



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



FEBRUARY 2025



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INTRODUCTION

Starland County 2021-2031 Strategic Plan lists Economic Growth as its first priority. The County has taken the initial steps of hiring an Economic Development Officer and is now embarking on an Economic Development Strategy to guide them.

OBJECTIVES

- Improve the County's investment readiness and regional competitiveness
- Bolster economic growth and diversify the County's economy

DESIRED OUTCOMES



Job creation for current and future County residents



Diversified tax base



Clarity regarding the role of the economic development department's structure, roles, responsibilities and resources



Increased understanding, capacity and collaboration among County stakeholders



Starland County recently purchased land with the intent to develop it for a commercial business park. This land will allow the County to grow local business, attract new businesses, and therefore grow their tax base.



METHODOLOGY

1

Kick-off consultation with Starland County's Economic Development Committee

Including the CAO, Reeve, and Economic Development Officer



2

Consultations with stakeholders

- other council members, staff, residents
- Community Futures Big Country
- Drumheller & District Chamber of Commerce
- Travel Drumheller
- Travel Alberta
- School principals
- Drumheller Economic Development
- business owners / entrepreneurs



3

Secondary research

assessing the County's demographics, agricultural profile, and background documents plus reviewing appropriate industry trends and documents, and best practices



CURRENT SITUATION



Regional Assets and Strengths

- Agriculture base
- Oil and gas activity
- Renewable energy (wind and solar)
- Strong tourism base and assets
- Highway 9 corridor
- Rural lifestyle
- Some motion picture and video production

Challenges/ Limitations

- Declining tax base
- Declining oil and gas activity
- Small and stagnant population base
- Rural depopulation and sustainability
- Limited employment opportunities
- Limited services for residents
- Limited agricultural services
- No rail line
- Drought conditions



Opportunities

- Agriculture and value-added agriculture activities
- Tourism and visitor economy
- Business Park
- Low carbon energy
- Motion picture and video production

★ Starland County is known for its natural beauty. A key feature includes the Red Deer River Valley, which cuts through the Alberta Badlands. The unique landforms of the Badlands contain some of the most important palaeontological areas in the world for the Cretaceous and late Cretaceous period.



STRATEGIES AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS

COMMUNITY READINESS



| | |
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| Rationale | Investments are more likely to come to a community that is prepared. |
| Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess community readiness by reviewing investment readiness toolkit/checklist.• Pick one or two gaps to work on each quarter or year.• Continue to work with regional partners, government, and the private sector to build capacity including housing availability, and to market the region. |

BUILD LOCAL BUSINESS CAPACITY (BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION)



| | |
|-----------|--|
| Rationale | Businesses are the key to understanding and stimulating the local economy. About 80 percent of new jobs and capital investment comes from companies that already exist in the community. Local businesses employ local people, and they recirculate a greater share of every dollar in the local economy as they create locally owned supply chains. |
|-----------|--|



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of new jobs and capital investment comes from companies that already exist in the community.

| | |
|---------|---|
| Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liaise with existing business.• Help foster entrepreneurship.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support entrepreneurs and new business start-ups for business growth by hosting and sharing information.• Support the establishment of a recurring farmers' market.• Facilitate collaboration between education and business community. |
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| Rationale | Most ideas are going to come from within the local population. Promote agri-value opportunities, agri-tourism opportunities, destination retail concepts, and other ideas help to foster and share an entrepreneurial mind-set. |
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| Rationale | Availability of labour is one of the top issues affecting today's workforce. Connecting business and education (K to 12 schools) is an important opportunity to grow and attract jobs in the region plus attract and retain people. |
|-----------|---|



BUSINESS PARK DEVELOPMENT



Rationale

“Shovel-ready” land is among the top business location decision factors. Growing local businesses are more likely to expand if land is available. The very existence of a shovel-ready site signals to investors and businesses the County’s commitment to growth and development.

The ripple effects of accelerating development can lead to enhanced tax revenues, improved quality of life, and a robust local economy.

Actions

- Physically develop the business park to a level of “shovel-readiness.”
- Develop a marketing strategy.
- Identify potential prospects and begin investment attraction.

★ **“Shovel-ready”** sites allow businesses to break ground and become operational in record time; this can be particularly important for businesses where speed to market is crucial.



TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION



Rationale

Tourism is the front door to all economic development.

Tourism draws visitors and brings external dollars to your community. Visitors inject money into destinations, retail shops, restaurants, and accommodations and help to make them more prosperous. Furthermore, if people like what they see and experience, they:

- Will tell their friends and family via social media (free marketing, third-party endorsement)
- May come back as permanent residents or business owners.

The province is committed to growing the tourism industry in the province. It is Alberta's #1 service export and has been identified as a way to diversify Alberta's economy to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience.

Tourism promotes cultural depth and the "best of" what you have to offer.

Tourism lets communities share their local pride and provides an opportunity for residents to share what makes their communities unique.

As more tourism experiences pop up in an area, family and friends will have something cool to do nearby!

Tourism leads to improved infrastructure and facilities. When sustainability is front of mind, focus is placed on ensuring the infrastructure and facilities can handle the increased traffic from out-of-town visitors. The improved amenities are a natural benefit for permanent residents. For rural areas, this could look like better roads or improved utilities, such as cell service or water supply.

Tourism can help preserve the natural environment. Alberta's wildlife and unique landscape is a point of pride among operators.



Over
50%

of Albertans recognize that they have more recreational opportunities in their area because of tourism.

Actions

- Identify, update and upgrade key tourism assets. E.g. campgrounds, Horsethief Canyon, regional signage, toilets, boardwalks/birding platforms.
- Continue to work with tourism partners e.g. Travel Drumheller, Travel Alberta, and neighbouring municipalities to market the region.
- Work with tourism partners to host and promote agri-tourism opportunities e.g. farmers' markets, Open Farms Days, and/or a long-table dinner.



MOTION PICTURE AND VIDEO PRODUCTION



Rationale

Motion picture and video production serve as powerful drivers of economic growth in rural areas, bringing in funds from outside the province, generating local jobs, and boosting revenue for a variety of local businesses. From vendors and service providers to hospitality and retail establishments, local economies benefit as productions stimulate demand across sectors.

Supporting the Creative Economy: The growth of “creative industries” underscores the importance of innovation and creativity in today’s knowledge-driven economy, where economic development hinges on producing and managing knowledge

rather than traditional goods. This shift opens new opportunities for rural communities to diversify their economies, reducing reliance on physical industries alone. Technological advancements now make it possible for many knowledge-based roles to be performed remotely, attracting professionals who seek a quieter, lower-cost rural lifestyle while retaining access to high-value employment.

By investing in motion picture and video production, rural areas can tap into the creative economy, bringing fresh energy and innovation to their communities and setting the stage for long-term growth and stability.

Actions

- Partner and work with the Town of Drumheller on a motion picture and video production promotional strategy.
- Identify local sites and landmarks, photograph them and upload them to Alberta Reel Scout.
- Create a location package using updated pictures, video and web and outlining regional production assets for producers and ad agencies.
- Develop a comprehensive media asset inventory, with detailed information on locations, historic sites, special events, production services and performers to market to producers.
- Build industry relationships.
- Longer term, host a regional film festival to showcase the region and bring connections to Drumheller / Starland County.

★ Film and media productions raise the profile of a region, enhancing its attractiveness to tourists and new residents alike.



EXPLORE AND IDENTIFY OTHER TARGET OPPORTUNITIES

VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURE PRODUCTS



Rationale

- Leveraging Starland County’s strong agriculture base aligns with
- its local resources
 - market trends for high-quality, locally-sourced, and specialty foods
 - economic goals of diversification, increased farm stability, and higher profit margins for local producers.

Actions



- Help local producers to diversify and expand their product offerings. E.g. Alberta’s On-Farm Value-Added Grant Program.
- Explore other Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership programs to determine their suitability for Starland County.
- Identify opportunities that could be a good fit for the County - ones that do not require rail, high amounts of labour, or water.
- Develop industry-specific promotional material that showcases the region’s assets.
- Identify potential prospects and begin investment attraction.





RENEWABLE AND LOW-CARBON ENERGY



Rationale

The need for energy is increasing. New, diverse sources of energy are being sought. Additionally, the trend is to bring more sources of low-carbon energy to market.

Adopting renewable and low-carbon energy production aligns with Alberta's resources, global climate trends, and the community's economic needs. It provides a strategic path to sustainable growth, creating jobs, and securing a prosperous, resilient future for the region.

Actions

- Explore those opportunities that could be a good fit for the County (including what the industry needs are).
- Develop industry-specific promotional material that showcases the region's assets.
- Engage and communicate with the public to foster their support.



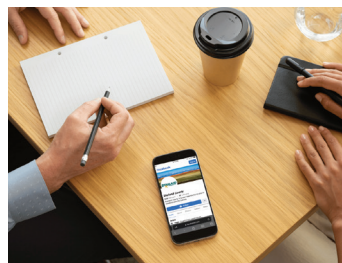
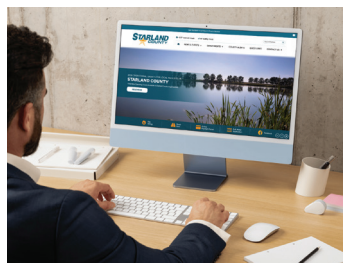
MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS



Rationale

Marketing and communications help shape the perception of an area, promote its unique advantages, and create a unified vision that aligns stakeholders and attracts investment, making it an indispensable element of successful economic development.

Actions



- Prepare marketing collateral for investment attraction such as a section on the website, and a downloadable community profile and brochure.
- Share investment attraction information with target markets. Target markets include business and investment attraction prospects, provincial counterparts and strategic partners such as Invest Alberta, CAEP Ltd., Regional Economic Development Specialist (REDS) rep, the local MLA, and Invest in Canada Regional Advisor.
- Prepare marketing plan and marketing collateral for business park.
- Administer an online marketing campaign to promote / showcase Starland County. Provide a steady stream of key messages and inspiring stories and make the most of social media.

