

# Revitalizing High Prairie:

A Long-Term Sustainability Plan  
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## Appendices

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the *Alberta Urban Municipalities Association*, a Municipal Sustainability Plan is a specific type of strategic plan. It outlines the steps necessary to build participative governance models and a strong economy that protect environmental integrity and that contribute to both a strong social cohesion and a vibrant culture in the community.

The strength of a community's economy, of its governance, environment, culture and social cohesion are the fundamental components of a sustainable community. Collaboration with citizens and municipal stakeholders is considered essential in the development of the plan to ensure that the community is behind its vision as well as the strategies that will be used to implement it.

The detailed plan is available in Appendix A. The body of the report provides the context and rationale for the plan.

## APPROACH

AAGI team members first reviewed a wide variety of documents to orient them to High Prairie, its surrounding communities and to other municipal sustainability planning projects in Alberta.

Members of the community were then invited to participate in a Public Meeting held March 3, 2010 to gauge the community's initial perceptions of its needs. Participants were invited to provide subsequent input through one of five groups established to focus on each pillar. Twenty-five people volunteered to participate. In preparation for a full-day workshop to be held on March 20, 2010, each group offered to meet on their own to research their topic area in relation to High Prairie and to discuss community strengths and needs. Each group met at least once and up to four times before the full-day workshop. To assist community members with their research, approximately 40-50 documents were made available to them online through a password-protected site on Google Docs. These included demographic, economic, environmental and other such data (see Appendix B).

Sixteen people were able to participate at the March 20 meeting. A represen-

tative from each pillar group presented a summary of its deliberations to the larger group. An opportunity was then given after each summary, for a guided, in-depth discussion of that sustainability pillar amongst the whole group. The interim plan was developed in response to the March 20 discussions.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

With a population just under 3,000, the Town harbours 907 dwelling units spread over 538 hectares. Located 365 km northwest of Edmonton on primary Highway 2 and 209 km northeast of Grande Prairie, High Prairie is on a direct route to both the Mackenzie and Alaska Highway systems. It is situated on 538 hectares a short distance from the western shores of Lesser Slave Lake, the largest lake within Alberta's boundaries. The town is surrounded by boreal forest and farmland as well as several Métis settlements and First Nations communities.

The area is served by a system of rail and road networks that permit the community to access and distribute goods and services. The municipality maintains an airport with a 4000 x 75 foot paved runway but does not have scheduled flights. The area has traditionally been dependent on agriculture and forestry but the growing petroleum, gas and tourist industries are soon expected to compete with the Town's original mainstays.

The global 2008-2009 recession had a profound impact on the High Prairie's economy. An already faltering forestry sector crumbled under its impact. Two mills closed and the Town's third one remained open primarily through the loyal commitment of its owner to employees and the community.

A 60-km unpaved road was recently built between High Prairie and a Penn West Energy worksite in a Seal Lake oil play. Its purpose is to improve the site's access to the south. As a result, the Town plans to attract some of the oil sands business servicing activity.

According to a local real estate agent, residential lots tend to range between \$60,000-75,000 while an average three-bedroom bungalow would run for \$160,000-240,000. Commercial lots range from \$65,000-86,000. Total assessment of all property in the Town for 2009 was \$248.6 million.

## THE MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN AND ITS RATIONALE

The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association defines sustainability<sup>1</sup> in its broadest terms as:

*...living in a way that meets our needs without undermining the ability of our children and our children's children to meet their needs. (p. 11)*

A Municipal Sustainability Plan's purpose is:

- to project a picture of what the community expects to look like in the future
- to plan the means to achieve that future

Unlike other planning documents that focus on specific projects and programs, a sustainability plan addresses each of the major influences that build a community. Plans for specific projects and programs are all strategies to achieve the overall sustainability plan. These multiple influences can be summarized in terms of their capacity to influence sustainability in five domains that are known as the Five Pillars of Sustainability:

- Social Cohesion
- Cultural Vibrancy
- Environmental Integrity
- Economic Viability
- Participative Governance

### **Evolution of a Vision Statement**

A key component of an MSP is its vision statement. It expresses the nature of the community in which citizens wish to live and provides a standard by which to judge the merit of potential decisions that the community must make. Building community is a continuous process of incremental decision-making with each

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<sup>1</sup> Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. *Comprehensive Guide for Municipal Sustainability Planning*. June 2006.

decision being subject to short-term pressures and emergent conditions.

A good vision statement has several characteristics. It must be characterized by a *measurable standard*. This provides a benchmark to judge the merit of emerging community decisions. In other words, the vision must be worded in such a way that any future Council decisions being made should be seen as having the capacity to contribute to the advancement of the vision. Community-building is a continuous process of incremental decision-making and is subject to short-term pressures and to emerging conditions.

The vision must also remain *consistent* over time so that current decisions contribute to, and build upon the outcomes originally envisioned by the community. While the vision needs to have *long-term validity*, there may be the rare situation where the vision needs re-examination. To be *authentic*, the vision must have deeply personal meaning for the community's residents and for its commercial sector. A fifth characteristic of a good vision statement is that it must be *actionable*. It must be worded in such a way that it is possible to develop strategies to reach it. The vision must be *internal to the community*. Individuals from outside of the community cannot impose a vision on its residents. It must come from the hearts of members of the community. Finally, the vision must be *value-based*. It should be a statement of the community's deeply-held values and not a comparison with other communities. Ideally, the vision should roll off the tongue as naturally as ABC.

Council took the first step in the development of its vision with the following statement. "High Prairie: A caring community with diverse heritage, safe and vibrant neighbourhoods, dedicated to people, environmental innovation and investment. A great place to work, learn, play and to call home."

Community residents were also asked to think about the vision and to come up with elements that it should encompass. The Economy/Governance team proposed the following key concepts: Self-direction, population being part of the community, revitalization. The Environmental team came up with: "To make the community a safe and healthy place to live, raise a family, by the development of environmental, economic & viable business practices.

At the community consultation meeting, concepts that emerged include: open for business, opportunity, family orientation, service centre, sharing and caring,

lifestyle, heart of a community, attractiveness, location, home, live here by choice, education, pride, friends. Vision statements proposed include:

- To create a community and region that is prosperous, vibrant, healthy and caring, where decisions that are made today, do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- High Prairie a caring community will revitalize to continue to serve the community and region and strive to enhance and to provide the essential needs for a healthy lifestyle
- Beautiful by nature. Diverse by culture. Vibrant by choice.

A vision must be a single “picture” that encompasses all of those ideas. What is the one pivotal picture that encompasses what High Prairie must focus on? How can it encompass the intent of the concepts described above? To accomplish this, a very short vision statement is presented below to provide the picture and a mission statement to capture the ideas’ intent.

Each sustainability pillar is fundamentally important to a community but for quite some time, the threat to the Town’s economic pillar has been growing. Even if resource extraction activities in the area recover and grow, an economy rooted exclusively in these activities remains vulnerable over the long-term to the volatility inherent in global trends in this sector. For the next couple of generations, High Prairie must focus on establishing an economy with sufficiently deep roots that they can weather global economic downturns.

To build a truly strong economy, the Town must expand its business, public and industrial activity. Residents are well aware of this need. The community meetings involved lengthy discussion of the need for High Prairie to reach out to regional residents, business and stakeholders. Building a strong base in regional public and commercial service delivery could assist the Town to weather the volatility characteristic in the resource sector.

### **Vision**

*High Prairie: Reaching out to the region*

In this context, “Reaching out” refers to enhancing the delivery of commercial<sup>2</sup> and public<sup>3</sup> services to regional residents and visitors. High Prairie’s “region” refers

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<sup>2</sup> Retail and business-to-business services

<sup>3</sup> Health care, post-secondary education, recreation and leisure services

to communities within a 125-km radius including:

- Hamlets
- Métis settlements
- First Nations communities
- Long-term residents in the lake communities
- Part-time residents in the lakes' visitor communities
- Business-tourist and pleasure-tourist communities
- Resource industry camps

While the vision provides a picture of what the community will look like in the long-term, the MSP's mission describes what the organization is working on now, to get to where it wants to be.

### **Mission**

*The Town of High Prairie's mission is to foster a healthy, dynamic and welcoming environment in which regional residents and visitors can abide and thrive, work and play, learn and heal at any and all stages of their lives.*

The long-term objective deals with more immediate conditions that are necessary to achieve the vision.

### **Long-Term Objective**

*To expand the local economic base to include the delivery of post-secondary, health, tourist and commercial supply services to residents in the surrounding region.*

While the Town has long served regional residents and businesses, it has done so without deliberate planning or intent. By making it the primary focal point for the Town's long-term objective is to place a very high priority on the delivery of pertinent, coherently-planned, high quality services to the region's residents in the Town's economic development plan. This must include strategies to increase the convenience of High Prairie's services to non-residents.

## ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

### **GOAL E1      HIGH PRAIRIE’S RESOURCE-EXTRACTION ECONOMY IS COMPLEMENTED BY A REGIONAL SERVICE ECONOMY THAT CONCENTRATES ON THE HEALTH CARE, POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, TOURISM, AND COMMERCIAL SUPPLY SECTORS**

As discussed earlier, the Town needs to strengthen its economy by broadening its customer base. This would provide a cushion for inevitable periods of market decline in the resource extraction sector. The Town’s location can be considered ideal for the delivery of regional services but only if High Prairie is very deliberate and proactive in carving its niche in the area. Both Slave Lake and Peace River are strong competitors for the delivery of services to the region’s residents. High Prairie must prove why it makes more sense to take one’s business there than to one of the other two communities. This means:

- Considering the point of view of potential service recipients
- Assessing their specific needs and the reasons for the shopping, business or leisure time choices they make
- Developing strategies to ensure that High Prairie addresses specific needs in a manner that is more attractive than that offered by the other two communities

Having better stores and more services may not necessarily be the Town’s first priorities to address however. Community attractiveness, ambience, comfort, co-location of multiple destinations (i.e., convenience), and safety and appeal for visiting children are highly important to increase regional participation in the town’s activities. Each has a major impact on the choices that:

- a regional resident makes when choosing a destination for errands, social and recreational activities
- an investor makes when choosing a community in which to establish a new business or new site for an existing business.

Community input made reference to a number of issues:

- Lack of perception of safety in some areas
- Litter
- Inappropriate social behaviour
- Unsightly commercial and residential premises
- Vandalism

In addition, the Town's current commercial layout is not conducive to convenient access to multiple destinations. The Town's layout will be addressed under the environmental pillar.

- Strategy E1.1** Make physical and social changes to the Town to reflect the blend of a regional service community with the existing industrial community
- (a) Enhance community appearance/ambience by developing pertinent residential, public service, business and industrial programs
  - (b) Make plans to increase the number and types of short-term social and recreational activities available to:
    - i. family and friends of regional residents who are in town to access medical services, either for the day or for several days
    - ii. hunting, fishing, camping and cottage visitors
    - iii. regional full-time and part-time residents visiting the Town
  - (c) Encourage local businesses and organizations to offer employee training programs that raise the level of professionalism in the services offered by their employees

To date, economic development activities in the community have focused primarily on attracting outside investment. This focus must now be complemented by the development of strategies that enhance the region's existing business and industrial communities. What do they need in order to plan for/improve/expand/streamline their businesses/physical structure/products/customer service practices to better serve regional residents and stakeholders? What role can the Town play to assist them in these processes?

Two potential areas of development are currently getting a great deal of attention. The establishment of a hospital on the eastern edge of Town will be an excellent spur for new economic and social activity. (replaces deleted paragraph; provides context for text that follows).

Northern Lakes College has a small campus in High Prairie and negotiations are

underway between the Town and the College to restore the College's main campus in High Prairie and to expand program offerings in the community. **Land is available for a new Northern Lakes College Campus.**

**Strategy E1.2** Develop a detailed economic development plan that outlines measures that the municipality will take to assist local business, industry to better serve regional residents and stakeholders

**Strategy E1.3** Obtain a commitment from the province to establish a model of health care delivery in the Town that addresses regional medical needs without sending residents for treatment in distant communities

**Strategy E1.4** Research what municipalities with large health service catchment areas offer to supplement the services provided by the health system (e.g., temporary residence for out of town outpatients, strong corps of health service volunteers<sup>4</sup>)

**Strategy E1.5** Provide additional tangible support to Northern Lakes College to expand its program base in High Prairie.

**Strategy E1.6** Encourage Northern Lakes College to **target the service and trade sectors as the focus for its local programming** (e.g, health-care and library technicians, business and office managers, tourist operators, executive and administrative assistants, computer networking and information processing technicians, **oil and gas workers, agricultural technicians**)

**Strategy E 1.7** Encourage Northern Lakes College to work with all local schools to identify students interested in integrated trades careers and to implement strategies for such students to achieve these objectives

The contract for the Town's economic development position may be opening in the within the next one to two years. It would be of benefit to the Town to consider how the economic development portfolio has evolved over time; what changes are occurring in the Town's economic picture; and what particular skills will be required to address them.

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<sup>4</sup> The Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton is known internationally for the quality and breadth of its volunteer services and may be a useful model to investigate

**Strategy E1.8** Identify and prioritize **the economic development skills** that will be needed to:

- assist existing business, industries and public services to “reach out to the region”
- identify potential opportunities related to the Seal Lake project and assist in the development of strategic plans to address them

Penn West Energy’s recent \$1.2 billion investment in the oil play near Seal Lake north of High Prairie has a significant potential to positively influence the Town’s economy in the coming years. Depending on the quality and depth of Town plans for these developments, it also has the potential to have significant social and other impacts that may not be in the Town’s best interests. The Town must avoid relying exclusively on this major project as its primary focus for economic development. Council and the Town must always keep the bigger picture of High Prairie’s long-term vision and objective as its highest priority, to *expand* its economy, rather than to *narrow* its focus.

Due to its faltering economy, the Town is particularly vulnerable at this time. With such good news comes the risk of leaping at opportunities before investing careful forethought into their long-term implications for the Town and the most effective way to implement them, where applicable.

It is critical for the Town to assess the best way to take advantage of this new opportunity *in a way that is sustainable*. A sustainable way is one that will ensure that High Prairie has the capacity to thrive long after Penn West’s work in the region has been completed in the next century.

Rather than thinking of the opportunity as a potential new anchor for the Town’s economy, this opportunity should be thought of as a financial tool to assist the Town to implement its strategies to expand the Town’s economy. As discussed earlier, it is these strategies that will assist the Town to achieve long-term sustainability, and not a new industry in town.

**Strategy E1.9** Establish a Task Force that:

(a) consists of local residents and Council representatives of the Town, MD, Métis settlements, and First Nations communities

(b) has a mandate to make recommendations to Penn West and/or to the respective Councils concerning strategies:

i. to support the company's economic and environmental management activities in the region

ii. to optimize the company's economic impact in the region

**Strategy E1.10** Adopt an evidence-based decision-making approach for all capital expenditures

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

### GOAL N1 THE TOWN'S DEVELOPMENT PATTERN:

- PROVIDES FOR RESIDENTIAL, COMMERCIAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL AREAS THAT ARE READILY ACCESSIBLE TO ONE ANOTHER VIA WALKING TRAIL LINKS
- INSPIRES VIBRANT PLACES FOR PEOPLE TO ASSEMBLE
- INVITES INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT THAT SERVE THE COMMUNITY, THE REGION AND VISITORS

The “downtown” area of most communities hosts a relatively small concentration of social and economic activities in a single, identifiable “place.” Such a place is attractive for new businesses looking for a site that will attract local foot traffic. Over the years, the High Prairie’s downtown development has followed an opportunistic pattern that is not conducive to such activity and has been detrimental to the maintenance of the Town’s original core area. Of High Prairie, one can either say that there is no longer a downtown, or that at approximately two kilometers, High Prairie’s downtown main street competes with the length of the downtown main streets of either of Alberta’s two largest cities.

It will be necessary for the Town to build on its current Municipal Development Plan and to enhance it where appropriate. By creating links between major local destinations (commercial, social, educational, health, government), the travel time between them decreases. The Town must achieve as much spin-off as possible from its key activities to enhance its economic base as a service centre. To do so, Councillors must take the time to make some very difficult decisions by delineating the Town’s core or “downtown.” This will require the creation of an urban design plan:

- to become a more attractive destination for residents and regional visitors and tourists
- to create a vibrant place that will naturally assemble people into one or more focal points around which redevelopment can be initiated

This will require improvements to the streetscape and to abutting buildings. New attractors may also be needed as catalysts for added commercial development.

Highway 2 is the spine of the community and represents its very face. As an

access point for all visitors, it significantly influences their perceptions. The Highway's street appeal must create a sense that the Town is a great place to live work and visit.

At the same time, Highway 2 may eventually have to be relocated. This could become necessary at some point to ensure that the core area remains vibrant for example, or if highway traffic becomes incompatible with local activities. Although there are no local or provincial plans to move the highway, the Municipal Development Plan must still address the location for an alternative highway. Should relocation become necessary at some point in the future, it must be consistent with the Town's long-term plans for its commercial core area. This means that the Town must incorporate long-term strategies into its MDP to protect an alternative route from encroachment.

**Strategy N1.1** Build on the existing Municipal Development Plan:

- Identify ways to improve accessibility between key destinations to make them as quick, convenient, pleasant, and comfortable as possible
- Develop an urban design plan for the Town's commercial core
- Invest in public infrastructure and other non-tax-based incentives to encourage existing non-industrial businesses to relocate to the Town's commercial core area
- Develop an urban design plan for Highway 2 through the community
- Develop a long term strategy for Highway 2

High Prairie has taken limited advantage of its natural features such as its watercourses. Council should take measures to ensure that excellent, existing resources are protected and expanded where possible (e.g., treed streetscapes such as "Elm St"). It should also develop natural feature standards for streets in newly developed areas so that future generations can enjoy the ambience that older neighbourhoods enjoy.

**Strategy N1.2** Develop a natural features plan

Because High Prairie's economy is experiencing a major shift, the Town's capacity to attract visitors and new residents is becoming increasingly important.

Cleanliness or signs of neglect are highly noticeable to community outsiders, something that the community cannot afford at this time. The Town must address the care and attention given to public spaces by developing a community standards bylaw for the appearance of private residential and commercial spaces.

**Strategy N1.3** Develop and initiate a clean-up campaign

The plan's third environmental strategy involves the creation of a Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ) for the Town's commercial core. The Municipal Government Act provides a means for businesses within a specific area to create an association whose purpose is to enhance the area's economic development. All businesses within the designated zone are required to contribute. A BRZ would provide resources and inspire the commitment of all businesses in the commercial core to address common actions that would benefit all.

**Strategy N1.4** Create a Business Revitalization Zone for the commercial core

The final environmental strategy addresses the local water supply. Occasional low water levels have meant that the availability of water is critical for the Town. The municipality must work with surrounding jurisdictions and the province to protect and enhance surface water supply especially from the West Prairie River. Not only is it a critical source of water, but it represents an important opportunity within the Town. Maintaining adequate flow and controlling flow in peak periods depend on the actions of others upstream and downstream of the Town.

**Strategy N1.5** Ensure the long-term protection of the Town's water supply

## **SOCIAL and CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY**

A socially sustainable community is one that is characterized by:<sup>5</sup>

- Respectful engagement with people from diverse backgrounds
- Social inclusiveness where all citizens have similar life opportunities
- Friendly, helpful behaviour in neighborhoods
- Opportunities for leisure, recreation, sport and social support activities
- Low levels of crime and anti-social behavior
- Diversity and affordability of housing

A culturally sustainable community is one that is characterized by:

- A sense of community identity and belonging
- Opportunities for expression via a variety of art forms representing each of the local cultural communities
- A strong sense of community heritage
- Pride in the community

These characteristics will be incorporated into High Prairie's social and cultural sustainability by focusing on four elements:

- Building a "sense of place"
- The cultural component to a "sense of place"
- Providing evidence of strong community values
- Strengthening the viability of community organizations

High Prairie hosts a relatively young population that has been deeply affected by the long-term slump in the forestry sector. The recent economic recession has further undermined the community's economy. Those who have built their lives in the community want to remain, but work opportunities are becoming increasingly scarce. At the same time, the community is also home to proportionately more seniors than can be found in neighbouring Big Lakes or Slave Lake.

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<sup>5</sup> Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. *Overview: Five Dimensions of MSP*. Retrieved 2010 02 17 from <http://msp.auma.ca/Overview/Five+Dimensions+of+MSP/#Society>

High Prairie's social, cultural and recreational facilities include:

- community hall
- **museum**
- performing arts centre with tiered seating
- two ice rinks and a curling rink
- **indoor** aquatic centre with slide, vortex, raindrop, geysers, tots pool, hot tub, steam room, party room, viewing terrace, foyer
- BMX bike track
- golf course
- tennis courts
- basketball court
- **four** ball diamonds
- **walking trails**
- agriplex/equestrian centre (rodeo grounds)
- proximity to:
  - **gun club**
  - **jackpines**
  - **historical trail**
  - ski area
  - sandy beaches and open water fishing
  - two provincial parks
  - **museums in Triangle, Grouard, and Kinuso**

Residents' commitment to the community is evident by the wide range of social and recreational opportunities available given the Town's size. Community participation in their establishment, use and maintenance has been extensive.

High Prairie's location makes it central to Métis settlements to the north and south, and to numerous First Nations communities throughout the region. Underlying cultural tensions in the town's streets and schools suggest that stronger relations between the First nations, Métis, and non-native communities are needed to ensure that the Town truly acquires the capacity to address the needs of all sectors of the region.

Many want High Prairie to be a community that can accommodate their needs through all life stages from infants to seniors. Over time however, the Town has seen a decline in its capacity to achieve this objective. *"You can no longer be born nor die in High Prairie."*

## NEEDS AT ALL LIFE STAGES

**GOAL S1 HIGH PRAIRIE SERVICES ADDRESS RESIDENTS' PERSONAL NEEDS AT ALL LIFE STAGES BY OFFERING A WIDE RANGE OF OPPORTUNITIES TO OPTIMIZE PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT (THIS WAS IN THE PLAN AT THE END OF THE REPORT IN THE JULY VERSION APPROVED BY COUNCIL, BUT WAS MISSING IN THE BODY OF THE REPORT).**

Five strategies have been identified to address this goal. These relate to: support for enhanced health services and facility, establishment of an area of assembly in the town's core, the enhancement of community standards, the establishment of a Town Community Co-ordinator position and the strengthening of community organizations.

The availability of "adequate" health services is a major preoccupation for community residents. In order to justify the establishment of a medical facility in the community, many want to make the Town the regional centre for health services. There have been few efforts however, to involve regional leaders in the planning or lobbying for these regional services. Given the cultural differences in the region, the Town may not necessarily be the first preference for many in the region to access health services. The community has long been lobbying the province for the enhancement of health services. Its efforts would be significantly strengthened by evidence of a regional partnership where all voices are heard and have equal weight.

Residents must continue to support that cause with actions in the community that demonstrate how the new services could contribute to the effective delivery of regional health care. Developing transportation options is a good example. The Town and jurisdictions in the Big Lakes region should develop a plan to bring non-emergency patients into the medical facility effectively and in a way that would improve the use of the facility and expand the potential service population.

Care for frail seniors is another area that requires attention. While acute care is medically and scientifically intensive, compassion should be the primary focus in caring for frail, elderly residents. In planning for seniors' services then, High Prairie leaders must keep in mind that seniors want to die at home. In cultural communities, seniors hold strong feelings about wanting to eat the same kinds of foods during their declining years as they did all of their lives and to "die in their

own language.” For these and similar reasons, they may often avoid being admitted to badly needed health services that do not cater to cultural needs. If High Prairie is to succeed in establishing a strong network of services that address regional seniors’ needs, it will be imperative that these services be carefully designed to meet the cultural needs of the targeted service recipients, and not just in a token fashion.

**Strategy S1.1** Promote and provide tangible support for major enhancements to the Town’s community, acute and long term care health services.

During the full-day workshop with citizens, a bus was rented to take all participants on a tour of the town to view it with new eyes. One question posed to the group was: “Where is High Prairie’s downtown core?” Although they were able to point to where it “used to be,” they were not able to find an existing core in the downtown.

Such a gap can have a profound impact on a community, not only at a social but an economic level. Currently, the Gordon Buchanan Centre and Sports Palace probably act as the Town’s place of assembly more than any other. Unfortunately, the aquatic centre is a distance away and the configuration of buildings, entries, walkways are not conducive to assembly (e.g., distance to cafeteria from separate building). There is also very little if any room to attract nearby economic or social activity to grow the assembly into a genuine core area of the Town.

Because there is no longer an apparent downtown, businesses have tended to sprout along the highway through Town. In fact, downtown High Prairie can now be said to stretch approximately two kilometres through the Town from one end to the other. Rather than a concentration of activity to spur assembly with its consequent economic and social activity, most of these activities are sufficiently spread apart to require the use of a vehicle to move from one key destination to another.

To curb commercial sprawl and to re-establish a commercial core requires the creation of several tools:

- An authentic and well-articulated *role* that the Town’s core area will serve in the community and to which Council is committed
- A Council approved *framework* that articulates what is to be preserved

- in the proposed new core and what physical changes are needed
- A detailed core area plan that outlines *strategies* that will be used to make the necessary changes that have been identified
- A significant *catalyst* or initial development that will serve to anchor the core area and will create confidence in the area’s future viability
- Amendments to the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) that replace Direct Control zones in the commercial core (DC2) with commercial zoning.

Each of these tools builds upon one another. The MDP cannot be amended until each of the other tools have been well articulated and implemented. To do so beforehand would lead to a plan on paper that cannot be implemented because the conditions to do so are not in place.

To articulate an authentic role for the Town’s core area, the community must assess its preferences for it and commit to its implementation. This may well be a challenge given that many traditional functions of a core area are now widely dispersed throughout the community. This first step is essential however, in order to build a core area whose functions are internally coherent with one another. Later in this section, the characteristics of a core area or “place of assembly” are described in more detail. These can be used to assist Council and the community to envision the role that the Town’s core can serve.

Once the role is clear, it will be necessary to determine:

- exactly where it should be located
- what specific characteristics of the area should be preserved
- what specific characteristics require improvement or significant change
- what can be done to “brand” the core area to distinguish it from the rest of the community

These “conditions” will serve as the foundation for a functional framework that would then be presented to Council for its approval.

Once Council approves the functional framework, it is then time to create a detailed plan that outlines strategies that will be used to make the necessary changes. Change strategies would:

- include recommendations for needed zoning changes

- outline the implications of these changes for existing property owners
- identify means to reduce any negative impact of these changes for individual property owners.

Change strategies may also include infrastructure investment in public facilities such as:

- enhanced street lighting, signs and/or walkways,
- historic or other types of markers with a thematic physical design,
- road enhancement,
- partially covered outdoor seating
- a small park on the corner of a block
- negotiation with the local business association to support thematic frontage for commercial properties in the area.

Once the Town has both functional and detailed plans that have been approved by Council, it will be possible to explore options to invite a desirable service-oriented or commercial enterprise that could serve as an anchor for the core area. The availability of the plans and evidence of Council commitment to their implementation will provide potential enterprises with an incentive to consider the opportunity based on confidence that Council is prepared to follow through on its plans. Once the anchor enterprise or organization has been secured, this will create confidence in the area's future viability for potential other investors.

The next step is to amend the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) to reflect the direction that Council has decided to take with the Town's core area. To amend the MDP as a first step in this process rather than the last can be tempting but introduces risk. With the MDP in place at the start, there is a risk that Council may not be able to follow through to create the necessary conditions to attract an anchor or to make changes to the targeted area. The MDP then becomes an idea on paper only, one without the motors in place to ensure its implementation.

Council's use of Direct Control Zoning for the "downtown" area in the MDP has been well intentioned, but is probably contributing to the gradual growth of commercial sprawl in the community. This is typical with the use of Direct Control Zoning because decisions tend to be made on an ad hoc basis using available land for available opportunities. A community's core area should be zoned Commercial. Once investors gain confidence in the area's long-term integrity as a

commercial zone, the Town should begin to see land values increase in its core. Direct Control (DC) zoning should only be used in very rare, site-specific circumstances to protect the site or surrounding development.<sup>6</sup>

**What forms the roots of a highly effective core area of a community?** A “sense of place,” where community relationship-building occurs, creates a setting to meet and greet others in public spaces and at public events. Parks, cultural events, formal social activities, coffee shops, restaurants, lounges and recreation activities are examples of places for people to get to know one other and to spend time together. A major area of assembly is of fundamental importance in creating a small town atmosphere and a family-friendly environment but it requires a considerable concentration of activity:

- Concentrate multiple uses (the more there are, the more likely it will be to succeed)
- Provide places for residents of all demographic characteristics to gather both in demographically distinct groups (e.g., youth) and in heterogeneously blended groups
- Provide a place for informal and formal, social, cultural, recreational and commercial activities
- Be designed to be people-friendly (e.g., has protected spaces to sit in the sun in comfort, is “senior friendly,”<sup>7</sup> and has a layout that minimizes walking distance between popular destinations)
- Be readily accessible from and to all neighbourhoods via a multi-use path network that would encourage the use of non-motorized modes of transportation
- Create a welcoming atmosphere for community residents and visitors

The more concentrated the core, the more people there will be. The more people there will be, the more commercial outlets will be attracted to locate there. The more commercial outlets able to provide high priority services, the more attractive the community becomes to newcomers. This is not the only attraction for newcomers, but is an important one.

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<sup>6</sup> “...circumstances that would be inappropriate or inadequate given the existing or future surrounding developments and the interest of the applicant and the public, generally.” Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. *Community Consultation Guide (Chapter on Zones and Land Use Classifications)*. 2003. Retrieved 2010 09 01 from <http://www.efcl.org/Portals/0/OtherSource/CCGuide/zoneclasses.html>

<sup>7</sup> Alberta Seniors and Community Supports. *Senior Friendly™ Program*. Retrieved 2010.02.17 from [http://www.seniors.alberta.ca/about\\_ministry/senior\\_friendly/](http://www.seniors.alberta.ca/about_ministry/senior_friendly/)

In a place of community assembly, the myriad interactions that sustain and create “community feeling” are expressed. Everyone must feel that they have a personal interest in the space so it should be designed to attract all population groups. This does not mean however, that everyone always shares the same activity areas. There would be separate spaces where different community groups have a place to meet, greet and socialize (e.g., seniors and youth). It would be designed as a people-centred area yet be auto-accessible.

Unfortunately, the need to accommodate parking often dominates such areas of a community. This tends to decrease ready access between businesses and services. Many are attracted to traditional commercial areas in smaller communities because they offer a streetscape with storefronts abutting the sidewalk and limited street parking. In other words, they are pedestrian-friendly. In order to maintain pedestrian-friendly streetscapes yet maintain auto-accessibility, design considerations can be incorporated into bylaws. Parking lots for example, can be placed behind storefronts that abut a sidewalk, not in front of, or beside a building.

The Town hub must be active from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily, consistently triggering sufficient hourly activity to draw new, added-value commercial services. While the intensity of activity may vary throughout the day, the more diversity in the area’s functions, the greater its use and viability will be.

The phrase, a “place of assembly,” is used to connote a place where people are coming together for a variety of purposes. Such a concourse or hub often defines the character of a community. Through a concentration of activity, it creates opportunities to enhance the availability of local services. Anything that increases pedestrian traffic in the target area is highly desirable. This place of assembly is essential as it addresses all components of sustainability.<sup>8</sup>

- It deepens identity by nourishing a common image in the minds of citizens of the community they call home, one that holds warm and loving memories. (social sustainability)
- It provides the concrete image needed by potential new citizens to discern

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<sup>8</sup> Most of the Town’s citizens already have a strong sense of identification with the Town, but its unique character is not readily apparent to potential newcomers. The depth of residents’ attachment to their community is most evident, even as they find it difficult to articulate why. Words used to describe it are similar to those used by residents of a large number of small communities to describe their own. The Town must find a means to express its uniquely attractive identity to potential newcomers.

the nature of the community's vitality and its distinctive personality. (economic sustainability)

- A convergence of social, cultural, and commercial activities builds a synergy that increases opportunity for new commercial activity thereby building the Town's self-sufficiency and its economic sustainability.
- The availability, in close proximity, of a variety of meeting places that have the capacity to host small, large, and very large groups nourishes cultural and social sustainability

Because of ready pedestrian-access to its location from many neighbourhoods and the potential for multi-purpose trips, environmental sustainability is enhanced by the reduced need for motorized transportation.

Potential new and existing community leaders benefit significantly from a busy place that provides a regular opportunity to interact informally with constituents. Cultivating leadership renewal is essential to nourish the sustainability of participative governance.

A sound sustainability plan must be oriented toward the future without being bound by past or existing limitations. While downtown development has been a continuing concern, it has resurfaced in this plan because it plays a pivotal role in achieving a sustainable vision for High Prairie.

**Strategy S1.2** Establish a place of assembly in the Town's core where people can assemble informally to socialize with one another, to be entertained or to enjoy the Town's ambience

Like **some other small** communities, **there are residents of High Prairie that** do not always feel safe walking about their community at night. Teen-agers roaming in large groups, vandalism, the loud use of abusive language and the use of excessive alcohol are more common than one might expect. There have been numerous reports that these behaviours deter residents from stepping out of their homes or into certain areas of the community. Some are even uncomfortable going to certain places in town during the day.

The feeling of safety is usually a cornerstone of small-town life. Parents want the security of knowing their children can move about their neighbourhood in safety and that if something happens, there will be a responsible adult nearby to ensure

they get home safely. To create vibrant commercial areas, the presence of people on the street is essential. To attract new people to the community, residents and visitors alike must feel safe walking around.

Community appearance plays into this phenomenon. Residents of, and visitors to a community form a visual impression of it and then treat it accordingly. If the Town wants to become a regional service centre, it must look like one and not like a frontier community. With the potential growth of oil sands activity in the area, there is a risk that the frontier aspects of the community (both visual and behavioural) may be enhanced. Council must take proactive measures to prevent this.

A “community standards bylaw” that is well thought through can deal with both behaviour in public places and maintenance standards for private residential, business, industrial and publicly-owned property. It would provide a benchmark to identify acceptable practices and an enforcement mechanism to ensure compliance in a way that all can recognize. Its enforcement is essential to ensure that regional residents and visitors of all ages and sectors of the social strata feel safe and comfortable in High Prairie. If not, many will go to extra lengths to go elsewhere.

**Strategy S1.3** Establish and enforce a “community standards” bylaw

Community organizations are the backbone of a community because they provide funds and volunteer time that would not otherwise be affordable. The strength of such organizations depends on expanding the number of people prepared to contribute time and resources. Communication is an important component of getting and keeping people involved. **In partnership with the MD**, the Town can play an important role in this such as allocating staff to assist with communication **by obtaining grants** and/or **by** maintaining and using tools such as the Internet to post information.

**(Strategy amended to reflect intent of community co-ordination addressed in text in this section of report)**

**Strategy S1.4** Establish a new Community Co-ordinator position of whose role would be to research, apply for and manage grants that would be used:

- to co-ordinate community events
- to facilitate communication amongst organizations and between these organizations and the community

- to assist organizations to broaden their bases of volunteer and financial support

Community strength can often be measured by:

- the vitality of its community groups, and
- the initiative of its residents to organize themselves and to take care of their own needs through volunteer efforts

In sustaining community, local organizations are as important or even more important than the Town's physical infrastructure.

High Prairie has a strong local base of organizations that deliver social, recreational and compassionate services. They cover a wide range of interests and needs and their contribution to the community's viability is immense. At the same time, the Town faces the reality that its population base is too small to meet all of its residents' needs.

Unfortunately, current social trends mean that increasingly limited financial resources are available to manage organizations. In addition, heads of families' increasing time constraints limit their time for volunteer activity and competing activities limit their involvement in local organizations.

Moreover, new regulations are restricting the way in which volunteers can be used. Understandably, more and more volunteers must be certified for certain duties making it difficult to recruit those with the appropriate certification. Many activities that could once be handled by volunteers now require that people be hired for that activity. One example is transportation where insurance requirements and liability now necessitate the use of paid contractors. Informal car-pooling is limited as well.

The challenge is for the community to broaden its base of support, both in terms of volunteer time and of sources of funds. Several trends that are assisting businesses and NGO's to broaden that base are:

- collective fund-raising
- partnership-building
- sharing of facilities

- regionalization of services

To strengthen its current community organizations, the Town of High Prairie can offer co-ordination support based on any or each of the four trends mentioned above.

Fund-raising is both a perpetual need and a perpetual challenge for community groups. There are many deserving causes and a limited number of people to ask for support. Community organizations are increasingly finding success by joining with a group of other organizations to implement collective fund-raising programs. Such a “community chest” or United Way approach to funding core volunteer organizations has the benefits of:

- reducing the number of approaches to potential donors
- creating opportunities to widen the base of potential supporters
- reducing volunteer time for fund raising

The initiative could also result in a vehicle that has charitable status and that can issue tax receipts for donations.

Another form of organizational support the Town could provide could be to assist community organizations to negotiate partnerships with other organizations, both locally and in nearby communities to create more opportunities or to diversify the types of service they can provide. The task of managing relationships with other groups or communities is very-time consuming and requires communication skills and tools that small organizations often do not have at their disposal. Much of such organizational work is ordinarily conducted during business hours limiting the contribution of many volunteers.

The Town is positioned to provide such organizational support by playing a key role in developing and managing partnerships. It can provide personnel to support the day-to-day administration of such partnerships and negotiate agreements on sharing facilities with other organizations.

Municipalities traditionally provide facilities for example, because of their overhead costs. In many cases, their actual utilization rate may be relatively low, but residents and especially potential newcomers value the fact that the facilities are available if they want to use them. The Town can act as a catalyst by

identifying potential opportunities and exploring the means to create shared facilities. Depending on the nature of the need, the Town may even take an active role in developing such facilities or in facilitating a private sector initiative.

Another emerging trend is the regionalization of service delivery. The delivery of Big Lakes/High Prairie's FCSS programs is a good example of this trend. Rather than looking for partnership activities for its own sake, the Town could consider the option as part of its regular decision-making processes. When planning a new facility, program or service, a routine question could be: Is there any way in which this project could take on partners such as the MD, a Métis settlement or a First Nations community to reach a broader audience or to share costs?

**Strategy S1.5** Strengthen community organizations

## **VISUAL, WRITTEN AND PERFORMING ARTS**

**GOAL S2 THE COMMUNITY'S STRENGTH IN ATHLETICS IS COMPLIMENTED BY AN EQUAL STRENGTH IN THE VISUAL, WRITTEN AND PERFORMING ARTS**

High Prairie residents are fortunate to have two rinks, a curling arena and a well-outfitted aquatics facility to name but a few of the Town's recreational services. Unfortunately, maintenance of these facilities usually runs an annual deficit of almost half a million dollars. While they are reasonably well used, there is potential for a significant increase in their utilization rate and the cost-recovery associated with it.

**Strategy S2.1** Establish incentives and negotiate agreements with other communities for non-resident use of the recreational and performing arts facilities to improve utilization rates

**Strategy S2.2** Develop creative strategies to increase residents' use of the Performing Arts space in the Gordon Buchanan building

**Strategy S2.3** Establish a High Prairie Cultural Society whose mandate would be to showcase local talent and to bring both spectator and participatory entertainment to the Town

## HIGH PRAIRIE AS HOME TO ALL IN THE REGION

### **GOAL S3 RESIDENTS IN BOTH THE TOWN AND IN THE SURROUNDING BIG LAKES REGION SHARE A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP OF HIGH PRAIRIE AS THEIR “HOME”**

High Prairie has long been an industrial community serving the forestry and agricultural sectors, with oil and gas as a more recent arrival. The residents of numerous Métis settlements and First Nations communities come to High Prairie for economic and social activity. In addition, High Prairie’s schools have a significant representation of First Nations’ children. The economic impact has been appreciated and encouraged by the Town’s business people, but underlying cultural tensions in the streets and in the schools do flare up from time to time.

The age of a community’s population has a major influence on its social profile. A simple way to study a community’s age is to compare it to its neighbours and to its “competitors.” The MD of Big Lakes is a neighbour while the Town of Slave Lake could be considered a competitor for the provision of certain types of services.

A “normal” age profile for a community is in the shape of a pyramid, with the largest number of people in the youngest age groups and the fewest number of people in the oldest age groups. One exception to this is that in small communities, young people in the 20-24 age groups typically leave the community for advanced educational or employment opportunities. The population in the next age group tends to increase again with new or returning 25-29 year olds coming into the community for work or to start families.

The 2006 Age of Population pyramids for High Prairie and Big Lakes (Appendix C) show slight but important differences. Firstly, it would appear that more young people 20-29 years old leave Big Lakes than do young people in High Prairie. The reason that High Prairie shows less people leaving however, may be that some of the Big Lakes young people are coming into High Prairie for work or post-secondary education thereby diluting the impact of the departure of the Town’s young people. At the other end of the spectrum, Big Lakes seniors 75 years old or older tend to be fewer than those in High Prairie. The difference may be more pronounced given that the Big Lakes seniors may actually be moving into High

Prairie.

The difference in the seniors population between High Prairie and Slave Lake is much more pronounced, and it is unlikely that the latter seniors are moving to High Prairie. Nor is it likely that seniors in Slave Lake die earlier than those in neighbouring communities, so two potential questions emerge. Where are they going? Or, why are there so few? In Slave Lake's case, there has been a major increase in its population in the past twenty years and the in-migration was primarily in the younger age groups (i.e., people looking for work). These will be important factors to consider when decisions are being made about the best location for long-term care services in the region.

Interestingly, Slave Lake shows a trend with 20-29 year olds that is similar to that of Big Lakes, yet it has its own advanced education programs and job opportunities, ones that probably attract some of the Big Lakes' young people.

The Town's economy relies heavily on the three Métis Settlements and 11 First Nations communities in the region (see Appendix D). Many local businesses ensure that their products and services respond to these buyers' specific needs. At the social level however, cultural tensions are evident in the schools, on Town streets and in the employment sector.

**Strategy S3.1** Invite Métis and First Nations communities to create and display icons of their cultures in the Town

**Strategy S3.2** Encourage local organizations to involve members of Métis and First Nations communities in the planning processes for local activities and events

**Strategy S3.3** Develop strategies to encourage members of Métis and First Nations communities and High Prairie residents to participate in one another's public activities and events and to feel genuinely welcome during such experiences (e.g., local festivals, cultural, and recreational activities)

## GOVERNANCE SUSTAINABILITY

The Town of High Prairie and its surrounding communities are interdependent in many ways. They need one another in order to create the kind of communities to which residents aspire. It is fundamentally important that the Town of High Prairie create a local environment that accommodates the needs of regional residents. This will encourage them to identify with High Prairie as their home as well. Regional residents must also recognize that they must treat the Town and its residents and visitors with respect.

Communities must understand their mutual needs and develop mechanisms to achieve mutual goals. Differences are apparent in the ways that they communicate with one another and in governance systems that are used. All parties should consider the use of cultural interpreter to manage inter-cultural communication and decision-making. This could bring about better understanding of issues and culturally appropriate strategies for their resolution.

**GOAL G1**      **THE TOWN OF HIGH PRAIRIE, THE MÉTIS SETTLEMENTS, THE FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES AND THE MD OF BIG LAKES RECOGNIZE THEIR MUTUAL INTEREST IN THE TOWN'S AND THE REGION'S WELL-BEING AND WORK JOINTLY TOWARD COMMON GOALS.**

**Strategy G1.1** Develop a joint protocol between the communities

**GOAL G2**      **THE TOWN'S MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN IS UP-TO-DATE AND CONTINUALLY REFLECTS THE TOWN'S EMERGING NEEDS**

**Strategy G2.1** Establish a Council Committee consisting of two Councillors and five residents whose mandate will be to:

- Ensure the implementation of High Prairie's Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP)
- Maintain awareness of social, cultural, environmental, economic and governance trends in the region
- Make recommendations to Council on modifications needed to the MSP

**Strategy G2.2** Develop Terms of Reference for the Sustainability Committee that include:

- a quarterly meeting structure
- citizen representation based on commitment to the plan's vision, goals and strategies and on personal strengths in at least one of the five pillars that make up the plan

**Strategy G2.3** Establish a regional planning body to develop plans and protocols for joint water course management that will address:

- Preservation
- Control (especially flooding)
- Pollution
- Protection of natural areas

## CONCLUSION

To implement this plan, Council must make decisions that involve risk and that affect existing interests:

- Transforming the Town's core area development pattern
- Expanding the Town's economic base
- Establishing formal relations with First Nations communities

It is very possible that these are decisions that have been on Council's agenda for quite some time but there has not been the opportunity or necessary catalyst to deal with them. To assure a healthy, long-term future for the community, Council must educate the community on the steps necessary for Council, community residents and stakeholders to transform the community. Mistakes may be made, but taking risks are part of any successful community's evolution.

High Prairie's Municipal Sustainability Plan presented is a long-term plan for the community. It involves two critical components: a time frame and a guide. Firstly, the plan proposed in this report will not be easy to implement and will take a very long time to complete. Council and community residents alike must remind themselves periodically that many of the strategies assume the establishment of a sound foundation. Laying foundations can be the most time-consuming element of implementing a plan whether it be in constructing buildings or in building communities. To implement the plan, Council must first establish its short-term (2011-2013), medium-term (2014-2020) and long term objectives (2021-2050).

It will be necessary to articulate strategies in more detail, to set target dates, and to update the plan annually, as goals get met, reframed or delayed.

The second concept that Council and residents alike must understand is that by its very nature, a plan cannot be rigidly adhered to. It must take into account changing conditions in the community as well as new opportunities or threats. As conditions change, the plan must be updated to accommodate these changes. For this reason, the plan should be considered as a guide to meet the vision rather than a legislated document that must be implemented in every detail.

It is essential however, to:

- keep the vision and the long-term objectives as targets
- review the strategies needed to achieve them on a regular basis and adjust them as necessary.

Improving pedestrian paths to connect the core to the neighbourhoods can only enhance commercial success. Pedestrian traffic creates opportunity for second- and third-level activities to build a customer base. Make it easy and attractive to walk between businesses in the core. Most connections between businesses are on private land because commercial spaces are set back with parking in front.

Since both community and commercial businesses will benefit from better circulation, the Town should partner with owners on plans to cost share on building frontage enhancement and façade enhancement. Keep storefronts active. With the co-operation of landlords, vacant storefronts and hard-to-lease commercial spaces can be used for short-term community use. These spaces create negative perceptions of commercial viability. While turnover of tenants is normal, some spaces languish for various reasons. An interim use is often needed to generate interest.

Improve maintenance for the main pedestrian routes. The commercial activity area needs to be accessible year-round including the winter months when maintenance requirements are important to encouraging use. An enhanced maintenance plan is needed to keep such routes as easy to traverse as possible.

In summary,

- Be prepared to take risks
- Always keep the vision and the objectives in the foreground and be cautious about getting caught prematurely in detail
- Educate the community on the steps necessary for Council, residents and stakeholders to transform the community
- Expand on the plan with time frames
- Use the plan as a guide, not as a law
- All of Council's efforts should be directed towards the achievement of Council's objective at hand, whatever it may be, rather than spending too much time fleshing out details of Plan B before they are needed
- Once the Town's future core area is determined, find ways to drive activity to that area now.
- Make it easy and attractive to walk between business areas
- Improve maintenance on the main pedestrian routes
- Keep store fronts active

## *Using this Plan*

To keep this Municipal Sustainability Plan off the shelf and in the minds of current and future Councillors, several steps can be taken to integrate it into ongoing decision-making processes. To ensure its implementation, a Municipal Plan must have life and must connect to Council's decision-making process.

The assumption is that if the Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP) is sufficiently comprehensive, it will serve as a guide for all Council decisions. The Town can require that requests to Council for funding or for decisions can state explicitly the goal or strategy in the MSP that it addresses. When Council makes other types of decisions, the related goal or strategy in the MSP can be reflected in the relevant Council meeting minutes. MDPs, Area Structure Plans, Business Plans, Strategic Plans, Emergency Management Plans and other planning tools can all tie their goals and strategies explicitly to the Town's MSP.

To facilitate this explicit linking process, a Decision-Making Template can be developed. When requests for decisions are submitted to Council, the template would pose a series of questions about:

- which sustainability pillar(s) will be addressed by the proposed action
- which specific goals and strategies will be addressed (referred to by a unique number identifier)
- measures to use to demonstrate the effectiveness of proposed actions

Clearly, the plan included in this report does not cover all of the potential decisions that will be made by Council. It is up to the Town then to take this plan and to modify it to meet needs not currently addressed in the plan. Only then can Council embrace it as its own plan.

# APPENDIX A

## High Prairie's Municipal Sustainability Plan

### *Vision*

High Prairie: Reaching out to the region

### *Mission*

The Town of High Prairie's mission is to foster a healthy, dynamic and welcoming environment in which regional residents and visitors can abide and thrive, work and play, learn and heal at any and all stages of their lives.

### *Long-Term Objective*

To expand the local economic base to include the delivery of post-secondary, health, tourist and commercial supply services to residents in the surrounding region.

## ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

**GOAL E1**      **HIGH PRAIRIE’S RESOURCE-EXTRACTION ECONOMY IS COMPLEMENTED BY A REGIONAL SERVICE ECONOMY THAT CONCENTRATES ON THE HEALTH CARE, POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, TOURISM, AND COMMERCIAL SUPPLY SECTORS**

- Strategy E1.1** Make physical and social changes to the Town to reflect the blend of a regional service community with the existing industrial community
- (a) Enhance community appearance/ambience by developing pertinent residential, public service, business and industrial programs
  - (b) Make plans to increase the number and types of short-term social and recreational activities available to:
    - i. family and friends of regional residents who are in town to access medical services, either for the day or for several days
    - ii. hunting, fishing, camping and cottage visitors
    - iii. regional full-time and part-time residents visiting the Town
  - (c) Encourage local businesses and organizations to offer employee training programs that raise the level of professionalism in the services offered by their employees
- Strategy E1.2** Develop a detailed economic development plan that outlines measures that the municipality will take to assist local business and industry to better serve regional residents and stakeholders
- Strategy E1.3** Obtain a commitment from the province to establish a model of health care delivery in the Town that addresses regional medical needs
- Strategy E1.4** Research what municipalities with large health service catchment areas offer to supplement the services provided by the health system (e.g., temporary residence for out of town outpatients, strong corps of health service volunteers)

**Strategy E1.5** Provide additional tangible support to Northern Lakes College to expand its program base in High Prairie.

**Strategy E1.6** Encourage Northern Lakes College to **target the service and trade sectors as the focus for its local programming** (e.g, health-care and library technicians, business and office managers, tourist operators, executive and administrative assistants, computer networking and information processing technicians, **oil and gas workers, agricultural technicians**)

**Strategy E1.7** Encourage Northern Lakes College to work with all local schools to identify students interested in integrated trades careers and to implement strategies for such students to achieve these objectives

**Strategy E1.8** Identify and prioritize the **economic development** skills that will be needed to:

- assist existing business, industries and public services to “reach out to the region”
- identify potential opportunities related to the Seal Lake project and assist in the development of strategic plans to address them

**Strategy E1.9** Establish a Task Force that:

- (a) consists local residents and of representatives of the Councils of the Town, the MD, the Metis settlements, First Nations communities
- (b) has a mandate to make recommendations to Penn West and/or to the respective Councils concerning strategies:
  - i. to support the company’s economic and environmental management activities in the region
  - ii. to optimize the company’s economic impact in the region

**Strategy E1.10** Adopt an evidence-based decision-making approach for all capital expenditures

# ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

## GOAL N1 THE TOWN'S DEVELOPMENT PATTERN:

- PROVIDES FOR RESIDENTIAL, COMMERCIAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL AREAS THAT ARE READILY ACCESSIBLE TO ONE ANOTHER VIA WALKING TRAIL LINKS
- INSPIRES VIBRANT PLACES FOR PEOPLE TO ASSEMBLE
- INVITES INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT THAT SERVE THE COMMUNITY, THE REGION AND VISITORS

### Strategy N1.1 Build on the existing Municipal Development Plan:

- Identify ways to improve accessibility between key destinations to make them as quick, convenient, pleasant, and comfortable as possible
- Develop an urban design plan for the Town's commercial core
- Invest in public infrastructure and other non-tax-based incentives to encourage existing non-industrial businesses to relocate to the Town's commercial core area
- Develop an urban design plan for Highway 2 through the community
- Develop a long term strategy for Highway 2

### Strategy N1.2 Develop a natural features plan

### Strategy N1.3 Develop and initiate a clean-up campaign

### Strategy N1.4 Create a Business Revitalization Zone for the commercial core

### Strategy N1.5 Ensure the long term protection of the Town's water supply

## **SOCIAL and CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**GOAL S1**      **HIGH PRAIRIE SERVICES ADDRESS RESIDENTS’ PERSONAL NEEDS AT ALL LIFE STAGES BY OFFERING A WIDE RANGE OF OPPORTUNITIES TO OPTIMIZE PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Strategy S1.1** Promote and provide tangible support for major enhancements to the Town’s community, acute and long term care health services.

**Strategy S1.2** Establish a place of assembly in the Town’s core where residents and visitors can assemble informally to socialize with one another, to be entertained or to enjoy the Town’s ambience.

**Strategy S1.3** Establish and enforce a “community standards” bylaw

**Strategy S1.4** Establish a new position of Community Co-ordinator whose role would be to research, apply for and manage grants that would be used:

- to co-ordinate community events
- to facilitate communication amongst organizations and between these organizations and the community
- to assist organizations to broaden their bases of volunteer and financial support

**Strategy S1.5** Strengthen community organizations

**GOAL S2**      **THE COMMUNITY’S STRENGTH IN ATHLETICS IS COMPLIMENTED BY AN EQUAL STRENGTH IN THE VISUAL, WRITTEN AND PERFORMING ARTS**

**Strategy S2.1** Establish incentives and negotiate agreements with other communities for non-resident use of the recreational and performing arts facilities could significantly improve utilization rates.

**Strategy S2.2** Develop strategies to increase residents’ use of the Performing Arts space in the Gordon Buchanan building

**Strategy S2.3** Establish a High Prairie Cultural Society whose mandate will be to showcase local talent and to bring both spectator and

participatory entertainment to the Town

**GOAL S3 RESIDENTS IN BOTH THE TOWN AND THE BIG LAKES REGION SHARE A SENSE OF PRIDE AND OWNERSHIP OF HIGH PRAIRIE AS THEIR “HOME”**

**Strategy S3.1** Invite Métis and First Nations communities to create and display icons of their cultures in the Town

**Strategy S3.2** Encourage local organizations to involve members of Métis and First Nations communities in the planning processes for local activities and events

**Strategy S3.3** Develop strategies to encourage members of Métis and First Nations communities and High Prairie residents to participate in one another’s public activities and events and to feel genuinely welcome during such experiences (e.g., local festivals, cultural, and recreational activities)

**GOAL S4 THE TOWN OF HIGH PRAIRIE, MÉTIS SETTLEMENTS, FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES AND THE MD OF BIG LAKES RECOGNIZE THEIR MUTUAL INTEREST IN THE TOWN’S AND THE REGION’S WELL BEING AND WORK JOINTLY TOWARD COMMON GOALS.**

**Strategy 4.1** Develop a joint protocol between the communities

## GOVERNANCE SUSTAINABILITY

### GOAL G1 THE TOWN'S MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN IS UP-TO-DATE AND CONTINUALLY REFLECTS THE TOWN'S EMERGING NEEDS

**Strategy G1.1** Establish a Council Committee consisting of two Councillors and five residents whose mandate will be to:

- Ensure the implementation of High Prairie's Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP)
- Maintain awareness of social, cultural, environmental, economic and governance trends in the region
- Make recommendations to Council on modifications needed to the MSP

**Strategy G1.2** Develop Terms of Reference for the Sustainability Committee that include:

- a quarterly meeting structure
- citizen representation based on commitment to the plan's vision, goals and strategies and on personal strengths in at least one of the five pillars that make up the plan

**Strategy G1.3** Establish a regional planning body to develop plans and protocols for joint water course management that will address:

- Preservation
- Control (especially flooding)
- Pollution
- Protection of natural areas

# APPENDIX B

## Documents made available to Advisory Group members

### **Cultural Pillar**

2010 03 08 High Prairie Social & Cultural Meeting  
Aboriginal People in Alberta 2006 Census

### **Social Pillar**

2006 Population High Prairie  
1996-06 Age of population: High Prairie vs Big Lakes  
1996-06 Age of population: High Prairie vs Slave Lake  
2001 Age of population: High Prairie vs Lac La Biche  
2006 Age of population: High Prairie vs Big Lakes  
2006 Age of population: High Prairie vs Lac La Biche  
2006 Age of population: High Prairie vs Slave Lake  
2006 Dwelling units total  
2006 Income  
2006 Occupations  
2006 Persons/dwelling unit  
2006 Population  
2006 Population growth rate  
2006 Statistics Canada's High Prairie Community Profile  
2010 03 08 High Prairie Social/Cultural Meeting  
Age-Friendly Communities  
Health Advisory Council details  
Health Services  
High Prairie Municipal Profile

## **Environmental Pillar**

2010 03 12 Environmental Meeting  
Alberta Natural Gas and Coal Map  
Alberta Northern Highways Strategy 2008  
Alberta Oil Pipelines Map  
Alberta Oil Sands and Conventional Oil Map  
Agriculture Zone Map  
Big Lakes Municipal Development Plan 2004  
High Prairie Existing Land Use Map 2008  
High Prairie Future Land Use Map  
High Prairie Municipal Development Plan 2008  
Water Bibliography  
West Prairie River Discharge Graph

## **Economic Pillar**

Alberta Economic Reviews  
2006 Assessment  
2006 Income  
2006 Industry  
2006 Occupations  
2006 Persons/dwelling unit  
2008 Alberta Regional Labour Market Review  
2008 High Prairie Audited Financial Statements  
2009 High Prairie Cap Budget  
2010 03 06 High Prairie Economy & Governance Meeting  
2010 03 19 Economy and Governance Meeting  
Alberta Conventional Oil Deposits Map  
Alberta Economic Highlights  
Alberta Forest Management 2009  
Alberta Natural Gas and Coal Map  
Alberta Northern Highways Strategy 2008  
Big Lakes Agriculture Stats  
Big Lakes Oil and Gas 2002  
Branding Agriculture Peace Country 2009  
Developing N Alberta Discussion Paper 2009  
High Prairie Economic Facts  
High Prairie Existing Land Use Map 2008  
High Prairie Future Land Use Map  
High Prairie Municipal Development Plan 2008  
Mill Rate Comparison

Northern Infrastructure 2009  
Slave Lake Region Economic Indicators  
Urban economies and productivity  
Wood Products Report for LSLEA & PREDA

**Governance**

2010 03 06 High Prairie Economy & Governance Meeting  
2010 03 19 Economy & Governance Meeting  
Council Goals 2007-2010  
High Prairie Historical MPs & MLAs

**Sustainability Planning**

2009 07 08 High Prairie Public Meeting  
2010 03 03 High Prairie Public Meeting  
5 Pillars of MSP  
Completing Your ICSP  
MSP Complete Guidebook June 06  
MSP requirements for Mar 31  
Starting Your ICSP

# APPENDIX C

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

# APPENDIX D

## MÉTIS SETTLEMENTS AND FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

# APPENDIX E

## HIGH PRAIRIE REGIONAL TRADING AREA