



CITY OF WILLIAMS LAKE COUNCIL REPORT

DATE OF REPORT: June 1, 2026
DATE & TYPE OF MEETING: June 9, 2026 Regular Council Meeting
AUTHOR: E. Dean, Director of Protective Services
SUBJECT: VIABILITY OF CLOSING WILLIAMS LAKE JAIL
FILE: 7500-23; 7500-25; 7400-01

Recommendation

That Council receive this report for information and provide further staff direction.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a high-level assessment of the viability of temporarily closing the municipal jail cells located within the Williams Lake RCMP Detachment, in response to concerns regarding repeat offenders and rapid release. The report outlines the key legal, contractual, operational, financial, and staffing limitations associated with the proposed concept.

Discussion

Background

At the May 26, 2026 Regular Council Meeting, Council adopted Resolution No. 201/26, which, among other directions, requested that staff examine “the option of closing the jail temporarily to transport the criminals out of our community” as part of Council’s response to increasing concerns regarding street disorder and repeat offending.

In response to this direction, staff were asked to assess the viability of temporarily closing the municipal jail cells located within the Williams Lake RCMP Detachment. This report provides that assessment, including legislative, operational, financial, and public safety considerations. This report responds only to that specific direction and does not assess broader public safety strategies.

Analysis

Municipal jail cells in British Columbia operate under the authority of the Police Act, the Municipal Police Unit Agreement (MPUA) between the Province and the City, and provincial standards for municipal lockups. While the RCMP operate the Williams Lake cellblock, the City is responsible for providing the detention function through municipal jail guards.

A key factor is that the City does not own or control the jail facility. The detachment building, including the cellblock, is leased by the Province. The City cannot close, restrict, or repurpose the jail, nor can it prevent the RCMP from using it. Therefore, the only meaningful action the City could take would be to withdraw guarding services.

The following summarizes the high-level limitations and realities associated with the proposed temporary closure and service disruption.

Legal and Contractual Implications:Municipal obligation to support detention capacity

The City's obligations regarding policing services and required facilities are established under the Police Act (RSBC 1996), which requires municipalities over 5,000 population to provide the infrastructure necessary for the delivery of policing services, including detention capacity. These obligations are further reinforced through the Municipal Police Unit Agreement (MPUA), and appendix under the Provincial Police Service Agreement (PPSA) published by Public Safety Canada. The MPUA requires municipalities to provide "adequate and suitable accommodation, facilities, and equipment" for RCMP municipal policing duties. Attempting to close the municipal jail by withdrawing guard services would frustrate these obligations without achieving any operational change, as the RCMP would continue to operate the jail using RCMP members, with associated overtime costs billed back to the City.

City does not own or control the jail

The detachment building and cellblock are leased by the Province. The City cannot close the jail, restrict its use, or prevent the RCMP from operating it.

No municipal authority over detention decisions

Arrest, charge approval, and release decisions are governed by federal and provincial law. Municipalities cannot direct:

- Who is detained
- How long they are held
- Whether they are released
- What conditions they are released on

Closing the municipal jail would not change release timelines or bail outcomes.

Operational Implications:City of Williams Lake Guard Staffing

Municipal jail guards are City employees. If the City ceased providing guard services:

- RCMP leadership has advised they would assign RCMP members to guard duties
- RCMP overtime costs would be billed back to the City under the policing contract
- The jail would remain operational
- The City would incur higher costs
- easing guard services does not close the jail.

Attempting to close the jail by withdrawing guard services would therefore frustrate the City's obligations under the MPUA and the Police Act.

Lack of practical alternatives

The nearest provincial correctional centres are in Kamloops and Prince George. Individuals arrested in Williams Lake are typically held locally for short periods.

If local cells were unavailable:

- Every arrest requiring detention beyond a short period would require transport
- Transport depends on Sheriff availability or RCMP members being taken off frontline duty

- In the absence of timely transport, officers may be forced to release individuals earlier than appropriate or hold them in unsuitable spaces

Impact on RCMP capacity and response

If RCMP members must transport prisoners long distances:

- Patrol coverage decreases
- Response times increase
- Proactive policing and investigative capacity decline

This could reduce overall public safety and service levels.

Increased risk during detention and handling

The BC Ombudsperson has identified risks associated with municipal lockups, including the need for adequate monitoring and appropriate facilities.

Closing the municipal jail without a provincially supported alternative increases the likelihood that:

- Individuals are held in temporary or unsuitable spaces
- Monitoring and medical response are compromised during extended transport
- Medical emergencies or use-of-force incidents occur in uncontrolled environments

These risks translate into potential Charter challenges, civil liability, and reputational harm.

When transport is delayed or unavailable, individuals may not reach court or remand facilities within required timelines. This can result in unintended releases or adjournments, undermining public safety and the intent of Council's direction.

Staffing Limitations:

Municipal jail operations are staffed by City employees under a collective agreement.

If the City ceased providing guard services:

- Layoff processes, notice periods, displacement rights, and potential severance obligations would be triggered
- Labour-management consultation would be required
- The RCMP would continue operating the jail using RCMP members
- The City would still pay the cost of guard coverage through RCMP overtime

A "temporary" cessation of guard services may therefore have the practical effect of a permanent staffing reduction.

Effectiveness of Addressing Repeat Offending:

Provincial and federal reviews of repeat and violent offending in recent years have identified key drivers such as:

- Mental health and substance use disorders.
- Housing instability and social conditions.
- Systemic issues in bail, sentencing, and community supervision.

In response, the Province has launched initiatives such as the Repeat Violent Offending Intervention (ReVOII). This initiative is focused on coordinated case management, enforcement, and supports for prolific offenders.

None of the reviews or initiatives identify local jail capacity as a meaningful lever in reducing repeat offending. Instead, they emphasize:

- Targeted enforcement and monitoring of prolific offenders.
- Improved information sharing between police, Crown, corrections, and health.
- Access to treatment, housing, and supports.

Additional Considerations

This report provides a high-level assessment of the operational, legislative, and jurisdictional considerations associated with the potential closure of Williams Lake’s municipal jail cells. It is not intended to serve as a comprehensive review of broader public safety challenges in the community, nor does it provide recommendations on long-term strategies to address repeat offending or street disorder. These matters involve multiple agencies and levels of government and fall outside the scope of this report.

Options

Option 1 – Do Not Pursue the Concept Further

Council may choose to discontinue consideration of the temporary closure of the municipal jail cells based on the legal, contractual, operational, financial, and staffing limitations outlined in this report.

Option 2 – Seek Legal Guidance and Further Research

Council may direct staff to obtain legal advice on the City’s obligations under the Police Act, the Municipal Police Unit Agreement (MPUA), and the implications of withdrawing municipal guard services.

Pursuing this option would require specialized legal counsel, additional staff time, and coordination with the Province, RCMP, and labour representatives.

Option 3 – Correspondence to Senior Levels of Government

Council may direct staff to prepare a letter to senior levels of government outlining Council’s concerns regarding repeat offending and the pressures placed on municipalities. The letter would note that the City is being asked to consider options outside municipal authority, contractual obligations, and operational feasibility (including regarding operation of the jail), and request provincial and federal support for more effective solutions.

Financial Considerations (Cost and Resource Allocation)

☒ Yes (see below)

☐ N/A

Financial Implications:

Increased costs if RCMP members act as guards

If the City ceased providing municipal jail guards:

- RCMP members would perform guard duties
- Overtime costs would be billed back to the City
- Total costs would increase, not decrease
- Other staffing related costs

Legislative Considerations (Applicable Policies and/or Bylaws)☒ Yes☐ N/A

The City's responsibilities related to policing services and detention capacity are established through a combination of provincial legislation and contractual agreements with the Province and the RCMP.

Attempting to close the jail by ceasing guard services would therefore frustrate the City's obligations under the Police Act and the MPUA.

This project aligns with the following Focus Areas of Council's Strategic Plan:☒ Collaboration and Partnerships☒ Indigenous Relations☒ Livability / Positive Atmosphere☒ Housing☒ Infrastructure☒ Organizational Effectiveness

OR

☐ *Core Service (not identified in Focus Areas, but necessary local government function)**This report has been prepared in consultation with:**

- Community Safety Wellbeing Coordinator
- Corporate Officer
- Deputy Corporate Officer
- Acting Detachment Commander – Williams Lake RCMP

Approved for Agenda by:

Chief Administrative Officer

Respectfully submitted,

Evan Dean
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