



STAFF REPORT

Title: Rural Renewal Stream - Update

Meeting Date: March 18, 2025

Executive Summary:

The immigration landscape in Canada continues to evolve quickly. In response to changes to immigration programs at both the Federal and Provincial levels, a number of Alberta Communities who were running Rural Renewal Stream programs have paused or even cancelled their programs. This has resulted in a spike of foreign nations and applications to the community.

The demand for the program is generally coming from prospective employees who are trying to attain their permanent residency, rather than coming from the business owners themselves in which the program was created for. Potential employees are seeking out communities that are a part of the program, then trying to find employers who are willing to seek a letter of nomination. With other Rural Renewal Stream programs being paused or cancelled, people who wish to gain permanent residence in Canada are increasingly seeking out Cold Lake, as the program remains open.

The rural renewal stream, from administration's perspective, creates a powerful incentive that can distort the local labour market. Previous applicants to the City's Rural Entrepreneur Stream, which requires a minimum \$100,000 investment and that jobs be created for Canadians, have expressed a desire to stop their Rural Entrepreneur Stream application to join the Rural Renewal Stream as an employee of an existing business. The incentives thus seem to be misaligned and are resulting in behaviour that runs counter to what would intuitively be considered sound immigration policy.

One risk which administration has been doing its best to monitor is that, while Canadian immigration targets are being aggressively revised downward, the quota allocated to the Rural Renewal Stream follows. With more people on temporary working visas competing for fewer spots in the immigration program, all in rural communities with limited resources for immigrants, a situation may develop where a glut of people find themselves in rural Alberta with their temporary visas expiring and no viable path to renewing their visas or attaining permanent residency. This is a substantial personal crisis for people in these situations.

Background:



On Nov. 6, 2024, new criteria were set in place for all future applications for Candidate Endorsement. These limitations were unique to the Cold Lake Rural Renewal Stream.

They included:

- Employers may only submit 10 Endorsement Letter nominations per calendar year, regardless if the nomination is successful or not. The nomination is still counted if an approved employee leaves the place of employment.
- Employers must have no more than 20% of their business's total workforce hired through any Temporary Foreign Worker Program (eg. Rural Renewal Stream, Alberta Opportunity Stream, LMIA, etc.)
 - To clarify, this includes any workers with a work visa, including student visas.
- Employers that are at, or over, the allotted 20% threshold will not be allowed any new nominations until:
 - the total headcount increases enough to qualify for additional nominations, or
 - enough endorsed employees have left the employer to drop the TFW hired employee percentage to below 20%

Since these rules have been in place, the City of Cold Lake has received 40 applications, with 8 being automatically denied due to the percentage of foreign workers being over 20%.

November and December were slow months for applications, as the program had been on a pause. An increase in applications was noted in the New Year.

Since Jan. 1, 2025, we have received 27 applications. Since the program began in April of 2023, the City of Cold Lake has issued 299 letters, with another 11 going to EDAC next week. Of the 299 letters processed so far, 11 have been requested by employers to be retracted, usually because the employee is no longer working at the business.

Completed Applications Received by the City of Cold Lake			
2024			
January	7	July	13
February	24	August	14
March	26	September	18
April	18	October	6
May	6	November	12
June	13	December	1
2025			
January	7	March (as of 14th)	4
February	16	--	



Once an immigration file is being worked on at the provincial level, the City receives a call to verify that the letter of nomination remains valid.

Verification requests:

March 2025: 1
February 2025: 4
January 2025: 3
December 2024: 2
November 2024: 0
October 2024: 5

The Towns of Elk Point and St. Paul's joint STEP program (which took in RRS applications) was paused on Nov. 18, 2024, to reevaluate in March 2025. (Link: <https://www.county.stpaul.ab.ca/temporary-pause-on-rural-renewal-program/>)

The Town of Bonnyville paused their RRS program was paused on Jan. 28, 2025. The Meridian Source reported that since the Town of Bonnyville's program launched in October 2023, their Economic Development Officer had written 300 referral letters and responded to 150 emails and telephone inquiries. <https://meridiansource.ca/2025/02/04/town-of-bonnyville-pauses-immigration-program/>
<https://town.bonnyville.ab.ca/news/council-highlights-jan-28/>

Most recently, the City of Grande Prairie has paused their program as of Feb. 25, 2025: <https://cityofgp.com/culture-community/about-grande-prairie/grande-prairie-guide/immigration-rural-renewal-stream>

"This decision follows recent Federal and Provincial immigration policy changes that have lowered immigration allocation spaces throughout the province. During this time, no new applications will be accepted. All candidate endorsement applications received before this date will be duly processed."

Other communities on pause include:

- Town of Westlock (October 2024)
- City of Lloydminster (unknown date)
- Town of Fox Creek (Nov 4, 2024)
- Cardston/Taber (unknown date)
- County of Barrhead (Aug. 30, 2024)
- Southeast Alberta Rural Renewal (Feb. 20, 2025) which includes: City of Medicine Hat, Cypress County, the Town of Bow Island and the Town of Redcliff. To be reviewed in January 2026.



Cancelled: Town of Sylvan Lake (May 27, 2024)

<https://www.sylvanlake.ca/Modules/News/index.aspx?feedId=6621f7d7-500f-46a6-aeb2-2682b1fa9eb7&newsId=34a3e1ed-dc4c-4eeb-934c-76c300d5779d>

Alternatives:

- This report is for the Committee's information.
- The Committee may recommend to Council a course of action based on its discussion here.

Recommended Action:

This report is presented for the Committee's information.

Budget Implications (Yes or No):

No.

Submitted by:

Kevin Nagoya, Chief Administrative Officer