

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REPORT

Reporting Period: June–September 2026

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Executive Summary

During this reporting period, Administration continued implementing Council's 2026–2029 Strategic Plan while preparing the organization for the 2027 budget process. Considerable work has been completed in organizational restructuring, policy development, emergency management, regional fire services, workforce training, financial oversight, service-level reviews, labour relations, infrastructure planning, and regional collaboration.

The first six months of departmental workplans have now been reviewed. Departments are better positioned to identify operational pressures, organizational changes, resource requirements, and emerging priorities. Workplans have been updated to reflect staffing changes, retirements, weather-related challenges, revised timelines, and the operational realities identified during the first half of the year.

Strategic Planning and Workplans

Administration completed a six-month review of departmental workplans developed to implement Council's 2026–2029 Strategic Plan.

The workplans have been updated and adjusted to account for:

- Organizational and staffing changes;
- New and retiring employees;
- Weather-related impacts on operations;
- Emerging infrastructure and drainage concerns;
- Departmental capacity and resource requirements;
- Revised financial information;
- Business continuity and succession-planning needs; and
- Changes to departmental priorities and anticipated completion dates.

Departments now have a clearer understanding of Council's strategic direction, the work required to meet established priorities, and the challenges that may affect implementation. Updated workplans will continue to be used to monitor progress and support future reporting to Council.

2027 Budget Preparation and Service-Level Review

Preparation for the 2027 operating and capital budgets has begun.

Administration has completed a review of departmental service levels to better understand:

- Existing service commitments;
- Council and public expectations;
- Staffing and equipment requirements;
- Areas where service levels may need to be clarified or adjusted;
- The financial impact of maintaining current services;
- Opportunities for efficiencies and modernization; and
- Infrastructure and asset-replacement priorities.

The results of these reviews will be presented to Council during the 2027 budget deliberations. Administration will identify where current resources are sufficient, where service pressures exist, and where Council direction is required.

Capital planning discussions have also begun, including fleet replacement, road and drainage infrastructure, parks and recreation assets, fire equipment, facility requirements, and other long-term infrastructure needs.

Financial Management and Revenue Review

Administration continues to review County programs, fees, and service costs to identify areas where the County may not be recovering the actual cost of providing a service.

Work completed or underway includes:

- Reviewing dust-control costs and updating the Dust Control Policy to provide one application and improve cost recovery;
- Reviewing the Senior Snow Clearing Program and clarifying that the discounted service applies to one principal residence per eligible senior;
- Reviewing departmental fees and charges;
- Reviewing fleet and equipment replacement requirements;
- Examining outstanding accounts and options for collection or transfer to the tax roll where authorized;

- Reviewing the financial components of departmental workplans;
- Reviewing services and programs for financial sustainability.

Administration is also working with legal counsel and staff regarding grazing lease tax assessments. This work includes reviewing the applicable assessment and taxation framework, addressing identified concerns, and determining the appropriate process moving forward.

Payroll Modernization and Administrative Restructuring

Demonstrations are being provided for an online timesheet and payroll system. The objective is to improve payroll accuracy, reduce manual processing, strengthen approval controls, and create a more efficient process for recording regular hours, overtime, leave, and departmental coding.

Administration is assessing whether the selected system can integrate with or upload information into the County's existing financial system.

As part of this modernization, the former payroll-focused position is being transitioned to an Administrative Clerk position. The position will provide front-counter and telephone support and serve as backup to the Finance and Planning and Development departments. Duties will include accepting payments, preparing deposits, assisting with fire invoicing, formatting documents, using MuniSight, and supporting County communications and social-media platforms.

Interim arrangements have been established to ensure payroll continues to be completed during the transition to the online system.

Human Resources and Labour Relations

The County has received formal notice regarding upcoming union negotiations. Administration is preparing for collective bargaining by reviewing the current collective agreement, operational requirements, compensation matters, existing practices, and areas requiring clarification.

Human-resource work during the reporting period has also included:

- Reviewing employee roles and departmental responsibilities;
- Supporting recruitment and organizational transitions;
- Reviewing sick leave, attendance, and recruitment practices;
- Developing an Absence Coverage and Additional Duties Pay Policy;
- Clarifying approval requirements for acting pay and additional compensation;

- Reviewing confidentiality and privacy expectations for employees with access to payroll information;
- Supporting performance-management processes;
- Reviewing succession-planning and cross-training needs; and
- Clarifying the respective roles of Council and Administration in personnel and labour-relations matters.

The proposed Absence Coverage and Additional Duties Pay Policy establishes a consistent process for temporary additional duties. It provides for acting or responsibility pay, up to a maximum of 10% at the CAO's discretion, where an employee or manager assumes substantial additional duties for more than two weeks and is not receiving overtime for that work.

Staff Training and Legislative Compliance

Privacy training has been completed by all employees whose duties require the training. The sessions reinforced employee responsibilities for collecting, accessing, using, storing, and disclosing personal information.

Workplace violence and harassment training has also been completed by all staff. The training included legislative responsibilities, respectful workplace expectations, reporting procedures, investigation processes, and practical workplace scenarios.

Additional work has included:

- Reviewing workplace violence and harassment procedures;
- Reinforcing confidentiality requirements;
- Reviewing occupational health and safety responsibilities;
- Supporting WHMIS and Transportation of Dangerous Goods compliance;
- Developing scenario-based learning and knowledge testing; and
- Identifying future training requirements for managers and employees.

Organizational Restructuring

Parks and Recreation has been transferred to the Agricultural Services Department. This change is intended to strengthen operational coordination, improve the sharing of staff and equipment, and better align vegetation management, recreation areas, public lands, and seasonal operations.

Administration has also continued to review the organizational structure to ensure appropriate reporting relationships, manageable workloads, business continuity, and clear departmental accountability.

Cross-training has been expanded within Public Works and other operational areas. Current and new staff are being trained on multiple pieces of equipment and operational functions to support business continuity and maintain service levels during absences, vacancies, and peak operational periods.

Emergency Management

Significant progress has been made on the Smoky Lake Regional Emergency Management framework.

Work completed or underway includes:

- Updating the Regional Emergency Management Plan;
- Reviewing and revising emergency management bylaws;
- Clarifying regional roles, responsibilities, and lines of authority;
- Updating the Regional Director of Emergency Management structure;
- Reviewing Emergency Coordination Centre procedures;
- Updating hazard, risk, and vulnerability information;
- Developing response levels and activation procedures;
- Updating evacuation and emergency social-services components;
- Reviewing notification, communication, and documentation processes; and
- Developing supporting appendices, forms, contact lists, and operational resources.

The updated emergency management bylaws and plans will be brought forward through the appropriate regional and municipal approval processes.

Administration has also documented impacts associated with the significant rainfall events experienced this summer. These events affected roads, bridges, culverts, gravel infrastructure, natural gas lines, drainage systems, and recreation areas. Information is being maintained to support future mitigation planning and any available funding applications.

Regional Fire Services

The regional fire bylaws and supporting policies have now been drafted. These documents establish a more consistent regional framework for fire governance, authority, service delivery, cost recovery, enforcement, and operational responsibilities.

The completed drafts will be forwarded to the Intermunicipal Collaboration Committee for review and direction before being presented to the participating municipal councils.

Administration continues to work with the Regional Fire Chief, Regional Deputy Fire Chief and municipal partners on:

- Fire-service governance;
- Officer classifications and responsibilities;
- Fire invoicing and cost recovery;
- Required training and certification;
- Equipment and capital requirements;
- Mutual-aid and regional-response procedures;
- Fire permits and enforcement;
- Levels of service; and
- Supporting regional policies and bylaws.

Public Works and Infrastructure

Public Works operations were significantly affected by rainfall and drainage conditions throughout the summer. These challenges also provided an opportunity to identify drainage patterns, infrastructure bottlenecks, and recurring problem areas.

Public Works has been working with Agricultural Services, Parks and Recreation, GIS, and MuniSight data to document drainage concerns and determine appropriate mitigation options.

Other Public Works initiatives include:

- Cross-training employees on equipment;
- Reviewing road-maintenance service levels;
- Supporting road-condition assessments;
- Improving service-request and ratepayer call processes;
- Reviewing drainage and water-flow concerns;

- Coordinating responses to culvert, bridge, and road damage;
- Reviewing fleet and equipment needs;
- Supporting business-continuity planning; and
- Clarifying communication and escalation processes for operational concerns.

Administration continues to reinforce that operational service requests should first be directed to the appropriate department. Matters that cannot be resolved operationally may then be escalated to the CAO, with Council being kept informed through the appropriate governance and reporting processes.

Protective and Enforcement Services

Administration has reviewed enforcement authority, jurisdictional boundaries, officer conduct, and joint-force operations with regional partners.

This work has included:

- Clarifying enforcement authority within urban municipalities;
- Reviewing circumstances involving joint operations with the RCMP, Alberta Sheriffs, or municipal partners;
- Reviewing traffic-safety and commercial vehicle enforcement practices;
- Reinforcing consistent and equitable enforcement;
- Reviewing complaint and dash-camera information where appropriate;
- Expanding community education and awareness objectives; and
- Including regional joint-force operations within departmental workplans.

Governance and Policy Development

Administration has completed or advanced several governance and policy initiatives, including:

- Updating the Council Requests for Information Policy;
- Updating the Dust Control Policy;
- Updating the Senior Snow Clearing Policy;
- Developing the Absence Coverage and Additional Duties Pay Policy;
- Updated the Procedural Bylaw;

- Reviewing Council remuneration and disclosure requirements;
- Reviewing signing-authority requirements;
- Reviewing purchasing and financial-control processes;
- Advancing the regional emergency management bylaws;
- Developing the regional fire bylaws and policies;
- Reviewing work-in-kind provisions;
- Reviewing fleet capital-replacement planning;
- Reviewing service levels and departmental mandates; and
- Clarifying Council and Administration roles under the Municipal Government Act.

Requests for Decision have been prepared or updated to clearly explain proposed policy changes, financial implications, legislative requirements, strategic alignment, benefits, disadvantages, and alternatives available to Council.

Regional and Intermunicipal Collaboration

Administration continues to participate in regional initiatives and support the County's relationships with neighbouring municipalities, commissions, Indigenous communities, provincial departments, and other regional partners.

Current work includes:

- Whitefish Lake First Nation gravel project;
- Proceeding with work supported through the approved Alberta Community Partnership grant;
- Supporting regional emergency management planning;
- Advancing regional fire-service governance;
- Preparing items for the Intermunicipal Collaboration Committee;
- Supporting mutual-aid and joint-force operations; and
- Reviewing opportunities for regional service delivery and modernization.

Communications and Public Service

Administration continues to improve internal and external communication processes.

This work includes:

- Clarifying how ratepayer service requests are received, assigned, tracked, and escalated;
- Supporting consistent departmental reporting;
- Improving the formatting and presentation of policies, bylaws, reports, and Requests for Decision;
- Supporting public notices and County social-media communications;
- Providing Council with operational and strategic updates;
- Improving documentation through MuniSight and GIS; and
- Strengthening coordination between departments.

Priorities for the Next Reporting Period

Administration's priorities for the next quarter include:

- Completing preparation for the 2027 operating and capital budget deliberations;
- Presenting departmental service-level reviews to Council;
- Continuing online timesheet and payroll system demonstrations and selecting an appropriate solution;
- Preparing for collective bargaining;
- Advancing grazing lease assessment and taxation matters with legal counsel and staff;
- Presenting updated departmental workplans and monitoring strategic-plan progress;
- Advancing the regional emergency management bylaws and plans through the approval process;
- Forwarding the regional fire bylaws and policies to the Intermunicipal Collaboration Committee;
- Continuing policy and bylaw modernization;
- Advancing asset-management and fleet-replacement planning;
- Continuing drainage, road-condition, and infrastructure assessments;
- Supporting organizational restructuring, recruitment, cross-training, and succession planning;

- Preparing a prioritized implementation schedule for projects arising from the 2027 budget process.
- Researching and developing other revenue streams for Smoky Lake County.

Conclusion

The reporting period involved significant organizational, policy, operational, and regional work. Administration has focused on building clear processes, improving accountability, strengthening legislative compliance, modernizing internal systems, and aligning departmental operations with Council's 2026–2029 Strategic Plan.

The work completed during the first six months has provided a stronger foundation for the 2027 budget process and has allowed departments to identify service pressures, resource needs, infrastructure priorities, and opportunities for improved coordination. Administration will continue bringing the applicable policies, bylaws, service-level decisions, and budget priorities forward to Council for consideration and direction.