

City files class-action lawsuit against opioid manufacturers



John Watson

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The City of Grande Prairie will act as the Representative Plaintiff in a class action lawsuit against more than 40 pharmaceutical companies. *POSTMEDIA FILE PHOTO / DAILY HERALD-TRIBUNE*

The City of Grande Prairie has signed on as the representative plaintiff on behalf of municipalities in a \$10-billion class-action lawsuit regarding the opioid crisis.

The lawsuit is being filed against over 40 various pharmaceutical companies for their alleged role in the harm caused to communities and the resource strain placed on Canadian municipalities to respond to the opioid crisis.

“Participating in this class-action lawsuit is a logical continuation in our community’s response to the opioid crisis,” said Mayor Bill Given in a Wednesday release.

“Each of us in Grande Prairie has been impacted in some form by the opioid crisis, and we can recognize the very real human cost the issue has. It also has a very real financial toll in the form of increased costs for local governments in areas ranging from policing and emergency response services, to social programs needed to address treatment and prevention and even into less expected operational areas such as parks and transit operations.”

The city is being represented by Guardian Law Group, a class-action firm in Calgary, and working with Napoli Shkolnik PLLC, a U.S. firm boasting a notably successful track record against similar pharmaceutical companies.

Guardian Law Group met with the city’s corporate services committee May 12 to introduce the notion of Grande Prairie acting as the representative plaintiff.

Through the courts, the representative plaintiff in a class-action lawsuit essentially represents the mean to adjudicate all issues common the represented class. This typically does not include specific cases unique to certain municipalities, which would have to be addressed separately.

The B.C provincial government launched a similar class-action lawsuit last year on behalf of all provincial, territorial and federal governments across Canada, which was joined by the Alberta government in October. This represented class did not include municipal-level representation.

The city is participating on a contingency fee basis, meaning there will be no costs to the city and any fees are deducted only from settlement funds. If there is no settlement awarded, the city will not be held responsible for paying any fees.

“This lawsuit allows us to take action on behalf of all municipalities and hold these companies, and not local taxpayers, responsible for the costs incurred in our community due to the opioid crisis,” said Given.

“We look forward to other Canadian communities joining this suit.”

Purdue Pharma, the makers of Oxycontin, filed for bankruptcy both in the U.S. and in Canada in 2019 in an effort to protect itself and its assets from a collective more than 2,000 lawsuits between the two countries.

According to Mathew Farrell, who represented Guardian Law Group when speaking to committee in May, claims may still be filed against Purdue Pharma on an individual basis until June 30. This includes consumers as well as institutions such as hospitals wishing to file personal injury claims against the company.

During Farrell's original presentation, he recommended to committee that it would be wise for Alberta to stake a claim to shares of Purdue Pharma's assets before those resources became unavailable.

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