

**REQUEST FOR DECISION**

**Subject:** 2024 Community Conversations Annual Report

**From:** Bill Given, Chief Administrative Officer

**Prepared by:** Jenna McGrath, Community Development Coordinator  
Lisa Riddell, Community Development Manager

**Reviewed by:** Christopher Read, Director of Community Development

**Date:** December 17, 2024



**Recommendation:**  
That Council receive the Community Conversations Annual Report for January to December 2024 for information.

**Options:**  
That Council direct Administration to bring forward additional information on any items of interest in the Community Conversations report to a future Committee meeting.

**Background:**  
On September 21, 2021 Council approved the [Community Conversations Policy \(A-105\)](#) which outlines Council’s commitment to meaningful resident engagement to ensure that municipal services and programs remain responsive to changing community needs. In February 2023, a revised Policy A-105 was adopted by Council, directing Administration to narrow the scope of conversations to focus on the life-stage focused conversations.

From January to December 2024, 27 life-stage focused Community Conversations took place. Post-Wildfire Community Conversations began October 2024, and three conversations per month have taken place since the return to conversations.

Here is a breakdown of attendance in 2024 compared to 2023 numbers.

|                              | Year | Breakdown by quarter and type of participant |         |       |                    |         |       |                   |         |       |
|------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------|---------|-------|--------------------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------|-------|
|                              |      | Jan. to March 2024                           |         |       | April to June 2024 |         |       | Oct. to Dec. 2024 |         |       |
|                              |      | MOJ                                          | Non MOJ | Total | MOJ                | Non MOJ | Total | MOJ               | Non MOJ | Total |
| Adults                       | 2023 | 9                                            | 17      | 26    | 10                 | 20      | 30    | 9                 | 23      | 32    |
|                              | 2024 | 12                                           | 16      | 28    | 8                  | 11      | 19    | 9                 | 19      | 28    |
| Seniors                      | 2023 | 8                                            | 24      | 32    | 14                 | 25      | 39    | 10                | 25      | 35    |
|                              | 2024 | 10                                           | 20      | 30    | 11                 | 14      | 25    | 10                | 24      | 34    |
| Early Childhood & School Age | 2023 | 17                                           | 13      | 30    | 16                 | 11      | 27    | 16                | 12      | 28    |
|                              | 2024 | 15                                           | 13      | 28    | 12                 | 12      | 24    | 13                | 26      | 39    |

*\*Municipal attendance at the Early Childhood & School Age Conversation is high because the Municipality of Jasper offers many services for this age group: daycare, out of school care, 3 x Outreach Workers, 1 x Settlement Worker.*

Here is a list of organizations/groups who have signed up to participate in Community Conversations. Those in *italics* attend regularly (2/3 of the time). The rest have attended periodically:

- *Recovery Alberta – Addictions/Mental Health*
- Alberta Health Services - Homecare
- Alberta Health Services - Physical Therapy
- *Alberta Health Services - Public Health*
- *Alpine Summit Seniors' Lodge*
- CN Wellness Committee
- *Community Development*
- *Community Futures West Yellowhead*
- *Community Outreach Services*
- *Ecole Jasper Elementary School*
- *Ecole Desrochers*
- *Friends of Jasper National Park*
- *Grande Yellowhead Public School Division*
- Government of Alberta - Alberta Supports
- Hinton Friendship Centre
- *Hinton Victim Services*
- *Jasper Activity Centre*
- *Jasper Artist's Guild*
- *Jasper Aquatic Centre*
- *Jasper Community Habitat for The Arts*
- *Jasper Employment Centre*
- *Jasper Library*
- Jasper Minor Sports
- *Jasper Museum*
- Jasper Real Estate
- *Jasper Seniors' Society*
- Jasper Seniors' Housing Society
- Jasper Tour Company
- Mens' Shed Group
- Mettra Pharmacy
- Mountain Makers
- *Municipal Council*
- *Municipal Operations Department*
- Parks Canada - Wellness Committee
- Parks Canada - Indigenous Relations
- Pine Grove Manor
- *Pursuit Jasper Banff Collection*
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) - Jasper Detachment
- *Settlement Services*
- Tourism Jasper
- Uplift Mural Festival
- Yellowhead Emergency Shelter for Women
- Red Cross
- Jasper Recovery Coordination Centre
- Jasper Crisis Team Society
- Service Canada
- Alberta Government Jasper Recovery Task Force
- Jasper Habitat for the Arts
- Options HIV West Yellowhead

Here is a list of organizations Community Development hopes to increase participation from in 2025:

- Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge
- Local Small Businesses
- Individuals
- Via Rail/Rocky Mountaineer
- Jasper Park Chamber of Commerce
- Supporting increased attendance from periodic attendees

## Discussion:

At Community Conversations, participants identify the changing needs of residents as well as opportunities to take action in response to those needs. A review of all trends and opportunities identified across all Community Conversations throughout 2024 but with an emphasis on what has emerged post-fire reveals a few thematic areas under which the majority of trends and opportunities identified could be grouped.

- **Financial Stress:** Residents of all ages continue to grapple with the rising cost of groceries, rent, and utilities. Costs like childcare are also hard to carry with reduced work hours while many businesses have reduced hours or remain closed. This is evident with large increases in requests for relief funding, gas and grocery cards, use of Santa's Anonymous and the food bank, food recovery etc.
- **Food Insecurity:** Tied very closely with financial stress, subsequent food insecurity continues to rise. Foodbank usage numbers have not decreased post-fire, despite a reduction in the population in general.
- **Mental Wellbeing:** There is an opportunity for in-person, relational mental health supports for all ages. There is also an opportunity to foster mental health and wellbeing through connection-based programming.
- **Connection:** Residents seem to want to participate in low-commitment, easy to access recreational programming. Events and initiatives that bring people together. The desire for connection-focused programming was something we flagged during the pandemic that promoted resilience and recovery.
- **Housing:** There is limited access to stable, affordable and longer-term housing for those displaced by the fire. People are making do in crowded spaces, trying to bridge this gap which is, in some instances, leading to tensions or even risk of unsafe conditions within families or between roommates. Unpredictable rent increases are also causing stress. Many residents live in precarious housing tied to employment that was tenuous pre-fire and is now even more unstable. There are Jasperites who experienced secondary displacement (by eviction or via job loss) who are also in very precarious, unstable housing situations – and who have experienced tremendous loss and upheaval in this disaster.
- **Displaced Jasperites:** Many Jasperites are displaced from the community and there is a strong desire to keep them connected and to ensure that they can still participate in the community as citizens of Jasper. Also to ensure that services and supports are reaching those who cannot live here. A concern was raised about Jasperites living outside of community who may still want to vote or run in our upcoming local election. Another challenge raised is some Jasperites are living at Outlying Commercial Accommodations and cannot access the school bus.
- **Relief and Recovery Supports:** The demand for supports specific to wildfire relief and recovery remains high. Those in helping professions are looking for creative solutions to support their staff and keep their teams going as they balance increased demands.
- **Unknowns:** The above themes are all related and overlapping. A common thread that ties them all together is the stress that comes with living with so many unknowns. Jasperites are making major life decisions without all of the information they want to have before making those decisions. Here are some examples of the questions that have been shared exemplifying this: *Will I be able to find work here in the spring? Will there be enough interim housing for me? Will I qualify for interim housing? Will my employer re-open their business? Will I be able to find a place to work and live if I move? Will moving impact my path to permanent residency?*

Several groups have taken action in response to social priorities raised at Community Conversations. In 2024, there were a variety of actions taken by several participants (both municipal and non-municipal). Here are some of those actions, activities or initiatives:

### **Municipality**

- Jasper Recovery Coordination Centre – struck to collaborate with Parks Canada on all dimensions of recovery including social recovery. Working on a needs assessment strategy, social recovery priorities including housing. Partnering with COS to ensure vulnerable clients have access to temporary accommodation.
- Community Development is working on an agreement with the Red Cross to have a recreation programmer who can help organize programming for all life stages. Also expanding the Community Dinners and offering initiatives that support food security. Applied for an employee wellness grant application submitted to support municipal employees.
- Community Outreach Services has hired a Recovery Outreach Team to assist with the high demands of complex needs of residents.
- Community and Economic Development Fund applicants were supported by administration to “action” gaps and noted trends. Examples: Childcare feasibility study, In-home support for seniors, Capacity building for the Filipino-Canadian Society to become registered, Early Childhood Conference support for gender diversity.

### **Schools**

- Meetings to coordinate a “School Lunch Program” grant application to assist with recovery, financial instability, and food insecurity.
- Schools are offering amazing initiatives internally to foster resilience and recovery.
- BEST Coaches doing all sorts of great programming.
- Possible collaboration with Municipality to involve children in emergency preparedness.

### **Recovery Alberta**

- Expanded services with walk in and low commitment approaches to try and reach more residents.
- Partnered with Community Outreach Services to offer multiple psycho-educational style sessions, sharing circles, etc.

### **All Community Conversation Participants**

- So many community conversation participants have noted things they can take and use to tweak their programs, services or initiatives. This includes the Library, Museum, Friends of Jasper NP, Service Canada, Options HIV West Yellowhead, employers, Red Cross, etc.

## 2024 Social Assessment

The results of the 2024 Social Assessment conducted by administration can be used to gauge the effectiveness of community conversations at communicating the social needs of the community. Please note: Social Assessment results are Pre-Wildfire while administration focused efforts on reporting a Community Conversations annual report with a focus on post-wildfire trends.

### Summary of the 2024 Jasper Social Assessment Report

**Adult Responses Received:** 220 total

**When:** March 1-31, 2024

**Methods used:**

- Online Engage Jasper received 818 visits
- Paper surveys & collection envelopes were available at most municipal facilities
- Paper surveys delivered to Seniors residence
- In Person public engagement at 2 community dinners
- Engagement through an instructor at JEEC English classes

**Promotion:**

- Posters around town
- Hand bills around town
- Promotion at Women's Day event
- Promotion at Parks public forum
- Promotion through social media
- Promotion at Community Dinners

**What Residents Love About Jasper:**

- Natural Beauty & Outdoor Activities (60%): Residents value the scenic environment and activities like hiking and skiing.
- Community & Small-Town Feel (50%): Appreciation for the close-knit, supportive community.
- Safety & Family-Friendly Environment (20%): Praised for walkability, tranquility, and being ideal for raising children.
- Recreational Opportunities (40%): Access to facilities, and parks.
- Services & Programs (20%): Community services like COS programs are highly valued by residents.

**Challenges Faced by Residents:**

**Key Themes:**

- High Cost of Living (55%):
  - Rising expenses for housing, groceries, and utilities.
- Housing Affordability & Availability (50%):
  - Limited affordable options, especially for families.
- Limited Services & Infrastructure (20%):
  - Inadequate medical care, and public transportation.
- Tourism/Economic Impact (25%):
  - Concerns over low wages and the strain of tourism on local resources.
- Quality of Life & Social Dynamics (35%):
  - Issues with isolation, division, and limited mental health resources.
- Infrastructure & Council Issues (20%):
  - Frustration with municipal spending, taxation, and growth management.

## **Ideas for Improvement:**

### **Key Themes:**

- Affordable Housing (45%):
  - Rent caps, better housing options, and accountability for landlords.
- Improved Community Services (30%):
  - Enhanced healthcare, mental health programs, and more robust public transport.
- Economic & Infrastructure Development (25%):
  - Use of tourism revenue for infrastructure and business support.
- Support for Locals (30%):
  - Discounts for residents and increased job opportunities.
- Environmental & Community Practices (20%):
  - Beautification projects and eco-friendly initiatives.
- Tourism Management (15%):
  - Balance tourism growth with local needs, including charging tourist fees to reduce resident tax burdens.

The survey also engaged 152 youth from Ecole Jasper Elementary School, Jasper Jr/Sr High School, and Ecole Desrochers to explore their views on community strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement.

**Youth Responses Received:** 152 total

**When:** April 1 – May 30, 2024

### **Methods used:**

- Google document at the Jasper Jr/Sr high school
- In-person engagement administration met with the Student Council at the Jasper Jr/Sr high school
- Engaged a grade 3 class @ Ecole Jasper Elementary School through teacher
- Engaged Ecole Desrochers Grades 3-12 through a teacher

## **What Jasper youth Love About Jasper:**

### **Key Themes:**

- Connection to Nature: Scenic beauty including mountains, lakes, and wildlife. Clean, fresh air and water.
- Seasonal diversity and outdoor opportunities.
- Community and Inclusivity: Supportive, safe, and welcoming community. Inclusivity, pride flags, and reduced discrimination. Access to community resources like gardens, libraries, and arts programs.
- Accessibility and Activities: Proximity to nature and essential services. Trails for biking, hiking, skiing, and outdoor music events. Engaging local celebrations and festivals.
- Infrastructure and Services: Access to good healthcare, schools, and restaurants. Recreational facilities like the Activity Centre.

## **Challenges Faced by Jasper youth:**

### **Key Themes:**

- Accessibility and Infrastructure Issues:
  - Winter road and sidewalk maintenance. Limited indoor recreational spaces and public amenities. Insufficient transport options, including driver education.
- Expensive housing and goods.
- Social and Community Concerns:
  - Limited activities and spaces for teenagers. Issues of boredom, isolation, and lack of socializing opportunities. Bullying and limited quality extracurricular programs.
- Environmental Challenges:
  - Harsh winters, hot summers, and risks from wildlife.
- General Discontent:
  - Perceived lack of fun activities, entertainment venues, and school field trips.

**Ideas for Improvement:****Key Themes:**

- Infrastructure and Recreation:
  - Develop facilities like badminton courts, indoor playgrounds, bike lanes, and skateparks. Enhance fields and playgrounds at schools, and unchain soccer nets.
- Community Services:
  - Increase daycare spaces, senior living options. Provide more youth programs and better bus service.
- Entertainment and Activities:
  - Establish an arcade, movie theater, bowling alley, trampoline park, and youth hangout spots. Create teen-specific activities and address substance abuse concerns.
- Economic Development:
  - Encourage local business growth, lower taxes, and attract tourism. Reduce reliance on bars and cannabis stores and promote diverse retail options.

**Relevant Legislation:**

- [Policy A-105: Community Conversations Policy](#)

**Strategic Relevance:**

- Communicate and engage with residents.
- Welcome the expertise, innovation, creativity, and commitment of community members, groups, associations, and businesses.
- Entrust our staff to develop healthy relationships with the people they serve.
- Nurture our most important relationships which are those within our organization

Activities that result from Community Conversations also advance these priorities:

- Take proactive steps to reduce the risk of people becoming vulnerable and respond when they are vulnerable.
- Promote and enhance recreational and cultural opportunities and spaces
- Enable and facilitate events that provide opportunities to increase community connections.
- Embrace our growing diversity.
- Leverage and create opportunities for greater inclusion.

**Financial:**

The costs to implement the Community Conversations Policy are within the 2024 Operating Budget and included in the draft 2025 Operating Budget.

**Attachments:**

The notes for each individual conversation can be found on the [Municipality of Jasper website](#).