



PEACE RIVER REGIONAL DISTRICT

SPECIAL HEALTH CARE SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

MINUTES

February 11, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
1981 Alaska Avenue, Dawson Creek, BC

- Directors Present: Chair Veach, Village of Pouce Coupe
Director Dober, City of Dawson Creek
Reid Graham, Alternate Director Electoral Area B (via Zoom)
Vice-Chair Hansen, City of Fort St. John (via Zoom)
Leonard Hiebert, Electoral Area D (ex Officio)
Director Rose, Electoral Area E (via Zoom)
Director Taillefer, District of Taylor (via Zoom)
- Directors Absent: Director Sperling, Electoral Area C
- Staff Present: Shawn Dahlen, Chief Administrative Officer
Tyra Henderson, Corporate Officer
Roxanne Shepherd, Chief Financial Officer
Joanne Caldecott, Deputy Corporate Officer
Ashley Dimapilis, Grants Coordinator
Katherine Lovino, Administrative Clerk/Recorder
- Delegations: **Northern Lights College Re: PRRD Health Care Scholarship**
Nicole Dahlen, Dean of Health Sciences and Human Services (via Zoom)
Lindsey Borek, Executive Director, NLC Foundation (via Zoom)
- University of Northern BC Presentation Re: The Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program**
Amanda De Smit, RN, MN, NBNP Regional Coordinator
Bruce Denis, Regional Campus Manager
- Northern Health Re: Recruitment and Retention in Northeast BC**
Stacey Pickering, Regional Director, Employee Experience & Organizational Development (via Zoom)

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.



2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

MOVED Director Hiebert

SECONDED Director Dober

That the Special Health Care Scholarship Committee agenda for February 11, 2025, be adopted:

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

3. DELEGATIONS

3.1 Northern Lights College Re: PRRD Health Care Scholarship Committee

3.2 University of Northern BC Presentation Re: The Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program

4. CORRESPONDENCE

4.1 North Peace Secondary School Re: Request Confirmation Commitment

5. REPORTS

5.1 PRRD and NHA Memorandum of Understanding - Health Care Scholarship Program, FN-HCSC-020

6. ADJOURNMENT

CARRIED

3. DELEGATIONS

3.1 Northern Lights College Re: PRRD Health Care Scholarship

Nicole Dahlen, NLC Dean of Health Sciences and Human Sciences at Northern Lights College and Lindsey Borek, Executive Director of NLC Foundation, delivered a presentation titled "Northern Lights College Re: PRRD Health Care Scholarships" which included the following highlights:

- Train in the North to Work in the North: Where education is provided locally, there is a greater likelihood that students will stay and work in the community upon graduation.
- Northeast BC - Statistics 2022/23: Regional graduation and unemployment rates with BC comparisons and college/university credentials.
- Findings of High School Focus Group Sessions: 48% of students who were polled expressed interest in pursuing a career in health while 62% of high school participants expressed interest in a dual credit 'Youth Explore Health Sampler' if offered by NLC.
- Some themes in preliminary review of data: The overall lack of awareness of all health career options and affordability issues.
- For a Bursary to be Effective: Key Decision Points in selecting a program were Before Applying and Once Enrolled. Financial Need is greatest at the start of a program and at the mid-point. Post graduation financial needs are usually alleviated because graduates are now working.
- Ideas for Health Scholarship Committee to 'Grow our Own'
 - Choose a Career in Health (Draw Students In) - Scholarships
 - Mid-Point Health Award (Support when life gets hard) – Scholarships
 - Strong Support Health (High financial need) - Bursary
- Which health programs should be eligible.

A question-and-answer period ensued and discussion included:

- Directors asked how students decide to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) or Psychiatry (RN) specialty. Presenters explained that the pathway for a Registered Psych nurse was different from the Bachelor of Science in Nursing and there were no programs that allowed switching between the pathways. The decision was made two years in and the RN was typically the chosen specialty.

3.1 Northern Lights College Re: PRRD Health Care Scholarship (Cont'd)

- Directors raised concerns about the first-come-first-served system for bursaries; this system does not cater to those who struggle the most who may be the last to apply. Directors asked for this approach to be changed so the system works for everyone. Presenters explained that the three different streams each had a different focus; recruitment may be easier for high school graduates and adult learners with deadlines set around the application process. The mid-point stream for support and health awards should be the priority as it was easier to assess this pool of applicants based on financial need.
- Directors asked how the PRRD's investment could be more 'locked down' and suggested that the entire system be restructured and made more functional. Presenters emphasized the need for a comprehensive reworking of the system to address the ongoing health crisis. They noted however that every small step taken counted towards finding funding and strategies to attract and retain more students. They spoke to the two sides: one being employment and the other being education where Northern Health focused more on employment and NLC focused more on education. Since it was highly unlikely that the Ministry would fund every healthcare seat available in the system, this was still worth advocating for. Meanwhile bursaries/scholarships were vital investments. Larger system adaptations like rural recruitment incentives were also necessary and while partnerships were seeing gains in terms of filling seats and hiring, continued collaboration was vital given all the other components at play in the healthcare system.
- Directors stressed the need to address the current negative narrative and perceptions around the health care sector as this was turning people away from considering the healthcare sector as a potential career. Directors agreed that more positive messaging around how nurses, doctors and the healthcare sector were portrayed was necessary explaining that people look at how healthcare professionals are currently treated and do not want to put themselves in that situation. More positive reinforcement and support for health care professionals was vital to remove this barrier.
- Directors discussed how the resource sector requires people to move around for work; however they take time to train only to move and need to train all over again. They expressed frustration with system that affects all Canadians moving across the provinces and questioned why this issue had not yet changed and whether it could be improved.
- Directors discussed how to attract more young people into healthcare. While starting a 4-year degree program may be difficult for most if students could just get their 'foot in the door' of the healthcare sector with a certificate program; this would provide an opportunity to see firsthand the array of opportunities that exist in the sector which could lead them to consider advancement or pursuing a career which they otherwise may have not have even realized.
- The Committee discussed whether providing all three funding streams was integral to the strategy moving forward. The presenters explained that this was the ideal however in reality, funding would be distributed between the streams with careful assessment. They noted that PRRD already supports Allied Health within NLC and the Committee could work in tandem with this program. They noted that the focus should be on overall healthcare; not just the RNs or LPNs and suggested that the Committee should work to ensure the best possible support remains for NLC.

3.1 Northern Lights College Re: PRRD Health Care Scholarship (Cont'd)

- Directors inquired about the current scholarship agreement for NLC, specifically the three-year commitment for Allied Health scholarships. Presenters confirmed that NLC targeted scholarships near the end of program dates and invoiced the Regional District upon award up to \$20,000 per year by December 31. Presenters reiterated that scholarships played an essential role in helping to address the healthcare crisis. They explained the difference between scholarships and bursaries was that scholarships were awarded based on the student's academic average while bursaries were based on financial need.
- Staff noted that the Memorandum with Northern Lights College expired on December 31, 2026.

The Chair thanked the presenters and welcomed them to remain in the meeting.

3.2 University of Northern BC Presentation Re: The Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program

Amanda De Smit, RN, MN, NBNP Regional Coordinator delivered a presentation titled "The Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program" which included the following highlights:

- A Bachelor of Nursing Program for the North
- Bursary opportunities
- Opportunities for growth
- Opportunities for growth - Students
- Community importance

A question-and-answer period ensued, and discussion included:

- Directors asked whether anything was missing in the Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program (NBNP) and asked why it was not yet fully subscribed. They expressed concerns about losing the NBNP if it was not possible to fill the seats. The presenter explained the NBNP's unique student requirements including 60 university credits. They noted that the program was only 3 years old - news of it was only just gaining momentum and there were no concerns about losing the program; rather there was strong commitment to keep the program. She noted that Terrace and Quesnel's programs had 32 seats available each but had been able to maintain their programs with as little as 8 students enrolled. She advised that the NBNP had received a higher number of applicants in the current year and the upcoming LPN to RN bridge program would further increase its appeal.
- Directors asked about the UNBC's plans for promotional communication and advertising and invited their thoughts on the NBNP program. Presenters explained that the Northern Baccalaureate Collaborative Nursing Program at UNBC was different from the Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program in Fort St. John and their program was designed to be completed at the same level of education, knowledge, and skills as students in a traditional four-year nursing program. Presenters also noted that UNBC had robust communications for the program over the last three years that focused on advertising through various modalities like radio, newspaper, and social media platforms. UNBC had also participated in community engagement sessions and forums and also relied on word of mouth by people who had been through the program.

3.2 University of Northern BC Presentation Re: The Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program (Cont'd)

- Directors discussed the need to participate in job fairs and asked where UNBC finds candidates that would be interested in healthcare professions. The presenter confirmed that UNBC did participate in job fairs to expose students to potential healthcare careers and highlighted a program called 'Adventures in Healthcare' that focused on Grade 10 and 11 students. Despite having a recruitment smaller team in Fort St. John UNBC also harnessed support from the Prince George Admissions Team and travelled to events that provide the most opportunities. UNBC aims to attract high school graduates to consider courses based on their eligibility and also finds suitable spaces for those seeking a second career in healthcare.
- Directors asked about textbook costs and availability, and the financial constraints impacting students; they asked what deterred students from completing their education and whether they could return to complete the program. Presenters noted that students were increasingly using virtual textbooks for faster search and content control. Presenters acknowledged that financial support was crucial for students who often worked part-time or night shifts while completing their programs. Presenters clarified that in spite of the program's short duration, no students had left due to financial challenges. Directors also asked about the employment status of the 19 graduates in the Northeast. Presenters recalled that two students from the first cohort had moved away; a US-based student returned to the US post-graduation, and the rest had remained in Northeast BC.
- Directors asked for clarification regarding students who were awarded bursaries working with Northern Health under Return to Service Agreements – did they have to stay in the Peace Region, or could they work anywhere that Northern Health provides services. Staff confirmed that under Northern Health Return to Service Agreements, graduates had to work anywhere in the Peace River Regional District or Fort Nelson for two years.
- Directors asked whether the Northern Rockies Municipality contributed to the program and staff confirmed that currently they did not however could be asked to, pending on the Terms of Reference. Staff clarified that the application process was specific to the Peace Region.

Notice of Closed Session

MOVED Director Rose
SECONDED Director Hiebert

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee move into a Closed meeting at 11:25 a.m. to discuss negotiations under *Community Charter* Section 90(1)(k).

CARRIED

Reconvene and Vary Agenda

The Chair reconvened the open Health Care Scholarship Committee meeting at 12:20 p.m. and varied the agenda to consider Report 5.1 - PRRD and NHA Memorandum of Understanding - Health Care Scholarship Program, FN-HCSC-020 before dealing with Item 4 - Correspondence.

5. REPORTS

5.1 PRRD and NHA Memorandum of Understanding - Health Care Scholarship Program, FN-HCSC-020

MOVED Director Rose

SECONDED Director Hiebert

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee recommend that the Regional Board (PRRD) allow the Memorandum of Understanding with the Northern Health Authority (NH) to expire and contribute the appropriate funding to meet the Peace River Regional District's remaining obligations.

On behalf of Northern Health, Stacey Pickering spoke to the Committee about recruitment and retention in the Northeastern BC and

- emphasized the need for recruitment and retention efforts, especially in the northeast region of BC;
- acknowledged the importance of the current partnerships between post-secondary institutions (NLC and UNBC) and local governments;
- discussed the need for education not currently available in Northern Health's region, (e.g. registered psychiatric nurses and respiratory therapists); she suggested alternative scholarship support for these programs focusing on residency requirements;
- suggested not-for-profit organizations like the Hospital Foundation or the Spirit of the North Healthcare Foundation could support scholarship fund management; and
- referenced the partnership between Northern Health and the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine (RDKS) where they had learned that too many criteria created obstacles to scholarships; their criteria had been changed to make the application and award process more simple noting that RDKS had received 15 applicants whereas the PRRD had only received 3 – moving to less strict criteria may open up students ability to access much needed scholarships.

Directors asked how students who had completed their nursing degrees in other provinces could be brought back to the region to work. Ms. Pickering mentioned the potential benefits of collaborating with nonprofit organizations and mentioned two nonprofit foundations closer to home; the Northeast Community Foundation and the North Peace Community Foundation. She suggested that a blended approach could support college students and those from the Peace Region who need to leave the region to further their education. Nonprofits are registered charitable organizations with administrative functions, allowing them to manage funding effectively with open interest-generating or endowment accounts. They can offer charitable tax receipts for donations, encouraging citizens to contribute voluntarily. A partnership of this nature could provide opportunities for communication, celebration, and awareness building. Meanwhile Northern Health remains a contributing partner and continues to promote opportunities for students and staff.

The Chair called the Question to the Motion.

CARRIED

The Chair thanked the delegates who had attended and participated in the robust discussion regarding health care scholarships.



Director Taillefer, District of Taylor, left the meeting at 12:05 pm.

4. CORRESPONDENCE

4.1 Letter from North Peace Secondary School Re: Funding Commitment for 3 Health Care Scholarships

MOVED Director Hiebert

SECONDED Director Dober

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee move the correspondence titled 'Letter from North Peace Secondary School Re: Funding Commitment for 3 Health Care Scholarships' for discussion.

CARRIED

Directors noted that students would be taking a gap year and sought clarity if this was allowed. Staff confirmed that the current policy allowed students to take up to 12 months to claim the scholarship.

MOVED Chair Veach

SECONDED Director Hiebert

That the Health Care Scholarship Committee authorize an allocation of \$4,500, for the purpose of awarding three scholarships, each with a value of \$1,500, to North Peace Secondary School graduating students.

CARRIED

6. ADJOURNMENT

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 12:36 p.m.

CERTIFIED a true and correct copy of the Minutes of the Peace River Regional District's Special Health Care Scholarship Committee meeting held on February 11, 2025 in the PRRD Board Room, 1981 Alaska Avenue, Dawson Creek, BC.

Danielle Veach, Chair

Katherine Lovino, Recorder