



**SMOKY LAKE COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**Committee of the Whole**  
**MEETING AGENDA**

Tuesday, March 24, 2025, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Held in-person at the Smoky County Council Chambers 461 McDougall Drive

\*\*\*\*\*

*Committee of the Whole Meetings are informal and  
no bylaw or resolution shall be passed at a Meeting of Committee of the Whole.*

**1. Call to Order**

**2. Adoption of Agenda**

*The purpose of this strategic retreat is to take stock and gauge progress in achieving the strategic plan. It is an opportunity to step out of daily routine and discuss any needed adjustments or pivots to address any issues, while reflecting upon questions such as:*

*Is the County on target to achieve the milestones and objectives?*

*How have employees fulfilled their responsibilities in the plan?*

*Are there any significant changes that have or will affect the strategy?*

*Are there any potential changes required to meet the objectives?*

**3. Items for Information**

3.1. Current 2023-2025 Strategic Plan

3.2. Strategic Priorities Progress Update

3.3. Investment Attraction Strategy, report prepared for Smoky Lake County, March 14, 2024

3.4. Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) Rural Economic Development Toolkit

**4. In Camera (Executive Session)**

**5. Adjourn**



SMOKY LAKE COUNTY

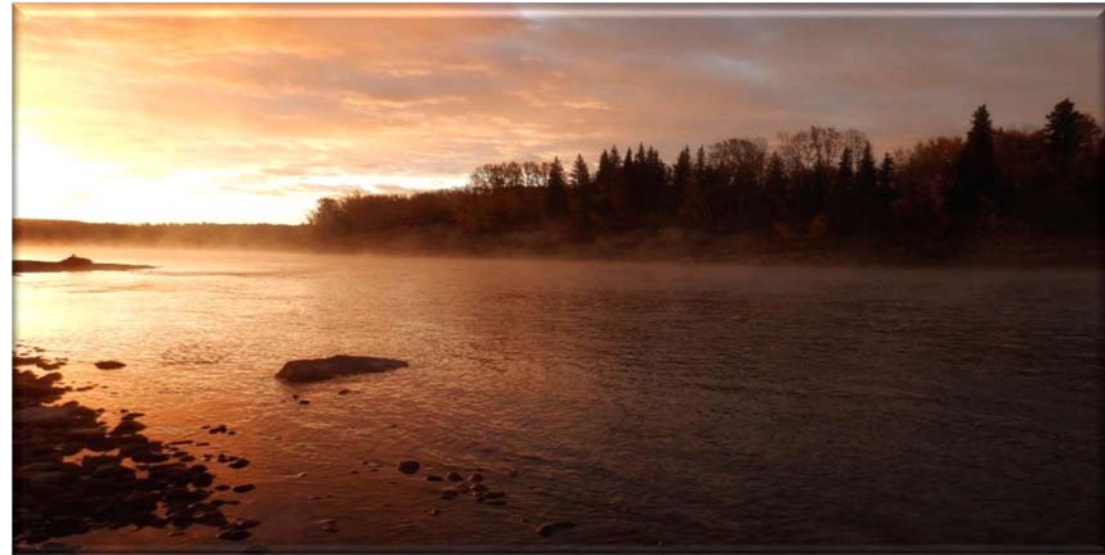
# STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2025

(Revision #1, approved on April 27, 2023, Council Motion #565-23)

# BACKGROUND

A municipal Council is responsible for identifying and defining strategic direction for the municipality to ensure that it fulfills its role as outlined in the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)*. A strategic plan fulfills this role as it clearly describes or affirms the values of the Council and Community. The strategic plan also:

- 1) defines the vision of the Council as to what it wants to achieve over the next few years, and,
- 2) establishes strategic priorities (between 3 to 5) to guide the organization towards achievement of the vision.



Sunrise on the NSR, Ceyana Canoe Club, 2021

The strategic plan forms the basis of the financial plan as it sets out what the municipality wants to do in the short-term (1 to 3 years) and longer terms (5-10 years). The financial plan determines the anticipated costs to accomplish the priorities of the strategic plan and consequently the extent to which a priority can reasonably be accomplished. The two plans are inseparably intertwined and for this reason, the strategic plan always precedes and is relied upon in the preparation of the budget priorities because the *MGA* requires municipalities to prepare mandatory three-year operating and five-year capital plans.

In reviewing our Values and Vision, Smoky Lake County strives to go beyond strategic plans of the past and instead create a plan with goals that are more tangible.

Smoky Lake County engaged 13 Ways to conduct a 2-day strategic session with the Council and Administrative staff to formulate the basis of the County's strategic plan. The outcome of this session provided the County with a document which provided the Council with a summary of its Values and Vision, which forms the basis for establishing the Council's priorities.

Smoky Lake County Council then conducted a separate workshop to review their Values, Vision and Levels of Service to establish its Priorities as the Council's

# VALUES

Smoky Lake County Council defined their values as:

1. **HEALTHCARE** – Council values the continuing access to the George McDougall and Vilna Health Centres by all residents in our region and the increasing of services for more advanced healthcare services.
2. **EMERGENCY SERVICES** – Council values a safe community where all County residents have access to locally sourced full-service police, fire and EMS services.
3. **EDUCATION** – Council values the prospect to allow residents to access dual credit opportunities / advanced education programs provided by colleges and also values the equality of education opportunity for County residents.
4. **CULTURAL DIVERSITY** – Council values the need to continue to accommodate, attain, build and grow the perception of being an open and culturally diverse community.
5. **RECREATION** – Council values the existing recreational opportunities and facilities for all our residents and seeks to explore enhancements to these facilities.
6. **HOUSING DIVERSITY** – Council values and recognizes the needs of our residents for diversified housing opportunities to allow our community to grow.

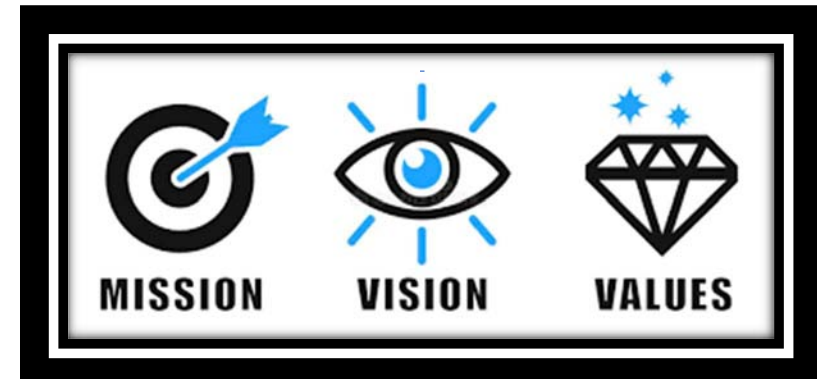


Looking east on the North Sask. River, at 'the Elbow'

# VISION

Smoky Lake County Council defined their vision as:

1. Development along Highways – Council visualizes new highway commercial growth and business development along key corridor highways in the region, where the County would proactively undertake processes to bring those properties to a “shovel-ready” status specific to land use, zoning, and other planning functions.
2. Creating policies/atmosphere to create pro-active growth and development:
  - a. Population growth – Council visualizes positive population growth by bringing key services back into the region.
  - b. Fully utilized Hospitals and Courthouse – Council visualizes a robust regional healthcare and fully utilized hospitals, health centres, and the courthouse in our region, supporting local needs and overflow capacity from larger metropolitan areas.
  - c. Housing Diversity – Council visualizes diverse housing opportunities designed to accommodate the needs of the region through innovative programming such as partnerships, incentives, and/or external grants.
  - d. Proactive/Partnering Development Strategies – The Council visualizes that the County would proactively undertake the processes and partnerships to stimulate and promote residential and commercial growth in the region, including “shovel-ready” principles pertaining to land use, zoning, servicing, and other land development functions.
  - e. Agriculture – Council recognizes the benefit and value of the County’s agriculture sector, and visualizes its enhancement and strengthening by supporting the expansion of veterinary services, promoting new value-added agri-business culture, and effectively promoting the region.
  - f. Environment – Council recognizes the benefit, value, and services delivered by our natural landscape, and visualizes its protection through land use planning, technical studies, collaborative partnerships, and leveraging tools under the MGA, etc.



# PRIORITIES



1. Grow Employment Opportunities - Council is committed to lobby for the re-instatement of healthcare services in the region, the re-opening of the courthouse, and supporting growth in all industries, including agricultural business and producers to stimulate population growth in the region.

To attain this priority, Council recognizes the following tasks will be required to be undertaken:

- Lobby efforts to the Provincial and/or Federal Governments – The Council will utilize their lobby efforts, along with other local and regional municipal partners, to jointly advocate to the various levels of government. This may include the retaining of registered professional lobbyist firm(s) as deemed necessary. This may require the adoption of an advocacy plan by the Council to assist in this role.
- Collaboration with Municipalities and Healthcare Providers – The County will need to form collaborative relationships with municipalities within and surrounding our boundaries, as well as explore relationships and/or partnerships within the Provincial Government.
- Examine recreation opportunities and new facilities – The County will review the Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master Plan, dated March 2013, in the context of 2023 and develop a program for the public to provide input respecting facility improvements and desired programs.
- Examine Incentive Initiatives – The County will examine the possibility of introducing incentives and/or partnership opportunities to foster the growth of business and industry development in the region.

2. Proactivity in Development – Council is committed to the development of policy and programming to foster a proactive approach to land development within our region.

- Sell land to raise revenues for development initiatives – The County will review potential opportunities for highest and best use of Municipal property currently vacant and dispose of the lands at fair market value. Some land may be sold on condition to assist in the undertaking development within a specified timeframe.
- Review existing policy framework – The County will review its existing policy statements across all departments to ensure that they remain relevant and effective.
- Market Evaluation – The County will undertake an evaluation of market conditions to determine what conditions, economic constraints, impediments, catalysts, and stimulus may be beneficial in the proactive promotion of land development in the region.
- Lobby efforts to the Provincial and/or Federal Governments – The Council will utilize their lobby efforts, along with other local and regional municipal partners, to jointly advocate to the various levels of government. This may include the retaining of registered professional lobbyist firm(s) as deemed necessary. This may require the adoption of an advocacy plan by the Council to assist in this role



- Proactive Preliminary Planning – The Council will undertake a review of the existing Land Use Bylaw (LUB) and Municipal Development Plan (MDP) which are both nearly a decade old, and replace or update them with modern language, uses, and provisions that balance economic development with the municipalities' role as a regulator and trustee of the environment and public good. This may also include review/update of older existing, or adoption of new, Area Structure Plans (ASPs) and other tools under the MGA.
- Effective Geographic Information Systems (GIS) - Smoky Lake County's GIS promotes and supports the County Strategic Plan with the use of technology to enable an efficient, effective business process and support decision makers at all levels with access to the most accurate information.
- Housing Diversity – The County will undertake a marketing analysis to determine the needs of the region. The Council will also consider options to promote the construction of diverse housing through the use of specific policy frameworks, investment, partnership, and possible subsidization to achieve this goal.
- Agriculture – The Council will seek opportunities to enhance the agricultural culture of the region through new and innovative partnerships that prioritize landowner needs, sustainable local foods.
- Environment – The Council will pursue necessary advocacy, technical studies, and policy and bylaw amendments to appropriately steward our environmental landscape.

4. Emergency Services – Council is committed to ensure that all County residents have access to full-service Police, Fire and EMS services.

- Lobby efforts to the Provincial and/or Federal Governments – The Council will utilize their lobby efforts, along with other local and regional municipal partners, to jointly advocate to the various levels of government. This may include the retaining of registered professional lobbyist firm(s) as deemed necessary. This may require the adoption of an advocacy plan by the Council to assist in this role.
- Explore the possibility of Partnership/Investment Opportunities – The County will explore opportunities for possible partnerships and/or investment to attain full-service emergency services.



3. Education – Council is committed to ensuring that educational opportunities for County residents continue to grow.

- Create and enhance Partnerships – The County will continue to forge partnerships with primary and post-secondary education providers (Portage College, Lakeland College, Aspen View Schools, Lakeland Catholic) to provide continuing programming required by residents of the County.
- Lobby efforts to the Provincial and/or Federal Governments – The Council will utilize their lobby efforts, along with other local and regional municipal partners, to jointly advocate to the various levels of government. This may include the retaining of registered professional lobbyist firm(s) as deemed necessary. This may require the adoption of an advocacy plan by the Council to assist in this role.
- Explore the possibility of Partnership/Investment Opportunities – The County will explore opportunities for possible partnerships and/or investment to attain goals such as additional dual credit education programs.



Hillside Acres in Fall



5. Cultural Diversity – *Council is committed to ensuring that the County is recognized as being a Culturally Diverse Community.*
- Apply to Provincial Government to become a Designated Community – Council is committed to researching and successfully applying to the Province to become a Rural Renewal Stream Designated Community.
  - Create Policy Statements – The Council is committed to creating policy statements ratifying the County's commitment to be viewed by peers as a Culturally Diverse Community and welcoming people from all cultural backgrounds.

### Who We Were

Our name 'Smoky Lake' comes from smoky vapor that rises from the shallow lake itself, which was noted by the original inhabitants of this area - the Indigenous Peoples' whose footsteps have marked these beautiful lands since time immemorial. Over the last 200 years, explorers and traders were replaced by farmers and entrepreneurs, Eastern Europeans, and others from around the world, as our region grew in population and prosperity.

### Who We Are

We have become a services-oriented hub by providing important amenities to our residents while also growing business industrial and agricultural opportunities, tourism, and recreation services. We also serve as a culturally diverse hub that attracts people from around the world for the quality of community and a family-focused life that we offer. This has been accomplished through a tradition of active collaboration with our neighbors.



Credit: Hank Holowaychuk

## WHO WE ARE



Waskatenau Creek

### Who We Are Becoming

With further partnerships and collaboration, we will be able to offer a re-instated full-service healthcare, emergency services and housing diversity with great amenities all within a short distance, including recreation facilities, walking trails and natural amenities that appeal to all ages.

We have achieved this through our forward thinking and in being proactively involved in the development process to create investment and business opportunities in the County. In response to our growing population, we will present a skilled workforce that will appeal to businesses and industries that create jobs and employment. We are focused on growing local ownership and entrepreneurship in our own community. We are a thriving community with a lot of value-added developments that support our appreciation of our beautiful environment, with year-round events that celebrate our four seasons and take advantage of our natural environments. Our businesses are self-sustaining because of a strong and growing population.

# LEVEL OF SERVICE

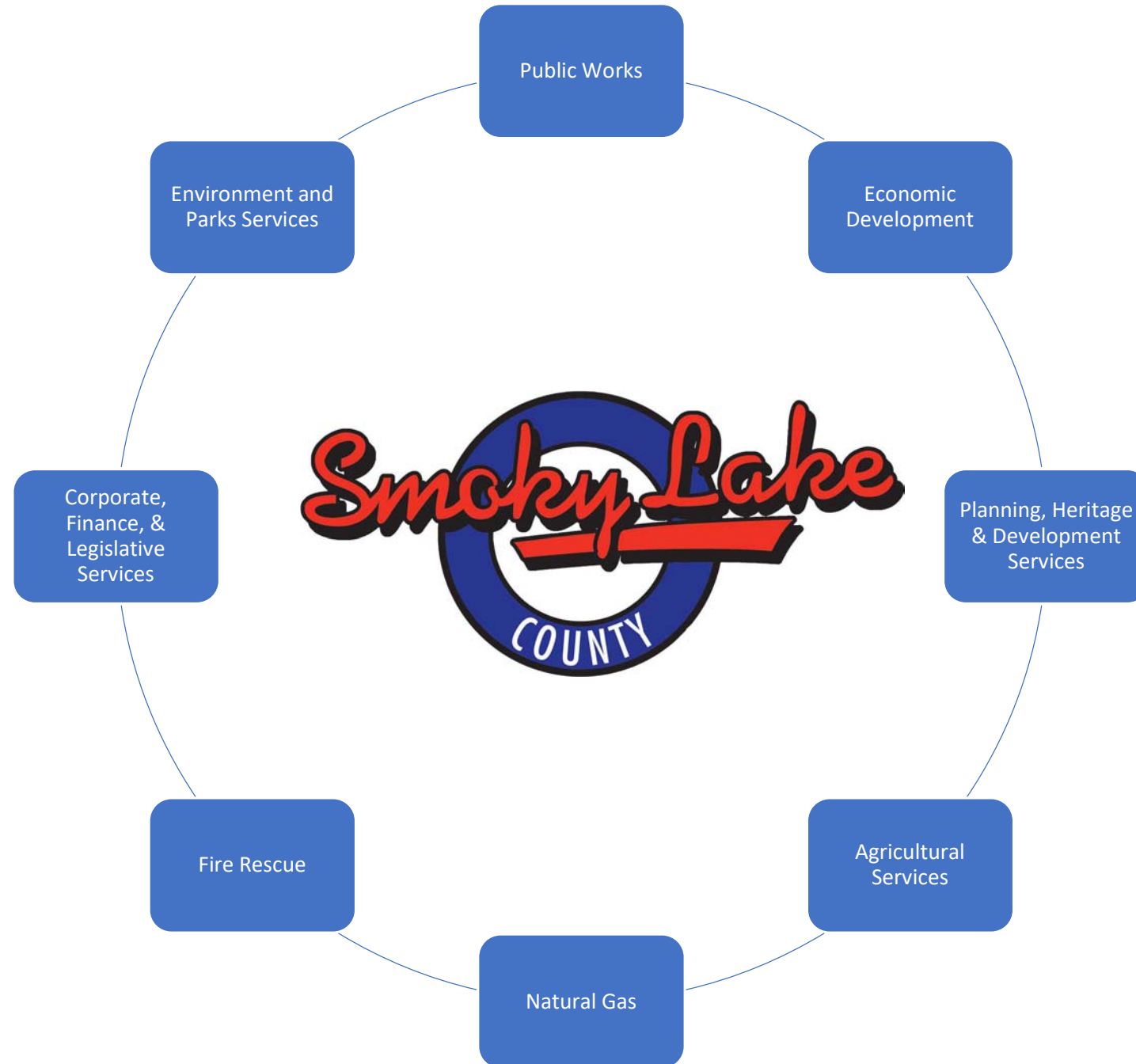


The Council reviewed the extent and costs of the services the County provides to our residents. While faced with the unpredictable cost of goods and services and inflation pressures, the County has been resolute to continue to provide our excellent levels of services.

In moving forward, the County will strive to minimal taxation increases while continuing to provide the same high-quality levels of service to our residents.



Core municipal services					Shared with province		
 Public Transit	 Roads & Winter Control	 Police Services	 Solid Waste Services		 Paramedic Services	 Public Health Services	 Child Care
 Cultural Services	 Parks & Recreation	 Wastewater Services	 Water Services	 Fire Services	 Assistance to the Aged	 Social Housing	 Social & Family Assistance





# STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2025

(Revision #1, Apr. 27, 2023, Motion #565-23)

## Priorities Progress Update as of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2024

1. **Grow Employment Opportunities** - Council is committed to lobby for the re-instatement of healthcare services in the region, the re-opening of the courthouse, and supporting growth in all industries, including agricultural business and producers to stimulate population growth in the region. To attain this priority, Council recognizes the following tasks will be required to be undertaken:
  - 1.1. Lobby efforts to the Provincial and/or Federal Governments  
**Ongoing**, lobbying is taking place through the "Northeast Alberta Alliance for Growth and Opportunities (NAAGO)" formed in 2023 comprised of 40 member municipalities and Indigenous communities that are working together to identify common issues and advocate for investment into our region, representing more than 137,000 residents.
  - 1.2. Collaboration with Municipalities and Healthcare Providers  
**January 2024**, implemented a letter writing campaign implemented through the Physicians & Health Care Professionals Committee involving members of the public, community stakeholders, businesses, Smoky Lake Region Municipalities, Settlements, Reserves, and anyone, to urge the Provincial Government and Regional Health Authority in taking action to remove the red tape hindering the attraction and retention of physicians affecting the George McDougall Health Care Centre's Emergency Room Services and Medical Clinics in the Smoky Lake Region.  
**February 2024**, letters were written from the NAAGO to 22 Ministers and the Premier bringing attention to concerns regarding prolonged health care challenges including recruitment and retention of doctors and nurses and enhancing our EMS.
  - 1.3. Examine recreation opportunities and new facilities  
**In 2023 & 2024**, partnered with the Town of Smoky Lake & Villages of Vilna & Waskatenau to conduct a Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Services Strategy funded through an Alberta Community Partnership (ACP) 2023-24 grant. Public feedback is expected to be engaged in early 2025 and the final report is expected to be received in December 2026.  
**In 2024**, partnered with Village of Waskatenau for grant funding to complete the Waskatenau Creek Corridor Restoration and Trail Concept study.
  - 1.4. Examine Incentive Initiatives  
**In 2024** Gave 1<sup>ST</sup> & 2<sup>ND</sup> Reading to Bylaw No. 1464-24: Non-Residential Development Municipal Tax Incentive, for the purpose of providing a Municipal Property Tax Exemption for Non-Residential Development or Expansions (3<sup>rd</sup> reading will be considered in January 2025).
2. **Proactivity in Development** – Council is committed to the development of policy and programming to foster a proactive approach to land development within our region:
  - 2.1. Sell land to raise revenues for development initiatives  
**In 2023:**  
 Sold River Lot 10 for \$80,000  
 Sold Plan 716CL, Block 1, Lot 9, in Warspite for \$9,000  
**In 2024:**  
 Sold PT. SE-09-58-15-4W (20.04 acres) for \$50,000.00  
 Sold NE 23-60-13-W4M (136.30 acres) through CLHBid.com for \$210,655.30 profit  
 Sold SW 34-61-13-W4M (127.60 acres) through CLHBid.com for \$266,148.55 profit  
 Sold NE 32-59-14-W4M (160.0 acres) through CLHBid.com for \$224,394.64 profit  
 Sold PT. NW-2-59-12-W4M (13.57 acres) for \$4,500  
 Sold PT. SW-21-60-13-W4M (1 acre) for \$1,000  
 Sold PT. SW-35-59-15-W4M (0.5 acre) for \$500  
 Sold PLAN 8120163, LOT 1 (20.16 acres) for \$40,000  
 Sold PLAN 1955CL, BLOCK 1, LOT 3 (3,900 sq ft) for \$1,600  
 Sold PLAN 1039CL, BLOCK 4, LOTS 12-14 (13,660 sq ft) for \$1,800  
 Sold PLAN 1039CL, BLOCK 4, LOTS 15-16 (12,785 sq ft) for \$1,200  
 Sold PLAN 0425044, BLOCK H, LOT 11A (10,000 sq ft) for \$5,000



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2025

(Revision #1, Apr. 27, 2023, Motion #565-23)

## Priorities Progress Update as of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2024

### 2.2. Review existing policy framework

**August 2023**, Policy Statement No. 61-08-01: Regional Engineering Design Standards (REDS), was adopted to establish a minimum acceptable regional design standards and criteria for the preparation and submission of plans and specifications for the orderly and satisfactory development of subdivisions and other municipal services within the County.

**April 2024**, Policy Statement No. 61-03-07: Application for Development Permit, was amended to align with other County policies and bylaws.

**April 2024**, Policy Statement No. 61-02-03: Resource Extraction Development Permit Application, was rescinded because it was made redundant by updating Policy Statement No. 61-03-07.

### 2.3. Market Evaluation

**September 2024**, the Investment Attraction Strategy, was completed as a project funded through the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) Microgrant program, to identify growth opportunities.

Also, there is market data available through the Alberta HUB website:

<https://albertahub.com/smoky-lake-county/>

### 2.4. Lobby efforts to the Provincial and/or Federal Governments

No opportunities have been available.

### 2.5. Proactive Preliminary Planning

**April 2024**, Bylaw No. 1453-23 was passed, to redistrict River Lot 15, Victoria Settlement, to Direct Control (DC2) District and to add provisions relating to Supportive Living Facilities.

**October 2024**, Council approve to issue Development Permit DP 024-24, for a Supportive Living Facility, on River Lot 15, Victoria Settlement, subject to conditions.

### 2.6. Effective Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

**December 12, 2024**, Policy Statement No. 01-45-02: Geographic Information Systems (GIS), was amended to clearly outline responsibilities to ensure the GIS database is updated regularly and ensure accurate data is provided to stakeholders.

### 2.7. Housing Diversity

**February 2023, Needs & Demand Assessment for the Region of Smoky Lake**: prepared by The Sustainable Housing Initiative at the Rural Development Network, through ACP Grant Funding with Vilna as the managing partner of the project.

**August 9, 2023, ICC Meeting Motion ICC11-23**: Established an ad-hoc working group committee for "Housing Opportunities and Initiatives".

**January 16, 2024**, aimed to review each respective municipality's Strategic Plan and Land Use Bylaw's permitted use, to regionally align the reduction of red tape to aim to be development ready and developer ready and attract housing investment to the region.

### 2.8. Agriculture

**December 2024**, 1<sup>st</sup> Reading was given to Bylaw 1467-24, to amend Land Use Bylaw to Redistrict Plan 9121735, Lot A, Pt. NE-33-58-18-W4M from AG to M2 and Amend Municipal Development Plan Bylaw 1249-12 to Reclassify Plan 9121735, Lot A, Pt. NE-33-58-18-W4M from Agriculture Area to Industrial Area.

### 2.9. Environment

**June 2023** passed Bylaw No. 1436-23: Major Alternative Energy, and Lake, Watershed, and Regional Planning Bylaw, Amending Land Use Bylaw No. 1272-14 and Municipal Development Plan Bylaw No. 1249-12, to address provisions for dealing with major alternative energy developments.

**2024**, the Waskatenau Creek Corridor Restoration and Trail Concept study was completed and will be utilized should funding become available for development.

### Rural investment attract strategy

## 3. Emergency Services – Council is committed to ensure that all County residents have access to full-service Police, Fire and EMS services:



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2025

(Revision #1, Apr. 27, 2023, Motion #565-23)

## Priorities Progress Update as of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2024

### 3.1. Lobby efforts to the Provincial and/or Federal Governments

**November 2023**, Met with RCMP K-Division, Deputy Commissioner Curtis Zablocki to discuss: Enhancing Service Delivery, Crime Reduction, & Enhancing Engagement and Communication with Communities and Stakeholders. Met with Mike Ellis, Deputy Premier & Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to discuss Regional Emergency Services and Volunteer Firefighters.

**January 2024**, applied to the Alberta Indigenous & Municipal Policing Transition Grant Program, to fund a project titled: Smoky Lake County Crime Strategy Study.

**January 2024, RMA District 5 Meeting**: brought forward a resolution for the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) to advocate to the Government of Alberta to collaborate with the Federal Government and Fire Underwriters Survey for the purpose of assisting municipalities to retain fire services by recruiting firefighters and addressing the declining Fire Department Services across Rural Alberta.

**November 2024**, met with the Deputy Premier / Minister of Public Safety & Emergency Services to discuss the need for funding towards community safety, and increased policing to mitigation rural armed / violent property crimes in Smoky Lake County. Met with the Minister of Justice to discuss repeated offenders and lack of consequences for charges laid – catch and release, and the need for a plan to achieve safe, crime free communities.

### 3.2. Explore the possibility of Partnership/Investment Opportunities

The County's Community Peace Officer works closely with the Smoky Lake RCMP Detachment Member to assist where possible.

## 4. Education - Council is committed to ensuring that educational opportunities for County residents continue to grow:

### 4.1. Create and enhance Partnerships

Aspen View Public School Division and Lakeland Roman Catholic Separate School Division are invited to attend Joint Municipalities Meetings as delegations to provide updates.

The County continues to participate in employing high school students through Alberta's Registered Apprenticeship Program.

### 4.2. Lobby efforts to the Provincial and/or Federal Governments

No opportunities have been available:

### 4.3. Explore the possibility of Partnership/Investment Opportunities

**January 2024**, invited Portage College President & CEO, and Associate Dean of Economic Development & Sustainability, to the Joint Municipalities Meeting to provide an update open the door to and explore opportunities.

## 5. Cultural Diversity – Council is committed to ensuring that the County is recognized as being a Culturally Diverse Community:

### 5.1. Apply to Provincial Government to become a Designated Community

**September 9, 2024**, Smoky Lake Region was approved for participation in the Rural Renewal Stream (RRS) which empowers rural communities to recruit and retain foreign nationals to live, work and settle in their communities. This approval includes Smoky Lake County, Town of Smoky Lake, Village of Waskatenau, Village of Vilna. The Smoky Lake Region is now officially a Designated Community for this.

### 5.2. Create Policy Statements

**January 26, 2023**, Policy Statement No. 07-09-01: Alberta Bilingual Municipalities Association (ABMA) – Liaison Committee Terms of Reference, was adopted to allow for representation to the **March 16, 2023**, Policy Statement No. 01-35-02: Flag Protocol & Half Mast, was amended to include Ukrainian Flag and Treaty 6 Flag.

**December 14, 2023**, Policy Statement No. 01-53-02: Treaty 6 and Indigenous Acknowledgement, was amended with updates and added definitions.

# INVESTMENT ATTRACTION STRATEGY

Prepared for Smoky Lake County

## Regional Investment Attraction

### Executive Summary

Smoky Lake County engaged Michelle Wright Consulting Services in November 2023 to research, assess and prepare recommendations on Investment Attraction opportunities in the County. The project included a review of industries, sites, statistics, and County aspirations. This report identifies growth opportunities by industry: tourism, agriculture, and energy.

To achieve the opportunities, this report also includes recommendations for attraction methodologies and associated resourcing, financing, and stakeholder engagement. Locations for these opportunities exist throughout the County, and benefits can be widely enjoyed across all divisions.

Development supports needed, in order of importance are: Housing, infrastructure and labour.

Several economic development studies, plans and municipal Strategic Plans were revised and summarized, with the primary focus and recommendations being the County's priorities. There is significant alignment and overlap with the prior studies and the recommendations contained herein.

Also considered were the County's current fiscal and resource capacities, and recommendations are made with respect to the current environment. Marketing, branding, performance measures and feedback are also included for the County's use as the activities to achieve their vision are undertaken.

A significant understanding in the completion of this work is that there are no new ideas to be developed, that the County and its partnering organizations over time have consistently identified the same needs for growth and are now ready to take action on those ideas.

## 1. Strategic Plan Reviews

Smoky Lake County's strategic plan was reviewed with the intent to identify the direction of the County with respect to investment opportunities. The consultant also reviewed and has included in the discussion, relevant content from the following plans and studies:

- Smoky Lake County Strategic Plan 2023-2025
- Travel Alberta Tourism Development Zone: Northeast Lakelands November 2023
- Government of Alberta Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan December 2022
- Victoria District Economic Development Strategy September 2020
- Town of Smoky Lake Strategic Plan 2022
- Regional Community Development Committee Smoky Lake Region Strategic Plan 2020
- Service Assessment and Economic Development Strategy 13 Ways Smoky Lake Region October 2022

## 2. Plan Summaries

### 2.1 Smoky Lake County

Approved by Smoky Lake County Council in April 2023, the County's Strategic Plan 2023-2025 includes the County's Values and Vision and forms the basis for establishing the Council's priorities. The content relevant to investment attraction is included here for clarity, as it informed the identification and recommendations for the opportunities. The report in its entirety is available on the County's website (<https://smokylakeCounty.ab.ca/p/strategic-plan>).

#### 2.1.1 Vision

Smoky Lake County Council defined their vision in the Strategic Plan as (numbering is consistent with the County Strategy):

- 1.1 Development along Highways – Council visualizes new highway commercial growth and business development along key corridor highways in the Region, where the County would proactively undertake processes to bring those properties to a “shovel-ready” status specific to land use, zoning, and other planning functions.
- 1.2 Creating policies/atmosphere to create pro-active growth and development:
  - a. Population growth – Council visualizes positive population growth by bringing key services back into the Region (using advocacy to obtain/maintain veterinary, health, courthouse services).
  - b. Fully utilized Hospitals and Courthouse – Council visualizes a robust regional healthcare and fully utilized hospitals, health centres, and the courthouse in our Region, supporting local needs and overflow capacity from larger metropolitan areas.
  - c. Housing Diversity – Council visualizes diverse housing opportunities designed to accommodate the needs of the Region through innovative programming such as partnerships, incentives, and/or external grants.
  - d. Proactive/Partnering Development Strategies – The Council visualizes that the County would proactively undertake the processes and partnerships to stimulate and promote residential and commercial growth in the Region, including “shovel-ready” principles pertaining to land use, zoning, servicing, and other land development functions.
  - e. Agriculture – Council recognizes the benefit and value of the County's agriculture sector and visualizes its enhancement and strengthening by supporting the expansion of veterinary services, promoting new value-added agri-business culture, and effectively promoting the Region.

- f. Environment – Council recognizes the benefit, value and services delivered by our natural landscape, and visualizes its protection through land use planning, technical studies, collaborative partnerships, and leveraging tools under the MGA etc.

**Note:** the Vision and Mission in the 2024 Smoky Lake County Budget plan are different than that of the Strategic Plan 2023-2025:

**Vision** - Leading the way in positive growth with healthy, sustainable, rural living.

**Mission** - Smoky Lake County strives for collaboration and excellence in the provision of transparent and fiscally responsible governance and services.

Included in the County Budget are these insights:

Revenue:

- The County's total revenue (not including government transfers) has been relatively constant.
- The linear tax revenue forms 50 to 55% of the County's total tax revenue.
- The residential/farmland tax forms 28 to 30% of the County's total tax revenue.

Expenses:

- The County's total expenses have increased.
- The highest expense is Transportation, (around 40% of total expenses), followed by Administration & Legislative.
- Protective services expenses have increased significantly (due to changes imposed by the provincial government).
- On average, 15% of expenses are paid by Government Transfers over the past 7 years, with the highest being 20%.
- Expenses per capita have increased over the past 7 years.

### 2.1.2 Relevant Investment Attraction Priorities

Smoky Lake County Council identified five priorities within the Strategic Plan 2023-2025 and supporting details for investment attraction (only relevant priorities and tasks included in this summary):

- Grow Employment Opportunities – supporting growth in all industries and including agricultural business and producers.
  - Examine recreation opportunities and new facilities: The County will review the Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master plan, dated March 2013, in the context of 2023 and develop a program for the public to provide input respecting facility improvements and desired programs.
  - Examine incentive initiatives to foster growth of business and industry: the County will examine the possibility of introducing incentives and/or partnership opportunities to foster the growth of business and industry development in the Region.
- Proactivity in Development
  - Sell land to raise revenues for development initiatives: the County will review potential opportunities for highest and best use of Municipal property currently vacant and dispose of the lands at fair market value. Some land may be sold on condition to assist in the undertaking development within a specified time frame.
  - Market evaluation: evaluation of market conditions to determine what conditions, economic constraints, impediments, catalysts, and stimulus may be beneficial in the proactive promotion of land development.

- Housing Diversity: The County will undertake a marketing analysis to determine the needs of the Region. The Council will also consider options to promote the construction of diverse housing through the use of specific policy frameworks, investment, partnership, and possible subsidization to achieve this goal.
- Cultural Diversity
  - Apply to the Provincial Government to become a Designated Community – Council is committed to researching and successfully applying to the Province to become a Rural Renewal Stream Designated Community (as per 2024 Budget – Project Cancelled)

The other two Smoky Lake County priorities not included in this review and report are Emergency Services and Education. These priorities support quality of life, but the tasks included for each of them are not directly relevant to investment attraction. They would be priorities for Council to action as part of their overall strategy implementation.

## **2.1 Travel Alberta Northeast Lakelands Tourism Development Zone Discovery Report 2023**

Smoky Lake County is a member of the Northeast Lakelands Tourism Development Zone, established through Travel Alberta's tourism strategy. In 2023, administration participated in the Discovery Report process on behalf of Smoky Lake County.

The Northeast Lakelands Vision is: By 2035 our tourism region will become a recognized year-round destination built around our natural assets (water and wilderness) and cultural assets (history and heritage), and supported by excellent communications, transportation and other infrastructure.

Smoky Lake is one of the seven primary clusters in the report, (the six other clusters are much larger communities of Lac la Biche, St. Paul, Vegreville, Vermillion, Cold Lake, and Lloydminster).

The Discovery Report identified the following initiatives and priorities:

- Increasing year-round accommodations, specifically unique accommodations, and accommodations within proximity to recreational assets that would interest a leisure traveller.
- Supporting communities, businesses, and stakeholders to develop new and enhanced year-round tourism products and experiences, with a focus on cultural and heritage tourism products and experiences and recreational/soft-adventure experiences (such as Iron Horse Trail)
- Working with local organizations to better coordinate with each other, play a larger role in developing the visitor economy and increase their capacity to operate sustainably.
- Improving technological connectivity (including mobile reception and broadband) to and within the zone, in key areas and along main routes
- Creating an enabling environment to attract and retain employees within the tourism industry.
- Working with municipalities to explore opportunities to modernize policies affecting the continuing development of agritourism.

## **2.2 GOA Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan**

The Government of Alberta developed the Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan in 2022, based on the insights gained from engagement with targeted rural stakeholders. This plan includes key strategies and measurable actions to ensure rural Albertans have economic opportunities where they live. The full plan can be found at <https://www.alberta.ca/rural-economic-development>.

This GOA plan identified 5 Strategic directions (priorities):

- Economic development-enabling infrastructure. Identify and improve economic development-enabling infrastructure to support investment and growth in rural Alberta.
- Rural business supports and entrepreneurship. Advance entrepreneurship capacity and a culture of innovation across rural Alberta.
- Support for labour force and skills development. Enable skills development in rural communities to enhance workforce capacity today and for the future.
- Marketing and promoting rural tourism. Enhance rural Alberta's reputation and capacity as a diverse tourism destination.
- Rural economic development capacity building. Enhance rural economic development through regional and targeted capacity building.

## **2.3 Victoria District Economic Development**

Smoky Lake County, Town of Smoky Lake and Métis Nation of Alberta created the Victoria District Economic Development Strategy (VDEDS) in 2020. This strategy is focussed on the tourism industry and identifies opportunities across the Smoky Lake Region. The Strategy goals are to add to the visitor economy, increase the visitor audience for Métis Crossing and other attractions, diversify the Region's economy, and support Municipal sustainability.

The three Strategy deliverables are:

- A loan fund for tourism developers and operators.
- Direct accommodation and attraction acquisition either solely or in partnership with Regional or Corporate investors.
- Infrastructure investment including roads, trails, housing, and signage.

## **2.4 Town of Smoky Lake**

The Town of Smoky Lake Strategic Plan 2022 is included as support to the County's strategy, where alignment exists. The Town's vision that Smoky Lake is a growing, well -planned community with diverse business opportunities, community amenities and events.

Priorities include:

Tourism – Local events, Trail development, Eco-tourism, Sport tourism

Growth Business/Commercial development - Business retention and growth, promote Highway commercial development and promote downtown business development.

Recreation – Promote the RV Park, local camping, and accommodation facilities, and the rich local heritage showcased through facilities such as the CN Station and Smoky Lake Museum.

## **2.5 Regional Community Development Committee (RCDC) Strategy**

Updated in 2020, the RCDC Strategic Plan notes Vision is: The Smoky Lake Region is an attractive, prosperous community that treasures its blend of rural and small-town lifestyles, with strong values placed on economic development, social cohesion, environmental protection, and historical preservation.

The goals of the plan include:

- Maintain the Region's Quality of Life
- Promote the Region

- Diversify the Region's Economy
- Attract New Residents to the Region
- Protect the Region's Natural and Historic Assets
- Improve the Region's Economic Development Capacity

The 2020 RCDC plan includes performance measures for each goal.

## **2.6 Service Assessment Strategy and Economic Development Strategy by 13 Ways**

Created collaboratively across the Region in 2022 with Smoky Lake County, the Town of Smoky Lake, the Village of Waskatenau and the Village of Vilna, the 13 Ways Strategy identified efficiencies and cost savings for the municipalities who are facing growing budget challenges due to the continued downloading of costs and services from other levels of government, increased demands for services and infrastructure from the residents, and a slowly shrinking tax base and population. Finding the cost savings, in the words of 13 ways is a matter of life or death for municipalities.

In addition to the Service Assessment, 13 ways included recommendations for an economic development strategy and marketing plan that complements the work done on service level reviews and priorities.

They noted they were unable to present a complete economic and marketing strategy as there is still more work to be done on collaboration and cooperation efforts that produce a clear vision and set of values for the Region. They took these additional elements of project work as far as they could in this phase.

Through their consultations it was clearly articulated by the participants that the goal is not focused on attracting industry. There is a high value placed on the quality of life for individuals and families in the Region, the interconnectedness of the community and communities, for the environment, and for recreation opportunities. The focus for growth was identified as small business and tourism and attracting families and professionals.

### **13 Ways Service Assessment Recommendations**

- Realize Efficiencies
  - Asset Management and Budgeting
  - Joint Operation of Linear Services
  - Administrative Support
  - Coordinated Fleet Management
- Grow the Pie
  - Regional Economic Development Strategy
  - Regional Marketing Strategy - An Effective Marketing Strategy
  - Regional Development Processes, Permitting, and Land Use Planning
- Make it Happen
  - Develop Common Purpose with Shared Strategic Direction
  - Governance Structure and Organizational Processes
  - Identify human and financial resources for each initiative

Within the 13 Ways Economic Development Strategy, the following priorities were identified (details of recommended actions are included in Appendix A). They noted that this is not a complete economic development strategic plan. Their current study analyzed the current strategic plan (at the time, the RCDC and VEEDS plans were the only ones in use), identified its missing pieces and weaknesses, and offered practical advice. It identified areas of improvement and potential additions based on the consulting team's extensive experience working with municipalities in Canada and the United States, their research on future trends in community building and economic development, and their conversations with the Smoky Lake Region municipalities staff, Council, and members of the community.

- Quality of Life
- Targeted Marketing Campaign (details in Section 7)
- Diversify the Regional Economy
- Grow Economic Development Capacity

### **3.0 Regional Competitive Advantage Summary**

Smoky Lake County economic profile is described in the following sections. It includes macroeconomic trends, baseline and industry trends, a review of the County resident employability, and land readiness factors.

#### **3.1 Macroeconomic Trends**

The North American context for foreign direct investment has been declining significantly prior to and following the years of the pandemic. For companies who operate globally, Alberta is competing with international sites, and fewer and fewer investments are made here due to regulatory uncertainty, taxation, and low labour pools. In Canada, Ontario is the most likely to see foreign direct investment. In Alberta, there has been a 10% decline in business investment in 2023. Energy is bouncing back after a period of slow growth, the population is the fastest growing of anywhere in Canada, and the Alberta economy is showing signs of diversification. ATB Economists are predicting that 2024 will see slower economic growth and the population growth will also be tempered, reducing some of the strain on the housing market and inflation overall will slow down.

As labour availability is a large factor in investment projects, take note that in Canada in 2023, 100% of labour force growth came from interprovincial and international immigration.

Another factor influencing investment is the rising cost of construction. As potential developers look to Smoky Lake County to build, their business case may prove to be unviable as construction estimates are developed.

#### **3.2 Local Economic Trends and Workforce**

Based on the 2021 census results, the County has experienced negative growth (-5.7%) since the last census (2016). The 20-year growth is negative as well, calculated at -12.3%. However, for the past 10 years, the population decline rate has slowed. The County statistics include the Métis Settlements of Buffalo Lake and Kikino. Excluding the two Métis settlements, Smoky Lake County had a population of 2,461 in 2016, and 2,517 in 2021 (2.2% increase). Reports of population decline in the County would be related to the population decline in Buffalo Lake Settlement (nearly 50% decline, may be due to under reporting during 2021 census).

In 2021, the Median age in the County was 44.8 years, which is higher than the provincial median age (based on 2021 census, Alberta’s median age was 38.4 years). The County has the lowest Median age and the highest % of under 20 years amongst the four municipalities of Smoky Lake Region with 21% of the County’s population over 65 years of age. Over 90% of the residences in the County are single family dwellings.

Most County residents have post secondary education, the breakdown of the education levels (2021 census) are:

High school diploma or equivalent	29.14%
Postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree	45.36%
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	15.07%
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	19.37%
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	2.32%
University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above	0.66%

Also from 2021 Census, the County’s employment participation rate is 53%, with most employed in trades, transport, agriculture, and natural resources. Post pandemic, the unemployment rate was at 12%, and is currently at 13%. 550 residents reported they commute outside the County for work (could include employment in Town and Villages) in 2021, up significantly from the prior census in 2016.

In 2022, one major project was initiated in Smoky Lake County (\$13 million solar energy development) and 29 development permits worth \$4.7 million were active in 2021. Of note, 90% of County’s businesses are small businesses. The industrial segment had the largest increase, however for a small dollar amount, increasing by 87.7% to \$281,500.

### 3.3 Regulatory Environment

In August 2023, the Alberta government announced it was instituting a six-month pause on all approvals related to renewable energy projects greater than one megawatt, citing as justification concerns over the impact on the environment and on rural areas. In late February 2024, specific policies were created including one relevant to Smoky Lake County: Renewable generation developments are no longer permitted on soil with either no or moderate limitations on crop usage unless it can be demonstrated that crops and/or livestock can coexist with the renewable project.

Other potential regulatory constraints, especially if Smoky Lake County were to pursue a mega industrial project, includes approval times, stakeholder challenges, and the use of higher classification agricultural lands for industrial development.

### 3.4 Land Analysis

Of the County’s 3,396.29 km<sup>2</sup> (1,311.31 sq mi), approximately one third is public lands, mostly used for grazing leases. The 2012 Municipal Development Plan Future Land Use District maps (pages 78 to 82) identify planned commercial zones adjacent to Highway 28 and 36, and secondary highways 855 and 831. Industrial lands are located on Highway 36 and west of Waskatenau along the County’s far western boundary north and south of Highway 28 (maps in Appendix B). The Town of Smoky Lake has also indicated commercial development plans adjacent to Highway 28 (Gateway Overlay) as well as Downtown (Downtown Overlay).

Recently the County sold 3 of its parcels (sale price included to support discussion later in this report):  
Parcel 1 NE 32-59-14 Gross sale price \$245,000  
Parcel 2 NE 23-60-13 Gross sale price \$230,000  
Parcel 3 SW 34-61-13 Gross sale price \$290,000

Despite no commercially suitable lands currently owned by the County, there are several parcels suited to recreational and tourism uses, near Hanmore Lake, Whitefish Lake and the Iron Horse Trail. These would be suitable to be in the Smoky Lake Tourism Company development strategy.

A full list of County owned parcels is in Appendix C.

### 3.5 Regional Competitors

All the County's neighbouring municipalities hold and are actively marketing serviced land parcels, although sales are slow.

Lamont County has commercial, industrial and heavy industrial lands for sale, adjacent to rail lines and for their vacant commercial lands, municipal services are in place or in close proximity. There is a unique process for the heavy industrial lands in that landowners can register with the Lamont County their interest in selling to heavy industrial investors, the Lamont County maps those parcels and makes them available for potential investors to connect with directly for any sales.

Thorhild County has approximately 147 hectares (363 acres) of available land for both industrial and business park subdivisions northeast and just outside of the Hamlet of Thorhild. This land area is close to three phase power, existing municipal infrastructure and Alberta's Industrial Heartland. Commercial lots are also for sale. Any lots located east of Thorhild have access to Edmonton water.

Sturgeon County (near Redwater) has several private and publicly owned commercial and industrial subdivisions. Many of the private lots have full services and useable buildings, and there is a high vacancy rate. Redwater is also much closer to Alberta's Industrial Heartland market. The Town of Redwater offers a one year tax rebate for new builds/businesses.

Athabasca County encourages development in Athabasca County by offering a 50% rebate on the municipal portion of property tax bills. The development, which can be new build or upgrades to existing structures, must have an assessed value of over \$100,000.

Lac La Biche County has several development-ready areas available for small, medium and large commercial investment. Incentives are provided for local business owners to improve their facade and appearances. It can also be used to introduce new features and amenities that create interest, improve accessibility, enhance safety, and increase vibrancy, transforming places into spaces where people want to spend time. The program grants 20% to approved improvement costs, to a maximum of \$20,000.

St. Paul County, through STEP the regional economic development partnership, promotes opportunities within their region for investors. No specific land area or incentives are in play, however STEP has a mandate to attract and retain businesses.

Except for St. Paul County, the other neighbouring Counties have better proximity to larger markets (heavy industrial predominantly) than Smoky Lake County. Growth in St. Paul County has been in the Town of St. Paul, as a large service centre to the surrounding communities.

#### **4.0 County Resources and Budget**

Smoky Lake County's 2023-2025 Strategic Plan has identified several investment attraction relevant priorities. In the 2023-2024 Budget presentation, Council committed funds to the following activities and their alignment to the Strategic Plan priorities are noted:

Priority 1, 2, 3, 4: Contract a Lobby Consultant.

Priority 5: Investigate and participate in the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program.

Priority 2: Prepare market studies.

Priority 1: Review the 2013 Recreation Master Plan.

Not in Strategic Plan: Review County Economic Development.

Priority 2: Update the Land use Bylaw and Municipal Development Plan.

By department, the following activities are to be funded:

Administration: No costs budgeted to advance the 2023 strategic plan.

Operations: No New 2024 initiatives.

Planning and Development: Hanmore Lake Area Structure Plan, Land use Bylaw/Municipal Development Plan Review, and ACP Grant (Priority 2).

Economic Development: Funding for County specific economic development programs and advertising, Doctor recruitment and retention, and Regional Community Development Committee (RCDC)

Recreation and Culture Services: Heritage, Northern Lights Library, Parks in the Hamlets and Lakes, as well as other County properties.

Smoky Lake County currently has key positions vacant (CAO, P&D) in administration and Economic Development through RCDC.

#### **5.0 Suitable Sectors for Smoky Lake County**

Based on strategies, current direction, budgeted funds, entrepreneurial spirit (high number of small businesses), and education levels, Smoky Lake County should focus on the growth and development of agriculture and tourism.

##### **5.1 Agriculture**

Smoky Lake County has a high concentration of agricultural operations with 398 active producers, nearly 45,000 head of cattle, and 199,000 acres of cropland. These operations continue to evolve due to technology, demographics, and land management practices. Each of these areas is an opportunity for business growth for the producer and for the industry. Anecdotally, Smoky Lake County has a growing number of young producers (under 40) who are assuming responsibility for family farms or partnering in other ways to expand their operations.

In the SLC Strategic Plan Priority 2 includes this action: the Council will seek opportunities to enhance the agricultural culture of the Region through new and innovative partnerships that prioritize landowner needs, sustainable local foods.

Several SLC agricultural producers are conducting farm sales, farmers' market sales and supply to restaurants and retailers, and there is room for this market to expand. Current consumer preferences are expanding into the producer/consumer relationship arena, local food sourcing, and overall sustainable and secure food production.

Larger investment opportunities (pending landowner input as indicated by the priority) include seed cleaning, equipment manufacturing and repair, storage and transportation facilities, particularly rail line renewal on the County's west end.

Actions to take in this opportunity:

1. Producer engagement – identify business expansion opportunities for individual operations
2. Producer engagement – identify services and supports most needed by current producers
3. Producer engagement – assess collaborative or cooperative appetites with producers
4. Neighbour engagement – identify collaborative opportunities with surrounding Counties which would serve needs of SLC producers
5. Tourism Strategy Alignment – identify, in the business expansion opportunities, those that are also aligned to the visitor economy and could be pursued jointly as agritourism.

## 5.2 Tourism

Smoky Lake County, with its partners, has invested \$1.8 million into the Smoky Lake Tourism Company (SLTC) for the advancement of the tourism industry in Smoky Lake Region. With the execution of the SLTC business plan, the County will see increased assessments for private operations and increased user fee revenue from County owned and operated assets. Three asset developments that are priorities for Phase I of the VDEDS business plan are: Hutterite Colony Interpretive Centre, Smoky Lake Forest Nursery Interpretive Centre and Smoky Lake Museum redevelopment.

The VDEDS also has a marketing plan and investment attraction plan within. Executing the tourism plan as already defined should be sufficient to achieve tourism industry growth and development goals. The County's focus should be to accelerate the SLTC activation and to provide policies supporting tourism developments.

## 5.3 Energy

Smoky Lake County has 1.3 billion m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas reserves within its boundaries, consistent natural gas extraction activities and in 2022, oil production increased in the County by 63%.

Also relevant, is the investment in renewable energy infrastructure within the County, with the \$13 million Métis Crossing project built to supply 4.9MW of solar energy to the Alberta grid (a partnership between Métis Nation of Alberta, Smoky Lake County and Town of Smoky Lake).

Another solar project is in the planning stages for the east end of the County near Vilna, to provide 42MW of solar generated electricity.

Wind studies in the area have indicated low feasibility for large scale power generation.

A 2018 Geothermal energy study for Smoky Lake County indicated factors that may be detrimental to large-scale geothermal development. First, though the Devonian-aged strata are quite thick (1350m),

there are no previously identified productive geothermal formations present in the geological record. As well, most wells in the study area are drilled to depths less than 750m meaning that temperature readings are likely to have been influenced by the thermal conductivity of shallow rock layers, potential anomalous temperature readings, improper measurement techniques, or data entry errors and has led to an overestimation of the temperature potential in the region. This Study recommended that the County investigate the geothermal potential of localized Devonian-aged formations and gather temperature measurements from deeper than 1000m to fully understand the geothermal potential of the area (*italics for emphasis*). However, there may be opportunities for direct use technology in the region, for individual businesses or applications (grain producers, greenhouses, etc). (Terrapin Geothermics, 2018).

Energy investments tend to the major project level; however opportunities exist within Smoky Lake County which may prove viable for the County to meet carbon emission targets, support business greenhouse gas emission reduction and brand itself as a green or greener community. With the Provincial government stand on renewable projects and the lack of direct control the County has with oil and gas decisions, a wait and see position is recommended for investment attraction in the energy sector.

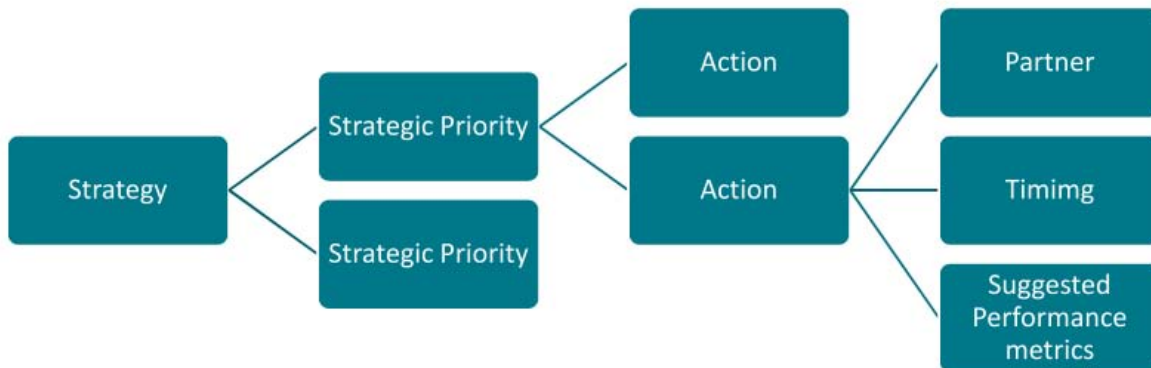
## 6.0 Attraction Strategy

The Strategic Plans are all designed to create growth and quality of life for Smoky Lake County. By following a simple flow, the aspirations of the plans can be achieved.

First is strategy and priorities (the Region has several plans and multiple priorities), then actions (some of which are described in the existing plans, some will be new) and ensuring resources are available including potential partners, determine when it should be done, and determine how the action be measured in terms of its ability to deliver the priorities.

To not weigh down the report, a separate matrix of actions is in Appendix A. This matrix notes the actions from the reviewed plans and other recommendations connected to Smoky Lake County's priorities. In addition to the report recommendations, the County may choose to plan to do some, or all the tactics associated with the plans (and some actions are duplicates of the recommended actions).

Possible partners, timing and performance metrics are also included.



### 6.1 What to Do?

In summary, Smoky Lake County's Strategic Plan identified two industries: tourism and agriculture for investment opportunities and three supporting quality of life components: housing, infrastructure, and recreation. These focus areas are consistent with the other plans reviewed, and this alignment is an opportunity for collaboration and possibly funding support.

The Smoky Lake County plan does not limit itself to these two industries but indicates it will "support growth in all industries". This approach might be difficult given the funding and resource constraints of the County and the ability to market and attract real opportunities with a generic "everyone welcome" strategy. The County should be an investment taker, not maker, when it comes to considering investment from industries outside of agriculture, tourism, and energy.

If the County chooses to actively pursue other opportunities, the recommendation is to focus on the 7 areas identified in 2013 RCDC Workshop Planning report, as they remain relevant today: retail and commercial, small business and entrepreneurship, service and supply companies, small scale and artisan production (agriculture), professional services, transportation and logistics providers, and tourism.

The analysis of the plans, the neighbours, current County budgets and resources and the larger economy indicates that 2024 is the year to be planning for future year initiatives and activities, with actions budgeted for and resources in the upcoming years. All of the Strategic Plans combined have “hundreds” of supporting tasks, not all of which can be or should be completed. A County review of the matrix is necessary, to weed out any those that are unlikely or not possible to execute due to resources and funding. Understanding the impact on the ability of the County to deliver on its Strategic Priorities if a task is deleted should be part of the review process.

As indicated in Section 5, activating the Smoky Lake Tourism Company is a high priority. The company is funded and has an executable plan, so getting resources in place is the final step to create this development vehicle.

In the agriculture sector, the focus should be on supporting business expansions and looking for larger or auxiliary (veterinary and value add) investments which support the producer needs. Policy review in this area should consider agricultural taxation policy, so expansion support is focussed on those developments which would create additional tax revenue (subsidiary commercial activities to the agricultural operation), versus providing support to agricultural developments which do not contribute to taxation revenue.

Energy, especially renewables, is a longer game. Any opportunity to conduct feasibility studies or investigations in the renewable sector is recommended, in order to be prepared for future opportunities.

In the supporting priorities, housing, infrastructure and recreation and associated actions will support the investment attraction aspirations.

Housing units, both number of and affordability of, continue to be a nationwide challenge. The County’s dwellings are over 90% single family dwellings. Servicing land and creating affordable housing or traditional housing units on County lands would be cost prohibitive. The recommendation is for the County to work with the Villages and Town on the creation of housing stock, particularly rental units and multi family housing.

Infrastructure needs for any development include water, sewer, high speed connectivity, power and gas. Agricultural business expansions may, and the VDEDS asset development will, require these services and will need to find funding to develop such infrastructure.

In the commercial/industrial parcels of the MDP future land use district map, power is the most available of the infrastructure needs. Again, servicing these sites in the current fiscal environment would rely on partnerships including Provincial investment and grants. The market currently does not indicate a need for these sites to be developed, as most neighbouring County’s have surplus serviced, and in some cases, incentivized lands available for sale.

The County’s priorities include a review of the Recreation Master Plan 2013 and engage the public on facility improvements and programs. Facilities in the County are limited to community halls and a curling rink (Hamlet of Bellis), with the bulk of recreational facilities within the Villages and Town. The review should be conducted jointly with the other Regional municipalities.

## 6.2 When is the Right Time?

The County has minimal capacity to support priority execution in 2024, therefore the creation of a 3 year action plan is recommended, and should include budget and resource requirements for the tasks identified. County lands have been sold grossing nearly \$750,000. Potentially some of the sale funds could be used to support future strategy execution.

The tourism strategy can begin execution in 2024, with the procurement of the resources to execute as the first step. As a member of the Municipally Controlled Corporation (MCC) one of the partners in the SLTC, the County should accelerate this opportunity as funding is in place to acquire the resources to execute the plan.

For the supporting activities in housing, infrastructure and recreation, the capacity of the Villages and Town will determine their engagement, as these supporting activities are recommended to be done jointly with the regional municipalities. If capacity exists, the recommended timeline for each is:

- Housing – immediate activation
- Infrastructure – project driven.
- Recreation – review 2013 Plan in 2024 and create 3-year action plan with budget and resources to begin execution in 2024.

## 6.3 Where to Do It?

The County's preferred locations for development are highway frontages, natural spaces, and agricultural lands. This aligns with both the tourism and agricultural opportunities, and highway frontage commercial development aligns with the Village of Vilna and Town preferences. If funds were available for direct land development by the County, the highway frontage adjacent to the Town of Smoky Lake and the lands near Waskatenau would be the priorities. The County does not own land near Vilna.

Area structure plans are in place for several natural (and historical) landscapes and would support tourism and other discretionary developments.

## 6.4 Who Does What?

For all opportunities, County Planning and Development policies and resources must be robust and be available to consult with developers often. A supportive development environment would include the County moving forward with perhaps unpopular opportunities, for the greater good of County sustainability and growth.

### Agriculture

The County should conduct the engagement with existing agricultural producers to identify their business expansions aspirations and impediments to those aspirations, as well as what supporting development would support their business sustainability.

Thus far, producers have shared informally with Council the need for veterinary services, agricultural equipment sales and repair, and their transportation challenges.

The County should consider an incubation and/or business support system, specific to agriculture production and supporting services. Consider partnering with the Chamber of Commerce, Community Futures, the Province and other resources.

#### Tourism

The Smoky Lake Tourism Company (SLTC) is mandated to pursue economic development in the visitor economy. Council should consider collaborating with the SLTC resources to deliver non-tourism sector economic development as a potential efficiency and would be a clear line of inquiry for all investors (one stop shop). This could be considered in the review of Economic Development and RCDC being contemplated by the County.

#### Supports

Housing should be done jointly with the Villages and Town. Any direct investment in housing on County owned lands is not recommended due to the cost, lack of existing services and current County revenue constraints. There are some recreational land development opportunities, potentially seasonal sites however these will contribute minor levels of revenue to the County. They may allow for labour to be available with less housing infrastructure. If funds become available, housing development on County owned or acquired lands would need to consider proximity to services and if housing is the highest and best use for those lands.

#### Infrastructure

County to work with investors on infrastructure challenges, accessing grants and provincial supports where needed to support development, as well as SLTC defined infrastructure needs.

#### Recreation

County to recommend to the joint municipalities review of the 2013 Recreational master plan and assign actions within a time blocked plan from that review (three year or five year plan).

#### Labour

The County has cancelled its Rural Renewal Stream Designated Community Immigration project for 2024. With 100% of labour growth in Canada coming from immigrants, a reconsideration of the project and other immigrant friendly and attraction policies is recommended. Due to the lack of housing in the County, this is recommended as a joint municipal project. There are several organizations willing to partner with municipalities on immigrant attraction and welcoming activities. Labour is likely to be a need identified in the agriculture producer engagement work.

#### Other Opportunities

County, as managing partner of RCDC, to lead the review of RCDC and economic development in the Region, and identify how retail, small business, services, etc can be expanded and attracted using RCDC or as recommended, SLTC as a contractor, for these opportunities.

### 6.5 How?

The focus of the County funding and resources should be on revenue generating developments and opportunities.

This report was also to consider the effectiveness of incentives in attracting investment. A review of the literature on this topic and of actual programs recommends incentives be limited to property tax deferment or relief, as these types of incentives do not require use of the County's current capital. The amount of the incentive is driven by the future projection of the tax revenues for the development. If incentives are to be implemented in County policy, consideration should be given to both new development incentives and existing business expansions.

As mentioned, in the agricultural sector, certain business expansions may not create additional property tax revenues if they are deemed agricultural developments only.

## **7.0 Marketing Deliverable**

### **7.1 Branding**

In this report, brand is not logos, it is the way the County is perceived, by potential investors (although logos and images may be created as part of brand development). Branding for the County's investment attraction activities is informed by the Vision and Mission presented in the 2023-2024 Budget. The terms in each of these statements aligns with the recommendations for investment activities in this report:

**Vision** - Leading the way in positive growth with healthy, sustainable, rural living.

**Mission** - Smoky Lake County strives for collaboration and excellence in the provision of transparent and fiscally responsible governance and services.

Essentially, a brand manages the gap between reality and perception, succinctly put "say what you do and do what you say" and they are built on a strategic foundation (Strategic Plan).

With the vision to "lead the way", the County commits to creative and innovative ways to ensure growth and healthy, sustainable, rural living are realized. Examples of this leadership is the Smoky Lake Tourism Company, an entity created by the Town, County and Metis Nation of Alberta, of which there is no comparable entity in North America.

As collaborators, the County knows it must work with others (residents, municipal partners, provincial and federal governments, and investors), transparently and responsibly, while focusing on its municipal purposes (Alberta MGA):

- (a) to provide good government,
  - (a.1) to foster the well-being of the environment,
  - (a.2) to foster the economic development of the municipality,
- (b) to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality,
- (c) to develop and maintain safe and viable communities, and
- (d) to work collaboratively with neighbouring municipalities to plan, deliver and fund intermunicipal services

With these attributes in mind, suggested branding ideas for investment attraction (including business expansion) are:

“We Grow our Own” – this could be talent, food, businesses.

“Guided Growth” – the transparency and collaboration the County commits to with developers.

“Right Place, Right Time, Right Investments” – that the right investments are pursued when the resources and budgets are available to do so.

Design elements should align to the Smoky Lake County logo – red and blue, stylized writing



## **7.2 Targeted Marketing Campaign**

The County will decide on which recommendations to plan, resource and budget for in 2024. Marketing recommendations are included here to be ready to support the planning outcomes. These are general guidelines and specific tactics are to be created after the County has decided which actions they will resource and fund.

### **Agriculture - Marketing Activities**

This campaign is focussed on getting existing County producers engaged in the planning of the investment attraction for agriculture. In two parts, producers would be approached on their business aspirations and supporting service needs, then the business support program for the producer could be implemented and the supporting service attraction activities commence. (pending budget and resource availability). Until the funds and resources are committed, no engagement or surveys should be undertaken as it would set expectations of support and change, which may not be doable.

To align with the recommendations, marketing tactics include:

1. Market producer engagement for business expansion needs via social media, utility inserts, local news outlets as well as personal invitations.
2. Engagement sessions to include individual conversations, group workshops, open houses and online surveys.
3. Market producer engagement for support services via social media, utility inserts, local news outlets as well as personal invitations.
4. Once producer expansion ideas are gathered and the support plan created (with budget and resources), market County services to producers via direct email to round 1 engaged producers, plus wider marketing of the business development services.
5. For the support services, engage resource to seek out companies and organizations who provide the desired services to producers in other communities and attract those organizations with the

market opportunity, collaborative nature of the County and potential incentives as defined in policy.

#### Tourism

SLTC to action the marketing plan from the VEDS business plan (v.6). County role is to compound the marketing efforts through their channels and connections.

#### Energy

For renewable energy, advocacy of Smoky Lake County as a natural site for solar installations due to availability of marginal agricultural lands in some areas, but still viable for solar projects. This advocacy should be a partnership between all the municipalities and be contracted to an industry expert with a solid industry network to attract potential project developers.

A general investment toolkit should be branded and include:

- Access to GIS tools for infrastructure and land capability maps – encourage a “pre approval” of access to types of investors to expedite access to the GIS information (currently requires 4 municipal approvals).
- Transportation statistics – County Transportation Profile
- Population rates and trends – County Investment Profile
- Educational levels – County Investment Profile
- Incentives - Policies

The Alberta HUB Smoky Lake County Lifestyle, Investment, Agriculture, and Transportation Profiles contain much of this information and can be enhanced by further content. These profiles are available at <https://albertahub.com/smoky-lake-County/> and can be edited through Alberta HUB.

#### Focused Toolkits

Agriculture Service Support Investors – include in the toolkit detailed information on producers by type and location, transportation corridors including County Road restrictions, infrastructure proximity, and community information (schools, recreation, healthcare, etc).

Tourism – SLTC to define toolkit – recommend including market proximity and demographics, supports from other entities (Travel Alberta, Travel Lakeland, Government of Alberta), existing operations, links, and County plans or studies (trail study for example).

**Appendix A: Actions for Priorities from Each Plan – Information only**

SLC Priority	Source of action:	Action	Partners Funding Resources	Timing	Performance Measures
Priority 1	SLC SP	The County will review the Smoky Lake Regional Receptions Master plan, dated March 2023, in the context of 2023 and develop a program for the public to provide input respecting facility improvements and desired programs.	JMM Public Consultant Grants for action execution	Fall 2024 (if JMM agree)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Plan reviewed - % complete</li> <li>2. Strategy created - % complete</li> <li>3. Strategy execution – within the Recreational strategy to included measures for the activities within the Strategy</li> </ol>
Priority 1	SLC SP	Lobby for veterinary, health, courthouse	Council Advocate	Fall 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contract Advocate</li> <li>2. Performance Measures for Advocacy: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Summary of issues created – % completion</li> <li>b. Effective networking and contacts - % of high probability of support</li> <li>c. assessing legislative success - subjective</li> <li>d. public opinion shifts – surveys</li> <li>e. return on investment &gt;0, provide insights into the cost-effectiveness of the campaign</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Priority 1	SLC SP	The County will examine the possibility of introducing incentives and/or partnership opportunities to foster the growth of business and industry development in the Region.	Administration	2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tax Incentive Policy - % complete</li> <li>2. Use of Policy – number of new developments attracted by tax incentive policy</li> <li>3. Financial analysis – deferred revenue compared to increase in tax assessment total for County</li> </ol>
Priority 2	SLC SP	The County will review potential opportunities for highest and best use of Municipal property currently vacant and dispose of the lands at fair market value. Some land may be sold on condition to assist in the undertaking development within a specified time frame.	Administration Investment Attraction Resource (commission based)	2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prepare attraction toolkit and marketing materials - % complete</li> <li>2. Contract Commissioned Attraction Resource - % complete</li> </ol>

SLC Priority	Source of action:	Action	Partners Funding Resources	Timing	Performance Measures
		Sale of municipal land holdings to be considered in creating additional investment opportunities and to assist desirable development opportunities			3. Measure contractor performance – number of developments created through their efforts
Priority 5	SLC SP	Apply to the Provincial Government to become a Designated Community – Council is committed to researching and successfully applying to the Province to become a Rural Renewal Stream Designated Community. <b>Project Cancelled in 2023 Budget – recommend reconsidering once Housing strategy is underway.</b>	Consultant Administration Businesses JMM Workforce Attraction and Retention Partnership Alberta Advantage Immigration Program (AAIP)	2025	1. Designation received 2. Number of immigrants (international) added to population 3. Include in this work, inter provincial attraction – number of Canadians relocating from other provinces
Priority 2	SLC SP	The County will undertake a marketing analysis to determine the needs of the Region. The Council will also consider options to promote the construction of diverse housing through the use of specific policy frameworks, investment, partnership, and possible subsidization to achieve this goal.	JMM	2025	1. Joint Housing committee established (if it is not, County's influence on housing starts will be minimal) 2. Grants received 3. Number of housing units built/retrofit through Municipal projects 4. Feedback from developers - >75% positive on planning and development policies and ease of doing business scores
Priority 2	SLC	Landowner needs	Consultant SLTC Chamber Grants AFSC Community Futures Province	2025	1. Landowner engagement plan finalized 2. Consultant engaged 3. Landowner engagements - % complete as per plan 4. Strategy created 5. Budget, resources in place 6. Actions undertaken – number of support engagements by resources with producers

SLC Priority	Source of action:	Action	Partners Funding Resources	Timing	Performance Measures
	SLC	Sustainable Local food investment	Consultant SLTC Sustainable Food Org's Grants	2026	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strategy created</li> <li>2. Strategy executed</li> <li>3. \$ of local food investment (private and public)</li> </ol>
	SLC	Grow local ownership and entrepreneurship	Economic Development Committee Chamber	2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create business incubation system</li> <li>2. Quantify current local ownership and target</li> <li>3. Measure system success against target</li> </ol>
	SLC	Create skilled workforce	Economic Development Committee Post Secondary Provincial Government	2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. With producer and business engagement, determine workforce needs</li> <li>2. Engage with PSI to create curriculum for local enrollment</li> <li>3. Number of local residents filling skills gaps with employers</li> </ol>
	SLC	Value Added development	Economic Development Committee Post Secondary	2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agriculture Value Add – with the investment resource, take producer engagement feedback on support services and action plan to attract those opportunities to County – number of opportunities realized</li> </ol>
	SLC	Sustained businesses through population growth	See Rural Renewal action		
The following sections are the recommended tasks and actions associated with the other Regional strategies reviewed, included for County consideration to action:					
	TDZ	Take full advantage of the possibilities for tourism development offered by the zone's considerable natural assets, particularly The Iron Horse Trail, which connects 10 municipalities and is a vital asset for the TDZ			
	TDZ	Significantly increase the number of tourism experiences available to visitors during the shoulder and winter seasons.			

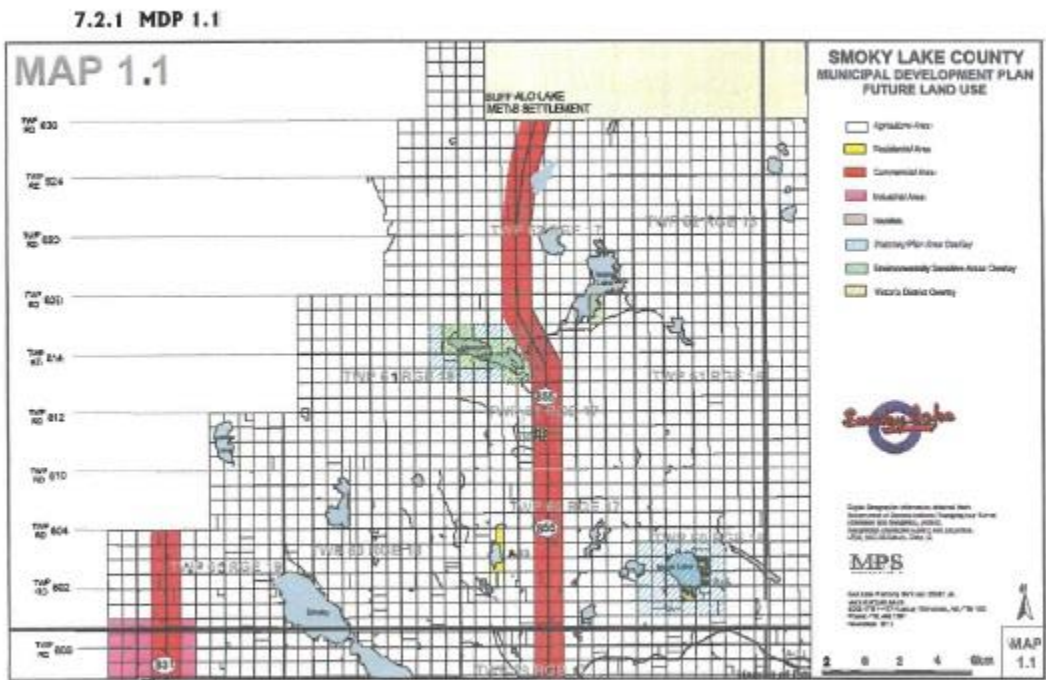
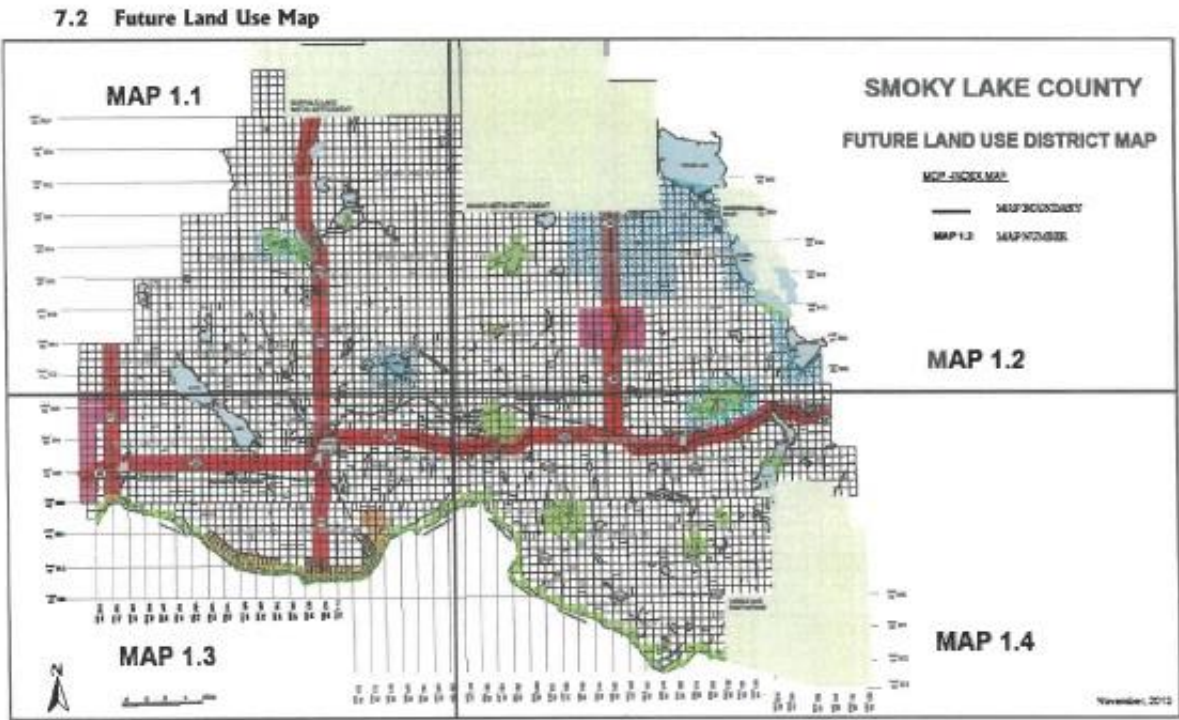
SLC Priority	Source of action:	Action	Partners Funding Resources	Timing	Performance Measures
	TDZ	Enhance collaboration between municipalities and tourism partners, and encourage stakeholders to think holistically regarding destination development and promotion of the TDZ (particularly by focusing on complementary development of the seven primary clusters identified in this report and by developing a cohesive brand for the zone)			
	TDZ	Increase and improve broadband/mobile infrastructure throughout the zone, thus empowering tourism businesses and operators, as well as facilitating a better experience for visitors navigating the TDZ or looking to share details of their trip			
	VDEDS	Invest in assets - initially acquire tourism assets to improve the tourism system in the Region.			
	VDEDS	The percentage of assets owned by the Corporation declines as private investors enter the growing market and operate the assets independently.			
	VDEDS	For larger assets unlikely to attract private owner/operators, the Corporation retains an equity position (ownership, operations, as asset requires). Investing in assets and then leveraging the assets to access additional financing, the tourism assets can grow and develop			
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Housing Diversity and Affordability Initiative through partnerships with developers and accessing grants that increase opportunities for ownership, as well as short-term and long-term rental.			
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Develop policies, support, and partnerships that improve access to regional transportation.			

SLC Priority	Source of action:	Action	Partners Funding Resources	Timing	Performance Measures
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Strategically invest to support new families' needs regarding those special loved ones in our lives, such as daycare and dog parks.			
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Work with tourism partners to encourage networking within the Region's tourism sector.			
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Support the development of tourism products to improve awareness and visitation of the Region's cultural and historic assets.			
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Develop rural water systems and highway service capacity.			
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Provide better support and resources to attract talented people and grow our economic development personnel capacity.			
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Partner with local chambers and other organizations to provide training to business owners, administrators, elected officials, entrepreneurs and others about the basic and advanced business success strategies and practices.			
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Develop four-season focused activities and experiences that also complement tourism growth initiatives but focus on the year-round quality of life opportunities of the Region.			
	13 Ways Quality of Life	Improve recreational diversity through the development of walking trails, cross country skiing, better boating, and lake access, and e-bike access			
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Encourage "buy local" campaigns.			

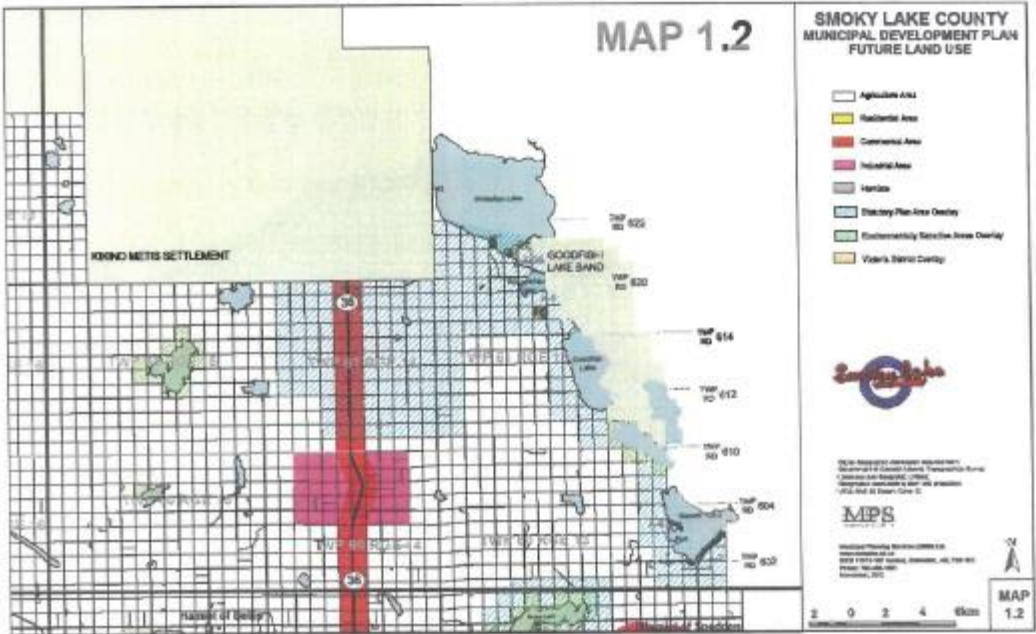
SLC Priority	Source of action:	Action	Partners Funding Resources	Timing	Performance Measures
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Develop an inventory of businesses in the Region.			
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Encourage procurement practices that support these businesses.			
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Develop an integrated marketing plan to attract visitors, businesses, and residents to the Region.			
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Work with the provincial government to ensure adequate signage is available along major transportation routes to increase visitation to regional tourism and recreation sites.			
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Develop and implement a marketing plan focussed on attracting residents to existing urban areas and waterfront properties.			
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Identify and communicate with former residents of the Region. Encourage people to “come home” to live or visit.			

SLC Priority	Source of action:	Action	Partners Funding Resources	Timing	Performance Measures
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Develop and implement a Regional “welcome package” for new and prospective residents based on a coherent regional identity.			
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Begin an internal marketing campaign to the residents of the Region, about the Region.			
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Target potential international and immigration populations considering relocating by leveraging our existing strengths through nuanced marketing strategies.			
	13 ways tasks Targeted Marketing Campaign	Develop a conversion strategy for visitors and tourists so they become residents.			
	13 Ways tasks Diversify the Regional Economy	Undertake a regional opportunity identification exercise for business attraction, retention, and expansion. Identify and pursue value-added agricultural opportunities in the Region. Ensure the identified opportunities are relevant and respond to regional and global trends.			
	13 ways tasks Grow Economic Development Capacity	Identify and eliminate impediments to economic development and business growth in the Region.			

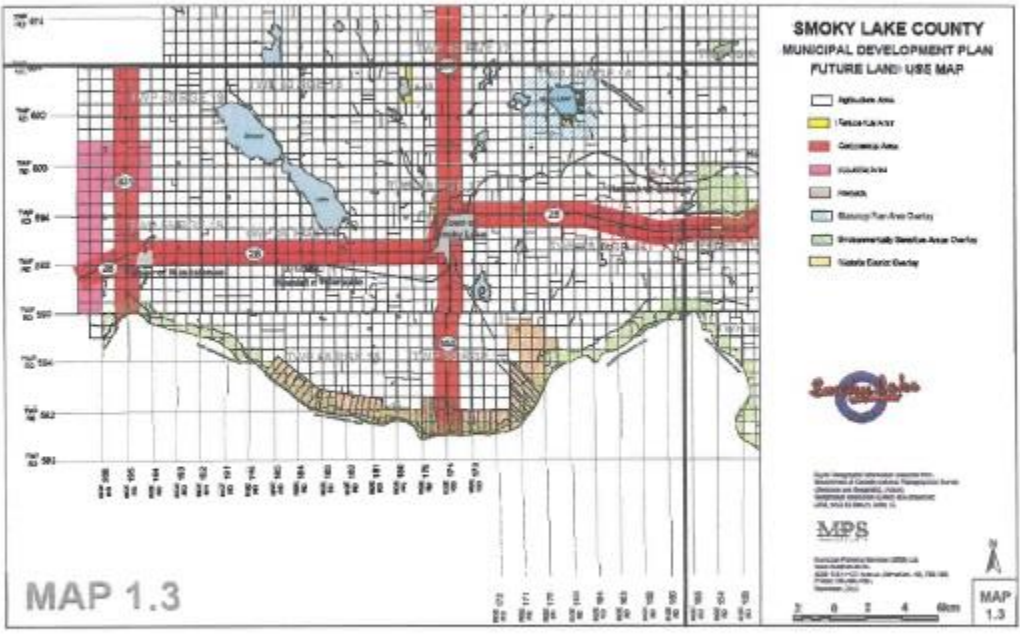
SLC Priority	Source of action:	Action	Partners Funding Resources	Timing	Performance Measures
	13 ways tasks Grow Economic Development Capacity	Encourage the development of outdoor recreation and adventure tourism products within the Region.			
	13 ways tasks Grow Economic Development Capacity	Targeted Business Development and Entrepreneurial Opportunity Identification.			
	13 ways tasks Grow Economic Development Capacity	Attract Recreation Amenities Dealership(s) such as quad, RV, and boating			
	13 ways tasks Grow Economic Development Capacity	Attract Horticulture and Alternative Agriculture Opportunities such as greenhouses, indigenous agriculture, and health related agricultural products.			
	13 ways tasks Grow Economic Development Capacity	Identify and support local home-based businesses and entrepreneurs to help them grow and locate in our commercial and downtown locations.			
	13 ways tasks Grow Economic Development Capacity	Establish an Economic Development Corporation.			



7.2.2 MDP 1.2



7.2.3 MDP 1.3



**SMOKY LAKE COUNTY  
MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
FUTURE LAND USE MAP**

Legend:

- Agriculture Area
- Residential Area
- Commercial Area
- Industrial Area
- Vacation
- Statutory Plan Area Overlay
- Environmentally Sensitive Area Overlay
- Historic District Overlay

**MAP 1.4**

Scale: 0 2 4 6 km

Map 1.4 is a detailed land use map of Smoky Lake County, Alberta. It shows various land use zones color-coded according to the legend. The map includes major roads like Highway 1, Highway 25, and Highway 59. The map is titled 'MAP 1.4' and includes a scale bar from 0 to 6 km. A legend on the right explains the color coding for different land use zones.

### Appendix C: County Owned Parcels

PROPERTY #	ROLL#	LEGAL DESCRIPTION	SIZE OF PARCEL	NOTES
1	12590230	NW-2-59-12-4	13.57 ACRES	NORTH SIDE OF SADDLE LAKE INDIAN RESERVE (RGE RD 122)
2	12592941	NE-29-59-12-4	2.02 ACRES	SOUTH OF HWY 28 ON RGE RD 124 (TAKEN FOR NUISANCE GROUND)
3	13602121	SW-21-60-13-4	1 ACRE	RGE RD 134 NORTH OF TWP RD 602
4	13602340	NE-23-60-13-4	136.30 ACRES	RGE RD 131 SOUTH OF TWP RD 604 ( <b>SALE PENDING</b> )
5	13613420	SW-34-61-13-4	127.60 ACRES	SOUTH SIDE OF WAYETENAW LAKE NORTH OF TWP RD 615 ( <b>SALE PENDING</b> )
6	13620810	SE-8-62-13-4	125.10 ACRES	SOUTH SIDE OF WHITEFISH LAKE
7	13620820	SW-8-62-13-4	153.50 ACRES	SOUTH SIDE OF WHITEFISH LAKE
8	14593042	NE-30-59-14-4	153.87 ACRES	ADJACENT TO IRONHORSE TRAIL EAST OF RGE RD 150 ( <b>QUAD CAMPGROUND - LEASED</b> )
9	14593240	NE-32-59-14-4	160 ACRES	RGE RD 144 & TWP RD 600 ( <b>SALE PENDING</b> )
10	15580911	SE-9-58-15-4	2 ACRES	WEST OF RGE RD 153 & NORTH OF TWP RD 581 (ACCESS ROAD FOR FORMER GRAVEL PIT)
12	15593521	SW-35-59-15-4	0.5 ACRES	EAST OF BELLIS & NORTH OF TWP RD 595A (NO ROAD ACCESS)
13	16582740	NE-27-58-16-4	2.5 ACRES	ADJACENT TO NORTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER, EAST OF RGE RD 163 (NO ROAD ACCESS)
14	16593341	PLAN 8120163 LOT 1	20.16 ACRES	NORTH OF TWP RD 595A & WEST OF RGE RD 163
15	16611220	SW-12-61-16-4	160 ACRES	NORTH OF TWP RD 604 & EAST OF RGE RD 155 (NO ROAD ACCESS - <b>LEASED</b> )
16	18591021	PLAN 3329ET	1 ACRES	EAST OF RGE RD 183 & SOUTH OF WARSPITE (LAND TAKEN FOR NUISANCE GROUND?)
17	18591037	PLAN 2562BS RLY 59	7.62 ACRES	ADJACENT TO IRONHORSE TRAIL IN WARSPITE
18	18612510	SE-25-61-18-4	107.35 ACRES	ADJACENT TO HANMORE LAKE WEST CAMPGROUND
19	18612541	NE-25-61-18-4	32.78 ACRES	NORTHWEST SIDE OF HANMORE LAKE
20	22010103	PLAN 1955CL BLOCK 1 LOT 3	3,900 SQUARE FEET	5026-49TH STREET SPEDDEN

21	22010118	PLAN 1955CL BLOCK 1 LOT 18	6,222 SQUARE FEET	4927 51 AVENUE SPEDDEN
22	27150412	PLAN 1039CL BLOCK 4 LOTS 12-14	13,637 SQUARE FEET	BELLIS NORTH OF PLAYGROUND
23	27150415	PLAN 1039CL BLOCK 4 LOTS 15 & 16	12,803 SQUARE FEET	BELLIS NORTH OF PLAYGROUND
24	40310109	PLAN 716CL BLOCK 1 LOT 9	3,900 SQUARE FEET	5004 50 ST WARSPITE
25	40310201	PLAN 716CL BLOCK 2 LOT 1	3,900 SQUARE FEET	5035 50 ST WARSPITE
26	40341501	PLAN 3474MC; OT	6.65 ACRES	WARSPITE
27	40451210	PLAN 0425044, BLOCK H, LOT 10A	12,800 SQUARE FEET	5104 49 AVE WARSPITE (NO PHYSICAL ROAD ACCESS - UNDEVELOPED ROAD PLAN)
28	40451211	PLAN 0425044, BLOCK H, LOT 11A	10,000 SQUARE FEET	5108 49 AVE WARSPITE (NO PHYSICAL ROAD ACCESS - UNDEVELOPED ROAD PLAN)
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>1,230.45 ACRES</b>	

#3.4



**RMA**  
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES  
of ALBERTA



Rural Alberta Municipalities

# RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT



## INTRODUCTION

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS A TEAM SPORT

Economic development has a broad mandate and can include any aspect of generating and sustaining the conditions for economic growth, resilience, and prosperity. This can be a daunting task, especially in small communities where economic opportunities can be constrained by geography, infrastructure access, and a small employment base.

*This is why economic development must be a team sport.*

By leveraging the capacity, insights, and resources of the broader community, municipalities can maximize their ability to generate economic opportunities and address economic pain points. This toolkit aims to provide rural economic development professionals, Council members, and municipal staff with guidance and tools for marshaling collective economic development efforts forward.

The Rural Economic Development Toolkit includes six chapters. Each chapter is made up of general guidance and lessons learned from other municipalities, a callout on some common municipal economic development pitfalls, and a tool designed to make managing collective economic development efforts easier. While some may find it helpful to use it as a step-by-step guidebook, it is anticipated that others will use it as more of a menu of ideas and tools to aid with aspects of delivering a municipal economic development program.



INTRODUCTION

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Chapter 1**  
Establishing Alignment on the Role of Economic Development ..... 04

**Chapter 2**  
Identifying Prospective Partners & Inviting Participation ..... 06

**Chapter 3**  
Structuring Committee or Partnership Commitments ..... 08

**Chapter 4**  
Building a Compelling Economic Narrative ..... 11

**Chapter 5**  
Mobilizing Committee Members & Project Partners ..... 14

**Chapter 6**  
Monitoring Impacts & Evaluating Outcomes ..... 16



## CHAPTER 1

# ESTABLISHING ALIGNMENT ON THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Chapter Overview

Economic development requires deep collaboration with the community. This collaboration, however, requires clear alignment among municipal leaders on the role of economic development and its value to the community.

*This chapter provides guidance on:*

1. Debunking economic development myths
2. Building Council alignment on the role and value of economic development
3. Identifying the right partnership structures

### Debunking Economic Development Myths

Common misconceptions about economic development can prevent municipal leadership from investing in economic development programs or realizing the full value of those investments. Common examples include:

**Myth 1: Economic development is solely about attracting the next big business to the area.**

While attracting new businesses is one way to spur economic growth, rural economic development must include strengthening the existing business community, including supporting local entrepreneurship, business development, and succession planning.

**Myth 2: Economic development is about replacing traditional local industries.**

Effective economic development typically builds on

established industries and resources, evolving to support sustainable growth and evolution of existing businesses rather than replacing or radically altering the local economic landscape.

**Myth 3: Economic development is an unnecessary cost in an already resource-constrained community.**

Investing in strategic economic development can result in a more stable municipal tax base from the business community over the long term, ensuring there are solid opportunities for employment and wealth generation in the community for years to come.

**Myth 4: The government should not interfere with private sector business.**

Government plays an important role in supporting the competitiveness of Canadian businesses through investing in research and development, infrastructure, and skill development.

Debunking these myths can be paramount to securing municipal resources and getting Council aligned on the role economic development can play in the community.

### Building Council Alignment on the Role & Value of Economic Development

To build the case for investing in municipal economic development, it can help to:


1. **Gather Intel** – Secure one-on-ones with Councillors to understand what they see as the biggest economic challenges and opportunities in the county.
2. **Set the Stage** – Build a baseline understanding of your community's economic makeup, how it's changed

over the past decade, and how it's expected to change over the coming decade, for better or worse.

3. **Establish a Role Model** – Identify another community that has successfully implemented an economic development program that addressed similar challenges or capitalized on similar opportunities to the ones your community is facing.
4. **Host a Workshop** – Prior to proposing investments in economic development, municipal leadership should have the opportunity to debate and prioritize the economic challenges they are looking to solve. Inviting a few local business leaders to join can help ground and focus the conversation around outcomes.
5. **Build a Targeted Proposal** – It is harder to secure broad-based investment in economic development than it is to secure funding for a targeted initiatives that align with Council priorities. When the value of economic development is unclear, it is easier to start by dedicating resources to a couple specific programs and partnerships.

Sharing examples of successful rural economic development initiatives can build Council alignment on where and how to invest in economic development. See the Rural Economic Development Inspiration Deck linked below (and in Appendix A) for an overview of what economic development can include and some example initiatives from other small municipalities.

## Toolkit

 Rural Economic Development Inspiration Deck

## Common Pitfall

### Waiting for a comprehensive strategy.

Many municipal economic development champions ask their Council for broad-based investment in economic development prior to proving its value. A full economic development strategy is not needed to start designing and delivering economic development projects or programs. Many of the most effective economic development efforts start with building alignment around a single issue and approach, pulling together the right partners, and proving some value or success in one domain before attempting to expand to others.

## Identifying the Right Partnership Structures

In addition to building internal alignment on what the objectives of economic development are, it is critical to build internal alignment on how it will be achieved. Small municipalities may struggle to get far in their economic development efforts without the knowledge, skills, networks, and backing of community partners.

Collaboration with community partners can take many forms. A few common partnership structures and the roles they play are outlined below.

### Economic Development Committee

A dedicated group of local business leaders that can help guide and deliver on a wide range of economic initiatives over multiple years. Examples roles include:

- Municipal advisory, including advising on key business challenges and solutions.
- Program delivery support, including helping engage with other business leaders.

### Project Delivery Partnership

A small set of partners with specific capabilities, capacity, and/or resources to help deliver on a single project or initiative over a set period. Example roles include:

- Service providers, such as infrastructure providers or educational program providers.
- Program delivery partners, such as industry associations whose membership have an active interest in a specific economic development project.

### Regional Advocacy Coalition

A coalition of municipalities with a similar set of challenges that can leverage their collective influence to secure policy change or funding from other levels of government. Examples roles include:

- Funding advocacy, including advocating for investment in specific sectors, programs, or types of infrastructure.
- Policy advocacy, including advocating for provincial policy change.

Selecting the right partners and partnership structures is critical to the success of economic development efforts. The subsequent chapters of this toolkit focus on crafting and leveraging these partnerships to maximize impact.



## CHAPTER 2

# IDENTIFYING PROSPECTIVE PARTNERS & INVITING PARTICIPATION

### Chapter Overview

Not all economic development partners are created equal. Establishing an economic development committee or project partners requires deliberate and proactive selection of participants to ensure a the right mix of skills, perspectives, and personalities are at the table.

*This chapter provides guidance on:*

1. Identifying the right partners
2. Articulating a compelling case for private sector participation
3. Inviting, vetting, and prioritizing prospective partners

### Identifying the Right Partners

When considering economic development partners and committee members, it is worth considering:

1. **Business Sector & Size Representation** – Representatives from different sectors and sizes of business can be helpful for understanding the range of issues impacting the local business community.
2. **Geographic Representation** – For counties with a wide geographic distribution, it can be helpful to aim to have representation from different physical locations within the county.
3. **Specialized Skills & Knowledge** – Crafting successful projects and programs requires individuals with

diverse business development, project development, and funding/financing skillsets.

4. **Embeddedness, Influence, and Trust** – Individuals and organizations that are well-trusted in the community and have significant influence (such as large landowners or employers) are likely to be stronger economic development partners. In addition, individuals that tend to be ‘connectors’, such as those that play an active role in industry associations, Boards of Directors, or local business associations are likely to be great assets.

When establishing an Economic Development Committee, participation cannot be left to chance. Identifying community leaders with the right influence, skills, perspectives, and networks takes time. It requires municipal economic development leaders do their homework to find the best candidates for specific partnership roles.

### Developing a Compelling Case for Private Sector Participation

Prior to inviting participation in a committee or project, it is important to identify the motivations of prospective partners and make a compelling case. Motivations for participating in municipal economic development can be wide-ranging.


Example motivations for committee participation include:

- Representing the needs of your business and your peers,
- Influencing municipal policy, project, and program priorities


- Expanding your personal and professional network,
- Developing new skills, knowledge, and insights into the local economy, and
- Building the profile of your business.

Financial compensation is offered by some communities to help cover the cost affiliated with attending meetings, participating in training, and contributing to program delivery. This compensation, however, is rarely the primary driver for participation. Most municipal economic development committees across Canada rely on volunteer participation, with compensation used to offset costs to participants.

For economic development program or project partnerships, benefits realization can be more complex. Below are some ideas on how to structure program or project partnership benefits.

 **Programmatic Partnerships**, including delivery partners for skills training, succession planning, or entrepreneurship programs benefit from

- *Increased profile or business development opportunities* – for instance, a law firm or financial institution may support the delivery of a succession planning program in exchange for getting in front of an audience of business owners that will eventually need legal and financial support to transition their business to new ownership.
- *Group purchasing or procurement opportunities* – for instance, an academic institution may support the development and delivery of a new education or skills training program if a large employer (or group of employers) expresses interest in sending a cohort of employees through that program as part of their training requirements.

 **Infrastructure Delivery Partnerships**, including infrastructure developers and/or operators with whom the municipality might partner to deliver affordable housing, digital infrastructure, or increased power supply benefit from:

- *Opportunities to secure a contract for infrastructure development of services once project funding is in place* – for instance, a construction company might partner with the municipality to help structure a downtown revitalization program knowing that there will be significant opportunities to bid on the work once funding is secured.
- *Opportunities to benefit from increased infrastructure provision once project is complete* – for instance,


a large industrial business might partner with a municipality to help fund increased power, water, or digital infrastructure if they are likely to be one of the main beneficiaries.

### Inviting, Vetting, and Prioritizing Prospective Partners

Municipal committees and partnerships typically require an open and fair process for soliciting participation from community members. While a transparent and fair process is needed, merely releasing an RFP for partners or broadly advertising committee roles is not reliable for finding effective partners or committee members. In most cases, the municipal lead will want to identify prospective partners or participants (based on the characteristics mentioned above) and extend a personal invitation to apply.

A simple expression of interest process is often sufficient to gather critical information from prospective partners or committee members. The information shared can then be used to vet and prioritize prospective partners or committee members. The tool linked below (and in Appendix B) includes an example expression of interest form and evaluation process for identifying and selecting economic development committee members.

#### Toolkit

-  [Example Expression of Interest Form & Response Evaluation Rubric](#)

#### Common Pitfall

##### Not being selective.

In attempt to solicit private sector partnership in a fair and open manner, municipalities can easily fall into a couple common traps, including:

- Relying solely on an open call for volunteers, partners, or committee members without proactively identifying individuals that would be a good fit for the role
- Not reaching out directly to prospective committee members or partners with a compelling case for participation
- Not being 'choosy' enough about selecting economic development partners in attempt to reach a specific committee size

The most effective economic development coalitions rely on careful selection of partners that will represent the diverse needs of the community.



## CHAPTER 3

# STRUCTURING COMMITTEE OR PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENTS

### Chapter Overview

Maximizing the impact from an economic development committee requires establishing an effective committee structure.

*This chapter provides guidance on setting up an economic development committee, including:*

1. Establishing committee roles and expectations
2. Defining committee parameters
3. Finalizing committee commitments

### Establishing Committee Roles & Expectations

An Economic Development Committee is a small collective of business, community, and municipal leaders that represent, steer, and advocate for their communities on economic development issues. Economic Development Committees take on activities in four broad areas:

1. **Information Gathering** - including gathering insight into the local economy, such as by monitoring industry trends in their sector or sharing new reports/insights from industry associations in which they are members. By following local business news and engaging with their peers, committee members are often a good source of insight on business trends and challenges.
2. **Decision Advocacy** - including advocating for policy decisions at the municipal and provincial level that align with the long-term economic interests of the community. In some cases, this may go as far as

developing high-level policy or funding proposals for consideration by Council.

3. **Communications & Engagement** – including liaising between municipal government, businesses, and the public by helping articulate the municipality's economic development goals and providing updates to their peers on the status of municipal economic development initiatives.
4. **Mobilization** – including playing a vital role in building participation in economic development initiatives. This might look like:
  - Using their contacts and knowledge to spread the word about local economic development initiatives.
  - Organizing or hosting community events that promote local businesses.
  - Connecting local organizations with business and funding opportunities.
  - Helping build coalitions between local businesses, academic institutions, and non-profits to support economic development projects.

Setting participant expectations early and often can ensure committee members seek out and identify these opportunities throughout their tenure.

### Defining Committee Parameters

#### Committee Size

Size matters for effective decision making. Economic Development Committees should be composed of 5-10 members. Committees on the higher end of this range

may be appropriate when the municipality has:

- A larger population.
- A diverse economy with several prominent industry sectors.
- An enthusiastic and relevant pool of potential committee members.
- Local academic, non-profit, or quasi-public organizations (e.g., airports, hospitals, universities) that meaningfully contribute to the local economy.

Committee members are typically appointed by the municipality and are expected to act in the best interests of the entire rural community, not as advocates for themselves or specific interest groups. Committee structure and membership should be reviewed at regular intervals and adjusted as necessary to meet the economic development needs and aspirations of the community.

### Member Composition

An economic development committee should include:

- One elected official and at least one municipal staff representative, such as an Economic Development Officer, CAO, or Planning Lead, to ensure alignment with local government policies and objectives.
- Business leaders from prominent local businesses, industries, or industry associations to provide valuable insights into economic trends and business challenges.
- Leaders from local academic, non-profit, or quasi-public organizations (e.g., airports, hospitals, universities) to bring expertise and connections that enhance the committee's understanding of economic drivers (if applicable).
- Leaders from local First Nations that share land, infrastructure, and/or economic development interests with the municipality (if applicable).

### Member Roles & Responsibilities

Member roles and responsibilities should include:

- **A Chair** - The Committee will elect a Chair who is responsible for overseeing meetings and helping resolve conflicts.
- **A Municipal Staff Representative** - This leader will be responsible for the administration of the committee, including:
  - Organizing sessions.
  - Setting agendas and preparing facilitation materials.

- Taking notes on key outcomes and action items and communicating them back to the committee at the conclusion of each session
- **A Municipal Councillor or Mayor** - This person will represent elected officials and be responsible to raise key issues or points of discussion with their peers.
- **Advisory Members** - All other committee members will be responsible for:
  - Providing input on committee items.
  - Volunteering to lead or contribute to specific committee initiatives or projects, particularly within their areas of expertise.

### Defining Committee Commitments

For a period of at least 3 months after inception, Economic Development Committees should meet monthly to:

- Align on committee protocols
- Establish committee priorities
- Develop an action plan in line with those priorities

Once established, Economic Development Committees typically settle into a quarterly meeting cadence, with additional ad-hoc meetings scheduled as needed.


A well-defined Terms of Reference (ToR) is critical to the success of an Economic Development Committee. It provides a clear framework for the Committee's operations and serves as a formal document that:

- **Clarifies Roles & Responsibilities** - The ToR ensures each member understands their specific duties and contributions, preventing misunderstandings and ensuring that everyone works toward the same goals.
- **Sets Expectations for Participation** - Members are expected to regularly attend meetings, actively participate, and contribute their expertise. The ToR holds them accountable to these commitments and specifies the duration ('term') of their membership.
- **Establishes Ethical & Confidentiality Standards** - The document lays out the ethical guidelines that members must adhere to, promoting transparency, integrity, and professionalism.
- **Provides a Basis for Accountability** - By signing the ToR, members agree to the expectations set forth, allowing for clear consequences if these standards are not met.
- **Establishes Issue Escalation & Resolution Protocols** - This includes identifying the conditions under which a committee member might be asked to relinquish

their role on the committee, such as due to regular absences.

Members are expected to read, agree to, and sign the ToR prior to beginning their term on the committee. The tool below (and in Appendix C) is an example Terms of Reference for a Municipal Economic Advisory Committee. A similar type of Terms of Reference document can be used to establish expectations for program and project partnerships or intermunicipal collaboration as well, with the content edited to reflect the roles and expectations affiliated with each partnership.

### Toolkit

 Example Committee Terms of Reference

### Common Pitfall

#### Setting a term that is too short.

To get the most out of an economic development committee, it is important to engage partners for enough time to foster strong group dynamics and a sense of shared purpose. A four-year term seems like a long time at the outset but can enable a team to fully gel and establish effective working relationships.





## CHAPTER 4

# BUILDING A COMPELLING ECONOMIC NARRATIVE

### Chapter Overview

Building and reinforcing a local economic identity can be a powerful tool in economic development, particularly when resources are limited.

*This chapter provides guidance on:*

1. Crafting a compelling economic narrative
2. Investing in focused communications efforts
3. Building a compelling case for investment

### Crafting a Compelling Economic Narrative

Compelling economic narratives are critical to building the vision for a community's growth and development and for spurring collective action. They can:

- Showcase your community as a place of opportunity, making it easier to attract investors, partners, prospective workers, and other stakeholders.
- Set your community apart within the region by highlighting what makes it unique.
- Guide local decision-makers in aligning planning, zoning, and policies with a clear economic vision.
- Foster collaboration among residents, businesses, and organizations toward shared economic goals.

A compelling economic narrative showcases the community's unique strengths can include:

- **Key Sectors & Cluster Information** - An overview of the primary sectors that drive the economy,

highlighting any specialized clusters of regional expertise.

- **Labour Data or Statistics** - A summary of the skills, knowledge, and experience of the local workforce, emphasizing specialized skillsets or workforce attributes.
- **Community Assets & Resources** - A map of key assets that support economic growth, including any natural assets (forests, minerals, water), intellectual property (local innovations, patents), or built infrastructure (industrial parks, transportation infrastructure).
- **Institutions & Associations** - An overview of influential organizations that support the local economy, such as academic institutions, hospitals, industry associations, or transportation authorities.
- **Policies & Programs** - An overview of unique policies or programs that actively support the local economy. This may include tax incentives, workforce development grants, or industry-specific programs that encourage local investment and entrepreneurship.

Grounding your economic narrative in real-life examples, specific organizations, and clear data can greatly enhance its impact and resonance. It makes your narrative:

- **Memorable** - Providing concrete examples help make the narrative memorable, ensuring it sticks with stakeholders long after they hear it.
- **Tangible** - Examples illustrate how the community's strengths translate into real value, helping ensure potential investors and partners can trust you.

- **Clear** - Referencing specific programs, initiatives, or organizations provides stakeholders with a clear point of entry to engage with the community.
- **A Source of Pride** - Showcasing local success stories builds pride and engagement among business and residents, encouraging them to support the narrative and advocate for their community.

#### Data Tools:

Statistics Canada and the Alberta Office of Information and Statistics are two of the most reliable sources of demographic, economic, and social statistics. Several dashboards have been created using these data sources to help make some of the economic and community data more accessible. These include:

The [Alberta Economic Dashboard](#) which includes a provincial overview of employment, demographic, and sector insights, as well as a [Regional View](#) that enables limited comparison between counties.

The [Townfolio Community Dashboard](#) and Benchmarking Tools provide a simple way to access community data and even embed it your municipal website at a cost.

#### Investing in Focused Communications Efforts

While a lot of municipal communications is focused on getting information broadly into the hands of citizens, most economic development communication is more akin to marketing. To be successful, it requires having a very targeted audience and purpose in mind.

Three questions can be used to help guide economic development teams to make better decisions about when, where, and how to communicate:

##### 1. What are we trying to achieve with this communication?

For instance, a sector profile may be designed to help attract new business to the area. This means it will need to not only provide sector information but provide insight on collaboration opportunities, market gaps, and potential partnership opportunities.

##### 2. Who is the audience for this communication?

For instance, if you are trying to promote career opportunities and quality of life in your community to attract skilled talent and retain current residents, your audience might include recent (or soon-to-be)

college graduates. Knowing your audience means being able to identify some specific contacts or organizations that will receive the communications.

##### 3. Is this the right channel for reaching this audience?

For instance, if you are trying to promote tourism in your community, it is important to know what channels tourists are using to find information, such as local travel blogs or social media sites. Updating content on your municipal website might not be the most effective use of communications resources if prospective tourists are primarily using social media to plan their trips.

#### How to Get the Word Out


Building and sharing economic narratives doesn't have to be expensive or comprehensive. Partnering on communications and engagement efforts can help keep costs low, and there are lots of free or low-cost tools that can aid with economic profile building, such as:

- **Economic Development Websites** - A dedicated landing page with a couple statistics, success stories, and a point of contact serves as an accessible hub for prospective investors, businesses, and residents.
- **Industry Profiles** - An industry profile can be developed more easily in collaboration with a regional industry association, trade group, or business. By partnering on the development of local industry profiles, municipalities can ensure they have a partner to help share the profile more widely.
- **Newsletters & Press Releases** - A short newsletter a couple times per year that highlights new business activity, local business support programs, and investment opportunities can help keep community members informed and engaged.
- **Conferences & Conventions** - Participating in industry events can enable meaningful networking with potential investors and partners, but it can also be costly. Municipalities can sometimes lower costs by partnering with local business leaders or neighbouring counties to send a small delegation or share the cost of sending an attendee.
- 4. **Community Engagement Events** - Hosting local events such as job fairs or networking mixers can help build connections in the local business community and match residents with new opportunities. Hosting events at local business sites is one way to keep venue costs low while raising the profile of a local employer.

Municipalities can quickly feel the pressure to be comprehensive in their approach to economic profile

building. Clear prioritization of projects and initiatives can ensure you are getting the greatest ‘bang-for-your-buck’ with limited economic development resources. It can also help economic development teams say ‘no’ to ideas or initiatives that might take resources away from the highest value projects. Check out the example Initiative Prioritization Tool linked below (and in Appendix D) for an example framework for choosing between competing communications priorities.

#### Toolkit

 [Example Initiative Prioritization Rubric](#)

### Building a Compelling Case for Investment

While many economic narratives are designed to showcase economic opportunities, there is also value in generating compelling narratives around the barriers that are limiting economic opportunity in the area. Building a compelling case for investment to address economic constraints can serve as a blueprint for decision-makers, helping to secure buy-in, funding, and resources.

A good business case:

1. **Clarifies the Problem.** This includes combining data and anecdotes to clearly articulate:
  - What specific infrastructure, funding, or program gaps exist
  - How many businesses and residents are impacted by the issue
  - How this compares to more well-served communities
2. **Demonstrates Impact.** This includes outlining the direct and indirect social and economic impacts of the gap, such as through:
  - The estimated number of businesses, residents, or employees impacted
  - Anecdotes that illustrate how individual residents or businesses are negatively affected by the gap (or could positively benefit from addressing it)
  - Survey data that illustrates impacts that are harder to quantify through central data sources
3. **Maps the Solution.** This includes identifying a feasible path forward and mapping out:
  - Key components of the solution and how they fit together
  - Clear, actionable steps to implement the

solution

- Specific partnerships and investments needed to implement the proposed solution
- How actions or investments will be timed or sequenced

4. **Specifies Roles, Partnership Models, and Governance Structures.** This includes identifying roles, responsibilities, and anticipated contributions of all parties involved in the project, such as:
  - Roles in project implementation and management
  - Financial and in-kind contributions agreed to by all parties (e.g. time, expertise, funds)
  - The governance structure that will be used to ensure accountability and effective collaboration among involved parties (e.g. project steering committee or oversight board, decision-making authorities)
5. **Articulates the Benefits.** This includes outlining the expected benefits of implementing the proposed solution and how success will be measured, such as:
  - The anticipated impact of the proposed solution on business productivity, growth, or resilience, considering both direct and indirect benefits
  - How the project will address the challenges identified in Step 1, including economic and social concerns
  - Example metrics for evaluating progress over time, including data or evidence that can be used to quantify these benefits or evaluate project impact

### Leveraging Collective Influence

Partnering with other regional municipalities to jointly build a case for infrastructure investment can be an effective way to stretch limited economic development resources and improve chances of success. This is because:

- **There is strength in numbers.** By uniting around shared infrastructure needs, rural municipalities can amplify their voices and demonstrate the broader, regional impact of investment
- **Funders, policy makers, and investment partners respond to a unified vision.** When municipalities align on a common goal, they send a clear message to stakeholders about the collective vision for regional development, making the case for investment more compelling.

## Common Pitfalls

### Getting stuck on data gaps.

Accessing reliable data in small communities can be tough and can become a barrier to developing a compelling business case. In the absence of reliable, centralized data, options available might include:

- Collecting a handful of data points (such as through interviews or survey responses) and using those to estimate population-wide impacts
- Triangulating insights from multiple sources (such as using total acres of crop production in the county and average provincial yields per acre to estimate county-wide crop yields)

### Over or under scoping the solution.

Proposing the right scale of solution is a bit of an art. If you scope your solution too small, it might not be ambitious and impactful enough to get the attention of funders and partners. On the other hand, if you scope the solution too big, the level of investment can feel out of line with the anticipated impact. One way to hit the scope 'sweet spot' is to ask: what is the lowest investment we could make to achieve 80% of our desired impact?

By asking this question, one RMA community abandoned a multi-million dollar proposal to improve the community's fibre optic network and scoped a program to support its businesses and homeowners in purchasing satellite-based web services. For a fraction of the cost, the community could quickly and effectively deploy high-speed internet access.





## CHAPTER 5

# MOBILIZING COMMITTEE MEMBERS & PROJECT PARTNERS

### Chapter Overview

Municipal economic development committees can play a much broader role than simply advising on business needs.

*This chapter provides guidance on how to effectively mobilize committee members for:*

1. Boosting participation in economic development programs
2. Aiding with investment attraction
3. Supporting municipal infrastructure projects

### Boosting Participation in Economic Development Programs

Economic development committees play a critical role in promoting participation in economic development programs, including programs for mentorship, succession planning, workforce development, or entrepreneurship. Specific roles that committee members can play, include:

- Conducting targeted outreach to relevant business owners/operators in their network that might benefit from the program.
- Sharing their personal experiences and reasons for participating or promoting participation.
- Identifying opportunities to partner with other local organizations (e.g., chambers of commerce or industry associations) to encourage participation from their members.

- Hosting program-specific events, such as networking or mentorship events at their place of business.
- Conducting ‘business walks’ or informal discussions with their peers and other community business owners to understand their needs and how to best support them.

To get the most out of mobilizing committee members to boost program participation, it is important to:

- Provide guidance on stakeholder types likely to see the most value from the program and why.
- Provide resources on the goals or objectives of the program, the scope and level of commitment it entails, and the anticipated outcomes of the program.
- Establish expectations of the committee member without being overly prescriptive about how to meet those expectations.

### Aiding with Investment Attraction

Community partners and business champions can also play a critical role in business attraction activities. Example roles for economic development committee members or partners include:

- Helping identify investment attraction targets, such as companies within their networks that they think would be a good fit for the community.
- Helping assemble the information necessary to make a compelling case to prospective businesses, including their own experience as a business owner in the community.
- Helping host incoming delegations, which includes

attending dinners or tours to make prospective business owners and investors feel welcome in the community.

In some cases, municipal economic developers can also leverage private sector business development efforts to support the wider economic development goals of the community. This might include:

- Partnering on a presence at a trade show or convention.
- Co-hosting business delegations with the municipality that private businesses have a vested interest in seeing land in the community.

### Supporting Municipal Infrastructure Projects

Mobilizing community partners to support municipal infrastructure projects can take several forms, including:

- Helping identify success stories and best practices from similar projects in other communities.
- Supporting the development of a funding proposal that highlights the economic and community benefits of the project.
- Engaging with the local business community to identify the beneficiaries of the project and their willingness to contribute to its delivery.
- Identifying community partners, such as industry associations, service providers, and local institutions that might partner on the delivery of a project.

Mobilizing private sector support for municipal infrastructure projects requires:

- Clarifying the ask of private sector partners.
- Providing guidance on the types of stakeholders that are most likely to benefit from the project.
- Identifying the entry point to participating in a project (such as participating in a survey or short introductory meeting).

Mobilizing committee members and private sector partners requires providing clear expectations on the role you are hoping your partners will play and the outcomes you are looking to achieve while leaving room for committee members and partners to figure out the best way to deliver. See the Key Questions for Scoping Partner Roles linked below (and in Appendix E) for some hints on how to establish clear roles for economic development committee members and delivery partners.

#### Toolkit



Key Questions for Scoping Committee Roles

#### Common Pitfall

##### Being too prescriptive.

When asking for community members or business owners to help with a municipal initiative, it can be tempting to lay out exactly *how* you want it done. This can limit trusted partners and committee members from exercising their judgement and finding ways to accomplish municipal goals in a way that feels unburdensome and authentic.

One RMA member learned this lesson when they asked Economic Development Committee members to aid with “Business Walks” to gather insights on business challenges facing the community. The initial process proposed was cumbersome and suggested a dedicated ‘script’ for discussions that felt inauthentic for committee members who were connecting with their peers and neighbours. After a couple weeks, the team went back to the basics of sharing the goals and timelines with committee members and getting them to ‘do it their way’. This boosted the capacity and enthusiasm of the committee to get out and gather insights.



## CHAPTER 6

# MONITORING IMPACTS & EVALUATING OUTCOMES

### Chapter Overview

The broad mandate of economic development initiatives, coupled with the long timelines for seeing results, can make it difficult to monitor progress and evaluate outcomes effectively.

*This chapter provides guidance on:*

1. Establishing metrics to meet your objectives
2. Setting up effective measurement systems
3. Combining metrics and stories for impact reporting

3. **Infrastructure Development** - Investing in physical infrastructure (roads, utilities) and community assets (cultural spaces) to improve livability, attracting businesses, new residents, and visitors.
4. **Entrepreneurship & Innovation Support** - Fostering entrepreneurship and supporting the development of small businesses to encourage innovation, resilience, and self-sustaining growth within the community.
5. **Investor & Business Attraction** - Attracting external investment and new businesses by promoting the community's strengths, incentives, and market opportunities, bringing capital and job opportunities to the area.

### Establishing Metrics to Meet Your Objectives

Metrics should align directly with your economic development objectives. Without this alignment, data collection can become burdensome as it doesn't provide actionable insight. Some examples of common economic development objectives include:

1. **Business Retention & Expansion** - Supporting the of growth, evolution, and resilience of existing businesses by providing resources, identifying potential barriers to growth, and creating a favourable environment to help local businesses thrive.
2. **Workforce Development** - Strengthening the skills and qualifications of the local workforce to meet employer demands, often in collaboration with local/regional educational institutions, training programs, and employers.

### Setting Performance Indicators

A lot of economic development initiatives will take a long time to see results. This is why it is important to collect both leading indicators (that measure actions being taken) and lagging indicators (that measure the outcomes of those actions).

Leading indicators typically take the form of activity or participation metrics, summarizing the types and number of activities completed, or the rate of participation in economic development programs or projects.

Lagging indicators measure outcomes or impacts after activities have taken place. They tell us whether the actions we are taking are resulting in the intended outcome. These can include direct outcomes affiliated with specific initiatives or second order impacts of economic development efforts, such as impacts on employment.

Some examples of leading and lagging indicators are outlined below.


Objectives	Leading Indicators		Lagging Indicators	
	Activity Metric	Participation Metric	Outcome Metric	Impact Metric
Business Retention & Expansion	Number of businesses identified as candidates for succession planning	Number of participants in succession planning program	Number of businesses successfully transferred to new ownership	Year-over-year business retention rates
Workforce Development	Number of training programs established	Number of participants in established training programs	Number of training program graduates employed in 6 months	Local unemployment rates
Infrastructure Development	Number of funding applications completed	Number of project partners secured	Funding secured for infrastructure projects	Number of businesses / residents impacted by new service delivered
Entrepreneurship & Innovation Support	Number of active entrepreneurship programs	Number of attendees at quarterly founders networking event	Number of program participants launching their own business	Year-over-year change in small business counts
Investor & Business Attraction	Number of leads generated	Number of meetings held with prospective investors	Financial investment in the community	Employment growth because of new businesses

To select the most relevant metrics for your municipality, you can ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the metric clearly tied to our objectives?
- Is it feasible to collect the data?

The Economic Evaluation Scorecard tool linked below (and in Appendix F) provides a wide selection of metrics or indicators that align with common economic development objects. It is meant to be used as a ‘cheat sheet’ to choose from or modify to establish a simple reporting framework for both regular operating updates (using leading indicators) and annual impact reporting (using lagging indicators).

#### Toolkit

 Economic Development Evaluation Scorecard

### Setting Up Effective Measurement Systems

To effectively monitor progress and evaluate outcomes, economic development teams need systems to reliably collect, organize, and analyze data. This section outlines key steps to establish an efficient and sustainable measurement framework.

First, reliable data sources must be identified. The

success of any measurement system hinges on access to accurate, cost-effective, and timely data. Common data sources include:

- **Municipal Administrative Data** - Examples include business licensing records, building permits, and property tax data.
- **Statistical Agencies** - Statistics Canada and the Alberta Office of Statistics and Information (OSI) provide social, labour, and economic data at no cost, but are sometimes time lagged (e.g. census data) or not at the appropriate geographic scale.
- **Partner Organizations** - Examples include information on business trends from local chambers of commerce or business associations, as well as program data from local training providers.

To augment these data sources, you could consider opportunities to:

- **Establish New Data Collection Protocols** - Leading indicators often don’t lend themselves to existing data sources. Establishing protocols for tracking and summarizing economic development activities (e.g., business walk logs) or participation in municipal programming (e.g., event registrations) can help bridge this gap.
- **Survey the Business Community** - Designing custom surveys can help fill gaps in existing data sources.

To maximize response rates and quantitative data, surveys should:

- Use multiple choice wherever possible
- Be simple and short (more than 5 minutes is a killer for response rates)

### Choosing a Format & Cadence That Works

To ensure data collection and reporting are manageable, it is important to define where data will be stored, how often it will be reviewed, and in what format it will be presented. Many municipalities opt for monthly operational reviews (to keep economic development top of mind) and a more in depth annual look at the outcomes of economic development efforts. A reporting cadence should be designed to match the frequency with which data or information can be meaningfully connected and acted upon. For example, leading indicators may require more frequent updates, while lagging indicators may only lend themselves to an annual or bi-annual review.

### Establishing Meaningful Targets

After setting your economic development objectives, there can be a lot of pressure to move directly to setting ambitious targets. Establishing a baseline for activity and participation metrics in the first year can help with setting realistic and achievable targets for staff.

While it is tempting to set ambitious targets for economic development outcomes and impacts (lagging indicators), these tend to be heavily impacted by outside forces, such as macro economic conditions or geopolitical forces. While these types of targets can be motivating, realizing them can rely on a mix of effort and luck. Setting relational targets can be one way to keep your efforts honest while acknowledging the environment in which you are operating (e.g. achieve higher crop yields across our agricultural sector than the provincial averages).

### Combining Metrics & Stories for Impact Reporting

Quantitative metrics provide a clear, objective picture of progress, but numbers alone don't capture the full impact of economic development efforts. Complementing metrics with compelling stories can make your results more relatable, memorable, and persuasive to a variety of audiences, from elected officials to community members. They do so by:

- **Humanizing the Data** - Metrics may show growth or improvement, but stories give data meaning by highlighting the people, businesses, and communities behind them.

- **Demonstrating Tangible Impact** - While metrics may reflect an increase in new businesses, a story about a local entrepreneur's impact in the community can help bring that statistic to life.
- **Strengthening Advocacy** - Stories can inspire action by appealing to emotions, helping secure buy-in for continued investment or new initiatives.

### Sources of Impactful Stories

Identifying and documenting meaningful anecdotes can be a straightforward and rewarding process. It might be as simple as connecting with enthusiastic program participants, highlighting key insights from business walks, or noting valuable conversations during a community event.



**[RMAAlberta.com](http://RMAAlberta.com)**

2510 Sparrow Drive,  
Nisku, Alberta  
T9E 8N5

Office: 825.319.2245