



REQUEST FOR DECISION

Meeting: October 24, 2025

Grant Application – Travel Alberta Event and Festival

DESCRIPTION/BACKGROUND:

Travel Alberta has announced a grant opportunity focused on growing existing festivals and events and supporting the development of new multi-day experiences that drive overnight visitation and regional tourism growth. The funding program aims to strengthen Alberta's tourism economy by supporting events that extend beyond a single day, attract new audiences, and enhance local collaboration.

Eligible events may receive between \$25,000 and \$150,000, with applicants required to contribute at least 25% of total event costs. The final contribution from Travel Alberta will be determined upon application review. Funding priorities include events and festivals held between April 1, 2026, and March 31, 2027, particularly those that take place during shoulder or winter seasons, encourage overnight stays, and work toward becoming annual signature events. Events must also charge admission and demonstrate long-term sustainability and community benefit.

As part of our continued work with Anna Look Consulting, we have had the opportunity to work more closely with Travel Alberta. Through additional meetings and ongoing communication, we learned that applying for this grant in conjunction with our Claresholm Fair Days expansion would be a strong and strategic move for the community.

Our proposal is to build on the already established success of Fair Days by extending it into a two-day music festival experience. The existing Fair Days schedule and activities—such as the street market, kids' events, races, and community fun would continue as usual. However, the main entertainment portion would shift to Amundsen Park, featuring live music and performances Friday from 12 p.m. to 10 p.m. and continuing Saturday after the parade into the evening.

This portion of the event would become an admission-based music festival, meeting the eligibility requirements for the Travel Alberta grant. With food trucks and beer gardens already part of Fair Days operations, the infrastructure and atmosphere are well-suited for expansion.

We consistently hear from residents how much they enjoy the live music during Fair Days, and expanding that component aligns with community feedback. We also recognize that adding a paid admission portion may initially be challenging for some locals to understand. Based on Yvonne's guidance, one option would be to offer affordable pricing for residents, such as free admission for ages 12 and under, \$10 weekend passes for local adults, and \$40 weekend passes for out-of-town visitors. This structure would help maintain accessibility for local families while also supporting the event's financial sustainability.

Currently, Fair Days invests approximately \$7,000-\$9,000 in musical entertainment. The expanded two-day format, featuring approximately six bands per day, would increase those costs significantly. However, through the support of this grant and ticket sales through Eventbrite, we can offset expenses and ensure the festival's sustainability.

This investment would remain within our community, generating long-term benefits by drawing larger audiences from across southern Alberta, encouraging visitors to stay overnight, and supporting local businesses, restaurants, and accommodations. By elevating Fair Days into a multi-day music festival, Claresholm can create a signature annual event that both residents and visitors look forward to each year.

DISCUSSION/OPTIONS:

The deadline to apply for the Tourism Grant is September 20, 2025, with notification of successful applicants not expected until February 2026.

Planning for Fair Days 2026 — including booking bands and major event logistics typically begins in October and November to ensure we can secure quality entertainment and necessary infrastructure. This means that key decisions will need to be made before we know the outcome of our grant application.

This timing raises an important question for Council to consider:

Do we commit to moving forward with a musical festival in conjunction with Fair Days 2026 — whether or not the grant funding is approved?

If Council supports this direction, there are two potential paths forward:

Option 1: Grant-Dependent Festival (Full-Scale Event):

If successful in receiving the tourism grant, Claresholm could expand Fair Days into a two-day musical festival, featuring larger headliners, professional staging, and enhanced marketing.

This would promote Claresholm as a destination community, drawing visitors from across southern Alberta and showcasing our local pride and hospitality.

Partnering with Anna Look and Travel Alberta on the grant application demonstrates our active commitment to growing Claresholm's tourism and event profile. Developing a two-day music festival — whether large or small in scale — has strong potential to position Claresholm as a destination stop, encouraging overnight stays, increased spending at local businesses, and a stronger regional reputation for hosting memorable community events.

Option 2: Modified Festival (Scaled Event Without Grant):

If the grant is not approved, we could still move forward with a smaller-scale music festival integrated into Fair Days using adjusted budget allocations.

This version would feature local or smaller touring acts, keeping costs more manageable while maintaining high community engagement.

However, additional funds in the Fair Days budget would still be required, as even small-scale entertainment carries notable costs. Our smaller bands and solo acts from last year averaged \$600–\$1,000 per two-hour set, compared to headliners like Trevor Panczak at approximately \$4,000 for a 1.5-hour set.

Ticketed evening performances through Eventbrite could help offset some costs while adding a professional structure to the event.

Option 3: Maintain Current Fair Days Format (No Grant Application)

Council may choose not to apply for the Tourism Grant and leave the music festival concept off the table at this time.

This option focuses on keeping Fair Days successful and community-driven, maintaining its current scale and budget without pursuing expansion or higher-cost entertainment.

While this approach minimizes financial risk, it also means foregoing an opportunity to elevate Claresholm's tourism profile and attract a broader regional audience.

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS:

Moved by Councillor _____ to proceed with option _____ in regards to the Town of Claresholm Fair Days Event as presented.

If proceeding with option 1: Moved by Councillor _____ to apply to the Travel Alberta Event & Festival Program and provide the matching funds from the Economic Development Budget for a total budget up to \$50,000 (25% Town commitment for matching funds).

ATTACHMENTS:

1.) N/A

APPLICABLE LEGISLATION:

1.) N/A

PREPARED BY: Megan McClung, Engagement Coordinator

APPROVED BY: Abe Tinney, CAO

DATE: October 10, 2025
