

Thank you for your questions. French is super important to me and my family. We had two languages growing up.. Hindi and English. When we attended school it was imperative for our parents to ensure we all learned French... and that was not limited to just the one hour of class per week. We needed the other official Canadian language in order ensure we could respectfully communicate within Canada. I studied French and was very fluent up until grade 13. After that unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to speak French and now it is the language I thank as it gave me the foundation to learn and speak Spanish. I am sure if I immersed myself in Quebec or France or Hearst..for a few months then I would be able get a lot of my language back. In the meantime both my niece and nephew are in French immersion elementary school. Both kids need to be multilingual. At this time they speak much better French than they do Hindi (Indian language). From a city perspective I have given this a bit of thought and acknowledge the population of French speaking community members and then the entire North Western Ontario population.

Your questions:

1. What place should the Francophone community have in our municipality?

The Francophone community is a major contributor of Northwestern Ontario's cultural, social, and economic heritage. Thunder Bay serves as the central hub for the North, and across our region, over 2000 residents in Thunder Bay and over 7,000 residents in the region have French as their first language. We must respect that Canada is a bilingual nation and take responsibility for delivering municipal services in the language of our people. The Francophone community must not only be welcomed but actively visible, recognized, and included in the governance and civic identity of our city. This means ensuring French speakers can fully participate in municipal life, access city services comfortably, and see their vibrant culture reflected in local heritage, streetscapes, public arts, and economic development strategies. A wonderful showcase of this vitality is the annual Festival Bonjour in Waverley Park, which celebrates French culture and highlights the lasting contributions Francophones have made to the foundations of our community. Respecting this community requires treating language rights not as an administrative burden, but as a pillar of inclusive municipal leadership.

2. What policies should be put forward to make municipal information available and improve access in French?

To build meaningful, accessible, and respectful access to municipal services, I support implementing the following key policy directions:

- Adopting an Active Offer Policy & Visible Staff Identification: Ensure that public-facing channels, main reception desks, and digital platforms proactively signal that services are available in French from the first point of contact. Furthermore, all municipal customer service areas and staff should clearly display signage or name plates indicating spoken languages—such as "*Je parle français*" or "*Languages spoken here: English, French, Italian, etc.*" This simple, welcoming step creates a far more inclusive city for everyone.
- Pioneering Multilingual Digital Wayfinding: A practical example of the leadership we need is in the Fort William Business District BIA, where I authored a federal grant application to incorporate French and Ojibwe into our digital wayfinding and beacon systems. If funded, this project will allow individuals to seamlessly translate information for navigation, municipal services, and local businesses throughout

downtown Fort William—establishing a modern, multilingual template for the entire city.

- Establishing a Formal Francophone Liaison Committee: Create a direct consultation mechanism between the City and community partners like AFNOO. Regular dialogue ensures that municipal priorities, major public projects, and strategic plans are developed with Francophone perspectives integrated from day one.
- Expanding Dual-Language Digital Access & Key Public Notices: Prioritize French translation for high-impact municipal information. In today's digital era we are able to translate quite quickly. This however does need to be verified and cross checked as computer do make errors.
- Strategic Bilingual Capacity in Municipal Services: Identify key frontline, customer-facing, and emergency roles where bilingual capacity is essential, while offering professional development and language incentives for staff seeking to maintain or improve their French proficiency. For hiring practices front facing service providers should be given preference if they are able to communicate in both languages.

Thank you for your joyous, engaging and vibrant culture. Il fait longtemps que je n'ai pas parlé français. Maintenant, je dois penser chaque mot avant de parler. Thank you for your continued fabulous contribution to our incredible city.

Regards,
Rajni Agarwal