

VOLUME 1: STRATEGY

SUCCEEDING TOGETHER



Flagstaff County

5-Year Economic & Community Development Strategic Plan

2020-2025

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Flagstaff County

Letter from the Reeve

The Flagstaff Region is a Community of communities committed to building a destination that is known for its wide-open spaces and opportunities for growth – both personally and professionally. Flagstaff County Council is proactive in pursuing economic initiatives that promote sustainability, diversification, and growth within the region. We are committed to finding opportunities out of the challenges that face us by fostering a culture that supports and encourages innovative and cooperative solutions.

This five-year strategy encompasses both economic and community development, recognizing that the two initiatives go hand in hand and cannot be successfully addressed in isolation. The strategy also recognizes that economic development is most effective when it is approached regionally, and that it cannot be defined by municipal borders.

While developing the strategy, more than 90 stakeholders from across the Flagstaff Region were consulted, including, but not limited to: representatives from law enforcement, family services, education, recreation, local municipalities, agriculture, oil and gas, and local business owners. The participation and contributions from these stakeholders were instrumental in identifying the wide range of challenges and opportunities that exist in the Flagstaff Region, as well as the many synergies within communities in the Region.

This strategy paves the way for an effective, efficient, and action-oriented economic development function. It is intended to be operational and action focused, and clearly identifies the importance of micro, small, and medium sized enterprises to the Region. Small businesses represent approximately 98% of Alberta's economy; at the local level we recognize that small and medium sized enterprises are instrumental to driving growth, investment, social resiliency, and citizen attraction for the region.

Flagstaff County is committed to the economic and community development of the region; I look forward to working with regional stakeholders, citizens, and the business community to ensure the Flagstaff Region is something we can all be proud of.



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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The development climate in which the communities, enterprises, and citizens of Flagstaff County exist today is challenging at best. Unfortunately, to complicate matters, although there are visible opportunities for renewal and revitalization, the outlook is decidedly uncertain. Substantive and dynamic structural changes within the political, technological, environmental, economic, and social framework of the County are making the task of economic development especially daunting. In order to not only cope but to thrive in this climate, the County fully understands it must be proactive and lead change rather than just respond to it.

Within this context of change and challenge, the Flagstaff County Economic Development Department has embarked on a process to revisit, revise, and renew its economic development planning and economic development effort. In doing so, they are seeking to not only build on past successes but to use these foundations and a proper understanding of evolving business and citizen needs, that is weighted by current context and circumstances to premise a realistic path forward.

The use of strategic planning in economic development reflects the increased complexity of today's challenges and is thus a rational and a defensible method for determining which economic development opportunities to pursue, which challenges to mitigate, and perhaps equally important, which opportunities to decline and which challenges to work around. Ultimately, it ensures that the end product is what the community at large desires and that investments in economic development efforts utilize precious local resources (dollars and time) effectively and efficiently.

1.1 Purpose of the Exercise

The following document seeks to outline and present a realistic plan of action to guide regional economic development efforts within Flagstaff County. In its simplest form, it seeks to articulate a path forward to a future based on fundamental community values and priorities. In doing so it represents:

- (1) planning that clearly communicates the County's economic development direction and priorities;
- (2) a shared vision and sense of purpose among community leaders, citizens, and stakeholders;
- (3) a path through which economic benefits and a high quality of life are maximized;
- (4) a formula that helps to manage, not interrupt nor deter, change;
- (5) a point of reference or framework for future decisions;
- (6) an assurance that the actions proposed make the most effective and efficient use of County resources by focusing on key priorities and opportunities;
- (7) a foundation for the preparation of annual operating budgets; and
- (8) a benchmark from which progress can be measured and informed change can be made.

Importantly, this plan builds on the synergies available to maximize economic impact through concurrence with those efforts proposed/implemented by resident communities and service providers; and especially those activities and efforts planned and implemented by the Battle River Economic Opportunities Committee (BREOC).

1.2 Objectives

Pursuant to the original Call for Proposals and within the agreement between Lochaven Consulting and Flagstaff County, the following objectives and considerations were noted and agreed to as guidance:

In terms of context:

- The County is concerned with retaining workforce and citizens inasmuch as erosion in population has a tendency to diminish overall community readiness, reduce investment attraction, and threaten the sustainability of local businesses, which in turn prolongs and/or contributes to further population erosion;
- The County is concerned with a demographic that is aging, with a median age of 45+ as of 2016. This suggests that youth retention and attraction is an ongoing concern in respect to the vitality of the Region. Although these numbers are inherent to many rural Alberta communities and regions, it still suggests a trend towards an imbalance that can constrain economic development and growth opportunities with a limited working-age population.
- The County's economic base and economic prosperity are heavily reliant on the fortunes of agriculture, energy, and an emerging tourism industry and as such is particularly vulnerable to fluctuations within these sectors. Further, there is considerable concern with not only the less than optimistic outlook for these key sectors given current socio-economic circumstances, but as well for those trickle-down activities, enterprises, jobs, incomes, and social institutions and family structures tied to the uncertain fortunes of these key sectors.

In terms of process and focus:

- Economic development planning for the Region requires the meaningful engagement of key stakeholders.
- Success in the effort to effect positive economic change requires at the very least in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Region, including existing circumstances and the implications of this context to future growth and prosperity.
- With an emphasis on sustainability, the plan must necessarily build on key assets by prioritizing competitive/comparative advantages in efforts to support economic growth and diversification.
- The overall strategy should encompass, but not be limited to, key activities to attract, retain, and expand on identified markets for growth and sustainability, and the prioritization of activities to attract and retain youth and working-age individuals/families.



1.3 Approach

We all well understand that countries, regions, and municipalities must be proactive and have a willingness to both adopt change and lead it if success in economic development is to be achieved. For Flagstaff County, planning is central to an effective economic development effort because it: (1) increases the County's ability to adapt to future eventualities; (2) helps to crystallize economic development goals and objectives; (3) reduces the unnecessary pressures of immediacy; (4) reduces economic development mistakes and oversights; (5) ensures a more productive use of scarce financial, physical, and human resources; (6) makes control easier; and, (7) increases development efficiency and effectiveness.

But not all planning is alike.

While for many strategic planning is a generic exercise, the reality, however, is quite the opposite. The choice of approach and model is critical. In fact, there are numerous strategic planning approaches, not all of which yield substantive results and not all of which are appropriate to the task at hand. We know that the essential foundations for progress within Flagstaff County will depend on efforts to fully understand what the community represents today; what it aspires to be tomorrow; and how best it can achieve these aspirations in an increasingly complex and competitive marketplace.

As such, a tailored strategic planning methodology was implemented for Flagstaff County. The approach built from the unique social, economic, and political evolution of the Region. It was premised upon best practices and lessons learned throughout a variety of development environments and it responds equally and effectively to global trends and events, as well as, changing local and regional circumstances. The approach is premised not simply on the collection, manipulation, and analysis of existing materials and information sources, but one that fully engaged the community at large, comprehensively incorporated the observations and inputs of key stakeholders, and capitalized on those realities and complex patterns of today's and tomorrow's economic and sectoral transitions. Therefore, the end product as presented herein is not simply a plan, but rather a comprehensive road map that provides realistic, objective, measurable, and focussed directions for moving forward.



THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

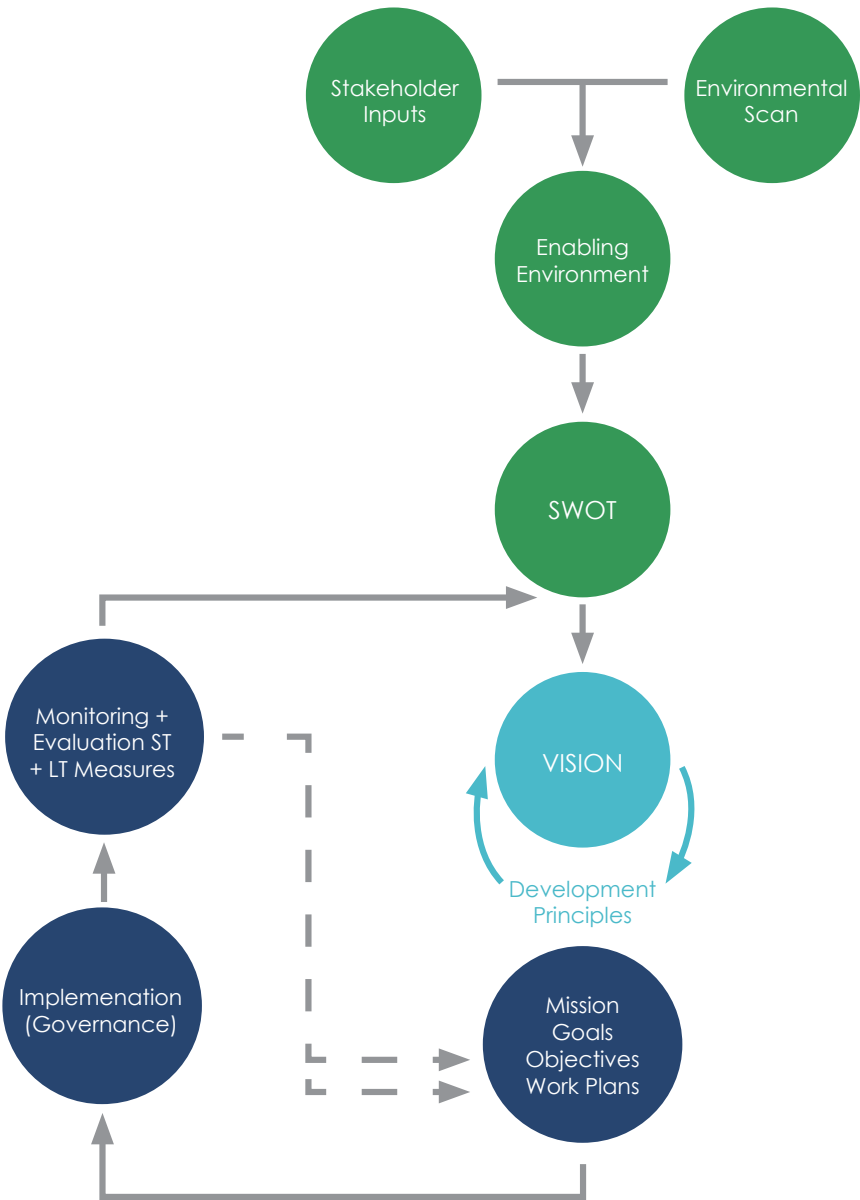
Project investigations extended over the summer and early fall of 2019 and encompassed both primary and secondary research. From the very beginning, special care was taken to ensure that the compiling of relevant information was as complete as possible. A number of studies, documents and statistics were identified and reviewed. Our approach was to build on existing efforts, not to replicate nor duplicate them.

Primary information and inputs were collected through workshops, surveys, one-on-one interviews, and group discussions. Economic Development canvass discussions were also facilitated with local Councils in the County, including Flagstaff County. These canvass discussions were instrumental in identifying priorities and challenges, as well as, highlighting opportunities for synergies. In all cases, considerable care was taken to ensure a diverse and substantive range of opinions and views were obtained. Within the context of this approach, the consulting team endeavored to capture as complete and balanced an understanding of the essential issues and pertinent insights as possible, as well as ensure that those individuals who wanted to provide input were given ample opportunity to do so.

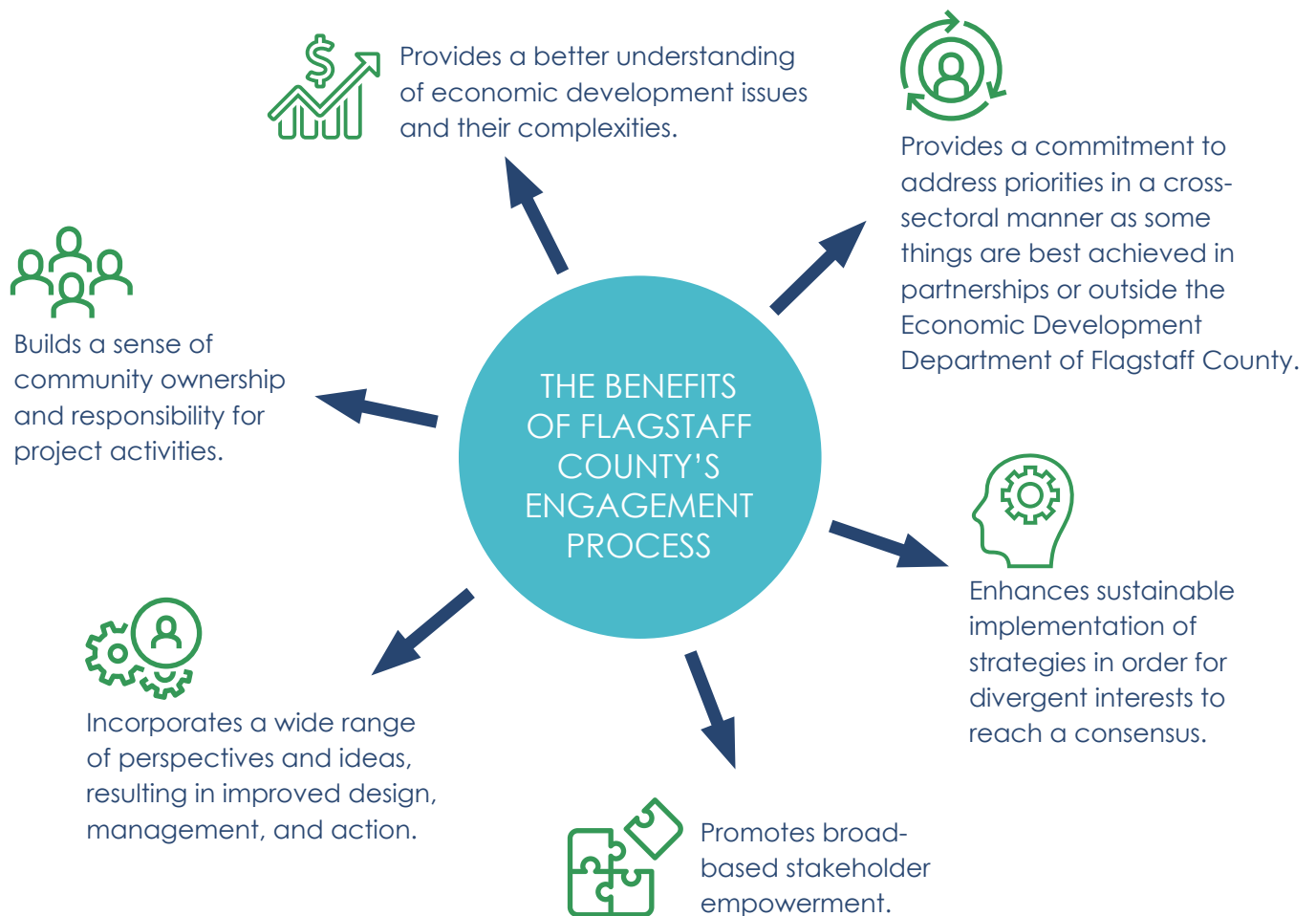
WHERE YOU ARE

WHERE YOU WANT TO BE

HOW TO GET THERE



THE BENEFITS OF FLAGSTAFF COUNTY'S ENGAGEMENT PROCESS



Ultimately, the process of formulating the strategies and tactics was open and transparent. As much as practical, the process encompassed the input of key stakeholders and community residents and was shaped by the environment for change (strategic challenges and strategic opportunities). The recommended goals, objectives, and implementation plans are therefore premised on a full understanding of their validity, not only in terms of their economic justification but most importantly their acceptance by the community at large.

The final output, therefore, sets out a clear direction for the development and organization of an effective framework from which the economic development program for Flagstaff County might realistically proceed.



1.4 Assumptions and Considerations

As with any planning effort of this type and scope, regardless of the care taken, certain limitations are inherent in the methodology employed and the assumptions made. As much as possible we have tried to minimize the impact of these limitations or considerations. While our analyses are firmly based and valid, and the recommendations derived therefrom are credible and realistic, we acknowledge that certain limitations exist, and it is important for the County to be aware of them.

- (1) This Strategic Plan is not a static document. By design, it proposes projects, initiatives, and actions to be implemented in the future. As such, as economic, political, demographic, and social conditions evolve, so must the plan.
- (2) Throughout the course of this exercise, we attempted to interview as many interested/affected individuals and stakeholders as possible. Despite our best efforts, there is a possibility that certain key interview subjects may have been missed. Depending upon the importance of the information not captured the subsequent analyses and strategy may be deficient.
- (3) Certain circumstances that existed as we started this project may no longer exist and therefore some assumptions we were obliged to make in drafting this report and plan might be less/more relevant when they were originally drawn. As such certain observations and initiatives proposed herein may need to be revisited and revised. However, even though specific actions might be subject to revision during implementation, the overall focus of the plan remains relevant, as the central theme of the strategy deals with broad long-term direction.

Notwithstanding the collective importance of these considerations, we are confident that the observations drawn throughout the report, as well as the recommendations and strategic initiatives proposed, are germane, realistic and supportable.

1.5 Acknowledgements

Certainly, no significant achievement in economic development has ever come about as an outcome of a solo performance – least of all the planning effort. In fact, the serious involvement of a broad spectrum of affected and interested community leaders, citizens, and stakeholders is an essential prerequisite to the planning success. Quite clearly active participation through which stakeholders meaningfully influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them is an essential precondition to success. To this end, as much as possible we endeavored to encourage the serious involvement of key stakeholders and interested citizens. For those that participated, we are especially thankful.

In particular, we wish to acknowledge the contributions of Flagstaff County Council and its staff for their ongoing input and guidance.



SECTION 2

BUILDING ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES



2.0 BUILDING ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

Increasingly regional and municipal governments (local governments) around the world are being relied upon to take into their own hands the responsibility to effect positive local growth and development to the benefit of individual citizens, local enterprises, and the community at large. Yet, the situational context in which this task is being managed can best be described as a complex array of development circumstances, methods and considerations, coupled with numerous challenges and exciting, yet more often than not elusive, opportunities. In order to not only cope but thrive in this context, local governments must not only be proactive but have a sincere willingness to fully understand the implications and impacts of many development factors and considerations; relevantly and realistically adapt to and capitalize on these realities, and then move forward.

To that end, first and foremost it is important to differentiate between economic growth and economic development. Economic growth is about quantitative change. This generally encompasses “measures” of investment, output, consumption, employment, and incomes. For example, a common measure of economic growth includes the number of new jobs created, or new enterprises started, or increases in taxes, or growth in GDP. Alternatively, economic development is about qualitative change, such as changes in the structure of the economy, including innovations in institutions, behavior, and technology – for example, not just jobs, but what kind of jobs, not just business start-ups, but what kinds of business start-ups, not just new investment, but in what form and for what end. Economic development then addresses the issue of not only economic progress but who gains and who loses from economic change.

To complicate matters further economic development is itself understood differently and undertaken differently within the context of different political and socio-economic circumstances. Therefore, unlike some of the certainty of replication within more mathematical sciences, trying to replicate the economic development efforts and successes of other regions/locations typically does not achieve the same results without some important adjustments or tweaking of certain nuances considering location and context.





There are a number of reasons as to why local economic development efforts have evolved the way they have and doubtless will continue to do so. In the years ahead we expect that the practice will continue to become more significant and important than it is today. At this point, it is difficult to say exactly what the next evolution of economic development might look like. However, it most certainly will be exceedingly more complex, competitive, and costly. A sample of some of the drivers of change include the following:

Economic Drivers of Economic Development Change

- the declining importance of commodities in the costs of production.
- the oversupply of manufacturing production in key global sectors.
- increasingly mobile capital and changing investment modalities/structures.
- talent attraction as the pre-eminent site location factor.
- the impact of global strategic alliances between multinational corporations on their investment and buying behaviors.
- the synchronization of economies.
- the changing employment dynamics from primary and manufacturing to the service sectors.
- importance of agglomeration, supply and value chains, and clustering in the new economy.



Technological Drivers of Economic Development Change

- technological advances and increased efficiency in production processes.
- absence of political boundaries in internet communication and business and the erosion of traditional site location determinants, i.e. e-commerce and e-government.
- major advances in logistics giving rise to reduced needs for, and costs, of shipping.
- importance of information services and information technology in all economic sectors.
- the internet of things; the GIG economy; artificial intelligence (AI)
- technological advances necessitating higher and "different" skill requirements.





Political/Regulatory Drivers of Economic Development Change

- confusing array of trade regulations, changes, and barriers.
- widespread privatization of whole industries and increased decentralization of government services.
- consistent changes in regional trade groupings and regional integration.
- increasing democratization that brings increasing pressures and expectations on private sector development (PSD) from individuals and groups.



Social/Environmental Drivers of Economic Development Change

- the increasing interconnectedness between social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental issues and aspirations.
- the increasing importance of inclusiveness in effecting successful planning and implementation of local economic development.
- increasing awareness and acknowledgment that healthy and prosperous communities require a multidisciplinary and engaged approach to economic development.
- increasing prominence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in economic development planning.
- changing workforce



And within the context of Flagstaff County and its unique rural-remote location, there are a number of location-specific drivers of economic development change.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE RURAL COMMUNITY

<p>Ongoing trends eroding future economic development performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) out-migration (due to increasing urbanization) especially amongst youth, resulting in an aging demographic impacting economic stability/ sustainability in rural areas.(2) typically, less access to a diverse range of skilled workers versus urban areas.(3) declining fiscal resources and a deterioration in rural economic structures.(4) lack of local competition limited possible sources of funds for enterprise development, and higher costs than in urban areas.(5) education systems typically not responsive to local demand/needs in terms of workforce skills.(6) delays/lack and costs in key infrastructure provision, e.g. IT.	<p>Emerging trends supporting future economic development performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) “areas of opportunity” are expected to be driven by enterprise and innovation (working in new ways, adapting products/ services for other uses, exploring new/different markets).(2) new technologies opening access to emerging market opportunities and applications within new and old industries (e.g. remote working; IT processing).(3) local supply/value chains are a crucial factor for regional growth.(4) the changing role for local government that is more inclusive and facilitates knowledge pooling with local people driving the economic development process.	<p>Emerging issues impacting economic development performance in rural areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) the burden of climate change policy disproportionately impacting rural communities.(2) increased devolution of national/provincial programs to regions and municipalities with an absence of capacities and resources.(3) increasingly evident and challenging transition prospects for single-industry towns.
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“Rural economic development policy in most developed countries has moved beyond the traditional, sector-based model, with its almost exclusive focus on agriculture. Today rural development policies are embracing more strategies that have a spatial context, that give priority to investments over subsidies, and that encourage a partnership-based, multi-stakeholder policy design and implementation framework.”
The New Rural Paradigm (OECD - 2015)

There are a number of common guiding principles inherent within every successful economic development effort - most notably it: is a strategically planned process; involves integrated interventions across multiple sectors; is premised on strong local leadership; is about sustainable development; is premised on stakeholder engagement with meaningful participation; is broadly inclusive; requires not only adequate community readiness but an especially strong enabling environment to achieve maximal success; is best achieved when it involves partnering and partnerships; emphasizes creativity and flexibility in approach; and is especially proactive when properly pursued.

While proper planning is the cornerstone of every successful economic development effort; plans logically lead to implementation. Because each region and each local government is unique it will have a different approach to undertaking economic development. There are nonetheless certain core functions that define the broader scope of every economic development effort. They include: (1) retention and expansion of local businesses; (2) entrepreneurial development; (3) business and investment attraction; (4) workforce development; and (5) community cash flow development. Inherent within each of these individual but highly interrelated economic development functional areas is an almost infinite range of services, programs, activities, models, and modalities, many of which have multiple impacts.



CORE FUNCTIONS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Business retention and expansion (BRE) programs seek to foster economic development by building relationships between local/regional governments and existing local enterprises in order to: (1) help local enterprises grow and become more competitive; and, (2) help local enterprises who are at risk to overcome difficulties.

Integral to business growth and expansion is the availability of appropriately skilled labour or talent. **Workforce development** encompasses all of those efforts to enhance the skills and abilities of the local workforce from plans and investigations to tripartite efforts between local governments, educational institutions, and the private sector to train individuals for specific jobs or industries.



Entrepreneurial development is a central foundation of economic development. Entrepreneurs act as catalytic agents in the process of economic growth and economic development. Regions and municipalities typically undertake a range of programs and services to encourage entrepreneurial development, such as efforts to provide entrepreneurs with the capital, training, and technical assistance they need to start and grow their business.

Business and investment attraction are by far the most visible economic development activity. Success typically leads to the influx of new capital; creation of a new enterprise and new jobs; opportunities for technology transfer; improvement in local workforce skills; and improved locational competitiveness. Offsetting these benefits include concerns with local enterprise dislocation; economic growth versus development; absence of integration within municipal/regional economic and social priorities; and a concern for decisions with local consequences made outside the region or county. Regions with success in investment attraction stress the importance of attracting investment based on regional strengths.

Finally, the economic health of a municipality or region can become unstable and the future significantly uncertain if an imbalance develops between the amount of local income and wealth that leaves a region's economy (leakage), and the extent to which "new" dollars come into and are retained by the regional economy. This cash flow crunch can be addressed by enhancing greater inflows or limiting leakage (**Community Cash Flow Development**). In the matter of leakages, **BRE** and entrepreneurial development efforts can serve to diversify and broaden the local economy, thereby limiting some amount of leakage, i.e. fewer residents or businesses purchasing products/services from outside the region. In other instances, direct action is required to bring in new dollars either through business and investment attraction or other initiatives that serve to either broadly enhance regional incomes (e.g. export promotion), offset regional costs/expenditures (e.g. inter-municipal agreements for shared services), or improve the leverage and use of local resources (e.g. public-private partnerships).





Services, programs, activities, models and modalities aligned primarily with one function do not exist in isolation of each other and typically encompass multiple purposes, i.e. the organization of a small business service centre usually serves the purpose of promoting entrepreneurial development, but also usually benefits efforts to promote sustainability and expansion of existing local enterprises (BRE). Further, there are literally hundreds of different individual economic development services, activities, and modalities and numerous variations on the same theme. By way of example, there are incubators, accelerators, commercialization centers, incubators without walls, thematic or sector-specific incubators, technology incubators, and so forth.

Importantly, these functional areas are not the sole responsibility of local government nor are they all typically controlled by local government, though there is certainly a local government role to play in each. In fact, it should not go unnoticed that local government participation in economic development seldom exists in isolation of the direct and indirect participation of other agencies and authorities such as other levels of government; civil society/not for profit agencies and organizations; banks and financial institutions; development companies; chambers of commerce; workers organizations; private sector interests; educational institutions; and the like. In practice, economic development is typically initiated and driven by multiple sources. Needless to say, the challenges of achieving some agreement on a common direction through broad and inclusive strategic planning; and ensuring some amount of complementarity and synergy in service delivery to maximize effectiveness and impact are essential.

SECTION 3

OUR PATH FORWARD – SUCCEEDING TOGETHER



3.0 OUR PATH FORWARD – SUCCEEDING TOGETHER

Flagstaff County has in place an existing Economic Development Plan (Economic Strategic Pathways for Flagstaff County (2015-2018)) and a County Strategic Plan (Flagstaff County Strategic Plan (2018-2022)) both complete with vision, mission, goals, and objectives. This project investigation and strategic plan development build from these efforts by incorporating the broader themes of the County and the past successes of previous economic development activities and initiatives. This strategy introduces the context and circumstances for sustainable economic development within Flagstaff County and describes ways by which the County might pursue a path of sustainable growth and development and address the many challenges and obstacles along the way.

This is not a strategy for growth for its own sake. Instead, this strategy is premised on the aspirations of the County including its citizens and enterprises. It suggests a highly proactive approach inasmuch as economic development success does not arise from sitting back and expecting great things to happen and the benefits of that success to somehow accrue and miraculously trickle down to benefit all citizens and enterprises alike. Instead, this strategy is focussed on hard work, a realistic evaluation of both strategic challenges and opportunities, and an articulation of relevant policies and actions that point out ways of moving forward. It is a strategy that moves from analysis and discussion of visions and ideas, towards action.

3.1 Vision

Flagstaff County's Vision:

To be a strong, vibrant and sustainable regional Community of communities through collaboration and a focus on economic, social and environmental cooperation that contributes to a rural essence and quality of life.

Vision in economic development terms sets out an optimistic view of where the municipality aspires to be in the future—usually within the next 10–20 years. It is a consensus opinion of what individual citizens, local leaders, and economic development stakeholders want it to be. Both imaginative and realistic, it draws on the competitiveness assessment and stakeholder inputs; it reflects and builds from the County's articulated development principles; and, it requires community ownership and awareness if it is to be an effective guide. It follows from and is supportive of the broader County vision.

Flagstaff County's Economic Development Vision:

As a rural "Community of communities" we will collaborate uniquely and innovatively to stabilize the population with investment attraction, business retention, a youth entrepreneurship development strategy, and tourism experiences development.

3.2 Guiding Principles

A properly constructed economic development strategy or plan is typically premised on a range of development principles or values that serve mostly to guide implementation in such a manner as to ensure desired goals and objectives are achieved in the way they are intended. These principles are usually confirmed within the context of the community visioning exercise and are refined during goal setting. They also play a part in setting the broader framework for the overall planning exercise from competitiveness to action planning. Development principles are of course unique to each region and align with broader regional development principles. The following principles are established for the Flagstaff County economic development effort:

Flagstaff County's Guiding Principles



Collaboration - Strengthen relationships to build a strong, vibrant and sustainable region that benefits all citizens.



Economic - Pursue economic initiatives that promote sustainability, diversification and growth within the region.



Social - Support and promote a strong, vibrant, resilient, healthy, inclusive and safe Community of communities that addresses local values, social issues and well-being of its citizens.



Programs and Services Delivery - Provide citizens with effective, appropriate and financially responsible levels of service.



Environment - Promote the value of a healthy, sustainable natural environment and encourage its effective stewardship to ensure its preservation for current and future generations.

3.3 Role Of The Economic Development Function In The County

Role or purpose, or more commonly mission, is defined as the economic development organizational reason for being. It is the underlying motivation for the organization/function. Purpose sets out who/what the economic development function/organization is, what it does, and how it operates. In other words, vision sets out what the County aspires to achieve in terms of economic development; development principles and values set out what the County believes in and how it will behave in achieving its vision; and purpose defines why the economic development effort exists. The purpose is the vehicle which leads to the realization of the vision.

Our Purpose (Flagstaff County Economic Development Function)

As an innovative and progressive "Community" that balances economic prosperity and environmental stewardship, we deliver a responsible level of service that is both efficient and effective.



SECTION 4

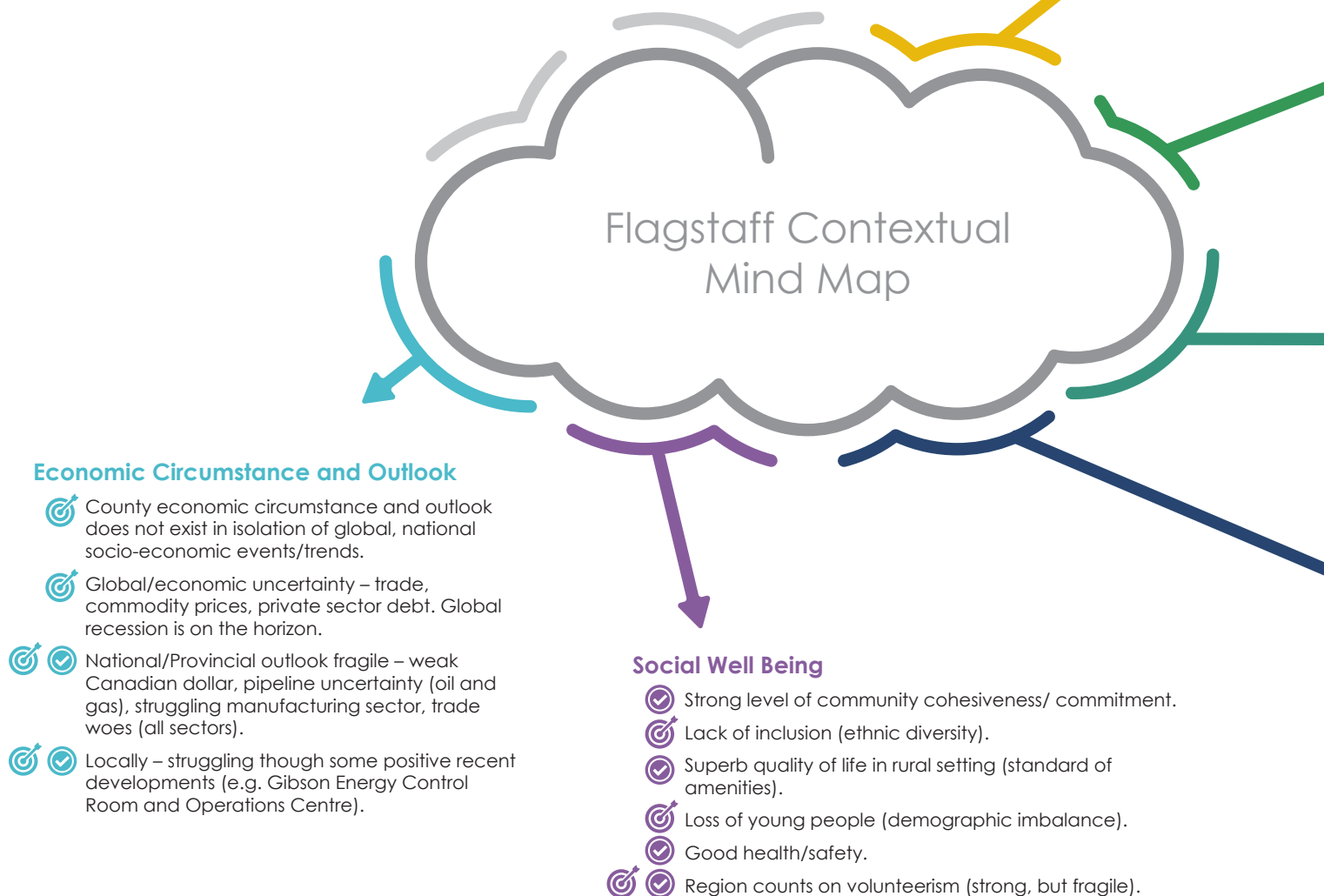
CONTEXT AND CIRCUMSTANCE



4.0 CONTEXT AND CIRCUMSTANCE

The essential foundations for progress within Flagstaff County depend on efforts to fully understand what the County represents today; what it aspires to be tomorrow; and how best it can achieve these aspirations in an increasingly complex and competitive marketplace. The purpose of a situational or competitiveness analysis is to describe and assess what is “relevant or meaningful” within the County’s current situation and how these factors impact the future prospects for sustainable economic prosperity. This includes an examination of external and internal factors. These insights, in turn, provide guidance in the effort to articulate an economic development program that is realistic and pragmatic. Further, a proper situational analysis will by implication suggest development objectives and provide a framework for identifying and evaluating key economic opportunities. A synopsis of findings/insights for Flagstaff County follows below.

4.1 External and Internal Environment for Growth and Development including Critical Development Challenges and Opportunities



Doing Business – Private Sector Development

- 🎯 Business Short-Term outlook is pessimistic/business vitality is low.
- 🎯 Region is made up of “business survivors”
- 🎯 Limited business acumen and capacity levels in new economic environment.
- 🎯 Succession – Aging of owners, closing/loss of services, business viability is low.
- 🎯 Business supports (ecosystem) lack accessibility and some are misaligned with needs.
- 🎯 Entrepreneurial culture is low.
- 🎯 Working with BREOC who's receiving funding provides opportunities for mechanisms for support.

Local Readiness for Economic and Social Development

- 🎯 Business/Government/Citizens level of understanding of regulations/policies and the impacts are confused and occasionally misaligned.
- 🎯 Aging condition of infrastructure networks.
- 🎯 Lack of economic diversity (sectoral and labourforce).
- 🎯 Connectivity (digital) is an issue.
- 🎯 Land and building available.
- 🎯 Land & building is primarily privately owned with unmotivated sellers.
- 🎯 Transportation and location (major transportation routes).

Local Economic/Community Development Foundations

- 🎯 Well-defined Economic Development Organization in Flagstaff County (focused on learning/development, outcome focused, high standards of delivery, respected from local governments, have grant application successes, etc.).
- 🎯 Good relationships with different levels of government.
- 🎯 Battle River Economic Opportunities Committee.

Political Environment

- 🎯 Provincial/Federal Environment unknown (election, limiting budgets, misalignment to local needs).
- 🎯 Commitment but limited Community Economic Development Capacity levels of local government.
- 🎯 Inconsistent to approach to regional projects/partnerships.
- 🎯 Willingness to support Region in diversification.
- 🎯 Improvements in Regional political relationships.

🎯 Opportunity

🎯 Challenge



SECTION 5

SUCCEEDING TOGETHER

– OUR PRIORITIES AND OUR STRATEGY



5.0 SUCCEEDING TOGETHER – OUR PRIORITIES AND OUR STRATEGY



"Implementation is the process of executing a plan or policy so that a concept becomes a reality. To implement a plan properly there should be a clear communication of goals and expectations, and sufficient resources and capacities to achieve those goals."

At the end of the day, strategy development is really about proper and concerted implementation. Implementation, in turn, requires a well-thought-out and logical process moving from vision and mission founded on a foundation of effective prioritization and focused action planning.

The process of prioritization is valuable to the strategic planning effort given the finite supply of financial, human, and infrastructure resources on which economic development efforts are premised. Regarding prioritizing actions and activities, the County must be extra cautious to balance its limited resources with its desire to ensure economic development efforts move forward and are as efficient and effective as possible.

Of course, various techniques and methodologies can be used to kick-start the process of prioritizing actions. In some cases, the prioritization process may be premised strictly on addressing economic and socio-economic needs and interests; or alternatively focus on political expediency, or alternatively on satisfying specific stakeholder interests; or perhaps on all of these considerations and others.

For our purposes herein, using the guidance of key stakeholders and input from the County, the initial step in the prioritization process focused on identifying priority outcomes with respect to: retaining workforce and citizens; demographic stability and balance; and, sector/enterprise diversity, strengthening, and growth. Subsequently, realistic, implementable actions were identified, compiled and assigned a value based upon the perceived level of importance and value of each proposed action to expected outcomes taking into account considerations such as aggregate impact, immediacy of impact, cost, ease of use/implementation and so forth. The combination of prioritizing needs and prioritizing actions to meet those needs was combined and the following strategic priorities and actions were shortlisted.



5.1 Strategic Priority One: Succeeding Through Strong Businesses - Business Retention & Expansion (BRE)

5.1.1 Objective: Enhance local procurement opportunities (both from the supply and demand sides).

5.1.1 Tactics

- Inventory procurement opportunities of major employers in the Region.
- Assist local businesses in their capacities to access procurement opportunities.
- Reverse tradeshow.

5.1.2 Objective: Assist local businesses to increase their capacities to reach their goals.

5.1.2 Tactics

- Annual needs determination (on-going).
- Design/facilitate capacity building workshops.
 - one-on-one and/or peer-to-peer mentoring
 - explore a regional business association
- Act as a concierge to programming (provide referrals to business assistance programs).
- Investment Retention – develop a program to retain future investment.
- Renew conversations around community co-op or community bonds (BREOC).

5.1.3 Objective: Increase the vitality and health of local businesses.

5.1.3 Tactics

- Help businesses to identify new markets.
- Assist businesses in accessing financing.
- Convene a tripartite (government, private sector, and educational institutions) consultation process on workforce issues.



5.2 Strategic Priority Two: Succeeding Through Attraction & Retaining Our Citizens

5.2.1 Objective: Promote and foster newcomer attraction and retention in the Region.

5.2.1 Tactics

- Introduce a Flagstaff “Ambassador Program” (external promotion of the community).
- Undertake labour force readiness study to understand the current and future workforce needs as a basis for citizen attraction.
- Integrate citizen attraction and retention with investment attraction and retention efforts.
- Promote citizen attraction through diaspora.

5.2.2 Objective: Ensure newcomers feel welcome and have successfully transitioned into the community.

5.2.2 Tactics

- Strengthen the match between existing newcomer programs and the needs and interests of newcomers.
- Increase understanding and connection through comprehensive education and citizen awareness of cultural diversity in the Region.



5.3 Strategic Priority Three: Succeeding Through New Business Start-Ups

5.3.1 Objective: Celebrating the Successes of the Region

5.3.1 Tactics

- Develop a communication plan for celebrating local successes.
- Community Benefit Assessment on the contribution of Micro, Small, & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- Profiles to promote MSME diversity (focus on youth and gender).
- Celebrate small business week.

5.3.2 Objective: Create support for entrepreneurship endeavours.

5.3.2 Tactics

- First Impressions Program.
- Workshops/Trainings from step 1 to launching a business (business lifecycle).
- Inventory of potential business opportunities by sector (MSME focused).
- Monitor the policy environment as it relates to entrepreneurial development and include it into the annual operating plan regarding the role of Economic Development.
- Develop a business start-up bootcamp.

5.3.3 Objective: Create a culture of entrepreneurship in the Region.

5.3.3 Tactics

- Develop youth entrepreneurship programming (in schools AND for post-school underemployed).
- Provide technical support to business associations in the Region (e.g. Flagstaff Crafted).
- Build and foster partnerships with business service providers (capacity building, financing, technical expertise) to maximize entrepreneurial development in the Region.





5.4 Strategic Priority Four: Succeeding Through New Business Investment

5.4.1 Objective: Retain investment through effective succession.

5.4.1 Tactics

- Promote the importance and proper process of succession planning.
- Develop succession programming for 1-on-1 workshops.
- Create a team to support businesses for succession (create linkages to business valuers, lawyers, accountants, financial planners, realtors, and others.)

5.4.2 Objective: Build capacity to promote investment attraction within the Region (Investment Promotion Organization – IPO).

5.4.2 Tactics

- Continue to build on existing tools and update tools (tools must be accessible – downloadable/usable).
- Identify/confirm target markets, sectors, and strategies.
- Align and look for synergies between local efforts and external agencies as partners for a Regional IPO (e.g. BREOC, BRAED, Government of Alberta, Government of Canada, and others).
- Establish “Team Flagstaff”.

5.4.3 Objective: Ensure there are local financial mechanisms to support investment opportunities.

5.4.3 Tactics

- Work/coordinate with local financial institutions as an advocate for the needs and interests of local businesses.
- Work with BREOC to further the Development Finance Institute (DFI) and investor network development.

5.5 Strategic Priority Five: Succeeding Together – Economic Development as a Supportive Team Member

5.5.1 Objectives (multiple): (1) keep regional collaboration as a focal point; (2) focus on effective social development; (3) support other business units and partners in program and services delivery; (4) include environmental sustainability in efforts (Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs).

5.5.1 Shared Tactics with Other Departments and Partners:

- Establish a monthly roundtable of operating departments to develop synergies among economic development-related efforts within the County.
- Provide promotional/communication supporting attraction efforts.
Example: community citizen/professional attraction for Doctor recruitment.
- Profiles to celebrate the citizen or group of the month.
- Develop a volunteer database.
- Provide a social enterprise workshop (volunteerism, strategic planning, infrastructure management).
- Create a backbone support agency offering the core functional area supports (Accounting, Marketing/Communications, Volunteers, Human Resources (HR) Management, Fundraising).



SECTION 6

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON IMPLEMENTATION



6.0 SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON IMPLEMENTATION

Successful implementation will demand a number of critical considerations. The most important include the following:



Strong Local Leadership: Successful implementation is highly dependent upon the strength and commitment of local leaders. This plan is premised on strong local leadership and, while those who provide leadership will vary depending upon the circumstances and issues involved, they will need to understand that leadership always means commitment and conviction.



Partnering and Partnerships: The challenges of business and economic development do not come cheaply. In fact, as proposed herein they are expected to place demands on Flagstaff County that, taken together, will exceed the resources of the County. It will be essential then that participation and/or engagement of other levels of government, the private sector, volunteers, interested/affected stakeholders, and others is to be encouraged. Working together will ensure synergies are realized and that scarce resources can be leveraged to meet growth demands.



Creativity: Balanced, sustainable economic development does not occur by accident or easily. Rapid technological, political, social, and economic change demand new responses and new approaches. While this plan builds from proven best practices and lessons learned, it also recognizes that innovative, forward-looking approaches are necessary for success.



Attention to the Needs of Local Businesses: The Flagstaff Region is home to a wide array of businesses, from home-based firms to small stores and shops. As such, within the context of business attraction, a substantive emphasis is also placed on an improved understanding of the needs and perspectives of local businesses, along with an emphasis on making the local business environment more productive, supportive, and attractive.



Community Engagement/Participation: Community engagement in the economic development process is an essential pre-requisite to not only the planning process but to the overall effort required to bring about positive change and on-going development. By ensuring the process is inclusive, transparent, and appropriate this plan builds from citizen input and the empowerment of local stakeholders.



Action-Oriented: The value in planning lies in the careful and deliberate selection of feasible and relevant actions and activities and the proper modality to carry them out. This strategy, while carefully endeavoring to move the community forward in the long-term, also emphasizes expeditious implementation in the short-term.





Flexible and Opportunistic: Economic development success today is a function of defining and aligning practical strategies and making them relevant in a dynamic and rapidly changing socio-economic environment for the future; an environment where the challenge is not just in coping with the pace of change but also with understanding and managing its complexity and constancy. Quite obviously in a time of “moving targets” rigid and staid approaches are at best inappropriate and at worse detrimental. This 5-Year Economic and Community Development Strategic Plan for Flagstaff County is therefore flexible and responsive; stated strategies can be easily adjusted to take advantage of changing circumstances and opportunities.



Consistent Review and Revision: Evaluation contributes to better development outcomes. Regardless of how committed the staff and how well economic programs are designed and implemented, experience shows that the absence of formal and regular program evaluations means that established systems of program delivery lose effectiveness over time, and the impacts of program efforts lose focus and intensity. When organizations undertake regular analysis of performance, they increase their ability to improve results. They do so by incorporating what they learn into their planning and decision making. Under this framework, they regularly adjust their resource allocation and operations to meet current realities and circumstances, and in doing so position the organization and its programs to achieve better and more focussed results over the longer-term. Despite its obvious importance, local economic development is notoriously difficult to benchmark, monitor or evaluate performance. This plan, as intentionally structured, supports: (1) impact evaluations that measure the change in a development outcome that is attributable to a defined intervention (program or service); and, (2) performance evaluations that focus on how economic development is being implemented, how it is perceived and valued, and whether expected results are occurring.

The vision must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps - we must step up the stairs.