



The background of the page features a photograph of several large, cylindrical grain silos. The silos are constructed from corrugated metal and have the word "WESTEEL" printed vertically on their sides. They are situated in an open field under a cloudy sky. A person in a red jacket is visible near the base of one of the silos, and a white vehicle is partially visible in the lower-left corner. The image is used as a background for the table of contents page.

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Executive Summary

The economy in Rocky View County is strong. The County's economy has benefitted from a rich history built on the foundation of agriculture and grown based on an emerging world-class reputation in warehousing and logistics.

This five-year Economic Development Strategy (Strategy) sets a clear path toward continued business growth in existing sectors, while further investing in regional development, and leveraging strategic partnerships to advance economic growth.

Rocky View County's geographic and economic diversity continues to be a strategic advantage. To enhance the County's ability to benefit from this diversity, the Strategy outlines three distinct Economic Zones within which efforts will be focused on leveraging the unique opportunities that exist within the area.

The County's existing key sectors and industries are well established. The Strategy seeks to support and build on the strength of existing businesses to diversify and attract additional investment in a focused way within the identified Economic Zones.

The Economic Development Strategy outlines four strategic areas of focus that will guide and focus the County's overall efforts as well as more targeted priorities to support efforts in specific zones and sectors. This diversified approach creates a clear path forward towards enhancing global competitiveness, creating jobs, and driving local economic growth within Rocky View County.





Introduction

Purpose of the Strategy

The Rocky View County Economic Development Strategy provides a vision and roadmap for attracting new investment while ensuring long-term sustainable growth within the County. It also acts as a framework for how land in the County should be used to create additional economic opportunities in specific geographic areas. The primary objectives of the strategy include:

- Understanding the current and desired future state of economic development in Rocky View County;
- Identifying key priorities and specific sectors within regional areas of opportunity; and
- Determining the resources needed to deliver the desired economic outcomes.

Based on our comprehensive understanding of the current and future economic opportunities in the County, the Economic Development Strategy will establish a vision for how best to accommodate growth and strengthen economic development in a responsible and sustainable way.

The strategy document is intended to support and be considered alongside the County's Strategic Plan, Municipal Development Plan, Master Plans, Area Structure Plans, and other documents that guide growth and development in the County. It will also support the County's Service Delivery and Accountability reporting.



Approach to Strategy Development

The Economic Development Strategy was developed using input from stakeholder engagement as well as industry and market research. Consultations were undertaken between July and September 2023, and included representation from local businesses, investors, community organizations, First Nations, and County staff and Council.

Economic development is one of the clearest intersections between the County's overall strategic direction, and the day-to-day decisions and work that happens to operationalize policy, planning, and development frameworks.

The Economic Development Strategy was created to align with the recently reimagined five-year County Strategic Plan. The Strategy establishes a vision for the County that recognizes the importance of preserving the County's rural roots while reflecting the desire of its citizens and positioning the County for growth. The strategy is based on four foundational goals:



The overall economic objective of the County is to build upon the strengths of existing sectors, while fostering an environment that supports new investment and sustainable development, bringing new opportunities and jobs to communities.

To support this overall objective, the Strategy contains three main components:

- Overarching Strategic Areas of Focus that are County-wide, and focused on positioning the County for growth in all desired sectors and regions;
- Objectives that are more specifically targeted at individual or groups of sectors within the County to build on synergies and opportunities for collaboration to support growth; and
- Objectives that are targeted towards development in specific geographical areas, or zones, within the County based on desired growth in that area.

The Strategy will identify areas for further exploration and development in support of the County's goals. It should be considered as directional, rather than prescriptive in the identification of objectives. In most cases, the Strategy does not set out to describe "how" the initiatives are to be undertaken. Many of the objectives identified will require additional planning or collaboration to execute.



Economic Development in Rocky View County

Overview of Economic Development

Economic development is focused on improving a municipality's prosperity, sustainability, and quality of life. Improvements are achieved through development, diversification, and maintenance of local economic, social, and political environments. To grow and enhance these environments, collaboration between governments, businesses, and community organizations is important to shape a shared strategic vision for the economic future.

Whether through infrastructure investments, workforce development, business incentives, or sustainability efforts, economic development endeavours to create an environment conducive to prosperity and an improved quality of life for residents.

Rocky View County's Economic Development Strategy leverages various economic development approaches based on the method that is best suited to the desired growth and development in the area.

No single economic development approach is a one-size-fits-all solution, and given the diversity within the County, multiple approaches to development allow the County to tailor development strategies to the unique circumstances, priorities, and strengths within each region.

In some areas of the County, the focus is on fostering growth of existing small and medium-sized businesses, while in others, the strategy contemplates primarily targeting the attraction of large corporations or industries from outside the area.

Leveraging a variety of approaches, the County will benefit from a more holistic and adaptable approach to development that fosters sustainable and targeted growth.



Understanding Rocky View County's Economy

Overview of the County

DEMOGRAPHICS

#1 most populous municipal district in Alberta

42.4

Average age of the population



\$150,000
median household income (2020)



Population
44,568
(2022)



1.7%
Annual Population increase (2017-2022)

LAND AREA



3,829
square km
of land area



10.7
population density
per square km



14
hamlets

AGRICULTURE



1,142
farming operations



512,091
acres of cropland

EMPLOYMENT



21,895
Total labour force



65.4%
Participation Rate
(2022)



Top Occupations
Trades & Transport
Business & Finance
Sales & Service

MUNICIPAL FINANCE



\$18.4 billion
Property Assessments (2022)



70.3%
Residential share of
property assessments

BUSINESS ACTIVITY



2,472
number of
businesses



95.1%
small businesses



28%
Annual growth in
incorporations (2017-2022)

CONSTRUCTION



\$3.1 Billion
Value of Major
Projects (2022)



1,189
Building Permits
(2022)

Regional Diversity

Rocky View County is known for its significant regional diversity, which encompasses a wide range of landscapes, communities, and economic activities.

- Geography** The County covers a vast area of approximately 3,836 square kilometers, making it one of the largest municipal districts in Alberta. With a variety of geographical features, including rolling prairies, foothills, and parts of the Rocky Mountains, the County landscapes contribute to a wide range of recreational and economic activities.
- Communities** The County is home to a mix of rural, urban, and urban communities, each with their own unique character and demographics. With larger urban centres with growing populations, such as Langdon, and many other smaller towns, hamlets, and cities comprising the landscape, the County offers a variety of living options.
- Agriculture** Agriculture plays a significant role in the County's economy and culture. The prairie landscape is well-suited for farming, and the County is known for its diverse agricultural activities, including grain and livestock production. Both large and smaller scale farms and ranches contribute to the region's agricultural diversity.
- Economic** The County's economy is not solely reliant on agriculture. It also encompasses various industries such as energy, manufacturing, retail, and commercial services. Its proximity to Calgary, Alberta's largest city, allows residents to work in various sectors while enjoying a rural lifestyle.

Recognizing the advantages that the County's diversity provides, the Economic Development Strategy identifies areas throughout the municipality that are conducive to growth and development based on various factors including: infrastructure readiness, existing industries, proximity to commercial and distribution areas, and current and future land use.

These identified zones offer locations for development in the East, Central, and West regions of the County based on the unique opportunities and competitive advantages in the area. Focused development in each of these zones will allow for cost effective servicing and infrastructure development, as well as potential for business clustering and growth.

Key Industries and Sectors

The County's Strategic Plan identified four key sectors within which the County intends to focus economic development efforts to build upon existing strengths and promote new investment. The County already has a solid base in all the identified sectors, and they are all important contributors to the economy.

The Strategy contains objectives to grow and diversify in each of the key sectors. Having clearly stated intentions to develop key sectors within the County will help draw attention from potential investors and stakeholders and enable the County to compete more effectively with other regions in the identified sectors.



Value-added Agriculture

Rocky View County hosts a well-established and thriving agri-business sector that contributes significantly to the economic prosperity of the County. Agri-business refers to all economic activities derived from or connected to farm products including: crop production, processing, transportation, and distribution.

With an abundance of viable agricultural land, raw agricultural products, access to transportation, and an established irrigation infrastructure, the County is well positioned to expand economic activity in value-added agriculture.

Value-added agriculture is the creation of value at different stages, by different actors throughout the value chain of agricultural production. Value-addition generally focuses on the manufacturing processes, marketing, or services that increase the value of primary agricultural commodities.

Promoting value-added agricultural activity not only supports diversification and attraction of new business in the agricultural industry, it also supports existing operations by increasing the economic value of raw agricultural product. Value-added agriculture can play a vital role in the economic development of rural and agricultural regions, providing a number of benefits:

Job Creation	The processing and production of value-added agricultural products often requires additional labour and specialized skills. This can lead to job creation in rural areas and supports local employment in the County.
Income Diversification	Value-added agriculture allows farmers to diversify their income streams by creating and selling processed products. This can help them become less reliant on commodity price fluctuations and support a more sustainable industry.
Local Economic Impact	Value-added agriculture can contribute to local economic development by boosting local manufacturing and production. It can also create opportunities for new businesses to emerge in complementary sectors, supporting further growth in the region.
Agricultural Innovation	Developing value-added products often requires innovation and research, leading to the advancement of agricultural practices and technologies that can be applied across the sector.
Market Diversification	Value-added products can open up new markets for the economy, including niche and premium markets, that may not be accessible with raw agricultural commodities alone. This diversification can increase market stability and growth within the County.

Transportation, Warehousing, and Logistics

Rocky View County has seen a high degree of development and investment in the warehouse, distribution, and logistics sector over the past few years, emerging as the center of logistics for Western Canada. The County is home to several large-scale operations including: Amazon, Walmart, and Sobeys/Safeway distribution facilities, and the CN Intermodal yard.

Demand is expected to continue for logistics infrastructure, and the County offers several advantages that make it a desirable location for additional investment including availability of affordable greenfield land and access to a skilled workforce.

The County is able to provide efficient, cost-competitive movement of goods and services due to proximity to major transportation routes, intermodal facilities, and air and rail transport facilities making it a high-growth potential location for warehousing and logistics investment and expansion.

Serving as the backbone of supply chain and commerce, transportation, warehousing, and logistics can provide a number of economic benefits to Rocky View County:

Job Creation	<p>Transportation and logistics generate a wide range of employment opportunities, from truck drivers and warehouse workers to supply chain managers and logistics professionals. A focus on this sector can boost employment and support a diverse workforce.</p>
Efficiency and Cost Reduction	<p>Efficient transportation and logistics operations help reduce costs for businesses by optimizing the movement of goods, reducing lead times, and minimizing waste. These cost savings can improve the competitiveness of industries within the region and promote further economic growth.</p>
Infrastructure Development	<p>The transportation sector requires significant infrastructure investments in roads, railways, ports, and airports. While additional ongoing investment will be required, the County already has expansive infrastructure in place to support growth and transportation of goods.</p>
E-commerce Growth	<p>Already benefitting from the rise of e-commerce with the attraction of Amazon, Lowes, and other large multi-national distribution facilities, the County is well positioned to support the ever-growing e-commerce market which relies on efficient logistics and warehousing facilities.</p>
Regional Development	<p>A key sector supporting supply chain and commerce, growth in warehousing and transportation facilities in the County provides significant advantages to other sectors and industries in getting their products to market.</p>

Tourism, Retail, and Entertainment

Rocky View County, particularly in the western region, is an important Canadian tourism destination and global attraction. Tourism is now one of the world's largest industries, with increasing volumes of international arrivals and related economic activity, including increased spending and investment. While not one of the County's largest sectors, tourism does play an important role in economic development in the western region as it creates jobs, strengthens the local economy, contributes to local infrastructure development, and conserves the natural environment.

With the tourism market expected to continue to increase in volume and expectations, Rocky View County has the opportunity to gain an increasing share of this growth through enhanced promotion and attraction of visitors year-round.

Opportunities for growth exist through enhancing experiences for the day trip market as well as providing additional options for overnight travellers. Identifying and supporting unique retail and events that generate and lengthen tourism visits in the region will also expand and diversify the existing market, providing several economic benefits:

Job Creation	The tourism sector is labour-intensive and creates numerous local job opportunities. The sector employs a diverse workforce, including retail associates, hotel staff, tour guides, event organizers, and more.
Revenue Generation	These sectors generate substantial local revenue through tourism-related spending, retail sales, and entertainment events which, in turn, leads to further investment in other industries and infrastructure in the area.
Small Business Support	Retail and tourism sectors often consist of small and medium-sized enterprises. Focusing on these sectors can support local entrepreneurship and help small businesses thrive, contributing to economic diversity.
Infrastructure Development	To support tourism and entertainment, investments in infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, transportation, and recreational venues are often necessary. These infrastructure projects create jobs and stimulate economic growth.
Retail Trade	Retail is a cornerstone of consumer economies, and it directly affects consumer spending and demand for goods and services. A thriving retail sector is indicative of a strong local economy.
Destination Marketing	Effective destination marketing can attract tourists and promote a region as a desirable place to visit and spend money. This marketing can boost tourism and related economic activities.

Manufacturing

Rocky View County has a strong manufacturing base across a breadth of sectors including food, fabrication, and machinery. Manufacturing businesses benefit from the County’s strategic location and access to market through the growing transportation, warehousing, and logistics sector.

One of Canada’s most important economic sectors, the manufacturing industry is undergoing significant transformation with the adoption of smart technologies and automation creating opportunities for significant advancement and growth within the sector.

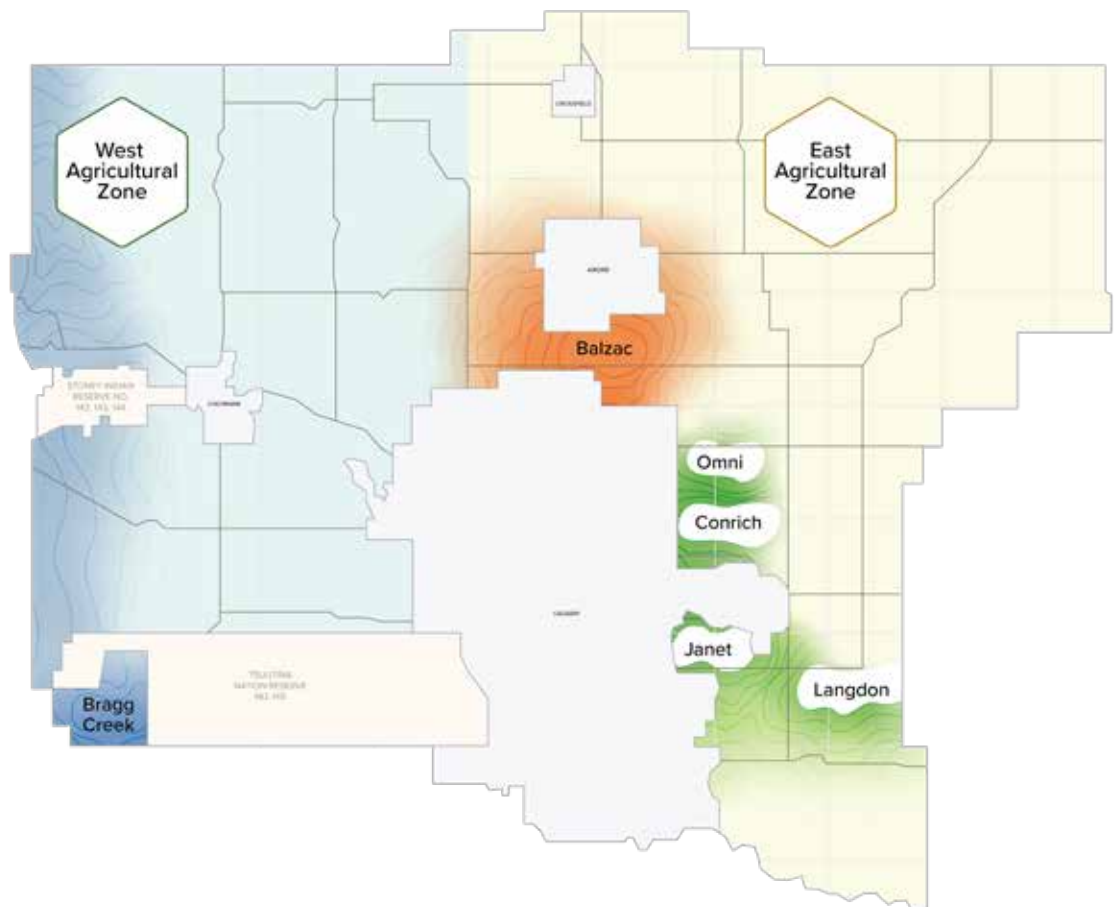
Continuing to develop the County’s manufacturing sector will enhance the County’s position as a supplier to key regional and global industries and has the potential to provide several economic benefits:

Job Creation	Manufacturing provides a substantial number of job opportunities, ranging from factory workers and technicians to engineers and managers. Additional investment and growth in the manufacturing sector can stimulate employment, boost consumer spending, and support other sectors of the economy.
Economic Growth	Manufacturing produces tangible goods that can be sold domestically and internationally. It has a multiplier effect, as a thriving manufacturing sector stimulates demand for raw materials, transportation, logistics and various service industries within a region.
Innovation and Technology	Manufacturing is closely tied to innovation and technological advancement. As manufacturing processes become more advanced, they often lead to the development of cutting-edge technologies and improvements in productivity which can have spillover effects on other sectors.
Supply Chain Development	The manufacturing sector contributes to the development of a robust supply chain, which benefits not only manufacturing, but also other industries in the region. A strong supply chain can enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of the regional business landscape.
Regional Development	Manufacturing often has a regional focus, and the establishment of manufacturing facilities in areas throughout the County can lead to regional, or cluster development and provide advantages and growth in related infrastructure.
Value Addition	Manufacturing adds value to raw materials and components, increasing their worth. The value addition is a significant driver of economic prosperity, as it allows businesses to capture a larger share of the revenue from finished products, which in turn can be re-invested back into the region.
Diversification	Growth and investment in manufacturing, and its subsectors, diversifies the economy which helps lessen the impact of economic downturns in other industries and contributes to overall economic stability.

Agricultural Zones

With 90% of the County's land base zoned for agriculture, Rocky View County acknowledges the important role of the sector in contributing to the region's historical and future economic prosperity. Agricultural land and uses vary across the County, and the agricultural community is active in areas throughout the County. To reflect the diverse nature of agriculture in Rocky View, this Economic Development Strategy identifies two distinct Agricultural Zones with unique characteristics and priorities.

The two zones are intended to reflect the diversity in biophysical attributes, climate, historical and current agricultural land use between East and West as well as the potential for future economic activity in each of the zones. The aim is to focus similar types of land uses within a pattern that is consistent with the working agricultural landscape. The Agricultural Zones provide the foundation for the identification of Economic Zones that consider and align with the existing and future agricultural operations and land use in the region.



West Agricultural Zone

The primary agricultural activities in the western region of the County are cattle and ranching operations. The region has larger parcel sizes and limited county road networks available, making it less suitable for a high degree of development or expansion.

Agricultural land stewardship is recognized as being important within Rocky View County, and particularly in western parts of the municipality. The focus within the Western Agricultural Zone is on supporting existing operations and land use, rather than significant expansion or investment attraction which would deviate from existing land use.

While growth is encouraged in traditional agriculture in the area, and opportunities do exist for businesses such as agritourism and equestrian-related activities, the emphasis is on sectors that are strategically integrated with the existing agricultural landscape.

East Agricultural Zone

The eastern region of the County consists of a high-level of mixed farming operations alongside cereal and oilseed crops and agricultural processing activities.

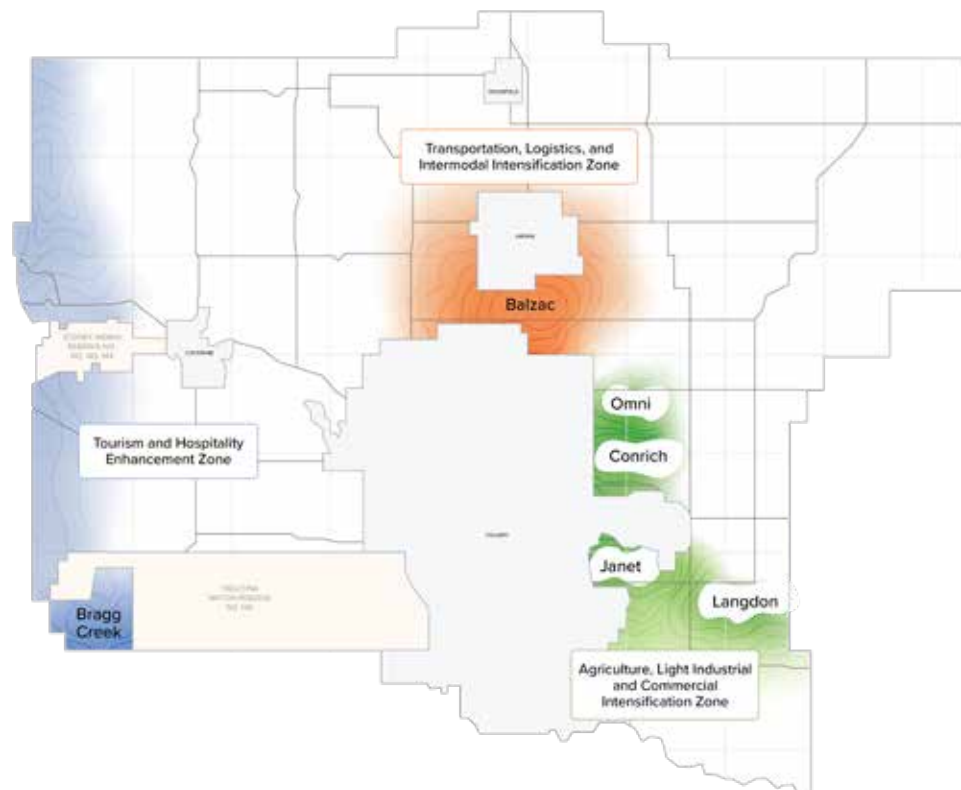
Access to irrigation infrastructure, established transportation networks, productive soil types, a longer growing season, and local population base all contribute to the East Agricultural Zone having significant potential in increased food production activity. Support and growth of specialized agriculture production and distribution including value-added agriculture in the East Zone provides opportunities for efficiencies in distribution and further attraction of new investment, relocation, or expansion of agribusiness in the area.



Economic Zones

The identification of economic zones is intended to stimulate innovation, accelerate business growth, and increase competitiveness in key geographic areas and industries within the County.

This Economic Development Strategy has identified three distinct zones of economic focus within the County. The zones are to be considered for illustrative purposes to define areas of economic opportunity within different regions. They are not intended to be instructive or supersede any other defined areas (Area Structured Plans, Preferred Growth Areas etc.) or electoral divisions within the County.



Tourism and Hospitality Enhancement Zone

Comprising the western-most region of the County, in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, the areas included in the Tourism and Hospitality Enhancement Zone have numerous scenic areas and trails for year-round outdoor activities making it an already established tourist destination. Preservation of the natural environment is a priority within the Zone and a key consideration of any development in the area.

Future development in the Zone is focused on supporting and enhancing tourism while preserving environmental integrity. Opportunities exist to enhance overall tourism services and experiences and diversify year-round accommodation offerings that are on a scale and character that blend with and support the existing landscape.

In the rural centre of Bragg Creek, the County will focus on opportunities to expand unique retail and services that generate or extend tourism visits while celebrating the character and history of the community.

Transportation, Logistics, Intermodal Intensification Zone

Strategically positioned along the QEII Highway, and between the City of Calgary and Airdrie, development in the Balzac area (East and West) has seen significant growth over recent years, becoming a regional centre for transportation and logistics.

With continued economic growth within the Calgary Economic Region, strong market demand exists for business and industrial development in the area.

The focus of the Transportation, Logistics, and Intermodal Intensification Zone, which is centered around the Balzac area, remains on expansion of industries that require proximity to primary transportation corridors, intermodal facilities, and urban markets.

The current and planned availability of water and sewer services, along with transportation accessibility and visibility, will continue to provide a strategic advantage for further development in the area.

Strategically located to serve as a prime location for further commercial, industrial, and mixed-use development, this Zone is likely to produce the strongest concentration of new high-valued business development in the County.



Agriculture, Light Industrial, and Commercial Intensification Zone

Comprised of existing growth nodes of Conrich, Janet, Omni, and Langdon the Agriculture, Light Industrial, and Commercial Intensification Zone has been identified as an area of significant development potential.

With easy access to the City of Calgary and logistics facilities in Conrich, the Zone is well suited to developments that complement the warehousing, light manufacturing, and transportation industries.

The area is well-suited to the development of Business Parks which may involve light industrial activities and processing to support existing agriculture and manufacturing operations. Commercial development has also been identified for the area to support the needs of the regional population including large format retail services, office parks, and personal services.

The Zone also contains a vast amount of productive farmland and farming operations which creates opportunity for further expansion of value-added agriculture and ag-related industries.

While opportunity exists for recruitment and relocation of new business to the area, the economic development focus in the Agriculture, Light Industrial, and Commercial Intensification Zone is on stability and growth of existing businesses and maintenance of existing agricultural lands. Growth among existing businesses will ultimately lead to benefits in existing sectors and expansion of complementary industries.

The hamlet of Langdon, which has largely been developed into a residential community, has been identified as a key residential development within the Economic Zone. Suburban residential growth in the area will provide expansion of the workforce needed to support further agricultural and industrial development.





Strategic Areas of Focus

Four Strategic Areas of Focus have been identified to guide economic development in Rocky View County. Each focus area has a series of priorities to be acted upon over the next three to five years to support achievement of the indicated desired outcome. As economic conditions are highly dynamic, the plan will be reviewed annually, and priorities adjusted as required.

While the areas of focus are relevant to the County as a whole, certain strategic objectives may be more relevant to certain zones than others. The table below illustrates the high priority focus areas within each of the County's identified Economic Zones.





Investment Attraction

Strategic Focus: Growing and diversifying the economy through targeted business attraction in sectors where Rocky View County has a unique advantage and can demonstrate a strong case for growth and investment.

Desired Outcome: A compelling value proposition that attracts the investment needed for sustainable economic development in the County.

Priorities:

- Develop sector profiles and marketing plans for target sectors, focusing on high-value industries and complementary supply chain businesses
- Enhance and promote programs and tools that support and anticipate the needs of the prospective business community (incentives etc.)
- Leverage existing Government programs and services to attract investment (i.e. Government of Alberta Agri-processing Investment Attraction Services)
- Identify opportunities in emerging and value-added sectors where the County can demonstrate strengths and unique advantages
- Promote Rocky View County as a choice destination for investment in key sectors among local and international audiences
- Create a prospecting plan to outline outbound prospecting activities, as well as identify specific potential leads and track results



Business Retention & Expansion

Strategic Focus: Understanding and responding to the needs of existing businesses to ensure they have the support they need to remain, grow, and become more competitive in the region.

Desired Outcome: A supportive environment for existing businesses to thrive, and, in turn, contribute to the overall economic growth of the County.

Priorities:

- Foster strong relationships with local businesses to understand their needs and challenges
- Provide programming that supports business operations and reduces barriers to business growth
- Develop and implement Business Retention and Expansion strategies to support local businesses
- Build a strong network of businesses in key sectors and economic zones to strengthen communities and support growth
- Support capacity building through connections with provincial and federal programming



Sector Development & Diversification

Strategic Focus: Supporting development of emerging sectors and value-added opportunities while continuing to grow and support established industry sectors.

Desired Outcome: A more resilient and dynamic economy that is less susceptible to economic downturns and more adaptable to changing market conditions.

Priorities:

- Explore emerging and innovative sectors that would be well supported and positioned within the County
- Support diversification and value-added expansion of the agricultural sector
- Prioritize attraction efforts on target sectors that align with our competitive advantages
- Increase engagement, relationship building, and business development activities through attendance at target sector events and involvement with trade and industry associations
- Foster growth within existing key sectors, with targeted focus in geographic zones
- Develop and implement focused sector strategies for each geographic zone
- Collaborative support of regional economic development efforts through involvement with regional economic development bodies and attendance at regional events



The table below provides additional detail on the sectors of focus in each of the identified economic zones.

 <p>Agriculture</p>	 <p>Transportation, Warehousing, & Logistics</p>	 <p>Tourism, Retail, & Entertainment</p>	 <p>Manufacturing</p>
<p>Tourism and Hospitality Enhancement Zone</p> <p>Agritourism</p>	<p>Transportation, Logistics, and Intermodal Intensification Zone</p> <p>Distribution Centres</p>	<p>Tourism and Hospitality Enhancement Zone</p> <p>Specialized Retail Tours and Events Accommodations Culture and Wellness</p>	<p>Transportation, Logistics, and Intermodal Intensification Zone</p> <p>Machinery Fabrication Food Processing</p>
<p>Agriculture, Light Industrial, and Commercial Intensification Zone</p> <p>Primary Agriculture Value-added Ag Processing and Distribution Innovative Ag</p>	<p>Agriculture, Light Industrial, and Commercial Intensification Zone</p> <p>Transload Complex Inland Port Facility</p>	<p>Transportation, Logistics, and Intermodal Intensification Zone</p> <p>Retail Fronts Entertainment Facilities Hospitality</p>	<p>Agriculture, Light Industrial, and Commercial Intensification Zone</p> <p>Machinery Transportation Industrial Equipment</p>
		<p>Agriculture, Light Industrial, and Commercial Intensification Zone</p> <p>Retail and services (groceries, food services, vehicle services etc.)</p>	



Strengthen Economic Development Capacity

Strategic Focus: Aligning resources to support economic development practices and enhance capacity for growth.

Desired Outcome: Effective people, processes, and relationships are in place that support and drive development in the County.

Priorities:

- Streamline and improve processes that will result in greater efficiencies and consistent customer service
- Improve data sourcing, collection, business intelligence tools and reporting capabilities to enhance competitiveness and build internal economic development capacity
- Strengthen internal departmental collaboration between economic development, planning, and engineering to break down barriers and leverage departmental knowledge and data
- Increase public relations initiatives to improve the County's regional profile and build awareness (ie; press releases, attendance at ribbon cuttings, regional announcements)
- Develop and implement a framework to monitor and measure performance of businesses and overall economic development efforts