4 Strategic Objectives and Guiding Principles

An effective economic development strategy is one that is fact-based and incorporates bold but practical strategies that are likely to work. Based on the consultation and research that went into this work, a central vision and guiding principles that form the core of the future economic development strategy for Strathcona’s Economic Development and Tourism team was developed. In this portion of the work, the strategies articulated are broad, reflecting a series of “aspirational” goals and strategic objectives that formed the basis of a more detailed action plan (described below).

The goals and related strategies were based on information derived from:
- County background documents (for a full list please see Appendix IV)
- discussions with economic development staff
- a review of the existing economic development initiatives and best practices
- a look at what economic development tactics other jurisdictions are employing
- identification of initiatives to increase competitiveness
- community profile and economic base analysis
- community and stakeholder input from the consultation processes
- a review of available and needed resources to implement suggested components of the Strategy
- our professional experience with respect to findings related to other similar assignments

Consideration was also be given to the barriers and opportunities for growth and how best to mobilize existing resources through the use of partnerships with other levels of government, business, academia and not-for-profit organizations.

4.1 Strategic Objectives

The following strategic objectives are recommended for Strathcona County:

1. Regularly achieve the **Gold Standard of services delivery** and maintain top quality promotional presence in target markets and in **social media**.

2. Lead the team that will transform Alberta’s Industrial Heartland into a globally recognized **Integrated Energy Complex** through vision, partnerships and investment attraction.

3. **Develop a globally recognized professional, scientific and technical services hub** by marketing Strathcona’s available labour force and quality of life.

4. **Promote the County to Lone Eagles as the preferred destination for small business in the Edmonton region** through reaping the opportunities available from the County’s many quality of place advantages.

5. **Grow the niche, value added agricultural and food processing sector into a unique food innovation centre** through promotion of local food campaigns, educational partnerships and utilization of a food sector incubator.

6. **Define the relative importance of the retail economy** as a wealth generator in order to determine level of effort.

The set of actions within each Strategic Objective will be expanded upon in Section 6.
4.2 Guiding Principles – Important Concepts for Action Planning

4.2.1 Implications of Technology on Service Delivery
Economic development is a service business and investment prospects require a high-degree of attention. To effectively determine the needs of the client (existing or prospective new business) and identify possible solutions takes strong selling skills and a broad knowledge of the local and regional economy, certain business sectors, building/land development and the local business community.

Interaction with the client may begin with a single staff person, but as the project develops it is normal for many different municipal departments and outside organizations to be involved. There needs to be a standard operating procedure and single point of contact, but this person must have the ability and capability of accessing information from many sources and being able to interact with the highest of corporate executives. To be consistently successful in retaining and attracting new business, the County and other organizations in the community must be recognized as one team who are working towards the common goal of doing whatever it can to attract desirable investments.

Figure 27 – Evolution of Economic Development Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>The Gold Standard Response Time</th>
<th>The Gold Standard of Economic Development Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>48 hours</td>
<td>At the end of the call with the investment prospect the EDO says: “To help you better understand our community and the opportunities we have for you, I will put together a package that contains our Community Profile, Available Properties Guide and Lure Brochure. I will use Post-It Notes to highlight the pages that will be of most interest so you can quickly find the relevant information. I will courier that out to you tomorrow and you should have it in 48 hours.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Same day</td>
<td>At the end of the call with the investment prospect the EDO says “To help you better understand our community and the opportunities we have for you, I will send you an email before the end of the day that has several attachments including key excerpts from our Community Profile as well as hyperlinks to online listings of available property that closely meets your criteria.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>While on the phone</td>
<td>During the call with the investment prospect, the EDO says “Do you have access to the Internet right now?” [YES] “Great, why don’t we go online and I’ll take you through our website so that you can download the relevant files. We’ll also go through our available properties directory and look at maps, photos and details of available properties which meet the criteria you’ve described to me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>While on the phone or in email inquiries.</td>
<td>During the call with the investment prospect, the EDO says “Do you have access to the Internet and a computer available.” [YES] The EDO says “Can we send a computer application so you can have direct access to up to date Strathcona County information at all times from your desktop and hand held device”. [YES] “Let’s do this right now and I will guide you through this extensive network of current information available to you.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any economic development and tourism organization necessarily responds to a number of publics (or ‘target markets’) in the course of doing business. The chart below outlines the nature of these markets, and our recommendation as to what “top notch” service provision would imply for each. A key philosophy running throughout this strategy update is to enable the organization to provide this kind of service to each of these target markets.

Figure 28: Service Delivery to Target Markets
Strathcona has an opportunity to utilize the latest in Internet and web-based communications and technology to provide top-notch client service. If the County’s competitors are, then without it, it will be that much more difficult for Strathcona to be successful. If the County’s competitors are not, then Strathcona has a leg up in the first 10 minutes of the selling process.

Earlier this year, the Economic Developers Council of Ontario held investment readiness seminars across Ontario. Hosted by a US-based firm that selects sites for international companies, the seminars were an effort to help communities identify what they need to do to be highly prepared for investment inquiries. The following findings are relevant to Alberta and this discussion:

- In the last 10 years decision cycles have been compressed. Operations run 365/7/24 and an economic development office that does not keep up is likely to miss opportunities.
- Having an inventory of “Certified” available properties speeds up the process and heightens an investor’s interest. These certified properties have been independently verified to be ‘shovel-ready’. In other words, zoning is in place, there are no environmental/archaeological/geological problems and utilities are at the site.
• Competitive communities have an inventory of immediately available buildings and land, appropriate utility infrastructure, a labour force that is ready to work, shows widespread support for industry and can give a professional presentation to decision makers.

4.2.2 Where Does Lead Generation and Prospecting Fit In?
Meeting the “Gold Standard” is great, but if the phone is ringing only once a month, then the County is not effectively leveraging its investment. Without a proactive effort of lead and visitor generation and prospecting this is exactly what will happen – the County will be waiting for people to call rather than generating interest in the product (the County) so that people will call.

The selection of target industry sectors that is contained in this report is an important component of being able to promote/sell effectively. Once there is an understanding and consensus on where Strathcona has the best chances of being successful, human and financial resources can be focused.

“Selling” is an important part of any economic development professional’s skill set. It should become an integral part of weekly activities. With target sector selected, the County can become much more confident in being proactive to reach out to potential investors/carriers and “influencers”.

Investment in a quality Contact Relationship Management software package is essential for lead prospecting and also delivering the Gold Standard of Service.

4.2.3 Messaging
Although this strategy does not specifically identify any one particular brand that the community should employ, it should send a positive message to a number of key target markets:

• What it says to the prospective business investor: Strathcona will meet my employment needs. Its citizens are productive. The communities care about their citizens and will do what it can to keep them valuable contributors to my business. This is a place I want to invest.

• What it says to the prospective resident and lone eagle: The community values its citizens and invest in them. I can count on getting access to good quality health and recreation services. The outdoor environment is varied, clean and healthy. This is a place I want to live.

4.2.4 Economic Growth by Attracting People, Not Businesses
Richard Florida, in his book, ‘The Rise of the Creative Class’, projects that the future is trending towards economies in the developed world that can be located anywhere in a global sense. Where businesses choose to locate is becoming less a function of the traditional economic drivers such as jurisdictional cost (e.g. taxes), the supply of serviced industrial land, a ready supply of unskilled or semi-skilled labour, proximity to markets and transportation and much more a function of where people choose to live, which is governed by factors such as health and education facilities, access to the outdoors, environmental cleanliness, cultural facilities, etc. In other words, industry will not come to communities so much because of the availability of the basics of doing business (which of course must be present but frankly do little these days to distinguish one community from another), and more for the quality of life factors that uniquely differentiate places. This is shown in the diagram below which compares the traditional approach with the new approach.
Fully half of the wealth in Canada is in the hands of the 50+ age group, the so-called ‘Baby Boomers’. Many of these are skilled and well-educated people who are seeking a different living format; some wish to retire early but many are looking for second careers, often very different than which created their wealth in the first place. Florida contends that the preferred environment for such people is more rural, but not in an isolated environment. Instead they are seeking a creative and vibrant milieu in a less structured frenetic format than exists in the major urban centres – a good opportunity for Strathcona.

Creative centres do not thrive solely because of traditional economic reasons such as access to raw materials, transportation routes and a general labour force. These centres thrive because people want to live there. The newer economies require creative people who, in turn, require a creative environment. In order to attract and retain these people, companies must be located within this creative milieu.

4.2.5 Linking to Senior Levels of Support
Throughout the consultation and the development of recommendations, there was an effort to identify ways in which Strathcona’s economic development initiative can synergistically tie into efforts being made at a regional, provincial or federal level. The advantages are multiple:

- Funding assistance could be available
- Professional expertise in marketing plan development and organizing promotional events and company visits can be accessed
- Both the provincial and federal government have active investment recruitment attraction efforts that bring investment prospects and their agents to the community.

Interestingly, related that the latter point, both the provincial and federal governments are looking to its municipal partners to have developed a minimum level of investment readiness before they will bring investment prospects to the community. In the past, the approach was more compassionate and ‘fair’ where they would open an investment opportunity to nearly any community that fit within the geographic region. Through that experience they often received a very low level of service from communities, which in the eyes of the investment prospect reflected poorly on the government.

The provincial and federal governments are also striving for the “Gold Standard” of investment services. As such, they are starting to be far less lenient with unresponsive communities. Communities need to continue to strengthen (or initiate) relationships with government influencers.

In many ways, there is an advantage to Strathcona to follow the leadership of the Provincial and Federal governments where the target sectors are aligned with its interests. This will increase the communities’
exposure to investment opportunities. In this case, it is important for officials with these levels of
government to clearly understand Strathcona’s value proposition. The following table identifies how
these match with this economic diversification strategy.

**Figure 30: Sectors and Local, Regional Provincial and Federal Interests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Strathcona</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Alberta</th>
<th>Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alberta’s Industrial Heartland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Eagles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Lone Eagles program is much more independent in nature because although it is attracting people
with global business networks and sales on a national and international level, the County’s target is local.
Canada, Alberta and the Capital Region already have these people. Strathcona’s goal is to attract them
from the local area and into Strathcona.

**4.2.6 Integration with Other Municipal Departments**

For effective management of growth, the economic development office should continue to base its goals
and objectives on the strategies of other departments. These strategies need to include, but may not be
limited to:

- Sustainability Frameworks
- Regional Tourism Strategies
- Retail Market Study
- Industrial Lands Strategy
- Small Hamlet Development Strategies
- Social Sector Strategies for education, health, housing, etc.
- Recreation and Culture Strategy
- Land Use Planning Strategies
- Residential Growth Strategy
- Transportation and Public Transportation Strategy
- Agriculture Development Strategy
- Communication and Marketing Strategy.

In the same respect, staff in other municipal departments should be using this economic development
strategy as a “platform document” which guides their work.