sectors, including health-care, skilled trades, transportation, technology and social services, and who intend to return to the municipality once completed, now have an opportunity to access support dollars

towards their goals.

Each participating municipality has slight variations to their program. Whitecourt's Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) Program was discussed at length during a Policies and Priorities Committee meeting and later passed and adopted by Town Council at their regular meeting on November 24. Rhonda Woods, Economic Development Officer for the Town of Whitecourt, explained that the program was for both youth students and adult learners.

Drayton Valley was one of the inaugural communities to launch the regional program and has successful-

continued on page 11



A pilot program is now available to help those seeking post-secondary opportunities in high-demand sectors who plan to live in the community after they complete their schooling. (Pictured) Graduating students and adult learners can both apply for this bursary.



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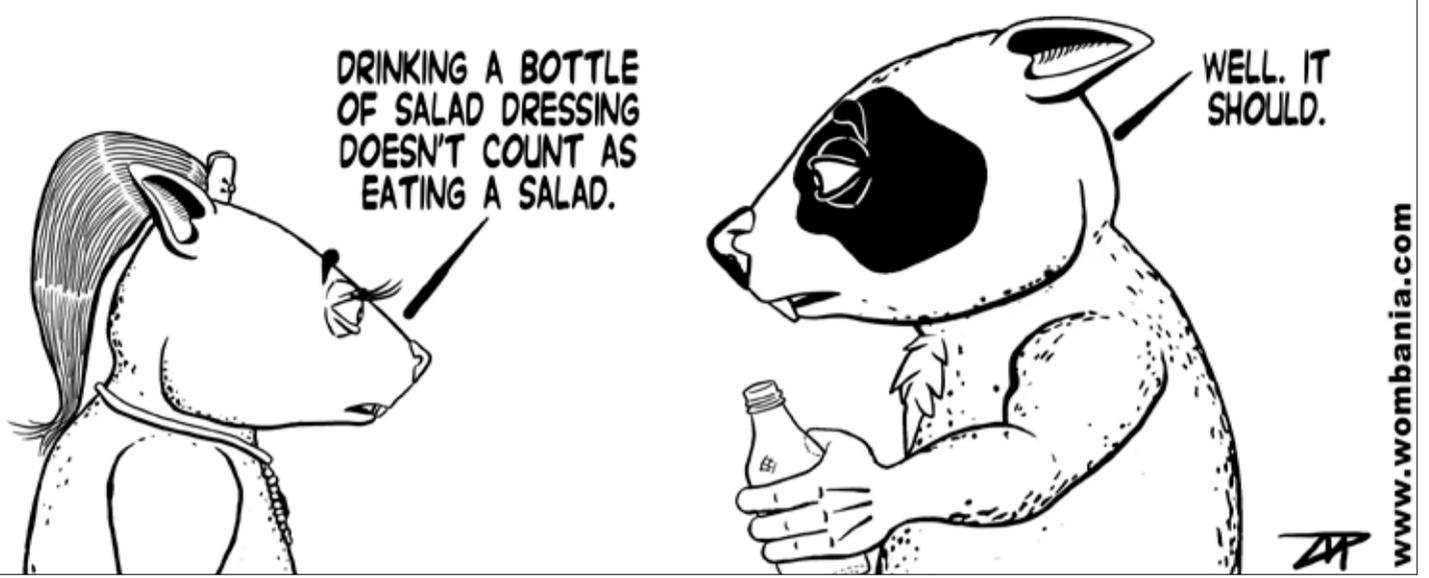


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**Child Support Program:**  
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**Preventative Education:**  
Provides Workshops, Information and Awareness to Schools, Community Organizations, Agencies and Businesses

Family Resource & Crisis Centre  
[www.whitecourtshester.ca](http://www.whitecourtshester.ca)

**Recover Out Loud**

- Mondays are in person, at the Family Worship Center upstairs, and online (hybrid) at 7:30pm
- Fridays 7:30pm at the Whitecourt Baptist Church in person only.

ZOOM ID: 818 413 483 PASSWORD: gratitude

**Whitecourt Alcoholics Anonymous Group**

Meetings are three times each week

- Monday 8:00 pm - 9:00 pm
- Wednesday 8:00 pm - 9:00 pm
- Friday 8:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Located at the United Church Basement on Legion Street (formerly 5201 - 50 Street), Please Leave a Message for Our AA member or Contact Addictions Helpline @1(866)332-2322

**CALL Ruth 780-674-7182**

Support group on Tuesdays 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm, September 16 – December 2, Crossroads Community Church, 4719 44 Avenue Mayerthorpe, Pre-registration is required

**NEED HELP? CALL ANYTIME! (24-7)**

- Mental Health Helpline 1-877-303-2642
- Addiction Helpline 1-866-332-2322
- Health Link 811



### Flipi Gas-Fired Generation Project

Comments invited and funding available

**January 7, 2026** — TransAlta Corporation is proposing to develop a new power-generating facility fueled by natural gas, located approximately 18 kilometres southwest of Rimbey, Alberta.

The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC) invites Indigenous Peoples and the public to review the summary of the Initial Project Description and provide comments on the proposed project. This feedback will help IAAC prepare a summary of issues that will be given to the proponent.

Visit the project homepage on the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry ([canada.ca/ciar](http://canada.ca/ciar)), reference number 90120, to:

- ✓ Learn more about the project.
- ✓ Submit your comments online by **11:59 p.m. on January 27, 2026**. All comments will be published to the Registry.
- ✓ Apply for participant funding by **February 6, 2026**.
- ✓ Participate in an information session to learn more about the project and the impact assessment process.



Scan the QR-Code to visit the project homepage.

**Have a question?**

Write to us at [Flipi@iaac-aeic.gc.ca](mailto:Flipi@iaac-aeic.gc.ca) or visit our website at [canada.ca/ciar](http://canada.ca/ciar).

For media inquiries contact [media@iaac-aeic.gc.ca](mailto:media@iaac-aeic.gc.ca).



# Residential roads cleared as snowfall finally subsides; focus shifts to main routes

**| By Haylee Winger**

After a relentless stretch of snowfall that blanketed the area, Town of Whitecourt crews have successfully completed the challenging task of clearing snow from all residential streets. The town has done an impressive job in managing the snow removal efforts, ensuring that cul-de-sacs, back lanes, and neighbourhood roads are now passable and safer for residents.

While most streets are in good condition, some areas remain slightly rough due to the repeated thaw/freeze cycles experienced over the past few weeks. Crews will continue to address these spots over the next sev-

eral days as conditions allow.

With the residential streets cleared, crews are now turning their attention back to high-priority routes, including the main downtown roads and industrial areas, which see the heaviest traffic. These areas are essential for daily travel and commerce, so crews will work to ensure these routes are cleared and accessible as quickly as possible.

In response to growing interest, town officials have also provided an update on the status of the outdoor skating rinks. As cooler temperatures are expected to return this week, crews plan to begin flooding the rinks, starting with

Percy Baxter and Ste. Anne's. More details will be shared with residents as the rinks become ready for use.

Local crews have worked tirelessly to keep the town moving, and officials are grateful for the community's understanding and patience during this time. The town's proactive approach to managing winter weather and its ongoing commitment to maintaining road safety are evident in the successful completion of these tasks.

As always, residents are encouraged to continue exercising caution when traveling on winter roads and to stay informed through local updates about road and rink conditions.

**Career ads, online at:**  
[www.whitecourtpress.com](http://www.whitecourtpress.com)

**Library Hours:**  
Mon-Fri 10am-8pm  
Sat 12pm-4pm  
Sun Closed

# FEBRUARY 2026

## EVENT CALENDER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2 Adult Book Club 1:30-2:30	3 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	4 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	5 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00  Scrabble Night 6:00pm-7:30pm	6 Yap & Yarn 6:00-7:30	7 Family Movie: Gnomeo & Juliet 1:00
8	9 French Homework Help 4:00-5:00  Tween & Teen Night 6:00-7:30	10 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	11 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	12 Story Time 10:30-11:15  Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	13 Adult Art Therapy: Blackout Poetry 5:30-7:30	14 Creative Corner: Heart Foxes 1:00-3:00
15	16 <span style="color: red; font-size: 1.2em;">Closed for Family Day</span>	17 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	18 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	19 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	20 Soapstone Carving 5:30-7:30	21 Creative Corner: Engineering Blocks 1:00-3:00
22	23 French Homework Help 4:00-5:00  Tween & Teen Night 6:00-7:30	24 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	25 Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	26 Story Time 10:30-11:15  Afterschool Program 3:30-5:00	27 Crib Night 6pm-7:30pm	28 Creative Corner: Ground Hog Puppets 1:00-3:00

**Valentine's Day  
Scavenger Hunt**

**All Afterschool Programs:  
Free, Drop-In at the Library,  
Designed for all school ages.**

For more Library information check our Facebook page, or call (780) 778-2900  
([www.facebook.com/whitecourtlibrary/](http://www.facebook.com/whitecourtlibrary/))



Repeat Boutique photo

**Celebrating 60 years of community spirit! Friends of Whitecourt volunteers gathered on January 10 for a night of memories, delicious food from Mama Gray's Kitchen, and a toast thanks to Ralcomm's generous wine donation. They look forward to many more years of helping the community and Health Care Centre with proceeds from Repeat Boutique.**

**EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**

www.whitecourt.ca | facebook.com/TownofWhitecourt | 780-778-2273

If you enjoy a fast-paced, progressive work environment and you have a passion for serving the local community, then this may be the opportunity for you! We believe that our values of diversity, collaboration, innovation and mutual respect bring out the best in our team, and we are currently looking to fill the following position:

**Job#: 26-013** – Facility Trades II – Permanent, Full-Time – Closes January 30, 2026

Please visit [www.whitecourt.ca](http://www.whitecourt.ca) for all employment opportunities and details on how to apply.



**FCSS GRANT FUNDING**

Are you a local organization delivering preventative social programs? We can help.

Woodlands County is now accepting applications for Family & Community Support Services (FCSS) grant funding for initiatives that:

- Strengthen children, families & seniors
- Build life skills & community wellbeing
- Support volunteerism
- Increase awareness of local services



**DEADLINE: February 27, 2026 (4:30 p.m.)**

Apply online or pick up a form at County offices in Whitecourt or Fort Assiniboine

[woodlands.ab.ca/p/fcss](http://woodlands.ab.ca/p/fcss)

Questions? Contact Community Services at 780-778-8400 or [communityservices@woodlands.ab.ca](mailto:communityservices@woodlands.ab.ca)

**RURAL COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS GRANT - APPLY NOW!**

**Do you have a new neighbour or want to get to know your existing ones?**

It's the perfect time to connect and build relationships in your community.

Woodlands County is now accepting applications for the Rural Community Connections grant. Receive up to \$500 to cover expenses such as food and entertainment.

Applications:

- [woodlands.ab.ca/p/rural-connections](http://woodlands.ab.ca/p/rural-connections)
- Pick up at the Whitecourt or Fort Assiniboine County offices

Completed applications can be submitted:

- In person at the Whitecourt or Fort Assiniboine offices
- By email: [communityservices@woodlands.ab.ca](mailto:communityservices@woodlands.ab.ca)
- By mail: Woodlands County, Attn: Community Services, Box 60, #1 Woodlands Lane, Whitecourt, AB T7S 1N3

For more information, contact Community Services at 780-778-8400 or [communityservices@woodlands.ab.ca](mailto:communityservices@woodlands.ab.ca).

**BULK WATER STATIONS - PREPAID ONLINE ACCOUNTS**

REMINDER! JANUARY 23 to JANUARY 26, all Bulk Water Fill Stations will upgrade to a prepaid online account system. During this 4-day window, there will be service disruptions and access to water may be unavailable.

IMPORTANT! BEFORE JANUARY 26, contact either County Office to create an online account. It will be required for access to all Bulk Water Fill Stations.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation during this transition!

Whitecourt Office: 780-778-8400, Fort Assiniboine Office: 780-584-3866 [utilities@woodlands.ab.ca](mailto:utilities@woodlands.ab.ca)

For more info: [woodlands.ab.ca/p/water-fill-stations](http://woodlands.ab.ca/p/water-fill-stations)

**SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS – DON'T MISS THIS!**

Woodlands County's **small business property sub-class** offers eligible property owners the chance to apply for a **reduced non-residential property tax rate** for the 2026 tax year.

You may be eligible if:

- You own a non-residential property.
- Your business (or tenant businesses) has fewer than 50 full-time employees.
- The property complies with the County's Land Use Bylaw.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 13, 2026**

Applications must be submitted every year and are reviewed before approval.

Pick up an application at the Woodlands County Office or apply online: <https://www.woodlands.ab.ca/p/property-taxes>



**We're Hiring! Local work. Good people. Let's talk.**

- Manager, Infrastructure Services
- Administrative Assistant, Legislative Services
- Administrative Assistant, Community Services
- Lead Hand, Parks & Recreation
- Community Ambassador(s)
- Seasonal Labourer(s)

For more information on these postings and to apply: [woodlands.ab.ca/p/careers](http://woodlands.ab.ca/p/careers)

**YOUTH PROGRAM FINANCIAL SUPPORT!**

Do you have a youth aged 4–18 who could use a little financial help to join a recreation, sports, art, or culture program?

Woodlands County's Youth Enrichment Subsidy (YES) can provide up to \$600 per year to help cover program costs – and it can be used for multiple programs!

**IMPORTANT: Apply BEFORE starting the program.**

Call Community Services: 780-778-8400

More info & applications: [woodlands.ab.ca/p/yes-program](http://woodlands.ab.ca/p/yes-program)  
Help your youth explore, create, and play!



**DAVE KUSCH**  
Reeve, Division 1 – Anselmo  
[dave.kusch@woodlands.ab.ca](mailto:dave.kusch@woodlands.ab.ca)  
780-778-9337



**PATRICIA MACNEIL**  
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SCHOOL NEWS



The view is great no matter where you sit.



The hill's temporary comfy seat.

It appears someone wanted an extra comfy seat while watching their children slide down the Dahl Drive Sliding Hill. A blue recliner, which has definitely seen better days, was perfectly positioned to enjoy the view from the fire pit area last week. Although it would probably be a comfier place to sit, here's hoping it was someone with good intentions, albeit silly, and not someone trying to dump their furniture without making a trip to the landfill.



Students at Hardy Elementary School enjoyed a beautiful day of skiing and tubing, thanks to Eastlink Park's extra work preparing the hills for the Grade two visit. The winter conditions made for a perfect outdoor learning experience.

PUBLIC NOTICE

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Christmas Tree Pick Up

Starting on Monday, January 5, crews will be picking up trees from across the community on a weekly basis throughout the month of January as time permits. There will be no set schedule, and pick up may be delayed due to snow or other higher priority tasks.

Please place your tree where you would normally place your garbage. For those residents in cul-de-sacs who place their garbage further out into the street, please don't place your tree where it will obstruct traffic.

Trees must be free of all decorations and tinsel. Please do not place the tree in garbage or tree bags.

The Whitecourt Regional Landfill also has a drop-off area for you to dispose of your tree. The Whitecourt Regional Landfill is open Monday to Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. has the right to appeal prior to the above date.

NOTICE OF DECISION

The following decisions were made by the Municipal Planning Commission:

Application No. 25-145 – Discretionary Use – Home Occupation, General Aesthetics at 1 Park Close – Approved with conditions.

Date of Decision: January 8, 2026

Appeal Closes at 4:00pm: January 29, 2026

An Appeal of the above decision(s) may be made by submitting a written appeal and appeal fee (\$315) to the Office of the Secretary of the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board, Town of Whitecourt Administration Building, Box 509, Whitecourt, Alberta, T7S 1N6 prior to 4:00pm on the above noted date. Any person(s) affected by the said proposal(s), has the right to appeal prior to the above date.

continued from page 1

after-hours line for that (1-888-870-6315).

At regular council meetings, council is provided with updated tracker data to see requests currently underway and those that have been dealt with and are now considered closed. They also receive a report each quarter, which allows them to compare to previous years, helping to highlight recurring issues and potential trouble spots.

Woodlands County CAO Matthew Ferris provided an overview of the final two quarters of 2025 at the January 15 Regular Meeting of Council. “We did have some staff changes over in the late part of Q3, which resulted in us being delayed in getting you the report. For Q3, July through September, we had a total of 129 requests. That’s about a ten percent decrease from the year-over-year comparison. The most fre-

quently requested category is for grading,” he explained.

“In Q4, we had a significant number of requests, but, interestingly, it was a decrease from the year before. With record snowfalls, and I’m told from our Public Works Managers in some places we had drifts over ten feet high over the roads, the fact that we actually experienced a decrease in calls and complaints, given the month of December, speaks volumes to our staff and public works department,” added Ferris.

The vast majority of requests from July 1 to September 30 were for grading/washboarding issues, with 65 requests for that. The next highest received was construction-related with twelve requests, by-law enforcement with eleven, potholes/road repairs with eight and nine requests for dust control.

From October 1 to December 31, 119

requests were received, with 58 relating to snowplowing and sanding. The next highest was 22 for grading or washboarding requests and thirteen for snowplow flags. October and November each had 21 requests, with most accumulating in December, just like the snow, with seventy-two requests. “I will say that our team sacrificed a great deal with their families over the holidays to make sure that everyone else’s holidays went off without a hitch. I want to say thank you to them, and I’m sure council’s appreciative, too,” said Ferris.

He then asked council how they felt about the reporting as it currently stands. “We haven’t really had a discussion with council on how they would like to see the reports,” he said. Ferris wondered if they wanted to keep seeing the tracker report broken down by division. “Is there a

benefit to, rather than breaking it down by division, speaking as one county in these reports?”

Any feedback that you have on things that would be nice to see in these reports or things that aren’t necessary would be greatly appreciated.”

Councillor Alan Deane said he preferred having the report broken down by each division. “From my perspective, I like the division breakdown. What it helps me to identify is areas that, I don’t want to say we struggle, but they are problem areas just by the very nature of the topography, and so to see it (that way) is helpful,” he explained.

Councillor Deane also wondered if they could increase communication to residents on how to find the tracker portal on different media. He said accessing the tracker on the County’s website was not the same on other devices.

“On your computer, it’s right at the bottom of the main page, and you can see it, but you have to go through the popular links on the mobile app. If a person doesn’t know what’s there or doesn’t know that’s an area to dive deeper into the website, they are not going to be able to find it. I’ve had numerous conversations with residents, who are better with their phones than I am, and they don’t know where it is, so I’m just thinking a quick “how to find it post” would be helpful,” he said.

Councillor Patricia MacNeil agreed to having the report broken up by divisions. “I really appreciate the divisional reporting for basically the same reasons (as Councillor Deane),” she said. She asked why service requests were submitted by staff roughly half the time and through the website the other half.

Ferris explained that staff submissions are a combination of things.

He said one of those is when a resident calls, and staff fill in a request for them. “If someone calls us and has a concern, I don’t think it’s best practice to say go on the internet and submit. So, some of those are phone calls where people have said, “Hey, let’s do something.”

He said staff also use the tracker system as a way to keep things from getting lost. “We were running into some issues, facility-wise, for our staff where there was an issue with a building, more so our third-party facilities, where they asked for something and it just either fell by the wayside or wasn’t properly tracked,” explained Ferris. In those situations, staff would be instructed to send a service request to help keep track of the issue on the administrative side.

The overhaul to the well-used service will be rolled out to residents once complete.

## Woodlands County council recap – regular council meeting

### | Woodlands County Release

Woodlands County Council discussed the following items at their Regular Council Meeting held on January 15th:

Council reviewed the draft Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy and directed Administration to amend the policy by removing references to Council and to refer the amended policy to the Governance & Priorities Committee for further review. The policy is intended to outline how municipal records and information are protected, while supporting the responsible and productive use of AI tools within the organization. Overall, the proposed policy reflects common themes emerging across Alber-

ta municipalities and addresses several gaps identified through Administration’s review.

Council received the Asset Management (AM) Progress Update – New AM Systems for information. The implementation of the new AM Systems provides a foundation for improved asset management and more reliable data.

Council received the 2025 Service Request Tracker Reports for information. Administration is currently transitioning to a new service request tracking software platform. As part of this transition, the format and presentation of the Service Request Tracker Report will change beginning in 2026. Communication on how to access this tool for ratepayers will

be coming soon.

### Upcoming scheduled meetings:

- Regular Council Meeting – Thursday, January 29 @ 9:30 a.m.
- Regular Council Meeting – Thursday, February 12 @ 9:30 a.m.
- Governance & Priorities Meeting – Wednesday, February 18 @ 5:00 p.m.
- Regular Council Meeting – Thursday, February 26 @ 9:30 a.m.

Meetings are held in-person at the Woodlands County Municipal Office in Whitecourt and live-streamed on the Woodlands County YouTube channel. Agenda packages are available on the Woodlands County CivicWeb Portal.

## How to recognize a controlling relationship

(NC) For many teens, figuring out what a healthy relationship looks like isn’t easy, especially when they’re just starting to explore dating and friendships. Without much experience to draw from, it can be hard to tell the difference between care and control, respect and pressure. Parents, guardians, and trusted adults all need to know how to recognize the signs of a controlling relationship, and how to intervene safely when it’s needed.

Identifying coercive and controlling behaviours

Coercive control can show up in many ways and is a form of gender-based violence (GBV) that youth and young adults can face in intimate relationships. It’s a type of abuse rooted in controlling, manipulative and fear-instilling behaviours.

There are four common types of coercive

controlling behaviours which include possessive behaviours, psychological abuse, sexual jealousy and stalking. This may look like a partner making threats, breaking personal belongings, isolating someone from family and friends or monitoring where they go and who they talk to. They may even threaten self-harm to pressure victims or survivors to comply and maintain power over them.

The dangers of gaslighting

One particularly harmful tactic of coercive control and frequent type of GBV is gaslighting. Gaslighting makes someone doubt their own memory, perception or sense of reality. For example, a partner might deny their abusive actions, blame the victim for things they didn’t do or twist events so the victim questions their own judgement. Over time,

gaslighting erodes confidence, instills doubt and makes it harder to leave relationships.

What you can do to help

It’s important to be able to recognize when something isn’t right. Look for signs like isolation, emotional manipulation and controlling acts, such as a victim has being made to give up autonomy over their phone, money or social life.

If a young person confides in you, the best things you can do is listen, believe them, label the behaviour for what it is and remind them that it’s not their fault. This can help them connect with resources to support their safety and well-being.

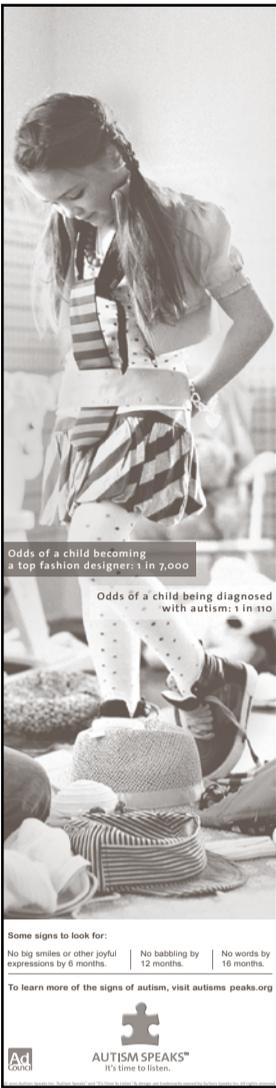
Everyone deserves healthy relationships without abuse or control. You can learn more and find resources to support the youth in your life at [canada.ca/itsnotjust](http://canada.ca/itsnotjust).



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### continued from page 5

ly supported students. Hinton is another municipality taking part. Now, the Town of Whitecourt will have the chance to find its own success in supporting learners thanks to a \$10,000 influx from the University of Alberta to get the program off the ground.

The standout difference between the TAB program and other grants or bursaries from other funders is that it is meant to supplement funding and not replace other forms of assistance. To qualify, students must show that they do not qualify for remaining funding sources, be it provincial, federal, regional or scholarships, as examples. Students who have exhausted funding sources and who still have tuition costs to pay could receive funding through TAB as a bridge over the remaining gap they have in paying for their schooling.

With ten thousand dollars, Whitecourt's TAB program can provide successful candi-

dates with up to \$5,000, which would enable the municipality to help at least two students at full funding allowance, or more, depending on how much is remaining from the pot. The dollars can also be carried over if not fully used in 2026. "Say we get two students that apply and we use \$5,000, that other \$5,000 is still part of this program for the following year," explained Woods.

Hinton, as an example, has chosen to craft its policy to provide five bursaries valued at \$2,000 each. The Town of Whitecourt has elected to set a maximum amount that they will provide to one applicant while leaving room to maneuver and vary amounts based on an applicant's request and approval within that maximum.

Councillor McAree said the program sounded amazing. He asked what would happen if it were oversubscribed. "Would it be expanded?" Woods explained that there is an option to apply for grants to extend it.

"Right now, I'm not sure what that will look like, but we will start with the ten thousand as a pilot project and see where that goes and how many applications we get, and if there are any changes, it will definitely come back to Council for future years," she said.

Councillor Baker asked for clarification on whether an applicant can receive dollars from other sources, too. "We're not saying they can't get funding through anywhere else?" Woods said no. "No, absolutely not. This program is really intended to top up and fill the gap that they are missing, and bridge the remaining gap. There is an area (on the form) where they can list the grants that they have applied for, and then the score will reflect based on what they have already received and what the difference in funding is. If they received funding and it didn't fully cover their tuition, this could cover what's missing," she clarified.

Four municipalities

are taking part in this pilot project, which aims to help students achieve post-secondary education while encouraging them to bring that achievement back to their communities, keeping local talent local. The seed funding helps encourage municipalities to give it a shot.

"The intention is for communities to be able to launch their own bursary programs for their residents, and then if funding is available then it could continue, and if not, then it would be up to municipalities to look at how they would fund that for future years," said Woods, adding that there are grants available to support programs such as this.

To learn more, residents can search for the Tuition Assistance Bursary Program on the Town of Whitecourt's website (www.whitecourt.ca). Applicants will need to show proof of residency in the community and must be accepted into an accredited post-secondary institution to apply.



### Letter to the Editor policy

The Press welcomes readers to write letters to the Editor. A maximum of 300 words is preferred but not necessary. Letters must carry a first name or two initials with surname and include an address and daytime telephone number. All letters are subject to editing. Please email letters to [wctpress@gmail.com](mailto:wctpress@gmail.com).



# The Press

A locally owned and family operated newspaper serving Whitecourt

PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY

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# Whitecourt Town Council update

Whitecourt Town Council will be hosting the 2026 Budget Information Open House from 3:00pm to 6:30pm on Thursday, March 5 at the Allan & Jean Millar Centre. The event will provide information to the public on the interim budget, provide the opportunity for rate-payers to comment, and allow for two-way communication between the public and Whitecourt Town Council and

staff. Residents are encouraged to attend and share their thoughts! Free childminding for children 7 and under will be provided for families attending the event, and the Doors Open Youth Program will be running from 3:30pm to 5:30pm for those in grades 6-12 to try out. Watch for advertisements in the coming weeks!

Council has scheduled a series of workshops on a number of

topics, including the Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework and other master plans.

The 2025 Strategic Plan Project Status Report has been updated, and is available for download on [www.whitecourt.ca](http://www.whitecourt.ca). Council is hosting a strategic planning session next week, and will be defining its priorities and areas of focus for the current Council term.

Councillor McAree

has been appointed to serve as Deputy Mayor from February 1 to May 31, 2026

Members of Council will be attending the 2026 Federation of Canadian Municipalities annual conference in Edmonton this June. Members of Council will also attend the 2026 Spring Municipal Leaders' Caucus hosted by Alberta Municipalities this March in Edmonton.

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*The road's edge in front of Mike and Rebecca's No Frills was perfectly chiselled after Town of Whitecourt crews worked to cut away some of the built-up snowbank, widening the roadway for motorists. With fresh white snow layered between dirty snow from the sand, the edge seemed to resemble an intricate dessert. Whether your eyes see the same illusion or not, the precision with which the bank was cut was neat to see.*

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