

Business Licence Bylaw

What We Heard Report

September 2026



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO

We humbly acknowledge that the land on which we live, learn, work and play is Treaty 8 Territory, the traditional lands of the Cree, Dene, and the unceded territory of the Métis.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

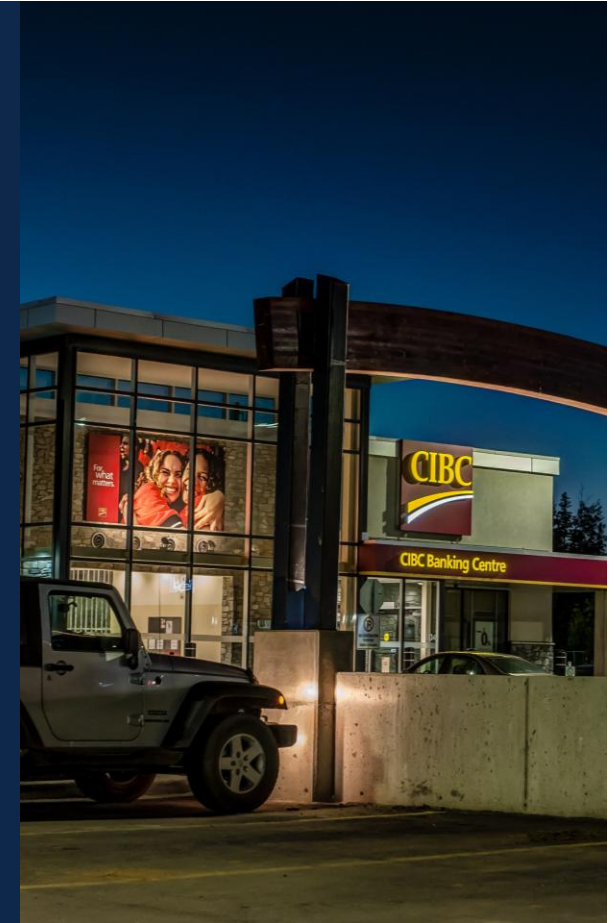
The current Business Licence Bylaw (01/031) was adopted in 2001. Since then, it has undergone several amendments over the years but has not seen a comprehensive overhaul that involves input from impacted stakeholders.

Following a review of the current bylaw, Planning and Development Services (P&D) identified gaps and explored best practices from other municipalities in Alberta. Based on this work, a draft updated bylaw was developed.

Between Nov. 2025 and Sept. 2026, P&D engaged with active business licence holders and the broader business community to better understand their experiences with the business licensing process and to provide an opportunity to review the proposed bylaw.

- One-on-one conversations were held with key business and economic development partners.
- 28 survey and 77 quick poll contributions were received.

The feedback gathered will help ensure the updated bylaw supports local businesses and reflects real-world experience.



PARTICIPANTS

Who did we talk to?

- Active business licence holders
- Wood Buffalo Pro Business Advisory Committee
- Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce
- Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Development and Tourism



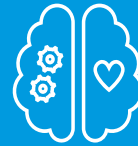
ENGAGEMENT IN NUMBERS



aware

Aware

- **2,863** Participate Wood Buffalo newsletter recipients
- **598** project page views
- Email invitation to **3,035** active business licence holders
- Inclusion in Chamber of Commerce, NAABA, and StartupYMM newsletters



informed

Informed

- **5** project page followers



engaged

Engaged

- **28** survey responses
- **77** quick poll responses
- **4** one-on-one interviews

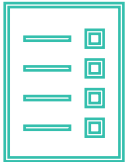


OVERALL KEY FINDINGS/THEMES



1. Support for economic growth and entrepreneurship in the region

- Participants generally supported a bylaw framework that encourages business development while minimizing barriers to starting, operating, and growing a business.
- **41.1% of quick poll responses** identifying “Supporting economic growth and new businesses” as the top priority of the business licence bylaw.
- **8 open-ended survey responses** referenced the need to support entrepreneurship and remove barriers to growth.
 - “I believe distinguishing between different types of secondhand businesses would allow the Municipality to meet the intent of the bylaw while continuing to encourage small, local businesses and the growing resale economy in our community.”



2. Desire to simplify licensing and renewal processes

- Participants identified opportunities to make licensing and renewal processes more straightforward.
- **66.67% of quick poll responses** rated simplifying the business licence process as **very important**.
- **10 open-ended survey responses** referenced simplifying administrative processes, renewal procedures, and payment methods.
 - “Offering an online automatic licence renewal option via credit card and other debit avenues would be more convenient.”



OVERALL KEY FINDINGS/THEMES



3. Flexibility for small and home-based businesses

- Respondents frequently emphasized that requirements should reflect the size, risk, and impact of a business, particularly for home-based and mobile-service operations, rather than applying uniform standards.
- **5 open-ended survey responses** focused specifically on home-based business requirements.
 - “My concern is that some parts of this proposed bylaw seem overly broad or unclear and could create unnecessary red tape for small and home-based businesses that are simply trying to operate legally and earn a living.”



4. Clarity and transparency

- Respondents identified several areas where additional clarification or refinement would improve understanding of the proposed bylaw.
- **9 open-ended survey responses** requested clarification, identified issues, and raised questions about implementation.
 - “I like that the business renewal will be the same time every year making it easier to remember a renewal, but my concerns are: How does pricing affect businesses that apply half-way or closer to the end of year? How will the RMWB office account for a very high number of renewals at the same time of year?”



ENGAGING WITH BUSINESS PARTNERS

Organization	Key feedback
Wood Buffalo Pro Business Advisory Committee	• Supported efforts to modernize the bylaw, improve consistency, reduce administrative burden, and expand business licence exemptions. • Discussed opportunities to improve licence renewals through updated expiry dates, potential automatic renewals, and consideration of resident/non-resident fee structures.
Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce	• Expressed support for the proposed bylaw updates, particularly the revised fee structure and changes impacting trade show vendors. • Identified internal municipal processes, including safety codes and development permits, as potential barriers to timely business licence renewals.
Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Development & Tourism	• Supported the proposed bylaw changes and recognized the value of adopting NAICS business classifications. • Noted that standardized business classifications would improve data quality and enable stronger benchmarking with other jurisdictions.



NEXT STEPS

Planning and Development Services will present the final version of the updated Business Licence Bylaw to Council for approval in Fall 2026.

Once approved, the updated bylaw will make the business licensing process easier to understand, more efficient, and better aligned with today's business environment.



Appendix A

Online survey 28 responses



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Share your thoughts on the draft Business Licence Bylaw: (28 responses)

Top themes from long answer responses:

1. **Support for business growth and entrepreneurship (~8)**

- “Small businesses should be able to grow and create local employment without being required to lease commercial premises that they do not operationally need.”
- “What I don’t want to see is a system that makes it unnecessarily difficult for ordinary people to start small businesses or earn additional income from their homes.”

2. **Simplifying licensing, renewals, and customer service (~10)**

- “Allowing renewals 60 or 90 days in advance seems much more practical.”
- “Will renewal notifications go out? Offering an online automatic licence renewal option via credit card and other debit avenues would be more convenient.”



Share your thoughts on the draft Business Licence Bylaw: (28 responses)

Top themes from long answer responses continued:

3. Flexibility for home-based and small businesses (~6)

- "The number of people employed by a business should not necessarily be treated the same as the number of people working from a residential property."
- "We generate zero client foot traffic, zero parking congestion, and zero outdoor storage in our residential neighbourhood...The regulations should recognize those differences."

4. Need for greater clarity and transparency (~9)

- "If I were a business owner actually trying to appeal a decision, I shouldn't have to figure out which of those bodies I'm really appealing to."
- "The bylaw needs to be much clearer about where the business premises ends and someone's private home begins."



Appendix B

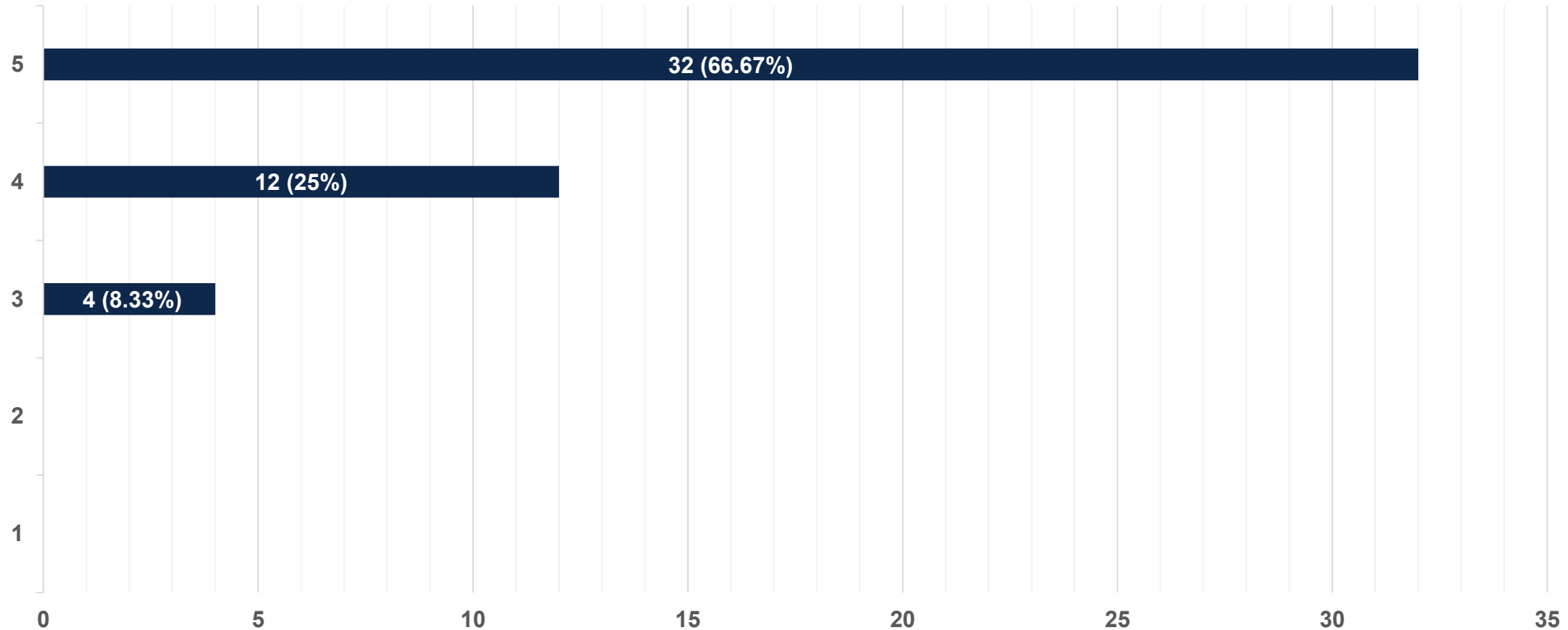
Online quick poll
77 interactions



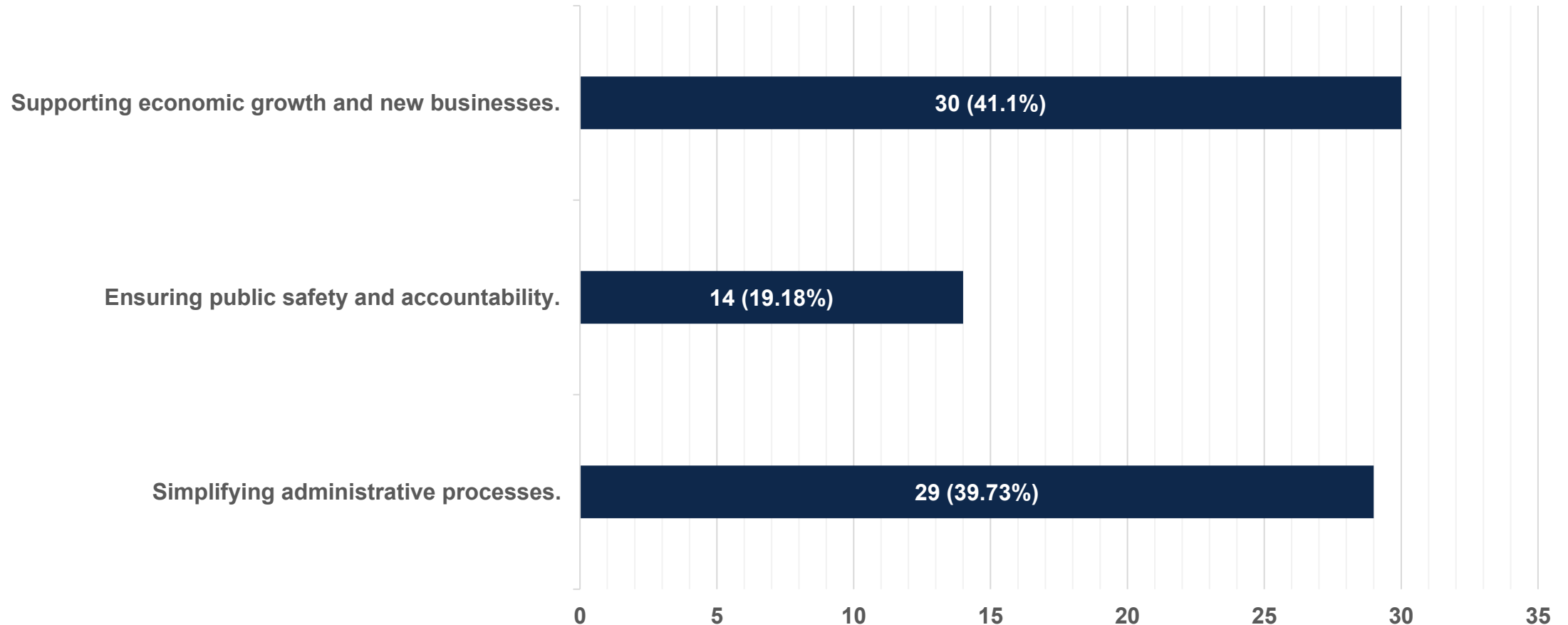
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How important is it to simplify the business licensing process?

From 1, not at all important, to 5, very important (48 responses)



What should be the top priority of the business licence bylaw? (73 responses)



Appendix C

One-on-one conversations



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ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS

Overview

- Hosted by members of the RMWB Planning and Development Services team, four one-on-one conversations were conducted with:
 - Wood Buffalo Pro Business Advisory Committee (*two conversations were held*)
 - Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce
 - Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Development and Tourism

Format

- The Manager of Customer Experience & Analytics (RMWB) met with representatives from each group to gather feedback on the draft Business Licence Bylaw.



Key areas discussed

1. The importance of business licensing data to **support municipal planning and decision-making**.
2. **Business licensing administration**, including renewals, penalties, and fees, exemptions, and opportunities to reduce red tape.
3. **Regulatory requirements** related to safety codes and development permits.
4. The use of **NAICS business classifications** to make it easier to compare the region's business environment with other jurisdictions.
5. **Comparisons with licensing frameworks** used by other municipalities and regions.

