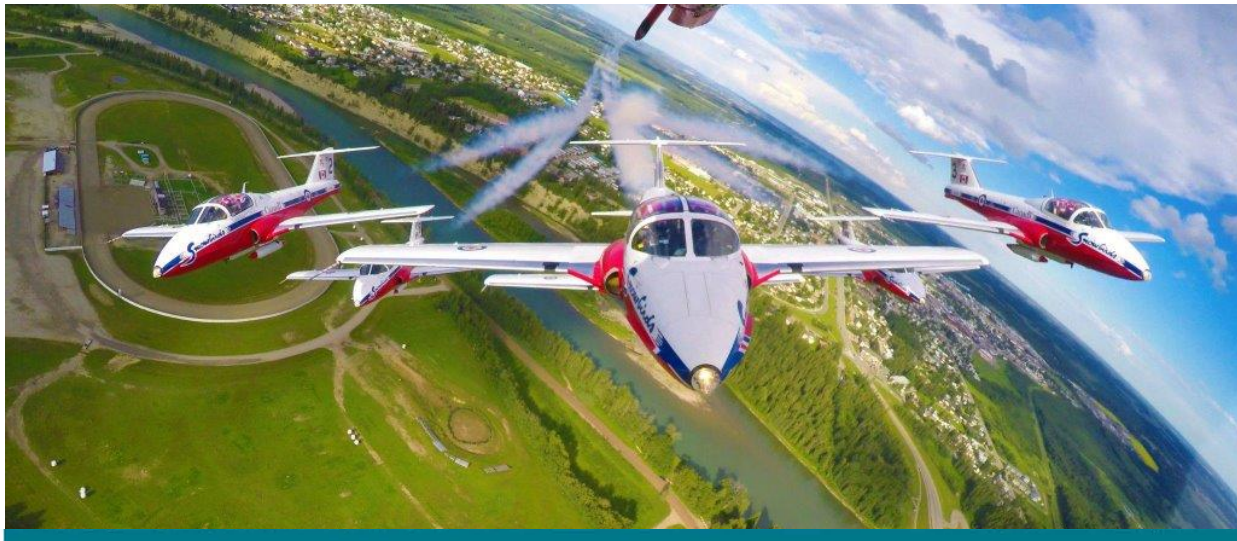
Town of Rocky Mountain House

2021-2025 Economic Development Strategy



February 2021

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE
Where Adventure Begins!

MDB INSIGHT

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Executive Summary

Rocky Mountain House is at an important point in time in its history. Today offers the community an opportunity to take intentional steps that will lead to economic development and achieve its aspirations. The community faces significant internal and external challenges, many at a macroeconomic level beyond the municipality's control (e.g. oil and gas downturn, COVID-19). Pressures include losing residents and investment to neighbouring communities. The local population has declined and aged over the past 20 years, which further illustrates the fundamental challenge of creating sustained and sustainable growth in Rocky Mountain House.

The Town has proactively focused on improving service delivery and reducing residents' costs; this Economic Development Strategy extends these efforts to focus on new growth. The community has also made progress in regional cooperation and economic development data accessibility through the Stronger Together[1] and David Thompson Regional Tourism Group initiatives. By commissioning this strategic plan, the Town of Rocky Mountain House has taken another step to support economic development and drive growth. This Strategy presents a tactical action plan that, when executed, will strengthen assets, correct disadvantages, and position the community to achieve its desired future.

Investment retention with selected efforts at investment attraction are the drivers of this Strategy. While the Town has commissioned this work, success will not be achieved effectively or quickly if it relies only on itself to implement the action plan. It will take a community-wide effort to support local business owners' dreams, improve infrastructure and development processes, and promote the community to prospective residents and businesses.

Rocky Mountain House has significant strengths, including a beautiful location, access to world-class recreation, high volume tourism traffic, status as a regional service hub, proximity to larger cities, lower cost of living and access to resource industries that, while changing, still support economic activity.

COVID-19 has turned the advantages of large city life on their head and given rise to a transformative approach to remote working. The new attitude to remote work creates opportunities for Rocky Mountain House to attract residents as "Zoom Towns," where remote enabled workers who want bigger houses, backyards and access to the outdoors have settled. Many of these potential new residents will have visited Rocky Mountain House.

Other opportunities include the large number of workers who live outside the community but travel to Rocky Mountain House to work. These workers and tourists represent a clear opportunity for the community's long-term growth. Major natural gas projects still bring workers and opportunities to Rocky Mountain House, but the community will need to compete for the limited growth projected in that sector.

The Town needs to take targeted action to support business expansion and attraction to create new jobs and draw in residents. The Strategy outlines short and long-term tactics that support the community's strengths and lay the groundwork for more considerable opportunities. As shown in the following figure, four strategic pillars underpin this Economic Development Strategy.

[1] Stronger Together, strongertogether.ecdev.org/

Strategic Pillars	
Pillar 1: Investment Readiness	Objective 1.1: Develop Investment Ready Sites
	Objective 1.2: Secure Infrastructure Investments
	Objective 1.3: Refine Sector Value Proposition
Pillar 2: Resident Attraction and Retention	Objective 2.1: Resident Attraction Strategy
	Objective 2.2: Support Entrepreneurs and Remote Workers
	Objective 2.3: Support Improving Training/Retraining Access
	Objective 2.4: Enhanced Health Care Services
Pillar 3: Business Retention and Expansion	Objective 3.1: Enhance BR+E Programming
	Objective 3.2: Enhance Communications
	Objective 3.3: Support Business Expansion
Pillar 4: Investment Attraction	Objective 4.1: Develop a Lead Generation Pipeline
	Objective 4.2: Develop Sector Focused Marketing Materials
	Objective 4.3: Complete a Supply Chain Analysis

With the ongoing support of the Town Council and the community-at-large, there is an incredible opportunity to build off Rocky Mountain House's tremendous strengths and transform the community into one of the most desirable places to live and work in Central Alberta.

1 - Strategy Development

The Rocky Mountain House Economic Development Strategy began in October 2020 with comprehensive primary and secondary research to support a deep understanding of community assets. The results of this research are presented separately in an accompanying technical report. An effort has been made to provide relevant content in this strategic plan report in a summarized format to support readability and showcase strategic pillars, objectives, and tactical actions.

The strategic development process entailed three phases:

- **Phase 1:** The starting phase included reviewing regional and local strategies that impact Rocky Mountain House's economic development programming. The Town's economic performance was also assessed against a range of socio-economic criteria, business, and industry data.
- **Phase 2**: The research conducted in phase I was tested through a comprehensive community consultation process. Through one-on-one interviews and focus groups with local stakeholders, businesses, and community partners.
- **Phase 3:** The final phase included an implementation plan with short, medium, and longer-term actions to move the Town's economic development priorities forward. Where relevant, the recommendations have been informed by best practice research.

Data Collection and Analysis

Various scales of analysis have been used to assess the Town's strengths, opportunities and economic capacity. Input has been gathered through data collection and engagement activities. A summary of each assessed component is presented in the following list, with detailed results available in the technical document:

Background Document Review and Common Themes Matrix: Relevant strategic and policy documents from Rocky Mountain House and Clearwater County were assessed to understand critical and common themes summarized in the matrix.

Literature Review and Trends Analysis: The literature review includes relevant industry publications, leading research related to local and regional development issues, technology impacts and talent attraction and retention in a globalized and evolving market.

Regional and Community Economic Analysis: Statistical data from various sources (Statistics Canada, Manifold Data Mining) paints a portrait of the local social and economic composition, including population, housing, living, income, education, employment, industries and occupations, and business characteristics.

SOARR Report: A Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Risks, and Results (SOARR) Assessment has been applied to the results of all research and engagement activities, and a report has been developed and vetted by each community.

Commercial Gap Analysis: The commercial gap analysis examines the local and regional projected commercial capacity by population and identifies specific gaps that may present investment attraction opportunities.

Key Informant Interviews: Key informant interviews were completed with identified stakeholders; these included educational representatives, businesses, local government, and service providers.

Council Workshops: Workshops were conducted with Town Council to investigate strategic objectives and identify opportunities, solutions, and aspirations.

SOARR Assessment

The Town of Rocky Mountain House's economic development strategy is designed for maximum impact and actionability in the short-term to lay the groundwork to achieve short and long-term goals. A SOARR Assessment is a forward-looking model, taking elements of what would traditionally be affiliated with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis. Developed using insights gained through stakeholder consultations and other research, the assessment informs the community's most desired future and gives indicators when aspirations have been achieved. It represents a summary of the key learnings that will inform the Economic Development Strategy's action and implementation plans.

Source: MDB Insight, 2021.

Strengths

What can we build on?

- What are we doing well?
- What key achievements are we most proud of?
- What positive aspects have individuals and enterprises commented on?

- **Role as a Regional Hub:** Rocky Mountain House's role as the service hub of Clearwater County leads to a diversified economy that has improved the community's ability to weather the long-running downturn in oil and gas prices.
- **Population Services Sectors:** Sectors that service the population base, including education, accommodation and food services, healthcare and social services and retail, have grown.
- **Industry Sectors:** The agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting sector has seen significant growth over the past ten years and growth in manufacturing and transportation and warehousing. Losses have been sustained in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, but the industry overall has remained stable in the face of sustained oil and gas challenges.
- **Location:** The town is the last major stop into the backcountry on the David Thompson Highway with easy access to Red Deer.
- **Broadband:** The town currently has multiple internet service providers, but the recent commitment by Clearwater County to develop an Open-Access Network of broadband infrastructure to provide internet access to the majority of County residents and businesses will extend this strength regionally.
- **Housing Availability and Price:** The town and county have various housing options available across the price spectrum at a relatively lower cost than larger centres.
- **Hospital:** The regional hospital anchors the healthcare and social services sector acting as a significant regional economic driver.
- **Red Deer College Campus:** Located within the West Central High School, the remote campus offers local training in town, improving accessibility to education services.
- **Tourism**: The town sees significant tourism traffic on the David Thompson Highway and is close to several attractions and campsites, including the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site.
- **Wide Variety of Lifestyles and Quality of Life Amenities:** The cost of housing in the region is relatively lower than that of Edmonton and Calgary, with a wide variety of built and outdoor recreation amenities. The town has a variety of housing types and lifestyle amenities that appeal to potential residents.
- **North Saskatchewan River:** It flows through the community and is a significant recreational asset for residents and a draw for tourists.
- **Airport:** The municipally-owned airport has an expansive runway, terminal and hangars that support a local club and incoming tourist flights and commercial activity.
- **Rodeo Grounds:** This significant community facility hosts events and is in a prime location on the North Saskatchewan River.
- **Downtown:** The Town has invested significantly in downtown improvements over the last decade.

Opportunities

What are our best possible future opportunities?

- What changes in demand do we expect to see in the future?
- What external forces or trends may positively affect development?
- What are the key areas of untapped potential?
- What weaknesses or threats can be converted into SMART improvements?

- **Tourism:** Capitalizing on tourism traffic through the region, particularly the national historic site that records 25,000 plus visitors a year and creating more four-season attractions. Stakeholder engagement indicated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a noticeable increase in Albertans visiting the backcountry. Not enough of this traffic is stopping in Rocky Mountain House to shop and access services.
- **New Pipeline Development:** The $2.3 billion NOVA Gas Transmission Ltd. Project is billed to create up to 600-800[2] jobs and give natural gas producers and shippers greater access to domestic and US markets while facilitating the phase-out of coal-fired electricity by 2030[3]. Although a percentage of the workforce will be based in camps, a significant number of workers will be based in Rocky Mountain House. The project has the potential to attract permanent residents and businesses that could feed into the supply chain.
- **Land Development:** The town has a land bank of several promising parcels for residential, commercial and industrial development, but they are not currently serviced or investment-ready. Ensuring sites are prepared and promoted will improve overall investment readiness. The Town should work with the County to develop industrial land agreements and parks to bring more investment-ready sites online.
- **Local Investors:** A group of high-net-worth individuals with a stated desire to invest in the community through new land development and a new museum.
- **Leverage Broadband Investments:** The County's broadband expansion will create new opportunities on lands near the Town to market sites and tout fibre access not available elsewhere. The new infrastructure could also support the establishment of free Wi-Fi access points for locals and tourists.
- **Oil and Gas:** There are local businesses that provide goods and services to the oil and gas industry across Alberta; attracting complementary services and manufacturing to build the cluster is an opportunity.
- **Agri-tourism:** A significant number of farms in the region could diversify their revenue streams by expanding into agri-tourism. Many of the region's farms are relatively smaller and privately owned by families than other regions in the province, making them more suitable as agri-tourism attractions.
- **Value-added Agricultural Products:** Meat processors and farmers' markets are already active in the region; value-added products diversify farm revenue streams, create jobs and are exportable. The

[2] Town of Rocky Mountain House

[3] https://rdnewsnow.com/2020/10/20/feds-approve-natural-gas-pipeline-expansion-west-of-rocky-mountain-house/

recently completed Craft Brewery Business Case is a perfect example of proactive support in this industry.

- **Forestry:** Significant forestry operations are active in the region. These primary industries require oil and gas transferrable skills, and their workforce needs should be tracked continually.
- **Potential Coal Mine:** Due to provincial regulation changes, the possibility of a new coal mine has received significant attention and could bring significant economic activity to the region.
- **Enhanced Communication with Residents:** The Town has taken significant steps to reduce costs and become a sustainability leader. These achievements and initiatives need to be more widely promoted.
- **Enhancing Access to Education:** COVID-19 has altered how post-secondary training is delivered, creating opportunities to retain larger numbers of new grads to study and work in the community.
- **Immigration:** Recruiting new Canadians to fill local businesses' niches is an opportunity to expand the business community and increase the local population.
- **Targeted Resident Attraction:** Raising Rocky Mountain House's profile as an affordable community with unparalleled access to the region's outdoor assets for those Calgary, Edmonton and Red Deer residents looking to make a change.
- **Improve Access to Medical Transportation:** Individuals are travelling to and from Red Deer for medical services, creating a need for medical transportation.
- **Improved Engagement and Partnership with First Nation Communities:** There are three First Nations Communities in proximity to Rocky Mountain House that utilizes the town as a primary service centre. Closer relationships and shared projects have the opportunity to attract investment in several sectors.

Aspirations

What do we care deeply about achieving?

- What are we deeply passionate about?
- What difference do we hope to make for businesses, residents, and institutions?
- What does our preferred future look like?

- **Maintain Economic Diversity:** Stakeholders want to maintain and grow the base of economic activity in the region, not to encourage dependence on one or two sectors.
- **Retain and Attract Retail and Services:** Stakeholders indicated they want to see more big box stores in the community that draw shoppers. They would also like to see vacant properties in the downtown updated and filled with new stores.
- **Hospital Upgrade:** Stakeholders indicated they would like to see the hospital upgraded and expanded to offer a wider variety of services.
- **Population Growth Retiree Attraction and Retention:** Stakeholders are concerned about population decline in the town and want to see these trends reversed. Stakeholders also want local seniors to choose the town to retire and as a retirement destination.
- **Improved Access to Training:** Stakeholders want to see more training options available in town.
- **New Commercial, Industrial and Residential Development:** Stakeholders want to see a mix of new commercial, industrial and residential development.
- **Investments in the Oil and Gas Sector:** Stakeholders are hopeful that more oil and gas industry investments can be secured in the region.
- **Promotion of the Town:** Stakeholders want to ensure that Rocky Mountain House has a higher profile. They want the community to be better known as a backcountry gateway destination.
- **Tourism Industry Expansion:** Stakeholders want to see the local tourism industry grow with more events, visitors, businesses, and jobs expanding into four-season offerings.
- **Proposed Coal Mine:** The majority of stakeholders want to see the proposed coal mine go into operation as it is one of the few opportunities that can create long-term, well-paying jobs.
- **Community Beautification:** Stakeholders emphasized that the community does not put its best foot forward from the highway, suggesting that improving its attractiveness and creating reasons for tourism traffic to stop is important.
- **Increased Openness to Change:** Stakeholders expressed a desire to see a wider range of community members engaged and supportive of change and growth in the town.
- **Green Technology:** Stakeholders indicated they want the town to continue to embrace green technology to improve performance and reduce costs.
- **Improved Communication and Transparency:** Stakeholders identified they want to see communication and transparency continue to improve including increasing the frequency and quality.

R Risks

How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?

- What challenges do we need to be aware of?
- What policy shifts could impact our aspirations?
- What contingencies should be in place address threats or consequences?

- **Access to Shovel Ready Land:** The town does not have a ready supply of investment-ready sites and buildings.
- **A Shift in Resource Industries:** The large resource sectors that have driven growth in the region are experiencing long-term challenges. Businesses have been adapting to the new environment by:
  - Focusing on cost reduction/efficiency, including automation and investment in technology, requiring fewer jobs
  - More intense focus on location factors, including specific zoning and tax rates
  - Investing in upskilling of their workforce to ensure they are adaptable to new technology
- **Worldwide Instability in Commodities:** The threat of future commodity-related recessions in oil and gas, forestry or agriculture is a source of insecurity among investors.
- **Ageing and Declining Population:** The community has seen a net loss of residents over the last ten years, with the population increasingly skewing older.
- **Access to Capital:** Lack of access to investment capital for municipal infrastructure and services and local entrepreneurs.
- **Competition with other Communities:** Nearby communities like Sylvan Lake are expanding while Rocky Mountain House is losing residents.
- **Local Landowners:** Several landowners will need to cooperate with the Town to develop new commercial, industrial and residential land.
- **Public Opposition to Development:** Stakeholders indicated that residents would likely oppose a significant change in the town.
- **Gaps in Medical and Professional Services:** The commercial gap analysis indicated significant service gaps in the region, specifically in medical and professional services.

Results

How will we know we are succeeding?

- What are the key goals we would like to accomplish in order to achieve these results?
- What meaningful measures will indicate that we are on track toward achieving our goals?
- What resources are needed to implement our most vital projects and initiatives?

- **Tax Base Ratio Improved:** Growth that shifts a larger portion of the tax burden to commercial and industrial.
- **Increased Tourism Traffic and Businesses:** Increase in the number of tourists stopping in town and new tourism operators.
- **Lead Generation:** Increased investment lead generation and wins.
- **Transition Support:** Number of workers supported in transition from oil and gas to other industries.
- **Improved Access to Training:** New graduates and businesses can access the training they need in town.
- **Improved Support for Entrepreneurs:** Number of individuals accessing entrepreneurship services, number of start-ups, investment attracted, and jobs created.
- **Tracking Local Business Indicators:** This includes tracking the number of new businesses and jobs in the community, the number of local businesses that expand, investment leads generated, businesses retained, downsizings prevented, and successions supported.
- **Business Satisfaction:** Business satisfaction monitoring and benchmarking progress.
- **Improved Awareness of Community Improvements:** An increased celebration of community accomplishments.
- **New Development**: New commercial residential and industrial land development in Rocky Mountain House.
- **Labour Force Development and Availability**: Better access to local training and upskilling in the community to ensure businesses can access the talent they need.
- **Population Growth:** Significant population growth and commiserate maintenance/expansion of lifestyle assets.

2- Strategic Pillars and Objectives

Rocky Mountain House's Economic Drivers

Economic Development Strategies build on the unique assets and resources of a community, communicating those characteristics to potential investment and development partners in a way that demonstrates an inherent value proposition. A growing number of entrepreneurial communities use their local advantages to spur innovation, investment, and job creation while retaining their communities' cultural and environmental assets.

While combining these trends in local economic development, the selection of economic development opportunities is rooted in the philosophy that initiatives must ultimately increase the total wealth within a community. There are two main ways to do this:

1. **Export Development** – any initiative that brings new money into the community:
    - Starting/attracting a business that sells products/services outside the community
    - Attracting visitors who then buy local products/services
    - Encouraging existing businesses to sell their products/service outside the community.
2. **Import Substitution** – any initiative that keeps money in the community:
    - Encourage people and businesses to buy their goods/services locally rather than importing them from another community
    - Starting or attracting new businesses that recognize the leakage and provide a product/service to stop it.

Figure 1: Current Economic Drivers and Redistributors for Rocky Mountain House

The Importance of Economic Impact and Influence

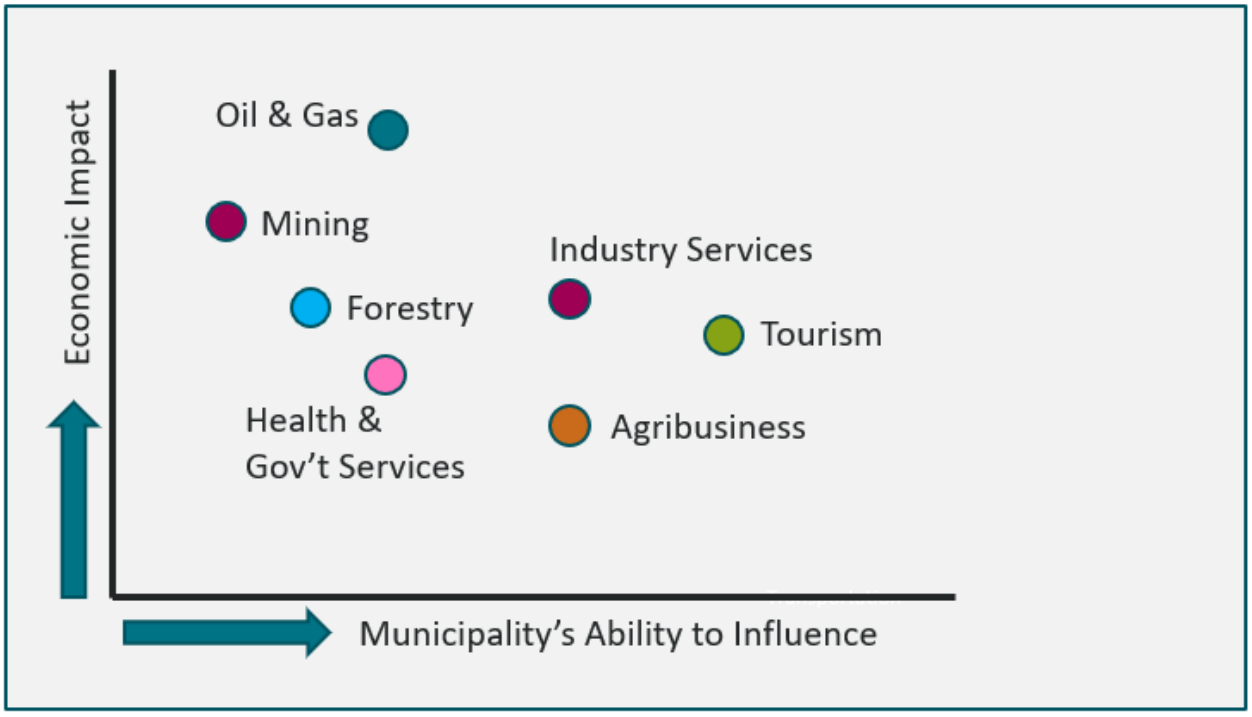
The economic drivers – or sectors – shown in the figure above can be prioritized by examining two important criteria:

1. Their economic impact on Rocky Mountain House
2. The ability of the Town of Rocky Mountain House to influence economic change in a given sector.

The image below shows the wealth-creating sectors of strength for Rocky Mountain House: health and government services, oil and gas, industry services, tourism, agri-businesses, mining, and forestry. They are placed on a graph that shows where each sector falls within the Town's ability to influence the sector's anticipated long-term economic impact. Notably, the oil and gas sector has a high economic impact. Still, it sits to the left side of the graph, which indicates that the Town's ability to influence economic change in this sector is relatively low. On the other hand, the tourism and agri-business economic impact on the Town is less, but the municipality's ability to influence investment and growth in these sectors is higher.

Ideally, it is best to prioritize economic development efforts to the sectors that fall closest to the matrix's upper right quadrant.

Figure 2: Long-term economic impact of' and 'Town influence on' investment and job creation opportunities



Priority Sectors

As identified in the previous section, there are three sectors in which Rocky Mountain House has a significant ability to influence recommended priority sectors. A location quotient[4] analysis using the total number of businesses in Rocky Mountain House shows these industries' local concentration.

The following economic drivers are anticipated to be Rocky Mountain House's best business retention and expansion and investment attraction opportunities. The selection of these sectors does not preclude action in others; for example, letters of support and engagement with mining firms and lobbying on behalf of increased health and education services are tools at the community's disposal. With limited resources available to economic development, narrowing the focus is fundamental to ensuring positive growth.

Industry Services

The Town has long been a centre for industry services that support primary resource extraction. The figure below highlights a large number of these businesses in the community.

Figure 3: Industry Services Sector

Industry	Number of Businesses	Location Quotient
Total Support Businesses	950	1.02 (average)
2131 – Support activities for mining and oil and gas extraction	121	3.94 (very high)
5416 – Management, scientific and technical consulting services	101	1.19 (average)
2389 – Other specialty trade contractors	52	1.82 (high)
5413 – Architectural, engineering and related services	41	0.73 (low)

Source: Canadian Business Counts, June 2020

The high number of businesses indicates the community has a significant value proposition in attracting these sectors. For the most part, these sectors do not require large industrial plots of land, and their location is often flexible. Engaging with these businesses to articulate the value proposition that attracted them is a key priority.

[4] Location quotient (LQ) is a way of quantifying how concentrated a particular industry, is in a region. An LQ greater than or equal to 1.25 – indicates that the community has a proportionately 'high' concentration of industries than the larger comparison area employed in a specific industry. An LQ lower than 1.25 and higher than 1.0 – indicates that the community has an 'above average' concentration of workers/industries than the larger comparison area employed in a specific industry. An LQ 1.0 – indicates employment/industry concentration in the community is 'on par' with the larger comparison area employed in a specific industry. An LQ lower than 1.0 and higher than 0.75 – indicates that the community has a 'below average' concentration of workers/industries than the larger comparison area employed in a specific industry. And an LQ lower than 0.75 - indicates that the community has a 'low' concentration.

Tourism

Rocky Mountain House is a major tourism gateway, and the community has worked to capitalize on that traffic, developing the David Thompson Country initiative. The Town has room to grow in this sector, with only 90 businesses increasing the spectrum of attractions and establishing more year-round visitation will be a priority.

Figure 4: Tourism Sector

Industry Subsector	Number of Businesses	Location Quotient
Total all Industry Sectors	90	0.83 (average)
7225 Full-service restaurants and limited-service eating places	29	0.76 (average)
7212 Recreational vehicle (RV) parks and recreational camps	13	5.54 (very high)
7211 Traveler accommodation	12	1.72 (high)
7139 Other amusement and recreation industries	10	1.06 (average)

Source: Canadian Business Counts, June 2020

Agribusiness

The agribusiness sector, particularly food processing, has increasingly been identified as a priority for Alberta. Creating value-added products has been a primary diversification tactic of the sector. The high number of farms creates opportunities for support services, equipment, and animal health services. There is also a significant opportunity for agri-tourism operations in the region.

Figure 5: Agribusiness Sector

Industry Subsector	Number of Businesses	Location Quotient
Agri-Business Total	328	1.27
1121 Cattle ranching and farming	118	2.21 (very high)
541690 Other scientific and technical consulting services	61	2.01 (very high)
1119 Other crop farming	42	1.59 (high)
1129 Other animal production	34	1.88 (high)
541380 Testing laboratories	16	3.49 (very high)
1151 Support activities for crop production	6	0.97 (average)
1152 Support activities for animal production	6	1.66 (high)

Source: Canadian Business Counts, June 2020

Strategic Pillars and Objectives

Based on research and consultation, four strategic pillars were identified as key considerations for the Economic Development Strategic Plan. The following figure highlights the relationships between these pillars and the aspirations of Rocky Mountain House.

Figure 6: Strategic Pillars Relationship to Aspirations

Strategic Pillars	Aspirations							
	Economic Diversity	Economic Growth	Investment Readiness	Healthcare	Population Growth	Tourism	Raise Community Profile	Investment Attraction
Investment Attraction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resident Attraction and Retention	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Business Retention and Expansion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Investment Readiness	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

The pillars, first and foremost, align with the aspirations of the community. Integrating the community's strengths and opportunities to achieve these aspirations is the core component of strategic development. The following sections break down each pillar's why and how they lead to the Strategy's objectives and actions.

Pillar 1 – Investment Readiness

Investment readiness is the foundation of effective investment attraction, which includes an ongoing review of permitting and servicing capacities and an understanding of the infrastructure required to meet industry needs today and into the future. A comprehensive inventory of available land and buildings that support the attraction and retention of targeted investment, including related supply chain opportunities, is the first step.

Investment readiness is more than simply supplying a searchable database of shovel-ready land and buildings. It includes the provision of forward-thinking infrastructure that supports technology-based enterprises (e.g., Broadband), flexible land use policy and zoning, a timely development approvals process and the data and information that conveys the collective vision, aspirations, and intent for targeted investment attraction.

The Town of Rocky Mountain House and Clearwater County has made significant progress on regional collaboration and promotion through the Stronger Together[5] and David Thompson Country[6] initiatives. Further enhancing investment readiness will require more in-depth information and sector targeting.

- **Infrastructure:** This includes critical infrastructure like water and sanitary sewers and broadband and quality of life assets like bicycle lanes and trails.
- **Shovel-ready employment lands:** Companies prioritize communities with sites ready for construction, including zoning and servicing.
- **Streamlined development and permitting processes:** Efficient regulatory procedures and easy navigation through administration procedures are critical.
- **Reducing Costs:** Taxation, levies and fees all factor into investment decisions. Reducing those costs is a component of investment readiness.
- **Available property inventory:** Easily accessible data on available properties is a core component to support investment attraction.
- **Incentive programming:** Incentives are not essential, but they are increasing in popularity amongst Alberta's municipalities because of recent provincial legislation. The Town of Rocky Mountain House needs to be aware of what its competitors are doing and make informed decisions based on the costs and benefits of providing incentives.

The Town's *2018 – 2022 Strategic Plan* prioritizes the availability of diverse land types for sale by completing a service level review. The Town's *Municipal Plan* builds on this with policies related to making available land attractive for investment through marketing, incentives, supportive land-use policies, increased accessibility by rail and air, and pre-servicing land. This priority is supported by a plan to bring more zoned and serviced land to the market for investors and perform an inventory of land that is already zoned and ready for residential construction.

Given the ready supply of residential land in the Town and the low cost of industrial land in Clearwater County, Rocky Mountain House should focus on commercial and light industrial development.

[5] Stronger Together, strongertogether.ecdev.org/

[6] David Thompson Country, davidthompsoncountry.ca/

The federal/provincial funding for the wastewater treatment facility, *Off-Site Levy Report* and *Land Use Bylaw* is also documented. These infrastructure investments and policies can significantly impact an investor's decision to select Rocky Mountain House.

Municipal Incentive Programming

Municipalities have access to several tools to incentivize new development and supporting infrastructure that ranges from developing new business parts and infrastructure, providing inexpensive land and structured incentive programming.

- Municipal Level Tax Incentives: The Province of Alberta's Bill 7 allows municipalities to create a non-residential tax incentive bylaw to reduce development taxes.
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Brownfield Grant Program: This federal program provides capital for brownfield sites' redevelopment.
- Development Incentive Programs: These programs provide additional funding to developments that align with community investments. (e.g., Façade improvement)
- Industrial Infrastructure Cost Sharing Program: These programs can include entitlement of front-end developers to recover portions of their over expenditures such as incremental tax revenue directly resulting from the construction of cost-sharable infrastructure and development levies collected within the benefiting area.
- Vacant Land Tax: A type of property tax imposed on vacant land at a rate that would apply to the possible development allowable given the site's existing zoning.

In Pillar 1, the following objectives were established:

Objective 1.1	**Develop Investment Ready Sites**
Objective 1.2	**Secure Infrastructure Investments**
Objective 1.3	**Refine Sector Value Proposition**

Pillar 2 – Resident Attraction and Retention

Rocky Mountain House's population has declined 1.5% in the last 15 years, and projections expect this trend to continue over the next decade. Manifold Data Mining projects that the Town's population will shrink 1.4% over the next five years, reaching a 2.9% decline by 2030. Rocky Mountain House also shows lower participation rates and higher unemployment rates than Alberta. Attracting and retaining talent depends on promoting the community's benefits, including affordable housing, recreation, and public services.

Resident attraction and retention are of growing concern to communities across Canada. This topic is typically explored in terms of "talent attraction" (largely characterized as skilled labour); communities are experiencing various demographic and economic changes that are rapidly altering the way their local economies operate. These changes include low birth rates and ageing population; increased mobility of talent based on lifestyle preferences and entrepreneurial opportunities; the widespread use of new technologies that give people an ability to work from any geography; and the increased urbanization positioning cities as magnets for people due to changing economic, cultural, and lifestyle preferences.

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned many of these urban advantages on its head, creating significant disincentives to city life while dramatically shifting the culture and operations of businesses towards remote work. These shifts create an unpreceded opportunity for smaller communities to level the playing field and attract the recently expanded ranks of remote-enabled workers who want a lower cost of living and access to outdoor amenities. Many of these potential residents will have visited the community as tourists highlighting the importance of community amenities.

Best practices to retain and attract residents include:

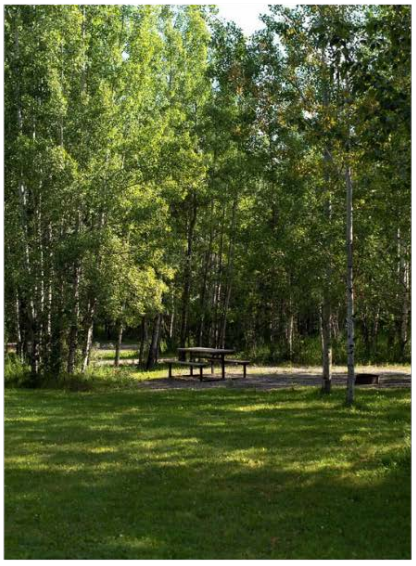
- **Having a strong place-based reputation** – Strong reputations and positive overall place branding are important in attracting talent (especially for the quality-of-life migrants).
- **Having a critical mass of job opportunities** – Places that can demonstrate they have a variety of good employers and job opportunities see success in talent attraction, highlighting the importance of investment attraction.
- **Demonstrating being a "liveable community"** – Above and beyond employment opportunities, talent is always looking for communities with a vibrant cultural scene, exciting opportunities to participate in the community's social life, and a pleasant physical environment. Engagement showed that quality of life is one of the Town's strengths. Rocky Mountain House has an important number of community and sports centres, parks, trails, campgrounds, and picturesque landscapes. Adequate health care services are a significant factor for retaining seniors and attracting new residents,
- **Having a safe, healthy, and clean local environment** – Talent tends to be drawn to places where health, safety, and sustainability are priorities and avoid those places where crime, congestion, and environmental problems are obvious. Rocky Mountain House is a safe community. The number of crimes committed in Rocky Mountain House declined 3% year-over-year and decreased 12% in the last five years[7]. Stakeholders also pointed that the hospital has become one of the Town's economic drivers as it provides an excellent suite of medical and health care services.

[7] Alberta Regional Dashboard, regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/rocky-mountain-house/crimes/

- **Delivering exceptional public services** – Skilled labour and talented people can be a demanding target group. They expect high-quality public services such as schools, day-care, arts and recreation services, local infrastructure, open spaces, etc. Rocky Mountain House school system is well perceived in the community; the recent opening of Red Deer College's Rocky Mountain House Campus provides new opportunities to retain post-secondary students.
- **Opportunities for entrepreneurship** – Although entrepreneurship has been traditionally linked to large cities, there is an increasing trend of entrepreneurship in small towns. This has motivated communities to improve and create infrastructure and to facilitate business creation for local innovators. This includes business incubation, business support systems, and easy municipal red tape. There is currently no space available for business incubation, start-ups, or co-working spaces in Rocky Mountain House. A feasibility study should be conducted to understand the need, interest, and capacity of such a facility in the community and the broader region.

In Pillar 2, the following objectives were established:

Objective 2.1	**Resident Attraction Strategy**
Objective 2.2	**Support Entrepreneurs and Remote Workers**
Objective 2.3	**Support Improving Training/Retraining Access**
Objective 2.4.	**Enhanced Health Care Services**



Pillar 3 – Business Retention and Expansion

Business retention and expansion (BR+E) is a fundamental economic development activity. It is an effort by the economic development team to proactively connect with existing businesses to understand and respond to their needs. A BR+E program is a continuous process of learning about and addressing emerging challenges for the business community and the opportunities and challenges facing individual business operations. Success with BR+E will ensure a better relationship between government and business, underpinning long-term success in economic development.

As one of the cornerstones of economic development, BR+E activities have a higher return on investment than supporting entrepreneurship or pursuing investment attraction. Studies have shown that 70-80% of new jobs and investment in a community will come from existing businesses. Relationships are the basis of these programs, and the most successful have dedicated staff maintaining clear lines of communication and providing consistent support to businesses.

Developing a complete understanding of who is in the business community and their needs is essential to identify ways to improve local policies and services to assist with business growth. Enabling the success of local businesses will also improve investment readiness and investment attraction potential.

Pillar 3 aims to enhance Rocky Mountain House's BR+E programming through a customer relationship management (CRM) system, which the economic development office will use to track and interactions withes. The CRM system will also be an incredibly useful tool to improve tracking business satisfaction and key performance indicators, including the number of new businesses, the number of employees supported, business and jobs retained, and investment dollars. It is also a tool used to communicate this information to stakeholders and the public.

The goal of fostering BR+E is written directly into the Town's *Municipal Plan* alongside the goal of promoting a positive and competitive business climate. Each goal has led to policies and considerations such as investigating incentive programs, promoting available funding opportunities, and considering implementing a local-first purchasing policy, among others. The 2020 budget also directly references BR+E as a primary area of the Town's approved economic development function.

For Pillar 3, the following objectives were established:

Objective 3.1.	**Enhance BR+E Programming**
Objective 3.2.	**Enhance Communications**
Objective 3.3.	**Support Business Expansion**

Pillar 4 – Investment Attraction

The attraction of new jobs and investment to Rocky Mountain House is based on lead generation in target sectors. The Town needs to articulate a vision and value proposition focused on traditional and emerging sectors that drive investment activity. This pillar should build on the communities' strengths and the broader development activities of the Clearwater County, Province of Alberta and relevant agencies and organizations.

Investment attraction programming is often targeted at businesses or investors who may not be familiar with an area. A coordinated approach to marketing available land and buildings, workforce characteristics and the business environment's quality is required.

Investment attraction should leverage current strengths by increasing investments in sectors that support the local economy. Clearwater County has identified five target sectors that show growth potential. These sectors include wood products manufacturing, food product manufacturing, advanced machine manufacturing, tourism, and cleantech and clean energy. These sectors align with those identified for Rocky Mountain House and may be candidates for joint attraction efforts with the County.

Investment attraction requires detailed planning, marketing, and follow-up. Understanding what Rocky Mountain House can do to promote the community, including location and unique assets, will support the investment attraction efforts.

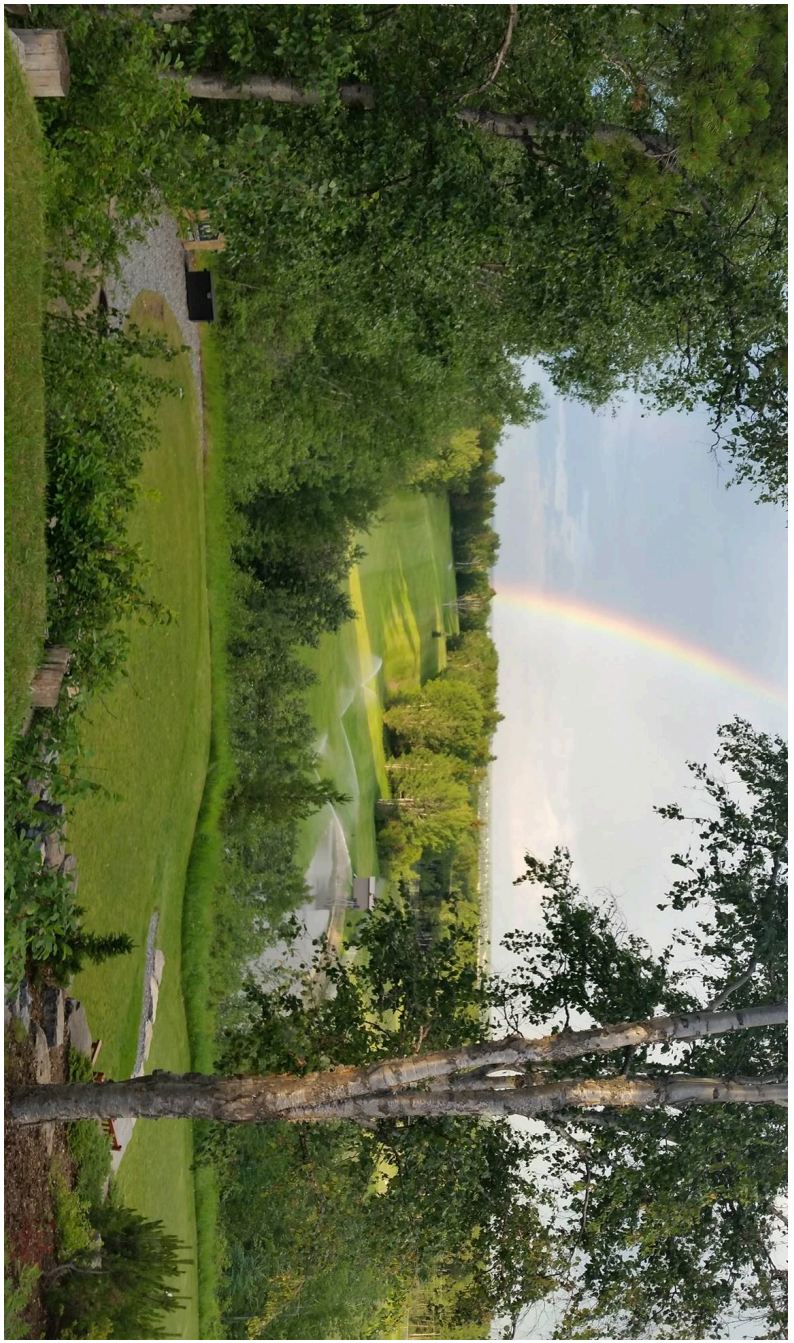
Rocky Mountain House investment attraction efforts are currently conducted through Access Prosperity[8], which provides prospective investors information and data from all the member municipalities. Rocky Mountain House Economic Development website uses the same web interface to provide data relevant to infrastructure, available property, business climate, land uses, workforce, and local opportunities. There are opportunities to enhance these processes by identifying key target sectors and developing sector-specific materials to promote and foster investment.

For Pillar 4, the following objectives were established:

Objective 4.1.	**Develop a Lead Generation Pipeline**
Objective 4.2.	**Develop Sector Focused Marketing Materials**
Objective 4.3.	**Complete a Supply Chain Analysis**

[8] Access Prosperity, accessprosperity.ca

3 - Action Plan



Action Plans for the Four Pillars

The objectives of this Economic Development Strategy were developed through research and consultation with stakeholders. Each is crucial to the success of the plan and requires specific action. The objectives are heavily interconnected and build on each other to support the community's aspirations, as identified in the SOARR assessment.

The Town of Rocky Mountain House will need to consider how best to spend time and resources on the economic development activities and programs that it believes will provide the greatest return on investment while addressing critical issues such as population decline, job creation, industrial and commercial land development, investment attraction, and business retention and expansion support services.

The time frame for each action is operationalized as:

- Short – immediate to one year.
- Medium – one to two years.
- Long – three to four years.
- Continuous – ongoing throughout the life span of the Strategy.

The action plan also includes a list of potential partners to conduct and achieve each strategic objective.

Pillar 1 – Investment Readiness			
Objective	**Actions**	**Potential Partners**	**Timing**
Objective 1.1: Develop Investment Ready Sites	1. Initiate a series of brownfield or underdeveloped commercial and industrial site redevelopment scenarios: i. Utilizing the database, assemble a list of priority sites that need redevelopment along the Highway 11 and Main Street commercial corridors. ii. Engage property owners to develop business cases and projected ROI.	Developers, Landowners, Real Estate Community, Province of Alberta, Government of Canada; Clearwater County	
	2. Continue to engage with developers to support site development on Highway 11 and Main Street commercial corridors.		
	3. Build on the Stronger Together platform and maintain a comprehensive database of available private and public land and properties. The site should identify priority sites and sectors.		
	4. Coordinate with developers to create a set of criteria that sites would have to meet to be considered investment-ready, including permitting and servicing.		
Objective 1.2: Secure Infrastructure Investments	1. Encourage regional efforts to improve broadband infrastructure, including negotiating with telecoms to support resident and business attraction.	Province of Alberta; Government of Canada; Clearwater County	
	2. Secure funding for infrastructure investment through Provincial and Federal programming (e.g., Community Revitalization Levy Program; Economic Recovery Grant Funding; Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program; and the Broadband Fund.		
Objective 1.3: Refine Sector Value Proposition	1. Establish priority sector value propositions in manufacturing, agribusiness, and tourism. i. Engage with local businesses in target sectors to continually refine value propositions. iii. Collect and share success stories from businesses that invest in Rocky Mountain House.	Chamber of Commerce; Business Community	

Possible Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Quantitative

- Absolute growth in non-residential tax assessment (Total $)
- Change in the number of businesses in a community, a region or in a specific sector
- Increased diversity of businesses (number of sectors, number per sector)
- The absorption rate of employment lands and by type (industrial, commercial-retail, commercial-office)
- Total number of inquiries received for new employment lands

Qualitative

- Reputation as a good location for small and medium business growth
- Reputation as an innovative community for technology-based businesses
- Feedback on the range of information products in demand by investors and the business community
- Level of engagement with the business community

Pillar 2 – Resident Attraction and Retention			
Objective	**Actions**	**Potential Partners**	**Timing**
Objective 2.1: Resident Attraction Strategy	1. Develop a resident attraction strategy focused on filling skills gaps, remote-enabled professionals, and young families.	Immigration and Citizenship Canada	
	2. Develop targeted promotional tools and resources to support businesses in their attraction and recruitment efforts, emphasizing health and quality of life assets.		
	3. Engage with Immigration and Citizenship Canada to evaluate Rocky Mountain House's eligibility as a participating community for the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot Program[9].		
Objective 2.2: Support Entrepreneurs and Remote Workers	1. Investigate shared/co-working workspace opportunities within Town-owned assets to support the attraction of small business operations, entrepreneurs, and remote workers.	Community Futures Central Alberta, Chamber of Commerce	
Objective 2.3: Support Improving Training/Retraining Access	1. Continue to facilitate conversations with local businesses, job seekers, educational institutions and community service providers to assess the local labour and skill demand needs. i. Support the Red Deer College and Olds College Rocky Mountain House Campus and other community service organizations to offer/deliver training and retraining programs locally.	Red Deer College; Career Assistance Network; Chamber of Commerce	
Objective 2.4: Enhanced Health Care Services	1. Continue to support the hospital committee in their efforts to petition the Provincial government to upgrade and enhance local health services.	Province of Alberta, Health Care Providers	
	2. Collaborate with health care service providers to attract medical professionals and fill the service gaps identified in the Commercial Gap Analysis, including physicians, offices of other health practitioners, dentists' offices, and nursing care facilities.		

[9] Claresholm Rural & Northern Immigration Pilot, claresholm.ca/rural-northern-immigration-pilot

Possible Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Quantitative

- Number of dwelling absorptions
- Number of training and retraining programs created
- Jobs created per $10,000 in investment

Qualitative

- Reputation as a good location for small and medium business growth
- Reputation as an innovative community for technology-based businesses
- Feedback on the range of information products in demand by investors and the business community
- Level of engagement with the community

Pillar 3 – Business Retention and Expansion			
Objective	**Actions**	**Potential Partners**	**Timing**
Objective 3.1: Enhance BR+E Programming	1. Enhance BR+E programming with CRM investment, and continue to engage the business community to gauge business satisfaction.	Business Community, Chamber of Commerce	
	2. Utilize the finding from business engagement to prioritize factors affecting business satisfaction, including workforce development, business planning, marketing and promotion and financing.		
	3. Utilize business engagement findings to support home-based business workshops (succession planning, marketing, social media) and other outreach activities to assist businesses.		
Objective 3.2: Enhance Communications	1. Publicly showcase and celebrate key performance indicators from BRE programming and share success stories from businesses who invest in the region.	Clearwater County; CAEP, Chamber of Commerce	
	2. Continue to share the cost-saving success stories highlighted in the annual financial reports that reduce costs and improve efficiency.		
Objective 3.3: Support Business Expansion	1. Through engagement with businesses, identify expansion, export and technology adoption opportunities.	Chamber of Commerce; Clearwater County; CAEP, Tourism Alberta	
	2. Continue to partner with Tourism Alberta to support local tourism stakeholders through workshops and webinars designed to introduce value-added opportunities to their business.		

Possible Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Quantitative ▪ Increased business engagement – the number of businesses, number of people ▪ The total number of businesses assisted ▪ Number of entrepreneurs assisted through the economic development department ▪ Change in the numbers of creative entrepreneurs in the community ▪ Change in the number of businesses in a community, a region or in a specific sector **Qualitative** ▪ Reputation as a good location for small and medium business growth ▪ Increased shop local engagement ▪ Reputation as an innovative community for technology-based businesses ▪ Level of engagement with the business community

Pillar 4 – Investment Attraction			
Objective	**Actions**	**Potential Partners**	**Timing**
Objective 4.1: Develop a Lead Generation Pipeline	1. Develop a relationship with provincial and federal government investment representatives, trade commissioners, and investment influencers within target sectors to ensure they understand the region's investment targets and are provided with marketing materials.	Clearwater County; CAEP; Invest Alberta	
	2. Establish an inter-municipal agreement to resource and support foreign direct investment (FDI)-related activities.		
	3. Leverage BR+E work to engage existing businesses in the FDI targeting activity and pursue leads in businesses that support the supply chain.		
	4. Develop business cases in the industry services, agribusiness, and tourism sectors that align with the Town's value proposition. Use these cases to promote opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs.		
Objective 4.2: Develop Sector Focused Marketing Materials	1. Develop sector-specific investment Pitch Decks, including tourism, agribusiness, industry services.	Clearwater County, Business Community, Chamber of Commerce,	
	2. Enhance the Stronger Together website with investment opportunities and target sectors in Rocky Mountain House and Clearwater County.		
	3. Coordinate with local hotels to support the implementation of visitor levy to fund marketing initiatives, travel trade bids, and new asset development.		
Objective 4.3: Complete a Supply Chain Analysis	1. Conduct a comprehensive supply chain analysis to: i. Identify growth opportunities related to local key industries. ii. Increase investment attraction efforts in local supply chain gaps.	Clearwater County, Business Community, Chamber of Commerce	

Possible Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Quantitative ▪ The total number of targeted companies attracted ▪ Job numbers ▪ Total investment ▪ The absorption rate of employment lands and by type (industrial, commercial-retail, commercial-office) **Qualitative** ▪ Reputation as a good location for targeted sector investment ▪ Feedback on the range of information products in demand by investors and the business community ▪ Level of engagement with the business community

MDB
INSIGHT

Appendix A: Technical (Phase One) Report

See Attached

Appendix B: Engagement Report

See Attached

Appendix C: Commercial Gap Analysis

See Attached