

**Sturgeon County
2024 Council Remuneration Review**

Recommendations from the Council Remuneration Task Force

August 2024

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Message from the Task Force Chair

The 2024 Council Remuneration Task Force was established by bylaw passed by Sturgeon County Council on January 30, 2024, in keeping with a recommendation from the 2019 Task Force that a similar review be conducted within five years.

Council subsequently appointed Julius Buski, Al Montpellier, Aaron Bokenfohr, Joe Dwyer, and Diane Pysmeny to the Task Force. Task Force members elected Julius Buski as Chair and Al Montpellier as Vice Chair.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Task Force adopted a methodology similar to the one used in 2019. This included interviews with Council members, a review of compensation in a number of similar jurisdictions, and extremely helpful presentations by County staff on factors such as economic factors and population growth.

In addition, Pamela Walters of P. Walters Consulting Ltd. was engaged to conduct a review and analysis of compensation in 11 comparable Alberta municipalities.

This review provided the Task Force with the information required to propose a number of recommendations for Council consideration. These, and a summary of the methodology and data gathered are contained in the following pages.

Interviews of Council members also provided valuable insights and information which helped guide the Task Force in its deliberations.

The Task Force wishes to recognize the contribution to our work and deliberations by Jesse Sopko, General Manager Corporate Services, as well as Dianne Mason and Melodie Steele, Legislative Advisors, in addition to the other County staff who provided background information.

We believe that the recommendations in this report, if adopted, will continue to provide fair compensation for Sturgeon County Council members and serve as a stimulus for continuing to attract interested and dedicated citizens to stand for political office.

Julius Buski, Ph. D.
Chair, 2024 Council Remuneration Task Force

Background Information and Methodology

Task Force Terms of Reference

In accordance with Bylaw 1636/24 (see Appendix A), the Council Remuneration Task Force was mandated to:

- Make recommendations to Council on appropriate compensation for the Mayor and Councillors, including salary, benefits, pensions, allowances, and any other form of compensation; and
- Provide recommendations on revisions to the County's policies related to Council remuneration.

The Task Force was comprised of five Sturgeon County citizens, appointed by Council, who meet the eligibility requirements of an elector pursuant to the *Local Authorities Election Act*, being 18 years of age or older, a Canadian citizen, and a resident of Sturgeon County. To ensure a fair and independent process, current members of Council, members of a Councillor's family, and current Sturgeon County employees were excluded from being appointed to the Task Force.

To fulfill its mandate, Council requested that the Task Force consider:

- Compensation that would attract a diverse range of candidates to the roles of Mayor and Councillor;
- The responsibilities, accountabilities, and time commitment required of the Mayor and Councillors;
- Alignment with other comparable municipalities;
- The current and anticipated economic environment; and
- Alignment with policies related to compensation for Sturgeon County employees.

The Task Force met 8 times between April 12 and August 22, 2024. The Task Force interviewed members of Council and received information from various County departments including Legislative Services, Communications & Strategic Services, and Economic Innovation & Growth. Further, the Task Force retained an external consultant to support an external market comparison and analysis. Cumulatively, this information formed the basis of the Task Force's recommendations.

The Task Force was provided with a budget of \$30,000 and assigned administrative support through the County's Legislative Services department. The Task Force completed its work within the assigned budget and submitted its Final Report to County Administration on August 22, 2024.

This report includes the recommendations of the Task Force, which, in accordance with Bylaw 1636/24, are not binding upon Council.

Existing Council Remuneration Policies

Sturgeon County's Council remuneration is prescribed in the following policy documents, which formed the basis for this review:

- Elected Official Remuneration Policy
- Councillor Business Expense Policy
- Maternity and Parental Leave Bylaw 1449/19

Market Peer Comparators

The Task Force used 11 municipal comparators as part of its review:

- Parkland County
- Strathcona County
- Leduc County
- County of Grande Prairie
- Red Deer County
- Rocky View County
- Foothills County
- City of St. Albert
- City of Fort Saskatchewan
- City of Spruce Grove
- City of Leduc

These comparators are those used in the most recent review of Council remuneration undertaken in 2019. These municipalities also form the comparator group for County employee compensation.

The Task Force considered this comparator group appropriate in consideration of the following factors:

- It includes counties that are neighbours to the two Alberta major cities of Edmonton and Calgary which have similar rural-urban characteristics and features with respect to regional municipal government.
- It includes rural municipalities with a mix of agriculture and industry like Sturgeon County.
- In acknowledgement of there being no single "perfect" comparator, it includes a mix of rural counties and mid-sized urban centres as well as larger, smaller, and similar-sized municipalities.

The Task Force's Guiding Principles

The Task Force established the following guiding principles as it collected information and conducted its analysis:

1. The work of Council is important, demanding, and time-consuming work.
2. Remuneration should fairly reflect the value of the contribution of the Mayor and Councillors to the democratic system and allow for the retention and attraction of a diverse and representative pool of candidates from Sturgeon County residents wishing to seek election to Council.

3. Council should be fairly compensated as public servants, acknowledging that a portion of the time and effort of the role of Mayor and Councillors is considered a service to the community to improve the well-being of the citizens of Sturgeon County.
4. Remuneration should be sensitive to local market conditions and to compensation levels for these roles in comparable municipalities.
5. Remuneration should demonstrate fiscal responsibility and align with the Strategic Plan of Sturgeon County.
6. Remuneration paid to Council members should be clear, transparent, and understandable to the public.
7. Principles should be established for regular review of Council remuneration where there are criteria to initiate a review of Council remuneration and where the evaluation is repeatable and based on specific factors.

Compensation Philosophy

Sturgeon County's current compensation philosophy for Council members and staff is the 67th percentile. The Task Force considered this to be a competitive, yet cost-effective target and therefore recommended it as the basis of analysis and recommendation.

Recommendations

The Task Force has made recommendations related to the following:

1. Base Remuneration
2. Status of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor Positions
3. Per Diem Rates
4. Mileage
5. Expense Reimbursement
6. Conferences, Conventions, and Professional Development
7. Health, Wellness, Maternity, Parental, and Retirement Benefits
8. Technology Allowance and Support
9. Timing of Implementation of Recommendations
10. Future Review of Council Remuneration
11. Update and Codification of Position Descriptions

Each element is addressed below, identifying the current state, the Task Force's recommendation for each element, and the rationale supporting each recommendation.

1. Base Remuneration Rates

Current:

The base remuneration rates for members of Council (2024 rates) are:

- \$117,592.93 for the Mayor,
- \$90,156.62 for the Deputy Mayor, and
- \$84,974.63 for Councillor.

These base remuneration rates reflect the recommendations of the 2019 Citizen Task Force on Council Remuneration and approved by Council in the Elected Official Remuneration Policy that took effect on January 1, 2020, with annual wage inflation adjustments applied using the Alberta's Average Weekly Earnings (AWE) indicator published by Statistics Canada. The percentage increase is calculated using the percentage change in the 12-month average of the AWE values from September of the previous year against the same value for the year prior.

The annual wage inflation adjustments applied since the time of Policy approval for the years 2020 to 2024 were 2.37%, 0%, 0.5%, 3.3%, and 2.4%, respectively.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends the following base remuneration rates:

- \$130,267.50 for the Mayor,
- \$90,156.62 for the Deputy Mayor, and
- \$84,974.63 for Councillor.

It is recommended that the Mayor be eligible for wage inflation applied effective January 1, 2025, but that the Deputy Mayor and Councillors be ineligible for a wage inflation adjustment until such time that the base remuneration rates are brought within 10% of the 67th percentile of the market.

Further, the Task Force recommends that the percentage increase be calculated using the percentage change in the 12-month average of the AWE values from June of the previous year against the same value for the year prior, rather than September.

Rationale:

The Consultant report indicated that Sturgeon County's base remuneration rates are competitive compared to the peer market at the 67th percentile as follows:

- The Mayor's base remuneration is at approximately 99% of market or approximately \$832/year under market (P67 is \$118,425/year).
- The Deputy Mayor's base remuneration is at approximately 115% of market or approximately \$11,848/year above market (P67 is \$78,672/year).
- The Councillor's base remuneration is at approximately 112% of market or approximately \$9,175/year above market (P67 is \$75,800/year).

Additional information regarding base remuneration rates of the peer comparator municipalities is provided in Appendix C.

The external market analysis identified that while the Mayor's base remuneration is slightly below the 67th percentile, the base remuneration for the Deputy Mayor and Councillors is above market. In general, a competitive remuneration is considered within +/- 5% to 10% of the target market position within a comparator market. Through the data collected from the comparators, the Task Force is satisfied that most peer group municipalities include similar items in base remuneration to that of Sturgeon County and therefore the base remuneration comparison represents an "apples to apples" analysis.

In reviewing the data, the Task Force considered what factors may have resulted in base compensation for the Deputy Mayor and Councillors to be above market following the 2019 review of Council remuneration. In reviewing annual wage inflation adjustments from comparators since 2019, the Task Force found that Sturgeon County's annual rates were below market, particularly in the years 2021 and 2022 when Sturgeon County's annual adjustments were only 0% and 0.5% respectively.

Prior to January 1, 2019, one-third of Council member remuneration was tax-exempt, but the passing of the 2017 federal budget removed this exemption meaning that Council member remuneration became fully taxable. The Consultant's analysis identified that 4 of the 11 comparators did not adjust for the loss of the one-third federal tax exemption that came into effect in 2019. Of the 7 municipalities that adjusted Council remuneration to "make members of Council whole", the adjustments ranged from 10% to 20% of the base salary, while Sturgeon County adjusted 16.8% for the Mayor and 12.77% for Councillor. The effect of 4 comparator municipalities not adjusting had the effect of dragging the 67th percentile downwards, and although unquantifiable, may have contributed to Sturgeon County's rates becoming above competitive in the market.

In interviews with Council members, a majority responded that the current pay structure is adequate, assuming that the individual is putting in the time required for the position. Several Council members responded that the Mayor's pay is inadequate, given the time requirements and the responsibility of the position.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends adjusting the Mayor's base remuneration to the ceiling of the target market position of 10% of the 67th percentile. Further, the Task Force recommends maintaining the Deputy Mayor and Councillor base remuneration rates until such time that the base remuneration rates are brought within 10% of the 67th percentile of the market.

With respect to the Task Force's recommendation that the wage inflation percentage increase be calculated using the percentage change in the 12-month average of the AWE values from June of the previous year against the same value for the year prior, the Task Force heard from Administration that using September data does not allow sufficient time for preparation of the annual operating budget. Adjusting this date from September to June will ensure balance between accessing timely data and adequately preparing for the annual budget process.

2. Status of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor Positions

Current:

The position of Mayor is considered an office that constitutes a primary responsibility and the position of Councillor a non-primary responsibility, as per the 2019 Citizen Task Force on Council Remuneration Final Report accepted by Council.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that the position of Mayor continue to be considered a primary responsibility and the positions of Deputy Mayor and Councillor continue to be considered a non-primary responsibility.

Rationale:

Of the 11 comparators:

- 7 considered the office of chief elected official (Mayor) full-time, 3 considered it part-time, and 1 did not indicate.
- 3 considered the office of deputy chief elected official (Deputy Mayor) full-time, 7 considered it part-time, and 1 did not indicate.
- 3 considered the office of Councillor full-time, 7 considered it part-time, and 1 did not indicate.

In Alberta, full-time work is defined as more than 30 hours per week and part-time as fewer than 30 hours per week. In interviews with Council members, it is apparent that the current Mayor spends more than 30 hours per week on Sturgeon County business. The Task Force heard that the time commitment required for the office of Councillor can vary depending on the individual Councillor and the Board and Committee work assigned. Some individuals reported average work weeks of 60 hours, some of 40 hours; most indicated that a significant amount of time is taken with reading and meeting preparation, phone calls, meetings with constituents, and social media. Time commitment also varied according to time of year.

Elected positions are not jobs in the regular sense in that they do not have fixed working hours or duties and therefore the Task Force deems it inappropriate to classify these positions "full-time" or "part-time". The Task Force concluded that the demands and time commitment of the office of Mayor are such that a person could not hold a typical 9-5 job and fulfill the duties of Mayor, while some Council members could work a regular part-time or full-time job in addition to fulfilling their Councillor responsibilities.

3. Per Diem Rates

Current:

The Mayor and Councillors' base remuneration compensates them for their work related to Council meetings, Sturgeon County Boards and Committees, meetings with residents, and other functions within Sturgeon County.

In addition to their base remuneration, members of Council representing external Boards and Committees are eligible to accept per diems at the rates established by those Boards and Committees.

Members of Council may claim per diems for the following duties:

- Attendance at conferences or conventions;
- External Board and Committee meetings where the Council member is appointed by Council and a per diem is not paid to the member by the external Board or Committee;
- Council retreats; and
- Formal in-person professional development courses or sessions.

Per diems are paid at the following rates:

- Less than 4 hours - \$130
- More than 4 hours - \$260

Alternate members who attend external Board and Committee meetings are eligible to receive per diems at the above rates if not paid by the external Board or Committee, even if the member appointed by Council is in attendance.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that per diem rates for the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor be maintained at the following rates:

- Less than 4 hours - \$130
- More than 4 hours - \$260

Further, the Task Force recommends that when an alternate member attends an external Board or Committee meeting and that Board or Committee's per diem is lower than Sturgeon County's rate, the alternate member be paid by Sturgeon County at the rate established by the external Board or Committee.

Rationale:

Per diems are provided by the comparator market as follows:

- Mayor by 5 municipalities
- Deputy Mayor by 7 municipalities
- Councillor by 7 municipalities

The market's practices are varied. Only one municipality pays per diems for "core" Council work, while most do not.

In general, Sturgeon County is behind the per diem values for the comparator market at the 67th percentile as follows:

- Mayor – half-day per diem is \$39 below market; full-day per diem is \$77 below market
- Deputy Mayor – half-day per diem is \$31 below market; full-day per diem is \$62 below market
- Councillor – half-day per diem is \$31 below market; full-day per diem is \$62 below market

Additional information regarding per diem rates of the peer comparator municipalities is provided in Appendix D.

In interviews with Council members, the Task Force heard that most agreed with the current per diem rates. A number suggested that there needs to be a clearer understanding of what constitutes a meeting, and which meetings are eligible for payment.

The Task Force finds it appropriate for Council members to receive per diems in acknowledgement of the potential for varied levels of participation in “non-mandatory” Council work including conferences and external Council commitments such as representing Sturgeon County on external Boards and Committees.

Although Sturgeon County’s per diem rates are below the 67th percentile of the market, in the short term, maintaining the existing rates will help to offset the base remuneration rates for the Deputy Mayor and Councillors being above competitive.

4. Mileage

Current:

Council members are eligible for the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) rate for any travel more than 30 kilometres per day, regardless of the location of the meeting or function, unless mileage is paid by an external Board or Committee, in which case the Council members shall receive mileage at the rate established by the external Board or Committee. In 2024, the CRA rate is \$0.70/km, adjusting to \$0.64/km after 5,000km.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that Council members be eligible to receive mileage at the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) rate and that the 30-kilometre per day provision be eliminated.

Rationale:

The County is in alignment with the comparator market on mileage reimbursement at the 67th percentile. All comparator municipalities provide mileage reimbursement equitably to all elected officials, with most applying the CRA rate.

In interviews with Council members, most expressed support for using the CRA rate, but strongly opposed the 30-kilometre per day requirement as it was seen as unfair.

The intent of providing mileage is to reimburse for the expense of using one’s personal vehicle for business purposes, including fuel, maintenance, and wear and tear on the vehicle, which begins the first kilometre driven. Therefore, the Task Force recommends the elimination of the 30-kilometre per day provision.

As part of its analysis, the Task Force considered comparator municipalities' provision of car allowances for Council members. 7 of the 11 comparator municipalities do not provide car allowances to Council members, and those that do have varied approaches. The Task Force does not recommend the provision of a car allowance to Council members.

5. Expense Reimbursement

Current:

Each Councillor has an individual operating budget approved through the budget process, which allocates funds for business expenses. Councillors have full discretion over their individual business expense accounts if expenses incurred align with policy. Councillors are encouraged to use the most direct, practical, and cost-effective mode of travel and most practical and cost-effective accommodations available.

Council members may be reimbursed for reasonable expenses, including meals, upon the submission of a receipt and shall not claim for an expense covered by another organization or provided as part of an event registration.

Alcohol may be reimbursed only when the event involves participants from outside the County.

Councillors may not incur expenses for a guest except in their official capacity to a banquet or reception, in which case guest's tickets may be charged to the Councillor's expense budget.

Councillors may not reimburse for attendance at a political fundraising event or for a donation to a political party, candidate for office, or political party leadership contestant.

Councillors may use their personal expense accounts to proactively seek legal advice as it relates to their elected role.

Any expenses which exceed a Councillor's total annual budget must be authorized by Council prior to the expenditure being made.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that the current practices for expense reimbursement be maintained and that the Councillor Business Expense Policy be consolidated with the Elected Official Remuneration Policy in promotion of the Task Force's guiding principle that Council remuneration should be clear, transparent, and understandable to the public.

Rationale:

Sturgeon County is generally in alignment with the comparator market practices for reimbursement of business expenses based on actual amounts. Further, the Task Force heard in interviews with Council members that the policy for business expenses is widely understood and agreed to.

Some comparator municipalities allow Council members to claim a fixed amount for meals or submit receipts for actual expenses. Further, with respect to expensing alcohol, 6 of the 11 comparators make no mention of alcohol in their policies, 3 allow alcohol to be expensed only for hospitality, and 2 mention specifically that alcohol is not an eligible expense. 8 of the 11 comparators allow

reimbursement for a guest at a formal reception, banquet, or fundraising event consistent with Sturgeon County's approach.

Sturgeon County's current Councillor Business Expense Policy does not mention international travel for municipal-related business, and the Task Force sought information from comparator municipalities as part of its analysis. 8 of the 11 comparators do not state any specific requirements or conditions on international travel. Those that do include provisions that the municipality will pay for travel, accommodation, and meals in Canadian dollars based on the exchange rate at the time.

In consideration of Council-approved individual expense budgets and the requirement for amounts exceeding budget to be approved by Council, the Task Force concluded that the current policy provides the necessary guidance for addressing expenses not specifically contemplated.

6. Conferences, Conventions and Professional Development

Current:

Through the annual budget process, Council establishes individual allocations for each Council member to attend conventions, conferences, and professional development opportunities. Once an elected official's individual budget allocation has been spent, any further requests must be authorized by Council resolution where the Council member may access a common budget of funds or have funding reallocated from the operating budget.

The 2024 budget for each Council member is approximately \$20,400 for the Mayor and \$10,900 for Deputy Mayor and Councillor.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that individual budgets for conference, convention, and professional development be maintained at the following rates:

- Mayor – \$20,400
- Deputy Mayor – \$10,900
- Councillor – \$10,900

In addition to the above allocations, the Task Force recommends that costs related to the following conventions be budgeted and funded separately from a common budget:

- Rural Municipalities of Alberta Spring Convention
- Rural Municipalities of Alberta Fall Convention
- Alberta Municipalities Convention
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities Convention

Rationale:

The comparator market analysis identified that Sturgeon County is above the 67th percentile of the comparator market for allocations for conferences, conventions, and professional development with the 67th percentile of the market being \$6,675 for Mayor and \$5,580 for Deputy Mayor and Councillor.

In interviews with Council members, several expressed that the current budget provisions are inadequate. Three conferences were viewed as ones which all should attend, including the Spring and Fall Conventions of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), Alberta Municipalities (AM), and the

Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), and that Council members were limited in attending other conferences due to existing budget constraints.

The Task Force considered conferences, conventions, and professional development in the context of remuneration. Unlike base remuneration that directly compensates the individual Council member, attendance at conferences, conventions, and professional development sessions benefit Sturgeon County as a whole by ensuring its elected officials are keeping abreast of issues facing municipalities, advocating to other levels of government on policy matters affecting residents and businesses, and bringing information back to County Administration and the broader community.

Notwithstanding the external comparator market providing lower allocations to its elected officials, the Task Force recommends that Council members be provided sufficient funding to enable Council members to engage in this important work on behalf of the community. Allocating specific funding for the “core” conventions will provide Council members with discretion to attend conferences with direct relevance to their individual Board and Committee appointments or otherwise as their attendance would provide benefit to Sturgeon County.

7. Health, Wellness, Maternity, Parental, and Retirement Benefits

Current:

Council members are eligible for the following benefits:

Accidental Death and Dismemberment

The County pays 80% and the Council member 20% of the Accidental Death and Dismemberment premium, which provides a defined schedule of benefits.

Basic Life Insurance

The County pays 80% and the Council member 20% of the Group Life Insurance premium, which provides three times the Council member’s annual taxable base remuneration to the nearest \$1,000.

Dependent Life Insurance

The County pays 80% and the Council member 20% of the Dependent Life Insurance premium for the following coverage:

- Spouse \$10,000
- Children \$5,000

Dental Plan

The County pays 80% and the Council member 20% of dental premiums for the following coverage:

- Basic Dental Services 100%
- Extensive Dentistry 50%
- Orthodontist 50%

Emergency Travel Plan

The County pays 80% and the Council member 20% of the premium. Benefits are provided as the result of an accident or unexpected illness that occurs outside of Canada.

Extended Health Care Coverage

The County pays 80% and the Council member 20% of the premium.

Vision Care

The County pays 80% and the Council member 20% of the premium.

Health and Wellness Spending Accounts

Council members are provided an annual credit to be allocated between two accounts. This amount is prorated from the eligibility date to the end of the first benefit year. The purpose of the Health Spending Account is to cover expenses in excess of the maximum limits covered by the Extended Health and Dental plans. This plan is also available to Council members and their dependents.

The purpose of the Wellness Account is to promote wellness in the workplace; therefore, coverage is available only to the Council member and not their families. This account is considered a taxable benefit.

On January 1, 2024, the combined value of the Health and Wellness Spending Accounts increased from \$650 to \$1,000 consistent with County employees.

Optional Life and Accidental Death & Dismemberment

These benefits are available to Council members and their dependents. The Council member and spouse may apply for a maximum of \$50,000 coverage without providing medical evidence. There is a maximum of \$500,000 coverage supported with medical evidence. Coverage of up to \$10,000 is also available for dependent children. The Council member is responsible for paying 100% of the premium.

Voluntary Critical Illness

This benefit is available to Council members and their dependents. The Council member and spouse may apply for a maximum of \$50,000 coverage without providing medical evidence. There is a maximum of \$300,000 coverage supported with medical evidence. Coverage of up to \$10,000 is also available to dependent children. The Council member is responsible for paying 100% of the premium.

Retirement Benefits

Council members may contribute 5% of their base remuneration to a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) to be matched by the County. Council members may contribute a larger amount, but any contribution exceeding 5% will not be matched by the County.

Maternity and Parental Leave

In accordance with Bylaw 1449/19, Council members are entitled to 15 weeks of maternity leave – 100% of base remuneration paid in the first week, and 95% of base remuneration paid in the following 14 weeks.

Council members are also entitled to 26 weeks of parental leave where the Council member is entitled to the current Employment Insurance maximum benefit entitlement.

A Council member is entitled to 15 weeks of maternity leave, followed by 11 weeks of parental leave (a leave no longer than 26 weeks cumulatively).

Transition Allowance

There is currently no transition allowance available to Council members.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that the current health, wellness, maternity, parental, and retirement benefits available to Council members be maintained.

Rationale:

Health and Wellness Benefits

The external market analysis identified that Sturgeon County is competitive relative to the benefits offered and the municipal-paid benefits premiums to its elected officials. In interviews with Council members, most expressed understanding and agreement with these benefits.

Retirement Benefits

8 of the 11 comparator municipalities offer a Retirement Savings Plan or Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RSP/RRSP). Contributions vary by municipality, with the 67th percentile being approximately 7.72%. In interviews with Council members, most were supportive of keeping the current arrangement. In consideration of the Deputy Mayor and Councillor base remuneration rates being above competitive in the market, the Task Force does not recommend adjustments to the 5% RRSP matching contribution rate.

Maternity and Parental Leave Benefits

4 of the 11 comparator municipalities have a maternity and parental leave bylaw in place. In interviews with Council members, it was noted that Sturgeon County's bylaw has not been utilized to date, and some respondents noted concern raised about lack of representation if an individual took the allowable 26-week leave. In consideration of its mandate as directed by Council, including recommending compensation that would "attract a diverse range of candidates to the roles of Mayor and Councillor", the Task Force concluded that such a program ensures that prospective candidates with parental responsibilities are not dissuaded or prevented from seeking elected office based on family status.

Transition Allowance

Transition allowances are provided to elected officials in some jurisdictions where the individual either does not seek re-election or is unsuccessful in being re-elected. The intent is to provide a financial bridge as they transition out of elected office, potentially to employment in another organization. Only 1 of the 11 comparator municipalities offers a transition allowance, equal to 2 weeks' pay per consecutive year as an elected official, to a maximum of 16 weeks' pay (8 years served). As this is not a common practice in the market, the Task Force recommends that a transition allowance not be introduced.

8. Technology Allowance and Support

Current:

Upon being elected, Council members receive a cell phone and tablet or laptop, along with required accessories and software, with the cost of the devices and reasonable charges covered by the County.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that the technology allowance and support for Council members be established in a standalone policy, entitling Council members to reasonable equipment and expenses to fulfill their roles effectively.

Rationale:

Overall, Sturgeon County's technology allowance and support practices are in alignment with the comparator market. In interviews with Council members, most were satisfied with the current information technology arrangements and equipment provided.

The Task Force concluded that technology does not constitute remuneration in that it is not compensation, but rather tools that a Council member requires to do their job effectively. Further, technology is changing so rapidly, and individual preferences vary widely such that a prescriptive technology allowance and support policy is impractical. Therefore, the Task Force recommends a standalone policy with appropriate parameters ensuring reasonable expenses are incurred.

9. Timing of Implementation of Recommendations

Current:

There is no prescribed policy regarding the timing of the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that its recommendations take effect after the next general municipal election scheduled for October 20, 2025, except that the Deputy Mayor and Councillor base remuneration rates shall not be subject to wage inflation, maintained at the current rates on January 1, 2025.

Rationale:

In interviews with Council members, there was general agreement that any recommendations of the Task Force should be implemented after the next Council election in October 2025. Maintaining the Deputy Mayor and Councillor base remuneration rates at 2024 levels will bring these rates closer in line with the 67th percentile of the comparator group.

10. Future Review of Council Remuneration

Current:

The existing Elected Official Remuneration Policy requires that a review of Council remuneration be conducted in 2024 but does not prescribe the timing of subsequent reviews.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that Council remuneration be reviewed every 4 years, in the third year of the Council term. Further, the Task Force recommends that a biennial (every 2 years) review of base remuneration be undertaken by Administration to monitor Sturgeon County's position compared to the market. If the Task Force's recommendation is accepted by Council, a mid-year review of Council remuneration would occur in 2027 with a fulsome review conducted by a citizen task force in 2028, for recommendations to take effect following the 2029 general municipal election.

Rationale:

The existing Elected Official Remuneration Policy does not prescribe a frequency for review of Council remuneration, but the Policy approved in 2019 directed a review to be completed in 2024 (5 years from the date of the most recent review). While market practices vary, most comparator municipalities review Council remuneration at least once in each 4-year Council term.

Amending the Policy to require a fulsome review the year prior to a general municipal election, with recommendations to take effect after the election, promotes the notion that Council is approving remuneration for the next Council, which depending on whether they reoffer or are re-elected, those approving the Policy may or may not be a member of.

Conducting a basic review of Council base remuneration rates and per diems in the mid-year of a Council term will provide the County, if necessary, the opportunity to adjust or maintain rates to ensure they remain within the target range of the 67th percentile rather than allowing variances to be further exacerbated by annual wage inflation adjustments until the full review is done in the fourth year of the review cycle.

11. Update and Codification of Position Descriptions

Current:

There are position descriptions for the offices of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor.

Recommendation:

The Task Force recommends that Council approve a policy with provisions regarding the minimum required duties for the offices of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor specific to Sturgeon County.

Rationale:

Although position descriptions for the offices of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor were developed following a recommendation from the Task Force that completed the Council remuneration review in 2019, in interviews with Council members, the Task Force heard that there may be need for more detailed position descriptions to ensure individuals contemplating elected office fully understand the roles and responsibilities of these offices.

The general duties of councillors are prescribed in section 153 of the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA). Most of these are broad statements, with the requirement to attend council and committee meetings being the only enforceable provisions.

The Task Force notes that, in addition to the prescribed general duties of councillors, section 153(f) of the MGA requires a councillor to “perform any other duty or function imposed on councillors by this or any other enactment or by the council.” To ensure transparency, equity, equal distribution of Council workload, and accountability to the public for remuneration received, the Task Force recommends that, in addition to the broad statements provided in section 153(a) to (e.1) of the MGA, Council update and codify the minimum required duties for the offices of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor specific to Sturgeon County in policy.

The Task Force recommends that such a policy be approved by Council before the 2025 election nomination period beginning on January 1, 2025, but take effect after the next general municipal election scheduled for October 20, 2025. This would ensure that prospective candidates fully understand the requirements and time commitment of the elected roles prior to putting their name forward for election.

Other Matters for Council Consideration

While not directly related to its mandate, during its review, the Task Force noted the following that it wishes to bring to Council’s attention for consideration.

Ward Boundary Review

Data provided by County Administration to the Task Force regarding economic growth and population trends point to the possible need for a future Council to review the ward boundaries within the County.

Research Support for Council Members

Although the Task Force heard from Administration that there is dedicated administrative support to coordinate Council meetings, financials, and other logistics, in interviews with Council it was noted that there may be need for additional capacity to support Council research.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Base Remuneration Rates

The Task Force recommends the following base remuneration rates:

- \$130,267.50 for the Mayor,
- \$90,156.62 for the Deputy Mayor, and
- \$84,974.63 for Councillor.

It is recommended that the Mayor be eligible for wage inflation applied effective January 1, 2025, but that the Deputy Mayor and Councillors be ineligible for a wage inflation adjustment until such time that the base remuneration rates are brought within 10% of the 67th percentile of the market.

2. Status of Mayor and Councillor Positions

The Task Force recommends that the position of Mayor continue to be considered a primary responsibility and the positions of Deputy Mayor and Councillor continue to be considered a non-primary responsibility.

3. Per Diems Rates

The Task Force recommends that per diem rates for the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor be maintained at the following rates:

- Less than 4 hours - \$130
- More than 4 hours - \$260

Further, the Task Force recommends that when an alternate member attends an external Board or Committee meeting and that Board or Committee's per diem is lower than Sturgeon County's rate, the alternate member be paid by Sturgeon County at the rate established by the external Board or Committee.

4. Mileage

The Task Force recommends that Council members be eligible to receive mileage at the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) rate and that the 30-kilometre per day provision be eliminated.

5. Expense Reimbursement

The Task Force recommends that the current practices for expense reimbursement be maintained and that the Councillor Business Expense Policy be consolidated with the Elected Official Remuneration Policy in promotion of the Task Force's guiding principle that Council remuneration should be clear, transparent, and understandable to the public.

6. Conferences, Conventions and Professional Development

The Task Force recommends that individual budgets for conference, convention, and professional development be maintained at the following rates:

- Mayor – \$20,400
- Deputy Mayor – \$10,900
- Councillor – \$10,900

In addition to the above allocations, the Task Force recommends that costs related to the following conventions be budgeted and funded separately from a common budget:

- Rural Municipalities of Alberta Spring Convention
- Rural Municipalities of Alberta Fall Convention
- Alberta Municipalities Convention
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities Convention

7. Health, Wellness, Maternity, Parental, and Retirement Benefits

The Task Force recommends that the current health, wellness, maternity, parental, and retirement benefits available to Council members be maintained.

8. Technology Allowance and Support

The Task Force recommends that the technology allowance and support for Council members be established in a standalone policy, entitling Council members to reasonable equipment and expenses to fulfill their roles effectively.

9. Timing of Implementation of Recommendations

The Task Force recommends that its recommendations take effect after the next general municipal election scheduled for October 20, 2025, except that the Deputy Mayor and Councillor base remuneration rates shall not be subject to wage inflation until such time that the base remuneration rates are brought within 10% of the 67th percentile of the market.

10. Future Review of Council Remuneration

The Task Force recommends that Council remuneration be reviewed every 4 years, in the third year of the Council term. Further, the Task Force recommends that a biennial (every 2 years) review of base remuneration be undertaken by Administration to monitor Sturgeon County's position compared to the market.

11. Update and Codification of Position Descriptions

The Task Force recommends that Council approve a policy with provisions regarding the minimum required duties for the offices of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Councillor specific to Sturgeon County.

Appendix A – Citizen Task Force on Council Remuneration Terms of Reference

BYLAW 1636/24 COUNCIL REMUNERATION TASK FORCE STURGEON COUNTY, ALBERTA

A BYLAW OF STURGEON COUNTY, IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA, TO ESTABLISH THE COUNCIL REMUNERATION TASK FORCE AS A COUNCIL COMMITTEE

WHEREAS, section 145 of the *Municipal Government Act*, RSA. 2000 c. M-26 (the Act), and amendments thereto provides that a council may pass bylaws in relation to the establishment and functions of council committees as well as procedures to be followed by council committees;

AND WHEREAS, the Council of Sturgeon County considers it appropriate to establish the Council Remuneration Task Force as a council committee to provide recommendations on the remuneration of Sturgeon County's Mayor and Councillors;

NOW THEREFORE, the Council of Sturgeon County, in the Province of Alberta, duly assembled, enacts as follows:

1. Title

1.1 This Bylaw may be referred to as the "Council Remuneration Task Force Bylaw".

2. Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this Bylaw is to establish the mandate, membership, and functions of the Council Remuneration Task Force.

3. Definitions

3.1 In this Bylaw, words have the meanings set out in the *Municipal Government Act*, the Procedure Bylaw, and the Council Committees Bylaw. In addition:

- a. "Final Report" means the written report presented by the Task Force to Council which includes advice and recommendations from the Task Force to Council;
- b. "Councillor's Family" means the Mayor or Councillor's spouse or adult interdependent partner, children, parents, or spouse or adult interdependent partner's parents; and
- c. "Task Force" means the Council Remuneration Task Force established by this Bylaw.

4. Establishment and Mandate

4.1 The Council Remuneration Task Force is established as a Council committee.

4.2 The mandate of the Task Force is to:

- a. Make recommendations to Council on appropriate compensation for the Mayor and Councillors, including salary, benefits, pensions, allowances, and any other form of compensation; and

- b. Provide recommendations on revisions to the County's policies related to Council remuneration.

5. **Terms of Reference**

5.1 The provisions of the Council Committees Bylaw and Procedure Bylaw apply to the Task Force unless otherwise noted.

5.2 In order to fulfill its mandate, the Task Force shall consider:

- a. Compensation that would attract a diverse range of candidates to the roles of Mayor and Councillor;
- b. The responsibilities, accountabilities, and time commitment required of the Mayor and Councillors;
- c. Alignment with other comparable municipalities;
- d. The current and anticipated economic environment; and
- e. Alignment with policies related to compensation for Sturgeon County employees.

5.3 The Task Force may conduct whatever research it deems necessary to enable it to make recommendations to Council. As part of its research, the Task Force may seek input from the Mayor and Councillors.

5.4 The Task Force may invite subject matter experts to attend any meeting of the Task Force, on an as-needed basis.

5.5 The Task Force must present its Final Report to Council no later than September 1, 2024. The Task Force's recommendations are not binding upon Council.

6. **Membership**

6.1 The Task Force shall be comprised of five Public Members who meet the eligibility requirements of an elector pursuant to the *Local Authorities Election Act*, R.S.A. 2000 c. L-21 as amended.

6.2 The following persons are not eligible to be appointed as Members:

- a. The current Mayor and Councillors;
- b. Members of a Councillor's Family; and
- c. Current County employees.

6.3 The Mayor is not an ex-officio Member of the Task Force.

6.4 When appointing Members, Council shall select persons with education, skills, and/or experience in the following areas:

- a. Financial services;
- b. Business and economics;
- c. Labour and employment relations;
- d. Accounting;
- e. Community service; and
- f. Other similar public service roles.

6.5 Members shall serve until the Task Force’s Final Report has been presented to Council.

6.6 Members shall be entitled to remuneration in accordance with the Board and Committee Public Member Remuneration Policy.

6.7 Members shall be subject to the Board and Committee Public Member Code of Conduct Bylaw.

7. Expiry

7.1 This Bylaw is repealed upon the presentation of the Task Force’s Final Report to Council.

8. Effective Date and Severability

8.1 This Bylaw shall come into force and take effect on the date that it is passed.

8.2 If any portion of this Bylaw is declared invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, then the invalid portion must be severed and the remainder of the Bylaw is deemed valid.

Read a first time this 16th day of January, 2024

Read a second time this 30th day of January, 2024

Read a third time this 30th day of January, 2024

“Original Signed”

Alanna Hnatiw
MAYOR

“Original Signed”

Reegan McCullough
COUNTY COMMISSIONER (CAO)

January 30, 2024

DATE SIGNED

Appendix B – Responses from Interviews with the Mayor and Councillors

The Task Force held individual interviews with the Mayor and six Councillors. Summaries of the responses received are provided below.

1. Please provide your perspective on the base remuneration rates for elected officials.

A majority felt that the current pay structure is adequate, assuming that the individual is putting in the time required for the position. Several respondents felt that the Mayor's pay is inadequate, given the time requirements and the responsibility of the position.

2. Please provide your perspective on the per diem rates provided to elected officials.

- **Are the current rates appropriate? Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the policy, or to make it clearer as to which meetings you are eligible to claim per diems for?**

Most agreed with the current per diem rates. A number suggested that there needs to be a clearer understanding of what constitutes a meeting, and which meetings are eligible for payment.

3. Please provide your perspective on the County's current approach to kilometrage for elected officials.

There was general support for using the CRA rate but strong opposition to the 30-kilometre provision, which was seen as unfair.

4. Please provide your perspective on Sturgeon County's retirement benefits package for elected officials.

Not all councillors were aware of this provision. Most were supportive of keeping the current arrangement, perhaps with some flexibility as to where the contributions could be directed.

5. Please provide your perspective on Sturgeon County's health and life insurance benefits for elected officials, including the distribution of premiums between the elected official and the County.

There was general agreement and satisfaction with this provision.

6. Please provide your perspective on Sturgeon County's Health and Wellness Spending Accounts for elected officials.

There was general satisfaction for and appreciation of this provision.

7. Please provide your perspective on maternity and parental leave benefits available to elected officials. Should the policy be continued?

It was noted that this policy has not been utilized to date. There was concern raised about lack of representation if an individual took the 26 weeks off.

8. Please provide your perspective on the current policy of elected officials submitting receipts for eligible business expenses such as travel, meals, accommodation, and hospitality.

There was general agreement with and understanding of this policy.

9. Please provide your perspective on the current provisions for elected officials to attend conventions, conferences, and professional development.

Many councillors raised a concern that the current budget provisions are not adequate. Three conferences were viewed as ones which all should attend: Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), Alberta Municipalities (AM), and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM).

10. Please provide your perspective on the technology allowance and support provided to elected officials.

Most interviewees were satisfied with the current IT arrangements and equipment provided. One expressed concern that the laptop screen is too small to be used at Council meetings.

11. Please provide an estimate of your average weekly time commitment to your elected role. How does this break down in terms of:

- Meetings at Sturgeon County Centre in Morinville
- Community meetings/meeting with residents
- Meetings outside of Sturgeon County
- Travel time?

Time spent varied widely. Some individuals reported average work weeks of 60 hours, some of 40 hours; most indicated that a significant amount of time is taken with reading and meeting preparation, phone calls and meetings with constituents and social media. Time commitment also varied according to time of year.

12. Please provide your perspective on transition allowances for elected officials.

Council members were split on the need for a transition allowance.

13. Please provide your perspective on the Elected Official Remuneration Policy including a mechanism for annual adjustments to base remuneration based on inflation.

Most council members were supportive of the policy.

14. Please provide your perspective on how accurately the provided position profile reflects your role.

While most respondents felt that the position description was adequate, there were suggestions that it should include reference to attendance at RMA and FCM conferences, more emphasis on the amount of time required for reading and meeting preparation, as well as meeting with constituents.

15. Please provide your perspective on the reasonableness of the overall compensation for your elected position given the time commitment and effort involved.

Most were satisfied with the current provision and many underscored that a councillor's position is not a part-time role.

16. When would you like to see the recommendations of the Council Remuneration Task Force implemented?

There was general agreement that any recommendations of the Task Force should be implemented after the next Council election in October 2025.

17. Is there anything you want to bring to our attention that we have not covered?

Staff for Council research etc.

Appendix C – Annual Base Remuneration Comparison

Municipality	Mayor	Deputy Mayor	Councillor
Sturgeon County	\$117,592.92	\$90,156.60	\$84,974.64
City of Spruce Grove	\$119,424.00	\$68,712.00	\$59,712.00
Parkland County	\$102,550.00	\$72,900.00	\$56,790.00
Strathcona County	\$176,937.66	\$95,076.58	\$95,076.58
Rocky View County	\$126,654.96	\$96,288.96	\$92,273.04
<i>*County of Grande Prairie</i>	<i>\$116,095.00</i>	<i>\$76,628.00</i>	<i>\$76,628.00</i>
City of Leduc	\$92,947.40	\$42,242.20	\$42,242.20
City of Fort Saskatchewan	\$110,252.77	\$45,332.01	\$45,332.01
Red Deer County	\$96,926.04	\$68,028.96	\$68,028.96
City of St. Albert	\$153,583.84	\$59,828.74	\$59,828.74
Leduc County	\$102,643.08	\$89,812.68	\$85,535.88
Foothills County	\$85,230.60	\$79,548.60	\$73,866.60

Comparator Percentile	Mayor	Deputy Mayor	Councillor
Average	\$116,658.67	\$72,218.07	\$68,664.91
Median	\$110,252.77	\$72,900.00	\$68,028.96
67 th Percentile	\$118,425.30	\$78,672.42	\$75,799.58

Sturgeon County as a Percent of Market	Mayor	Deputy Mayor	Councillor
Average	100.8%	124.8%	123.8%
Median	106.7%	123.7%	124.9%
67 th Percentile	99.3%	114.6%	112.1%

**The County of Grande Prairie is an outlier in the market in that it relies heavily on per diems as the basis of compensation for its elected officials. To ensure a consistent basis of comparison, the Consultant retained by the Task Force recommended these figures.*

Appendix D – Per Diem Rate Comparison

Municipality	Half-Day	Full Day	Other
Sturgeon County	\$130.00	\$260.00	-
City of Spruce Grove	\$131.00	\$262.00	-
Parkland County	\$161.00	\$322.00	\$483.00
Strathcona County	-	-	-
Rocky View County	-	-	-
County of Grande Prairie	\$195.06 (M), \$177.33 (DM & C)	\$390.12 (M), \$354.65 (DM & C)	\$585.18 (M), \$531.98 (DM & C)
City of Leduc	-	-	-
City of Fort Saskatchewan	\$100 (Mayor ineligible)	\$200 (Mayor ineligible)	-
Red Deer County	\$105.00	\$210.00	-
City of St. Albert	\$100.00 (Mayor ineligible)	\$200.00 (Mayor ineligible)	-
Leduc County	-	-	-
Foothills County	\$172.10	\$344.20	-
67 th Percentile	\$168.55 (M), \$161.22 (DM & C)	\$337.10 (M), \$322.44 (DM & C)	Insufficient Data

**M = Mayor, DM = Deputy Mayor, C = Councillor*