

SUCCESS GROWS HERE!

AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR LACOMBE COUNTY



CAPACITY
BUILDING



INVESTMENT
READINESS



MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATION



COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT



PURSuing
OPPORTUNITIES

*Bring life to Lacombe County’s development plans
by pursuing opportunities.*

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3	Analysis	16
Introduction	3	Strategy	18
The Economy	3	Capacity Building	20
The Strategic Context	4	Investment Readiness	22
Methodology	5	Marketing + Communication	24
Key Findings and Highlights 2023	8	Community Engagement	26
Investment Readiness	10	Pursue Opportunities	28
Industrial Roundtables	11	2026 Update	29
Business Survey	12	Key Finding and Highlights 2026	32
Resident Survey	13	Implementation Plan	34
Council Workshop	15	Performance Measurement	40

Lacombe County acknowledges that our municipality is situated on Treaty 6 lands, the traditional and ancestral territory of the peoples of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux and Nakota Sioux, as well as the Métis. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit and all First Peoples of Canada whose footsteps have marked these lands for generations. We respect the histories, languages, and cultures of Indigenous peoples whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bring life to Lacombe County's development plans by pursuing opportunities.

“Success grows here; through empowering diverse, innovative and community-minded industry and entrepreneurs.”

- » **Attract** new businesses and residents
- » **Monitor** satisfaction of business community
- » **Maintain** competitive tax rates
- » **Increase** population to support workforce
- » **Recognize** entrepreneurial leadership

Lacombe County Strategic Plan Our Business, pg.6 2022-2027

Introduction

Lacombe County is an attractive, balanced and progressive community, situated in the heart of Central Alberta. It is a diverse municipality with a variety of agricultural operations, industrial and commercial developments and small businesses, as well as vibrant petrochemical and oil and gas industries.

The current population in Lacombe County is 10,791. The County has demonstrated forward thinking, making consistent and significant investments in infrastructure to support healthy growth in the region.

The Economy

With numerous post-secondary institutions nearby, including Burman University in the City of Lacombe, Red Deer Polytechnic and Olds College, Lacombe County features a skilled and educated labour force. Lacombe County also boasts a variety of recreational amenities, including beaches, lakes, trail systems, parks, natural areas and golf courses.

The County has a range of unique opportunities, including recreation areas, the QEII Corridor, urban neighbors,

petrochemical facilities and charming heritage villages.

Lacombe County's economic strength can be attributed to its strategic geographic location as well as existing clustering policies that were updated in the last Municipal Development Plan.

By focusing industrial and commercial development into clusters along the principal transportation routes, the County has experienced continual growth and diversification. In 2021, commercial and industrial development contributed 56% to the County's tax base with an assessment value of \$3.78B.

The clustering policy serves to strategically protect agricultural lands and ensure continued prosperity for the agricultural sector. Agriculture is the dominant industry and is integral to the region's economic, social, and environmental identity. Although the County is currently experiencing considerable growth and development, there is a need for balance to preserve the existing rural lifestyle.

Investment and support for existing businesses, workforce attraction and development, and wealth generation will be prioritized.

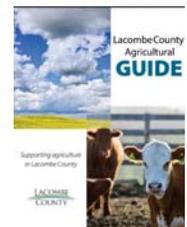
CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN



MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN



AGRICULTURE GUIDE



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GUIDE



The Strategic Context

A lot of important work has been done in the County in preparation for this strategy, including the hiring of an Economic Development Officer, an updated Municipal Development Plan, Land Use Bylaw, and the Agriculture and Business Development Guides. The County was also recently selected to participate in the 2022 Municipal Energy Champions (MEC) program.

Until recently, the County's economic development was primarily a planning and development function, with the Municipal Development Plan serving as the core strategic document. This new strategy seeks to build on the Municipal Development Plan, providing proactive leadership that will bring the plan to life.

The County's Municipal Development Plan also sets out a clear and shared vision for the future growth of Lacombe County. Reviewed in 2017, the Municipal Development Plan works in conjunction with the Land Use Bylaw and emphasizes the importance of agriculture while encouraging sustainable and structured economic growth and development within County borders.

While the region has an evolving workforce with higher rates of apprenticeship and trades certification than other parts of the province, the County has identified a need for continued workforce attraction.

The top occupations in the County are management, trades, transport and equipment. The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) sector is expected to be an area of upcoming growth.

Quality of life is high compared to similar

communities. Access to amenities, unique heritage, scenic natural areas and a plethora of recreational opportunities make Lacombe County a great place to live and visit. Lacombe Regional Tourism has over 50 partners and looks after marketing and advertising in the region as a tourism destination. Their collaborative approach demonstrates the benefit of partnerships and regional cooperation, making Lacombe County stand out as a great place to “find yourself, explore and indulge”.

Lacombe County's corporate mission is to “build a safe and vibrant community through leadership, innovation, and healthy relationships”, with supporting businesses identified as a key priority.

“Success grows here; through empowering diverse, innovative and community-minded industry and entrepreneurs.”

- » **Attract** new businesses and residents
- » **Monitor** satisfaction of the business community
- » **Maintain** competitive tax rates
- » **Increase** population to support workforce requirements
- » **Recognize** entrepreneurial leadership in the community

Lacombe County Strategic Plan, Our Business, pg.6
2022-2027

To bring the corporate mission to life, the County needs to proactively engage the business community and evolve the economic development function from its land use planning roots into an energizing force by pursuing opportunities.

“We are proud of our home – of Lacombe County – for its beautiful natural and rural environment, its convenient location that fosters growth and diversification, and its hardworking residents and business owners. The Municipal Development Plan reflects the vision and defines the priorities of our community. ”

Lacombe County Council

METHODOLOGY

This Strategy is the result of a comprehensive process that balances data with stakeholder engagement, primary and secondary research.

Phase 1: The first phase started with a tour of the County followed by a staff training workshop which solidified project goals. A survey was developed and administered to establish a baseline of investment readiness. To prepare for the research during phase 2, a thorough document review and environmental scan were conducted. All the data was compiled into a background report, informing the strategy. This data was also used to create the business and resident surveys conducted during phase 2. An economic profile was developed, including an overview of the population, demographics, education, workforce, industry, and business trends and their potential implications for the economic landscape.

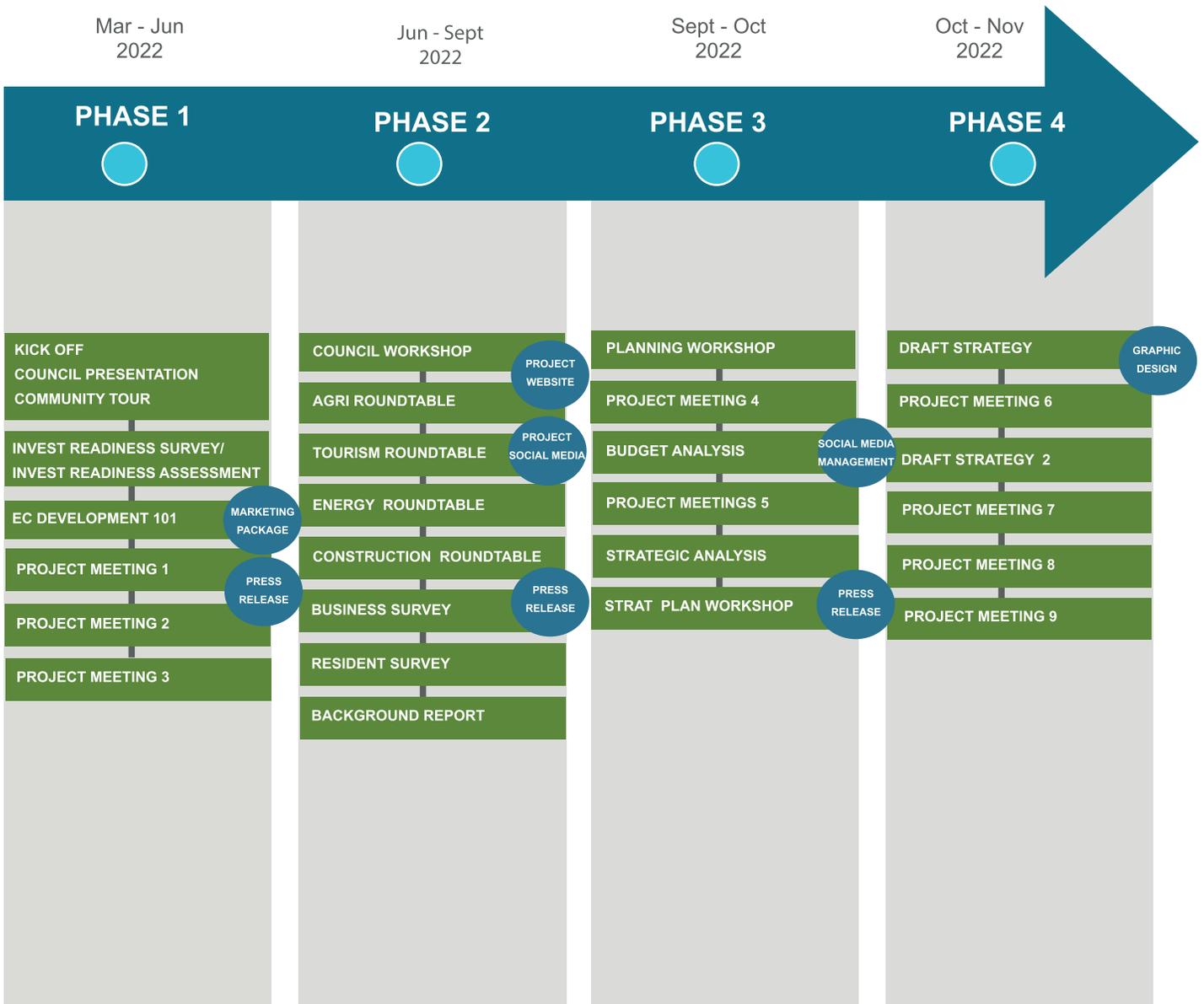
Next, a marketing and communications infrastructure was developed to engage the business community and the public. Externally, a project brand guide and logo around the concept of 'Reinventing Rural' and corresponding splash page, www.reinventrural.com was created. Other tools included a project photobank, Eventbrite account, and social media channels with ad accounts for both Facebook and Instagram with a total reach of 146 followers, 18 posts, and 13 ads.

Phase 2: The transition to phase 2 started with a full-day workshop with Council and senior management to establish a shared understanding of economic development and identify key priorities. A press release was developed to set the public narrative of the strategy development process and industry roundtables were scheduled and promoted for agriculture, tourism, energy, and construction. Forty two businesses were registered. A business survey (58 respondents) was conducted by telephone, email and social media between May and September 2022 to gather insights into challenges and opportunities facing the County. A resident survey was also conducted (333 respondents) between June and September via email and social media to gather insight into public priorities.



Phase 3: A planning workshop was held on September 8, 2022 to review key findings and determine core ideas for development. A comparative analysis of comparably sized County economic development budgets was conducted to determine annual economic development spending. A SOARR assessment, (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, risks, and results), was performed to allocate findings from earlier phases into an analytical framework to help inform strategy development. A compilation of key strategic inputs, including community engagement and survey results was completed.

Phase 4: A draft strategy and implementation plan was developed, including a vision, strategic priorities, performance framework, and budget. An internal review of the draft resulted in constructive feedback and led to significant redevelopment of the strategy. A study of future land use policies and plans across the County resulted in a more community-oriented approach to economic development. The outcome is a strategy that clearly emphasizes the role of the Municipal Development Plan in guiding economic development. The revised strategy was submitted in November 2022.



“We place a high value on being a cooperative supporter of local business. The County’s clear direction through its Municipal Development Plan and Strategic Plan – and now through our Economic Development Strategy – will encourage prospective businesses to set up shop here in the region.”

Tim Timmons, County Manager



KEY FINDINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS

This section provides context for Lacombe County, including a summary of key findings from primary and secondary research as well as consultation results.

An economic summary is presented here for Lacombe County as a whole, including demographics, income, education, employment, industry and quality of life attributes of the community. Results are based on Statistics Canada’s Census Profiles, National Household Survey, and the Alberta Regional Dashboard.

Median Individual income

\$41,200



Median household income

\$89,000

Population change over 10 years	4.5%
Labourforce Participation rates	67%
Unemployment rate	8.8%
Labourforce (15-64)	6,800
Emerging Labourforce (15-24)	1,215
Primary Labourforce (20-64)	6,130
Mature Labourforce (55+)	1,830
0-14 as percentage of the total pop.	19%
Labourforce as % of the total pop.	65%
65+ as percentage of the total pop.	16%

TARGET INDUSTRIES

VALUE-ADDED
AGRICULTURE



CONSTRUCTION



OIL & GAS



HEALTH CARE





40

18%

Population
10,791

Median Age

Residents Arrived within 5 yrs.

HIGHEST EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

Post-secondary



33%

High School



49%

Avg House Size



Total Private Dwellings
4,616

TOP OCCUPATIONS

#1

MANAGEMENT
21%
Of Labourforce

#2

TRADES + TRANSPORT
19%
Of Labourforce

#3

BUSINESS, FINANCE, ADMIN
21%
Of Labourforce

#4

NATURAL RESOURCES + AGRICULTURE
13%
Of Labourforce

#5

SALES + SERVICE
12%
Of Labourforce

IMMIGRANTS

- 76% of immigrants are 3rd generation
- 17% of immigrants are 2nd generation
- 7% of immigrants are 1st generation



Employed
62%

Self-Employed
36%

Other
2%

INVESTMENT READINESS

Investment readiness is the first step to supporting investment in the community. It is about being ready to respond to investment inquiries from entrepreneurs, existing businesses, and potential investors. Investment readiness should remain a priority.

At the outset of the strategic planning process, we conducted a preliminary investment readiness assessment to assist the Economic Development Officer in identifying the key success factors in supporting investment in the community. The assessment scorecard is a tool to guide investment readiness action planning, while providing a benchmark for tracking progress.

Community Investment Readiness Survey Categories

Section 1: Capacity and Networks

Communities need to have the right people working collectively together to build collaborative relationships to successfully engage investors.

Section 2: Economic Development Plans

Communities need to be active in encouraging a strategic approach to economic development.

Section 3: Municipal Planning Impacting Economic Development

Communities need to plan for economic development. This includes having comprehensive municipal plans, bylaws and policies that support business retention, expansion and new investment.

Section 4: Basic Land Inventory, Real Estate and Infrastructure Information

Communities need information on real estate and infrastructure for business and residential investors.

Section 5: Community Information and Investment Attraction Tool Box

Communities need to be proactive in their approach to investment readiness by having socio-economic information readily available to respond to site selection inquiries, to market the municipality and to support investment decisions.

INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLES

On June 21 and 22, 2022, a series of industry roundtables were facilitated to engage business leaders in agriculture, energy, tourism and construction in identifying changes, barriers and opportunities. The key result was the identification of leading priorities for each sector.

Industry	Top Priority	Opportunities
Agriculture	Create Awareness	Develop economic development outreach activities that engage a wide variety of local residents in industry activities including school programs, expo, field days, marketing, Business to Business
	Right to Farm	Continue to integrate right to farm policies into land use plans and actively promote investment and development that conforms to the clustering strategy outlined in the Municipal Development Plan
	Broadband Access	Collaborate with regional partners to advocate to higher levels of government for investment in broadband infrastructure
	Labour Shortages	Work with Central Alberta Economic Partnership to develop the region's workforce while promoting planned residential development in collaboration with urban neighbors
	Value Added Processing	Leverage studies completed by Central Alberta Economic Partnership, the Government of Alberta and other industry leaders to engage the local business community in pursuing value added opportunities.
	Energy	Electricity Generation
Regulatory Environment		Advocate for an inclusive energy regulatory environment that fosters investment in petrochemical infrastructure as part of a transition to renewable energy
Infrastructure		Leverage existing infrastructure to promote renewed investment that includes carbon capture, utilization and storage, and renewable energy
Tourism	Partnership Development	Collaborate with Lacombe Regional Tourism to build local industry networks that lead to business clusters
	Wayfinding	Initiate long term strategic planning to improve wayfinding including digital resources, transportation infrastructure and signage in collaboration with other departments, regional partners and levels of government
Construction	Housing	Investigate densification and other residential development opportunities as outlined in the Municipal Development Plan Housing Strategy to provide a variety of housing options to address some of the housing challenges faced in the region
	Infrastructure	Actively promote development on serviced industrial lands and maintain open dialogue with industry on the need for further infrastructure investment

BUSINESS SURVEY

During the second phase of the project, 58 businesses took part in a business survey between June and September, 2022. The survey had 24 questions and was administered via telephone, email and social media. The industry with the highest number of responses was agriculture, forestry and fishing, (15.5%) followed by arts, entertainment and recreation, (12%), and then construction (10%) and mining, quarrying, oil and gas (10%).

Health of Local Business

Despite the impacts of COVID-19 lock downs, 57% of respondents had a good to record year in business and 55% of respondents plan to expand or grow their business. Only 3% of respondents plan to close, sell or relocate their business. Anecdotal evidence collected via telephone call surveys suggests that retirement may be one of the leading reasons for planned exits. Other highlights include 38% of respondents are hiring, 40% of respondents have been operating in the County for over 15 years, and another 40% between 5 and 15 years in operation. Only one business had been operating for less than one year.

Labourforce

The majority of businesses have full time employees, (56%), and their workforce is between 1-5 people. 24% rely on seasonal staff, 16% have part time workers and 5% of businesses have casual staff. All of these businesses also indicated they have 1-5 full time employees. 28% of respondents listed the workforce as their greatest challenge, and 10% state that affordable housing is a barrier to employee retention or expansion. One business surveyed indicated 50-100 full time employees, and three businesses indicated over 100 employees. 28% of respondents would like to know about the temporary foreign workers program.

Challenges

Some of the other challenges mentioned during the survey were access to supply (17%), market demand (17%), and regulations and red tape (9%).

COVID-19

According to the survey, the biggest impacts of Covid19 on Lacombe County businesses was an increase in the cost of doing business (70% of respondents), and decrease in total revenues (82% of respondents). However, 16% of businesses experienced an increase in revenues due to the nature of their business.

“We want to hear from residents and business leaders about emerging opportunities and key challenges so that we can work together to build a bright future here in Lacombe County,”

Monica Bartman, Economic Development Officer

RESIDENT SURVEY

During the second phase of the project, 333 residents took part in the survey between May and September, 2022. The survey had 19 questions and was administered via email and social media.

According to the postal codes, 12% of the respondents were from the Gull Lake area in the electoral district in Division 5. The next largest group of survey respondents was from the outskirts of Lacombe in Division 3 at 10%. The largest age cohort was 35-44 (27%), followed by 45-54 (24%). Only 5 respondents represented the 25-34 age group. The 55-64 age group was also well represented, accounting for 20% of all respondents. 65+ accounted for 17% of the respondents.

Employment

The highest number of respondents were employed in paid work (43%) and many were self employed (33%). 15% were retired and only 4% were unemployed. Two respondents were on long-term disability and only one full-time student took the survey. A disproportionate number of unemployed respondents (28%) were from the agricultural sector. 46% of unemployed respondents say job availability is what is keeping them from employment.

New Business

When asked, 23% of respondents would like to start a business. The types of businesses people were interested in starting were #1 agriculture and value-added agriculture, #2 health and wellness, and #3 tourism related.

Economic Growth

Most respondents felt that economic growth is important (46%), but nearly the same number of respondents felt that economic growth is extremely critical to top priority (43%). When asked about the rate of growth, 62% of respondents would like to see the County grow slowly, and 24% of respondents said that they would like it to stay the same. 85% of respondents strongly support business growth, 50% strongly support visitor growth, and 36% strongly support resident growth. 6% of respondents say that economic growth is a threat to quality of life in the County.

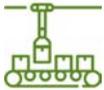
When asked about the quality of life in Lacombe County, 97% of respondents rate quality of life as 'good' or 'very good'.



When asked about priority industries in Lacombe County, 307 residents responded. The top 10 industries were:



1. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (66%)



2. Manufacturing (36%)



3. Healthcare and social assistance (28%)



4. Arts, entertainment and recreation (27%)



5. Retail and trade (25%)



6. Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (21%)



7. Professional, scientific and technical services (20%)



8. Accommodation and food services (19%)



9. Construction (18%)



10. Educational services (18%)

“We knew coming into the strategic planning process that preserving both the agricultural land and rural way of life would be priorities. Results from the resident survey confirm those values, but also highlight the desire for vibrant business development within the footprint of existing communities across the County. Local businesses are the lifeblood of the County’s economy, and we are eager to hear how we can support their prosperity and success.”

Barb Shepherd, Reeve

COUNCIL WORKSHOP

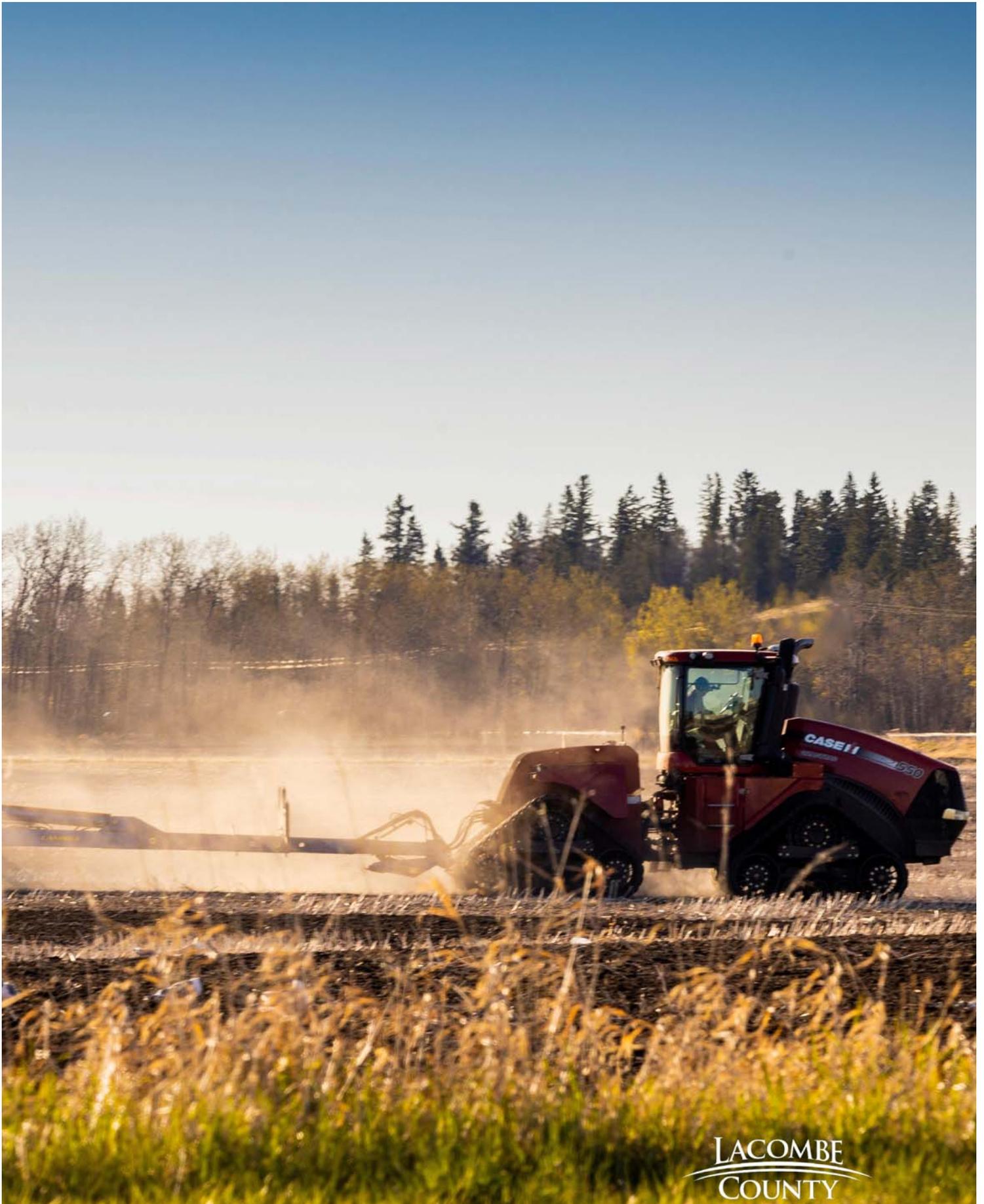
On June 20, 2022 a full day workshop was facilitated with Council and senior management to provide training in economic development and identify priorities. The session included an intro course in community economic development approaches, an overview of recent economic indicators, a scenario planning exercise and roundtable discussion of key economic priorities. The session resulted in “pursuing opportunities”, and “communicate and support business” as the priorities for developing the local economy.

Priority	Opportunities
Pursuing opportunities	Build a process to systematically identify and advance economic opportunities through community engagement with local businesses and partners
Communicate and support local businesses	Prioritize ongoing communication with local businesses through the development of online channels, business visits, industry events and community workshops
Economic diversification	Leverage existing business and infrastructure to cluster economic growth of all key sectors including agriculture, energy, tourism and construction manufacturing
Communication with potential investors	Become best-in-class investment ready and work closely with government partners to open channels of communication with site selectors and foreign investors
Grow population, business, industry	Engage the community in bringing the County's plans to life, including residential, commercial, and industrial developments
Workforce attraction + education	Work with Central Alberta Economic Partnership to develop the regional workforce while promoting planned residential growth in the County
Addressing barriers to business expansion	Promote the benefits of commercial and industrial expansion opportunities in designated areas
Build on current serviced lands	Prioritize the development of serviced lands through proactive marketing and community engagement
Value-added agriculture	Engage the agricultural community in exploring value added opportunities.
Technology and innovation	Promote opportunities to leverage funding and partnerships that support local businesses in adopting technology that improves efficiency and competitiveness
Business incubation + start-up	Network with regional, provincial and federal startup supports and disseminate information through online channels
Investment readiness	Foster collaboration with internal and external partners to ensure that Lacombe County is ready to respond to investment opportunities in a timely and comprehensive manner
Tourism development	Support Lacombe Regional Tourism in marketing the region to tourists while engaging local residents and businesses in the development of tourism assets and business partnerships.

ANALYSIS

A SOARR Assessment is a model for reflecting on a baseline for strategic planning by studying identified Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Risks, and Results (SOARR). It is a model that uses insights gained through the process to inform the future. Feedback gathered through surveys, interviews, and roundtables are all combined to help create a vision for the future and a framework to determine when our aspirations have been met.

<p>S</p> <p>STRENGTHS</p>	 <p>What can we build on?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Strategic location » Strong sense of community » Momentum » Municipal finances » High quality of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Low municipal taxes » Serviced industrial lands » Recreational spaces » Rich farm land » Entrepreneurial spirit
<p>O</p> <p>OPPORTUNITIES</p>	 <p>How do we leverage strengths?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Industry cluster development » Residential development » Energy diversification » Workforce development » Supply chain development » Business expansion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Value-added agriculture » Grocery store » Alternative energy » Waste management » Tourism/agritourism » Infrastructure investment (roads, water, wastewater)
<p>A</p> <p>ASPIRATIONS</p>	 <p>Where do we want to be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Maintaining the high quality of life » Preserving the environment » Increase community amenities » Increased tourism attractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Maintain agricultural lands » Sustainable pop. and bus growth » Attract and retain workforce » Shared community identity
<p>R</p> <p>RESULTS</p>	 <p>How will we know we're succeeding?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Low tax environment » Slow, steady growth » Continuously Improved resident and business satisfaction » Workforce achieved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » New housing » High speed internet access » New attractions » New amenities
<p>R</p> <p>RISKS</p>	 <p>What could negatively impact our progress?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Lack of amenities » Internet access » Lack of infrastructure required for growth » Loss of agricultural lands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Workforce retention » Loss of identity » Lack of housing



LACOMBE
COUNTY

STRATEGY

Mission

Proactively engage the business community to evolve the economic development function from its land use planning roots into an energizing force that brings life to plans and opportunities.

Vision

Empower diverse, innovative and community-minded industry and entrepreneurs.

Lacombe County is home to a vibrant and diverse economic base firmly rooted in agriculture with a strong rural sense of community. The County has invested in diversifying industry while businesses flourish by working together to pursue opportunities. Industrial, commercial, and residential nodes in every division across the County have been strengthened through place-based infrastructure, networks, marketing, policy, and services. Of special note, the Hamlet of Mirror has been reinvented as a modern village with deep roots in the region's history. The County's agricultural producers have continued to thrive and innovate, with growing support from local consumers, public awareness of its high standards of practice, and collaboration between all levels of government. Together, we have pride in our rural past and excitement for our rural future.

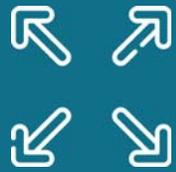
Strategy

Bring life to Lacombe County's development plans by engaging local entrepreneurs, businesses, investors and agricultural producers in pursuit of opportunities.

Strategic Objectives

Pursuing opportunities and bringing life to the County's development plans requires a concerted effort led by the Economic Development Office and supported by Council, staff, and the business community. Together, the County can empower local businesses to be the driving force behind a wide range of development opportunities.

Energizing the business community around identified opportunities requires capacity building, investment readiness, marketing and communications, community engagement, and pursuing opportunity.



Capacity Building - Council, staff, and community volunteers have the capacity to contribute to the County's strategic economic development by working together as a team to support local business leaders.



Investment Readiness - Prospective investors receive excellent customer service in response to investment inquiries as a result of readily available plans, contact networks, community information, property details and internal processes.



Marketing and Communications - Active marketing and communications leads to a strong sense of community among current and future businesses resulting in participation in economic development workshops, events, and initiatives.



Community Engagement - Entrepreneurs, investors, agricultural producers, neighbors, and community organizations actively contribute to the identification and advancement of development opportunities



Pursuing Opportunities - Local business leaders and investors participate in familiarization tours, opportunity assessments, and feasibility studies that lead to development in the County.

CAPACITY BUILDING



Strategic Objective

Council, staff, and community volunteers have the capacity to contribute to the County's strategic economic development by working together as a team to support local business leaders.

Rationale

Building capacity to support local business starts with establishing a strong staff team supported by Council and senior management and then expanding it to include community leaders from across the County.

Broad Corporate Capacity

Building the capacity of the senior management and staff from across the entire corporation will strengthen the economic development team's ability to leverage corporate resources and processes to achieve excellence. To foster broad understanding and support for economic development, an annual interdepartmental economic development workshop should be hosted in alignment with the annual budget planning cycle.

Annual Interdepartmental Economic Development Workshop

Target Audience:

- » Planning Services
- » Corporate Services
- » Community Services
- » County Manager
- » Communications
- » Operations

Council Capacity

Building Council capacity to lead economic development requires understanding of the strategy and clear information on the challenges and opportunities. Research opportunities for board involvement and encourage Council members to participate in economic development training and networking sessions through Central Alberta Economic Partnership, Economic Developers of Alberta, Central Alberta Tourism Alliance, Lacombe Regional Tourism, and others. To empower Council to make evidence-based decisions, report regularly on a consistent cycle:

Council Reporting Cycle

- » **Monthly progress reports** on strategic milestones, key performance measures and pursuit of opportunities
- » **Annual Economic Development Report** to provide Council with an overview of economic development priorities, key performance measures and recommendations for consideration during budget deliberations.



Small Business Capacity

Building capacity among small businesses to respond to challenges and take advantage of economic opportunities requires providing up to date information on available support programs. To support businesses in accessing supports, host extension activities that create awareness of business support programs including business planning, funding opportunities, marketing and workforce development. Leverage partnerships to bring these extension activities to life, including:

- » **Business Planning** - Community Futures, Business Link, Bizconnect
- » **Workforce Development** - Alberta Labour and Workforce Strategies, Central Alberta Economic Partnership, Red Deer Career Assistance Network
- » **Access to Capital** - ATB, Servus Credit Union, Futurpreneur, BDC, FCC, AFSC, Community Futures

Volunteer Capacity

Building community capacity to lead economic development requires volunteer contributions from business leaders who can provide business perspectives on priorities and leverage business networks. To empower community leaders, an Economic Development Committee should be developed. The mandate of the committee is to advise Council on the allocation of annual budgets and oversee the pursuit of specific economic development opportunities. Quarterly committee meetings can be hosted by committee members onsite on a rotating basis to improve understanding of development opportunities across the entire County. The committee would be authorized to oversee the pursuit of specific opportunities through familiarization tours, opportunity assessments and feasibility studies in conjunction with local business leaders. Committee members would be expected to act as community ambassadors in promoting opportunities to their business networks, and supporting the Economic Development Officer with business outreach.

- » **Develop** a committee Terms of Reference
- » **Recruit** committee members including representation from Council, agriculture, industry and small business
- » **Develop** an onboarding process including an orientation package that clarifying roles and responsibilities

INVESTMENT READINESS



Strategic Objective

Prospective investors receive excellent customer service in response to investment inquiries as a result of readily available plans, contact networks, community information, property details, and internal processes.

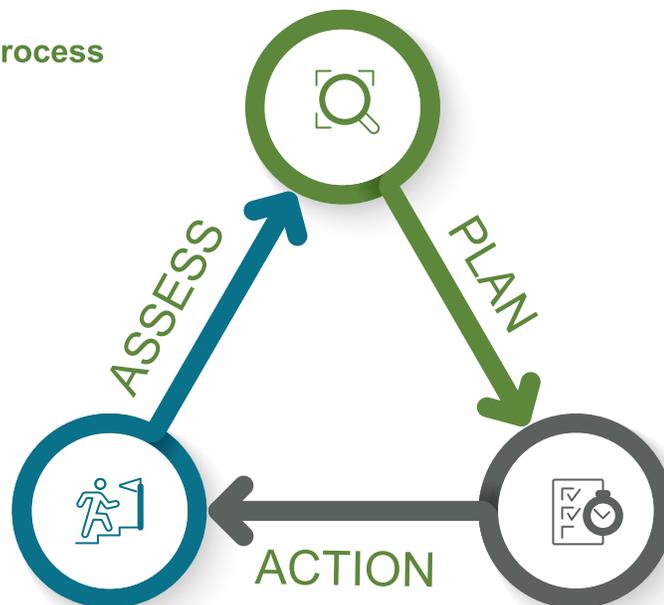
Rationale

Supporting development in the County that leverages strategic advantages while conforming to the principles of the Municipal Development Plan requires being ready to respond quickly and completely to investment inquiries. The key components to investment readiness are:

Criteria for Investment Readiness

- » **Capacity and Networks** - the right people working collectively together to build collaborative relationships to successfully engage investors.
- » **Economic Development Plans** - a strategic approach to economic development
- » **Municipal Planning** - Comprehensive municipal plans, bylaws and policies that support business retention, expansion, and new investment.
- » **Property Information** - basic land inventory, real estate, and infrastructure information for business and residential investors.
- » **Community Information** - socio-economic information to market the municipality and support investment decisions.

Investment Readiness Process



Assess

The first step to investment readiness is conducting an internal self assessment survey. The survey includes questions related to each of the readiness criteria. Responses are scored with Yes receiving 1 point, No receiving 0 points, and Under Development and Needs Improvement both resulting in .5 points. The points are then tallied and divided by the total number of points available in each section, resulting in a percentage score of investment readiness. The overall score provides a big picture indicator of the level of investment readiness of the community, while the score on each criteria helps to identify the current investment readiness strengths and weaknesses. The score should be recorded as a timestamped benchmark for use in assessing the progress over time. This action highlights the importance of prioritizing investment readiness and sets the stage for dramatic improvement in short order.

When conducting an investment readiness assessment, take the time to collect and organize contact information and documentation so that it is readily accessible when needed to respond to inquiries and for the development of marketing materials.

Plan

The second step to investment readiness is using the results of the self assessment survey to develop an investment readiness action plan to address the deficiencies. Start by grouping together all of the questions that received 0 points. Identify common actions that would result in the answers turning from No to Yes. Group the actions by short, medium and long term, and prioritize those actions that will earn the most investment readiness points.

Action

The third step is to implement the investment readiness action plan. This will include a mix of short, medium and long term actions. Some will be straightforward and can be undertaken by the Economic Development Officer directly, some will require help from other team members. Still others will require planning, deliberation, and budgeting by other departments, making it the job of the Economic Development Officer to raise awareness of the value of the action.

Repeat

Investment readiness is a constant state of preparedness. Over time, information becomes stale, key contacts change, and plans become out of date. It is important to repeat the process on a continuous basis. This not only leads to improvements, but it is a powerful communication tool for demonstrating the importance of economic development activities to Council and senior management.

"We pride ourselves in creating a proactive and competitive business climate by ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is in place, taxes are competitive, services meet our needs, and approval processes are business friendly."

Barb Shepherd, Reeve



MARKETING + COMMUNICATION



Strategic Objective

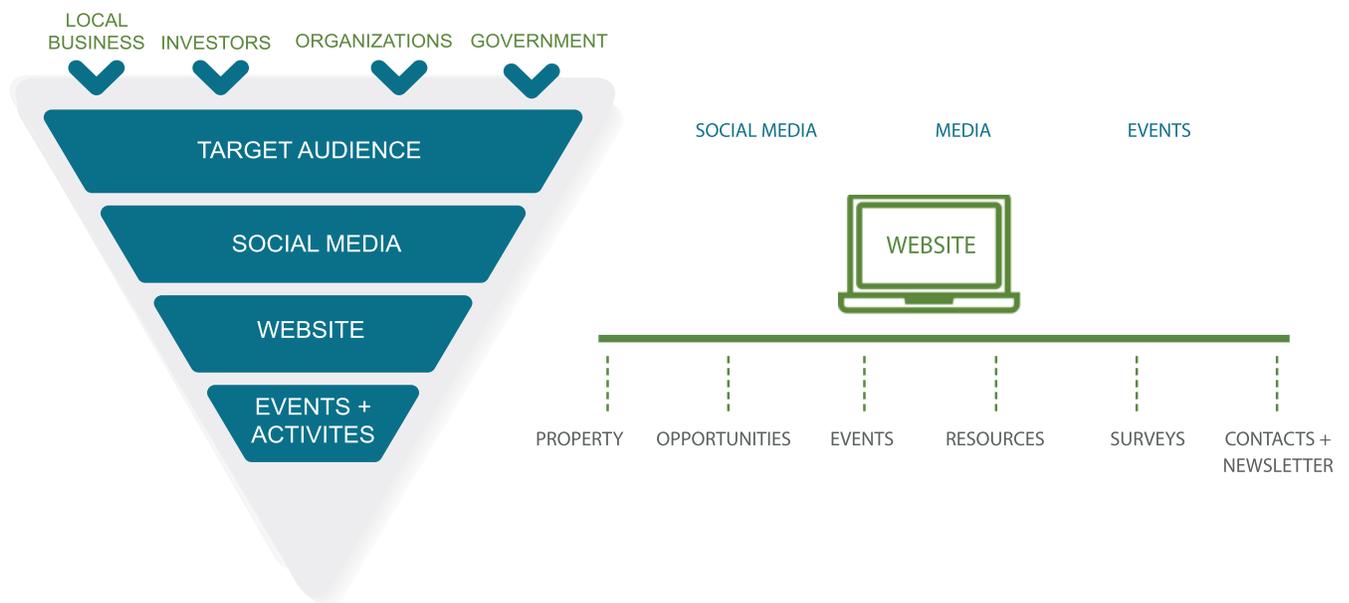
Active marketing and communications leads to a strong sense of community among current and future businesses resulting in participation in economic development workshops, events and initiatives.

Rationale

Communicating with local businesses was identified by Council as the most important priority. This requires a dedicated effort to build a strong communications and marketing platform that local businesses trust to get relevant information, access to resources and services, and news about upcoming events that will make a difference in the success of their business. Engaging local entrepreneurs, residents, agricultural producers, and organizations in pursuing opportunities requires information on opportunities to be packaged and distributed in a way that captures and keeps the attention of target audiences. This starts with creating narratives around opportunities; building out communications and marketing materials that draw from credible sources, launching awareness campaigns to drive online traffic, and ultimately, fueling participation in events, activities, initiatives, and meetings. Achieving excellence requires an organized approach to building key channels, and packaging information.

Developing Key Channels

The County's website and social media are effective tools for communicating with residents. Existing tools will be optimized and used with entrepreneurs, businesses, and investors in mind.



- » **Website** - properties, opportunities, contact, newsletters, surveys, events and resources, plans, studies, reports, and community profile
- » **Social Media** - Facebook, Instagram, YouTube
- » **County News** - business feature, ag business spotlight
- » **Print** - media releases
- » **Presentations** - slide deck material

Content

Marketing content will take different forms based on the channel use. However, following a process will result in the gradual rollout of content that captures the attention of the target audience. The same process can be used to structure presentations to stakeholders.

- 1. Media Releases and Business Spotlights** - create public narratives that tell the story of opportunity, using local businesses as examples of leaders pursuing opportunities.
- 2. Plans, Studies and Reports** - gather plans, studies, and reports from credible sources and use them in creating intrigue
- 3. Development Opportunities** - focus attention on development opportunities in the Municipal Development Plan, area structure plans and intermunicipal development plans, using a development prioritization framework
 - Serviced commercial and industrial
 - Growth Hamlets
 - Unserviced industrial, agricultural lands and Joint Economic Areas
- 4. Resources and Services** - identify and highlight resources and services available to support businesses in pursuing specific opportunities
- 5. Upcoming Events, Activities and Initiatives** - highlight upcoming activities to engage with key stakeholders, service providers, and prospective partners

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

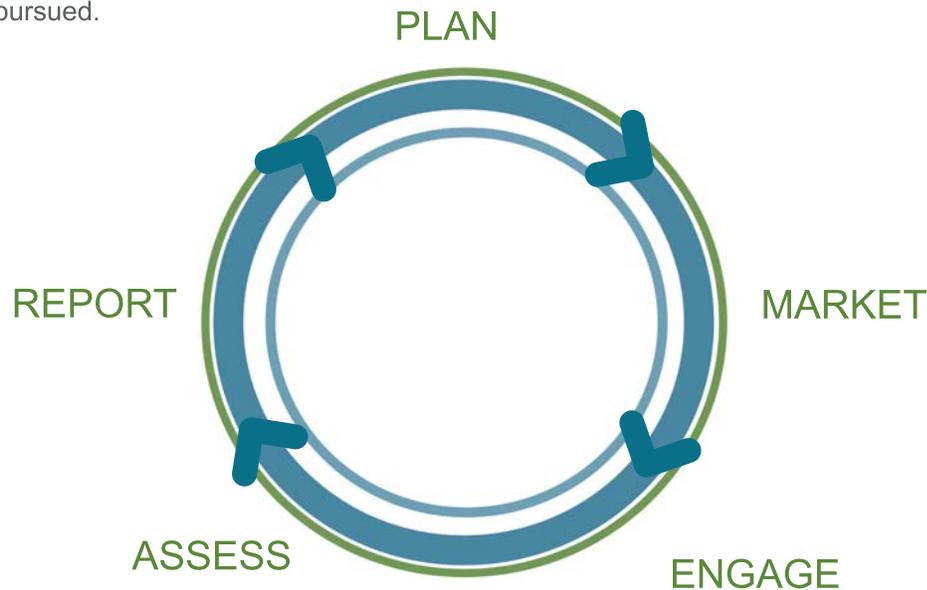


Strategic Objective

Entrepreneurs, investors, agricultural producers, neighbors, and community organizations actively contribute to the identification and advancement of local development opportunities

Rationale

Engaging the community is a powerful way of unleashing the full potential of residents, businesses, organizations and partners to pursue opportunities and drive economic development. Community engagement requires an organized process on how to systematically communicate with stakeholders on a continuous basis, while steadily advancing shared priorities and taking concrete action. This will result in strong working relationships that contribute to economic development on an ongoing basis, and can be activated to advance specific opportunities. This economic development strategy relies on engaging local business leaders in pursuing opportunities, using an interactive process that allows the County to make calculated investments in support of opportunities that generate meaningful demonstrated commitment from the business community. This process can be used to target specific communities, and industries based on the nature of the opportunities being pursued.



Plan

The first stage is to plan how to engage the community.

1. **Draft a project outline** that identifies the purpose, strategic objectives, key partners/stakeholders, workplan, budget, and performance measures
2. **Circulate rough draft** of plan internally to gather informal input from colleagues in communications and planning
3. **Conduct outreach** to key partners to get informal input on opportunities for collaboration
4. **Develop project/program plan** for formal review and approval

Market

The second stage is to work with communications and planning colleagues to communicate and market the community engagement activities.

1. **Develop** communications and marketing plan and materials
2. **Compile** target outreach list
3. **Prioritize** outreach to key stakeholders and gather feedback to fine tune messaging
4. **Leverage** buy-in from key stakeholders to expand audience reach and build momentum.
5. **Follow-up** with the target audience to increase participation and raise awareness of community activities

Engage

The third stage is to organize and facilitate community engagement activities or events.

1. **Develop** topical content that draws from Municipal Development Plan, industry reports, and anecdotal insights gathered from community outreach
2. **Facilitate** dialogue between stakeholders to build trust and gather local insight into challenges and opportunities
3. **Identify** emerging themes and shared priorities for future collaboration

Assess

The fourth stage is to assess findings and input from key stakeholders

1. **Review** stakeholder responses to marketing and community engagement activities
2. **Assess** stakeholder buy-in, leadership capacity and alignment with County strategies
3. **Identify** opportunities to create synergies with corporate processes and leverage resources.

Report

The final stage is to compile all findings into a report to inform evidenced based decisions by Council on next steps

1. **Draft preliminary report** for internal review by colleagues in communications and planning.
2. **Make recommendations** on next steps in alignment with corporate plans, funding opportunities such as grants, and strategic priorities
3. **Review plans** with senior management and present to Council for approval as appropriate

PURSUING OPPORTUNITIES



Strategic Objective

Local business leaders and investors participate in familiarization tours, opportunity assessments, and feasibility studies that lead to development in the County.

Rationale

Supporting local businesses in pursuing opportunity requires the dedication of resources. These resources, whether in the form of financial commitment and dedication of staff time, need to be used in a calculated manner to maximize the likelihood of return on investment. To ensure that resources are being deployed efficiently, the County will use an opportunity development process that begins with modest commitment, and gradually increases based on the response from key stakeholders, including local business leaders. Those opportunities that continue to gain traction and manage to rally local businesses and prospective investors will have more dedicated resources to enable their continued momentum. The result will be the cultivation and advancement of opportunities that lead to developments that are led by local businesses with the support of the community.

Opportunity Development Process

- » **Review** development opportunities with planning team and determine short list of priority opportunities
- » **Discuss** priority opportunities with local businesses through visitation program
- » **Develop** marketing packages for priority opportunities
- » **Promote** priority opportunities through social media and press releases
- » **Present** priority opportunities at community workshop(s) to engage local leaders
- » **Assess** the viability of further pursuing opportunities, including deployment of resources
- » **Report** on local buy-in and make recommendations on next steps to Council
- » **Conduct** detailed investigation into opportunity in collaboration with local businesses
 - Opportunity assessment in conjunction with business leaders
 - Feasibility study in conjunction with business leaders
 - Familiarization tour of target development site to promote investment
- » **Provide** pathfinding support to business leaders in proceeding with development

Initial opportunities to pursue through the process:

1. Value-Added Agriculture
2. Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage
3. Alternative Energy
3. Hydrogen Development

APPENDIX A: SUCCESS GROWS *here!*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2026 UPDATE



CAPACITY
BUILDING



INVESTMENT
READINESS



MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATION



COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT



PURSuing
OPPORTUNITIES

PURPOSE

of the Economic Development Strategy 2026 Update

“Success grows here; through empowering diverse, innovative and community-minded industry and entrepreneurs.”

- » **Attract** new businesses and residents
- » **Monitor** satisfaction of business community
- » **Maintain** competitive tax rates
- » **Increase** population to support workforce
- » **Recognize** entrepreneurial leadership

Lacombe County Strategic Plan Our Business, pg.6 2022-2027

WHY NOW

Lacombe County’s Economic Development Strategy, *Success Grows Here!*, was adopted in 2023 to guide the County’s approach to economic development, investment readiness, and business support.

Since that time, the County has:

- transitioned from program establishment to active implementation,
- advanced key initiatives identified in the strategy,
- strengthened partnerships with regional and provincial organizations,
- responded to investment inquiries and development opportunities, and
- received direction from Council on specific priorities and messaging.



Administration has prepared this 2026 Update Appendix to:

- update key economic information,
- report on progress to date,
- reflect Council feedback and operational realities, and
- identify priorities moving forward.

This 2026 Update Appendix maintains the approved strategy framework while ensuring Lacombe County’s economic development efforts remain current, focused, and aligned with Council’s vision.

UPDATE 2026

Lacombe County continues to demonstrate strong economic fundamentals rooted in agriculture, energy, and regional connectivity.

The County's strategic location along the QEII corridor between Edmonton and Calgary provides access to major transportation routes, labour markets, post-secondary institutions, and opportunities for industrial, agricultural, and commercial growth.

Administration continues to observe:

- ongoing investment interest in agriculture and agri-processing,
- continued activity in the energy and resource sector,
- demand for industrial and serviced commercial lands,
- increasing importance of regional collaboration, and
- continued need for proactive marketing and investment readiness tools.



KEY FINDINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS 2026

This section provides updated context for Lacombe County, summarizing key demographic and economic indicators and reflecting changes observed since the original Economic Development Strategy was adopted.

An economic overview is provided for Lacombe County as a whole, including demographics, income, education, employment, industry sectors, and quality of life attributes. Data is drawn from Statistics Canada, provincial and regional sources, and Lacombe County’s Investment Hub, which now serves as the primary platform for maintaining current economic and community information.

For the most up-to-date statistics and interactive dashboards, visit: [Invest Hub_Lacombe County](#).

Median Individual income

\$89,000



Median dwelling value

\$448,000

Population	11,072
Population Change over 1 Year	1.4%
Labourforce Participation rates	70.4%
Unemployment rate Labourforce	5.4%
Workforce: Number of Employed	4,990
Workforce: In Labour Force	5,470
Workforce: Not in Labour Force	2,650
Businesses Counts	205
Agriculture, Forestry Business Count	403
Businesses with Employees	24.6%

TARGET INDUSTRIES

VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURE



CONSTRUCTION

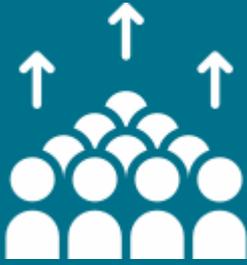


OIL & GAS



HEALTH CARE





44.4

18%

Population
11,072

Median
Age

Residents
Arrived within
5 yrs.

HIGHEST EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

Post-secondary



37%

High School



55%

Avg Household Size



Total Private Dwellings

4,803

TOP OCCUPATIONS

#1

AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

25%

Of Labourforce

#2

TRADES + TRANSPORT

24%

Of Labourforce

#3

BUSINESS, FINANCE, ADMIN

14%

Of Labourforce

#4

SALES AND SERVICE

13%

Of Labourforce

#5

EDUCATION, LAW, COMMUNITY & GOVERNMENT

6%

Of Labourforce

IMMIGRANTS



76% of immigrants are 3rd generation

17% of immigrants are 2nd generation

7% of immigrants are 1st generation

Labourforce Projections



Employed
58%

Self-Employed
40%

Other
2%

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The implementation plan continues to guide Economic Development activities through two coordinated components.

The first includes ongoing annual activities that form the foundation of the County’s program, including initiatives that have transitioned from time-limited projects into ongoing operations. The second consists of strategic initiatives and special projects aligned with priority objectives and emerging opportunities.

Strategic Objection	Action
Capacity Building	Strengthening internal systems, partnerships, and business supports to improve effectiveness, accountability, and long-term economic resilience.
Investment Readiness	Enhancing Lacombe County’s competitiveness by preparing sites, processes, infrastructure, and information to attract and support new development.
Marketing and Communication	Promoting Lacombe County’s opportunities, services, priority sectors, and business success through coordinated messaging, storytelling, and outreach.
Community Engagement	Building strong relationships with businesses, partners, and stakeholders to ensure alignment, collaboration, and shared economic growth.
Pursing Opprotunity	Proactively identifying, supporting, and advancing business expansion and new investment opportunities within the County.

IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES

Drawing from studies, plans, and community input, the County continues to identify and refine target opportunities for economic development and investment.

ENGAGE LOCAL BUSINESS

Implement targeted marketing and engagement initiatives to connect with local businesses, entrepreneurs, investors, and agricultural producers, including workshops, outreach, and sector-specific engagement.

PURSUE OPPORTUNITIES

Implement and continuously refine the County’s opportunity development process to support business growth, investment attraction, and project advancement.

Ongoing - Continuous/Annual

Strategic Objective	Special Projects	Description	Progress
Investment Readiness	Investment Lead Management	Develop a lead response plan that includes a criteria for deploying resources in support of investment opportunities using a client relationship management program such as business counts for tracking inquiries and conversions	Ongoing - Annual
Investment Readiness	Partner Presentations	Deliver presentations to partner communities and organizations to promote the Economic Development Strategy	Ongoing - Annual
Community Engagement	Business Visitation	Conduct outreach and site visits to monitor satisfaction and promote investment opportunities	Ongoing - Annual
Capacity Building	Annual Economic Development Report	Deliver an annual Economic Development Report to Council highlighting key performance indicators, trends, challenges, and opportunities for consideration	Ongoing - Annual
Capacity Building	Annual Economic Development Planning	Review annual operational priorities with senior management in preparation for upcoming year, including an investment readiness self-assessment, as well as interdepartmental workshops to strengthen synergies within the County	Ongoing - Annual
Marketing and Communications	Business Spotlight Refresh	Refresh Ag Spotlight and Business Feature based on County brand and economic development strategy	Ongoing - Annual
Investment Readiness	Investment Action Plan	Develop action plan to improve accessibility of investment information including implementing a program such as localintel, cityviz or comparable internal system that integrates with the new County website and allows investors to easily access data that is updated automatically through external sources	Ongoing - Annual
Pursuing Opportunities	Heavy Industrial Investments	Advocate for an inclusive energy regulatory environment that supports investment in heavy industrial infrastructure and broader energy sector development	Ongoing - Annual
Investment Readiness	Site Selection Networks	Conduct outreach to site selection networks including higher levels of government and private site selection firms by continuing to build relationships with Invest Alberta and Jobs, Economy and Northern Development. Attend upcoming events through SiteLink and leverage those connections to build new networks in target sectors and markets	Ongoing - Annual
Pursuing Opportunities	Tourism Development	Support and work with Travel Alberta on their initiative of the Olds to Lacombe Tourism Development Zone	Ongoing - Annual

Short Term - 1 to 2 Years

Strategic Objective	Special Projects	Description	Progress
Investment Readiness	Property Inventory	Develop and maintain an inventory of available land and buildings to facilitate investment transactions	In Progress
Investment Readiness Community Engagement	Labour Market Workforce Study	Build a study with collaboration efforts from the region to understand our labour market and workforce needs and gaps	Initiated
Marketing and Communication	Social Media Plan	Develop a plan, with communications, to promote target opportunities, disseminate information and market economic development activities through social media	Not Started
Investment Readiness	Industry Clustering	Develop a map of the County that shows businesses by 4-digit NAICS codes similar to the ownership map to facilitate cluster development by industry	In Progress
Marketing and Communication	Investment Profile Business Case Add ons	Leverage regional industry profiles and build a one-pager that highlights specific local investment opportunities	In Progress
Pursuing Opportunities	Value Added Agriculture	Leverage studies to engage the local business community in pursuing value-added opportunities	Not Started
Capacity Building	EcD Committee	Develop an economic development committee including terms of reference, recruitment process/positions and volunteer orientation	Initiated
Investment Readiness	Invest Readiness	Conduct an investment Readiness Self-Assessment to establish the baseline score for the performance Framework. Work on increasing the score until complete. Work with Council and Businesses to find out what our priority industry(s) are	Not Started
Pursuing Opportunities	Tourism Product Development	Support Tourism and work with Lacombe Regional Tourism in developing the tourism industry while engaging communities in pursuing local development opportunities, especially clusters in value-added ag	In Progress
Community Engagement	Eckville Intermunicipal Development Plan	Support the Eckville IDP update by identifying economic development opportunities, documenting stakeholder input, and providing recommendations to strengthen commercial and industrial growth potential	Initiated
Community Engagement	Hamlet of Mirror Area Structure Plan	Support completion and implementation of the Mirror ASP, working collaboratively with Planning to align land use, servicing, and sustainable local economic opportunities	Initiated
Community Engagement	Bentley Intermunicipal Development Plan	Participate in the Bentley IDP review process to strengthen intermunicipal collaboration, align land use planning with regional economic opportunities, and ensure coordinated infrastructure and servicing discussions that benefit both municipalities	Not Started
Community Engagement	QEII North of Lacombe Area Structure Plan	Collaborate with Planning on the QEII North ASP to align corridor land use, servicing, and long-term commercial and industrial investment readiness	Not Started

Medium Term - 2 to 3 Years

Strategic Objective	Special Projects	Description	Progress
Investment Readiness	Digital Marketing Audit	Conduct audit of digital marketing after one year of marketing plan	No Started
Marketing and Communications	Create Industry Awareness	A follow up from the Workforce Project, engage a wide variety of local residents in industry activities including school programs, expo, field days, marketing, Business to Business	Not Started
Marketing and Communications	Housing	Investigate densification and other residential development opportunities as outlined in the Municipal Development Plan Housing Strategy to provide a variety of housing options to address some of the housing challenges faced in the region	Initiated
Pursuing Opportunities	Investment Attraction	Identify a target sector for each commercial and industrial park and conduct familiarization tours targeting prospective investors, businesses, and partners. As well as conduct target sector reach analysis	Not Started
Pursuing Opportunities	Energy Infrastructure	Leverage existing infrastructure to attract diversified energy and industrial investment, including carbon capture, utilization and storage, on lands designated for development	Initiated
Pursuing Opportunities	Advance Target Opportunities	Advance target development opportunities in conjunction with local business leaders by conducting opportunity assessments, preparing feasibility studies and organizing familiarization tours of target investment sites	Not Started
Community Engagement	Clive Intermunicipal Development Plan	Initiate discussion with local businesses, residents and Clive stakeholders on development opportunities and future updates to the Intermunicipal Development Plan	Not Started



Long Term - 3 to 5 Years

Strategic Objective	Special Projects	Description	Progress
Community Engagement	Wayfinding	Initiate long term strategic planning to improve wayfinding including digital resources, transportation infrastructure and signage in collaboration with other departments, regional partners, and levels of government	Not Started
Community Engagement	Gull Lake Intermunicipal Development Plan	Initiate discussion with local businesses, residents and partner communities on residential and recreation development opportunities identified in the Gull Lake IDP	Not Started
Investment Readiness	Growth/Development Opportunities	Develop long-term hamlet revitalization plans for priority growth hamlets	Not Started
Investment Readiness	Commercial and Industrial Parks Growth	Assess Commercial and Industrial Parks to identify growth nodes, infrastructure needs, and investment readiness priorities aligned with existing Area Structure Plans	Not Started
Pursuing Opportunities	New Sectors	Maintain and create relationships with current up-and-coming sectors	Not Started
All Components	New Strategy	Revitalize of Economic Development Strategy to engage business, industry and ratepayers the direction Economic Development supports in the future. Re-aligning top priorities	Not Started





PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

The 2026 Update Appendix refines performance measurement to better reflect economic impact, service standards, and corporate alignment while maintaining the approved strategic framework.

Capacity Building

Key Performance Indicators	Measurement
Annual interdepartmental workshop	Delivered annually
Economic Development Committee	Established and active
Annual Economic Development Report	Presented to Council
Cross-departmental projects aligned with strategy	Tracked annually

Investment Readiness

Key Performance Indicators	Measurement
Investment inquiry response time	≤ 2 business days
# of investment inquiries received	Annual tracking
Serviced industrial/commercial land available	Acres designated
Non-residential tax competitiveness	Annual comparative review
Investment materials updated	Annual refresh

Marketing and Communication

Key Performance Indicators	Measurement
Website visits (Economic Development Data Hub Page)	Year-over-year comparison
Qualified leads generated	Annual tracking
Business spotlights published	Minimum 10 annually
Social media engagement	Annual analytics review

Community Engagement

Key Performance Indicators	Measurement
Business visits conducted	Annual target established
Business satisfaction rate	≥ 90%
Partner collaborations active	Annual tracking
Event attendance	Annual tracking

Pursuing Opportunities

Key Performance Indicators	Measurement
Target sector opportunities advanced	Annual tracking
Investment projects supported	Annual tracking
Non-residential permit value	Year-over-year comparison
Net new non-residential assessment growth	Annual measurement

Performance will be reviewed annually through the Economic Development Report to Council and adjusted as required to reflect economic conditions and Council priorities.

LACOMBE

COUNTY