

Youth Council

CONTACT

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Year awarded: 2025

Project timeline: January 2018 – Present

Project video: <https://youtu.be/lr5pbp42FY>

THE PRACTICE

What was the issue?

Recognition that youth perspectives were missing from civic discussions.

What was the project?

In 2016 the city started their Youth Representative initiative which evolved to Youth Mayor role in January 2018. A Youth Council Representative was informally included in City Council meetings in 2016. In January 2018, the City of Weyburn Council Procedure Bylaw was amended to include:

“YOUTH MEMBER APPOINTMENT

36. (1) Council, at its sole discretion may appoint or remove a Youth Member to City Council from time to time under Section 56.1 of The Cities Act.”

In fall of 2018 the city established a structured advisory model which had the Youth Mayor position expanded to a five-member Youth Council. This was at the recommendation of the Mayor and City Manager at that time, and the bylaw was amended to allow up to 5 members. The goal was to actively empower young residents and embed their perspectives in municipal planning. What began as a solution to a "missing voice" is now a civic leadership pathway, equipping future leaders who continue to contribute to their community long after their term. Youth Member Appointment is outlined in the Council Procedures Bylaw:

<https://weyburn.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/108/?preview=17895>

While Weyburn Youth Council acts in an advisory position to Weyburn City Council and does not vote on motions raised at City Council meetings, their advice is actively considered on identified priorities and recommendations have been submitted to Council that have informed planning, programming and communications that affect daily life for young people. The goal was to bring forward the perspectives of young people, build understanding of municipal governance, and create opportunities for youth to engage in civic life.

The Youth Council Terms of Reference guides its mandate and structure and is reviewed annually to ensure it is current, practical, and reflective of youth needs. According to the City of Weyburn Youth Council Terms of Reference:

“The purpose of the City of Weyburn Youth Council exists to encourage youth participation in the community, engage leaders and volunteers of the future, and provide a mechanism for youth to communicate with Council and staff of the City of Weyburn.”

Key functions of the program include:

- A direct youth voice
- Advocacy and awareness
- Policy influence
- Community engagement
- Youth engagement
- Leadership development
- Long-term community impact and outcomes

THE PROCESS

Who was involved:

- *Municipal council*
- *Municipal administration*
- *Weyburn Comprehensive School Teachers and Students*

City Council champions the program and supports governance. Council takes Youth Council’s recommendations seriously and acts on what is brought forward. One to two City Councillors are assigned as a liaison to work closely with the Youth Council to provide leadership and assist them with reaching the correct audiences. The City’s Mayor ensures Youth Councillors are active participants in regular Council meetings.

Year to year, the program’s development has been driven by the Communications Coordinator, creating frameworks and follow-through on administrative tasks that support and develop the program. Mentoring and guidance is also provided through designated representatives from City administration, including the Communications Coordinator who oversees the program.

Although there is no formal partnership with the Weyburn Comprehensive School, program administrators continue to build relationships with teachers to help encourage involvement in the program, and host events to drive recruitment and retention. It is mandatory that Youth Councillors are students in grades 10-12 at Weyburn Comprehensive School.

The Weyburn Youth Council program involves several municipal resources to support its activities and ensure success, including:

- *Meeting space*
 - *Council Chambers is their dedicated space to convene and hold meetings)*
- *City staff*
 - *City administrators play a key role in supporting and advising the program*
- *Financial support*
 - *Municipal budget allocation*
- *Communication channels*
 - *Website, social media platforms and other information sharing activities*
- *Access to local officials and decision-makers*

- *To communicate their ideas and concerns directly to those with decision making powers*
- *Public facilities and services*
 - *Recreation facilities and public spaces for events, relationship building with local safety services such as police and fire departments*
- *Governance support*
 - *Policy and regulations to support municipal procedures*
- *Collaboration opportunities*
 - *Expertise and an integrated approach to addressing community issues*

The program's main objectives are to:

- *Provide a youth voice with the City of Weyburn*
- *Increase awareness and understanding of municipal governance among youth*
- *Serve as a channel for engaging younger residents in community issues and opportunities*

Challenges Faced:

Minor challenges that the program has come across included:

- *Engagement and participation - Encouraging and maintaining active participation from young members can be a challenge, as youth have diverse interests and commitments.*
- *Recruitment and retention - Attracting new members and retaining fluctuates, as members' availability changes year-to-year.*
- *Communication - Effective communication across students, teachers, parents, and the wider community is complex in a multi-channel environment; while we use proven processes, we adapt them each term to fit the needs and habits of the participants each term.*
- *Youth motivation - Keeping youth engaged and motivated to work on council initiatives can be a struggle, particularly if they do not see the immediate results of their efforts. Striking the right balance between allowing youth to take the lead and providing guidance and structure has required the program to adapt and be flexible to meet the needs of each cohort.*

Evaluation:

An evaluation is completed after every term, which runs typically runs from October to June and informs the next year's plan. While it is an internal review rather than a formal audit, it is consistent and produces measurable improvements. The evaluation helps increase adoption of Youth Council recommendations, increase leadership skills in participants, improve participation rates and strengthen community impact.

THE RESULTS

The Youth Council has contributed to various community-building efforts over the years. Highlights include leading annual community clean-up campaigns, supporting the development of the Weyburn Theatre Community Service Cooperative, and initiating conversations that contributed to policy changes, like speed limit reductions in school zones.

The implementation of the program has had a range of positive community effects which contribute to a more inclusive, engaged and vibrant community. Notable impacts include:

- *Youth empowerment*
- *Enhanced civic participation*
- *Better representation*
- *Community awareness*
- *Youth-led initiatives*

- Leadership development

Reoccurring initiatives include:

- Engaging with local organizations to foster a sense of community cohesion and pride
- Engaging with provincial and federal organizations and leaders to increase our youth members' understanding of a municipality's governance responsibilities.
- Regular meetings with the local Member of Parliament and Member of the Legislative Assembly.
- Engaged with the Saskatchewan Youth Council and the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth.

The Youth Council has made many contributions to growth and development in the community:

1. In 2018, they played a pivotal role offering insights and recommendations to City Council during the proposal of speed limit changes in school zones.
2. They provided valuable input to Council in 2018 as communities around the country grappled with the impending cannabis legislation.
3. Their commitment to advocating for youth mental health has been a cornerstone of the program since 2019.
4. Youth Councillors initiated a community-wide garbage cleanup, catalyzing the establishment of the City's "Wey-Clean Week" initiative.
5. Following the closure of the local movie theatre in 2017, the Youth Council prioritized advocacy for increased opportunities to keep youth active and engaged in the community. This advocacy played a pivotal role in the establishment of a community-run movie theatre, which is currently under construction.
6. The WYC Youth Captivator Series is an annual event hosted by the Youth Council as an opportunity to engage their peers, drive recruitment and showcase youth leadership in action.

The influence of the Weyburn Youth Council program extends beyond the local community and resonates at a provincial and national level. Several municipalities have reached out to program administrators seeking to model their youth council initiatives after the successful structure established in Weyburn.

Beyond the projects themselves, one of the most meaningful impacts is the personal growth seen in the Youth Councillors. As they build confidence, leadership skills, and a deeper understanding of civic responsibility, the goal is for them to carry those values forward; whether that means continuing to contribute to Weyburn in the future or creating lasting impact in other communities they choose to call home.

LESSONS LEARNED

After every yearly evaluation, program administrators and the City Councillor representative make changes to the program or terms of reference that enhance the program's community impact. However, larger lessons learned include:

- Youth empowerment - When young people are given a platform and responsibility, they can become effective leaders in their community.
- Community impact - Youth councillors can create positive changes in the community. This program promotes the idea that young people are stakeholders in their community, are valued for their diverse perspectives and can yield effective results for the overall benefit of their community.