



STRATEGIC PLAN

2022•2026





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MESSAGE FROM MAYOR AND COUNCIL

We are extremely proud and excited to present the Town of High Level's new Strategic Plan. This document is a pivotal moment for our town as we emerge from the rigours of the COVID-19 Pandemic with renewed optimism, looking ahead with determination and energy to the next four years and beyond. Our Strategic Plan is for every resident, community member, business owner, and service provider, and for those who are yet to come. It celebrates and builds on our past and looks to the future of High Level - pursuing opportunities for growth and addressing the challenges towards building a brighter future for our community.

We are building on solid foundations; our 2010 and 2016 Community Sustainability Plans furnishes us with excellent guides, and the Alberta Northwest Species at Risk Committee's 2021 State of the Region Report provides us with robust data, informed by our community members' insights and needs through in-depth engagement sessions. Our Strategic Plan draws on this collective wisdom and provides us with a roadmap to guide our decisions and allocate our resources and efforts in the most impactful way.

We are seeking to address High Level's growing and evolving needs to ensure we are on a path of shared prosperity and sustainable development. Our extensive engagement defined the areas of greatest need, shaped our priorities, and focused our actions. The importance of diversified economic growth, the need to address our housing and infrastructure, along with the provision of additional leisure and recreational facilities and childcare, were identified as focus areas in this Plan. These needs are complex and connected, but we take courage and confidence from two words that came up repeatedly through our community engagement - opportunity and potential. Overwhelmingly our community sees abundant potential and a multitude of opportunities that will meet both the needs of our present and future generations.

We remain committed to serving and leading the town of High Level with integrity, transparency, and respect. We have been intentionally ambitious in this Plan, setting ourselves robust goals and objectives that we firmly believe are achievable, if we all pull together and all do our part. We are, and will always be, Better Together.

Thank you
Mayor McAteer & Council



OUR VISION

High Level, an inclusive and **vibrant community**, with a strong and resilient economy that offers an active and healthy lifestyle.

OUR MISSION

We foster a thriving community that enhances our quality of life through **sustainable planning**, economic prosperity, and inclusion.



*The **AFFORDABLE** cost of living and access to the outdoors and leisure activities, as well as **FRIENDS** and **FAMILY** are what raise their quality of life here.*

THE SNAPSHOT OF OUR TOWN

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The town of High Level, within the Mackenzie region of Northern Alberta, is home to almost **4,000 residents** and covers an area of 21km². The name High Level comes from our original location and the height of the land that separates the Peace and the Hay Rivers. These waterways have shaped our town and provided us with some of the northernmost lands suited to agriculture in Canada. We have a vibrant and diverse economy, with our biggest industries by labour force being in manufacturing, followed closely by healthcare, and accommodation services. Many of our community are also employed in education, public administration, and transportation. We have a

healthy agricultural sector, including the northern most grain elevator in Canada, with farmers transporting their grains from up to 120kms away. With proven strong levels of employment, we have sustained approximately an 80% employment rate over the last decade. We pride ourselves in having a thriving local business community, with small to medium sized enterprises with 1 to 4 employees contributing 44% of our employment. Our average family income remains above that of the province, with many residents enjoying **\$122,109 annual salaries**, compared to the provincial average of \$93,835.

WITH DIVERSITY COMES INCLUSION

We are **growing** in number too, experiencing a 26% growth between 2016 and 2021 and an increasing number of national and international migrants moving into our community. We have a **young and diverse population**, with an average age of 36.6 years and a large **family** demographic. As a commercial centre we serve approximately 20,000 people, including neighbouring **Indigenous communities**, Dene Tha' First Nation, Beaver First Nation, and Little Red River Cree First Nation, Rainbow Lake, and Fort Vermilion. We value the rights, culture and history of Indigenous Peoples and acknowledge the traditional territories across the region. As a Council we are committed to continuing to build **stronger relationships**, seek to grow our knowledge and build trust, moving forward in Truth and Reconciliation.



A REGIONAL HUB FOR SERVICES

Nestled in the northwest Lower Peace Region, we are at the intersection of the Mackenzie Highway and Highway 58, this strategic location means the town plays many crucial roles to surrounding communities, the region, and beyond, in that:

We provide vital commercial, government, health, and recreational services.



We are the most northern town in Alberta and support the surrounding natural resource industries (forestry, oil and gas, and agriculture) in their service and logistics needs.



We respond to regional emergency events, including situations like the Chuckegg Creek wildfire, Fort Vermilion and Chateh flooding events, and the global COVID-19 Pandemic.



Our location also benefits from a flourishing tourism industry, acting as a natural stop for explorers and workers heading north and south. High Level is well-serviced and equipped with a range of accommodation and restaurants, as well as a thriving downtown, an interesting boutique museum and a good range of retail outlets.



INTRODUCING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

In the preparation of this Strategic Plan, as a Council we intentionally took the time to meet and discuss with residents, Indigenous communities, local businesses, service providers and visitors, to fully understand their needs, concerns, hopes and expectations, as well as garner their insights and ideas. This engagement enabled us to prepare a Plan that is representative of our community and therefore conveys a shared understanding for the next four years.

With a strong vision and mission that guides us, we have defined four priorities and accompanying goals, reflecting our areas of focus for the coming years. These goals are broken down further into objectives, that carefully inform the decisions and actions we and our partners will take moving forward.

This four-year timeframe enables us to be both strategic and operationally focused, setting targets with enough time to deliver impactful and sustainable results. We have adopted a SMARTER approach to setting our goals and objectives, committed to ensuring our goals are: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely, including the importance of Evaluating and Re-adjusting as we make progress.

This Plan is foundational to our success. Through dedicated implementation we will build resilience, attract new business and investment to grow our economy and ensure a healthy and safe community for our residents.



“People love High Level because it offers a safe ‘SMALL TOWN VIBE’ with good CAREER OPPORTUNITIES and a CONNECTED COMMUNITY.”

SETTING US UP FOR SUCCESS

VIBRANT ECONOMY

GOAL 1

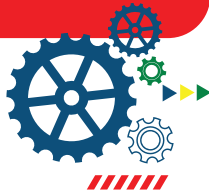


Opportunities generated that deliver economic growth, diversity, and strengthen our sustainability for both the town and the region

- Identify and facilitate partnerships and industries with growth potential
- Work with, and support businesses
- Create opportunities to attract new businesses
- Provide adaptable land use and zoning diversity

INFRASTRUCTURE, GROWTH, AND RELIABILITY

GOAL 2



Community needs are met with reliable infrastructure and attractive shared spaces

- Promote infrastructure growth opportunities
- Pursue infrastructure corridors for enhanced connectivity
- Identify and address new and aging infrastructure
- Create and enhance community spaces and facilities through environmental, economic, and social sustainability

RESILIENT COMMUNITY

GOAL 3



A safe community, where programs and services are adaptable to people's needs and where health and wellness are priorities

- Expand and promote recreational and tourism opportunities
- Advocate for and support professional and technical services for the organization and community
- Maintain and strengthen programs, and increase community volunteer base
- Collaborate with partners on emergency planning, and augment safety measures

ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE

GOAL 4



Leadership is accessible, transparent and respectful; creating trust and confidence in the community

- Increase involvement and relationship building with all levels of government
- Improve collaborative community engagement
- Improve the effectiveness of administrative communication and collaboration
- Regular review and update of governance documents

IMPLEMENTING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN SUCCESSFULLY

We believe that actions speak louder than words. As a Council we are committed to implementing this Plan to the best of our abilities towards achieving the desired outcomes. This Plan has carefully laid out the direction through a comprehensive Implementation Plan. Our actions will be accompanied by key performance indicators enabling us to track and manage our progress effectively and efficiently. Progress will be made sustainably, inclusively and meaningfully to provide tangible benefits and improvements to our quality of life.

COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

On-going tracking of progress must be coupled with a laser focus on achieving more and doing better. Put simply, we will not continue doing something if it is not working and progress is not being made. We will stop, review and if needed we will take a different approach. Taking the time to evaluate and re-adjust are critical for ensuring we are allocating our resources and efforts in the most effective way and most importantly, delivering value to our community.



GATHERING INSIGHTS

Engagement was a crucial part of this Strategic Plan's development, allowing the community to come together to provide input into the vision for their town, define key priorities, express interests, and concerns. This collective input served to guide us in preparing the roadmap for the community for the coming years.

PHASE ONE: PLANNING OUR ENGAGEMENT

As a Council we worked with CMR Consulting, an experienced stakeholder engagement firm, to carefully plan our approach and develop key communications pieces aimed at raising awareness and promoting participation from the community.

PHASE TWO: ENGAGING INCLUSIVELY AND WIDELY

This phase spanned a 6-week period during February and March 2022 and saw a robust community engagement exercise conducted, including key stakeholder interviews (leaders in industry, business, education, healthcare, non-profit, and government services), a focused online and physical survey for the public, as well as a youth survey, information in the local newspaper and attached to residents' water bills, we utilized the Town's social media channels, created a dedicated project webpage on the Town's website, put up posters throughout the community, set up community pop-up stands, and a 1-800 number with a message from the Mayor.

This engagement saw approximately 350 participants offer their thoughts on topics including the top strategic priorities for the town. Priorities coming forward included, the need for economic development, increased commercial and retail services and improvements to our infrastructure.

PHASE THREE: ENGAGING AGAIN AND VALIDATING

This phase sought community input on the draft strategic goals over another 3-week period, with the same engagement tools as phase two, and the addition of a community BBQ which hosted a table for community members to provide their input using engaging tools. Approximately 130 participants offered their feedback that directly shaped the final goals and objectives presented here.

What we heard loud and clear from all phases of community engagement is that we all care about our town and want it to keep its 'small town vibe', while growing in a sustainable way that continues to provide a high quality and safe standard of living in a vibrant community. Furthermore, ongoing transparency and engagement, and active communication remains a commitment from the Council.



BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

Sustainability is a guiding principle for High Level and can be seen in earlier Plans, where our work centred around the five pillars of community sustainability. Underpinning this new Strategic Plan is being a sustainable community, this is embedded within each goal and objective, informing and influencing each of our decisions and actions.

During our engagement with the community, we asked a simple question, **what is a sustainable community for you?** For some this was about businesses and jobs, for others housing, some adequate facilities and services, and for many it meant having a happy, healthy place to live and work. We reflected on all the great responses and concluded for High Level to be a truly sustainable community, we must take a long-term perspective and an holistic and inclusive approach to addressing all these needs and many others, while ensuring we are not compromising one for another.

Our Strategic Plan has been carefully crafted to navigate these complexities, with a built-in understanding of the need to balance economic, social and environmental priorities, while addressing all needs with good governance, aware leadership, and strong partnerships.

For High Level, a **sustainable community** is one where everyone can live safely, thrive, and prosper together, having equal access to inclusive and appropriate services and opportunities.



BETTER TOGETHER

As we look ahead to the next four years we are filled with optimism and enthusiasm.

We look forward to community participation and input, and believe that together we are better, and can create a sustainable community, where everyone is welcome, and we all prosper and grow together.





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