

# Red Deer Advocate

## Community making airport successful: CEO

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Red Deer Airport is taking off and showing no signs of being grounded.

RJ Steenstra, Red Deer Airport Authority CEO, said securing Air Canada Express service, expansion of Northwestern Air, Red Deer County's approval of the Red Deer Airport Area Structure Plan and growth in scheduled passengers as 2013 highlights in his presentation to Red Deer city council on Monday.

"We're certainly very pleased to see citizens in Central Alberta and Red Deer are taking the service and using it because it is community that make airports successful, not airports," said Steenstra. "There is a habit that is formed in terms of getting into your car and driving to airports that are north and south. My job is to ensure that people are aware the service exists and that they use it."

Air Canada Express from Red Deer to Calgary was launched in October and the airline has seen on average 12 to 13 passengers on its 18-seater plane three times a day, seven days a week. The new service created 10 jobs.

In 2013, the airport also regained its security screening services by the Canadian Air Transport Security Association. Four local jobs were created.

Northwestern Air expanded its service with the launch of the Abbotsford Service with Kelowna connection and increased frequency on the Kelowna/Abbotsford and the Fort McMurray runs. Nine jobs were created.

Scheduled flights grew to 62 from eight scheduled weekly flights in 2013.

Steenstra told council he anticipates travel in 2014 will be as strong as it was in 2013. The airport continues to work on bringing service from Red Deer to the east such as Saskatoon and to the north to Grande Prairie.

One of the most crucial plans in 2014 is to work on the airport's master plan. This will set the stage for the airport's development over the next 20 to 30 years. The airport will continue to make headway in its strategic direction.

"When you fly Red Deer, you're voting for Red Deer Airport," said Steenstra. "When you use your airport you're voting for your own air infrastructure."

In other council news:

Council added to its advocacy list by adopting a motion requesting the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association to open a conversation with the province's Advanced Education Ministry and Education to ensure the sufficient, quality training opportunities are provided to meet the growing demands of the early

childhood profession and to meet provincial licensing standards as they relate to early learning and care programs across the province.

Council agreed to act as a community entity for the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy for Designated and Aboriginal funding for the period of April 1, 2014, through to March 31, 2019. This technical requirement of the application raised concerns among council including being locked into a five-year funding agreement as the community entity.

The entity's role is to ensure fiscal transparency and appropriate safeguards are in place to administer the funds and use them with EveryOne's Home, Red Deer's Five Year Plan Towards Ending Homelessness. The entity also monitors the funded projects and reports back to the federal government.

While the city has acted as the community entity for several years, council is considering whether this remains the best practice.

Mayor Tara Veer said there are many organizations and agencies that play a strong and direct housing role in the community and are part of a broader community vision.

"We need to keep the option open that in the future we would have another means or mechanism of delivering those funds to the community," she said.

"Ultimately the goal for the community is that we have adequate affordable housing across the continuum of housing."

In the end council unanimously agreed to fill the technical requirement of the grant application with some clauses. They added council reserves the right to revisit the Community Entity designation and assignment pending the outcome of the city's role in housing as identified in the social master plan/social policy framework; the establishment of a broader community housing vision in consultation with the community and clarity in the provincial mandate and role with respect to local housing and homelessness.

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