

1. Background

As part of the 2014 budget considerations, Council approved the re-creation of an Economic Development Department within Administration. This department would consist of one individual as the Economic & Community Development Officer who would report to the Director of Legislative, Community and Agricultural Services. In March of 2014 an Economic & Community Development Officer was hired and began identifying policies and actions to increase the County's presence in Economic Development.

Since that time significant accomplishments have been achieved by the County that set into motion the direction of Economic Development for the County. They include:

- Council created and adopted the following strategic goals:
 - Provide an environment in which traditional and new forms of agriculture along with innovative, value-added agricultural industry can thrive.
 - > Encourage diversification and business retention.
- Completed of a Visitor Friendly Assessment in conjunction with the Town of Olds and Sundre.
- Installed of new entrance signage on all County roads that follow the County's current brand standards.
- Created and implemented a two-year solar pilot program that included a grant incentive for producers throughout the County.
- Successfully proposed Land Use Bylaw Amendments that saw the addition of a new use for Business, Agri-tourism and Large Scale Renewables.
- New entrance signage for business parks within the County without a specific developer/owner and the two County owned Regional Airports.
- Completed a Mountain View County Economic Development Background.
- Established an annual grant funding program for Visitor Information Centers and projects throughout the County.
- Obtained core membership in the Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development.
- Obtained membership in the Central Alberta Tourism Alliance, with 11 other central Alberta municipalities

Mountain View County has recently undertaken extensive engagement with the business community located in various Business Parks and Airport locations throughout the municipality. The intent of this exercise was to obtain information relative to the business community's desire to be engaged and supported by the County in various aspects of their operations. The feedback received from the community has been influential in developing this document.

1.1 Executive Summary

The Economic Development Action Plan is intended to help focus Mountain View County's activities and priorities over the next three years. Estimated deliverables are multi-year while the outcomes are meant to have a long-lasting impact and influence far beyond the three-year lifespan of this document. However, it is imperative to recognize that regular updates are necessary to adapt to new realities and initiatives.

The plan will complement the County's previously approved statutory plans and policies and provide a solid foundation for future economic development success. While, other studies and documents may also be prepared by Economic Development such as marketing plans, business plans, sector assessments etc.

The Strategy is designed to support Council's Economic Development Values along with their approved 2018-2021 Strategic Plan.

1.2 Mountain View County's Vision Statement

An engaged rural community inspired by the unique and diverse qualities of our people and environment

1.3 Mountain View County's Mission Statement

Provide high quality services in support of a healthy, safe, and vibrant rural community

1.4 Approval by Council and review on annual basis

The Economic Development Action Plan is approved by Council, to ensure that it remains relevant it must be reviewed on an annual basis. An annual report on the progress made toward achieving results will be presented to Council prior to the budget process annually.

Mountain View County Economic Development Goals

In developing the Economic Development Strategy, Council first considered the intent of the overall document to understand what the purpose of the Economic Development program is attempting to achieve. At the foundation of all County programs and identified within Mountain View County's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan Mission¹ is the crucial principle of ensuring that resources are available during the budget process to continue to provide high quality services to the community. As such, the entire program is focused on ensuring that Mountain View County has the resources and ability to continue to provide high quality services now, and into the future. Council has instituted goals for the Economic Development Program to parallel the long-term vision for the community. These goals as they related to the Economic Development Program include:

1. Protecting the Agricultural Identity of Mountain View County;

Mountain View County's Agricultural Identity differentiates itself from other municipalities in proximity. The strong foundation of the agriculture and support that the sector has from ratepayers, industry and other community partners including Olds College certainly speaks to the importance of Mountain View County's Agricultural Identity. Although a primary focus of this Strategy will be to encourage economic growth to be located in areas that prevent conflict with the agricultural sector, Council is supportive of encouraging traditional, innovative, and value-added agriculture industry throughout the municipality².

2. Diversification of the Economic Base of Mountain View County to ensure tax base sustainability in order to continue to provide the high level of service outlined in Mountain View County's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan;

Mountain View County currently obtains approximately 43% of its total taxation from linear assessment. Council has a focus on diversifying the overall tax base to decrease the reliance that the municipality has on linear assessment and create a higher level of sustainability and resiliency. Further, Mountain View County is desirous of providing opportunities for a diversity of business opportunities to ensure that the non-residential tax base remains sustainable into the future.

3. Maintaining the local autonomy of Mountain View County while supporting growth in surrounding Urban Partners.

The Modernized Municipal Government Act proclaimed in 2018 mandated new requirements for intermunicipal collaboration with all municipalities with common boundaries. This Act includes the requirement for the adoption of a framework that identifies the services that are being provided by each municipality and how these services can be shared for mutual benefit. Although Mountain View County supports and has complied with the new requirements, Council has a priority on ensuring that their focus remains on the growth of Mountain View County and accomplishment of their own respective goals and objectives.

¹ Mountain View County 2018-2021 Strategic Plan, May 23rd 2018, pg. 5

² Mountain View County 2018-2021 Strategic Plan, May 23rd 2018, pg. 5

Economic Development Objectives

The objectives of this Economic Development Strategy have been instituted to achieve the values of Mountain View County as outlined above. Although Council recognizes that Economic Development plays a role in policies, programs and decisions across the organization, Council has outlined four objectives for Administration to focus attention and resources towards. Accompanying each objective are potential action items that will particularly strengthen and work towards the achievement of that objective. It should be noted that the potential action items will vary each year based on Council priorities, Economic Development Strategy progress and budgetary resource allotments.

Business Growth Potential

Arguably one of the biggest trends that may affect Mountain View County's ability to achieve its mission of providing high quality services is the future uncertainty of revenues; mostly due to linear taxation. Identified as one of Mountain View County's long-term challenges, linear taxation decline needs to be further reviewed and understood to identify possible solutions for Council to consider. The purpose of this priority will be to develop further action items as required to minimize the possible impact that decreased linear taxation may have on the overall goal of providing high quality services within the community and to understand how existing policy and direction will influence the future potential of non-residential growth in Mountain View County.

Potential Action Items:

- Review of Linear Taxation Gap in comparison with non-residential growth potential;
- Review of Non-Residential/ Non-Agricultural Land Absorption Rates;
- Review of opportunities for future Airport Expansion including a comparison between the economic feasibility, and benefits and disadvantages between private or public development;
- Identification of conflicts with statutory documents to achieve increases in non-residential growth potential;
- Review existing opportunities in Mountain View County for value-added revenue streams.

Business Retention and Expansion

Identified in Mountain View County's Strategic Plan, Council has a strong preference on Building the County from within. This is solidified in Council's desire to focus economic development on retaining and expanding existing businesses. In conversations with existing businesses located in Mountain View County, the same desire to be engaged and supported was expressed.

Potential Action Items:

- Increased marketing of existing businesses within Mountain View County;
- Creation of workshop series/networking sessions (Financial, legal etc);
- On-going site tours and conversations;
- Growing home based businesses;
- Facilitation of future growth possibilities within MVC (marketing of available locations/benefits etc)

Business Attraction

Although the priority for business growth is focused on existing industry, Council recognizes that there are a number of locations within Mountain View County that are ideal for business attraction. In particular, utilizing the various business parks and regional airport lots within the County tend to be appealing to new business opportunities.

Potential Action Items:

- Marketing of existing business park and airport lots available:
- Future airport development;
- Review of business incentives, off site levies, and policy surrounding Developer plays for Development;
- Review of opportunity for small business incubators within Mountain View County;
- Review of internal policies to ensure efficiencies for businesses relocating to business parks and airports is maximized;
- Review of current development permit processes, policies and timelines;
- Review of internal capacity to deal with large development processes.

Building Relationships

Mountain View County has a strong focus on building and maintaining effective relationships with various partners. These relationships will be important in marketing Mountain View County as a region and attracting innovative and sustainable businesses. Further, through the Intermunicipal Collaboration process, Council is desirous of ensuring that Urban Partners continue to grow while promoting diverse opportunities for businesses in both Rural and Urban settings.

Potential Action Items

- Connect with local developers and realtors to understand any challenges with the MVC market and identify possible solutions;
- Continue established communication lines with existing businesses;
- Negotiate intermunicipal development plans with adjacent municipalities that encourage growth in both Mountain View County and Urban Partners with the general direction to avoid joint growth and to decrease the likelihood of competition between the Rural and Urban settings;
- Establish internal procedures for effective communication between Economic Development and Planning and Development;
- Continue to participate in and further enhance Mountain View Corridor's Regional Economic Development initiatives.