



Parkland County Economic Development and Tourism Strategy: 2014-2018



November 19, 2014





Front Cover Images (Clockwise from top right):

TransAlta

Parkland County

Parkland County

Parkland County

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A scenic landscape photograph of a lake. In the foreground, there are green, out-of-focus plants with small yellow flowers. The middle ground features a body of water with tall reeds and grasses. A bird is captured in flight, its wings spread, over the water. The background shows a dense line of trees under a sky with dark, dramatic clouds and some lighter patches. The text "Executive Summary" is overlaid in white on the left side of the image.

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

After a strong year in 2013, Alberta's economy continues to surge in 2014. The labour market continues to buck the national trend, leading all provinces in job growth and attracting large inflows of migrants. These trends are fueled by accelerating manufacturing shipments, exports and production of crude oil products. The Capital Region remains a primary beneficiary, but sometimes trends can change.

While overall oil and gas related investment has been reaching new heights in recent months, with a portion of that investment directly landing in Parkland County, as more recent market activity has demonstrated, global politics and market changes can quickly translate to industry problems in any sector, even oil and gas.¹ A sudden drop in the value of oil may not be likely to last long, but it is enough to be a reminder that change can happen and other economic engines must be strong enough to shoulder some of the burden.

Importantly for Parkland County, there are growing opportunities in economic and fiscal diversification – an important goal of local business and community leaders. Further diversification is contingent upon an investment in infrastructure, marketing and customer service. With competition for business investment in the Capital Region at an all-time high, Parkland's municipal, community and business leaders must be relentless in their pursuit of entrepreneurs, investors and tourists or risk not living up to its potential.

This project provides a plan to optimize Parkland County's economic development capacity by prioritizing growth opportunities and supporting them with clear action plans.

It is an update of Parkland's 2009 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, which, from all accounts, has served the County's Economic Development Office well.

1 Argitis, Theophilos, "Alberta economy's dominance under threat from plunging oil price," Edmonton Journal, Oct 16, 2014: <http://www.edmontonjournal.com/Alberta+economy+dominance+under+threat+from+plunging+price/10295975/story.html>

Report Highlights and Key Observations:

Population growth – Parkland County's population has grown from 29,220 in 2006 to 30,568 in 2011; a rate of 4.6%. This places the County behind Alberta's growth rate of 10.8%.

Household incomes – Parkland County household incomes (\$100,023 in 2010) are slightly lower than Sturgeon County (\$103,762 in 2010) and Strathcona County (\$110,170 in 2010), but higher than Leduc County (\$86,398) and the Provincial median.

Employment by industry – Proportionately, Parkland County is above the provincial equivalent distributions in nine of its twenty best sectors, with highest scores going to specialty trade contractors, farms, construction of buildings, repair and maintenance, and truck transportation.

Occupational growth – Parkland County has seen strong occupational growth between 2006 and 2011, with declines in only two occupation categories: art, culture, recreation and sport; and natural resources, agriculture and related production.

Workforce by skill level – Parkland County's proportion of the available workforce across different skill level categories is on par with the province, except for on-the-job training where it has a higher proportion.

Commuting flows – Edmonton is the most common destination for Parkland County residents for work. In total, Edmonton, Spruce Grove and Stony Plain represent about 70% of residents' work destinations.



Despite an ever-changing economy, this Strategy points to course corrections rather than sweeping reforms to established economic development policies or practices. With that said, this Strategy includes a much stronger emphasis on development in rural communities.

This Strategic Plan and accompanying Action Plans describe a roadmap for the County and its partners. It illustrates how working with partners and different municipal departments will enhance employment and investment opportunities. If these Action Plans are implemented systematically and over the long-term, the County can shore up its economic base while maintaining its core values and improving personal quality of life.

Guiding Principles for Economic Development in Parkland

Through the consultation and research activities conducted for this project, a series of principles have been articulated by the community, and hence adopted by the consulting team, to guide the setting of priorities.

- Adopt an explicit culture of 'customer first' service within the municipality
- Ensure Parkland County's fiscal sustainability
- Seek to diversify the local economy and business composition
- Foster rural living and new rural-based businesses
- Continue inter-municipal collaboration to further economic development goals
- Invest in Acheson to ensure it remains a leading business location
- Promote strategic business growth, not for its own sake
- Improve residents' quality of life by enhancing recreational, cultural and social opportunities

These principals were aligned with the County's strengths and economic development opportunities to inform the Strategy's Action Plan. Parkland County's most notable strengths include:

TransAlta – This company is the single largest employer in the County as well as its single largest tax payer. TransAlta is a strong corporate citizen, engaging residents'

Report Highlights and Key Observations:

Business Patterns – Parkland County currently has 3,045 unique businesses, of which 1,236 employ at least one person other than the owner. The top five sectors where companies employ at least one employee in addition to the owner are:

- Construction (301 businesses)
- Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (159 businesses)
- Other Services (except Public Administration) (121 businesses)
- Transportation and Warehousing (118 businesses)
- Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (63 businesses)
- Manufacturing (63 businesses)

Business growth – Growth has been strongest in health care and social assistance; real estate and rental and leasing; and mining and oil and gas extraction.

Tourism in Parkland – There are seven broad categories that represent distinct dimensions of the tourism industry, and for which Parkland County has 246 enterprises falling within them. These are summarized as:

- 3 Travel service businesses
- 26 Recreation and entertainment businesses
- 20 Accommodation businesses
- 72 Retail businesses
- 18 Transportation businesses
- 31 Food and beverage service businesses
- 72 Other tourism affiliated businesses



lives and contributing to community vitality. It holds large tracts of land that can help the County to achieve its economic objectives.

Competitive tax rates – The County's competitive tax rates are central to investment attraction. Cost effectiveness has been noted as primary sales feature for attracting new businesses to the area or encouraging expansion.

Beautiful natural spaces – The County has many natural assets that residents and visitors can enjoy. Lake Wabamun and the North Saskatchewan River Valley are fitting examples, but there are many others.

Acheson Industrial Park and Acheson Business Association – Acheson is synonymous with opportunity and security. This has been further enhanced by Acheson Business Association's advocacy role and its championing of member needs.

Focusing Economic Development Priorities

Parkland County's economic drivers have the greatest potential of creating positive economic impact and are the focus of the Strategy's Action Plans (refer to sections 5-7 for the complete plans).

- **Rural Economic Development** contains a wide spectrum of opportunities which have presented themselves throughout the strategic planning process. Their importance must be emphasized as the County expands its definition of economic development. In the years ahead, the County will strengthen its economy with initiatives that recognize, but move beyond, the traditional maxims of increasing the tax base and creating jobs.
- **Acheson Industrial Area's** success has been a direct result of Parkland County's efforts to attract the interest of developers and end users/builders. With this momentum, now is not the time to become complacent. It is critical to remain 'top of mind' with the development community. Proactive marketing is also required to ensure that Acheson becomes home to the most desirable types of development.
- **TransAlta** is a particularly unique driver of Parkland County's economy. It was recognized in the 2009 Strategy and has since experienced both growth and change. As the landowner of huge tracts of land it has an asset that could relieve pressures that Parkland has been experiencing from developers wanting non-serviced industrial lands and the desire for more publicly available

Action Plans by Economic Drivers and Top Opportunities:

Rural Economic Development:

- Enhancing Rural Business Environment
- Building a Tourism Market Place
- Entrepreneurial Attraction and Retention
- Cultural Heritage and Tourism Asset Mapping
- Siting of Laydown Yards and Other Land Extensive Investments

Acheson Industrial Area:

- Investment Attraction in the Logistics and Industrial Sectors
- Infrastructure Improvements
- Maximize Land Utilization and Availability

TransAlta:

- Diversification of Rural Business Base
- Siting of Lower Density or Dry Development
- Expansion of Recreational Assets



recreation space. There are also significant opportunities which should be explored related to colocation of industry that can use TransAlta's utilities and by-products of production.

Finally, the Strategy underscores the need for the County to **improve communications** and more clearly **define the roles and responsibilities of its Economic Development Staff**. To this end, the Strategy outlines a recommended organizational structure for economic development and tourism department. It also identifies a series of actions to improve communications within the County and between the County and its residents and businesses.

Introduction





1 Introduction

After a strong year in 2013, Alberta's economy continues to surge in 2014. The labour market continues to buck the national trend, leading all provinces in job growth and attracting large inflows of migrants. These trends have been fueled by accelerating manufacturing shipments, exports and production of crude oil products. Most recently, however, sudden declines in oil prices have served as a reminder that every sector can experience highs and lows, reaffirming the importance of developing a diversified economy.² As Alberta battles to assert itself in other important economic dimensions, areas like Parkland County stand poised to reap the benefits of good times while also being able to weather the storm when times are not as good.

Further diversification in Parkland County is contingent upon investments in infrastructure, marketing and customer service. With competition for business investment in the Capital Region at an all-time high, Parkland's municipal, community and business leaders must be relentless in their pursuit of entrepreneurs, investors and tourists or risk not living up to its potential.

This project provides a plan to optimize Parkland County's economic development capacity by prioritizing growth opportunities and then supporting them with clear action plans.

This project is an update of Parkland's 2009 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, which, from all accounts, has served the County's Economic Development Office well. Despite an ever-changing economy, this Strategy points to course corrections rather than sweeping reforms to established economic development policies or practices. This supports an approach of continuous improvement, and strengthens the County's demonstrated commitment to being pro-active yet responsive to the needs of the entire County.

However, this strategy does include a much stronger emphasis on development in rural communities. This is a direct reflection of one of County Council's *2014-2018 Strategic Plan* Commitments: "Ensure residents benefit from local employment opportunities that help them achieve personal success."

Responding to the collective voice of the County's leadership, this Strategy advances the following objectives:

- Ensure Parkland County's fiscal sustainability
- Diversify the local economy and business composition
- Support rural living and new types of rural-based businesses

² Argitis, Theophilos, "Alberta economy's dominance under threat from plunging oil price," Edmonton Journal, Oct 16, 2014: <http://www.edmontonjournal.com/Alberta+economy+dominance+under+threat+from+plunging+price/10295975/story.html>



- Improve residents' quality of life by enhancing recreational, cultural and social opportunities
- Strengthen the competitive position of the Acheson Business Park
- Adopt an explicit culture of 'customer first' service within the municipality

This Strategic Plan and accompanying Action Plans describe a roadmap for the County and its partners. It illustrates how working together will enhance employment and investment opportunities. If these Action Plans are implemented systematically and over the long-term, the County can shore up its economic base while maintaining its core values and improving personal quality of life.

Parkland's Economy Since 2009





2 Parkland's Economy Since 2009

The purpose of the environmental scan is to provide a concise overview of Parkland County's demographic and economic footprint and some of its most recent developments. It begins with a review of some programs and initiatives offered by the County followed by an economic base analysis.

2.1 Economic Development Initiatives

Parkland County's Economic Development and Tourism Department and its partners have been busy since it last engaged Millier Dickinson Blais Inc. to complete its first economic development strategy in 2009. This section reviews some developments which have occurred since the last strategy, based on materials provided to the consultants from staff at Parkland County's municipal office and affiliated offices.

The spirit of Parkland County's enthusiasm for a well-balanced quality of life and strong and growing economy is demonstrated in its 2014-2018 Strategic Plan, which stated it would "Parkland County will be the rural community of choice for its progressive and strategic governance efforts to create one of the most competitive business environments in Alberta, and enhance the lives of our residents in pursuit of quality of life."³ Public engagement conducted in Entwistle, Blueberry, and Woodbend in January 2014 identified a common vision that resonated in similar ways based on community pride and a spirit to move "upward." Also important was respecting the environment, being proud of agriculture, growing the economy, and improving health, wellbeing and job opportunities.

³ Parkland County, Parkland County Strategic Plan: 2014-2018.

Key Environmental Scan Observations:

Demographics – Parkland County's population continues to grow, at a rate of 4.6%, but slower than the provincial rate of 10.8%. It has a comparatively smaller working age population compared to Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, but these communities feed its workforce greatly. Household income situates the County in the middle of the pack above Leduc County, but below Sturgeon and Strathcona counties. Unemployment in Parkland, Leduc, Strathcona and Sturgeon counties was consistently below provincial averages.

Labour force characteristics – Proportionately, Parkland County leads the province in nine of the 20 industry sectors, especially specialty trade contractors, farms, construction of buildings, repair and maintenance and truck transportation. The Counties available workforce according to skill level is on par with the province. Most commuters travel from Edmonton, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove to work in Parkland, while these three municipalities are also the most popular destinations for residents of Parkland County to commute to for work.

Business profile – Parkland County has 3,045 unique businesses, and its top five sectors are construction; professional scientific and technical services; other services (except public administration); transportation and warehousing; agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; and manufacturing. Proportionately, it leads its neighbours of Leduc, Strathcona and Sturgeon in mining and quarrying and oil and gas; utilities; information and cultural industries; and real estate and rental and leasing. It lags in wholesale trade and education services. Though its transportation and warehousing sector has seen significant growth, it trails that of the three competitor regions.



Progress is evident in the rural areas, where programs such as Alternative Land Use Services, Green Hectares and Intelligent Communities have sought to bring competitive advantages to rural entrepreneurs and farmers.

The **Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS)** pilot program has garnered attention as a partnership between the County and ALUS, promoting the balancing of “agriculture, wildlife and natural spaces for the benefit of both landowners and society.”⁴ ALUS is a Manitoba initiative, beginning in 2006, but has expanded across western Canada, with Parkland County



becoming the second in Alberta to partner with the organization.⁵ ALUS projects are admired for their sensible and flexible approaches to project management, operating under seven broad categories; native prairie establishment; pollinator habitat; multi-row shelterbelts; riparian enhancements; wetland restoration/creation; wildlife friendly fences, and; artificial nests for birds.⁶ Despite the potential benefits of the program, little has been reported about its progress by media or Parkland County, and it is subsequently difficult to chart its success.

The County has also attempted to enhance rural development in entrepreneurs in collaboration with **Green Hectares** through the Community Connector program. The program offers education, skills training, and development workshops geared to rural communities via online and in-person services.⁷ A report was issued after 2 years of the program estimating the direct economic benefits at \$250,318, and a further \$223,450 in indirect benefits. The program has made significant advances to bridge the rural-urban divide, observing that the rural context requires important attention to psychographic information (i.e. personalities, values, attitudes, etc.) in addition to traditional attention to demographic considerations.



⁴ Alternative Land Use Services, “Parkland ALUS Pilot Project – Agricultural Producers Needed!,” Feb 2014.

⁵ Alternative Land Use Services – Alberta, <http://alus.ca/category/alberta/>, n/d.

⁶ Alternative Land Use Services, “Parkland ALUS Pilot Project – Agricultural Producers Needed!,” Feb 2014.

⁷ Green Hectares and Parkland County, Community Connector Project Report, Parkland County, Jan 31, 2013.



Another strategy by Parkland County to enhance the rural economy has come from investment in the **Intelligent Communities** program. Intelligent communities are a growing area of interest among planners, economists, and social scientists because they represent the cross-roads at which creativity and innovation meet. There are five key indicators of intelligent communities: broadband connectivity, knowledge workforce, innovation, digital inclusion, and marketing and advocacy.⁸ Scholars are only now realizing the important role that rural areas play in the contribution to intelligent communities, via food supply, clean air and resources, arts, and natural beauty which can be used to inspire innovation.⁹ The contemporary view of rural life is less optimistic, however. As rural populations continue to decline, education levels stagnate and job opportunities diminish, the knock-on effect on tax-bases and local economies is exacerbated. The silver-lining to this trend is that the broadband economy is being hailed as a new era for rural engagement, provided the infrastructure is there. At the same time, even developing and creating the infrastructure is good for the economy. In response to the potential contribution Parkland County can play to intelligent community development, the County has begun to initiate parallel programs which address the above indicators of intelligent communities.

SMART Parkland has been developed as an intelligent community strategic plan. One important part of the plan is the broadband infrastructure, where projects have been developed to create two towers (Meridian Tower and Carvel Tower). The towers will make broadband connectivity a reality, while at the same time creating jobs in utilities and related sectors. In addition, a “Tech Fest” was organized in Carvel, to provide interactive learning opportunities to business and community association, and allowed them a chance to network as well.

Acheson has continued to thrive as well. Its business association is has been a supportive partner and eager participant in ongoing communications and outreach to the Acheson business community. There has been steady interest from a much wider range of developers than in 2009, and construction permit acquisition has grown exponentially since the last strategy. In addition Parkland County has increased the amount of serviceable land in Acheson in anticipation of continued growth and development.



⁸ Intelligent Community Forum, Intelligent Community Indicators, n/d. https://www.intelligentcommunity.org/index.php?src=gendocs&ref=Research_Intelligent_Community_Indicators&category=Research

⁹ Intelligent Community Forum, The Rural Imperative, n/d. www.intelligentcommunity.org/index.php?src=gendocs&ref=Rural-Imperative-Intro&link=Rural-Imperative-Intro



The County has also been interested in exploiting its existing strengths. In November 2011, a **transportation, logistics and distribution opportunity study** was published concerning the County.¹⁰ The report observed that transportation was a major advantage in the region, with faster transit times leading to savings for users. Furthermore, lower land costs are incentive to relocate warehousing and transport hubs to the area, including a favorable tax environment. In particular the report singles out Acheson as having tremendous growth potential. It concludes:

While it is unlikely that Edmonton will draw major retail distributors away from Calgary, Acheson is particularly well suited, both within Western Canadian and regional contexts, to serving northern and northwestern oil and gas, natural resources and consumer markets and supporting trade logistics and transport activity, in particular. This should be the focus of business attraction strategies.¹¹

In summary, Parkland County remains committed to the values of its mission and vision, having instituted numerous initiatives to encourage economic growth and improve rural life in general. These attempts have not been without problems, however; particularly minimal follow-up or transparency regarding ongoing projects or programs. Nonetheless, there are signs of a willingness to move forward while maintaining strong ties to the character and values of the region.

¹⁰ CPCS Transcom Limited, Parkland County: Transport/Logistics and Distribution Activity Opportunity Study, Nov. 24, 2011.

¹¹ CPCS Transcom Limited, Parkland County: Transport/Logistics and Distribution Activity Opportunity Study, Nov. 24, 2011.



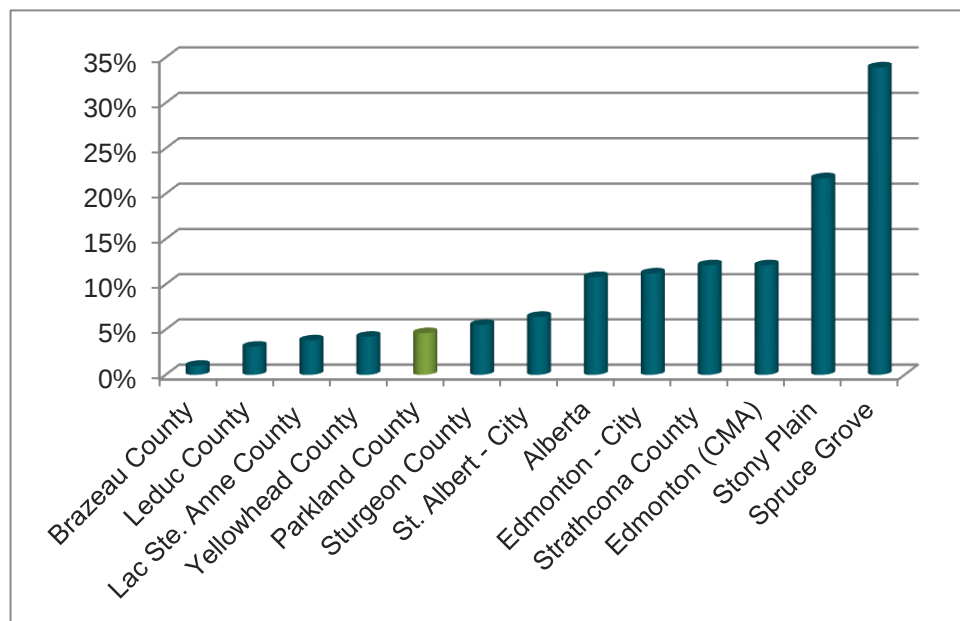
3 Economic Base Analysis

Parkland County's economic landscape is defined by its population, industry, and labour force. Since the County interacts and competes with other municipalities, it is important to take stock of its position vis-à-vis other counties and municipalities, and to consider how its relative position has changed over time. This section provides an overview of Parkland County's economic path and recent history.

Demographics

Data from the most recent 2011 Census shows that Parkland County's population has grown from 29,220 in 2006 to 30,568 in 2011; a rate of 4.6% (Figure 1). This places the County behind Alberta's growth rate of 10.8%. In comparison to other counties that

FIGURE 1: POPULATION GROWTH BETWEEN 2006 AND 2011



Key demographic observations:

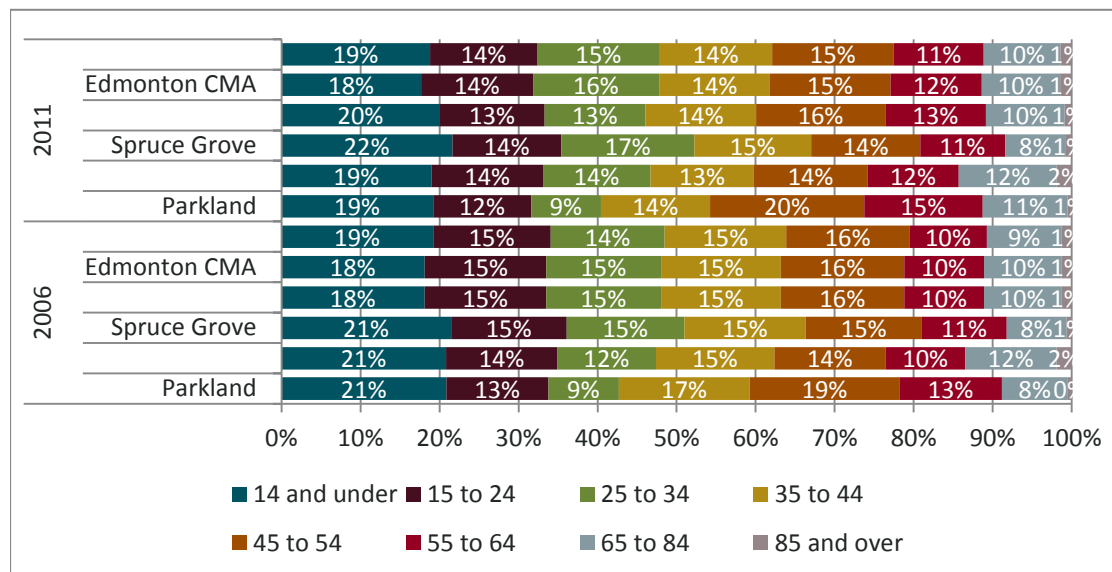
- **Population growth** – Parkland County's population has grown from 29,220 in 2006 to 30,568 in 2011; a rate of 4.6%. This places the County behind Alberta's growth rate of 10.8%.
- **Age of workers** – Parkland County trails neighbouring communities with respect to the size of its 15-34 age cohort. Controlling for Stony Plain and Spruce Grove, the difference is resolved, but this also means there are fewer people in that age-range actually living in the County, even if many from outside work in the County. Moreover, many of those people may also work in other places such as Edmonton or nearby counties. Proportionally, Parkland has fewer youths and young adults in than in greater Edmonton area and Alberta.
- **Household incomes** – Parkland County household incomes (\$100,023 in 2010) are slightly lower than Sturgeon County (\$103,762 in 2010) and Strathcona County (\$110,170 in 2010), but higher than Leduc County (\$86,398) and the Provincial median.
- **Education** – Education levels in Parkland County are similar to the provincial average across all categories except "apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma", where the County has about 7% more of its population in the category.
- **Unemployment** – Unemployment rates climbed across Alberta between 2006 and 2011, largely due to the global recession. While Parkland County's rate increased moderately from Leduc was the only county in the area that saw a decline in its unemployment rate during the period. In both census years, all four counties were well below the provincial unemployment rate median.



surround Edmonton, Parkland's population has grown more than Leduc (3.1%) but less than Sturgeon (5.5%) and Strathcona (12.1%).

Figure 2 shows the age distribution for Parkland County compared to Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, the Edmonton census metropolitan area (CMA), which includes Parkland County, and the Provincial totals for all of Alberta. Parkland County trails these all other comparators in the 15 to 24 and 25 to 34 age cohorts. This means, proportionally, there are fewer youths and young adults than older people in Parkland County than in the other areas. When Parkland is combined with Stony Plain and Spruce Grove, as is also shown in the figure, the gap in age distributions is resolved, suggesting that many people that live in Stony Plain and Spruce Grove likely work in Parkland, but it also means that Parkland County is missing out on a sizable tax-base that could otherwise be living in the county as well as working in it. On a positive note, Parkland's 45-54 year old cohort is about 4% larger than the Edmonton CMA and Alberta distributions, which means there are also likely more people in this age range that are well paid for their work. In fact, Parkland's median household income was greater than both in 2005 and 2010, as demonstrated in Figure 3.

FIGURE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTIONS, 2006 AND 2011

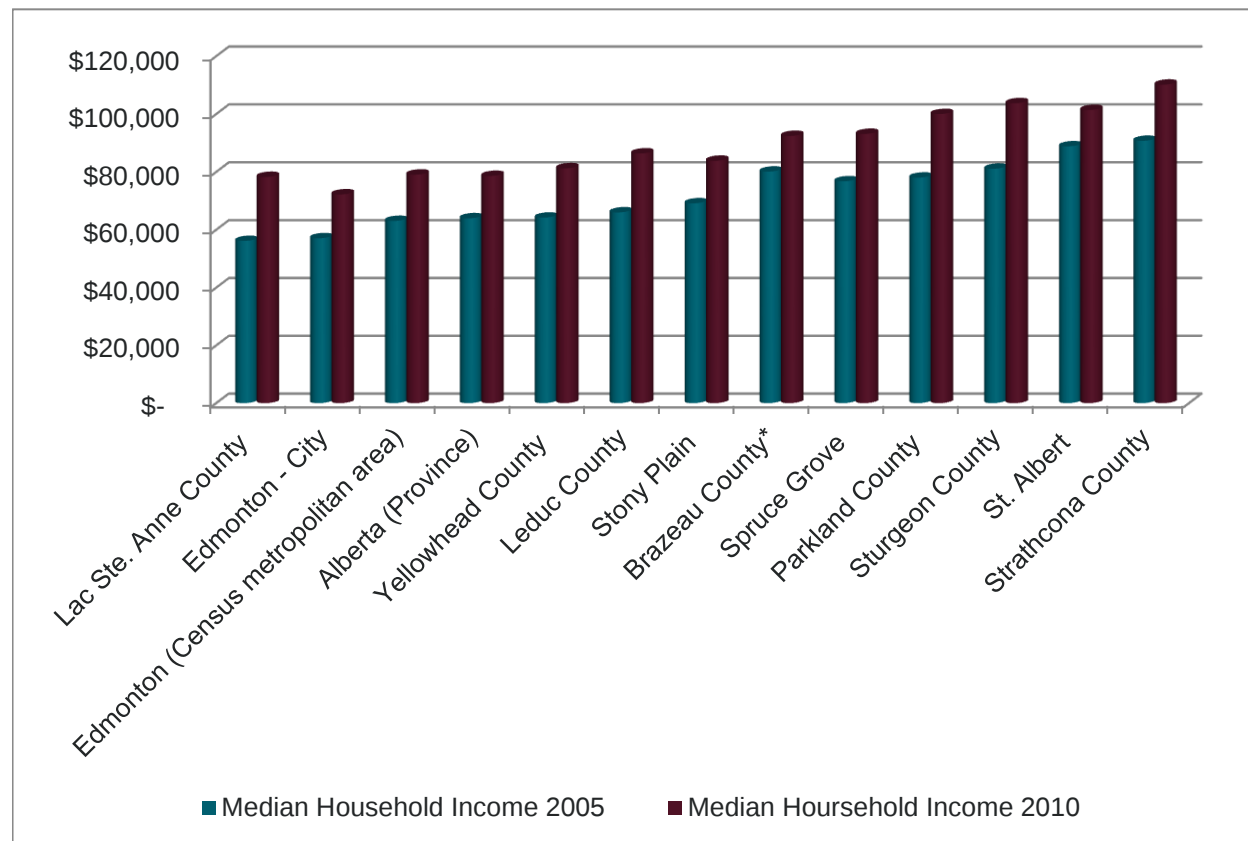


Source: Statistics Canada Census 2006 Statistics Canada National Household Survey 2011



Median household incomes in Parkland County (\$100,023 in 2010) are slightly lower than Sturgeon County (\$103,762 in 2010) and Strathcona County (\$110,170 in 2010), but higher than Leduc County (\$86,398).¹²

FIGURE 3: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME, 2005 AND 2010



Sources: Statistics Canada, Census 2006, Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

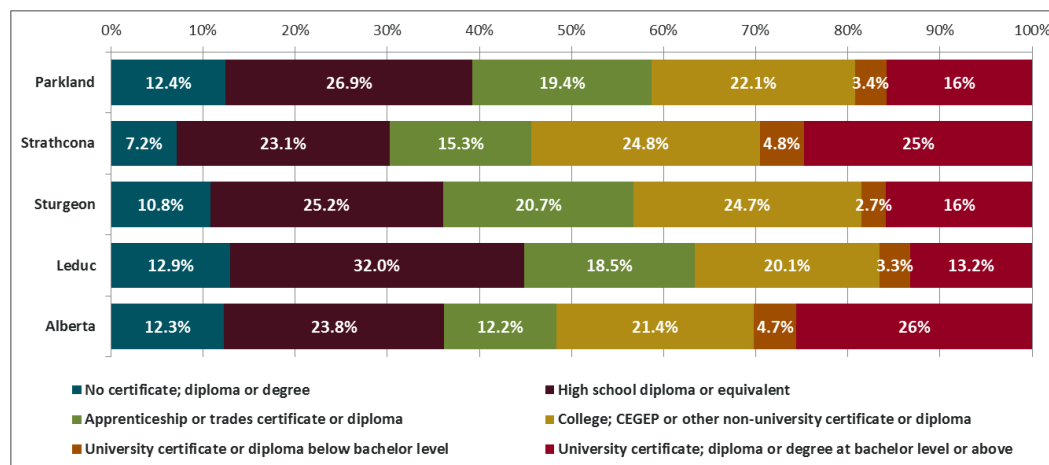
*Note: The Brazeau County statistic also includes totals for Drayton Valley

The household income statistic (before taxes) is likely inflated for tax year 2010 due to a larger share of lower income and less educated people not voluntarily joining the National Household Survey in 2011. Of all areas in the figure, the median increase from 2006 to 2010 is 25%, with St. Albert constituting the lowest increase (14%) and Leduc constituting the highest (31%).



Figure 4 shows the highest level of education for Parkland County and others which surround Edmonton, as well as the Alberta median for people over age 25. Education levels in Parkland County are relatively similar to the provincial average across all categories except “apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma”, where the County has about 7% more of its population in the category. Meanwhile, it also trails the Alberta average of university certificate, diploma or degree above bachelor by 10%. Compared to other counties, Parkland County has fewer university graduates than Strathcona, the same amount as Sturgeon, and more than Leduc.

FIGURE 4: COMPARTIVE EDUCATION LEVEL S, AGES 25 AND OLDER, 2011



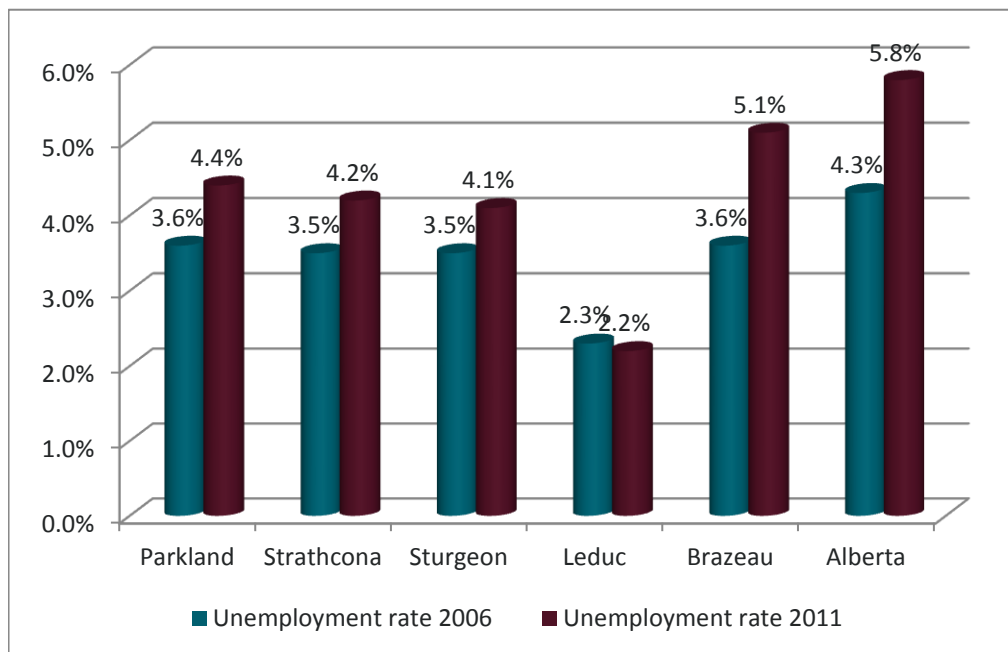
Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

Figure 5 shows unemployment rates for Parkland and other municipalities. The effects of the global recession reverberated throughout Alberta, leading to a median increase from 4.3% in 2006 to 5.8% by 2011. Unemployment levels increased in Parkland, Strathcona, Sturgeon and Brazeau counties between 2006 and 2011, largely due to the recession which began in late 2008. Leduc was the only county in the area that saw a decline in its unemployment rate during the period. In both census years, all five counties were well below the provincial unemployment median. It is likely that many if not all municipalities have seen declines as in 2013 it was reported Alberta’s economy had grown by 3.9%.¹³

¹³ Alberta Canada, “Economic Results” Government of Alberta, last updated, Jul 22, 2014. <http://albertacanada.com/business/overview/economic-results.aspx>



FIGURE 5: COMPARATIVE EMPLOYMENT AND PARTICIPATION RATES, 2006 AND 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2006, Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

Note: the Brazeau County statistic also includes totals for Drayton Valley



Labour Force by Industry

Figure 6 compares the proportional distribution of different sectors of the economy across Parkland County based on total labour force, in contrast to Strathcona, Sturgeon and Leduc for 2011. The County leads the other three counties in the following categories (where “greatly” pertains to at least 2% greater than or equal to the next highest scoring county and “marginally” pertains to less than 2%):

- Utilities (marginally)
- Construction (greatly)
- Transportation and warehousing (greatly)
- Administrative and support; waste management and remediation services (tied with Strathcona)
- Accommodation and food services (marginally)

Parkland County trails the others in the following sectors:

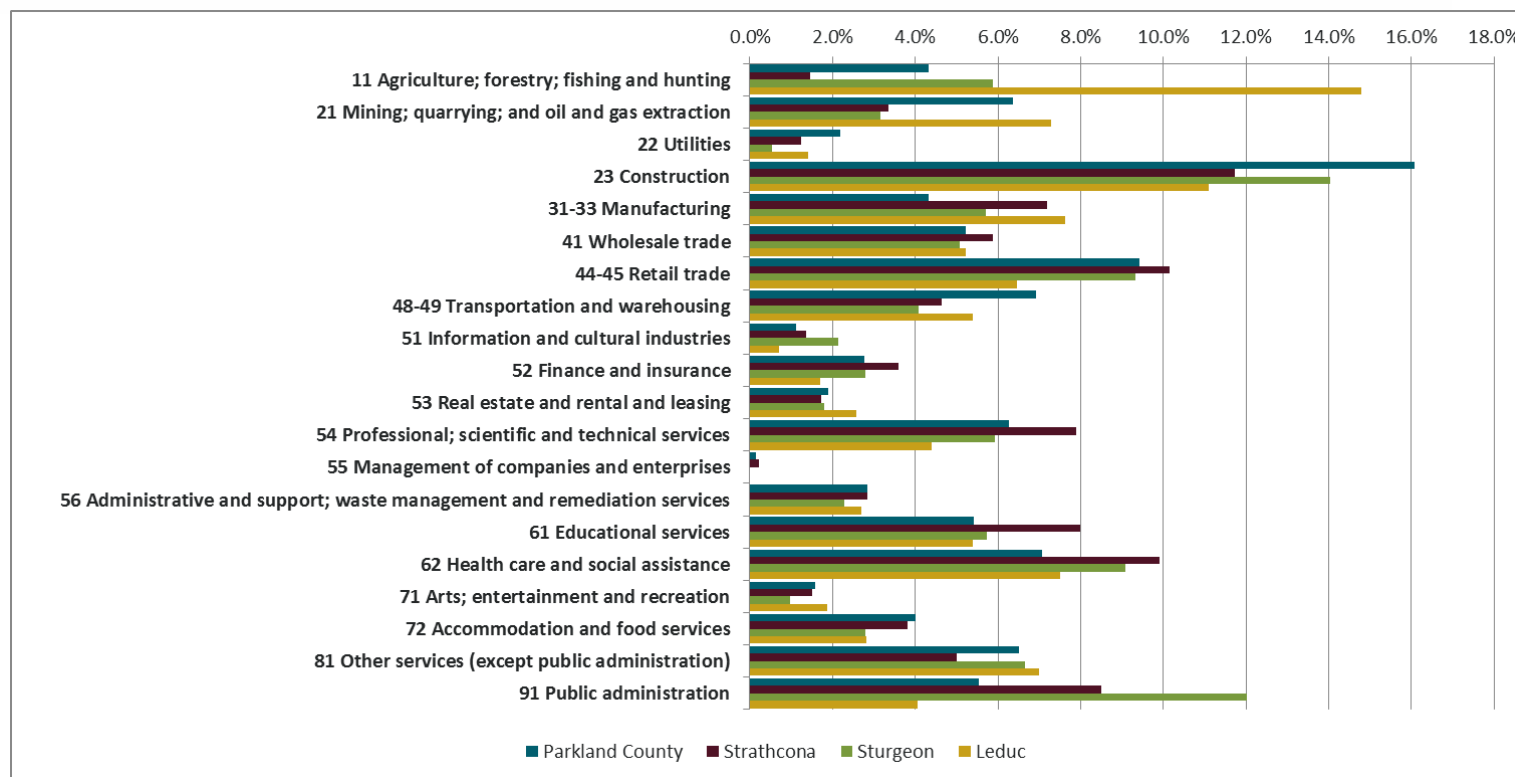
- Manufacturing (greatly)
- Education services (tied with Leduc)
- Healthcare and social assistance (marginally)

Key Labour Force Observations:

- **Employment by industry** – Proportionately, Parkland County is above the provincial equivalent distributions in nine of its twenty best sectors, with highest scores going to specialty trade contractors, farms, construction of buildings, repair and maintenance, and truck transportation.
- **Occupational growth** – Parkland County has seen strong occupational growth between 2006 and 2011, with declines in only two occupation categories: art, culture, recreation and sport; and natural resources, agriculture and related production.
- **Workforce by skill level** – Parkland County’s proportion of the available workforce across different skill level categories is on par with the province, except for on-the-job training where it has a higher proportion.
- **Commuting flows** – Edmonton is the most common destination for Parkland County residents for work. In total, Edmonton, Spruce Grove and Stony Plain represent about 70% of residents’ work destinations. Of those who travel to Parkland County for work, Edmonton contributes slightly more residents to Parkland County than the County contributes to Edmonton (by about 2.6%). Spruce Grove and Stony Plain also contribute a high proportion of workers to the County.



FIGURE 6: TOTAL LABOUR FORCE BY INDUSTRY FOR SELECTED GEOGRAPHIES, 2011

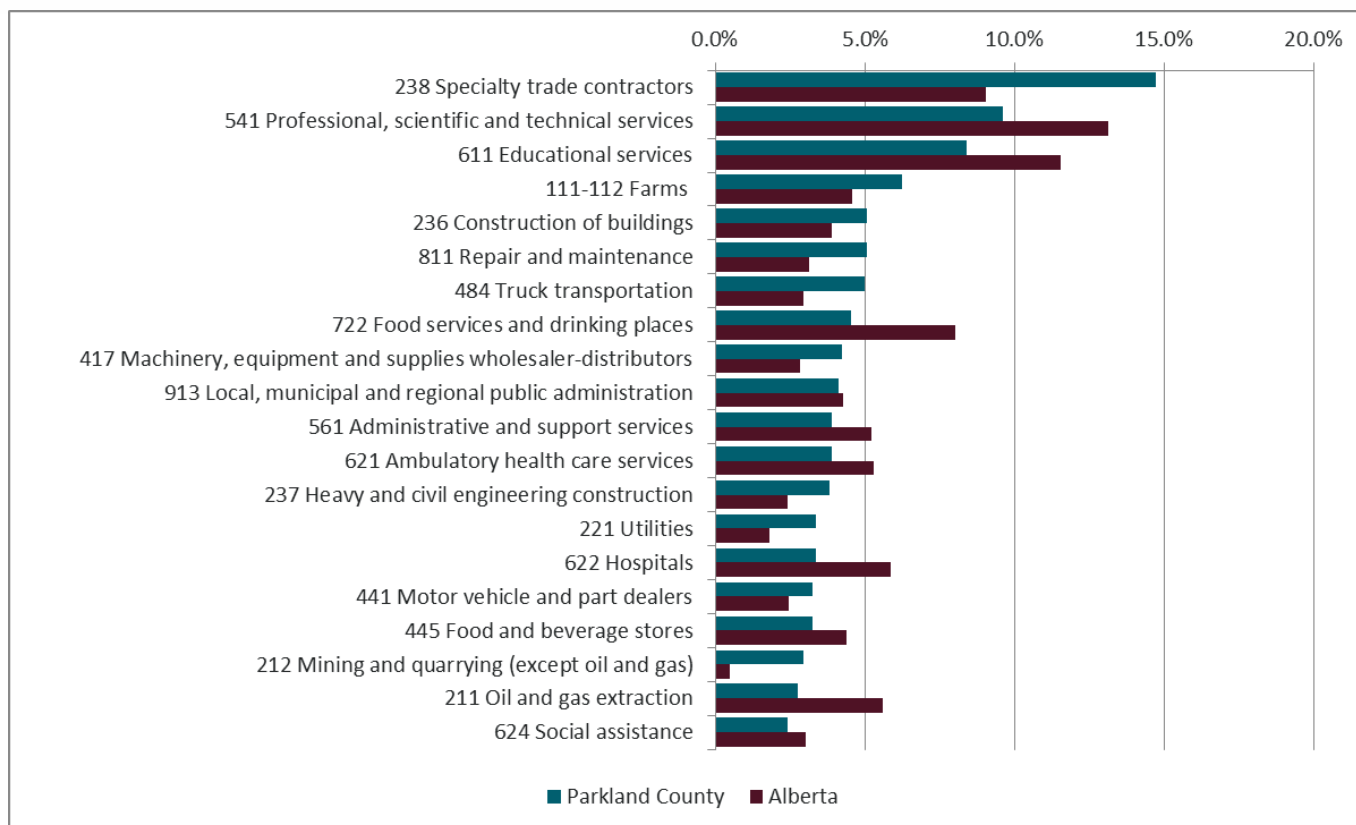


Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

Figure 7 demonstrates Parkland County's top 20 industries, and provides a comparison to the Provincial proportion for the same categories. The County leads the province in nine of the 20 sectors, with highest scores going to specialty trade contractors, farms, construction of buildings, repair and maintenance, and truck transportation. Growth in the population may account for some of these strong categories, several of which intersect with the construction industry. As the population in the area continues to grow at a modest yet consistent rate, continued demand for construction support occupations can be expected to remain in high demand.



FIGURE 7: TOP 20 SECTORS IN PARKLAND COUNTY COMPARED WITH ALBERTA, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011, 99-012-X2011030.



Labour Force Trends, 2006-2011

Parkland County has seen strong occupational growth between 2006 and 2011, with declines in only two occupation categories; art, culture, recreation and sport, and natural resources, agriculture and related production. Unfortunately, because Parkland County prides itself on its agricultural contribution to the capital and the rest of the province, the decline of 23.7% carries a special burden. The labour force category that had the highest growth was “education, law and social, community service and government service occupations (+24.1%).” Combined, the large decrease in the one category and large increase in the other balance out, with additional gains contributed from management, business, finance, and administration, and natural and applied science occupations. Overall, occupational growth posted an increase of 4.3%.

FIGURE 8: LABOUR FORCE GROWTH BY OCCUPATION, 2006 AND 2011

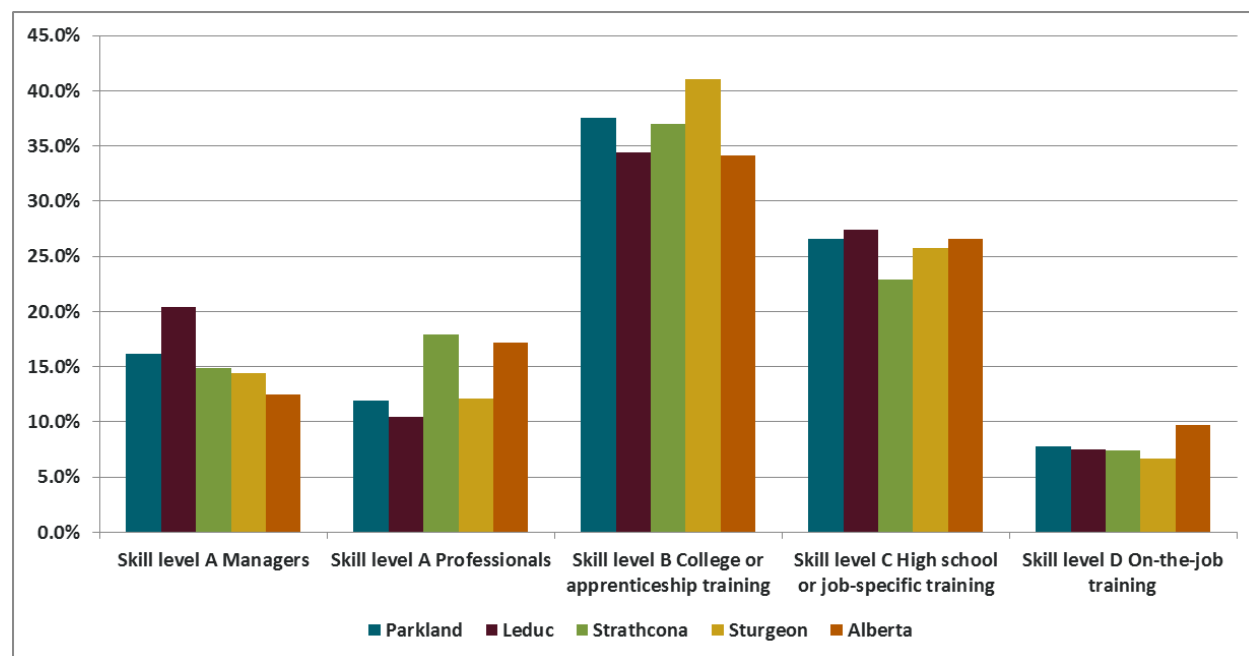
	2011	2011 % of total	2006	2006 % of total	Change from 2006 to 2011
0 Management occupations	2,870	15.7%	2,513	14.4%	14.2%
1 Business; finance and administration occupations	3,175	17.4%	2,779	15.9%	14.2%
2 Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	1,095	6.0%	959	5.5%	14.2%
3 Health occupations	745	4.1%	812	4.6%	-8.2%
4 Occupations in education; law and social; community and government services	1,545	8.5%	1,245	7.1%	24.1%
5 Occupations in art; culture; recreation and sport	260	1.4%	295	1.7%	-11.9%
6 Sales and service occupations	2,980	16.3%	3,059	17.5%	-2.6%
7 Trades; transport and equipment operators and related occupations	4,365	23.9%	4,441	25.4%	-1.7%
8 Natural resources; agriculture and related production occupations	710	3.9%	930	5.3%	-23.7%
9 Occupations in manufacturing and utilities	510	2.8%	465	2.7%	9.8%
Total	18,255	100.0%	17,497	100.0%	4.3%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2006, Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.



The proportion of the available workforce across different skill level categories (Figure 9) sees Parkland County in the middle of the pack across all levels except on the job training, where it leads in 'On-the-job training'. All four counties trail behind the provincial average. Leduc leads in management skills and high school or job-specific skills, while Strathcona leads in level A professionals and Sturgeon leads in college or apprenticeship training.

FIGURE 9: WORKFORCE SKILL LEVELS FOR FOUR COUNTIES AND ALBERTA

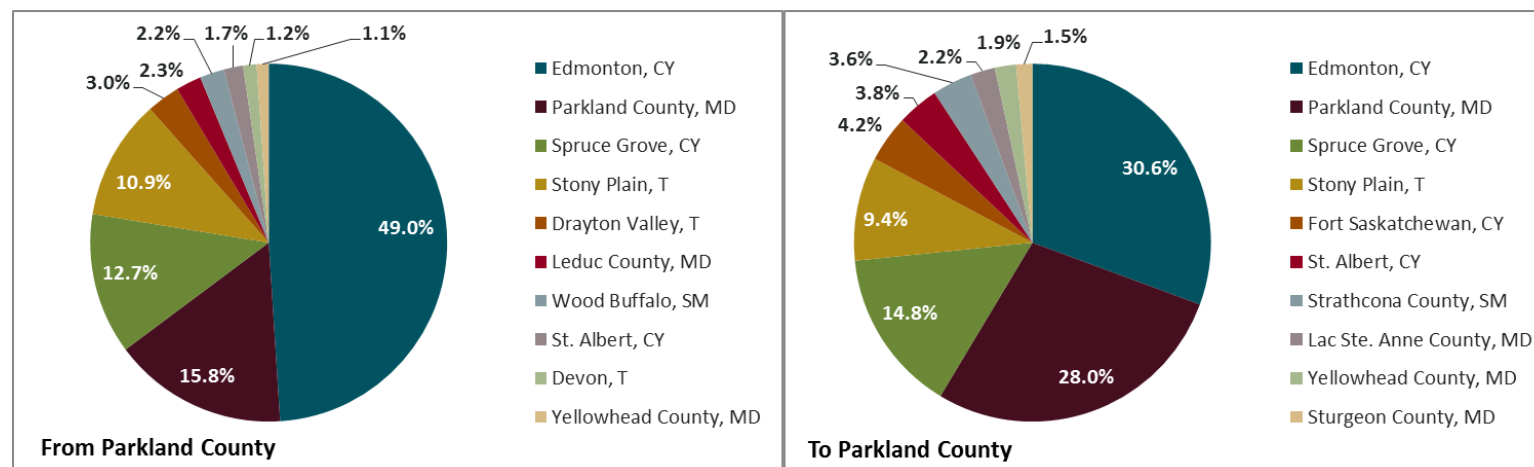


Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011, 99-012-X2011054.



Figure 10 shows commuting patterns among the top 10 destinations from Parkland County and to Parkland County. Edmonton is the most common destination for Parkland County residents for work. Parkland County is the second most common place for residents to commute to, meaning they live and work in the same county. Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, which are both within Parkland County's geographic area, but external to its municipal jurisdiction, constitute the third and four largest destinations from the County, respectively. In total, Edmonton, Spruce Grove and Stony Plain represent about 70% of residents' work destinations.

FIGURE 10: COMMUTING PATTERNS FROM AND TO PARKLAND COUNTY



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011, 99-012-X2011032.

Turning to those that commute to Parkland County, of all commuters to the area, Edmonton contributes slightly more residents to Parkland County (by about 2.6%). Spruce Grove and Stony Plain also contribute a high proportion of workers. Comparing those that commute to Parkland with those that commute from the County, Dayton valley, Leduc County, Wood Buffalo and Devon are all within the top 10 work for Parkland Residents, while Fort Saskatchewan, Strathcona County, Lac Ste. Anne County, and Sturgeon County are unique areas where people commute from.



Business Patterns in Parkland County

Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Patterns Data provides a record of business establishments by industry and size. This data is collected by Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). The business data collected for Parkland County includes all local businesses that meet at least one of the three following criteria:

- Have an employee workforce for which they submit payroll remittances to CRA; or
- Have a minimum of \$30,000 in annual sales revenue; or
- Are incorporated under a federal or provincial act and have filed a federal corporate income tax form within the past three years.

The Canadian Business Patterns Data records business counts by "Total", "Indeterminate" and "Subtotal" categories. The establishments in the "Indeterminate" category include the self-employed (i.e. those who do not maintain an employee payroll, but may have contracted workers, family members or business owners). With CRA as a source, Canadian Business Patterns Data does not include businesses without a business number or those with annual sales less than \$30,000. The population of these small, unincorporated businesses is thought to be in the range of 600,000 in all of Canada.

The remainder of this section elaborates on business growth in greater detail for Parkland County and its comparator regions.

Parkland County currently has 3,045 unique businesses, of which 1,236 employ at least one other person other than the owner (Figure 11). This means 1,809 businesses in the County – nearly half – are indeterminate. This supports the overall Canadian norm of small and medium sized enterprises comprising a significant portion of the Canadian economy. The top five sectors where companies employ at least one employee in addition to the owner are:

- Construction (301 businesses)
- Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (159 businesses)

Key Business Pattern Observations:

- Parkland County currently has 3,045 unique businesses, of which 1,236 employ at least one person other than the owner. The top five sectors where companies employ at least one employee in addition to the owner are:
 - Construction (301 businesses)
 - Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (159 businesses)
 - Other Services (except Public Administration) (121 businesses)
 - Transportation and Warehousing (118 businesses)
 - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (63 businesses)
 - Manufacturing (63 businesses)
- **Business growth** – Growth has been strongest in health care and social assistance; real estate and rental and leasing; and mining and oil and gas extraction.
- **Relative business growth** – Compared to Leduc, Strathcona and Sturgeon counties, Parkland County leads business growth in a number of industries including: mining and quarrying and oil and gas extraction; utilities; information and cultural industries; and real estate and rental and leasing. It lags the other jurisdictions, in wholesale trade and education services.
- **Transportation and warehousing** – In Parkland County, transportation and warehousing businesses have experienced relatively less growth (21%) compared to combined average growth of 27.8%. Leduc, Strathcona and Sturgeon County.



- Other Services (except Public Administration) (121 businesses)
- Transportation and Warehousing (118 businesses)
- Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (63 businesses)
- Manufacturing (63 businesses)

FIGURE 11: NUMBER OF BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS BY SECTOR, PARKLAND COUNTY 2013

Industry (NAICS)	Total	Indeterminate	Subtotal	1 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 19	20-49	50-99	100-199	200-499	500 +
Total Economic Snapshot	3045	1809	1236	819	201	91	71	28	17	6	3
11 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	285	222	63	42	14	6	1	0	0	0	0
21 Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	102	50	52	39	5	3	2	1	1	0	1
22 Utilities	10	4	6	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0
23 Construction	629	328	301	195	51	21	15	13	5	1	0
31-33 Manufacturing	114	51	63	16	11	13	13	5	4	1	0
41 Wholesale Trade	99	51	48	19	11	7	7	1	2	0	1
44-45 Retail Trade	137	77	60	32	17	5	6	0	0	0	0
48-49 Transportation and Warehousing	259	141	118	91	16	6	3	1	1	0	0
51 Information and Cultural Industries	17	12	5	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
52 Finance and Insurance	97	75	22	16	4	0	1	1	0	0	0
53 Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	256	208	48	34	6	4	2	0	1	1	0
54 Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	415	256	159	146	11	1	0	0	1	0	0
55 Management of Companies and Enterprises	86	73	13	8	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
56 Administrative and Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services	129	69	60	37	14	5	2	1	0	1	0
61 Educational Services	20	11	9	4	2	1	2	0	0	0	0
62 Health Care and Social Assistance	72	32	40	29	7	2	2	0	0	0	0
71 Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	30	19	11	2	0	3	3	2	1	0	0
72 Accommodation and Food Services	52	19	33	10	11	4	5	2	0	0	1
81 Other Services (except Public Administration)	232	111	121	91	18	8	4	0	0	0	0
91 Public Administration	4	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Total Economy	3045	1809	1236	819	201	91	71	28	17	6	3

Source: Canadian Business Patterns, Statistics Canada, 2013.



The top five indeterminate sectors are:

- Construction (328 businesses)
- Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (256 businesses)
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (222 businesses)
- Real Estate and Rental and Leasing (208 businesses)
- Transportation and Warehousing (141 businesses)

The only notable difference between the top five indeterminate industries and the top five industries that employ at least one additional employee, is that the former includes “other services” while the latter includes “real estate and rental and leasing.” There is considerable overlap between the two categories otherwise.

Also notable are manufacturing and construction businesses, which have the highest numbers of businesses that employ more than 100 people.

Figure 12 compares business patterns over a five year span in Parkland County (2008 to 2013). Overall, there was an increase in businesses of 35.9%. Growth has been strongest in health care and social assistance (from 40 to 72 businesses), real estate and rental and leasing (from 144 to 256 businesses) mining, oil and gas (from 65 to 102 businesses) and administrative and support, waste management and remediation services (from 85 to 129). An area that also saw growth by a factor of 100 percent, was utilities, however the increase was from 5 companies to 10.

Indeterminate growth is strongest in utilities (1 to 4 businesses), health care and social assistance (13 to 32 businesses), real estate and rental and leasing (111 to 208), mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, (26 to 50 businesses) and administrative and support, waste management and remediation services (36 to 69). Overall indeterminate, business growth saw an increase of 44%.

There were three sectors with declines in the number of businesses; public administration (20%), education services (13%), and wholesale trade (2%). Declines in wholesale trade and education services are also notable in indeterminate businesses, while public administration remained the same at zero.



FIGURE 12: NUMBER OF BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS BY SECTOR, PARKLAND COUNTY 2008 AND 2013

Industry (NAICS)	December 2008			December 2013			2008-2012	
	Total	Indeterminate	Subtotal	Total	Indeterminate	Subtotal	% change total	% change subtotal
Total Economic Snapshot	2240	1257	983	3045	1809	1236	35.9%	25.7%
11 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	212	168	44	285	222	63	34.4%	43.2%
21 Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	65	26	39	102	50	52	56.9%	33.3%
22 Utilities	5	1	4	10	4	6	100.0%	50.0%
23 Construction	466	216	250	629	328	301	35.0%	20.4%
31-33 Manufacturing	96	39	57	114	51	63	18.8%	10.5%
41 Wholesale Trade	101	54	47	99	51	48	-2.0%	2.1%
44-45 Retail Trade	111	69	42	137	77	60	23.4%	42.9%
48-49 Transportation and Warehousing	214	118	96	259	141	118	21.0%	22.9%
51 Information and Cultural Industries	15	9	6	17	12	5	13.3%	-16.7%
52 Finance and Insurance	67	56	11	97	75	22	44.8%	100.0%
53 Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	144	111	33	256	208	48	77.8%	45.5%
54 Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	268	152	116	415	256	159	54.9%	37.1%
55 Management of Companies and Enterprises	73	63	10	86	73	13	17.8%	30.0%
56 Administrative and Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services	85	36	49	129	69	60	51.8%	22.4%
61 Educational Services	23	13	10	20	11	9	-13.0%	-10.0%
62 Health Care and Social Assistance	40	13	27	72	32	40	80.0%	48.1%
71 Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	23	13	10	30	19	11	30.4%	10.0%
72 Accommodation and Food Services	38	13	25	52	19	33	36.8%	32.0%
81 Other Services (except Public Administration)	189	87	102	232	111	121	22.8%	18.6%
91 Public Administration	5	0	5	4	0	4	-20.0%	-20.0%
Total Economy	2240	1257	983	3045	1809	1236	35.9%	25.7%

Source: Canadian Business Patterns, Statistics Canada, 2008 and 2013.

Business growth in comparison to other nearby counties may present opportunities for identifying areas of distinct competitive advantage. For this reason Leduc, Strathcona and Sturgeon counties become ideal comparators. To look at the actual numbers of an aggregate representation of the three other counties would introduce problems of comparability; therefore, comparisons are best made based on percentages of growth over a defined period from 2008 to 2013.



Figure 13 provides a comparison of business growth across industry sectors between Parkland County and a combined pool of Leduc, Strathcona and Sturgeon counties. Parkland County leads growth in mining, quarrying, oil and gas, utilities, information and cultural industries, real estate and rental and leasing, administrative and support, waste management and remediation services, and health care and social assistance. It lags the other jurisdictions, most significantly, in wholesale trade and education services, where Parkland County has seen declines in both sectors despite growth in the other counties. Overall Parkland County trails the combined economic footprint of Leduc, Strathcona, and Sturgeon counties by a slight margin of 1.5%. Transportation and warehousing has only constituted an increase of about 31%.

FIGURE 13: PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF BUSINESSES BY SECTOR, PARKLAND COUNTY AND OTHERS (LEDUC, STRATHCONA, AND STURGEON, COMBINED) 2008-2013

Industry (NAICS)	Indeterminate Intake Parkland	Indeterminate Intake Other	1 or more employees Parkland	1 or more employees other	Total Change Parkland	Total Change Other
Total Economic Snapshot	43.9%	45.4%	25.7%	28.0%	35.9%	37.4%
11 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	32.1%	69.1%	43.2%	110.1%	34.4%	77.0%
21 Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	92.3%	40.6%	33.3%	12.9%	56.9%	24.2%
22 Utilities	300.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
23 Construction	51.9%	54.9%	20.4%	43.7%	35.0%	49.4%
31-33 Manufacturing	30.8%	22.6%	10.5%	4.3%	18.8%	11.3%
41 Wholesale Trade	-5.6%	17.4%	2.1%	9.3%	-2.0%	12.8%
44-45 Retail Trade	11.6%	27.1%	42.9%	15.0%	23.4%	19.6%
48-49 Transportation and Warehousing	19.5%	32.4%	22.9%	23.4%	21.0%	27.8%
51 Information and Cultural Industries	33.3%	-30.4%	-16.7%	0.0%	13.3%	-19.2%
52 Finance and Insurance	33.9%	48.1%	100.0%	6.2%	44.8%	36.0%
53 Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	87.4%	53.8%	45.5%	73.8%	77.8%	57.4%
54 Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	68.4%	41.0%	37.1%	33.4%	54.9%	37.9%
55 Management of Companies and Enterprises	15.9%	25.2%	30.0%	-9.4%	17.8%	17.3%
56 Administrative and Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services	91.7%	24.7%	22.4%	27.6%	51.8%	26.2%
61 Educational Services	-15.4%	37.9%	-10.0%	39.6%	-13.0%	38.7%
62 Health Care and Social Assistance	146.2%	125.0%	48.1%	39.4%	80.0%	56.8%
71 Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	46.2%	24.6%	10.0%	20.0%	30.4%	22.9%
72 Accommodation and Food Services	46.2%	22.6%	32.0%	28.1%	36.8%	26.8%
81 Other Services (except Public Administration)	27.6%	70.0%	18.6%	11.8%	22.8%	35.4%
91 Public Administration	0.0%	0.0%	-20.0%	-42.9%	-20.0%	-30.0%
Total Economy	43.9%	45.4%	25.7%	28.0%	35.9%	37.4%

Source: Canadian Business Patterns, Statistics Canada, 2008 and 2013.



Since suggestions were made in Parkland County's previous economic and tourism development strategy to prioritize "lone eagle" business growth, it is worth noting that growth has been comparably strongest in utilities, health care and social services, administrative support, mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction and waste management and remediation services. On the other hand, growth in the other counties is stronger in other services (except public administration), retail trade, agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, management of companies and enterprises and finance and insurance. Overall, the three other counties represent a combined growth of 3% more than Parkland County in regard to indeterminate businesses.

In summary, Parkland County does have strong growth in a number of vital economic sectors, such as health care and social assistance, real estate and rental and leasing and in mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction, but some of these strengths are shared with surrounding counties. Where Parkland County does have a distinct competitive advantage is in mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction, utilities, information and cultural industries and real estate and rental and leasing sectors.

Areas of specific interest from the previous economic and tourism strategic plan such as transportation and warehousing have seen relatively moderate growth (21%) when compared to the tremendous growth across Leduc, Strathcona and Sturgeon County of 27.8%.

Tourism Development in Parkland County

While some resources have been committed to tourism efforts in the past, it has not been a strong priority in Parkland County. In fact, the previous economic development strategy advised to use limited financial resources on other priority areas. Nonetheless, the tourism sector is a component of the local economy and, as even its name indicates, a mandated component of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

The tourism industry includes many business types, some of which may not appear to be connected to tourism at all, but in fact they are. Tourists may be visiting the region for a variety of personal or professional reasons and consequently require different amenities. A family visiting to take part in a wedding may use tourism assets

Key Tourism Industry Observations:

- **Industry Categories** – There are seven broad categories that represent distinct dimensions of the tourism industry, and for which Parkland County has 246 enterprises falling within them. These are summarized as:
 - 3 Travel service businesses
 - 26 Recreation and entertainment businesses
 - 20 Accommodation businesses
 - 72 Retail businesses
 - 18 Transportation businesses
 - 31 Food and beverage service businesses
 - 72 Other tourism affiliated businesses

- **Top five sub-sectors** – There are also distinct sectors which can be identified by their North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 2013, code. The top five sectors affiliated with the tourism industry are:
 - 21 General Automotive repair businesses*
 - 12 Golf and country clubs
 - 11 Limited service restaurants
 - 10 Miscellaneous store retailers (except beer and wine-making supply stores)
 - 9 Full service restaurants, tied with 9 Beauty salons

*Note: General automotive repair businesses are classified within the tourism industry sector because they are an associated support industry, as are retail stores and other amenities that tourists rely upon as they travel.



differently than business professionals in the area for a conference. Some people may be coming to the region specifically, while others may be passing through. All these factors contribute to the diversity of the tourism sector.

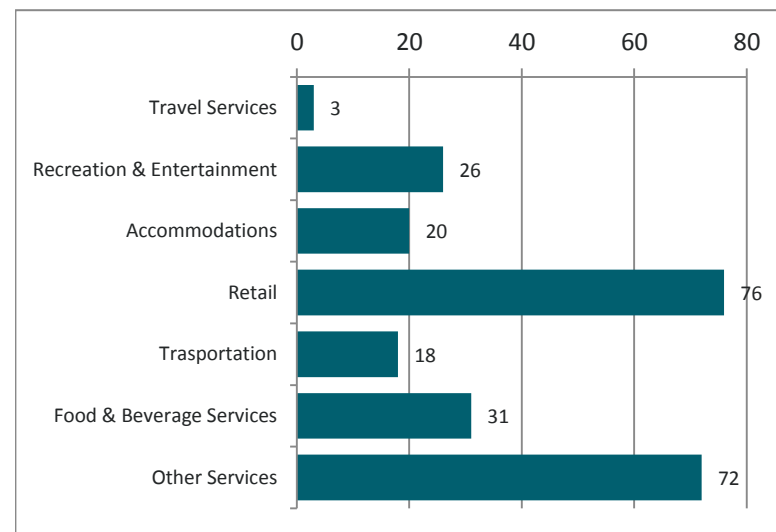
Tourism related industry can be tracked according to seven broad sectors:

- Travel services (travel agencies; tour operators; other travel arrangement and reservation services)
- Recreation & entertainment (art dealers; theatre companies; horse race tracks; casinos; museums; golf and country clubs etc.)
- Accommodations (hotels, motor hotels, motels, resorts, bed and break fasts, RV parks, campgrounds, etc.)
- Food & beverage services (food service contractors; caterers; mobile food services; drinking places; full service restaurants, and; limited service eating places)
- Retail (stores and shops of all kinds)
- Transportation (non-scheduled specialty flying services; taxi service; limousine service; chartered bus industry etc.)
- Other tourism affiliated services (postal services; general automotive repair; beauty salons; dry cleaning etc.)

These data are available via Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Patterns data sets, constituting over 140 specific sector categories (at the six digit North American Industry Classification System level).¹⁴

In Parkland County there are currently 246 enterprises associated with the tourism sector, summarized in **Error! Reference source not found..** The retail sector has the highest number of businesses, ranging from grocers to beer, wine and liquor stores, to gift, novelty and souvenir stores. There are 76 businesses in this category. The category with the least amount of businesses, three, is travel services, such as travel agencies or tour operators. The number of accommodation businesses is explained by five hotels, two motor hotels, one resort, three motels, one bed and breakfast, four recreational vehicle (RV) parks and campgrounds, two hunting and fishing camps, one recreational and vacation cabin, and one "other."

FIGURE 14: PRIMARY TOURISM CATEGORIES



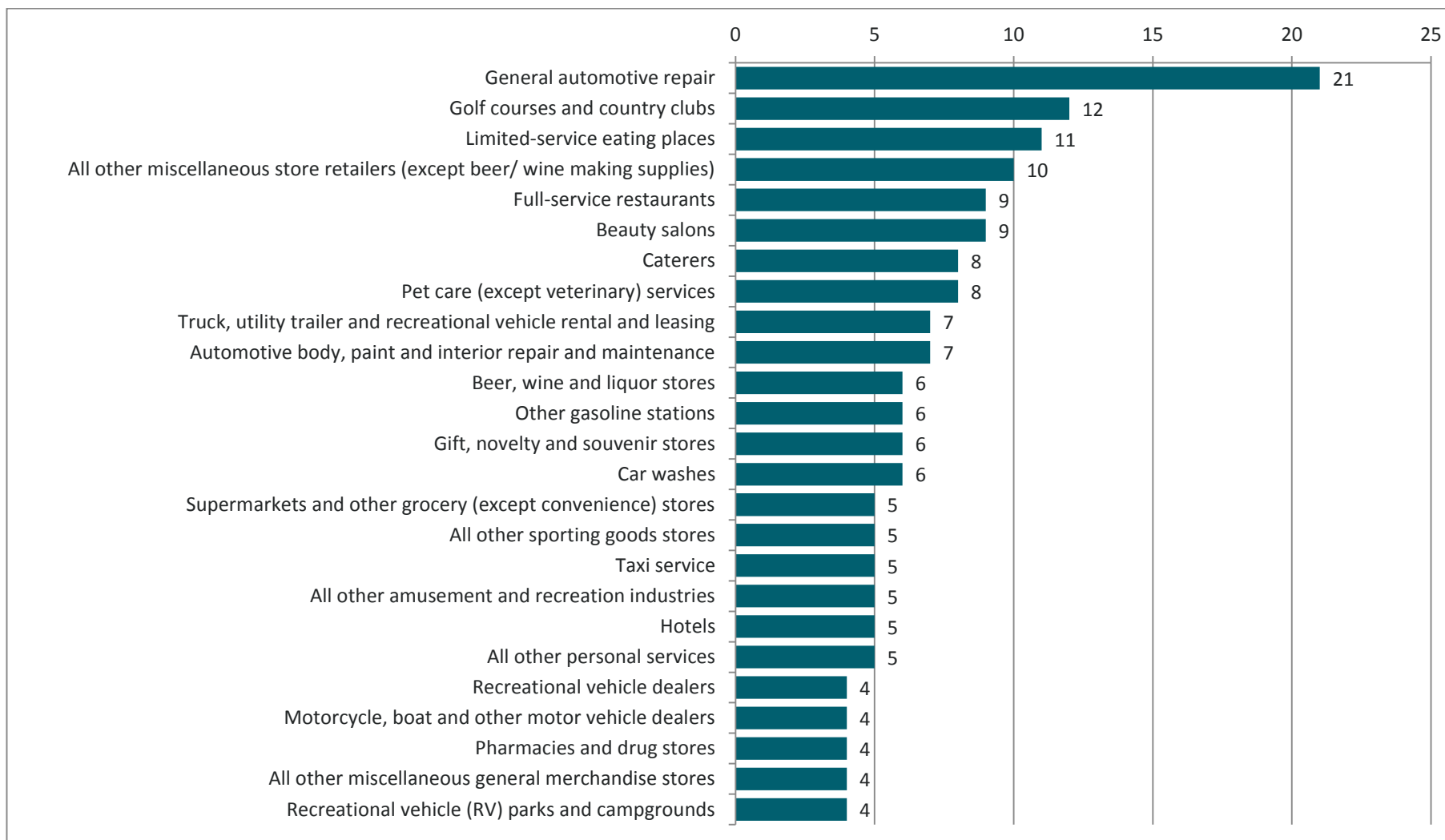
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Patterns, Parkland County, 2013.

¹⁴ Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Patterns, Parkland County, 2013. Note: the 140 categories are based on Province of Ontario tourism tracking standards drawn from NAICS 2007 classifications.



The top 25 tourism affiliated sectors are listed in Figure 15 (discussed below).

FIGURE 15: TOP 25 NAICS (2013) SECTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TOURISM IN PARKLAND COUNTY



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Patterns, Parkland County, 2013.



Some areas of note in the above figure include golf and country clubs posting the second highest number of businesses, behind general automotive repair, a sector that also shares commonality with general commerce, but which travelers may depend on when their transportation has encountered problems. Limited service eating places occupy the third position, indicating that fast-food is more prevalent than full-service eating establishments. Of note is that in the recreation and entertainment category other than golf and country clubs, only 'all other amusement and recreation industries' occupies a place in the top 25 sectors.

Missing in Parkland County are motion picture and video exhibition industries, theatre companies, museums, historical or heritage sites and bowling centres. At the same time, neighbouring communities such as Spruce Grove and Stony Plain do have some of these amenities, and collaborate with Parkland in tourism and cultural promotion. Though there are five hotels and two motor hotels, there is only one registered bed and breakfast and no housekeeping cottages and cabins. Also of note is that there is only one 'drinking place.'

Thoughts and Opinions of Business and Community Leaders





4 Thoughts and Opinions from Business and Community Leaders

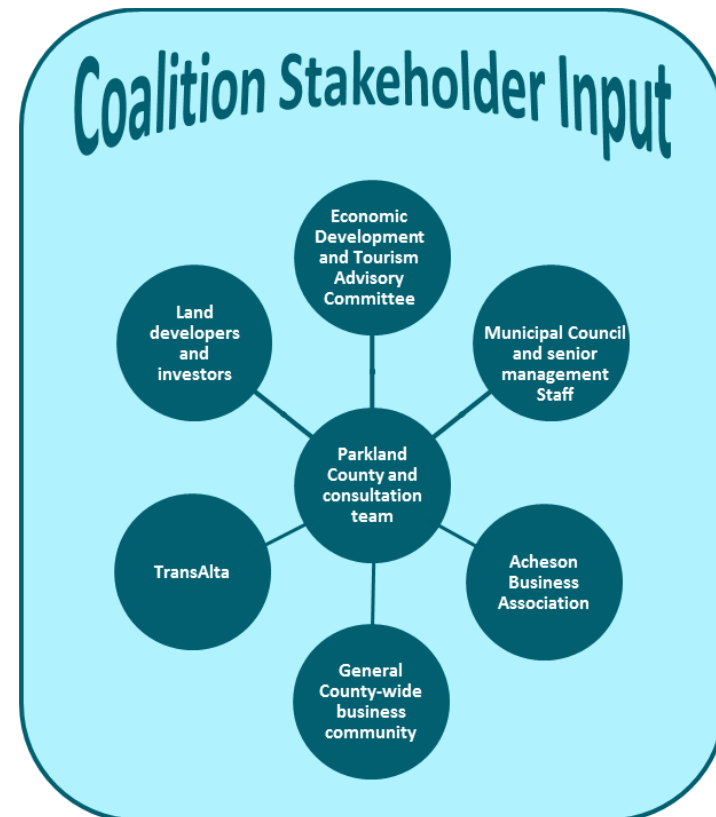
The 2009 Economic Development Strategy placed a strong emphasis on initiatives that required Parkland County to enhance the quality and number of partnerships. This advice was taken to heart and the value of those partnerships is evident in the number of successful initiatives undertaken since 2009, as shown in the previous section. With that in mind, in its terms of reference for this project, Parkland County placed a significant emphasis on engaging members of the business community both inside and outside of the County. This “Coalition” played a significant role in identifying opportunities and challenges, but it is also expected to have an important role as leaders and supporters of future economic development initiatives.

A variety of outreach tools were employed to evaluate past successes and problem areas and to identify current demands and needs of various stakeholders in Parkland County’s economic landscape. The consultant team used an online survey, focus group discussions, in-person interviews and semi-structured telephone interviews to engage Coalition members. Figure 16 identifies the Coalition members who were consulted.

The following section provides an overview of dominant themes emerging from the consultation. Broadly, they represent highlights of strengths of the county, possible future objectives and obstacles, opportunities for tourism advancement, and a final section dealing more directly in themes related to Acheson.

The various points and suggestions represent those of participants in the various engagement activities conducted by the project team and do not reflect the conclusions or suggestions of the project team.

FIGURE 16: COALITION STAKEHOLDER INPUT INTO STRATEGY





Recent positive developments for Parkland County

A major strength identified was the competitive costs of doing business in the region (e.g. property prices, taxes, etc.). Geographic location and proximity to markets or supply chains and access to municipal servicing were also key factors attributed to strong development.

The Acheson Industrial Area was identified as a source of regional pride because of its growth and competitive tax rates. People also mentioned the new industrial park fire hall, which sends the business community the signal that their safety is in good hands.

Another local beacon is TransAlta, with its sustained employment and expected growth over the foreseeable future. It was also mentioned because of its new Sundance 7 development, which is added insurance for sustainability of the county tax base and jobs in the rural community.

County-wide internet tower installation and increased broadband and wireless telecommunications coverage are celebrated as positive infrastructure developments. They are part of the Intelligent Community Initiative, which garnered the County a “SMART 21 Intelligent Communities of 2014” award. Also, related to infrastructure, the Anthony Henday overpasses at Highways 16 and 16A were recently completed as was the northwest section of the ring which offers County businesses better access to the entire region.

Quality of life was regarded positively with many examples of recreational activities in the area, such as Pembina River rafting, Pembina Provincial Park, golf courses, and a new swimming pool in Entwistle.

Local economic development objectives

Numerous themes emerge in regard to objectives for Parkland County’s future development.

Sustainable Growth

Despite overall pride in the quality of life, people want greater walkability and recreational aspects. On the other hand, many are also aware that investments must be sustainable with low incremental costs. Some are optimistic that County Council has adopted the philosophy of a “complete community,” based on key pillars of social, jobs, businesses, and assessment.

Key themes from Consultations, Participants want:

- Diversified economy and employment opportunities
- Emphasized rural opportunities
- Enhanced infrastructure throughout the region with some key concerns for mobility and long-term land availability in Acheson
- Enhanced communications within the municipality and in dealing with residents and businesses
- Improved tourism opportunities relating to outdoor experiences and in partnership with TransAlta
- Diversified business base in Acheson to remain self-sustaining
- Improved resources for investor understanding of zoning and development requirements



Jobs and the Economy

Respondents also indicated interest in a diversified economy. As is common in many rural areas, poor employment opportunities for young people and un-skilled workers were cited as a challenges. Overall, people want to see diverse employment opportunities and higher paying jobs as well as educational institutions that can produce the skills needed to fill those jobs. Interest in drawing new businesses to the area is important as well, but some people would like to see continued support of existing businesses by aligning agriculture and small businesses with intelligent community growth and objectives.

Priority sectors identified by participants of the online survey were distribution and logistics, services and maintenance, manufacturing, machinery, construction materials, advanced energy, advanced manufacturing (i.e. high technology), and metal fabrication. Those earning moderate interest were resource processing, food processing, value added agriculture, and eco-industrial production. Areas of lower interest were consumer-ready food, tourism, agri/agro-tourism, lone eagles (i.e. indeterminate businesses), and chemicals production/processing. This is not to say that those with less support ought to be disregarded, after all, respondents will most likely have a tendency to favor sectors affiliated with their own industries and some people simply may not be aware of what some of these industries are or how they may contribute to a growing economy.

Improved physical infrastructure was a dominant theme in both consultations and the online survey, especially as it pertains to dated road networks, shoulders and railway crossings.

Local Government, Communications, and Zoning

One suggestion by people at one consultation session was to increase the amount of inter-municipal collaboration so that redundancies can be eliminated and overall spending would decrease.

There are concerns that Acheson gets too much attention, noting Parkland should be looking at economic development more across the County more broadly.

Developers expressed frustration with land development processed and the “discretionary” way in which zoning officers enforce bylaws. There were suggestions of setting best practices for internal staff to work with developers more consistently and to create mechanisms to hold them accountable for their interactions.

Communications was identified as a problem area by a couple groups, such as listening to businesses and responding to their needs, and facilitating regular engagement with the broader business community.



Others are unhappy with the way the County classifies zoning. For example, a respondent noted Parkland currently only has two types of zoning in the Acheson Industrial Park. Some advised it may be advantageous to narrow the permitted types of development in new lands. This is particularly important for any new lands added to the Acheson Industrial Area as a result of the new ASP which is still under review. Current zoning measures do not apparently encourage high returns on industrial development. There need to be higher rates of site coverage, and it is believed revisiting zoning may help alleviate the issue. Another suggestion was to build-in greater flexibility in the approval system so that lot size can be established more readily by a buyer without having to go back to the beginning of the approval process.

Finally, an issue has emerged in regard to a lack of unserved land. Companies who only require unserved land are being forced to purchase serviced land that has potential for more productive uses.

Areas of Potential Concern

The following themes were identified specifically as areas of potential concern:

- Transportation infrastructure is underdeveloped, especially in Acheson. Rail crossings and no overpasses are creating challenges for the flow of goods and labour.
- From business' point of view, local government appears to have inefficiencies in process and burdensome regulations.
- 'Status quo' thinking in rural areas may lead to stagnation and missed opportunities.
- Demographic challenges (age, available labour and skill levels) remain roadblocks to greater vitality.
- Inequitable growth across the County; the western portion of Parkland County is not growing like the east and want more opportunities to grow.

Enhancing rural employment opportunities and development

For the rural economy there was a clear sense that participants wanted to ensure growth was not limited and defined according to Acheson alone. Participants acknowledge the value Acheson plays but also want more opportunities for rural development. In particular, they wanted to hear more about success stories. While programs like Green Hectares and Intelligent Communities have had broad appeal, there is little knowledge of the success stories that have grown from them. There are also demands to better market opportunities associated with these programs so that rural residents are more aware of them and how they can benefit from



them. There was expression from Council members that the Parkland's Council needs to be prepared to support these types of resources.

In addition, there may be opportunities for agricultural business in partnership with the Leduc Agri-Business Incubator, which is a province-wide facility. There is also interest in other rural business incubator programs.

Potential Action Steps

- Agricultural mapping exercise to understand current strengths and potential for partnerships and synergistic activities.
- More communication between Economic Development and Tourism Department and agriculture department
- Effectively market and leverage Green Hectors and its programs
- Explore partnership opportunities with NorQuest College for young entrepreneurship opportunities or relevant sectors
- Look to attract creative business owners and employees
- More actively to support youth and bring them back
- Offer more camp ground space

Vision for tourism in Parkland County

Opportunities

Some potential growth opportunities include river tours, circle tours, sport tourism, and bed and breakfasts. Agri-tourism is also a growing area in tourism in other parts of the country. There is tremendous opportunity for it in the region. Some believe the County should support or build a space for a large-scale farmers' market.

Another suggestion was to work with TransAlta to develop tours of the mine, which could also supplement its public relations efforts.

Recreation themes often came back to the value of being outdoors. For example, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and snowmobile trails development has high potential. Other suggestions related to improvements to park areas, where it is believed there are opportunities to establish seasonal structures and events. Similarly, others suggest using the various lakes in the County to its advantage; accommodating the needs of those looking for a one or two day get-away.

Finally, as related to infrastructure discussions overall, improved community walkability is seen as a way of enhancing tourism and buy-in from locals.



Strategic Considerations

Participants were eager to contribute important considerations to helping develop the tourism sector.

For one thing, many emphasized capitalizing on the inherent “rural resilience” and willingness to local strengths to draw people from Edmonton and other nearby markets.

They noted that tourism may not result in large increases to local tax assessments. Instead they believe that investment is about improving the local quality of life for residents and supporting the development of a more well-rounded or complete community. These attributes, it is believed, will draw visitors to the area. They also bring money into the community from outside the region and offer more employment opportunities.

Others took an opposing stand regarding the role of the County, arguing it is not in the business of tourism. They suggest the County should instead encourage tourism through regulation and licensing, but stay away from investments with ongoing financial liability. As an alternative, they suggest consider developing a community grants program.

Others saw a key role for the County in helping operators to form partnerships and stronger networks.

Potential Action Steps

- Complete an inventory of existing tourism and cultural assets.
- Increase collaboration between departments to address issues of accountability and responsibility for tourism growth.
- Develop a clear tagline, such as “Come experience the rural Parkland”
- Road Master Plan – Develop a master plan for road work which is visitor-friendly and considers other modes of transportation, such as pedestrians and cyclists

TransAlta’s importance as stakeholder and partner

TransAlta is a great local business and tax contributor. Many Parkland residents work for the company or have businesses that are associated in supporting it and other similar companies’ needs. TransAlta was discussed by many participants at consultations and often in positive ways. The new Keep Hills 3 development plans for a gas-fired plant were well supported. Other opportunities were identified in seeing TransAlta partner with local non-profits as land reclamation is completed over time. These lands can potentially be used for other industries, as laydown yards or as places of natural beauty or outdoor recreation. Participants wanted to see expanded mining opportunities to ensure employment demand for at least 30 more years.



At the same time, some concern was expressed about possible blockages between senior decision makers at TransAlta and Parkland's municipal Council and mayor. There was expression that these senior decision makers need to resolve long-term plans to ensure new opportunities can be developed and future residents can benefit.

Vision and recommendations for the Acheson Industrial Area

A fair number of participants in both the online survey and in consultations framed their responses specifically to Acheson.

Those interested in Acheson more specifically noted a vision of the area as a great western hub for transportation, logistics, warehousing, and product distribution. They see the potential for a bustling employment area with a diverse range of occupations. Similar to those that provided input more broadly, they also were interested in a well-developed transportation system; particularly in regard to a train-track overpass.

Some believe the zoning is flawed and needs to better facilitate uses other than the traditional industrial commercial binary distinction, such as retail-commercial services like dental or health care, or hybrid businesses. Another issue identified is that some businesses have trouble expanding onto adjacent properties because of zoning. Also, site coverage requirements are seen as too high, which reduces options for new or expanded locations. There is demand for 1.5 to 3 acre lots to build free standing structures upon, which may encourage developments for lease.

Infrastructure was a major issue, with repeated complaints about roads and rail obstacles, but also support for public transit. Public transportation should also be considered to service the Acheson Industrial Area and its users. There is a challenge when looking to attract lower skilled and lower paid workers. Increased transit could alleviate some hurdles to accessing appropriate labour.

Overall, participants generally suggest a desire for a self-sufficient area, with more commerce, restaurants, and hotels.

Development process

Some key suggestions for the development process include:

- Have the County do broader environmental impact assessments and a storm water assessment instead of the developers.



- Parkland County staff could be more upfront with the development community and businesses about the specific requirements for developing each parcel of land and be more proactive with respect to educating businesses about the development process.
- Developers and businesses are also in need of “shovel ready development checklist” as an education tool. This would mitigate potential misunderstandings about development requirements.
- Development officers need to be more “customer service oriented”.

Key Messaging

- The ease of access to Northern Alberta to service oil sands developments
- Importantly, “We are not selling land, we are selling Acheson”
- Cost effectiveness is the primary selling feature
- Continue to push for logistics businesses, but we could look to expand the message a little bit to include entrepreneurship and more creative enterprises

Prioritizing Economic Opportunities





5 Prioritizing Economic Opportunities

5.1 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis

Building on the findings of the economic base analysis and consultations with business and community leaders, a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis provides a further indication of challenges and opportunities that should be addressed by an updated economic development plan. For the purposes of this report, a SWOT is characterized as the following:

- **Strengths:** Positive attributes or assets currently present in Parkland County, particularly in comparison to the broader region surrounding Edmonton.
- **Weaknesses:** Local issues of characteristics that limit the current or future economic development of Parkland County.
- **Opportunities:** Areas where Parkland County can remedy weaknesses or leverage strengths into competitive advantages.
- **Threats:** Trends or characteristics that threaten Parkland County's future and attractiveness to new industry, and represent potential competitive disadvantages.

The SWOT analysis that follows provides insight into the challenges and opportunities for Parkland County in its efforts to generate and sustain economic development.

Strengths

Industry leadership – Parkland currently leads the other regional counties (Sturgeon, Strathcona and Leduc) in growth in nine industry sectors: Mining, quarrying, oil and gas, utilities, information and cultural industries, real estate and rental and leasing, alternative support, waste management and remedial services, and health care and social assistance. Areas of most significant growth are health care and social assistance, real estate and rental and leasing, and oil and gas.

Commitment to economic development – The County's commitment to economic development is continually reinforced in its numerous municipal publications and strategies.



Competitive tax rates – Survey respondents and consultation participants have highlighted the County's competitive tax rates as key vehicles for investment attraction. Cost effectiveness has been noted as primary sales feature for attracting new businesses to the area or encouraging expansion.

Green Hectares – This initiative, being one of the earliest in the province, is a tremendous source of pride as was expressed in consultations as well as earlier SWOT analyses by the County.

TransAlta – This company is the single largest employer in the County as well as its single largest tax assessment contributor. In addition, TransAlta is a strong corporate citizen, engaging residents' lives and contributing to community vitality.

Beautiful natural spaces – The County has many natural assets that residents and visitors can enjoy. Lake Wabamun and the North Saskatchewan River Valley are fitting examples, but there are many others.

Intelligent Communities – Much commercial and general support for intelligent community growth, especially in broadband infrastructure and related technologies. The SMART 21 Intelligent Communities Award is evidence of this strength.

Acheson Industrial Park and Acheson Business Association – Acheson's industrial growth has been consistently in demand. Interview participants in the real estate sector spoke highly of land's ability to quickly turnover (even though land availability is declining). It is still a significant contender for business investment opportunities and its name is synonymous with opportunity and security. This has been further enhanced by Acheson Business Association's advocacy role and its championing of member needs.

Weaknesses

Poor demographics – With a population that is growing at a slower rate than the provincial median and an median family income that lags behind other nearby counties, interest in relocating to Parkland is diminished. Other regions with more competitive wages may ultimately attract labour that would otherwise make Parkland their home and place of work. Lower wages lead to less interest in relocating or staying in the region, which leads to a lower growth rate as well as possible workforce availability issues.

Communications – Consultations and interviews identify various forms of communication problems associated with the County, particularly inter-department communication barriers due to siloed bureaucratic structure and business-to-government communications issues associated with lack of responsiveness to business community needs or concerns.



Road infrastructure – All stakeholder engagement activities (survey, consultations and interviews) noted Parkland's highly problematic transportation infrastructure, which not only leads to inefficiencies for businesses but also likely dissuades some investors from considering the region. This is especially the case for Highway 60, with the railroad crossing bridge near Acheson. A side-effect of the infrastructure problem is that it may also be one of the reasons why the transportation, warehousing and logistics sector has seen slower growth than anticipated. To be a transportation hub, Parkland must have good transportation infrastructure.

Available land in Acheson – Interviews highlighted the importance of investment ready land. A major concern is that land cannot be converted fast enough, even going so far as to note that there is more interest than there is available land. While the demand is positive, the reality of insufficient land also means potential investors may look elsewhere for sites.

Skills gaps – As is common to most regions across the country, business managers in Parkland have noted skills gaps in the emerging labour-force as a problem. This is noted as a weakness because there may be opportunities available that are not being used to better prepare the workforce for the job market as well as to ensure management expectations remain realistic in regard to core-learning verses hands-on, tacit experience which can only be gained by starting at the bottom in the industry.

Walkability and active transportation – In relation to overall infrastructure, walkability was noted as an issue during consultations conducted by the County in early 2014 and was again mentioned during consultations conducted by the project team. If amenities require the use of a motor-vehicle to access in a practical way, residents suffer in quality of life and quality of place. Similarly, if road networks are not accommodative to bicycles and other forms of active transportation, residents again suffer from a poor quality of place. Enhancing these things would potentially draw more residents to the County because they know amenities will be easily accessible and transportation will be safer for everyone. An enhanced quality of life and quality of place will also result in increased tourism.

Tourism-development – Some business owners believe that the county should play no role in promoting tourism or growing the sector. Though the sector is very small in the region, the potential for growth and expansion actually represents an opportunity for greater economic diversification. In the previous economic development strategy tourism was not given a high priority because other sectors were seen as better areas to make strides. Now that many of these have been addressed or continue to receive attention, there is room to begin thinking about tourism as a viable instrument of a diversified economy. The tourism sector cross-cuts many industries. As such, the value-chain associated with tourism is not only economically relevant because of the contributions operators may potentially bring to the local economy directly, but because of the secondary and support industries which come into play as operators rely upon them for essential services.



No regional brand – There is little evidence of a regional brand, designed to market the region in a holistic sense to investors, potential residents or visitors. There is tremendous pride in the rural spirit of the broader community, and consultations have highlighted the desire for this to be part of the message the County promotes to others about itself. It is a weakness because with a well-defined regional brand, other marketing, regardless of the audience, will show consistency and unity.

Opportunities

Regional brand development – There is an opportunity to convey a common sense of identity and launch a regional marketing strategy as a corollary of regional brand development. Develop the brand and everything else will fall into place.

Farmers' market and local food promotion – Consultations explicitly identified a desire for a full-scale farmers' market, which would not only promote local farmers and bring awareness to the buy-local movement which is growing, but also enrich the cultural vitality of the region and provide a space for community engagement and building social capital. Interest remained in having something specifically targeting area residents, perhaps in partnership with nearby Stony Plain and Spruce Grove. Caution should be taken with this opportunity, however, as 'bricks and mortar' farmers' markets are financially difficult to sustain.

Place-making – To counter-act weaknesses noted in walkability, active transportation infrastructure, tourism and declining populations, place-making needs to be a priority for the region in conjunction with other departments in the municipal government. Place-making may also cater to the establishment of a regional brand, or be the product of such an endeavor.

TransAlta – The County needs to work with TransAlta to ensure there are long-term opportunities for the company in the region which go beyond generation of electricity. This may include growing other related sectors, encouraging industrial symbiosis, formulating lay-down yard policies, and integrating reclaimed land recreational property into the local tourism economy.

Industrial symbiosis – This method of connecting businesses with resources of other businesses is not only a viable model for environmental protection, but a growing vehicle for economic growth. Businesses can also save on their bottom lines. It was discussed in the previous strategy, but has not been addressed. There is an opportunity for the County to facilitate networks between businesses so that one enterprise's waste can become another enterprise's gold. In the previous Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, it was suggested TransAlta be approached as potential advocate and champion, but this still has not been done.



Expand industry in Acheson – Consultations indicated there is a desire for more commerce, restaurants and hotels in the Acheson area. Not only would these be positive for other existing industries, but they would also diversify Acheson's economy. Parkland County may want to ensure municipal bylaws are reviewed to ensure certain sections of the business park have flexible enough zoning.

Tourism development along Highway 16 – This highway is the primary artery for people traveling from Edmonton to Jasper National Park or Wabamun Provincial Park. There is an opportunity to identify means of attracting these travelers for a short stop-over in the area. Once stopped, other promotional materials and media may also be used to stimulate interest in planning a longer visit to the region another time. There is an opportunity to roll out a strategy in conjunction with a regional branding exercise and in cooperation with the Tri-Region Tourism partnership with Stony Plain and Spruce Grove.

Market Green Hectares Successes – Though also listed as a strength, to maintain and even grow interest and support for the partnership, Parkland needs to highlight success stories associated with Green Hectares, as they are currently under-reported.

Sector profiles – Numerous sectors have been identified in this strategy as core priority areas. These sectors require thorough analysis and articulation to create streamlined documents to facilitate investment. Sector profiles will highlight the competitive advantage Parkland County holds in these areas. Two different documents should be made for each focal-sector, a detailed profile and an abbreviated brochure-type document.

Mentorship for lone-eagles – These entrepreneurs are a special case because they do not operate with multiple employees, but the work they do may be invaluable to the local community and they may importantly rely on other businesses as part of their operation. As such they do not necessarily have the same needs or questions as other businesses when they first strike out. The County has an opportunity to develop support mechanisms to enhance this sector, which was identified as a priority in the previous strategy, by identifying mentorship opportunities.

Rural Population Base - Though the population in the rural areas of the County may be limited, adjacent areas like Drayton Valley may assist with supplying industrial and commercial businesses in western Parkland County with both potential customers and potential employees.

Threats

Development land competition – As discussed in the weakness section, the large demand for available land in the County is hampered by lack of investment ready land, which could result in investors shifting their preferences toward competing counties and municipalities nearby. The threat of competitive land availability in



other regions therefore represents an area of concern to which more pro-active solutions are required to continue to ensure potential investors keep Parkland at the top of their lists.

Oil economy – A factor which Parkland has no direct control over is the principal focus Alberta has on oil and oil related industry, which is subject to a large number of global market and geopolitical pressures. Market stability cannot be guaranteed; therefore, this instability must be viewed as a threat.

Worker shortage – As with many communities, availability of adequately skilled labour is a threat to local business maintenance and expansion. As Alberta's economy continues to grow, competition for skilled labour can be expected to intensify among different regions.

Trend to urbanization – Many rural residents are concerned about the trend toward urbanization. They view suburban sprawl as a threat to the scenic beauty of the country-side and to the rural culture which residents currently value so highly.

5.2 Sectors Creating Economic Growth in Parkland

Strong Economic Development Strategies build upon the unique assets and resources of a community, communicating those characteristics to potential investment and development partners to demonstrate unique value propositions. Growing numbers of entrepreneurial 21st century communities are use local advantages to spur innovation, investment and job creation, while retaining their cultural and environmental assets.

While combining these trends in the economy, the selection of economic development opportunities is rooted in the philosophy that initiatives must ultimately increase the total wealth within a community. This is accomplished in two ways:

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 business to sell their product/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.

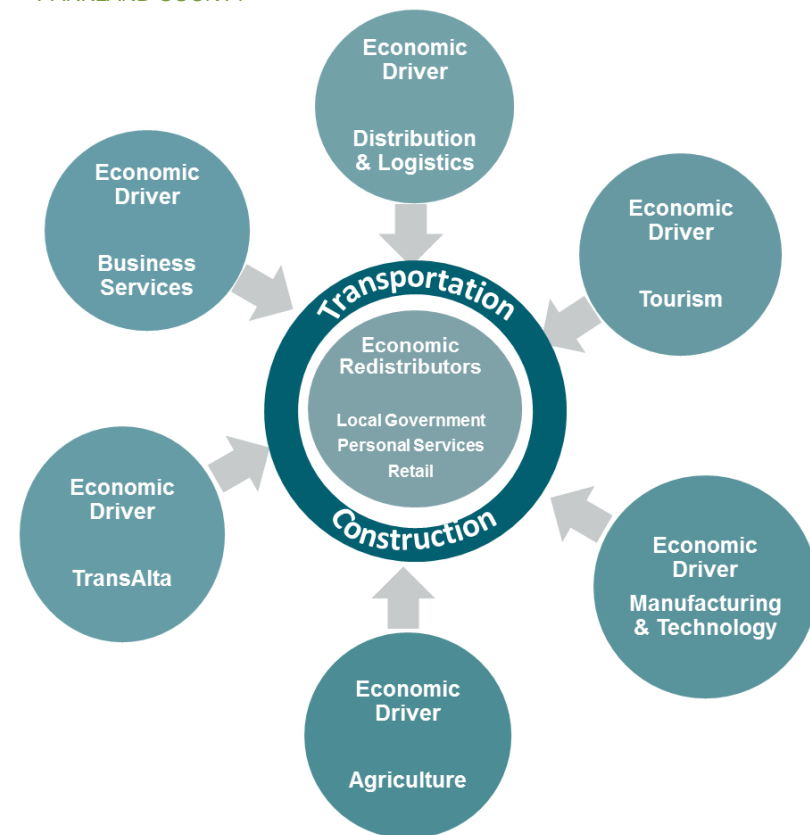


Export development and import substitution activities bring in the wealth. Other activities are redistributors – they circulate the money within a community. Strong economies bring in new money and then keep it in the community as it moves from business to business.

FIGURE 17: CURRENT ECONOMIC DRIVERS AND REDISTRIBUTORS FOR PARKLAND COUNTY

These two philosophies form the fundamental direction for economic development programs. If economic development programs are meant to increase wealth in the community (and for the community) then initiatives should be directed to improving export development (primarily) and improving import substitution (secondarily).

The concept above is profiled in the accompanying figure. The circles on the outside represent sectors that are “driving” wealth into Parkland County. The businesses in the sectors in the centre benefit from this economic stimulus and keep wealth circulating in Parkland County. In strong economies, this wealth changes hands many times before it is spent outside. The impact of these drivers and subsequent circulation is job creation, property investment and local taxation.

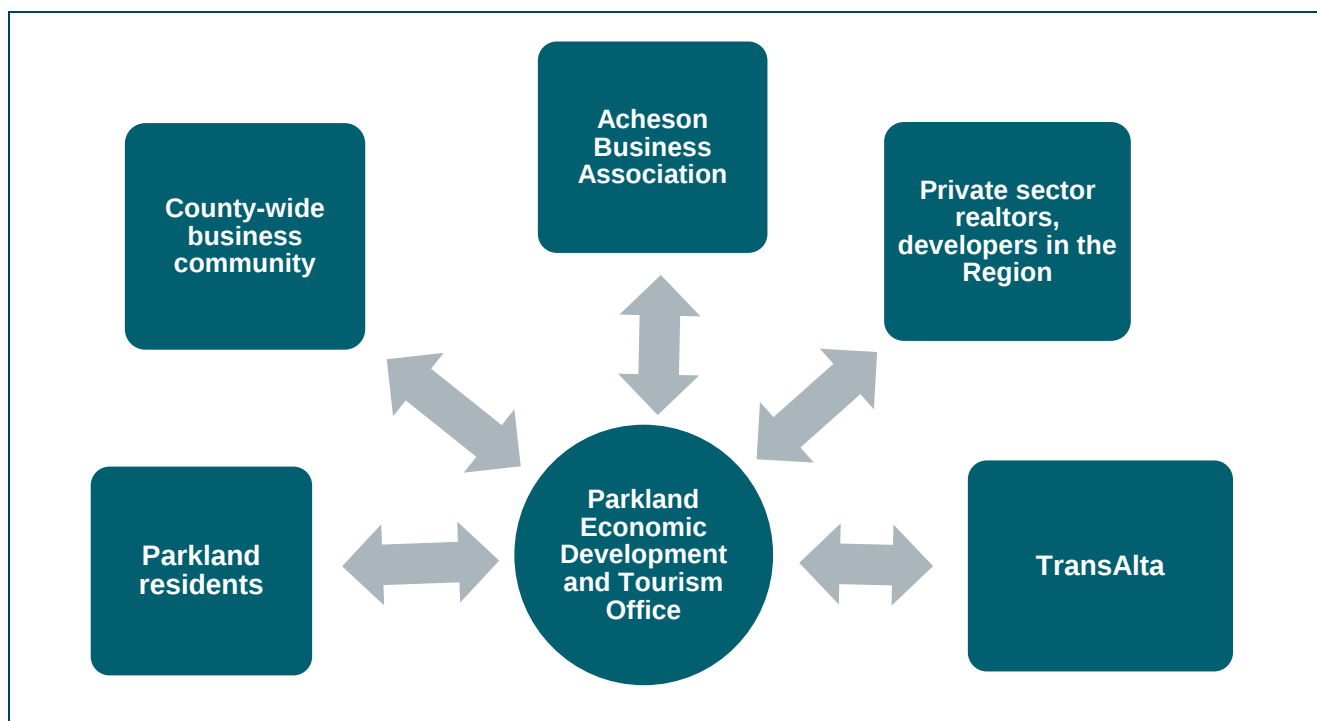




Economic Development and Tourism's Unique Mandate

Parkland County's Economic Development and Tourism Office occupies a unique position at the centre of economic development in the region. It is focused on external marketing, garnering interest of developers and investors, and BR&E support. It provides leadership but works in partnership with a number of other groups as Figure 18 demonstrates. These organizations and groups complement each other but have very distinctive roles in supporting economic development in the county.

FIGURE 18: PARKLAND'S EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS





Current Organizational Structure

To ensure successful implementation of the action plans the actions have to be aligned with the resources available in the economic development organization. Currently, the following staff positions are in place:

- Manager, Economic Development & Tourism
- Economic Development Officer
- Economic Development Officer – Tourism (part-time)
- Special Events/Projects Coordinator
- Administrative Assistant (part-time)
- Economic Development Officer – Business Development (being proposed in the 2015 budget)

Future Organizational Structure

Based on the recommended plans of action that will follow in subsequent chapters below, some modifications to the organizational structure are suggested. They are summarized in table Figure 19 below. They are not necessarily the changing of who does what, but the formalization of some very specific roles.



FIGURE 19: RECOMMENDED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM DEPARTMENT

Manager, Economic Development and Tourism	Long range strategic planning, management of Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Committee, liaison with other departments for infrastructure projects/planning and red tape reduction/approvals process, laydown site investigation and development, liaison with TransAlta, inter-municipal partnership development, spokesperson for economic development
Business Investment Specialist	Client contact for new investment destined for industrial parks, developer of customized responses to inquiries, proactive efforts to retain and enhance developer interest, advisor for investment attraction materials, liaison for new industrialists examining TransAlta facility, research and data analysis in support of business attraction, representative on Greater Edmonton Economic Development Team
Rural Development and tourism Specialist	Ongoing enhancements to high speed telecommunications, liaison for Green Hectares Program, small business networking sessions and workshops targeting the western portion of the County, liaison with agriculture associations, tourism business development and product development initiatives, principle contact for existing tourism sector businesses, liaison for non-industrial uses of surplus TransAlta property
Business Retention and Expansion Specialist	Initiate and manager of non-tourism business retention and expansion initiatives, facilitate connections between existing companies and business support organizations, connect existing firms with supplier opportunities, liaison for retention/expansion of existing TransAlta facilities
Marketing and Communications Coordinator	Responsible for all marketing and communications materials aimed at government-to-business communication, liaison with County staff for development and management of website and social media channels, coordinator of special events including business breakfasts/realtor and developer forum/business of the month
Research and Administration Assistant	General administrative assistance to the team, executive assistance to the Manager, research particular support to the Communications and rural development specialists. Full time position.

5.3 Economic Development Activities in Neighbouring Counties

No matter what community, there are always many forces and organizations involved in economic development activity. This is easy to understand when one looks at the variety of projects that are considered to be “economic development.” These include delivering services for small businesses and entrepreneurs, business investment attraction, business retention and expansion, tourism marketing, workforce development, community beautification, and hosting major events. Parkland County does not operate in a vacuum, and the other nearby municipalities it competes with also have similar priorities. It is essential to take stock of to what extent other



municipalities are actively championing certain economic development priorities so that Parkland might understand how to better enhance its competitive advantages. The following two figures (Figure 20 and Figure 21) address the notion of competitive benchmarking. By category, each municipality's programming or initiatives are highlighted in Figure 20.

FIGURE 20: COMPETITIVE BENCHMARKING OVERSRVATIONS

	Parkland	Sturgeon	Strathcona	Stony Plain	Spruce Grove
Institution	Economic Development and Tourism, answerable to Development Services	Department of Planning and Economic Development, answerable to manager of Integrated Growth	Department of Economic Development and Tourism, answerable to Infrastructure Planning Services Division	Individual Employee (EDO), answerable to Town Manager	Department of Economic and Business Development, answerable to City Manager
Most recent economic development strategy	Forthcoming (2014)	Forthcoming (2014)	2010	2010	2009
Annual budget	\$124,000 (not including salaries and benefits) Has increases with inflation, plans a larger increase to hire more staff in 2015.	Not available	\$242,700 (not including salaries or benefits) Has increased at rate of inflation, expecting larger increase in 2015	\$54,000 (not including salaries or benefits) Has stayed the same	\$350,000 (not including salaries or benefits) Has remained roughly the same over last three years
Business retention and expansion	Business Recognition Program (includes awards and profile of the month) Business visitation program	Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association collaborations Business directory listing Business association meetings and events (such as breakfasts)	Education materials and support specific to understanding regulations Business Connect program for networking Regular feedback surveys conducted online with small businesses Business visitation program in coordination with Mayor and Chamber of commerce, 10 runs per year	One-on-one business visitation program Business community meetings held with developers and real estate Annual meeting with business park land and business owners	Business Visitation program Residential development industries are highly promoted as important aspect of local economic development GIS site selector can be used to acquire information about adjacent or alternate properties



	Parkland	Sturgeon	Strathcona	Stony Plain	Spruce Grove
Investment attraction	Intelligent Communities, Broadband infrastructure Green Hectares Property locator tool (industrial lands inventory) Parkland advantage calculator	Part of Alberta's Industrial Heartland region and marketing campaign Industrial land inventory integrated in website Industrial park profile and location specifications Sector profiles available in abbreviated and detailed PDF versions (also available by municipality)	Five pronged approach (some may also be applicable to business retention and expansion): - Regular updates to/from business clubs - Regular updates with County-level financial institutions - Meet with economists regularly to get true understanding of economic impact of region on Canadian Economy - Head office calls/visits to oil and gas companies in Calgary (even ones not currently doing business in Strathcona) - Retail, regular attendance at International Council of Shopping Centres conferences in Whistler and Toronto, other locations planned Trade missions planned for Europe and South Africa, possibly in collaboration with Alberta's Industrial Heartland Work with Planning and Development to identify development locations High priority on emphasizing quality of place, draw people to the area	Statistical monitoring GIS data collected (but not shared online), in collaboration with Technology Services Department	Retail gap analysis conducted annually Comprehensive review of industrial priorities every two years Site locator function works through GIS and contains much valuable metadata about economic impacts, demographics, tax rates and degree of investment readiness Land development initiatives



	Parkland	Sturgeon	Strathcona	Stony Plain	Spruce Grove
Small business	BizPal, collaboration between municipal, provincial and federal governments to provide potential small business owners with all necessary permit and license information needed to start a business	BizPal Business Link collaboration with Province and other regional municipalities, business network Regional EDOs and Chamber in partnership Community Futures collaboration	Symbiotic relationship with Chamber of Commerce regarding businesses of all sizes (in contact daily) Mentorship program for business owners with Chamber of Commerce Has an employee dealing exclusively in small business support and development (quota of at least 200 calls per year with small business owners) Business Start-up Seminars with Chamber of Commerce Hosts Small Business Week symposium Enactus University partnership for case-competition in social entrepreneurship	Community Futures partnerships Identify properties and information about property-zoning and processes Referrals to local agencies Help develop business profiles Mentorship partnerships in collaboration with Spruce Grove and Parkland County Annual awareness week in collaboration with Community Futures and Chamber of Commerce	Business information program (provides data useful for small business regarding investment) One-on-one, business visitation programs (used for all levels of business) Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce and Community Futures to encourage small business development
Agriculture and natural resource development	Green Hectares ALUS has connection between agriculture and environmental protection or restoration but no direct economic benefit	Sturgeon County Bounty program, a local food and culinary promotional resource providing a collective identity and communications vehicle, initiated by the County (hosts annual events), enhances visibility of all components of the agriculture and food production value-chain	Two positions at Transportation and Agricultural Services department has an advisory committee dedicated to agriculture Economic Development Advisory Committee has two positions dedicated to agriculture Hosted workshops on subject of locally goods Green Hectares program; fee for service setup is unique to the region (Strathcona priority areas, not Green Hectares ones)	Other departments do some work in community gardening Annual Farmers Day, is a yearly appreciation and celebratory event	Some minor attention from Community and Protective Services department (Cultural Services section)



	Parkland	Sturgeon	Strathcona	Stony Plain	Spruce Grove
Events, arts and culture	Tri-municipal partnership between Parkland, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove to promote arts and culture shares costs and enhances the regional profile, examples include mutual support of the Cultural Centre in Stony Plain, the establishment of a Tri-Municipal Region Community Development Committee, and plans to develop a regional event host strategy. Cultural experiences and events are outlined on Tri Region Tourism website.	Sturgeon County Bountly	Works closely with Department of Recreation, Parks and Culture Holiday festivities in association with Alberta's Industrial Heartland Mandated to host three events per year, focussing on rural areas	Cultural development officer Cultural development plan (2012) Tri-municipal partnership between Parkland, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove to promote arts and culture shares costs and enhances the regional profile, examples include mutual support of the Cultural Centre in Stony Plain, the establishment of a Tri-Municipal Region Community Development Committee, and plans to develop a regional event host strategy.	Handled by Cultural Services (in Community and Protective Services department) Provides discretionary financial support to some events Tri-municipal partnership between Parkland, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove to promote arts and culture shares costs and enhances the regional profile, examples include mutual support of the Cultural Centre in Stony Plain, the establishment of a Tri-Municipal Region Community Development Committee, and plans to develop a regional event host strategy.
Tourism	Tri-partnership between Parkland, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove (Tri Region Tourism) Partnership in Edmonton Regional Tourism Group	Listing of attractions, historical and cultural sites (including parks and wilderness areas, accommodations and campsites) Sturgeon County Bountly	The Traveler, brochure featuring unique visiting experience in the County Sport Tourism, major events hosted in the area, such as the +55 Games, cross country ski competitions and cycling competitions Savour Strathcona gourmet and local food festival	Cultural development officer Visitor information centre (on collaboration with Chamber of Commerce) Tri-partnership between Parkland, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove (Tri Region Tourism)	Tri-partnership between Parkland, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove (Tri Region Tourism) Help local organizations promote local events Draw many sporting events to numerous world-class facilities
Workforce development	Intelligent communities network and skills development sessions Eddie Lemoine workshop sponsorships Job fairs	Listing of in-demand skills and education degrees available nearby which provided Annual employee survey Management survey	Quality of place development and marketing to attract workforce (and families) Regular contact with industries regarding workforce needs Job fairs approximately three times per year	Work proactively with NorQuest College about education needs (actively trying to make better linkages between management demands and employee skills) Track employment and other statistics to understand where labour is needed	Skills investment and attraction in residential development Regular inventory update of commercial industrial purposes and needs Collect survey data and other statistics relevant to industry needs Job fairs

Source: Millier Dickinson Blais Inc. 2014.



Figure 21 includes a matrix that evaluates the economic development initiatives that are being undertaken in Parkland County and some neighbouring municipalities. For simplicity, a check mark or x is used to indicate a strong prioritization on a given category. This is determined by assessing the kinds of programming available associated with a given category relative to the other municipalities. In some instances, where there is some evidence that there is a priority in the area, but where the respective programs are more ambiguous both a check and an x are used to symbolize the “so-so” aspect. The x itself represents evidently non-evident or easily identified programming or initiatives.

FIGURE 21: CURRENT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES OF NEIGHBOURING COUNTIES

	Parkland	Sturgeon	Strathcona	Stony Plain	Spruce Grove
Investment Attraction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Business Retention and Attraction	✓	✓ ✗	✓	✓	✓
Small Business	✗	✓ ✗	✓	✓ ✗	✗
Rural economic development	✓	✓ ✗	✓	-	-
Agricultural development	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Infrastructure and planning	✓ ✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tourism development	✗	✗	✓ ✗	✗	✓ ✗
Tourism marketing	✓ ✗	✓	✓ ✗	✓ ✗	✓ ✗
Workforce development	✗	✓	✓ ✗	✓	✓

✓ = Strong programming and initiatives, easily identified

✗ = Weak programming and initiatives, not evident or easily identified

✓ ✗ = Mix of strong and weak programming

Source: Millier Dickinson Blais Inc. 2014.



What follows is a brief overview of the top municipality for each category and why they are viewed as such. In some cases, programs and initiatives were rather uniform. In interviewing representatives from some of these governments, it was also clear that although many partnerships were sited, very few in-house programs were in place. Examples of these will be pointed out as they arrive.

- **Investment Attraction** – Most municipal governments offered the same kinds of programming geared toward this theme. Examples include land inventory registries, GIS databases, and semi-regular gap analyses. Sturgeon County can be singled out as an interesting case because it has developed sector-profiles for key sectors it is aggressively trying to spur interest in. Strathcona's land inventory appears the most comprehensive, even including key statistical details about demographics and other markers, and it is also very user friendly, functioning similarly to a real-estate company's search engine and screening criteria.
- **Business Retention and Expansion** –All municipalities have BR&E programs which include visitation programs and meet and greet typed events, but how these things are unpacked by each is where there is the most variation. To shine out in business visitation a balance needs to be struck between how many businesses are contacted and met versus how many municipal staff and elected officials conduct the rounds. Another consideration is whether visitations are done in a large group setting or on a one on one basis. Strathcona County has conducts regular updates with business clubs as part of its strategic approach and specifically conducts head-office calls with large companies, especially for oil and gas.
- **Small Business** – This category is dominated by Strathcona County, who aggressively follows up with small businesses to ensure their needs are being met, and even has a dedicated staff person dealing just in small business BIR&E in small business and has an annual quota of a minimum 200 direct interactions with different small businesses. The County also coordinates a small business set-up seminar series with the local business association, and hosts a small business week symposium.
- **Rural economic development** – In this topic Parkland County's engagement in Intelligent Communities programming has increased accessibility to technology for rural entrepreneurs in small businesses. Furthermore, the Green Hectares program is encouraging small business development that suits both rural needs and strives to protect the environment. Stony Plain and Spruce Grove are not included in this category because of their different geographic scale and associated land-use.
- **Agricultural development** – Most agricultural development is conducted in conjunction with the Province. The Green Hectares program is used by Parkland County and Strathcona County, but in



different ways. There is some connection agriculture through some Green Hectares initiatives. Sturgeon County has created a brand that interconnects agriculture with local markets, food security and agri-tourism under Sturgeon County Bounty. As with the rural economic development category, again, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove are not included.

- **Infrastructure and planning** – All the municipalities have been trying to aggressively develop infrastructure that is conducive to investment. Sewage line expansions in select areas are common. Parkland County continues to face some challenges over accessibility and bottle-necking issues, which is why it has a mixed review.
- **Tourism development** – This is the component of the tourism sector that is associated with investment and expansion. It may also include the infrastructure that would help tourism-specific industries, such as hotels. While the infrastructure aspect is positive in all the municipalities, little is being done in any to encourage tourism business investment or growth. Strathcona County and Spruce Grove have both invested a great deal in sport-tourism associated facilities, explaining their positive scores.
- **Tourism marketing** – This category has relatively consistent marketing between Parkland, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove, with their Tri-Region Tourism website. Simultaneously, Parkland County's Tourism webpage is blank, and does not even have a link deferring to the Tri-Region Tourism website. In addition, all the municipalities compared in this section are part of the Edmonton Regional Tourism Group as a promotional vehicle geared toward residents of Edmonton. Only Sturgeon County stands out as having a captivating brand via its Sturgeon County Bounty initiative. All the other individual municipalities have very vague marketing and awareness components to their tourism webpages.
- **Workforce development** – All municipalities conduct basic industry evaluations to understand where the jobs are and where they are not. In addition, they all tend to arrange job fairs to provide awareness to young adults. Spruce Grove conducts surveys that sometimes have workforce needs related questions. Sturgeon County is also more pro-active sending surveys out to management in local businesses as well as to employees.

5.4 Guiding Principles for Economic Development in Parkland

Through the consultation and research activities conducted for this project, a series of principles have been articulated by the community, and hence adopted by the consulting team, to guide the setting of priorities.



1. Adopt an explicit culture of 'customer first' service within the municipality
2. Ensure Parkland County's fiscal sustainability
3. Seek to diversify the local economy and business composition
4. Foster rural living and new rural-based businesses
5. Continue inter-municipal collaboration to further economic development goals
6. Invest in Acheson to ensure it remains a leading business location
7. Promote strategic business growth, not for its own sake
8. Improve residents' quality of life by enhancing recreational, cultural and social opportunities

5.5 Focusing Economic Development Priorities

The economic drivers will have the greatest potential of creating positive economic impact and will be the focus of action plans in the next three sections. All of these drivers will have some impact on Parkland's rural economy and most will affect growth opportunities in urban Acheson.

TransAlta is particularly unique. It was recognized as an important economic driver in the 2009 Strategy and since then has experienced both growth and change. As the landowner of huge tracts of land in Parkland it has an asset that could relieve pressures that Parkland has been experiencing from developers wanting non-serviced industrial lands and the desire for more publicly available recreation space. There are also significant opportunities which should be explored related to colocation of industry that can use TransAlta's utilities and by-products of production. For these reason, three main areas of focus are recommended as shown in Figure 22 and discussed individually in the subsequent sections.

FIGURE 22: FOCUSING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

Parkland's Economic Development Priorities		
Rural Economic Development	Acheson Industrial Area	TransAlta



For clarity, these three themes are matched-up with different guiding principles from the earlier list, as well as relevant commitments expressed by Parkland County in its 2014-2018 Strategic Plan (Figure 23).

FIGURE 23: ALIGNMENT OF PRIORITIES WITH STRATEGY

Economic Development Priority	Strategic Guiding Principles	Parkland County 2014-2018 Strategic Plan Goals	Capital Region Board Strategic Drivers and Themes
Rural Economic Development	- Adopt an explicit culture of 'customer first' service within the municipality - Ensure Parkland County's fiscal sustainability - Seek to diversify the local economy and business composition - Foster rural living and new rural-based businesses - Continue inter-municipal collaboration to further economic development goals - Promote strategic business growth, not for its own sake - Improve residents' quality of life by enhancing recreational, cultural and social opportunities	- Assess the current state of agriculture to help identify and connect to viable and profitable markets into the future. - Actively explore partnerships and potential revenue streams that will enhance our future growth and reduce our reliance on property taxes. - Form strong and meaningful partnerships. - Deliver quality services in an efficient and economical manner that enables development and growth.	- Vibrant communities - Infrastructure for the 21st century global economy - Removing barriers to business competitiveness and growth - Collaborative and efficient regional management - Vibrant communities
Acheson Industrial Park	- Adopt an explicit culture of 'customer first' service within the municipality - Ensure Parkland County's fiscal sustainability - Seek to diversify the local economy and business composition - Invest in Acheson to ensure it remains a leading business location - Promote strategic business growth, not for its own sake	- Establish an environment that attracts businesses and allows them to succeed. - Actively explore partnerships and potential revenue streams that will enhance our future growth and reduce our reliance on property taxes. - Form strong and meaningful partnerships.	- Connecting people, goods and information to the global marketplace - Being strategically productive and competitive - Building the region's competitive advantages
TransAlta	- Seek to diversify the local economy and business composition - Foster rural living and new rural-based businesses - Promote strategic business growth, not for its own sake - Improve residents' quality of life by enhancing recreational, cultural	- Actively explore partnerships and potential revenue streams that will enhance our future growth and reduce our reliance on property taxes. - Form strong and meaningful partnerships.	- Demonstrating leadership in regional management - Strategically managing our natural resources - Collaborative and efficient regional management

Source: Parkland County, Parkland County Strategic Plan 2014-2018, 2014; Capital Region Board, "Capitalize: The economic roadmap for Alberta's Capital Region," 2014.

Priority Opportunity: Rural Economic Development





6 Priority Opportunity: Rural Economic Development

“Rural Economic Development” contains a wide spectrum of opportunities which have presented themselves throughout the strategic planning process. Admittedly it is a broad statement of focus; however, the importance of this array of opportunities must be emphasized as the County expands its definition of economic development. In the years ahead, the County will strengthen its economy with initiatives that move beyond the traditional maxims of expanding the tax base and creating jobs.

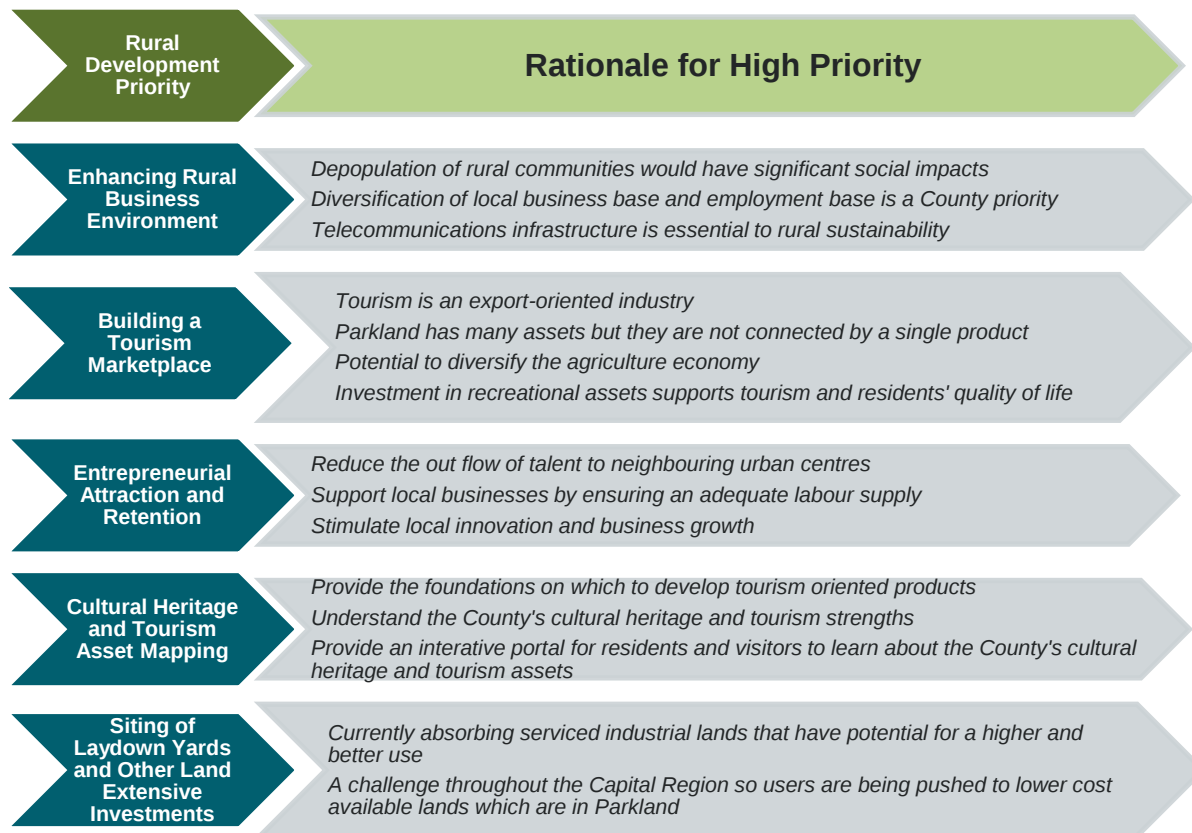
As demonstrated in the previous section, placing importance on rural development aligns with a number of this Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Plan’s Guiding Principles along with a number of objectives from Parkland County’s Strategic Plan (2014-2018). Accordingly, allocating significant resources to this area of economic development supports the County’s explicit mandate. Over the last five years, this mandate has translated into successful economic development programs and initiatives. The most notable of these programs include Intelligent Communities and Green Hectares, which continue to pay dividends for the County, its businesses and its residents.

Combined with an emphasis on TransAlta (Section 7), currently the largest employer and landholder in Parkland’s rural community (considered everything outside of the serviced Acheson Industrial Area), there are a considerable number of opportunities to prioritize from 2014 to 2018. In this regard, it will be critical for the County to consider the long term ramifications of investing or not investing in these opportunities. While a risk adverse approach to investment is often prudent, given the well-recognized need to diversify the County’s economic base, assuming some calculated risk in this case may be necessary.



6.1 Rural Development Priorities

FIGURE 24: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY, GOALS AND RATIONALES





6.2 Rural Development Action Plan

FIGURE 25: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITY ACTION PLAN

Description of Broader Opportunity	Recommended Action Items	Role for Parkland Economic Development & Tourism?	Key Performance Indicators	Important Partners & Benchmark Community
Enhancing Rural Business Environment	Ongoing enhancements to high speed telecommunications.			
	Continue to support Green Hectares Program and enterprise facilitation activities.			Some partnerships already exist (e.g. Green Hectares) while others will need to be fostered
	Leverage County communications capacity to profile and encourage small businesses.	Yes	Growth in small business base	
	Leverage County communications capacity to increase the profile of the Green Hectares program and potential benefits to local businesses	Prioritizing these actions in tandem with Green Hectare will be the first step.	Level of satisfaction with small business services	
	Sponsor small business networking sessions and workshops targeting the western portion of the County.		More outlets for farmers' products	Evansburg and Entwistle Chamber of Commerce
	Facilitate collaboration amongst local business. One approach would be to provide a 24/7 business portal where local businesses post what they need and local people / businesses respond with how/where to do it (a local tendering site).	Assigning resources and staff to support these actions is the more complicated, yet essential step.	Maintaining equality with urban areas when it comes to broadband speeds	Benchmarks: Lennox & Addington (Enterprise Facilitation)
	Increase ICT in Community Halls (partner with local businesses to provide sponsorship).			
	Facilitate expansion and attraction into the Entwistle Business Park through active recruitment of primary sector oriented enterprises and responses to other incoming inquiries.			



Description of Broader Opportunity	Recommended Action Items	Role for Parkland Economic Development & Tourism?	Key Performance Indicators	Important Partners & Benchmark Community
Building a Tourism Market Place	Identify sub-sectors where there are gaps in tourism related operations and support industries.	Yes	Dollar value of public investment in development projects	Regional Chambers of commerce
	Develop a tourism destination management and marketing strategy in line with a Parkland branding exercise (can also be done in concert with Tri-Region Tourism).			Bus charter companies
	Conduct a market feasibility study for adventure based tourism opportunities (ATVing, zorbing, zip lining etc.).			River Valley Alliance, Director Larry Wall
	Strategically encourage tourism along the Highway 16 corridor.			
	Celebrate and promote tourism-related success stories about local entrepreneurs.			Best practices and mentorship from Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance, Cindy Cassidy
	Develop strong partnerships with River Valley Alliance.			
	Explore tourism opportunities associated with Pembina Park, Wabamun Lake, and North Saskatchewan River, including camping, adventure activities, buildings and infrastructure, accommodation and food services.			Hotels / Accommodation facilities in Spruce grove or in Stoney
	Explore opportunities to work with TransAlta to convert reclaimed land into recreational use areas, such as multi-purpose trails.			
	Work with TransAlta and other organizations (e.g. old Whitemud Mine) to create museums or visitor centres.			Benchmarks: Brazeau County, Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance
	Create exclusive user-pay recreational trail system and limit recreational motor vehicle activity to private lands and/or permitted trails.			
	Continue to market via Tri-Region Tourism partnership, and ensure all Parkland County web content dealing in tourism defers to the organization to reduce redundancy and streamline information.			



Description of Broader Opportunity	Recommended Action Items	Role for Parkland Economic Development & Tourism?	Key Performance Indicators	Important Partners & Benchmark Community
Entrepreneurial Attraction and Retention	Create and facilitate a mentorship program for rural entrepreneurs; examine ways to leverage the junior achievement program through the “Alberta North” initiative.	Yes		Green hectares
	Pair established Acheson based business leaders with rural businesses to provide mentorship.	In partnership with Green Hectares the economic development office will be required to make introductions and provide financial support for these actions.	Growth in small rural based businesses	Alberta North
	Provide and promote entrepreneurial oriented shared spaces with internet, printing services etc. (consider repurposing selected community halls).		Number of facilitated mentor relationships	Regional Universities and Colleges
	Raise the profile of Green Hectare program; ensure adequate resources are dedicated to grow and sustain the program.		Number of new entrepreneurial oriented shared spaces	Community Connector program
	Establish and maintain a presence with regional universities and colleges to promote the County as an ideal location to live, work and play.			
Cultural Heritage and Tourism Asset Mapping	Develop a Cultural Asset Map that will nurture the development of the region’s cultural and cultural tourism sectors and increase public awareness and participation in available programming and activities, and improve the long term sustainability of the assets themselves.	Yes	Completion Y/N	Partners: PlaceVantage technology
	Leverage results to support local tourism value proposition marketing.			Benchmarks: Stony Plain
Siting of Laydown Yards and Other Land Extensive Investments	Encourage the development of industrial and commercial uses with low employment densities (e.g. laydown yards) to locate outside of Acheson, through the provision of appropriate lands in the rural areas.	Yes		
	Leverage the findings of Parkland County’s Industrial Lands Strategy to determine potential sites.	There is an equal role to be played by the County’s Planning department and Council.	Provision of new laydown sites	Private land owners
	Take an active role in future land developments by buying land and establishing an industrial zone; in this zone encourage short term lease options and ear-mark revenue for future specified County improvements.			TransAlta

Priority Opportunity: Acheson Industrial Area





7 Priority Opportunity: Acheson Industrial Area

Nearly all industrial development over the last decade in Parkland County has been accommodated in the Acheson Industrial Area. In the years since the last economic development strategy, the Acheson area has attracted a considerable number of expansions and new companies, reinforcing its role as a key element of the County's ongoing economic development strategies.

Since 2009, Acheson Industrial Area has generated the following in terms of development activity:

- An average of 420,000 square feet of development activity annually, with the majority of that (93%) in the industrial sector
- An average of 88 net acres (36 hectares) of industrial land absorption annually, with 39% of total absorption between 2010 and 2013 focused on parcels over 25 net acres (10 net ha)
- Strong levels of land absorption in manufacturing (27%), construction (27%), and transportation (24%), paired with increasing employment density as development moves to a higher standard of design and urban-type development
- Development of facilities for a number of large industrial users, including Powell Canada, Manitoulin Transport, CIVEO (PTI), and Graham Group
- Sustained interest from a wider range of developers, including Trans America Group, Panattoni, Remington Group, and Fath Group

Undoubtedly, much of the activity generated has come as a result of the area's strongest competitive advantages, including comparative cost of business (e.g. land cost, taxes), and proximity to major markets and major transportation routes. However, challenges persist in the area which may limit economic development prospects. Factors like development approvals processes or infrastructure bottlenecks suggest that despite the positive momentum experienced over the last five years, efforts still need to be made on the part of the County to ensure that Acheson continues to function as an effective piece of the County's economic development program. In particular, the County has a continuing role to play in attracting a wide range of industrial and complementary commercial users to generate employment and tax assessment, while working with public and private sector partners to ensure that transportation and water/sewer/stormwater infrastructure capacity and land supply match current levels of market opportunity.



Vision for Acheson Industrial Area

Acheson's success has been a direct result of Parkland County's efforts to attract the interest of developers and end users/builders. While there is most definitely a momentum that is self-propelling, now is not the time to become complacent. It is critical to remain 'top of mind' with the development community. Proactive marketing is also required to ensure that Acheson becomes home to the most desirable types of development. Based on consultations throughout the process, the following elements have emerged to guide the five-year vision for the Acheson Industrial Area:

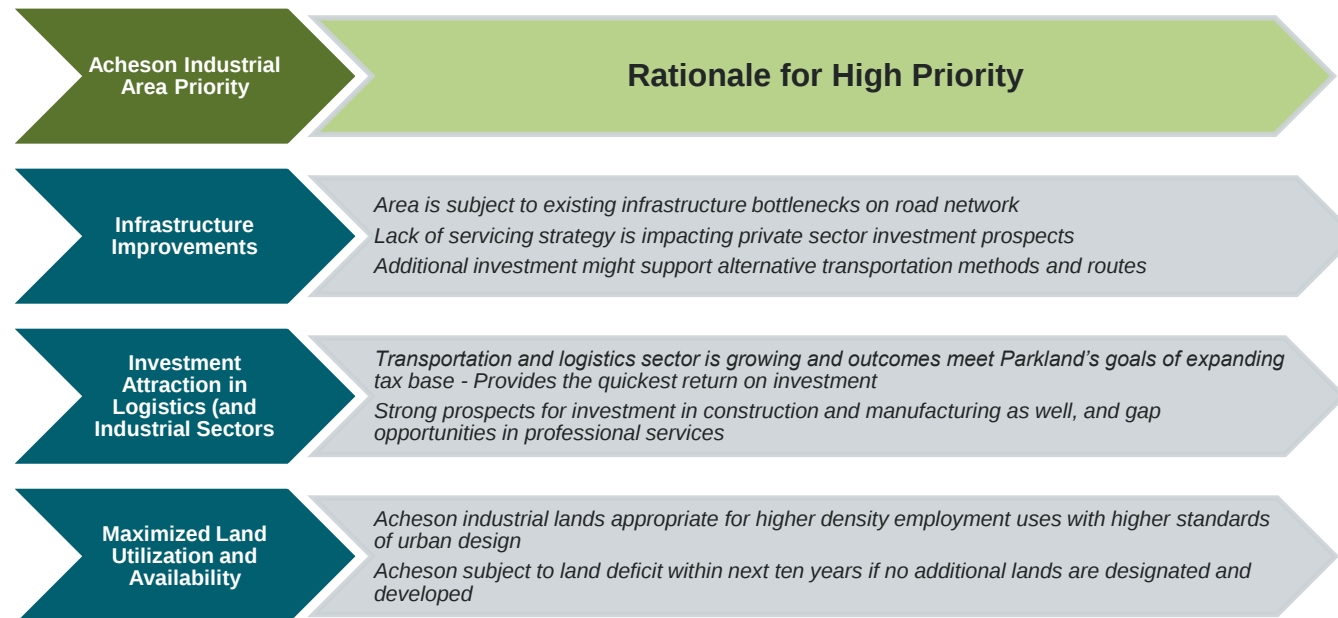
- The foremost hub for transportation, logistics, and product distribution in Western Canada
- A bustling centre of employment for a broad range of opportunities
- A well-serviced transportation network to effectively move its workers and goods
- A more complete and self-sufficient park, with complementary commercial development to serve industrial and commercial office employment (e.g. small retail, accommodations, food services, personal services)
- A competitive and balanced supply of industrial and employment lands that provides broad market choice for a range of industrial users

Those consulted also outlined challenges related to achieving those vision elements. These include the quality and state of infrastructure, perceived and real barriers in the development approvals process, environmental constraints, availability of labour force, and external factors influencing demand (e.g. oil and gas market conditions, provincial funding, and inter-municipal collaboration). Given those vision elements, and the barriers to achieving them, there are several priorities for the County with regards to Acheson over the next five years.



7.1 Priorities for Acheson Industrial Area

FIGURE 26: ACHESON INDUSTRIAL AREA PRIORITY, GOALS AND RATIONALES





7.2 Acheson Industrial Area Action Plan

FIGURE 27: ACHESON INDUSTRIAL AREA ACTION PLAN

Description of Broader Opportunity	Recommended Action Items	Role for Parkland Economic Development & Tourism?	Key Performance Indicators	Important Partners & Benchmark Community
Investment Attraction in the Logistics and Industrial Sectors	Undertake ongoing recruitment and business retention and expansion efforts with developers and landowners who are engaged with the industrial sector.	Yes Transportation and logistics has been a strong area of success in the past and promises to be in the future. Industrial (e.g. manufacturing, construction) has also generated activity in Acheson, but continued support is needed.		
	Develop a site selection response team made up of ABA members and County Staff in planning, economic development, and leverage personal connections of ABA members in recruitment activities.		Tax assessment growth	Partners: Developers, Acheson Business Association, Chambers of Commerce, Alberta IIR Benchmarks: Calgary Region, Ontario East, Edmonton
	Direct engagement and communications efforts at corporate real estate executives and other decision makers in logistics and transportation, particularly through major tradeshows.		Impact of economic development office on decision maker	
	Develop both detailed and abbreviated sector profiles, including mapping that illustrates location of key industrial businesses and suppliers.		Employment figures	
	Target business retention and expansion activities on rapidly growing industrial and transportation businesses to ensure Parkland has infrastructure to accommodate growth.		Industrial GFA Number of inquiries (by sector)	



Description of Broader Opportunity	Recommended Action Items	Role for Parkland Economic Development & Tourism?	Key Performance Indicators	Important Partners & Benchmark Community
Infrastructure Improvements	Improve railroad bypass options by getting Government of Alberta to take action on Highway 60 widening and railroad overpass or other alternatives to reduce congestion.	Yes	NA	Partners: Government of Alberta, Private land owners, developers. Benchmark: Markham (Commerce Valley Business Park).
	Proceed cautiously on integration of public transit – a unique solution is required to overcome design and cost challenges to retrofitting transit in the area.	Work with public partners to make accessibility a matter of economic sustainability and vitality.		
	Provide infrastructure, policies, and regulations that encourage the development of complementary population-oriented uses (restaurants, accommodations, conference facilities) in or in close proximity to Acheson.	Establishing commercial zones and promoting commercial opportunities.		
	Develop commercially-oriented marketing materials focused on outlining customer characteristics in the Acheson area, based on daytime and travelling population.			
Maximize Land Utilization and Availability	Encourage the development of industrial and commercial uses with low employment densities (e.g. laydown yards) to locate outside of Acheson, through the provision of appropriate lands in the rural areas.	Yes	Employment density (industrial and commercial) Tax assessment growth	Partners: ABA, Capital Region Board, developers, landowners
	Work with developers and landowners in Acheson's future industrial land areas ¹⁵ to established phased strategies for designation, zoning, and servicing, that are sensitive to natural heritage features and development constraints.	In partnership with the development community and planning department, ED&T should identify opportunities for additional inventory and higher density types of development that yields employment and tax assessment growth.		
	Work with developers and landowners to identify opportunities to develop higher-density industrial and commercial office uses, including multi-tenant facilities.			

¹⁵ As outlined in the Employment and Industrial Land Strategy.

Priority Opportunity: TransAlta



Image provided by TransAlta



8 Priority Opportunity: TransAlta

In Parkland County's 2009 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, TransAlta was identified as a longer-term strong economic development opportunity. The opportunity, as described then, focused on the potential to establish an eco-industrial park, a place where businesses cooperate with each other to reduce waste and pollution with the intention of increasing economic gains and improving environmental quality. This comes from three main applications:

1. **By-product reuse** – The exchange of firm-specific materials between two or more parties for use as substitutes for commercial products or raw materials. The materials exchange component has also been referred to as a by-product exchange, by-product synergy or waste exchange and may also be referred to as an industrial recycling network.
2. **Utility/infrastructure sharing** – The pooled use and management of commonly used resources such as energy, water and wastewater.
3. **Joint provision of services** – Meeting common needs across firms for ancillary activities such as fire suppression, transportation and food provision.

This notion applied directly to potential around TransAlta's Keephills and Sundance Generating Stations. The main ingredients to stoke this type of "industrial symbiosis" are plenty of utilities and a willingness to create mutually beneficial partnerships. TransAlta is a necessary partner and this concept fits perfectly with their interests which are:

- Position coal generation fleet for after Power Purchase Arrangements roll-off, which begins in 2017
- Identifying new sources of revenue (selling by-products or selling electricity "direct" to customers)
- Demonstrating environmental stewardship
-

These motivations have not changed significantly since 2009. The benefits to the County of retaining TransAlta and expansion into an eco-industrial park can be immense:

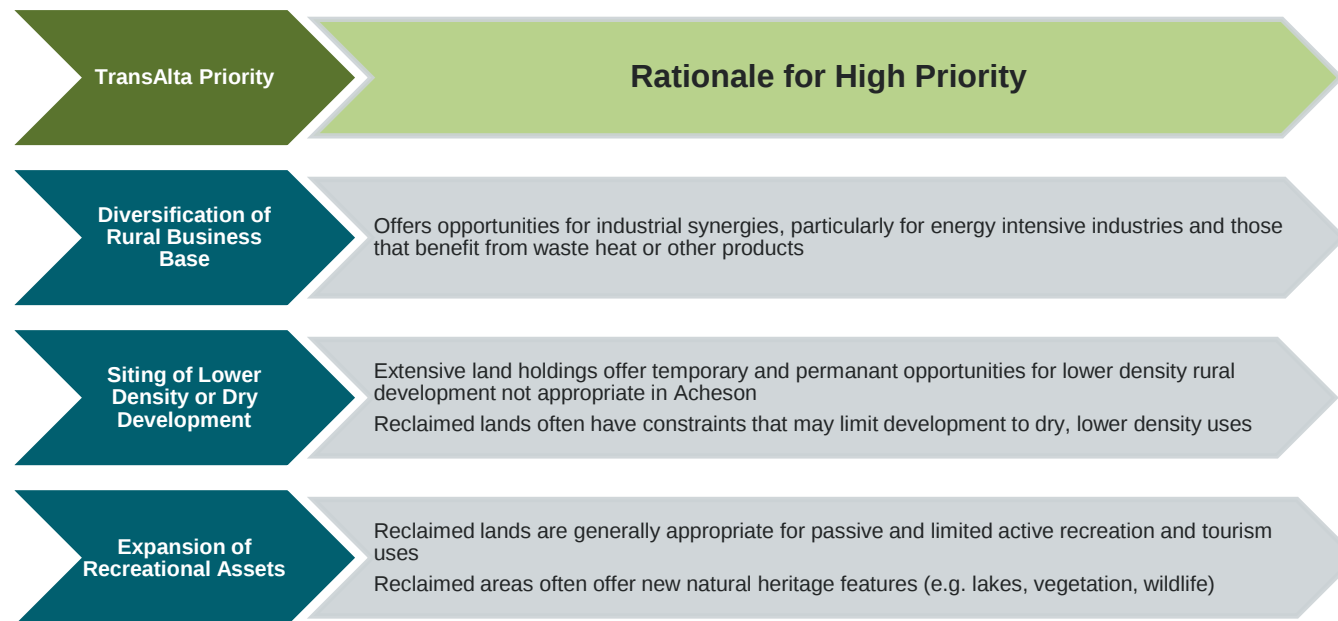
- longevity and continued reinvestment by TransAlta
- diversified economy through location of new industry, which would not consider other locations in the County (they may be "heavier" in nature and/or must find sites with these benefits and can be located anywhere in order to take advantage of them)
- cleaner environment through diversion and re-use of heat, chemicals, and water
- employment opportunities for residents of the western part of the County
- siting of un-serviced industrial lands



Consultation with TransAlta has validated this potential by pointing to medium and long term development opportunities in the western portion of the County. To encourage these opportunities, Parkland County will be required to establish strong relationships with TransAlta, to identify key locations and opportunities that might offer mutual benefits. Nevertheless, with the projected growth in agriculture and the resource-related sectors, and existing demand for dry rural industrial lands, there should be sustained demand for these new employment and industrial lands should they come on-stream. Finally, this is a long term strategic initiative; accordingly, the onus is on Parkland County to drive the conversation and provide the supporting business case to TransAlta.

8.1 Priorities for TransAlta

FIGURE 28: TRANSALTA PRIORITY AREA, GOALS AND RANTIONALES





8.2 TransAlta Action Plan

FIGURE 29: TRANSALTA ACTION PLAN

Description of Broader Opportunity	Context for Action and Next Steps	Role for Parkland Economic Development & Tourism?	Key Performance Indicators	Important Partners & Benchmark Community
Diversification of Rural Business Base; Siting of Lower Density or Dry Development; Expansion of Recreational Assets	Partnership Development – TransAlta must be aware of Parkland’s interests at the highest levels (Mayor to CEO). TransAlta cannot be expected to be pro-active in pursuing these opportunities. Parkland County will need to take the lead to allocate time and money towards the completion of feasibility studies relating to industrial synergies, industrial use of reclaimed lands, recreational opportunities and other possibilities. These studies will identify the following: economic benefits, legislative hurdles that may need to be overcome (local, provincial and federal), specific partnership opportunities (industry sub-sectors that will most likely benefit), recommended governance and business models, return on investment for both partners, key international linkages to assist in understanding and accessing important market expertise and next steps to take.	Yes Opportunities are largely economic, but top municipal administration and Council needs to be engaged.	Long-term sustainability of the operation Established relationships and open channels of communication at all levels of the organizations	TransAlta; potentially private land owners who are leasing to TransAlta

Parkland County's Communications Priorities





9 Parkland County's Communications Priorities

9.1 Improving Development Potential with Improved Communications

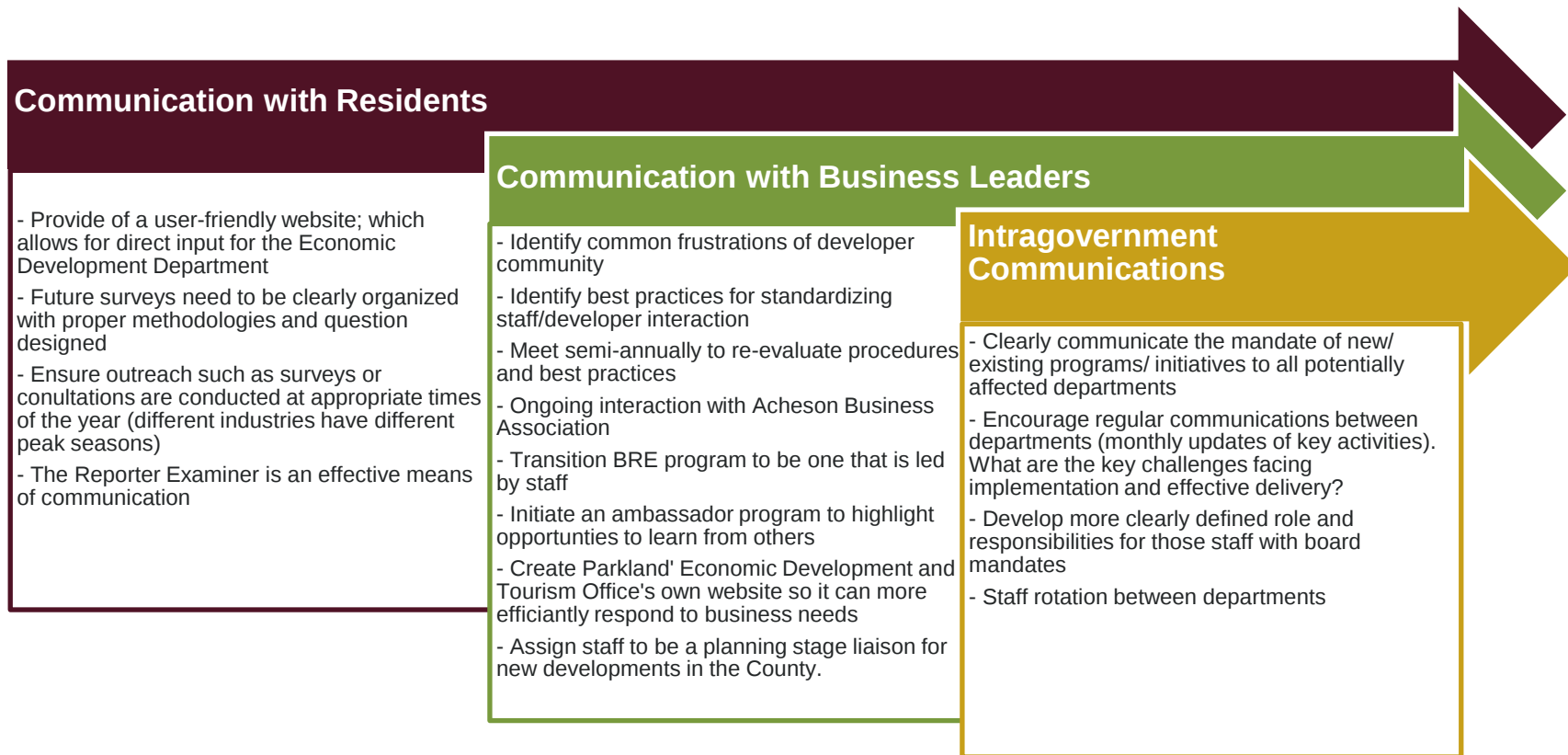
Sections 5, 6 and 7 offer a clear picture of the activities recommended for Parkland's Economic Development and Tourism Office. However, one aspect of the Strategy has yet to be broached: Communications. In today's hyper-state of connectivity, regular and formalized channels of communication may seem like a bureaucratic relic, but their importance has never been greater. Despite the current realities of instant telecommunications, communities across Canada are struggling to be heard by their residents, businesses and even by their own staff. Parkland County is certainly no exception. In fact, consultations with County staff and business leaders pin pointed the need to improve communications across the board. In this regard, there is a need to breakdown the 'silos' within which departments operate; land developers and businesses require more standardized relationship management; and the County's key messages need to be effectively communicated to residents.

As outlined in the figure below, there are several actions which may improve each of these lines of communications; although, these recommendations should be considered only a starting point. Approaches to communications will require constant attention in the years ahead. Therefore, the County will need to commit resources to keep pace with these new technological realities.

Figure 30 provides an overview of the approaches available to the County help in its mission to effectively communicate with its different audiences.



FIGURE 30: APPROACHES TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS WITH PARKLAND COUNTY'S DIFFERENT AUDIENCES



Conclusion and Implementation





10 Conclusion and Implementation

This Strategy has been informed by primary and secondary research and by direct input from the County's leadership. It is intended to build on the historical success of the County, but also recognizes the limits of this success and the need for greater momentum and leadership if the County is to achieve lasting and sustainable economic growth.

It must be said, however, that economic development by its nature is a dynamic landscape, impacted by a wide range of internal and external stakeholders with opinions and ideas on how sustainable economic development is to be achieved. This becomes apparent when consideration is given to the scope and variety of projects that can be described as "economic development".

One of the key considerations in the effective implementation of this Strategy will be an understanding and communication of how the strategy is to be resourced. This includes the financial resources required to move forward and clarity of roles and responsibilities between the County's Economic Development staff, other municipal staff or departments, and local and regional stakeholders. This is relevant from the perspective of potential residents and businesses, investors and visitors to the County and their desire for a one stop approach to gathering information and assistance and understanding where future partnership might emerge.

With the bulk of the opportunities identified by the Strategy receiving "high priority" status, it is important to consider the current capacity of the County's Economic Development Team to address these items. Simply put, an increase in resources may be required to facilitate swift action for each of these opportunities. Alternatively, an internal prioritization exercise would allow for targeted, albeit more limited, action.