

Response to Mayor Johnston and City Manager Lodewyk's Letter on Dynamic Staffing

Dear Red Deerians

Recently, the Mayor and City Manager wrote a letter to Red Deerians regarding firefighting services. The tone of that letter is troubling. Leadership should never be about ego, blame, or talking down to the community. As councillors, we are elected to serve the people of Red Deer — not administration, and not ourselves.

True leadership means listening, being transparent, and working together toward real solutions. In the case of emergency services, that means doing the hard work needed to meet NFPA 1710 standards. That should be our shared goal. Exacerbating the issue or reframing it as something it is not will not get us there.

Dynamic staffing is not about wages. It is not about negotiations. And it is certainly not “normal.” Red Deerians deserve the facts presented clearly — not blurred. They also deserve transparency. Many residents would have liked to be in council chambers when decisions on dynamic staffing were pushed into closed-door discussions.

My response here is not a typical letter. I have chosen to take the Mayor and City Manager's letter and break it down section by section. I do this to correct the narrative where it strays from the facts, and to provide my perspective on what real solutions should look like for our community.

From the City's Letter: Safety of Red Deerians

They said:

“The City of Red Deer is not compromising your safety. We continue to deliver exceptional emergency response, meeting our longstanding established target of arriving within 10 minutes, 90% of the time for all reported structure fires.”

Here are the facts:

- The City uses its own 10-minute target. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA 1710) standards require the first engine in 4 minutes and the full assignment in 8 minutes, 90% of the time.
- Red Deer has grown by over 10,000 residents in just four years, yet staffing depth has not increased. More people, more calls, same thin force.
- When multiple emergencies happen at once — a house fire, a collision, and a medical call — there are not enough firefighters staffed to meet recognized standards?

The question for citizens:

If standards are weaker, our population is larger, and our depth already strained — can anyone say safety is not being compromised?

From the City's Letter: Responding to the Firefighters' Association

They said:

“Until now, we have not publicly responded to the International Association of Fire Fighters... Like the union, we believe every second counts. And every dollar counts too. That is why we have chosen not to engage in a costly public labour dispute using taxpayer money.”

Here are the facts:

- The Firefighters' Association is raising a public safety issue, not a wage dispute.
- Contract negotiations are one matter. Dynamic staffing is another. One is about contracts, the other is about how many firefighters arrive when you dial 911.
- By linking them together, the City blurs the line between negotiations and safety.

The question for citizens:

If national safety standards clearly define how many firefighters are needed, why is the City framing this as a labour issue instead of addressing the real question: are we meeting those standards or not?

From the City's Letter: Why Dynamic Staffing?

They said:

“Action was required in 2025 to reduce overtime costs. In 2024, overtime... totaled more than \$3.2 million — the highest per capita in Alberta. Comparable Alberta cities with similar population and staffing levels spend less than \$1 million annually.”

Here are the facts:

- Overtime is not the problem — it is the symptom of insufficient staffing.
- Larger cities like Calgary and Edmonton can staff multiple alarms with on-duty crews. Red Deer cannot. After the first alarm, off-duty firefighters must be called in.

The question for citizens:

Is overtime really the issue, or is the issue that Red Deer does not have enough firefighters to staff emergencies safely?

From the City's Letter: What Does Dynamic Staffing Mean?

They said:

“Dynamic staffing is designed to be flexible... four or more firefighters are still dispatched... in some cases, this means more resources arriving at your door, spread across two trucks instead of one.”

Here are the facts:

- At Station 2, engines are sometimes staffed with only two firefighters. When that two-person engine is dispatched to a fire-related call, the City automatically sends a second engine from elsewhere in the city to make up the numbers.
- The result: two engines and six firefighters are sent to do the work that one properly staffed four-person engine should be able to handle.
- This approach doesn't solve the staffing problem — it creates inefficiency and leaves other parts of the city exposed while a second truck is pulled in.
- NFPA 1710 sets clear standards: four firefighters on the first arriving truck.

The question for citizens:

Does sending two under-crewed engines to cover what one fully staffed engine should do make sense — or does it show the flaw in dynamic staffing itself?

From the City's Letter: The Results Speak for Themselves

They said:

“In 2024, there were 1,920 overtime shifts. In 2025 to date, there have been 160 overtime shifts — a 90% reduction so far. Dynamic staffing has reduced the money spent on overtime by more than \$1 million between January and July 2025.”

Here are the facts:

- Overtime is down because fewer firefighters are being sent or stations are left dark — not because emergencies disappeared.
- Cities across North America that cut staffing for short-term savings have faced slower responses, firefighter fatigue, and increased risk to residents.
- Fire studies confirm fully staffed crews put water on the fire faster, rescue victims sooner, and operate more safely.

The question for citizens:

You can't buy fire insurance after your house has already burnt down. Should we wait for tragedy to force change, or should we fund our core services now so safety is not compromised?

From the City's Letter: The Bigger Picture

They said:

“Budget pressures are not unique to Emergency Services... Parks crews, police, and downloading from other governments all add strain.”

Here are the facts:

- Budget pressures are real, but not all services carry equal urgency.
- Fire and EMS are core services. They must be funded first, because lives depend on them.
- Other Alberta cities face the same budget strains, yet still maintain minimum firefighting standards.

The question for citizens:

If every department is stretched, do we spread resources evenly — or do we first fund our core services?

From the City's Letter: Respect and Professionalism

They said:

“The Firefighters' Association's current activities — unprofessional billboards and public campaigns — do not change the facts.”

Here are the facts:

- Politicians can write all the letters they want, but that does not change the fact that Red Deer is not meeting recognized safety standards.
- Billboards and outreach are one way firefighters warn the community when safety is at risk — and they are funded entirely by firefighters themselves through union dues, not taxpayer money.
- Speaking up about staffing and standards is not unprofessional — it is part of their duty to protect the public.

The question for citizens:

When firefighters raise concerns about your safety, should we dismiss them — or listen?

From the City's Letter: Quick Facts

They said:

“Safety First... average response time 6:48 for structure fires.”

Here are the facts:

- NFPA 1710 sets the standard at 4 minutes for the first engine, 8 minutes for the full assignment, 90% of the time.
 - Averages hide how often standards are missed and do not reflect the risks when multiple emergencies occur at once.
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They said:

“Competitive pay is approximately \$109,853–\$148,301.”

Here are the facts:

- The City highlighted top-tier salaries (Platoon Chief, Captain, First-Class Firefighter). Three positions below First-Class earn closer to \$91,500.
 - Presenting only the highest salaries blurs the picture and invites an emotional reaction instead of focusing on safety.
 - Would it be fair for the Firefighters’ Association to publicly call out the City Manager’s salary as part of this debate? Of course not — because the issue is staffing and safety, not individual pay levels.
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They said:

“Dynamic staffing has reduced overtime by \$1 million.”

Here are the facts:

- Overtime fell because fewer firefighters are being sent, stations are left dark not because calls went away.
 - If dynamic staffing were truly a safe and effective cost-saving strategy, why don’t other cities adopt it and reduce their depth of force? They don’t — because they know it compromises safety.
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The question for citizens:

If the City’s own “facts” avoid national standards, highlight selective salary numbers, and celebrate cost savings that other cities refuse to copy, are we really getting the full picture?

Closing:

Throughout this campaign, I will continue to focus on the issues — not personal attacks. But when the facts are blurred, I will speak up, especially when it affects the safety of our community. Nothing is more important than ensuring Red Deerians can count on safe, reliable emergency services when they need them most.

I fully support our firefighters in their desire to return to NFPA 1710 standards. That is the benchmark that keeps both residents and firefighters safe, and it should be the goal our city is working toward together.

On October 20, I ask for your support — vote Calvin Goulet-Jones for Red Deer City Council. There are also other great candidates who share a desire for real solutions on this issue. I encourage you to do your research, support those who are committed to public safety, and vote for the kind of leadership that puts residents first.

We must rise above division, keep our focus on solutions, and work together for a stronger Red Deer. Let's change Red Deer for the better.

Sincerely,

Calvin Goulet-Jones

Candidate for Red Deer City Council

CalvinForCouncil.com