

# **SEEDS OF SUCCESS: SOWING THE FUTURE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT**



**The Village of Donnelly and  
Smoky River Region Economic  
Development Plan**

**2024**





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No significant achievement in a region that has successfully diversified has ever come about as a result of individual efforts alone, especially when it comes to implementing economic development initiatives. On the contrary, it demands the active engagement of a wide array of community leaders, citizens, and stakeholders to ensure effective planning and execution.

Clearly, the Village of Donnelly and the communities within the Smoky River Region have demonstrated a keen eagerness to engage in meaningful dialogue and collaborative planning sessions. It is evident that the community and its leaders, both formal and informal, are not only eager to influence but also take a leading role in diversification efforts. In pursuit of this goal, we made concerted efforts to foster the meaningful participation of key stakeholders and interested citizens. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to those who actively participated. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the Village of Donnelly, the Smoky River Regional Economic Development, and all others for their continuous input and guidance.

Prepared by:



Lead by:



Supported by:





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# SEEDS OF SUCCESS: SOWING THE FUTURE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In today's dynamic environment, it is more critical than ever for regions such as the Smoky River to take control over their own destinies through strong leadership, commitment to partnerships, and a clear vision and plans for the future. By proactively shaping their economic landscape, communities can harness their strengths, address challenges, and capitalize on opportunities to foster sustainable growth and prosperity. With a collaborative approach and a strategic road map in place, Smoky River can navigate complexities, leverage resources effectively, and build a resilient economy that benefits all stakeholders for generations to come.

The Village of Donnelly took a leadership role in finding the resources needed for the region to conduct careful planning and strategizing to build off the momentum created by the recent attraction of a hemp decortication facility.



# PROJECT PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the project is to:

**“Assist the Village of Donnelly and the region to best capitalize on the recent attraction of Smoky Hemp Decortication Ltd. to maximize the socio-economic benefits for the Village and the region now and into the future.”**

It was driven by the following objectives:

## Stakeholder Engagement:

Actively involved diverse stakeholders in the Smoky River Region in the planning process to ensure their input and buy-in.

## Context Analysis:

Conducted a thorough analysis of the Smoky River Region’s economic, social, and regulatory environment to inform targeted strategies.

## Needs Assessment:

Identified gaps in infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities within the Smoky River Region to guide strategy development.

## Capacity Building:

Provided an opportunity for increased capacity building for key stakeholders in the region through work along, presentations and strategic planning sessions.

## REGIONAL FIT - VISION AND PRINCIPLES

To effectively pursue economic opportunities, a community must do more than identify a market and secure an investor; it must also gain residents’ approval, known as the “social license.” Community leaders should align economic development with residents’ goals. to achieve this, there were over 400 interactions with the community, including interviews, surveys, and planning sessions with local councils and economic development functions. These engagements allowed citizens, businesses, and leaders to shape their collective future.

## VISION

### Sustainable & Vibrant Community

Ensure a healthy environment, strong social connections, and vibrant cultural activities within the community.

### Opportunities for Multiple Generations

Provide education, training, and resources to empower individuals of all ages to succeed and contribute to the community’s growth and prosperity.

### Foster a Positive Business Environment

Create a supportive ecosystem that attracts investment, removes barriers to entrepreneurship, and encourages business growth and innovation.

### Facilitate Job Creation

Stimulate economic activity by attracting new businesses, supporting existing ones, and providing residents with the skills needed for meaningful employment.



## OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES



### Collaboration and Partnership

We foster collaboration and partnerships among local governments, businesses, educational institutions, community organizations, and other stakeholders to leverage resources and expertise for comprehensive economic development efforts.



### Sustainable Development

We promote sustainable development practices that balance economic growth with environmental conservation and social equity, ensuring long-term prosperity for current and future generations.



### Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Support innovation and entrepreneurship by providing resources, programs, and initiatives to help start-ups and existing businesses thrive.



### Equity and Inclusion

Stimulate economic activity by attracting new businesses, supporting existing ones, and providing residents with the skills and opportunities needed to secure meaningful employment.



### Quality of Life

Community characteristics that contribute to overall quality of life must be consistently considered with new development, including factors such as access to healthcare, education, recreational facilities, and a clean environment.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The following priorities clearly set out broad themes for the next three (3) years (up to the end of 2027). They were formed by considering “what is possible?”, “what is desirable?”, and “what can realistically be achieved?” within the region’s economic development efforts.

- 1 Capacity Building
- 2 Workforce Development
- 3 Business Retention and Expansion
- 4 Fostering Entrepreneurial Spirit
- 5 Infrastructure Investment
- 6 Promote Smoky River Region

# CAPACITY BUILDING

## Description:

As the Smoky River Region endeavours to strengthen its local economy, proactive action and a commitment to success are paramount. However, it's equally crucial to prioritize the establishment of robust local capacities to implement and adapt to the region's evolving dynamics. To this end, the Smoky River Region proposes laying strong foundations that will support its long-term diversification efforts. This initial phase, to be completed within the first six months, will focus on capacity building, communication, and the cultivation of partnerships and alliances, ensuring a solid framework for ongoing progress and adaptation.

## Core Tactics

1. Peer-to-Peer Mentorship
2. Networking and Collaboration
3. Resource Mobilization and Grant Writing
4. Strategic Partnerships and Alliances:
  - a. Collaborate on joint projects
  - b. Empower community members:

## Tertiary Tactics

1. Training and Professional Development for Necessary Staff/ Council Members
2. Stakeholder Involvement (HS\*)
3. Capacity Building Workshops (HS\*)





## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Description:**

Workforce development in the Smoky River Region focuses on aligning skills and education with the needs of local industries. By offering training, apprenticeships, and partnerships with educational institutions, we ensure our workforce is equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in our diverse economy.

**Core Tactics**

- 1. Employment Counseling and Support Services
- 2. Employee attraction and Retention capacity building for employers.

**Secondary Tactics**

- 1. Skills Assessment and Gap Analysis
- 2. Matchmaking service

**Tertiary Tactics**

- 1. Training Programs (HS\*)
- 2. Apprenticeships and Internships (HS\*)



## BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION



**Description:**

BRE efforts build from an understanding of context, needs, and gaps in existing services as they pertain to business survival, sustainability, and growth. They build from a recognition that while in some cases there may be commonality of certain needs, in other instances, there is not a one size fits all. This is confirmed by considerations like the varying importance of selected firm level influencers.

**Core Tactics**

- 1. Celebrate Successes
- 2. Concierge Program for Business Support Services
- 3. Peer to Peer Mentorship Program
- 4. Business Seminars/Workshops (Capacity building for business owners)
- 5. Access to Financing (Match Making)

**Secondary Tactics**

- 1. Buy/Support Local Campaigns
- 2. Succession Planning
- 3. Local Procurement Initiatives

**Tertiary Tactics**

- 1. Business Incubators (HS\*)
- 2. Marketing and Promotion for Hemp Industry (HS\*)



## FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

### Description:

Fostering an entrepreneurial spirit is key to driving innovation and growth in the Smoky River Region. We support aspiring entrepreneurs through mentorship, networking, and access to resources, creating an ecosystem that encourages start-up success and fosters a culture of innovation.

### Core Tactics

1. Small Business Week Celebration
2. Access to Financing
3. Entrepreneurship Training Programs
4. Promote Specific Opportunities Relating to Hemp

### Tertiary Tactics

1. Shared Facilities and Equipment
2. Run a Mentorship Program

### Secondary Tactics

1. Entrepreneurship Education in Schools



## INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT



### Description:

Infrastructure investment is crucial for the Smoky River Region's economic development. By investing in transportation, broadband, utilities, healthcare, and education infrastructure, we enhance our region's competitiveness, connectivity, and quality of life, supporting sustainable growth and prosperity.

### Core Tactics

1. Broadband Connectivity

### Secondary Tactics

1. Employment Land Preparedness and Inventory
2. Housing Strategy

### Tertiary Tactics

1. Centre of Innovation
2. Community Investment Fund
3. Transportation Networks (HS\*)
4. Utilities and Processing Facilities (HS\*)
5. Housing and Community Services (HS\*)



## PROMOTE SMOKY RIVER REGION (SEE MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS PLAN)

### Description:

- a. **Citizen Attraction:** Promotion efforts target attracting new residents to the Smoky River Region by showcasing our unique lifestyle, amenities, and opportunities. Through marketing campaigns and community events, we highlight our region's natural beauty, affordability, and strong sense of community.
- b. **Business Attraction:** Business attraction initiatives aim to attract new businesses and investment to the Smoky River Region. By highlighting our region's strengths, incentives, and opportunities, we seek to attract investors and businesses looking to relocate or expand, fostering economic growth and diversity.



## FINAL THOUGHTS

The economic development journey for the Village of Donnelly and the Smoky River Region highlights the power of collaboration, resilience, and forward-thinking. This Economic Development Plan is a living blueprint designed to adapt with the community's changing dynamics. It emphasizes community engagement, sustainable development, innovation, equity, and quality of life improvement. The plan's guiding principles are practical pillars for future actions and decisions.

Success will rely on continued commitment to collaboration, strategic partnerships, and possibility thinking. As the region progresses, flexibility and readiness to adapt will be crucial. The plan aims to achieve sustained economic growth, create meaningful employment, and enhance overall community well-being. With a shared vision and collective effort, the region can navigate towards a prosperous and resilient future. Each community member's dedication will nurture these efforts, meeting today's needs and paving the way for future generations.



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

*For community development to occur, people in a community must believe working together can make a difference and they must organize to address their shared needs collectively.*

In today's dynamic environment, it is more critical than ever for regions such as the Smoky River to take control over their own destinies through strong leadership, commitment to partnerships, and a clear vision and plans for the future. By proactively shaping their economic landscape, communities can harness their strengths, address challenges, and capitalize on opportunities to foster sustainable growth and prosperity. With a collaborative approach and a strategic roadmap in place, Smoky River can navigate complexities, leverage resources effectively, and build a resilient economy that benefits all stakeholders for generations to come.

The Village of Donnelly took a leadership role in finding the resources needed for the region to conduct careful planning and strategizing to build off the momentum created by the recent attraction of a hemp decortication facility.

### 1.1 PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of the project is to:

*"Assist the Village of Donnelly and the region to best capitalize on the recent attraction of Smoky Hemp Decortication Ltd. to maximize the socio-economic benefits for the Village and the region now and into the future."*



## 1.2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

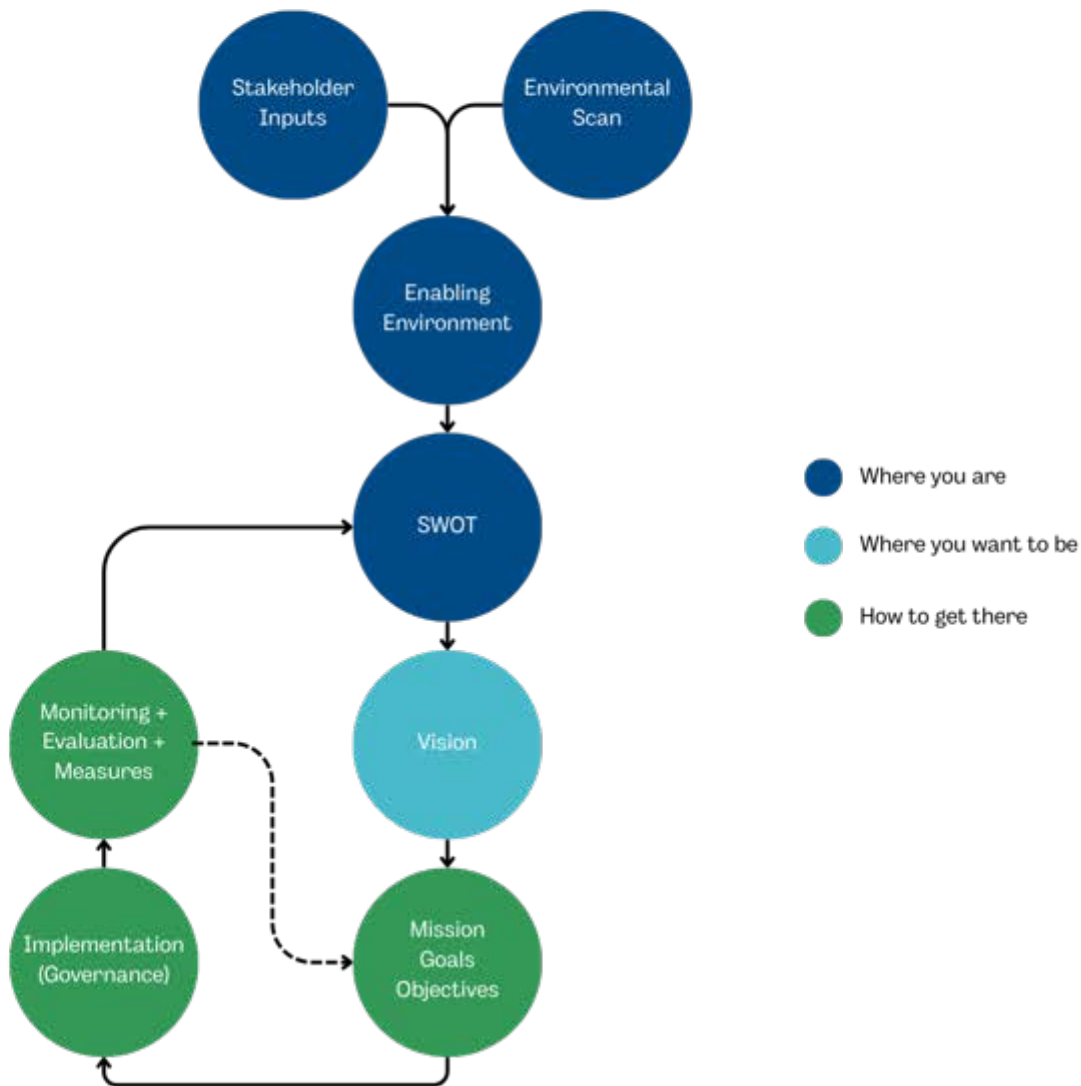
To achieve this purpose, the following objectives were accomplished throughout the duration of this project:

1. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Actively involved diverse stakeholders in the Smoky River Region in the planning process to ensure their input and buy-in.
2. **Context Analysis:** Conduct a thorough analysis of the Smoky River Region's economic, social, and regulatory environment to inform targeted strategies.
3. **Needs Assessment:** Identify gaps in infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities within the Smoky River Region to guide strategy development.
4. **Determine Community's Vision of Success:** Engage citizens, business owners, and community leaders within the Smoky River Region to define shared goals.
5. **Establish Guiding Principles:** Respect and adhere to key principles for responsible and community-centric decision-making within the Smoky River Region.
6. **Identify Strategic Priorities:** Determine key focus areas for economic development efforts within the Smoky River Region.
7. **Develop Tactics for Implementation:** Create actionable plans to achieve strategic priorities within the Smoky River Region.
8. **Capacity Building:** Provide an opportunity for increased capacity building for key stakeholders in the region through work along, presentations and strategic planning sessions.
9. **Communication and Outreach:** Develop a comprehensive communication and outreach strategy to engage the broader community in the planning process, raise awareness of the project's objectives and progress, and solicit feedback and participation from stakeholders.



## 1.3 OUR PROCESS

While our process is highly dynamic and open to changes and updates as they occur, the framework is captured below in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. High-level process followed in creating the Smoky River Economic Development Plan*

## 1.4 ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

As with any planning effort of this nature, regardless of the care taken, certain limitations are inherent in the methodology of investigation and assumptions made. As much as possible we have worked to minimize the impact of these limitations. While we feel the analysis and the recommendations are valid and credible, we acknowledge that certain limitations exist, and have outlined them for the reader.

1. This strategic plan is not a static document. By design it discusses projects, programs, and actions to be developed and implemented in the future. As such, as economic and social conditions evolve in the Smoky River Region and its communities, so must the plan.



2. The Smoky River Region does not exist in isolation from the broader regional, provincial, national, and global environment. The context in which critical issues and opportunities are identified (considering an aggregate of social, economic, technological, political, and environmental considerations) is at best highly dynamic. As such we would expect that change is not only a possibility, it is a certainty, and the identification of opportunities, and their potential role, can also be expected to change.
3. Certain circumstances that existed as we started this project may no longer exist and some assumptions we were obliged to make in drafting this report may no longer be valid. As such, certain observations and recommendations proposed herein may need to be revisited and revised in the coming years.

Notwithstanding the collective importance of these considerations, we stand by the analysis, observations, and conclusions that follow.

## 1.5 ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS CONDUCTED

A cornerstone of the economic development plan for the Village of Donnelly and the Smoky River Region has been the comprehensive engagement of local stakeholders. Recognizing that successful economic development requires the active participation and input of the community, extensive efforts were made to involve diverse groups and individuals throughout the planning process. This inclusive approach ensures that the plan reflects the unique needs, aspirations, and strengths of the community, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment among all stakeholders.

The engagement process aimed to gather insights, build consensus, and foster collaboration among various community members, including local residents, business owners, industry experts, government officials, and non-profit organizations. Through a series of targeted activities, a wide array of perspectives was collected and incorporated into the development plan, ensuring that the strategy is grounded in an intimate appreciation of the local context and truly reflects the community's vision for the future. Key engagement efforts included:

- **Business Interviews:** Conducted 22 in-depth interviews with local business owners to understand their needs, challenges, and opportunities.
- **Interviews with Economic Development Partnering Agencies:** Held 5 interviews with agencies to gather insights on potential collaborations and support mechanisms.
- **Economic Development Planning Workshops:** Facilitated 7 planning workshops with local councils and the Economic Development Agency, engaging over 44 participants in strategic discussions and planning.
- **Surveys of Local Citizens:** Collected feedback from 200 local citizens through comprehensive surveys, capturing their views on community needs and economic priorities.
- **Surveys of Local Businesses:** Conducted surveys with 57 local businesses to gather data on business conditions, future plans, and support requirements.

This level of engagement ensures that the economic development plan is deeply rooted in an intimate understanding of the local context. The goals and desired outcomes of the plan respect and reflect the vision of local residents and businesses, providing a strategic road map that aligns with their aspirations and leverages the unique strengths of the Village of Donnelly and the Smoky River Region.







## 2.0 SETTING THE STAGE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There is a constant buzz and dialogue across the country, especially at the community level, about the importance of economic development. From politicians and business leaders to service organizations and citizens, everyone cares about making their region successful. The challenge is that not everyone agrees on what economic development is and what it entails for their community. This confusion can lead to efforts and initiatives that do not align with the region's vision and strengths, or worse is in direct conflict with a desired outcome or goal. All too often, the result is wasted time, money, and capacities, with little to no return. Without a clear understanding of what economic development is, strategies and projects typically do not have a clear focus and become ineffective. For this reason, it's so important to make sure all key regional players are on the same page and have a shared vision. For a region to push forward towards a collective vision of success, they must look at and agree upon the full picture of economic development which includes attracting, retaining, and starting businesses, creating jobs, and optimizing quality of life. Only then can communities reach their full potential and succeed in the competitive landscape of our modern world.

### 2.1 WHAT IS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

While our process is highly dynamic and open to changes and updates as they occur, the framework is captured below in Figure 1.

*"The sustained, concerted actions of policymakers and communities that promote the economic well-being and quality of life for all individuals within a society. This includes efforts to stimulate economic growth, increase productivity, create jobs, reduce poverty, and improve living standards through policies and initiatives focused on infrastructure development, education and skills training, innovation, entrepreneurship, trade, and investment. Economic development aims to foster inclusive and sustainable growth, ensuring that the benefits of economic progress are equitably distributed and contribute to the overall prosperity and resilience of communities and nations."*

Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)



## 2.2 CORE FUNCTIONS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

From a practical perspective, in terms of economic development implementation, there are usually five general functions within a well-rounded economic development program. All functions in turn imply a myriad of sub-components or activities including an array of short-term focused and longer-term focused efforts. Further, because they are “typical” it should not be inferred that all of these broad categories imply equal weight or resource allocations; that these weights are consistent over time; or even that these activities are all present at any one time.



*Figure 2. Five functionalities of economic development*

### Business Retention and Expansion

Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) is the practice of creating an environment that encourages existing local businesses to stay and grow in your community. A healthy business retention and expansion environment facilitates growth of your business community so the community can support local jobs and attract investment. Elements that create a desirable environment for successful BRE are:

- Business Planning and Strategy Development
- Access to Talent
- Economic Infrastructure
- Employment Lands
- Social Hubs and Networks
- Access to Capital (\$)
- Succession Planning
- Networking Events
- Expansion and Growth Programs
- Advocacy and Planning

## Entrepreneurial Development

Entrepreneurial development is the practice of creating an environment that fosters the creation and development of new business owners. A program related to entrepreneurial development helps entrepreneurs turn ideas into businesses through fostering an environment that lends itself to creating and expanding businesses, while mitigating the risk of business creation and ownership. Elements of successful entrepreneurial development include:

- Business Planning and Strategy
- Capacity Building
- Business Accelerator and Launch Programs
- Market Research Analysis
- Access to Financing
- Business Purchase Assistance
- Social Hubs and Networks

## Workforce Development

Workforce development refers to those activities and initiatives that educate and train individuals to meet the needs of current and future business and industry in order to maintain a sustainable competitive economic environment. Elements in a community that lead to a successful workforce development environment include:

- One-on-One Employment Services
- Educational Institutions – Secondary and Post-Secondary
- Skills Enhancement Programs
- Promotion of Employment Opportunities
- Talent Attraction and Retention
- Labour Market Intelligence
- Social Hubs and Networks
- Trade Associations

## Inbound Investment

Inbound investment is the act of external parties investing into a region that they do not live or reside. It refers to new dollars entering a community through a variety of avenues including an external party purchasing a local business, or an external party investing in a business. Elements in a community that contribute to facilitating inbound investment include:

- External Promotion of the Region
- Amenities Maintenance and Development
- Municipal Planning and Development
- Business Case Development
- Access to Research and Information
- Site Selection
- Soft Landing Pads
- Land and Infrastructure
- Market Entrance Strategies

## Community Cashflow

Community cashflow refers to the difference between the dollars that come into a community via investment and income, and the amount of new dollars that leave the community. To ensure the economic health of a community, they must be able to attract new dollars and effectively limit the money that leaves the community. The activities that assist in increasing the health of community cash flow include:

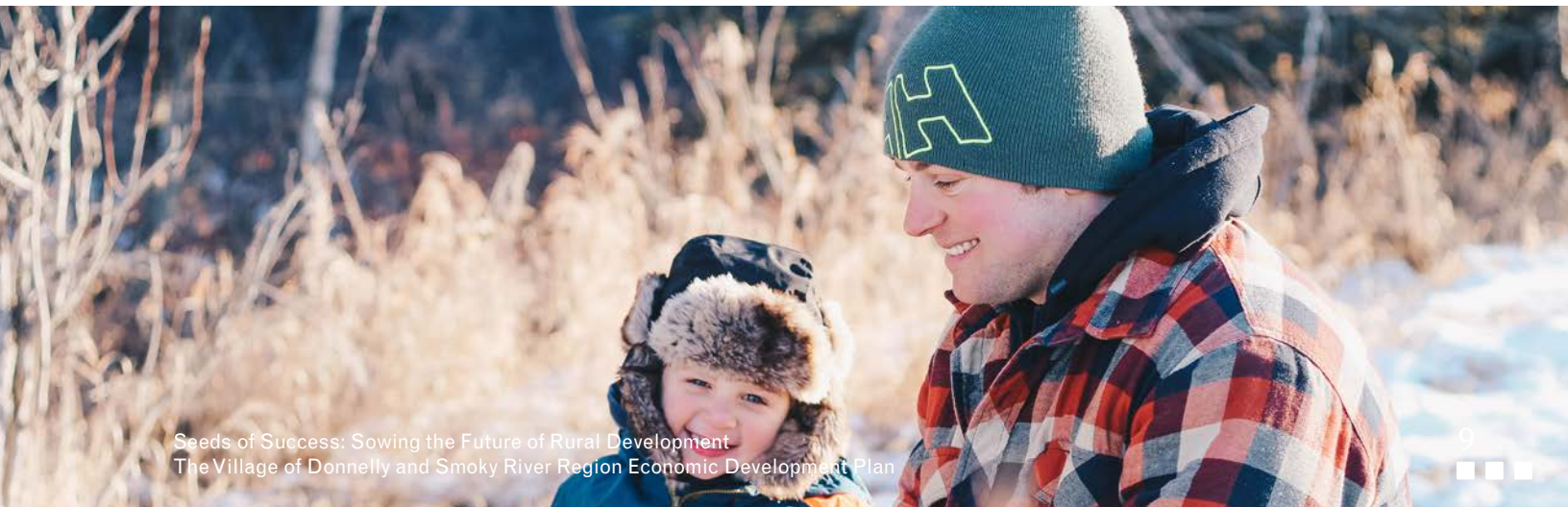
- Support Local Campaigns and Initiatives
- Private Public Partnerships
- Tourism Promotional Activities

Services, programs, activities, models, and modalities that are designed with a primary function in mind do not operate in isolation; they often fulfill multiple purposes. For instance, a small business service center typically aims to promote entrepreneurial development but also supports the sustainability and expansion of existing local enterprises (BRE). Furthermore, there are countless individual economic development services, activities, and modalities, each with numerous variations. Examples include incubators, accelerators, commercialization centers, incubators without walls, thematic or sector-specific incubators, and technology incubators. The interconnected nature of these services and the vast array of available models highlights the complexity and multifaceted nature of economic development efforts.

## 2.3 ROLES IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As shown herein, economic development is a broad field encompassing numerous topics that impact everyone, making it a collective responsibility rather than the sole domain of any one organization, municipality, or community group. It is a collaborative effort where a community comes together to contribute to advancing the community toward its goals. Too often, municipalities assume they must shoulder the entire burden of economic development and its strategies. However, success is far more achievable when multiple stakeholders each play a role that works in synergy with other. At a high level, these roles are:

1. **Be a Doer** – take on the lead and ownership of getting an activity/tactic completed.
2. **Be a Catalyst** – spark and ignite fire behind a tactic and motivate partners to get it going and role onto the next tactic.
3. **Be a Connector** - Liaise with partners (industry, service providers, government) bring people together for the accomplishment of tactics.
4. **Be a Promoter** – leverage existing programs to ensure the Region access programs/services as much as possible. sure local community benefits by the existing of programs.





## 3.0 CONSIDERING CONTEXT

*In crafting an economic development strategy, context is key. Like a compass guiding a traveler, understanding the unique nuances of our region illuminates the path to success.*

The essential foundations for progress within the Smoky River region depend on efforts to fully understand the context that the region competes within, while also assessing how it can address issues in an increasingly complex and competitive marketplace.

The purpose of an external influencer analysis is to describe and assess what is relevant or meaningful within the Smoky River Region's current situation and what implications these factors may have on future planning. These insights, in turn, provide guidance in the effort to articulate an economic development plan that is realistic, pragmatic, and effective. Further, it helps define development objectives and provide a framework for identifying and evaluating key economic opportunities.

### 3.1 EXTERNAL ANALYSIS

The external analysis conducted for the Smoky River Region included 1) an analysis of external influencers, and 2) research on the gaps in the industrial hemp sector in Canada.

#### External Influencers

The following external influencers were analyzed for the Smoky River Region:

##### Political Trends



##### Economic Trends



##### Social Trends



##### Technological Trends



##### Land and Infrastructure



##### Legal and Regulatory Trends



## Political Trends

### Federal

1. Strength of global trade partners are expected to shift in the near future, with Europe and US contributing less to global GDP growth while China and South America take a more prominent global role.
2. The war in the Ukraine continues to affect global supply chains, immigration trends, and governmental policy and budget decisions.
3. Climate change and climate change awareness is putting pressure on government policy and action.
4. The US 2024 election cycle is expected to disrupt global economic activity in the short term.
5. The Government of Canada is expected to accept a record number of immigrants into the country in 2024.
6. Monetary policy continues to be aggressive to curb inflation by decreasing consumer and business spending.

### Provincial

1. Alberta consistently feels it is not heard by Ottawa on policy issues, this sentiment has gained steam over recent years
2. The voice of the rural community is not as powerful at the provincial level
3. UCP Party continues dominance
4. Instability in the energy sector has brought political focus to alternative energy, diversification, and environmental policy.
5. As of late 2023, voters are most concerned with the government improving healthcare, the cost of living, and managing the economy.



## Societal Trends

### Federal

1. The senior population (64+) is at historically high levels in Canada putting pressure on housing infrastructure and an under prepared healthcare system.
2. Awareness of environmental sustainability and climate change is increasingly prevalent causing changes in consumption, business action, government action, and investment patterns.
3. COVID saw many individuals leave urban centres to seek more rural settings for lifestyle and affordability.
4. Working from home has stuck as the commercial office space of large centres continues to have low occupancy rates.



### Provincial

1. Alberta's population is growing faster than other provinces due to domestic and international migration. Families are choosing Alberta for economic opportunity and affordability.
2. Like many other regions, urbanization and suburbanization see individuals moving to urban areas and their suburban areas for employment opportunities and amenities.
3. Post-COVID, older generations are moving to more isolated, rural regions for lifestyle and affordability.
4. There is a real concern across the province over the ability of the healthcare system to handle the demand of a growing population.



## Economic Trends

### Federal

1. Global economic cool down will occur in 2024, but the US is likely to secure a soft landing.
2. Highly stringent business lending and investment environments expected in the short-medium term.
3. Canadian businesses are known to lack aggressiveness in seeking growth. In a time of economic cool down, this trend is expected to be magnified.
4. The structure of employment is shifting to adapt to our tech-centric future meaning new skills are being valued more than others, such as computer programming and software development. Meanwhile, unskilled labour is becoming decreasingly valuable or needed.
5. There is a continued and sustained push to return to inflation targets across the globe, maintaining high interest rates and costs of borrowing. Monetary policy continues to be aggressive to curb inflation by decreasing consumer and business spending.

### Provincial

1. Despite difficult global economic conditions, Alberta's GDP growth is expected to accelerate in 2024-2027 ahead of the Canadian average
2. Alberta continues to strive for diversification beyond oil and gas through innovations in technology, renewable energy, and agriculture.
3. Investments in infrastructure is a current focus to stimulate economic growth.
4. Alberta's job market is currently the strongest in Canada with a declining unemployment rate and increasing labour participation rate.



## Land and Infrastructure Trends

### Federal

1. Regional competition is increasing from availability of high-quality industrial lands in concentrated areas and along high-volume traffic corridors.
2. Aging infrastructure in communities across the country are approaching the end of their useful life and requiring replacement.
3. Asset management is increasingly tied to government funding availability and requires strong planning and prioritization of capital projects.



### Provincial

1. Aging infrastructure in rural communities is becoming increasingly expensive to repair, maintain, and replace.
2. Rural communities are lacking infrastructure to support healthcare, education, and essential services.
3. Despite trend #1, there has been significant public and private investment in infrastructure in major cities to support the growing population.
4. Alberta is exploring opportunities to leverage technology and data-driven solutions to improve infrastructure efficiency, enhance public services, and address urban challenges.
5. Infrastructure involving pipelines, oil and gas, and power generation plants, are always the topic of ongoing debate due to environmental concerns, Indigenous rights, and economic diversification.

## Technological Trends

### Federal

1. Process automation and virtualization will decrease reliance on the workforce while increasing process efficiency.
2. Applied artificial intelligence will continue to drive technological growth and progress at significant rates. It is already being applied across sectors.
3. Canada is considered a top 5 player in AI. In 2022 and 2023 alone, there have been over 144 AI start-ups, over \$3 billion in venture capital investment, and over \$120 million invested by the Government of Canada for the development of responsible AI.
4. Connectivity is increasing globally due to advancement in 5G technology and universally available Wi-Fi.
5. Clean technology and innovation will be the driver of climate change solutions.
6. Cyber security and trust architecture will increase in importance as more and more information is stored as data.

### Provincial

1. Alberta's tech sector has seen massive growth in venture capital funding with \$2.7 billion being invested over the past five years alone.
2. The Government of Alberta is committing resources in the form of investment as well as business supports to grow the tech sector primarily in large centres. Organizations like Start Alberta, Alberta Innovates, and Alberta Enterprise Corporation are tech focused.
3. Edmonton is one of the largest Canadian centres for AI, and one of three national hubs for the federal Pan Canadian AI Strategy that has been designed to leverage and grow the country's expertise in AI and machine learning.
4. Technology is influencing all sectors within Alberta as there is a strong push to innovate agriculture, energy, finance, transportation, and more.



## Legal and Regulatory Trends

### Federal

1. Regional competition is increasing from availability of high-quality industrial lands in concentrated areas and along high-volume traffic corridors.
2. Aging infrastructure in communities across the country are approaching the end of their useful life and requiring replacement.
3. Asset management is increasingly tied to government funding availability and requires strong planning and prioritization of capital projects.



### Provincial

1. Alberta's energy sector is highly regulated. Recent trends include efforts to modernize regulatory frameworks, streamline approval processes, and address greenhouse gas emissions and managing water usage in energy extraction.
2. There is increased legislation in recent years on thoroughly engaging Indigenous leaders and communities in resource development projects.
3. Legal trends in regards to labour has seen increased rights for employees through increase minimum wage, and employment standards increasing overtime pay and leaves of absence.
4. Increasing concerns about data privacy has seen updates to privacy laws, enhancing cybersecurity measures, and debates over the balance between privacy and government surveillance powers.



## Analysis of the Canadian Industrial Hemp Industry

Recognizing that the catalyst to the project was to assist the Village of Donnelly and the Smoky River Region in capitalizing on the recent attraction of Smoky Hemp Decortication Ltd. By maximizing the socio-economic benefits for the community, this initiative aims to foster sustainable economic growth and diversification. Understanding the context of the industrial hemp industry is crucial for developing targeted strategies that leverage local strengths and address specific challenges. This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the Canadian industrial hemp industry, identifying key trends, regulatory frameworks, technological advancements, and market opportunities that will inform the region's economic development efforts.

### Overview

The Canadian industrial hemp industry has seen significant growth since the legalization of industrial hemp cultivation in 1998. Known for its versatility, industrial hemp is used in various sectors, including textiles, food, construction, and health products. This industry presents substantial opportunities for economic diversification, particularly for regions like the Smoky River Region, aiming to capitalize on agricultural innovation and sustainable practices.

#### Economic Environment

The industrial hemp industry in Canada contributes significantly to the national economy. In recent years, the sector has seen increased investment and a steady rise in the number of licensed hemp cultivators. The economic potential is driven by the high demand for hemp-based products, both domestically and internationally. Canada is a leading exporter of industrial hemp, particularly to the United States and Europe.

#### Technological Advancements

Technological advancements have played a crucial role in the development of the industrial hemp industry. Innovations in cultivation techniques, processing methods, and product development have enhanced efficiency and product quality. The adoption of advanced agricultural practices and the integration of technology in processing facilities have allowed Canadian hemp producers to meet stringent quality standards and expand their market reach.

#### Regulatory Framework

The regulatory environment for hemp cultivation and processing in Canada is governed by Health Canada. The legalization of hemp and subsequent amendments to regulations have streamlined the process for obtaining licenses, conducting research, and developing new products. However, challenges remain in terms of navigating regulatory complexities and ensuring compliance with evolving standards, particularly concerning CBD extraction and use.

#### Market Trends

The market for industrial hemp-derived products is diverse and growing. Key segments include hemp seeds and oil, valued for their nutritional benefits, and hemp fibers, used in textiles and construction materials. Additionally, the market for CBD products has seen exponential growth, driven by increasing consumer awareness and demand for natural health products. The versatility of hemp and its applications in various industries present ongoing opportunities for market expansion.

### Challenges and Opportunities of the Industrial Hemp Sector

The industrial hemp sector is experiencing dynamic growth, driven by increasing recognition of hemp's versatility and environmental benefits. However, as with any emerging industry, it faces a range of challenges that must be navigated to unlock its full potential. The following outlines the key challenges and opportunities currently associated with the industrial hemp sector:

### Challenges:

- **Regulatory Hurdles:** Navigating the regulatory landscape for hemp, especially concerning CBD products, can be complex and time-consuming.
- **Market Competition:** Increased competition from both domestic and international producers necessitates a focus on quality and innovation.
- **Infrastructure Needs:** Adequate processing facilities and transportation networks are essential to support the industry's growth.

### Opportunities:

- **Product Diversification:** Developing new hemp-based products and applications can open up additional revenue streams.
- **Sustainability:** Hemp cultivation is environmentally friendly, offering opportunities to promote sustainable agricultural practices and reduce carbon footprints.
- **Research and Development:** Investment in R&D can lead to advancements in hemp genetics, cultivation techniques, and product innovation, enhancing the industry's competitiveness.

### Regional Implications

For the Smoky River Region, the industrial hemp industry offers a promising avenue for economic development. The establishment of facilities like Smoky Hemp Decortication Ltd. can act as a catalyst for regional growth, providing jobs, attracting investment, and fostering innovation. By leveraging local agricultural strengths and embracing sustainable practices, the region can position itself as a leader in the hemp industry.

In conclusion, the Canadian industrial hemp industry presents a dynamic and rapidly evolving sector with significant economic potential. By addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities, regions like the Smoky River can benefit from the growth of this industry, contributing to broader economic diversification and sustainability goals.





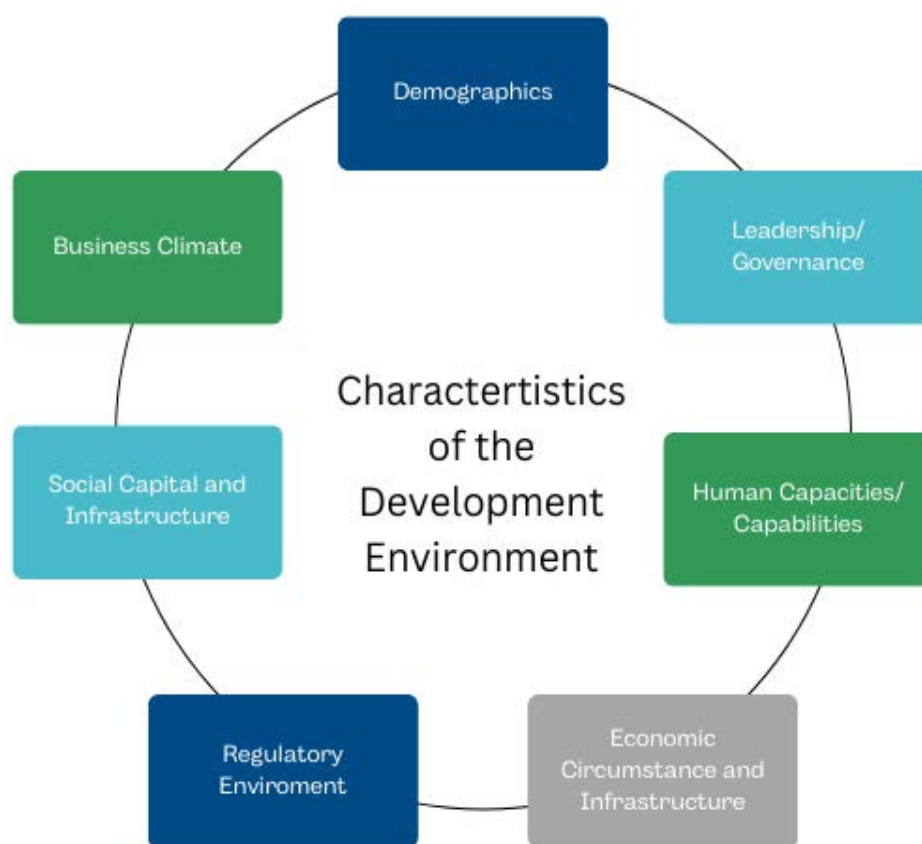




## 3.2 INTERNAL ANALYSIS

A full situational analysis involves a review of both external and internal factors as they relate to economic development. Therefore, a comprehensive and objective review of the internal environment within Donnelly and the Smoky River Region was completed to identify apparent strengths and challenges within the region. Our investigations involved interviews with key stakeholders, a review of key publications and reports, and a review/investigation of efforts already undertaken. This internal analysis is critical as it builds the foundation of what strategies and activities the community can expect to implement in its efforts to successfully move forward.

### Characteristics of the Development Environment



### Demographics

#### Strengths

- While population is decreasing, infrastructure exists to support a larger population
- Higher than average distribution of children 0-14
- Higher than average high school, apprenticeships, and college level education than Alberta.

#### Weaknesses

- Population is consistently decreasing every year
- Much lower than average % of population between 14-54 compared to Alberta and Canada
- Lower than average median household income
- High unemployment rate and low labour participation rate
- Lower than average university graduates

## Leadership/Governance

Governance is broadly defined as the process of exercising authority to provide direction and to undertake, coordinate, and regulate activities in support of achieving a specific direction and desired outcomes. Good governance combines participatory action-oriented learning, capacity-building tools, and the power of data. Leadership is defined in several different ways, but generally speaking it refers to the act of leading or, in the case of economic development, is more the act of taking a community where it needs to go.

Clearly the presence both of strong local leadership and a system of good governance are critical prerequisites to the Village of Donnelly and the Smoky River Region's efforts to achieve sustainable economic development success.

### Strengths

- High level of local pride from elected officials and councils
- Strong desire from local leadership to succeed and grow the region
- Community members are engaged and excited about the planning initiative
- There exists strong regional leadership outside in the private sector

### Weaknesses

- Regional Economic Development function lacks direction and capacity to implement initiatives
- Limited engagement of major employers in economic development initiatives
- High ratio of political groups to citizens
- Limited consideration of municipal or regional plans in initiatives undertaken
- Councils are largely siloed and focused on their own municipality.

## Human Capacities/Capabilities

A region's human capacities/capabilities will certainly impact available options and opportunities for future growth and development. Success is highly correlated with a capable workforce, talented individuals in key areas, cutting-edge knowledge, educational facilities/infrastructure embedded in the community, and proven economic development know how.

### Strengths

- Smoky Hemp is a strong example of community leaders engaging in an opportunity to diversify their region.
- Strong volunteerism.
- Resilient individuals and community –They find a way to make it through difficult times
- Individuals conduct many activities to make a living (resourceful and creative)
- Access to talented/skilled retirees

### Weaknesses

- Low levels of capacity and resources to implement economic development initiatives
- Highly sector focused workforce (energy/agriculture) indicates limited diversity in skills
- Limited access to post-secondary education/training
- Youth drain/leak is eroding the talent base
- Extraction based resource communities typically have a sense of entitlement

## Business Climate

As the saying goes, attitude determines altitude. A positive business climate allows businesses to conduct their affairs openly and freely. While no business climate is perfect for every kind of company, certain attributes of the regional or local economy allow investors to find fewer risks and higher returns when compared to other places.

### Strengths

- Donnelly has shown willingness to support local business development
- Small business owners in the region driven to create and contribute to change
- Many business owners own multiple businesses and revenue streams (i.e. agriculture and storefront)
- Business owners are highly involved in municipal councils
- Strong presence of innovative social enterprises in the region
- There is a strong understanding among local citizens that something needs to be done to enhance the local business ecosystem

### Weaknesses

- Lack of local ownership draws earnings out of the region
- Limited traditional lending institutions in the region
- Limited entrepreneurship in immediately impacted areas
- Limited business support services and professional services to support business ecosystem
- Councils are largely siloed and focused on their own town.

## Social Capital and Infrastructure

Social infrastructure refers generally to those agencies, authorities and services that broadly contribute to or enhance social well being including hospitals and medical care, schools, social housing and the like while social capital refers to connections among individuals and is an indication of community cohesiveness.

### Strengths

- Strong Volunteerism in the Region
- Strong Schooling System – Bilingual school system is an asset
- Safe and Trusting Community
- There is deep sense of history and a belonging among the people in the region – Genealogical Society
- Strong community groups/non-profits are tackling some deep issues i.e. senior's housing

### Weaknesses

- Limited access to healthcare and complementary healthcare supports
- Limited indoor recreational assets
- Limited childcare and programs for youth
- Homogenous population, limited cultural and religious diversity
- Large region with small pockets of population
- Communities are siloed within the region
- Councils are largely siloed and focused on their own town.



## Regulatory Environment

The type, level, and effectiveness of regulatory controls places limits and/or dimensions on what might be pursued in the broader task of economic development.

### Strengths

- Willingness to be flexible to accommodate businesses

### Weaknesses

- Planning efforts appear to occur in isolation between communities and between functions

## Economic Circumstances and Infrastructure

While seemingly obvious, it should be reiterated that economic development builds directly from existing economic circumstances.

### Strengths

- Service and retail presents opportunities for new and existing business owners
- Major highway access
- Cannabis is an emerging sector

### Weaknesses

- Consumer and business spending leakage outside of the region is prevalent
- Small local marketplace with limited diversity, need for export
- Limited telecommunications service in space between communities
- Limited industrial/commercial employment ready lands that are local government controlled
- Lack of shared office and office space throughout the region.





## Business Needs

To accurately assess and represent the needs of the businesses within the region, the business cycle was segmented into four distinct sections: Pre-Launch, Launch, Growth/Maturity, and Business Exit. It should be respected that each of these sections have unique needs within each business functionality and should be treated as such. Therefore, they were assessed under the following functionalities: Operations, Marketing, Financials, Human Resources, Market Research, Legal, and General Strategy. This information was collected directly from business interviews, discussions, and surveys and is summarized in the following section.

Business Function	Pre-Launch	Launch
Market Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitor analysis</li> <li>• Industry analysis</li> <li>• Unique selling proposition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying in tune with industry changes</li> <li>• Understanding of target market segments</li> <li>• Consumer expectations of a business in the industry (i.e., price, service offering)</li> </ul>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of viable markets and offerings within those markets</li> <li>• Creation of effective market entrance strategy</li> <li>• Logo and branding creation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of effective market entrance strategy</li> <li>• Social media management and strategy</li> <li>• Website and landing page implementation and management</li> </ul>
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of Industry Specific Government Regulation (Provincial and Federal)</li> <li>• Identifying key equipment needs</li> <li>• Choosing suppliers and understanding supplier relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable shipments and transportation costs to and out of rural remote region</li> <li>• Product manufacturing and service process mapping for efficiency and effectiveness</li> <li>• Knowledge of complete business cycle</li> </ul>
HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of available talent given recent realities</li> <li>• How to hire remote for specific skills (i.e., graphic design)</li> <li>• Leadership and management training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to attract, hire, and retain start-up employees as a new company</li> <li>• Leadership and management training</li> <li>• Should I hire? Understanding of capacity needs</li> </ul>
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing funds within a strict lending environment</li> <li>• Understanding the process of start-up financing (loan and investment)</li> <li>• Access to Accounting services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing funds within a strict lending environment</li> <li>• How to begin peer-to-peer lending/investment process</li> <li>• Assistance with the financing/investment process</li> <li>• Systems related to inventory tracking, POS system, payroll, AP/AR, and the knowledge to use them effectively</li> </ul>
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal considerations of all business structures</li> <li>• Assistance with Incorporation</li> <li>• Partnership agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to decrease liability in customer's use of product</li> <li>• Insurance needs updated</li> <li>• Government regulation followed</li> </ul>
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting up proper business structure and governance</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial self-assessment and goal setting</li> <li>• Business leadership self-assessment and goal setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to launch a business</li> <li>• Business development strategy</li> <li>• Update strategic plan</li> </ul>



Business Function	Growth/Maturity	Business Succession/Exit
Market Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated understanding of target markets</li> <li>Economic indicators at Global, National, Provincial, Regional levels</li> <li>Refreshed product offering strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When is a good time to sell?</li> <li>Industry Trends</li> <li>Current market prices of comparable business</li> <li>Economic indicators at Global, National, Provincial, and Regional Levels</li> </ul>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessing new markets for expansion (export of products/services)</li> <li>Enhancing previous marketing strategies</li> <li>Implementation of new strategies within all marketing tactics</li> <li>Social media management and strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Properly communicating business closure/sale</li> <li>Reassess brand under new ownership</li> <li>Reassess pricing, product placement, and product offering under new ownership</li> <li>How to properly handoff all marketing accounts to new ownership</li> </ul>
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Industrial/Commercial lands and facilities to grow into</li> <li>Optimizing process scaling</li> <li>How to optimize expansion while respecting demand</li> <li>Reassessment of government regulation amidst scaling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selling of key equipment</li> <li>Scaling down operations for business closure</li> <li>Preparation of all assets for sale</li> <li>Handover to new owners (takeover strategy)</li> <li>Supplier relations and account closure/continuation</li> </ul>
HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to attract, hire, and retain start-up employees as a new company</li> <li>Hiring in line with growth needs</li> <li>Understanding of HR needs to create a well-rounded comprehensive team</li> <li>Create an attractive culture through growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee engagement in closure/sale/succession process</li> <li>Mentorship network for businesses in sale process</li> <li>Mediation between family members</li> <li>Increase capacities of employees if necessary for succession</li> </ul>
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding of operating within new financial realities with limited access to funds</li> <li>How to seek, conduct, and finalize peer-to-peer investment</li> <li>Reassessment of financial goals</li> <li>Ensuring financial health before growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business valuation strategy</li> <li>Understanding of depreciated assets</li> <li>Increasing net income</li> <li>Reassessment of financial goals</li> <li>Owner payment format and structure (continuous salary, straight up sale, owner's equity draw etc.)</li> </ul>
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to decrease liability in customer's use of product</li> <li>Government regulation followed</li> <li>Proper licences obtained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proper legal sale/handoff of business</li> <li>Mediation between family members/shareholders/key members</li> <li>Sale of property and buildings</li> </ul>
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable growth</li> <li>Update strategic plan</li> <li>Risk mitigation</li> <li>Creation of a growth strategy</li> <li>Future goal setting</li> <li>Accurate problem identification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update a strategic plan for business sale</li> <li>Risk mitigation</li> <li>How to approach a business sale</li> <li>Business sale readiness assessment</li> <li>Succession in agriculture</li> </ul>

# 4.0 CRITICAL DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SMOKY RIVER REGION

Strategic planning for the Smoky River Region must be grounded in an understanding of its unique strengths, challenges, and opportunities. While it is essential to recognize and leverage existing strengths and opportunities, effective strategic planning also requires addressing current critical issues that impact both immediate and long-term outcomes, aligning with the region’s overarching development strategy.

Identifying these critical issues requires rigorous analysis and objective assessment of the region’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. These issues are not isolated occurrences but are deeply intertwined with complex factors such as business processes, organizational structure, culture, and strategic objectives.

In the context of the Smoky River Region, critical development challenges and opportunities have significant implications for the region’s future sustainability and prosperity. Through comprehensive analysis and consultation with stakeholders at all levels, several critical issues have been identified that demand immediate attention and strategic intervention to ensure the region’s continued growth and resilience. These issues form the basis for guiding the Smoky River Region’s strategic development efforts, addressing key priorities, and maximizing its potential for sustainable economic and social advancement.

## 4.1 CRITICAL DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES/THREATS

### Capacity Constraints

The Smoky River Region grapples with significant limitations in both resources and capabilities concerning the formulation, design, and implementation of programs aimed at economic development. This scarcity of resources hampers the region’s ability to effectively deliver services and programs crucial for fostering economic growth.

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### Limited Employment Opportunities

The Smoky River Region faces challenges in providing diverse employment opportunities, particularly beyond primary industries. This situation can result in high unemployment rates and underemployment, especially among youth, impacting the region’s economic vitality and social well-being.

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### Economic Diversification

Like many rural and remote communities in Alberta, the Smoky River Region relies heavily on traditional industries such as agriculture, forestry, and oil and gas. This dependence exposes the region to risks associated with commodity price fluctuations and economic downturns, highlighting the need for diversification to enhance resilience and sustainability.

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## Population Decline and Aging

The outmigration of young people seeking better job opportunities in urban centers contributes to population decline and an aging population in rural areas like the Smoky River Region. This demographic trend places strain on local services and reduces the available workforce, posing challenges for community development and economic growth.

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## Lack of Infrastructure

The Smoky River Region may face challenges associated with inadequate infrastructure, including transportation networks, high-speed internet access, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. This lack of infrastructure hinders economic growth and limits residents' access to essential services and opportunities, impeding the region's development potential.

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## Limited Access to Markets

Geographical isolation and inadequate transportation infrastructure in the Smoky River Region can hinder rural businesses' access to larger markets, limiting their growth potential and competitiveness. Addressing these barriers to market access is crucial for stimulating economic development and promoting the region's prosperity.

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By addressing these critical challenges and threats, the Smoky River Region can work towards fostering sustainable economic development, attracting investment, and enhancing the quality of life for its residents. Collaboration between government, community stakeholders, and private sector partners will be essential in overcoming these obstacles and unlocking the region's full potential





## 4.2 CRITICAL DEVELOPMENT STRENGTHS/OPPORTUNITIES

### Hemp Sector Development

Given the possibility of Smoky Hemp Decortication opening in the region, a significant opportunity lies in the development of this sector within the region. Specific efforts can be made to progress the sector from infancy to maturity.

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### Sense of Community

Smoky River boasts a strong sense of community, fostering collaboration, mutual support, and local pride. This tight-knit community environment creates an ideal setting for grassroots initiatives, community development projects, and the establishment of small businesses.

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### Quality of Life

Residents are drawn to Smoky River for its slower pace of life, cleaner air, and close connection to nature. The region can leverage its high quality of life to attract residents, entrepreneurs, and remote workers seeking a healthier and more balanced lifestyle.

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### Cultural Heritage

Smoky River is rich in cultural heritage, traditions, and local craftsmanship, contributing to its unique identity and appeal. Celebrating and preserving this cultural heritage can enhance the region's attractiveness to visitors and residents alike, fostering cultural tourism and supporting local artisans.

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### Affordable Living Costs

Compared to urban centers, Smoky River offers lower living costs, including housing, utilities, and healthcare. This affordability makes it easier for residents to achieve financial stability and for businesses to establish and operate with lower overhead costs.

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### Natural Resources

The region is abundant in natural resources, presenting opportunities in industries such as forestry, agriculture, and mining. These sectors offer potential for employment and economic growth, contributing to the region's prosperity.

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### Tourism Potential

The Smoky River region's pristine natural environments, including its river, forests, and wildlife, can be leveraged to develop ecotourism and outdoor recreation activities. Opportunities exist for activities like fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, and agritourism experiences, attracting tourists and generating economic activity.

## Renewable Energy

The Smoky River region has potential for renewable energy development, particularly in wind and solar power. Investing in clean energy projects can not only provide sustainable energy sources but also create economic opportunities through construction, maintenance, and possibly ownership of these facilities.

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## Local Agriculture and Food Production

Supporting local agriculture can boost the economy and enhance food security. Smoky River's fertile land is suitable for farming, ranching, and specialty crops, while value-added food processing can further enhance economic benefits.

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## Technology and Remote Work

With advancements in technology, remote work has become increasingly feasible. Smoky River can attract remote workers, freelancers, and telecommuters seeking a high quality of life. Investment in high-speed internet infrastructure is crucial to unlock this potential.

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## Value-Added Industries

Smoky River can explore value-added industries that capitalize on its natural resources and local expertise, such as forestry products, artisanal goods, and specialty food and beverage manufacturing. Adding value to raw materials through processing, branding, and marketing can create higher-value products and generate additional revenue streams.

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## Digital Connectivity

Improving access to high-speed internet and digital infrastructure can unlock new opportunities for remote work, e-commerce, telehealth, and online education in rural areas. Enhanced connectivity can bridge the urban-rural divide and empower residents to participate in the digital economy.

By capitalizing on these strengths and opportunities, Smoky River can overcome its challenges and work towards sustainable economic development and prosperity for its residents. Collaboration and strategic planning will be key to realizing these goals.

## 5.0 INDUSTRIAL HEMP SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

As this strategy was initiated by the momentum of the hemp sector in the area, the sector development within Smoky River Region is a vital aspect of this plan, yet it requires a balanced approach. We must recognize that sector development efforts cannot adopt an all-in mentality. Rather, they must be carefully calibrated to capitalize on opportunities while mitigating risks. This approach involves identifying and leveraging the unique strengths and opportunities within the region's industries. By strategically developing these sectors, we can drive sustainable growth, foster innovation, and enhance the resilience of our economy. However, it is imperative to maintain a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in sector development, ensuring that our efforts are targeted, responsible, and inclusive.

### 5.1 LIFE STAGE APPROACH TO SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

A life stage approach to sector development involves recognizing that sectors within a rural region go through distinct phases of development, much like the lifecycle of organisms. By understanding these stages, stakeholders can tailor their strategies and interventions to effectively support the growth and evolution of sectors over time. Here's how this approach might be structured:

#### Life-Cycles of Sector Development

Sector development typically follows a life cycle that includes several distinct phases: emergence, growth, maturity, and decline. Each phase has its own characteristics and challenges, influencing the strategic actions necessary to support and sustain the sector.

##### Phase 1: Emergence

**Characteristics:** This initial phase involves the introduction of new technologies or products. It is marked by innovation, experimentation, and the establishment of early adopters.

**Challenges:** High uncertainty, lack of established infrastructure, regulatory hurdles, and limited market awareness.

**Strategic Focus:** Support for research and development, regulatory facilitation, market education, and infrastructure development.

##### Phase 2: Growth

**Characteristics:** Rapid market expansion, increasing demand, and the entry of new players. The sector begins to gain mainstream acceptance and economic significance.

**Challenges:** Scaling production, maintaining quality, increasing competition, and managing supply chains.

**Strategic Focus:** Workforce development, investment attraction, business support services, and market expansion strategies.

##### Phase 3: Maturity

**Characteristics:** Market saturation, consolidation of players, and stabilization of growth rates. The sector becomes a significant contributor to the economy.

**Challenges:** Differentiation, innovation stagnation, and maintaining market share.

**Strategic Focus:** Innovation and differentiation, export development, and sustained competitive advantages.



## Phase 4: Decline

**Characteristics:** Decreasing demand, obsolescence of technology or products, and exit of players. The sector's contribution to the economy diminishes.

**Challenges:** Managing decline, transitioning workforce, and repurposing infrastructure.

**Strategic Focus:** Diversification, transition planning, and support for affected workers and businesses.

By applying a life stage approach to sector development, stakeholders can better anticipate and respond to the evolving needs and challenges faced by industries within a rural region. This tailored approach maximizes the effectiveness of interventions, fosters sustainable growth, and promotes economic resilience over the long term.

## 5.2 CURRENT PHASE OF INDUSTRIAL HEMP SECTOR - ALBERTA

The industrial hemp sector in Alberta is currently in the **emergence phase of its development life-cycle**. This phase is characterized by the following:

**Innovation and Experimentation:** The sector is exploring various applications of hemp, such as textiles, food products, construction materials, and health products, particularly CBD.

**Early Adoption:** Early adopters, including businesses like Smoky Hemp Decortication Ltd., are establishing operations and testing market viability.

**Regulatory Navigation:** Stakeholders are working through the regulatory environment established by Health Canada, focusing on licensing, compliance, and standards.

**Infrastructure Development:** Initial investments are being made to develop the necessary infrastructure for cultivation, processing, and distribution.

## 5.3 GOVERNMENT ROLES IN SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

The region is in the early infancy stage of the industrial hemp sector's growth life-cycle. To support and nurture this emerging sector, coordinated actions are required at the federal, provincial, municipal, and local community levels.

### Role of the Federal Government:

**Regulatory Support:** Simplify and streamline the regulatory processes for hemp cultivation and CBD product approval. Ensure consistent and clear guidelines for producers.

**Research Funding:** Provide funding for research and development in hemp cultivation techniques, processing methods, and product innovation.

**Market Development:** Support market development initiatives, including international trade missions and marketing campaigns to promote Canadian hemp products globally.

### Government of Alberta:

**Incentive Programs:** Develop and implement incentive programs to attract investment in the industrial hemp sector. This could include tax incentives, grants, and low-interest loans.

**Infrastructure Investment:** Invest in the necessary infrastructure to support the industrial hemp sector, including transportation networks, utilities, and processing facilities.

**Workforce Development:** Collaborate with educational institutions to develop training programs and certifications tailored to the needs of the hemp industry.

## Local Municipalities:

**Zoning and Land Use:** Ensure that local zoning and land use regulations support the development of hemp cultivation and processing facilities. Designate appropriate areas for industrial hemp activities.

**Infrastructure Support:** Work with provincial authorities to develop local infrastructure projects that facilitate the transportation and processing of hemp products.

**Business Support Services:** Establish local business support services to assist new and existing hemp-related businesses with regulatory compliance, financing, and operational challenges.

## Local Communities:

**Stakeholder Engagement:** Actively involve local stakeholders, including residents, business owners, and community leaders, in the planning and implementation processes. Ensure their input and support for development initiatives.

**Capacity Building:** Organize capacity-building workshops and seminars to enhance the skills and knowledge of local businesses and entrepreneurs.

**Public Awareness:** Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate the community about the benefits and opportunities presented by the industrial hemp industry, fostering a sense of ownership and support.

**Local Business Support:** Provide support services and resources to local businesses to help them innovate and expand within the hemp sector.

By considering these elements and ensuring coordinated actions across all levels of government and the local community, the Smoky River Region can effectively support the growth and development of the industrial hemp sector. This strategic focus will position the region as a leader in this emerging industry, capturing the associated economic benefits and fostering sustainable growth.







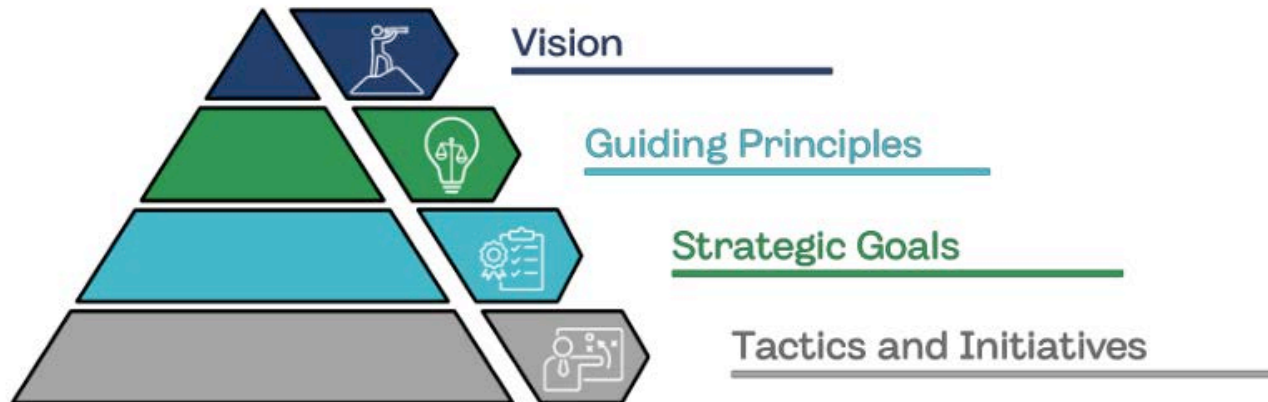
## 6.0 BUILDING SUCCESS TOGETHER - FROM THE GROUND-UP

*Success in economic development hinges on the collective wisdom of a community, the innovation of its entrepreneurs, and the commitment of its leaders to build a future that thrives on opportunity and resilience.*

The recommendations presented in this report stem from a thorough examination of the Smoky River Region's vision for economic development, as articulated by its citizens and businesses. By discerning the desired outcomes and employing various criteria such as contextual analysis, best practices, guiding principles, and existing capacities, the plan delineates strategic priorities and tactics aimed at realizing these objectives.

While these recommendations may appear ambitious, there is confidence in the Smoky River Region's ability to forge partnerships and garner support to enhance its capacity for implementation. This underscores the region's commitment to proactively pursue its economic development goals. For the Smoky River Region, this entails not only addressing specific needs and concerns but also adopting a more focused, pragmatic, and inclusive approach to propel the region forward.

The process by which this strategy was devised is illustrated in Figure 3, reflecting the meticulous deliberation and collaborative effort invested in crafting a blueprint for the region's economic advancement.



*Figure 3. Process of developing tactics for Smoky River Region*

## 6.1 REGIONAL FIT - VISION AND PRINCIPLES

To effectively pursue economic opportunities, a community must go beyond merely identifying a viable market and securing an investor. Community leaders must also prioritize gaining the approval and support of residents. This can be described as obtaining their “social license” for the venture. In the modern context, it’s increasingly crucial for community leaders to align economic development efforts with the desires and goals of the community.

To achieve this, the process involved extensive efforts to involve the community and elicit their desired outcomes for the transition initiatives. Over the course of the four-month project, there were more than 400 interactions throughout the region, including interviews, survey responses, and planning sessions with local councils and the economic development function. These engagements provided local citizens, businesses, and leaders with ample opportunities to shape their collective future.

### Vision

Establishing a shared understanding of direction is a pivotal aspect of any plan. Aspirations serve to paint a vivid picture of the community’s future, guiding actions by offering context, prioritizing concerns, outlining immediate steps, and identifying metrics for progress.

The following aspirations have been crafted through a thorough understanding of the community’s context and an initial assessment of social resilience at the regional level. As the Smoky River Region advances its journey towards enhancing its socio-economic resilience and delves deeper into economic development endeavors within the community, the following outcomes will steer the process:

**Sustainable & Vibrant Community:** to ensure a healthy environment, strong social connections, and vibrant cultural activities within the community.

**Cultivating Opportunities for Present and Future Generations:** provide education, training, and resources to empower individuals of all ages to succeed and contribute to the community’s growth and prosperity.

**Fostering a Positive Business Environment:** creating a supportive ecosystem that attracts investment, removes barriers to entrepreneurship, and encourages business growth and innovation.

**Facilitating Job Creation:** stimulate economic activity by attracting new businesses, supporting existing ones, and providing residents with the skills and opportunities needed to secure meaningful employment.

### Our Guiding Principles

The below guiding principles underpin the economic development plan, serving as foundational values and beliefs that inform our approach to fostering sustainable growth and prosperity in the Smoky River Region.

**Collaboration and Partnership:** We foster collaboration and partnerships among local governments, businesses, educational institutions, community organizations, and other stakeholders to leverage resources and expertise for comprehensive economic development efforts.

**Sustainable Development:** We promote sustainable development practices that balance economic growth with environmental conservation and social equity, ensuring long-term prosperity for current and future generations.

**Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** Support innovation and entrepreneurship by providing resources, programs, and initiatives to help start-ups and existing businesses thrive.

**Equity and Inclusion:** Promote equity and inclusion in economic development initiatives, ensuring that all residents have access to opportunities and benefits resulting from economic growth.

**Quality of life:** Community characteristics that contribute to overall quality of life must be consistently considered with new development, including factors such as access to healthcare, education, recreational facilities, and a clean environment.

## 6.2 STRATEGIC APPROACH AND DIRECTION

The strategy recognizes that the Smoky River Region's financial and human resources are valuable and should be used in a way that maximizes their effectiveness, which means being selective and strategic about where to focus efforts. In order to do this, the strategy was built on four (4) main tenets. These tenets are listed and described below:

### Take an Ecosystem Approach:

An ecosystem approach acknowledges the Smoky River Region's role in fostering an environment where small businesses can flourish. It encompasses a holistic view of the business landscape, emphasizing the multifaceted elements necessary for sustained growth and expansion. By broadening our perspective beyond traditional measures, we aim to nurture a supportive ecosystem conducive to entrepreneurial success.

### Be Opportunistic in Implementation:

Embracing opportunism allows swift adaptation to evolving circumstances, seizing unforeseen opportunities, and navigating dynamic landscapes effectively. By remaining responsive to market shifts and fostering strategic partnerships, the region can position itself to capitalize on emerging trends for sustainable growth and innovation. Flexibility and agility are key in transforming challenges into opportunities.

### Leverage Existing Alliances/Partnerships and Aggressively Pursue New Ones:

Economic development efforts must harness the power of both internal and external partnerships to drive successful transitions within the Smoky River Region. Collaborating with a diverse array of stakeholders ensures synergy, fosters inclusivity, and maximizes resource utilization.

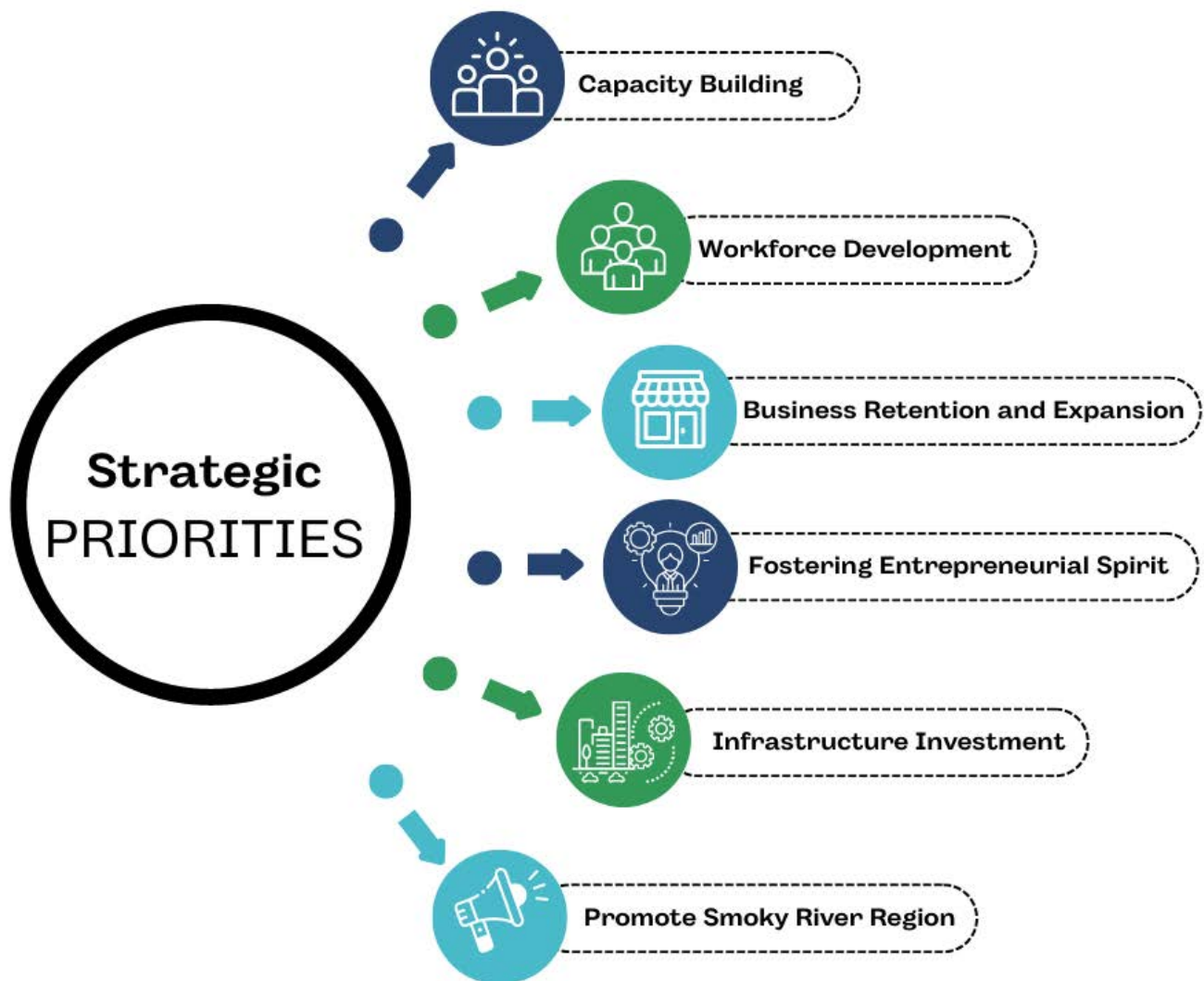
### Integrate Industrial Hemp Sector Development

Recognizing that the catalyst for the Economic Development Plan was to capitalize on the recent attraction of Smoky Hemp Decortication Ltd., it is being recommended that the region takes the approach of sector development that integrates hemp sector development tactics within each of the existing strategic priorities. Rather than focusing solely on one sector, the plan incorporates hemp sector development into the broader economic framework, ensuring diversified and sustainable growth. This approach will maximize the socio-economic benefits for the Village and the region now and into the future. By embedding hemp sector strategies into our comprehensive plan, we can ensure that the growth in this industry supports and enhances other regional economic activities.



## 6.3 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND TACTICS

It is best to think of priorities and goals as outcome statements that flow logically from the community's desired outcomes. The Smoky River Region, through the engagement process, have identified the following six (6) goals. These goals, and their corresponding objectives and actions, were derived from a consensus of expressed ideas, opinions, and inputs from key stakeholders. Collectively, they are logical and supportable. They clearly set out broad themes for the next three (3) years (up to the end of 2027). They were formed by considering “what is possible?”, “what is desirable?”, and “what can realistically be achieved?” within the region's economic development efforts.



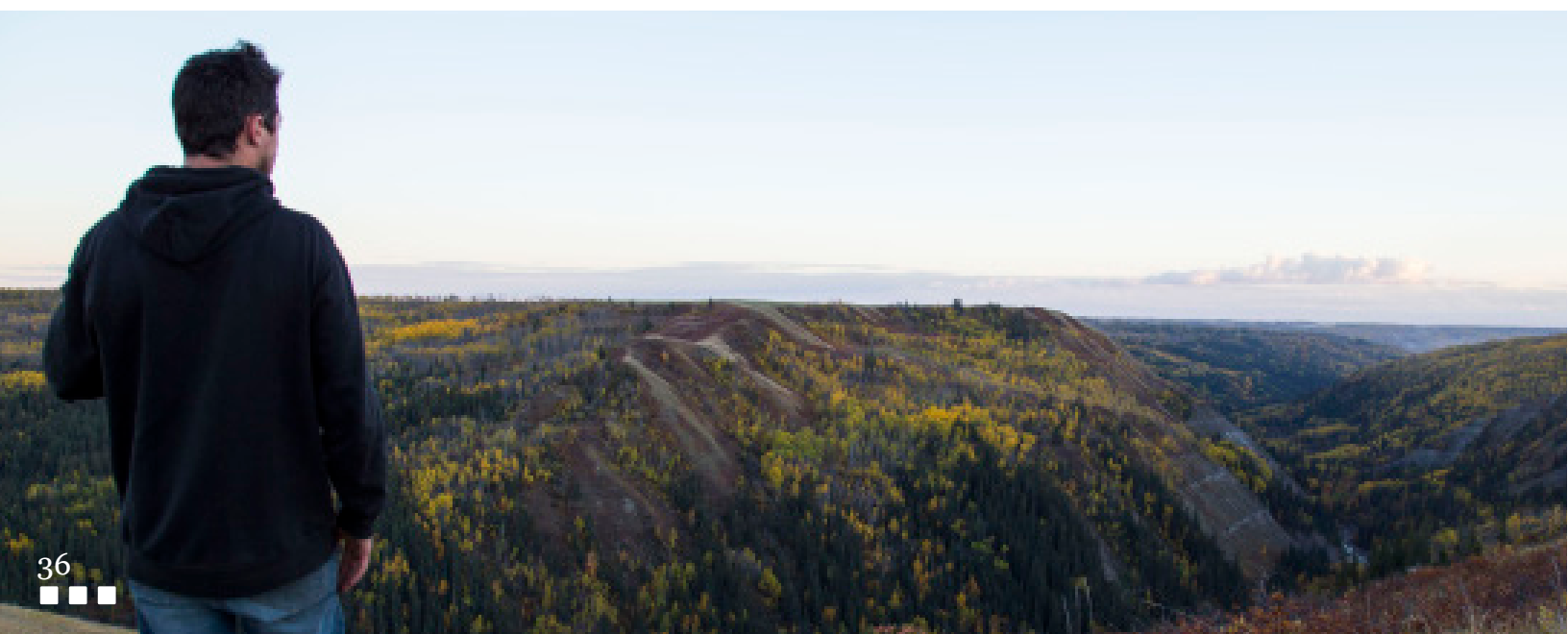
*Figure 4. Strategic priorities of the Smoky River Region Economic Development Plan*

## Strategic Priority #1 - Capacity Building

### Description:

As the Smoky River Region endeavours to strengthen its local economy, proactive action and a commitment to success are paramount. However, it's equally crucial to prioritize the establishment of robust local capacities to implement and adapt to the region's evolving dynamics. To this end, the Smoky River Region proposes laying strong foundations that will support its long-term diversification efforts. This initial phase, to be completed within the first six months, will focus on capacity building, communication, and the cultivation of partnerships and alliances, ensuring a solid framework for ongoing progress and adaptation.

Tactics	Role of SRRED	Timeframe (Months)
Core Programs		
1. Peer-to-Peer Mentorship	Doer	0-6
2. Networking and Collaboration	Doer	0-6
3. Resource Mobilization and Grant Writing	Doer	0-6
4. Strategic Partnerships and Alliances: a. Collaborate on Joint Projects b. Empower Community Members	Doer	0-6
Tertiary Programs		
1. Training and Professional Development for Necessary Staff/Council Members	Doer	12-18
2. Stakeholder Involvement (HS*)	Doer	12-18
3. Capacity Building Workshops (HS*)	Catalyst, Promoter	12-18
4. Public Awareness Campaigns (HS*)	Catalyst, Promoter	12-18



## Strategic Priority #2 - Workforce Development

### Description:

Workforce development in the Smoky River Region focuses on aligning skills and education with the needs of local industries. By offering training, apprenticeships, and partnerships with educational institutions, we ensure our workforce is equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in our diverse economy.

Tactics	Role of SRRED	Timeframe (Months)
Core Programs		
1. Employment Counseling and Support Services	Connector, Promoter	6-12
2. Employee attraction and Retention capacity building for employers	Catalyst, Promoter	12-18
Secondary Tactics		
1. Skills Assessment and Gap Analysis	Catalyst	12-18
2. Matchmaking service	Connector	12-18
Tertiary Tactics		
1. Training Programs (HS*)	Catalyst	
2. Apprenticeships and Internships (HS*)	Connector	
3. Recruitment Initiatives (HS*)	Catalyst	





## Strategic Priority #3 - Business Retention and Expansion

### Description:

BRE efforts build from an understanding of context, needs, and gaps in existing services as they pertain to business survival, sustainability, and growth. They build from a recognition that while in some cases there may be commonality of certain needs, in other instances, there is not a one size fits all. This is confirmed by considerations like the varying importance of selected firm level influencers.

Tactics	Role of SRRED	Timeframe (Months)
<b>Core Programs</b>		
1. Celebrate Successes	Doer, Promoter	0-6
2. Concierge Program for Business Support Services	Doer, Catalyst	12-18
3. Peer to Peer Mentorship Program	Catalyst	24-30
4. Business Seminars/Workshops (Capacity building for business owners)	Doer, Catalyst	12-18
5. Access to Financing (Match Making)	Connector, Promoter	0-6
<b>Secondary Tactics</b>		
1. Buy/Support Local Campaigns	Catalyst	12-18
2. Succession Planning	Connector	12-18
3. Local Procurement Initiatives	Catalyst	18-24
<b>Tertiary Tactics</b>		
1. Business Incubators (HS*)	Catalyst, Promoter	12-18
2. Marketing and Promotion for Hemp Industry (HS*)	Connector	12-18



## Strategic Priority #4 - Fostering Entrepreneurial Spirit

### Description:

Fostering an entrepreneurial spirit is key to driving innovation and growth in the Smoky River Region. We support aspiring entrepreneurs through mentorship, networking, and access to resources, creating an ecosystem that encourages start-up success and fosters a culture of innovation.

Tactics	Role of SRRED	Timeframe (Months)
<b>Core Programs</b>		
1. Small Business Week Celebration	Doer, Catalyst	0-6
2. Access to Financing	Connector	0-6
3. Entrepreneurship Training Programs	Catalyst, Promoter	0-6
4. Promote Specific Opportunities Relating to Hemp	Doer, Promoter	24-30
<b>Secondary Tactics</b>		
1. Entrepreneurship Education in Schools	Catalyst	0-6
<b>Tertiary Tactics</b>		
1. Shared Facilities and Equipment	Catalyst	12-18
2. Run a Mentorship Program	Doer, Catalyst	24-30



## Strategic Priority #5 - Infrastructure Investment

### Description:

Infrastructure investment is crucial for the Smoky River Region's economic development. By investing in transportation, broadband, utilities, healthcare, and education infrastructure, we enhance our region's competitiveness, connectivity, and quality of life, supporting sustainable growth and prosperity.

Tactics	Role of SRRED	Timeframe (Months)
<b>Core Programs</b>		
1. Broadband Connectivity	Doer, Catalyst, Promoter	0-6
<b>Secondary Tactics</b>		
1. Employment Land Preparedness and Inventory	Catalyst, Connector	12-18
2. Housing Strategy	Catalyst, Connector	18-24
<b>Tertiary Tactics</b>		
1. Centre of Innovation	Catalyst	24-30
2. Community Investment Fund	Catalyst	30-36
3. Transportation Networks (HS*)	Connector	30-36
4. Utilities and Processing Facilities (HS*)	Catalyst, Connector	24-30
5. Housing and Community Services (HS*)	Catalyst	18-24

## Strategic Priority #6 - Promote Smoky Region (See Marketing and Promotions Plan)

### Description:

- a. **Citizen Attraction:** Promotion efforts target attracting new residents to the Smoky River Region by showcasing our unique lifestyle, amenities, and opportunities. Through marketing campaigns and community events, we highlight our region's natural beauty, affordability, and strong sense of community.
- b. **Business Attraction:** Business attraction initiatives aim to attract new businesses and investment to the Smoky River Region. By highlighting our region's strengths, incentives, and opportunities, we seek to attract investors and businesses looking to relocate or expand, fostering economic growth and diversity.





## 7.0 ESSENTIAL FOUNDATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS

*Success in strategy implementation hinges not only on meticulous planning but also on cultivating a 'can-do' attitude and a positive mindset. With determination and optimism, we turn challenges into opportunities, and aspirations into achievements, charting a course towards a prosperous future for the Smoky River Region.*

In laying the groundwork for economic development, the Smoky River Region recognizes that the efficacy of any strategy lies not solely in its construction, but in its execution. The successful implementation of our economic development strategy hinges upon adherence to fundamental principles that ensure effectiveness, efficiency, and alignment with our community's overarching priorities and values. Therefore, this strategy embraces a set of guiding principles and values as essential pillars of implementation.

While the Smoky River Region already boasts a successful economic development function, these principles serve as enduring guides, requiring continual reaffirmation and application to steer our efforts towards sustained progress now and in the future.

### **Intentional Action:**

The strategy defines clear goals and articulates purposeful actions to achieve community priorities. Recognizing that not all development aligns with long-term economic health and livability, we remain steadfast in our commitment to pursuing strategic endeavors that uphold our community's values.

### **Strong Local Leadership:**

The success of our economic development strategy hinges on the dedication and leadership of our local stakeholders. Momentum and opportunities abound in the Smoky River Region, yet their significance is contingent upon robust local leadership committed to driving progress forward.

### **Partnering and Partnerships:**

Given finite resources and high growth demands, collaboration with diverse stakeholders becomes imperative for effective economic development. We invite and engage all levels of government, the private sector, public institutions, and other stakeholders to foster synergies and amplify our collective impact.

### **Possibility Thinking:**

In today's dynamic global economy, the Smoky River Region acknowledges the need for innovative and forward-looking solutions to address evolving challenges and opportunities. By fostering a culture of possibility thinking, we embrace creativity and adaptability as essential tools for navigating complexity and driving sustainable growth.

### **Attention to the Needs of Local Businesses:**

Central to our economic development strategy is an enhanced understanding of and support for local businesses. Recognizing the potential for growth within our existing business community, we prioritize initiatives aimed at improving the local business environment and fostering their continued success.

### **Community Engagement/Participation:**

Stakeholder engagement is paramount to the success of our economic development efforts. Leveraging the existing network of community participation, we seek to enhance transparency, engagement, and empowerment in our implementation processes.

## 8.0 STRATEGIC ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS

In the pursuit of economic development and diversification, strategic alliances and partnerships play a pivotal role in maximizing resources, fostering innovation, and ensuring sustainable growth. The Village of Donnelly and the Smoky River Region recognize the importance of building and nurturing these alliances to effectively leverage local strengths and address regional challenges. This section outlines the key strategies for developing and maintaining strategic alliances and partnerships that will drive the success of our economic development plan.

### 1. Identifying and Engaging Key Partners

#### Local and Regional Partners:

- **Municipal Governments:** Collaborate with neighboring municipalities to coordinate economic development efforts, share resources, and promote regional growth.
- **Educational Institutions:** Partner with Northern Lakes College and the University of Alberta to develop training programs that align with local industry needs, particularly in the hemp sector.
- **Local Businesses and Industry Leaders:** Engage with businesses like Smoky Hemp Decortication Ltd. and other local enterprises to understand their needs, foster innovation, and support business expansion.

#### Provincial and Federal Partners:

- **Government Agencies:** Work with Alberta Economic Development and Trade, Western Economic Diversification Canada, and other relevant agencies to access funding, resources, and support for regional projects.
- **Research Institutions:** Collaborate with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and other research bodies to drive innovation in hemp cultivation, processing, and product development.

### 2. Building Collaborative Frameworks

#### Joint Projects and Initiatives:

- **Regional Development Projects:** Initiate joint infrastructure projects such as improving transportation networks and enhancing broadband connectivity to support industrial operations and attract investment.
- **Workforce Development Programs:** Develop and implement training and apprenticeship programs in partnership with local educational institutions and industry leaders to equip the workforce with the skills needed for the hemp industry and other emerging sectors.

#### Shared Resources and Facilities:

- **Business Incubators and Innovation Hubs:** Establish incubators and innovation hubs to support startups and small businesses within the hemp industry, providing resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities.
- **Shared Equipment and Facilities:** Create shared processing facilities for hemp and other agricultural products to reduce costs and increase efficiency for local producers.

### 3. Leveraging Funding and Investment

#### Incentive Programs:

- **Investment Attraction:** Develop incentive programs, including tax breaks, grants, and low-interest loans, to attract new businesses and investors to the region.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Foster public-private partnerships to invest in essential infrastructure and services, such as utilities and transportation networks, that support economic development.

#### Grant Writing and Resource Mobilization:

- **Funding Opportunities:** Actively seek and apply for provincial, federal, and private sector grants to fund economic development projects and initiatives.
- **Resource Allocation:** Ensure effective allocation of resources by prioritizing projects that offer the highest potential for economic impact and sustainability.

#### 4. Promoting Sustainable Practices

##### Environmental Stewardship:

- **Sustainable Farming Practices:** Promote sustainable farming practices among hemp cultivators, including organic farming, water conservation, and soil health management.
- **Green Certifications:** Develop a regional certification program to recognize and reward businesses that adopt environmentally friendly practices, enhancing the marketability of their products.

##### Research and Innovation:

- **Collaborative Research Projects:** Support research initiatives focused on improving the sustainability and efficiency of hemp cultivation and processing through partnerships with research institutions and industry leaders.
- **Innovation Grants:** Offer grants and funding for innovative projects that advance the industrial hemp industry and other key sectors in the region.

#### 5. Enhancing Community Engagement

##### Stakeholder Involvement:

- **Community Engagement:** Actively involve local stakeholders, including residents, business owners, and community leaders, in the planning and implementation of economic development initiatives through town hall meetings, workshops, and feedback sessions.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch campaigns to educate the community about the benefits and opportunities within the hemp industry and other sectors, fostering a sense of ownership and support for development initiatives.

##### Capacity Building:

- **Workshops and Seminars:** Organize capacity-building workshops and seminars to enhance the skills and knowledge of local businesses and entrepreneurs, covering topics such as business management, market analysis, and innovative practices in the hemp industry.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship programs that pair experienced business owners with new entrepreneurs to share knowledge and provide guidance.

By establishing and nurturing strategic alliances and partnerships, the Village of Donnelly and the Smoky River Region can create a robust support network that drives economic development, fosters innovation, and ensures sustainable growth. These collaborative efforts will be instrumental in achieving the region's long-term economic goals and enhancing the quality of life for all residents.



## 9.0 FINAL THOUGHTS

The economic development journey for the Village of Donnelly and the Smoky River Region stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, resilience, and forward-thinking. This strategic planning process and comprehensive analysis underscore that the foundation of economic progress lies in harnessing strengths, addressing challenges, and embracing opportunities with an open mind and proactive stance. This Economic Development Plan transcends being merely a document; it is a living blueprint for action, designed to adapt and evolve with the changing dynamics of the community and the broader economic landscape. The plan emphasizes the importance of community engagement, recognizing that the most sustainable and impactful developments are shaped by the voices and aspirations of the people they serve.

Key to success will be the continued commitment to the guiding principles outlined in this plan: collaboration and partnership, sustainable development, innovation and entrepreneurship, equity and inclusion, and an unwavering focus on improving the quality of life for all residents. These principles are not merely abstract ideals but practical pillars that will steer actions and decisions in the coming years. As the Village of Donnelly and the Smoky River Region progress, vigilance and flexibility will be crucial, with readiness to pivot and adapt as new challenges and opportunities arise. Thriving in a competitive and ever-changing environment will depend on maintaining strong local leadership, fostering strategic partnerships, and cultivating a culture of possibility thinking.

In conclusion, the future of the Smoky River Region is bright with potential. Building on the robust framework established through this plan positions the region to achieve sustained economic growth, create meaningful employment opportunities, and enhance the overall well-being of the community. The path ahead may be complex, but with a shared vision and collective effort, the journey towards a prosperous and resilient economic future for all can be successfully navigated. The seeds of success have been sown, and it is now up to each community member to nurture these seeds with dedication, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to the shared goals. Together, the future can be built to meet the needs of today and pave the way for generations to come.



# APPENDIX A - TACTIC DESCRIPTIONS

## Strategic Priority #1 - Capacity Building

### Core Tactics

#### 1. Peer-to-Peer Mentorship

This initiative aims to foster a culture of learning and growth, where experienced mentors provide advice, share best practices, and offer insights into navigating challenges. By facilitating these relationships, we aim to build a resilient business community capable of driving sustained economic growth.

#### 3. Networking and Collaboration

Encouraging networking and collaboration among staff, council members, and external stakeholders fosters a cooperative environment. This approach leverages collective expertise, resources, and relationships to address economic development challenges, promote innovation, and enhance community resilience.

#### 4. Resource Mobilization and Grant Writing

Resource mobilization and grant writing involve identifying funding opportunities and developing compelling proposals to secure financial resources. This tactic is essential for supporting economic development projects, enhancing infrastructure, and implementing community programs.

#### 5. Strategic Partnerships and Alliances

i. Collaborate on Joint Projects: Forming strategic partnerships to collaborate on joint projects can amplify impact, share risks, and pool resources. Joint projects with other municipalities, businesses, or non-profits can address common challenges, create efficiencies, and drive regional economic growth.

ii. Empower Community Members: Empowering community members involves engaging them in decision-making processes, providing training, and supporting grassroots initiatives. This approach builds local capacity, fosters a sense of ownership, and ensures that development efforts align with community needs and aspirations.

### Tertiary Tactics

#### 1. Training and Professional Development for Necessary Staff/Council Members

- i. Economic Development Conferences: Participation in economic development conferences provides staff and council members with insights into the latest trends, best practices, and strategies in economic growth. These conferences offer networking opportunities with industry leaders and other municipalities, facilitating knowledge exchange and collaborative solutions to common challenges.
- ii. Rural Development Conferences: Rural development conferences focus on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by rural communities. Attendees gain exposure to innovative approaches for rural revitalization, community engagement, and sustainable development. These events are essential for understanding how to leverage local assets and foster resilient rural economies.

## **2. Stakeholder Involvement (HS\*)**

Engaging key stakeholders in the decision-making process to ensure their perspectives and needs are addressed in economic development initiatives.

## **3. Capacity Building Workshops (HS\*)**

Providing training sessions to enhance the skills and knowledge of community members and local businesses, improving their ability to contribute to and benefit from economic development.

## **4. Public Awareness Campaigns (HS\*)**

Creating campaigns to inform the public about economic development projects and their benefits, fostering community support and participation.

# Strategic Priority #2 - Workforce Development

## Core Tactics

### **1. Employment Counseling and Support Services:**

Providing employment counseling and support services helps individuals navigate the job market, improve their employability, and find suitable employment. These services include career advice, resume writing, interview preparation, and job placement assistance.

### **2. Employee Attraction and Retention Capacity Building for Employers:**

Building employers' capacity to attract and retain employees involves training them in best practices for recruitment, onboarding, and employee engagement. This ensures a stable and motivated workforce, crucial for business sustainability and growth.

## Secondary Tactics

### **1. Skills Assessment and Gap Analysis:**

Conducting skills assessments and gap analyses identifies the current workforce's skills and the skills needed by local employers. This information is crucial for developing targeted training programs and educational initiatives to bridge these gaps.

### **2. Matchmaking Services**

A matchmaking service connects job seekers with employers based on their skills, experience, and job requirements. This service streamlines the hiring process, reduces unemployment, and helps businesses find the right talent efficiently.

## Tertiary Tactics

### **1. Training Programs (HS\*)**

Developing specialized training programs to equip individuals with the skills needed for the hemp industry, from cultivation to processing.

### **2. Apprenticeships and Internships (HS\*)**

Establishing apprenticeship and internship opportunities within the hemp sector to provide hands-on experience and foster industry-specific expertise.

### **3. Recruitment Initiatives (HS\*)**

Implementing targeted recruitment efforts to attract talent to the hemp industry, ensuring a skilled and knowledgeable workforce.



## Strategic Priority #3 - Business Retention and Expansion

### Core Tactics

#### 1. Celebrate Successes

Recognize and promote the achievements of local businesses to inspire and motivate other business owners and build the region's reputation as a place to operate. Celebrate their achievements through press releases, business profiles, and social media promotion.

#### 2. Concierge Program for Business Support Services

Offer personalized assistance to direct businesses to the correct support for their needs, helping them navigate the complicated landscape of services and programs available in Canada.

#### 3. Peer to Peer Mentorship Program

Create and bring together a mentorship group made up of experienced business leaders through a facilitated program.

#### 4. Business Seminars/Workshops (Capacity building for business owners)

Organize educational sessions to enhance the skills and knowledge of business owners, based on their needs.

#### 5. Access to Financing (Match Making)

Connect businesses with potential investors and funding sources to support their growth and development.

### Secondary Tactics

#### 1. Buy/Support Local Campaigns

Promote the importance of purchasing from local businesses to boost the regional economy through different campaigns, events, contests and promotional pushes within the region.

#### 2. Succession Planning

Provide a program for businesses to plan and prepare for ownership and leadership transitions to ensure continuity and sustainability.

#### 3. Local Procurement Initiatives

Encourage local organizations and governments to prioritize purchasing goods and services from local suppliers.

### Tertiary Tactics

#### 1. Business Incubators (HS\*)

Establish centers that provide resources, mentorship, and support to help new businesses grow and succeed.

#### 2. Marketing and Promotion for Hemp Industry (HS\*)

Develop campaigns to raise awareness and promote the benefits and products of the hemp industry.

## Strategic Priority #4 - Fostering Entrepreneurial Spirit

### Core Tactics

#### 1. Small Business Week Celebration

Organize events to celebrate and recognize the contributions of small businesses to the local economy.

#### 2. Access to Financing

Provide resources and connections to help businesses secure funding and investment opportunities.

#### 3. Entrepreneurship Training Programs

Offer training programs to equip aspiring entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge to start and grow their businesses.

#### 4. Promote Specific Opportunities Relating to Hemp

Highlight and advertise particular opportunities within the hemp industry to attract interest and investment.

### Secondary Tactics

#### 1. Entrepreneurship Education in Schools

Introduce programs in schools to teach students the fundamentals of entrepreneurship, fostering a culture of innovation and business acumen from a young age.

### Tertiary Tactics

#### 1. Shared Facilities and Equipment

Provide access to communal facilities and equipment to reduce costs for startups and small businesses.

#### 2. Run a Mentorship Program

Implement a program where experienced professionals guide and support entrepreneurs to help them grow their businesses.

# Strategic Priority #5 - Infrastructure Investment

## Core Tactics

### 1. Broadband Connectivity

Continue work being conducted to provide broadband connection across the Region. Make sure it is promoted to be able to attract business, citizens, and tourists.

## Secondary Tactics

### 1. Employment Land Preparedness and Inventory

Assess and prepare available land for business development to ensure it meets the needs of potential employers.

### 2. Housing Strategy

Develop a comprehensive plan to provide adequate and affordable housing options to support workforce growth and community stability.

## Tertiary Tactics

### 1. Centre of Innovation

Establish a hub to foster creativity, research, and development, supporting new and existing businesses.

### 2. Community Investment Fund

Create a fund to finance local projects and businesses, stimulating economic growth.

### 3. Transportation Networks (HS\*)

Develop and enhance transportation infrastructure to improve connectivity and support economic activities.

### 4. Utilities and Processing Facilities (HS\*)

Ensure adequate utilities and establish processing facilities to support industrial and agricultural sectors.

### 5. Housing and Community Services (HS\*)

Provide essential housing and community services to support a growing workforce and enhance quality of life.