Economic Recovery Task Force 2020

Rocky View County's economic recovery and resilience in response to COVID-19

ROCKY VIEW COUNTY

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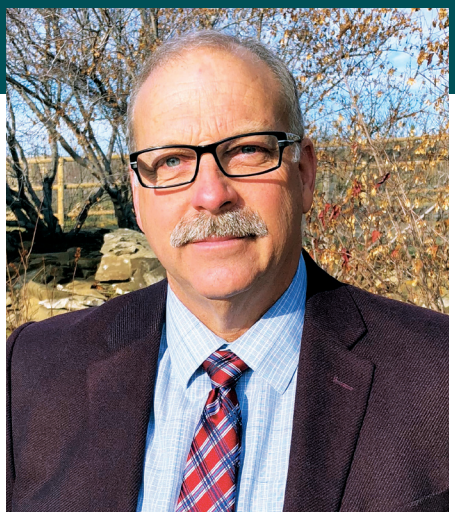
MESSAGE FROM THE CAO



It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered many facets of life for the residents and business community of Rocky View County. However, the pandemic has also demonstrated the willingness of our community to pull together, help each other and do the right thing to protect the health of our friends, family and neighbours.

The County took a proactive stance and switched to work-from-home on March 16th 2020 in order to protect the health of our employees and County residents. Employees returned to work and the County re-opened to the public as we learned more about COVID-19 and ensured we were able to put the recommended protocols in place to guarantee public safety. The health, safety, and well-being of our employees, alongside our efforts to maintain important County services for the public continue to be our top priority.

It quickly became apparent that the economic and labour force impacts of the necessary shutdowns would be every bit as painful as the public health impacts of the pandemic. The economic impacts have been especially harsh in Alberta, and as we enter the sixth year of a prolonged economic downturn, global oil prices continue to remain low and we face the provincial downloading of costs to municipalities.

To ensure that the County does its part in stimulating Alberta's economic recovery from the pandemic, I established the CAO's Economic Recovery Task Force. The Task Force consisted of Councillors, local business leaders, and County administration. It was directed to investigate potential actions for businesses, residents, and the County to stimulate economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19, as well as recommend processes that may build resilience in the face of future public health crises.

I would like to thank the external members of the Task Force: Peter Loats, James Moller, Rich Vesta, Adrian Monroe, Charlie Holschuh and Paul Ryneveld. Without their contributions, the work of the Task Force and associated recommendations would not have been possible.

Finally, I would like to thank the residents and business community of Rocky View County. Despite the adversity of a public health crisis, our community has demonstrated resilience, ingenuity and solidarity. These values form the backbone of our community, and our willingness to pull together gives me hope that we will emerge on the other side of this pandemic stronger than ever.

Sincerely,

Al Hoggan
Rocky View County Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the World Health Organization declaration of COVID-19 to be a global pandemic, the Government of Alberta declared a public health emergency as a result of COVID-19 on March 17, 2020 and proceeded to shut down the majority of Alberta's economy to limit the spread of the disease. The result has been unprecedented economic impacts, not seen since the Great Depression, and Alberta is among the hardest hit parts of the country. Albertans have experienced significant job losses and a 13 per cent unemployment rate. The fiscal and social impacts to Alberta will impact the Province for years to come.

Before COVID-19, Rocky View County proved itself to be a dynamic and attractive destination for business investment due to competitive taxes, affordable land, excellent transportation infrastructure, cost-effective service delivery and a sensible regulatory regime. Over the past ten years, the County's assessment base has grown by $5.2 billion, from $13.5 billion to $18.7 billion, despite the ongoing adverse economic conditions in Alberta. Over the same period, the County's non-residential assessment base tripled from $1.1 billion to $3.3 billion.

Despite the significant challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Rocky View County is determined to do its part to assist in Alberta's economic recovery. To spur economic recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rocky View County's Chief Administrative Officer established the Economic Recovery Task Force in May 2020. The Task Force consisted of local business leaders, two Councillors, and County Administration and was mandated to determine potential actions the County could undertake to spur economic recovery as well as build economic resilience in the event of future public health crises.

The Task Force recommended a number of actions, grouped into four broad categories:

1. **Create opportunities for enhanced business-to-business connections, as well as connections between businesses and prospective employees and/or customers**. Leverage digital opportunities; enhance connections between Chambers of Commerce; promote business-to-business solutions on the County's webpage; create a Rocky View business directory; and encourage local synergies.
2. **Develop a comprehensive marketing plan for Rocky View County**. Enhance the 'Shop Local' campaign; raise awareness of resources for businesses, both local and federal/provincial; leverage existing digital tools; and create a comprehensive marketing plan with a number of supporting actions.
3. **Reduce red tape to enhance the County's business-friendly environment**. Examine County regulations for opportunities to reduce red tape; review County policies for opportunities to enhance economic recovery; and assess County procedures for opportunities to streamline processes.
4. **Advocate through provincial, national, and international agencies to raise the profile of the County**. Work closely with provincial MLAs and Ministers to raise awareness of business opportunities in the County and remove provincial barriers to growth; send County representatives or local business leaders on provincial trade missions, where appropriate; and send the mayor to national/international trade conferences and events to better market the County.

With every crisis comes opportunity. The County will accelerate existing economic development initiatives and integrate lessons learned from the current pandemic to emerge on the other side of this public health crisis more resilient and stronger than before.

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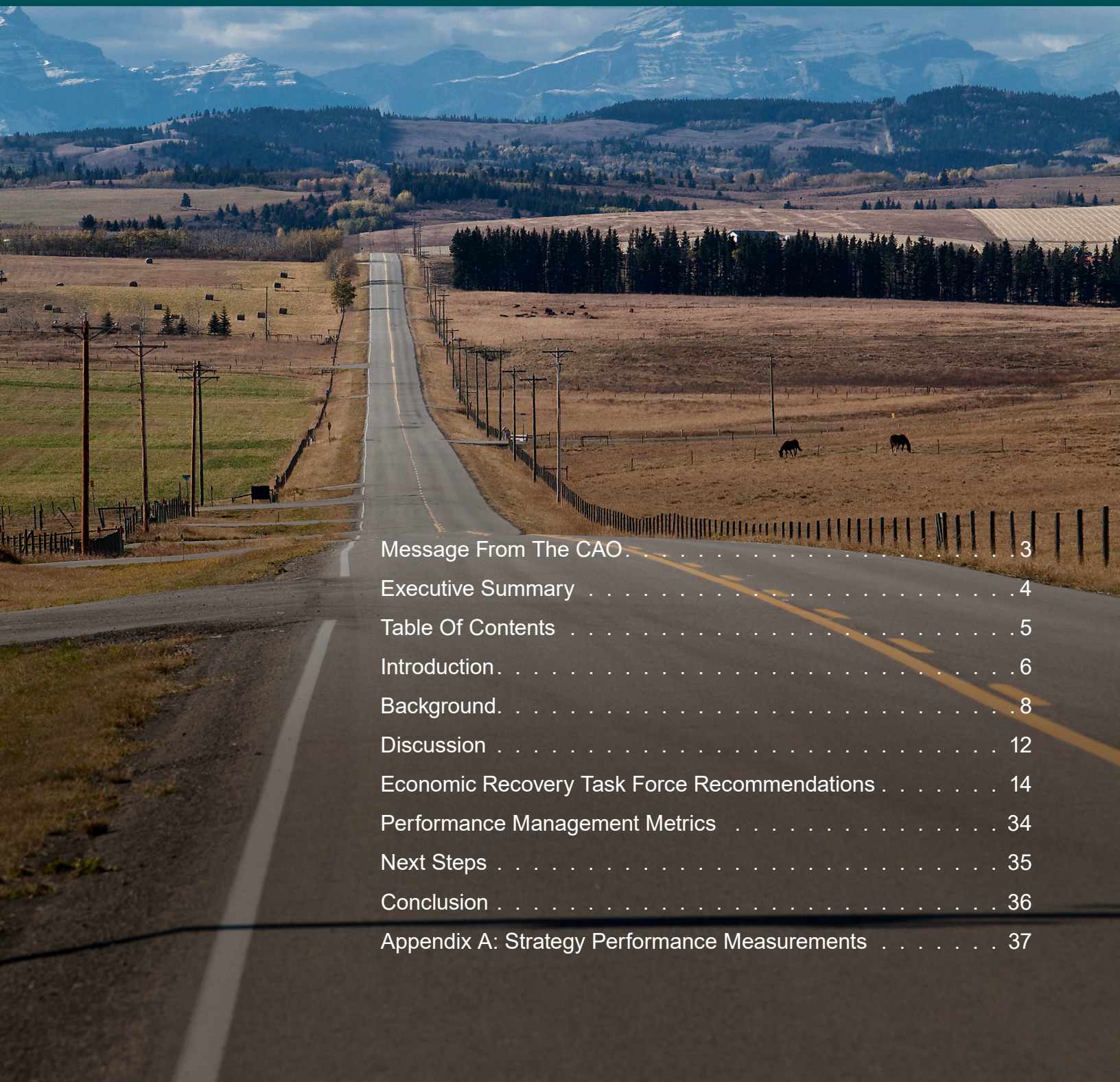

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INTRODUCTION

Task Force Mandate:

Generate recommendations to stimulate economic recovery for businesses, workers and the broader community.

Generate recommendations to increase economic resilience.

In mid-March 2020, Canadian provinces and territories, including Alberta, declared states of emergency due to the rapidly-emerging COVID-19 pandemic. The worst-case scenario for pandemic cases and deaths was averted due to timely actions by all levels of government and compliance with public health orders by the general public. However, the economic impacts of COVID-19 and associated shutdowns quickly became apparent. Rocky View County created the Chief Administrative Officer's (CAO) Economic Recovery Task Force, consisting of local business community leaders, elected officials, and County Administration, to determine potential actions the County could undertake to spur economic recovery and build economic resilience in the event of future health crises.

The purpose of the Task Force was to provide recommendations to Council on how various segments of the County can assist with spurring the County's economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Task Force was mandated to generate recommendations to stimulate economic recovery for businesses, workers and the broader community, as well as generate recommendations which would increase economic resilience in the event of future health-related crises. The Task Force met monthly from May to September, 2020, to develop the recommendations found in this report.

BACKGROUND

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. The Government of Alberta declared a public health emergency as a result of COVID-19 on March 17, 2020. By March 22, 2020, every province and territory in the country had declared a state of emergency or public health emergency. Early modelling showed that, without shutdowns and precautionary measures, the pandemic would have resulted in massive numbers of cases, overwhelming the healthcare system and resulting in many deaths. Fortunately, due to proactive measures taken by all orders of government and a high degree of personal compliance with public health orders, this worst-case scenario was averted and deaths in Canada have remained relatively low.

However, the necessary public health measures have resulted in significant economic and labour force disruptions. There have been unprecedented economic impacts, not seen since the Great Depression, and Alberta is among the hardest hit in the country. As of August 2020, Albertans had experienced losses of more than 170,000 jobs and a 13 per cent unemployment rate. This does not include lost hours due to a lack of childcare, work-from-home, or other circumstances. Recent Scotiabank forecasting predicts that Alberta will experience a real GDP decline of 7.3 per cent in 2020, with 4.1 per cent growth in 2021. The provincial deficit is projected to reach $24.2 billion this year, and the province's debt burden to reach $99.6 billion by the end of the fiscal year.

While it is well-understood that we are reliant on the private sector to create economic growth, governments can support the private sector by creating the appropriate conditions to enable growth. Municipalities may have fewer levers to accomplish these goals than provincial or federal governments, but the County is determined to do its part to stimulate the provincial economy and participate in the post-COVID economic recovery. Over the past few years, the County has undertaken a number of initiatives to reduce red tape and create a business-friendly environment including adoption of a new and streamlined Land Use Bylaw. The Task Force recommendations contained in this report focus on economy recovery, but also further the work that was already underway before the pandemic struck.

20,574 jobs in Rocky View County despite a population of 40,000 people.

Economic Development in Rocky View County
Rocky View County has enjoyed significant economic development and growth since 2001. Rocky View County's 2020 assessment base was valued at $18.7 billion, the fifth largest in Alberta. Over the past ten years, the County's assessment base has grown by $5.2 billion, from $13.5 billion to $18.7 billion, despite the ongoing adverse economic conditions in Alberta. Over the same period, the County's non-residential assessment base tripled from $1.1 billion to $3.3 billion. These investments provide a stable tax base to pay for necessary infrastructure and services provided by the County, in addition to employment opportunities for County residents.

The County's commitment to a sensible regulatory regime, combined with competitive taxes and a range of industrial/commercial development opportunities, has created a business-friendly environment and spurred economic growth in the area. The County has developed a number of regionally significant business centres, including Conrich, Langdon, East Balzac, Janet Industrial Area and the North Springbank airport area. Some notable logistics businesses in the County include: Amazon Fulfillment Centre, Gordon Food Services, Walmart distribution centre, the CN Intermodal Yard in Conrich, Sobey's/Safeway distribution centre, and a recently announced Lowe's distribution centre. The County also offers opportunities for light manufacturing, aviation, transportation companies and many retail-oriented opportunities. The CrossIron Mills shopping centre and the Groupe Nordik spa represent significant customer-oriented developments. The County is also home to numerous agricultural producers, agri-processors, and agricultural businesses, such as Harmony Beef, G3 grain terminal, and Highline Mushrooms, as well as equipment and input suppliers.

3-GOALS:

1. Attraction of new investment, both Domestic and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
2. Retention and expansion of existing businesses in the County
3. Contribution to the diversification of the Alberta economy

The economic development in the County supplies employment opportunities to County residents as well as residents in surrounding municipalities. A recent employment study for the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board found that there were 20,574 jobs located in the County in 2018, despite a population of approximately 40,000.

Rocky View County is focused on attracting new tax base growth by encouraging investment in commercial and industrial development as well as seeking opportunities for growth, expansion and product development for existing businesses. The County has three main goals, which are supported by the recommendations of the Task Force:

1. Attraction of new investment, both Domestic and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
2. Retention and expansion of existing businesses in the County
3. Contribution to the diversification of the Alberta economy

COVID-19 has motivated many investment groups to reconsider the focus on dense downtown cores and businesses may consider moving to areas with more space, in light of consumer concerns around limited ability to physically distance. Changing consumer preferences represent an opportunity for the County to market itself as a place with space.

DISCUSSION

When the CAO Economic Recovery Task Force was formed in May 2020, a Terms of Reference was approved that outlined the following deliverables:

1. How the business community can spur economic recovery;
2. How the County residents can support economic growth;
3. How the County can support economic recovery; and
4. How the County can build resiliency in the event of future pandemics;

These deliverables have been addressed by the Economic Recovery Task Force and are reflected throughout this report. The Task Force ensured that recommendations aligned with the Government of Alberta's Economy Recovery Plan, addressing the following recovery objectives: providing immediate relief and supports, creating jobs, building, and diversifying. In their document, the Province also highlighted logistics as an opportunity for growth in the Calgary region

Task Force discussions were wide-ranging and covered a number of topics, including: fostering business connections, increasing consumer confidence and protecting employees, reducing the regulatory burden, internet connectivity issues, labour force concerns, creating a voluntary business registry, shop local campaigns and local procurement, increasing connections with other levels of government and the broader business community, and marketing the County both to consumers and as an investment destination.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on the livelihoods of residents and businesses, the Task Force identified some opportunities in the crisis. Some recommendations build on existing initiatives or address ongoing issues, while others originated in response to COVID-19. Task Force discussions focused on both short-term recovery measures and opportunities to build long-term economic resiliency in the event of future public health crises. Task Force recommendations were sorted into the following broad categories, with actions identified in each category:

1. Create opportunities for enhanced business-to-business connections, as well as connections between businesses and prospective employees and/or consumers;
2. Develop a comprehensive marketing plan for Rocky View County;
3. Reduce red tape to enhance the County's business-friendly environment; and
4. Advocate through provincial, national and international agencies to raise the profile of the County.

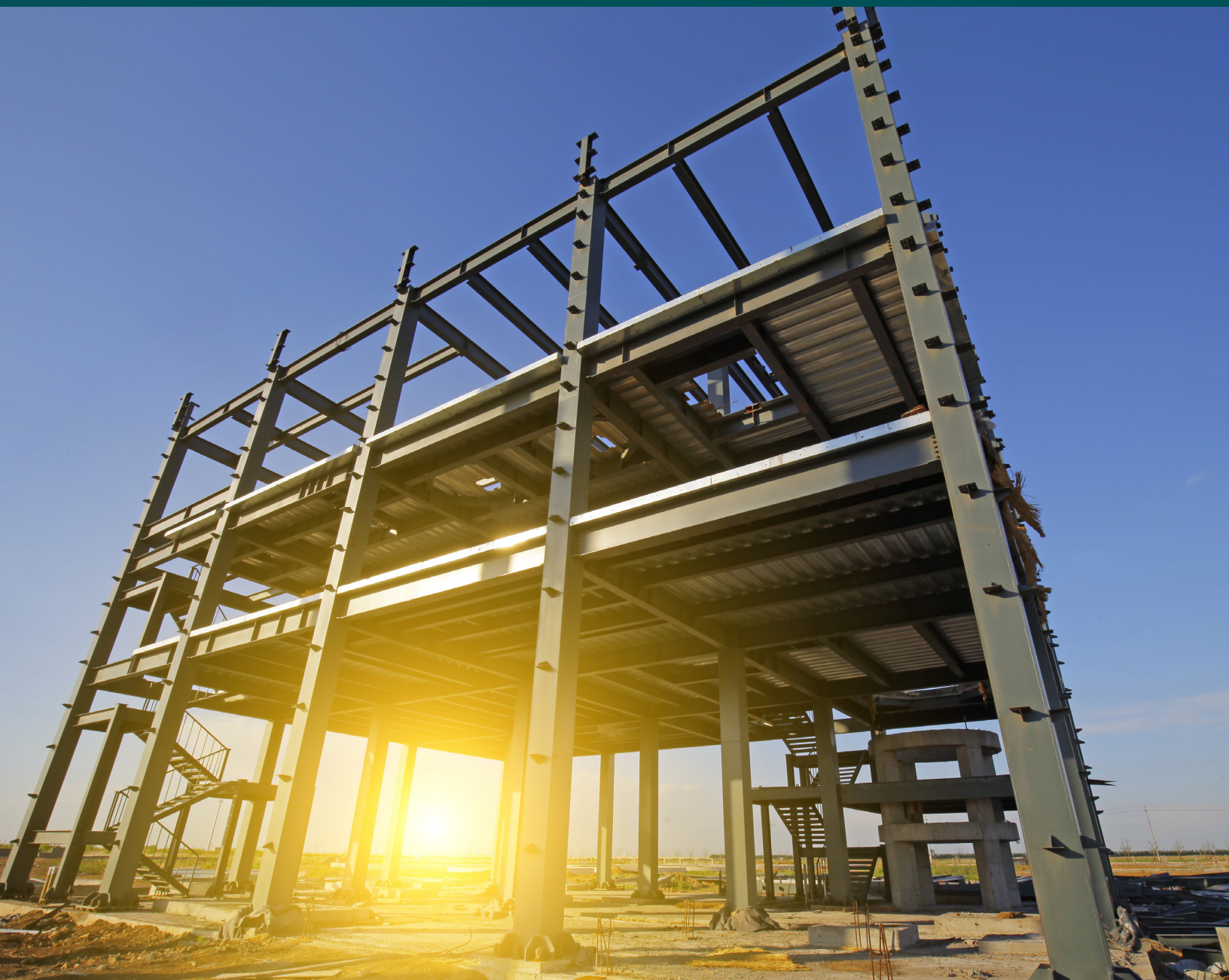
BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

FAST FACT:

In April 2020, Rocky View Council unanimously approved an unprecedented tax reduction of 3%, in response to the COVID-19 crisis with "the intent to help everyone, across the board". While many municipalities in the Province raised or froze taxes in 2020, Rocky View took action to support rate-payers in a tangible and demonstrative way that was unmatched in Alberta.

Source: *Rocky View County Council Minutes, 2020-04-28-03 (D-1) – April 28, 2020.*

ECONOMIC RECOVERY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS



ECONOMIC RECOVERY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION #1

Create Opportunities For Enhanced Connections Between Business, Prospective Employees, And Consumers

COVID-19 has underscored the importance of communities coming together to help each other in times of adversity. The Economic Recovery Task Force discussed the importance of networks and connections between businesses, their employees, and customers. The County currently assists by helping businesses connect, identifying programs for businesses to access, and connecting businesses to COVID-19 federal and provincial loans and support programs.

Connections between businesses can be a valuable resource, but they need to be able to find each other in order to help each other. Task Force members identified issues around being able to connect with each other to pool resources, reduce costs and identify opportunities for synergy. For example, one member noted that they had access to vast supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the early stages of the pandemic, and would have been willing to share with other businesses in the County if they had been able to identify which businesses were in need. This concept could be expanded to pooling resources to access bulk discounts on PPE or other sanitation supplies.

Chambers of Commerce are a valuable tool for fostering connections between local businesses. Rocky View County has three separate Chambers for Langdon, Balzac and Bragg Creek. These Chambers are a great resource, but not all businesses are members. Other opportunities to enhance business connections within the County are the creation of a voluntary County-wide business directory, a business-oriented County website to foster connections, and improvements to digital rural addressing.

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

FAST FACT:

For the first time in Rocky View County's history, municipal tax revenue generated from non-residential assessments exceeded residential. In 2019, tax revenue from Commercial and Industrial (plus Linear and M&E) assessments was $39.1 million versus $33.9 million from residential and farm assessments. Sustainable and progressive assessment growth was only made possible through effective economic development, critical infrastructure investments and significant investment attraction. This speaks to the County's economic strength, ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: *Corporate Services at Rocky View County — September 10, 2020.*

Leveraging digital opportunities

COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption of digital consumer technology. Although this trend was occurring before the pandemic, the need for physical distancing has impacted consumer preferences towards using digital spaces to shop and relying more on delivery of products. It is important for businesses to work together to help each other, particularly when major events that impact businesses occur. For example, online platforms such as Amazon, Shopify, and Lightspeed offer free workshops that teach businesses how to increase online sales. If businesses can find each other through effective networks, they can pool resources and work together to reduce costs and explore potential opportunities. Leveraging digital opportunities will allow businesses to grow their online presence and expand into new markets.

A big part of today's digital space is searchable online maps. Accurately mapping Rocky View businesses is an ongoing challenge identified by local business leaders. The Task Force recommended working with companies such as Google to ensure rural addressing is accurate. There were also discussions around advocating for appropriate rural addressing where necessary, with Canada Post and prominent courier companies like Purolator, DHL, UPS, FedEx and others.

As property owners and businesses want the most accurate and reliable addressing for the delivery of products and services, the Task Force recommended publishing a "how to guide" that would assist rural addressing requests and submissions to groups like Canada Post. The County would take the lead on advocacy and creating the 'how to' guide, while businesses would be responsible for following the actions outlined in the guide.

Businesses, non-profits and the public sector need to work together to increase the visibility and awareness of Rocky View County

Chambers of Commerce
The Task Force spent a significant amount of time discussing the Chambers of Commerce and business associations in the County. There were lively conversations around pooling resources, sharing PPE and prioritizing local contracts, but companies need to be able to find each other to access these synergies. The County could partner with local Chambers of Commerce to encourage business-to-business synergies and work together on mutually beneficial projects. Greater collaboration could be achieved by sponsoring or coordinating an annual summit of Chambers and bringing groups together on specific projects, such as COVID-19 relief. This would encourage local business groups to expand their focus to the County as a whole, in addition to their efforts to assist the local community.

The Task Force felt that businesses, non-profits and the public sector need to work together to increase the visibility and awareness of Rocky View County as a cost-effective option for business. The Task Force recommended Rocky View County develop a long-term, comprehensive marketing plan, in partnership with the Bragg Creek Chamber of Commerce, the Langdon Chamber of Commerce, and the Balzac Business Community Association, to raise the profile of the County, market advantages, and increase investment. The Task Force recommended that the County, in partnership with local businesses, should be raising awareness of local businesses to encourage people to shop and spend locally. The marketing plan should have several campaigns, addressing the unique offerings of specific communities and business areas like Langdon, Balzac, Indus, Janet, Conrich, Springbank, and Bragg Creek. This recommendation is discussed in greater detail below.

County Website to Promote Business-to-Business Solutions
In addition to the business connection recommendations above, the Task Force recommended the creation of a webpage on the County website dedicated to connecting businesses to each other and to potential employees. This website could have a ‘classified section’ which would allow local businesses to connect with each other for contracts. It could also have a jobs section to encourage local employment, and promote local businesses, opportunities (such as training sessions), or events.

Rocky View Business Directory

A gap that was identified by the Task Force is the lack of a business registry in the County. As a result, it can be difficult to find businesses or specific services that are offered in a community. An online registry of County businesses could be used to foster business connections for workshops and training opportunities. In order to remain competitive and minimize red tape for business, participation in a County business registry would be free and voluntary.

Creation of a voluntary business registry of County businesses could be tied to the Development Permit process, on a go-forward basis. The first step in implementing this process would be to examine existing processes and identify opportunities to use existing information to maintain a voluntary business registry.

Opportunities for Agricultural Sector

The Task Force emphasized many opportunities for local synergy to increase the profitability of individual companies. For example, Rocky View County's rich agricultural capacity and local agri-processors and manufacturers could leverage the world-class distribution networks present in East Balzac. In general, proximity to processors and supply chain logistics are beneficial for individual producers and the agriculture industry more generally. More specifically, opportunities were identified around connecting consumers to producers and processors using Shop Local, Chambers of Commerce and enhanced online purchasing platforms such as Amazon. Rocky View has an active Agricultural Service Board that also has a role to play in enhancing economic opportunities for producers.

There are opportunities to connect major processors, like Harmony Beef, to large warehouse and distribution facilities in Balzac such as Walmart, Sobeys, Gordon Food Services, Pratt Foods and Amazon. There is a potentially lucrative opportunity to attract value-added processors who could use local agricultural commodities — everything from beef and lamb, to pulses, oilseeds and grains — to produce value-added products that the online or specialty consumer desires.

Alberta has recognized the importance of embracing economic diversification in addition to our traditional strengths. The County is determined to do its part to contribute to this goal, and approximately 90 per cent of the County's land base is zoned for agriculture. Current and emerging opportunities in the agricultural sector involve merging traditional techniques with information and communications technologies through precision farming, advanced analytics, predictive algorithms, crop and livestock genetics, traceability, direct-to-consumer marketing, smart manufacturing and improved health and safety. Agri-food technologies and production increasingly rely on real-time access to cloud data and information processing, but gaps need to be overcome in rural broadband and logistics infrastructure. The County, in partnership with higher orders of government, is well-positioned to contribute to efforts to diversify the local economy and strengthen local value-added initiatives in the agricultural and agri-processing sectors.

#1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCED CONNECTIONS BETWEEN BUSINESS, PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES, AND CONSUMERS

STRATEGY:

Identify programs for businesses to access. Connect businesses to COVID-19 federal and provincial loans and support programs.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Business Dev. Bank of Canada (BDC)

Export Development Canada

Government of Alberta

Community Futures (WD)

Regional partners

TIMELINE:

Current and Ongoing

STRATEGY:

Promote workshops with Amazon, Shopify, Lightspeed and other digital economy support organizations to educate and facilitate online retail and digital commerce for Rocky View businesses.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Amazon, Shopify, and Lightspeed

Government of Alberta

Community Futures (WD)

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q2 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Develop and publish a “how to guide” to assist rural addressing requests for Canada Post and search engines like Google.

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q1 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Create a voluntary business registry of County businesses, tied to Rocky View County’s Development Permit process.

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q2 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Update County webpage to promote business-to-business connections.

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q1-2 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Sponsor and coordinate an annual summit of Chambers of Commerce and business associations in Rocky View County.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Bragg Creek Chamber of Commerce

Langdon Chamber of Commerce

Balzac Business Association

Other business interests in Springbank, Indus, Conrich, etc.

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q2 or Q3 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Leveraging digital opportunities to enhance Rocky View County's online presence and raise the profile of business opportunities in the County.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Chambers of Commerce

Industrial real estate brokers

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q3 of 2021

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

FAST FACT:

Long term County debt is down 34.7% since 2011. In 2019, long term County debt stood at $49,151,103, down 7.92% from the previous year.

Equity in tangible capital assets is up 48.85% since 2011. In 2019 equity in tangible capital assets was $600,445,219 (2019), up 2.81% from the previous year.

These are strong indicators of economic growth and superior fiscal management at Rocky View County. This fiscal foundation has provided Rocky View with the capacity to weather the storm of COVID-19.

Source: *Alberta Municipal Affairs — Rocky View County Profile, September 9, 2020.*

ECONOMIC RECOVERY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION #2

DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING PLAN FOR ROCKY VIEW COUNTY

The Economic Recovery Task Force noted that many businesses, residents, and visitors to the Calgary Region are not aware that Rocky View County exists as a municipal entity separate from the towns and cities in our metropolitan area. They are equally unware of the tax advantages and superior land options that the County presents to businesses and investors. While many land owners, developers and industrial real estate brokers actively promote the many advantages of developing in Rocky View County, the County could be more active in marketing its strengths and opportunities.

The Task Force identified the importance of a comprehensive marketing plan to raise awareness of the advantages of doing business in Rocky View County. In the short term, this would be focused on economy recovery and promoting the County as a place with space to grow and ample room for physical distancing. In the medium and long term, the focus would be on investment attraction by raising awareness of the County's sensible regulatory regime, relatively affordable land, access to transportation infrastructure, competitive tax rates and range of development opportunities.

A comprehensive marketing plan will build on some of the short term actions that are already underway, support economic recovery in the medium term, and build economic resilience in the event of future public health crises. Some examples of efforts that are already underway are:

- Shop Local Campaign
- LinkedIn Page
- Local Intel

Shop Local

It became apparent during the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic that 'shop local' campaigns were a simple and effective way to encourage area residents to support local businesses. In particular, small businesses — the 'main street' mom-and-pop shops that often struggle during times of disruption — desperately needed help and continued to conduct their business to make ends meet. The Task Force recommendation to increase membership in local Chambers of Commerce (page 21) would help to amplify 'shop local' campaigns.

In March 2020, Rocky View County created a free online business directory on the Rocky View website entitled, 'Shop Local'. This has been very well-received by the business community, with largely positive and constructive feedback. Work continues promoting the directory to get as many businesses to participate and generate exposure for their enterprise. In addition to other businesses, the Shop Local directory highlights many local agricultural producers and enhances their farm-to-table marketing. Where appropriate, increased efforts will be made to assist local producers to transition into the digital space in order to strengthen their bottom line. Future marketing will take the 'Shop Local' directory into business-to-business (B2B) opportunities and cooperatively orientated "packaging" of complimentary products and services for growing markets, such as tourism and agri-tourism.

Raising Awareness of Resources for Business

The COVID-19 pandemic spurred an outpouring of federal and provincial support for business, not only in the form of funding but also educational resources to navigate the public health crisis. The number and quality of free online seminars, print resources, and programs in response to COVID-19 were exceptional. Rocky View County played an active role in monitoring various resources and posting relevant information in a LinkedIn group called Rocky View County Business Connects. This allowed the County to distribute the most pertinent resources for local businesses. Currently, this online group has 54 members, but the County will strive to increase the reach of this network and modify the content as necessary to provide maximum value to its membership.

Other Digital Resources

Early in 2020, before the COVID-19 crisis, the County engaged a local company, Local-Intel, to provide enhanced community profile data for the Rocky View website. Local-Intel is a platform that provides business and development investment interests with a quick and intuitive data resource that showcases strategic advantages and baseline metrics, such as demographics, labor force, property taxation, and approved development areas. The self-serve nature of Local-Intel makes it a powerful tool for marketing the County to potential and existing investors.

The Economic Recovery Task Force recommended that the County continue with initiatives such as Local-Intel, whose mandate is to "ensure that every community, regardless of size, has the opportunity to access world class technology that helps local business prosper." Rocky View County has much to offer developers, land owners and investors. Innovative online marketing tools, like Local-Intel, help amplify messaging about the Rocky View Advantage.

"A place with space"

Marketing Plan

In addition to the actions that are already underway, the Task Force recommended the creation of a comprehensive marketing plan to raise awareness of the County's appeal as a place to live, work and play. Potential investors would benefit from a comprehensive campaign that would raise awareness of the many benefits of doing business in Rocky View County. The County's affordable land, plethora of development types, competitive tax rates and ease of doing business is second to none in the region. COVID-19 has motivated many investment groups to reconsider the focus on dense downtown cores and businesses to consider moving to areas with more space, in light of consumer concerns around limited ability to socially distance. Changing consumer preferences represent an opportunity for the County to market itself as a place with space.

The comprehensive marketing plan will provide an overall strategy to achieve the goal of raising awareness and increasing investment in the County. The Task Force identified a number of recommended actions that could be included in a marketing plan, which are outlined in this report. There may be other actions and recommendations that arise as part of the overall strategy. The process of developing the marketing plan will begin immediately, with timelines for preliminary steps outlined in this report and adjusted as necessary.

Short term actions would include raising the profile of the County, identifying roles for a coordinated campaign to be conducted by both the County and local businesses, and marketing the County as a 'place with space' in response to consumer preferences that have changed as a result of COVID-19. Medium term actions would include evaluating re-branding the County, targeting specific sectors, increasing advertising across all mediums, and creating a series of marketing tools for local businesses that are easily usable but reinforce common themes that reflect the County's strengths. In the long term, this marketing campaign would be evaluated for effectiveness and adjusted as necessary to ensure the goals are being achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING PLAN

STRATEGY:

Target specific industry sectors such as retail and entertainment, tourism, value added processing, warehousing and logistics, manufacturing, agri-business, etc.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Industrial real estate brokers

Industry associations

Trade and investment partners

TIMELINE:

Current and Ongoing – Continuous

POTENTIAL PERFORMANCE METRIC:

STRATEGY:

Raise the profile of Rocky View County. Encourage participation of elected officials at grand openings, ribbon cutting events, press releases and industry events.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

New business and industry

Industrial real estate brokers

Event and conference planners

Government of Alberta

TIMELINE:

Immediate & Ongoing

STRATEGY:

Identify roles for the County, businesses, and residents to raise the County's profile.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Local businesses

Citizen ambassadors

Media outlets

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q2 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Promote the County as a "place with space" for consumers (with physical distancing), for businesses wanting room to grow and for investors looking for opportunity. Urban congestion — from streets to office towers, elevators to transit — has quickly become a source of stress for many. Promoting businesses to move to Rocky View County is an immediate opportunity.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Chambers of Commerce

Industrial real estate brokers

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q2 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Consider rebranding the County to focus on attracting increased commercial and industrial investment.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Local businesses

Investors

Residents

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q1 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Raise awareness of available resources for businesses

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Local businesses

Chambers of Commerce

TIMELINE:

Immediate & Ongoing

STRATEGY:

Continue with Local-Intel marketing campaign and adopt other digital tools as necessary

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Local-Intel

TIMELINE:

Immediate & Ongoing

STRATEGY:

Create a set of marketing tools for businesses to access such as signage, workshops, and industry familiarization tours.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Local tour operators

Chambers of Commerce

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q4 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Use multiple channels or mediums to advertise including; television, radio, newspapers, social media, print media, public service announcements, etc.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Local media outlets

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q3 of 2021

STRATEGY:

Create a local tourism strategy to market the attractions in the County such as provincial parks, retail destinations, hamlet shopping, and entertainment venues.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Regional tourism partnerships

Chambers of Commerce

Industry experts in tourism, retail, and entertainment development

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q4 of 2021

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

FAST FACT:

With a Total Assessment Base of $18,651 million, Rocky View County has the 5th largest assessment base in Alberta, behind (1) Calgary, (2) Edmonton, (3) Strathcona County, and (4) R.M. of Wood Buffalo — Fort McMurray. Many are surprised to learn that, Rocky View County's tax base is larger than the cities of Red Deer, Lethbridge, or Medicine Hat.

Rocky View County currently has an assessment ratio of 71.9 residential to 28.1 non-residential. This ratio is the envy of many municipalities in Alberta.

Source: *Alberta Municipal Affairs — Rocky View County Profile, September 9, 2020.*

ECONOMIC RECOVERY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION #3

Review And Remove Red Tape To Promote Economic Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a new reality for business operators, consumers, logistics companies, and their staff. Businesses continue to adapt and change, as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and the possibility of a second wave and additional shutdowns remains a possibility. Throughout all this, Rocky View County remains committed to maintaining a business-friendly environment where bureaucratic burden and red tape is continuously reduced.

Prior to the pandemic, the County had been amending policies, regulations, and processes to promote a business friendly environment in Rocky View that supports continued economic development. The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that outside forces can drastically alter how businesses operate and they must be flexible enough to adapt to changing conditions. The Task Force identified regulatory barriers as a potential impediment to the flexibility and adaptability that businesses need to survive the pandemic and keep operating. Barriers can exist in several areas: regulations, policies, and process. This recommendation focuses on actions that will identify and remove any new barriers that have surfaced as a result of the pandemic, to help businesses recover as quickly as possible.

Regulations

The County has made significant strides in improving flexibility and streamlining regulation as demonstrated by the recent adoption of the new Land Use Bylaw. The new Bylaw includes simplified, clear rules for applicants to follow to receive development permits for their business. The new bylaw reduces internal red tape and speeds up the permitting process. This has been achieved notably by allowing increased flexibility for setback and height variances, a greater number of permitted uses in a district, and improving parking regulations.

As a result of the pandemic, the manner in which businesses deliver services has changed and there may be a need for the County to revise certain regulations in the Land Use Bylaw to ensure businesses can respond to these changes. As an example, the increase in curbside pick-up may necessitate changes to the parking and setback regulations. The County should work with businesses to determine what is needed, then review current standards and regulations to identify any changes required to accommodate curbside pick-up.

As part of ongoing red tape reduction and internal process streamlining, the County is reviewing all of the current Direct Control District Bylaws with the intent of transforming as many of them to regular districts as possible. This will simplify permit issuance under these districts and further reduce hurdles to development.

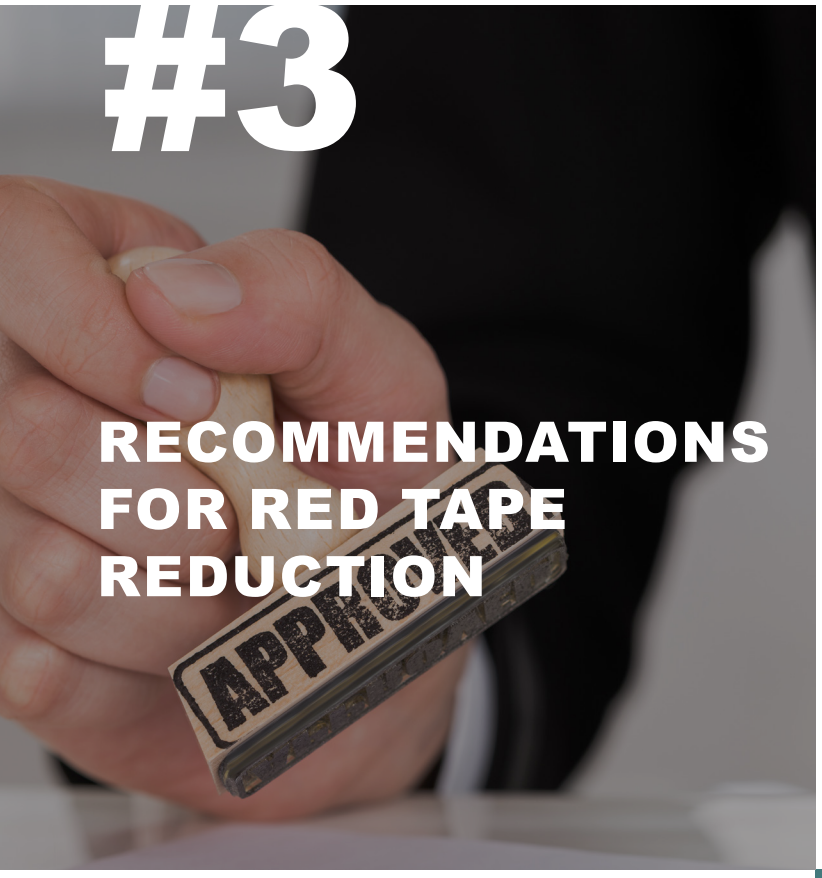
Implementation of the Land Use Bylaw is ongoing and continual review and amendment will occur. As part of the regular tracking process of the new Land Use Bylaw, the County should monitor COVID-related issues that arise and prepare amendments that further aid business recovery.

The County should work with businesses to determine what is needed, then review current standards and regulations to identify any changes required

Policies
Rocky View County is in the process of a preparing a new Municipal Development Plan (MDP) to guide the continuing growth in Rocky View County. One of the principles of the new MDP is to promote economic diversification through new business development and existing business expansion. The plan includes policies that support business development and identifies a number of key growth areas in the County for economic development.

Process
Rocky View County has been diligently working to improve internal processes for permitting, over the past two years, especially with respect to business-related development permits. As mentioned, the new Land Use Bylaw has assisted with these efforts by reducing certain regulations and allowing decisions to be made administratively in a reduced timeframe.

The following recommended actions will identify the COVID-related barriers that have arisen that may not have been foreseen in normal circumstances. Combined with the County's ongoing revision of process, these recommendations will further reduce red tape and streamline processes. Engagement with the business community and residents will be important to identify COVID-related issues that have occurred.



STRATEGY:

Identify new business needs and practices, as a result of the pandemic, that may result in different permit requirements such as parking lot requirements, building design, and setbacks.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Chambers of Commerce

Business Owners

Developers

TIMELINE:

Immediate and ongoing

STRATEGY:

Examine regulatory actions and changes of other municipalities, in response to economic recovery from COVID-19.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Municipal Neighbours

Municipal Affairs

Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA)

Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA)

TIMELINE:

Immediate

STRATEGY:

Review County Area Structure Plans and other high level policies to determine if policy amendments are required to support economic recovery due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

TIMELINE:

Commence in Q1 2021

STRATEGY:

In response to the identified requirements and other best practices, prepare appropriate amendments to the Land Use Bylaw for Council's consideration.

TIMELINE:

Pending completion of regulation review

STRATEGY:

As part of regular, ongoing review of the Land Use Bylaw, identify amendments to assist with COVID recovery.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Business Owners

Developers

Residents

TIMELINE:

Part of current Direct Control District Review process

STRATEGY:

As part of the Direct Control District review, identify amendments to assist with COVID recovery.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS:

Residents

Businesses

TIMELINE:

In-progress

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

FAST FACT:

Total Non-Residential Assessment at Rocky View County, which includes commercial, industrial, linear as well as machinery and equipment (M&E) assessment, was up 15.18% last year and now totals $5,311,383,210. This is a direct measurement of economic growth in Rocky View County. Despite COVID-19, Rocky View County anticipates continued, yet somewhat modest growth in 2020.

Source: *Rocky View County Tax Rate Bylaw and Rocky View Chief Assessor — September 9, 2020.*

ECONOMIC RECOVERY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION #4

Advocacy Through Provincial, National And International Agencies

While the County can achieve many of its goals on its own, the Task Force recognized the importance of raising the County's profile well beyond its borders. Currently, the County meets with representatives from higher orders of government and is a member of many economic development agencies. However, strengthening these partnerships and increasing attendance at events will serve to raise increased awareness of the County as an investment destination.

Raising awareness serves several strategic purposes. Specific to economic development and economic recovery, advocacy helps achieve the following:

- Greater investment attraction capacity and deal flow for major developments;
- Improved 'brand recognition' for economic development prospect generation; and
- Enhanced relationships with provincial and federal politicians as well as inter-jurisdictional officials (for example, Transportation Ministers in Western Transportation Advisory Council or State Legislators in Pacific Northwest Economic Region for addressing regional or pan-regional opportunities).

County representatives meet regularly with federal and provincial government partners in the Calgary region. Monthly meetings provide opportunities to learn about new programs, exchange ideas and share updates in a roundtable report. Not all communities in the region participate in these meetings, so Rocky View County is in the enviable position of having a strong network and access to timely information for the benefit of our local businesses and industries. Strong and extensive networks have been invaluable during the COVID-19 crisis.

The resources and support available from organizations like the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), Economic Development Alberta (EDA), Ohio Economic Development Association (OEDA), the Canadian Real Estate Forum, Canada West Foundation and global industry leaders like Cushman Wakefield, CoreNet, International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) and Industrial Asset Management Council (IAMC) have been invaluable. Again, resources have been posted on Rocky View County's Business Connects group on LinkedIn as well as shared with local business owners and the Chambers of Commerce in Rocky View County.

As an example of the County's continuous efforts to raise its profile, Council recently changed the title of the Chief Elected Official from 'reeve' to 'mayor'. This was a strategic move to increase visibility, as mayor is a more commonly recognized term than reeve among national and international investors.

#4

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCED CONNECTIONS WITH INVESTORS, DEVELOPERS, AND DECISION MAKERS

Work more closely with provincial Ministers and local MLAs to bring awareness to the County's economic contributions to our province and promote Rocky View County interests.

Educate local MLAs and provincial Ministers in order to reinforce economic opportunities in Rocky View County, remove obstacles through provincial policy, and potentially support infrastructure in the County through funding agreements.

Where appropriate, send County representatives such as the Mayor or local business leaders on provincial trade delegations to other countries to market the County as an investment destination.

Send the Mayor to trade conferences (for example):

- Cargo Logistics in Vancouver
- PNWER (Pacific NW Economic Region) in western Canada or northwest United States, or Alaska
- WESTAC (Western Transportation Advisory Council) in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan or Manitoba
- IAMC (Industrial Asset Management Council) in the United States.

Send the Mayor in order to achieve a deeper knowledge of business opportunities and industry sectors in Rocky View County and the Calgary region by attending special events or conferences (for example):

- Calgary Real Estate Forum
- BILD Calgary Region
- Plant Protein Alliance of Alberta .
- EDA (Economic Development Alberta)

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT METRICS

Annual measurement of Rocky View County's Total Assessment, including:

- Growth in Non-Residential Assessment through commercial, industrial, linear as well as machinery & equipment (M&E) assessments (Tax Rate Bylaw).
- Percentage growth diversification measurement of Rocky View County's tax assessment (Policy C-197).

Provide regular reports to the CAO on the following:

- The state of industry sectors in Rocky View County and the Calgary Region.
- Investment prospects (as well as investment targets or leads).
- Updates on new developments under construction.
- Identification of red tape issues impacting current developments.
- Quarterly updates on major initiatives and special projects (as identified in this report).
- Other opportunities as they arise.

NEXT STEPS

Administration will include the recommended actions in the considerations for the 2021, and subsequent, budget and work plan, except where able to accommodate in the current budget and work plan. A number of the recommendations are currently underway and have existing resources assigned. Administration will collaborate with local business leaders, residents, and identified partners, where appropriate, to achieve the recommendations. The CAO will provide a progress update to Council in Q4 of 2021 to report on the status of the recommendations.

With crisis comes opportunity, and the County is determined to leverage lessons learned and emerge from the public health crisis stronger than ever.

CONCLUSION

Rocky View is not only a viable alternative for investors, it is a superior location for investment. This is evidenced by the County's robust assessment growth over the past two decades, creating world-class warehousing & logistics hubs, a thriving agricultural and agri-business sector, business parks and retail destinations. The County's focus on maintaining a business-friendly environment has resulted in a sensible regulatory regime and competitive tax rates; two essential components for business investment. In addition, the County's emphasis on value for money has resulted in appropriate infrastructure and effective service delivery. The County's proximity to a major urban centre with access to excellent transportation infrastructure, combined with affordable land and a wide variety of development forms, has resulted in a world-class investment destination.

The Task Force has recommended marketing the County's strengths, fostering connections between local businesses, reducing regulatory burden, and leveraging relationships to further raise the profile of the Country. These goals, and the actions required to meet them, will help the County to contribute to the post-pandemic economic recovery and build economic resilience to weather future crises. COVID-19, and the necessary measures to contain its spread, have had significant impacts on the economic well-being and health of our community. However, with crisis comes opportunity, and the County is determined to leverage lessons learned and emerge from the public health crisis stronger than ever.

APPENDIX A: STRATEGY PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS

The following table summarizes each strategy of Task Force Recommendations and provides performance metrics and reporting timeframes for each strategy. A status report will be prepared annually on all recommendations to provide an update on the status of the actions outlined in the CAO's Economic Recovery Task Force Report. All actions associated with Recommendation #4 are ongoing and will be reported on as part of the annual update.

#1: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCED CONNECTIONS BETWEEN BUSINESS, PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES, AND CONSUMERS			
Strategy or Action	**Potential partners**	**Timeline**	**Performance Metric**
Identify programs for businesses to access. Connect businesses to COVID-19 federal and provincial loans and support programs.	Business Dev. Bank of Canada (BDC) Export Development Canada Government of Alberta Community Futures (WD) Regional partners	Current and Ongoing	Number of LinkedIn group posts related to COVID programs for businesses. Request RVC numbers from program operators, report "uptake numbers" and evaluate for effectiveness, on an annual basis.
Promote workshops with Amazon, Shopify, Lightspeed and other digital economy support organizations to educate and facilitate online retail and digital commerce for Rocky View businesses.	Amazon, Shopify, and Lightspeed Government of Alberta Community Futures (WD)	Commence in Q2 of 2021	Successful promotion of at least two opportunities in 2021.
Leveraging digital opportunities to enhance Rocky View County's online presence and raise the profile of business opportunities in the County.	Chambers of Commerce Industrial real estate brokers	Commence in Q3 of 2021	Report back to CAO by Q4 2021.
Develop and publish a "how to guide" to assist rural addressing requests for Canada Post and search engines like Google.		Commence in Q1 of 2021	Completion of the 'how to guide'. Report back to CAO by Q4 2021.
Sponsor and coordinate an annual summit of Chambers of Commerce and business associations in Rocky View County.	Bragg Creek Chamber of Commerce Langdon Chamber of Commerce Balzac Business Association Other business interests in Springbank, Indus, Conrich, etc.	Commence in Q2 or Q3 2021	Successful completion of annual Chambers of Commerce Summit in 2021. Report back to CAO by Q4 on completion & lessons learned.
Create a voluntary business registry of County businesses, tied to Rocky View County's Development Permit process.		Commence in Q2 of 2021	Short term: Completion of registry by Q4 2021. Medium – Long Term: number of businesses registered (analyze change on an annual basis).
Update County webpage to promote business-to-business connections.		Commence in Q1-2 of 2021	Completion of web page by Q4 2021. Report back to CAO by Q4 2021.

#2: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING PLAN

Strategy or Action	Potential partners	Timeline	Performance Metric
Target specific industry sectors such as retail and entertainment, tourism, value added processing, warehousing and logistics, agri-business, manufacturing, etc.	Industrial real estate brokers Industry associations Trade and investment partners	Current and Ongoing — Continuous	Report back to CAO on efforts to date by sector in Q4 2021.
Raise the profile of Rocky View County. Encourage participation of elected officials at grand openings, ribbon cutting events, press releases and industry events.	New business and industry Industrial real estate brokers Event and conference planners Government of Alberta	Immediate & Ongoing	Short term: Create & implement a 'Councillor Events Tracker' system and report back to CAO on actions to date in Q4 2021. Medium/Long Term: Once a baseline has been established, set a quantitative target for increased presence of elected officials.
Identify roles for the County, businesses, and residents to raise the County's profile.	Local Businesses Citizen ambassadors Media outlets — 'good news' ops	Commence in Q2 of 2021	Report back to CAO on actions to date in Q4 2021.
Promote the County as a "place with space" for consumers (with physical distancing), for businesses wanting room to grow for investors looking for opportunity. Urban congestion — from streets to office towers, elevators to transit — has quickly become a source of stress for many. Promoting businesses to move to Rocky View County is an immediate opportunity.	Chambers of Commerce Industrial real estate brokers	Commence in Q2 of 2021	Report back to CAO on actions to date in Q4 2021.
Consider rebranding the County to focus on attracting increased commercial and industrial investment.	Local Businesses Investors Residents	Commence in Q1 of 2021	Report back to CAO on actions to date in Q4 2021
Raise awareness of available resources for businesses.	Local businesses Chambers of Commerce	Immediate & Ongoing	Increase membership in County Business Connects Linkedin. Seek feedback from to measure satisfaction. Report back to CAO on status in Q4 2021.
Continue with Local-Intel marketing campaign and adopt other digital tools as necessary.	Local-Intel	Immediate & Ongoing	Research and identify other potential tools and report back to CAO on potential opportunities in Q4 2021.
Create a set of marketing tools for businesses to access such as signage, workshops, and industry familiarization tours.	Local tour operators Chambers of Commerce	Commence in Q4 of 2021	Report back to CAO on actions to date by Q4 2021.
Use multiple channels or mediums to advertise including; television, radio, newspapers, social media, print media, public service announcements, etc.	Local Media Outlets	Commence in Q3 of 2021	Identify a benchmark and quantify 'number of views' that would constitute success & report back to CAO on actions to date in Q4 2021.
Create a local tourism strategy to market the attractions in the County such as provincial parks, retail destinations, hamlet shopping, and entertainment venues.	Regional tourism partnerships Chambers of Commerce Industry experts in tourism, retail and entertainment development	Commence in Q4 of 2021	Report back to Council with local tourism strategy by Q2 2022.

#3: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RED TAPE REDUCTION			
Strategy or Action	**Potential partners**	**Timeline**	**Performance Metric**
Identify new business needs and practices, as a result of the pandemic, that may result in different permit requirements such as parking lot requirements, building design, and setbacks.	Chambers of Commerce Business Owners Developers	Immediate and ongoing	Report back to CAO by Q4 2021.
Examine regulatory actions and changes of other municipalities, in response to economic recovery from COVID-19.	Municipal Neighbours Municipal Affairs Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA)	Immediate	Report back to CAO by Q2 2021.
In response to the identified requirements and other best practices, prepare appropriate amendments to the Land Use Bylaw for Council's consideration.		Pending completion of regulation review	Pending completion of regulation review, identify actions and prepare amendments to LUB for Council consideration by Q1 2022.
Review County Area Structure Plans and other high level policies to determine if policy amendments are required to support economic recovery due to the COVID-19 pandemic.		Commence in Q1 2021	Report back to CAO by Q3 2021.
As part of the Direct Control District review, identify amendments to assist with COVID recovery.	Residents Businesses	Part of current Direct Control District Review Process	Report back to CAO by Q4 2021.
As part of regular, ongoing review of the Land Use Bylaw, identify amendments to assist with COVID recovery.	Business Owners Developers Residents	Ongoing	Pending completion of previous items, identify actions and prepare amendments (if any) to Land Use Bylaw for Council consideration by Q1 2022.

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