



# **REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**

**WORKING TOWARDS REGIONAL  
PROSPERITY AND SUSTAINABILITY  
IN THE GRANDE PRAIRIE REGION  
FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS**





## FOREWARD

A province wide initiative of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) in partnership with The Natural Step was created to ensure the long-term prosperity of Alberta municipalities through proactive planning.

The Rural Alberta Development Fund (RADF) is the key financial supporter of the Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP) Phase 4 Initiative. Other partners are: Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Alberta Environment and Alberta Municipal Affairs. Amongst the participating communities are the City of Grande Prairie and County of Grande Prairie #1, as well as County of Camrose & Area, Grande Alberta Economic Region, Olds Area, Taber & Area, Town of Swan Hills, Beiseker & Area, City of Brooks, Town of Morinville, Town of Peace River and City of Wetaskiwin.

In January 2009, participating municipalities began work on their Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP) with the Regional Sustainability Coordinator, prior to commencing the overarching Regional Sustainability Plan. The AUMA process and The Natural Step principles were followed to ensure the completion of the plans. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the key strategy areas by the Regional Sustainability Committee and with the commitment of the participating Councils to work towards the recommendations and actions of this plan will achieve success.

Municipal Sustainability Plans, also referred to as Integrated Community Sustainability Plans were developed by the City of Grande Prairie, County of Grande Prairie #1, Town of Sexsmith, Town of Beaverlodge, Town of Wembley and Village of Hythe. The defined strategy areas in this plan were extracted from the MSPs and evaluated to identify regional priorities by the Committee. Public input sessions, workshops and other municipal documents were utilized to gather the data.



## REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

This Regional Sustainability Plan would not have been possible without the efforts, time, ideas and contribution of the committee members.

### **Committee Members**

- Bill Given (Alderman, City of Grande Prairie)
- Leanne Beaupre (Councilor, County of Grande Prairie)
- Sharon Nelson (Councilor, County of Grande Prairie)
- Leona Hansen (Mayor, Town of Beaverlodge)
- Claude Lagace (Mayor, Town of Sexsmith)
- Gary Burgess ( Mayor, Village of Hythe)
- Greg Scerbak (City Manager, City of Grande Prairie)
- Michelle Gairdner (Environmental Sustainability Manager, City of Grande Prairie)
- Nick Lapp (Senior Planner, County of Grande Prairie)
- Chris King (Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Beaverlodge)
- Carrie Gaunt (Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Sexsmith)
- Lori Parker (Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Wembley)
- Christene Livingstone (Village Manager, Village of Hythe)
- Mande Takhar (Regional Sustainability Coordinator, AUMA)



## PROCESS

The Regional Sustainability Plan follows the AUMA process as described in its Municipal Sustainability Planning Guide; which encourages communities to consider five dimensions – social, culture, economic, environment, and governance - when making decisions that affect the future growth and development of their communities.

The guide provides a definition for each dimension and some goals to start discussion and create understanding during the planning process.

### **Economic** – a flourishing and diverse local economy

- A wide range of jobs and training opportunities
- Sufficient land and buildings to support economic prosperity and change
- Dynamic job and business creation
- A strong business community with links into the wider economy

### **Governance** – effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership

- Strategic, visionary representatives and accountable governance systems that enable inclusive, active and effective participation by individuals and organizations
- Strong, informed and effective leadership and partnerships that lead by example
- Strong, inclusive community and voluntary sector
- A sense of civic values, responsibility and pride



## **Environment** – a quality and natural built environment

- Efficient use of resources now and in the future in the built environment and service provision (e.g. energy efficiency, land, water resources, flood defense, waste minimization, etc.)
- Living in a way that minimizes the negative environmental impact and enhances the positive impact (e.g. recycling, walking, cycling)
- Protecting and improving natural resources and biodiversity (e.g. air quality, noise, water quality)
- Having due regard for the needs of future generations in current decisions and actions
- High quality, mixed-use, durable, flexible and adaptable buildings

## **Social** – harmonious and inclusive communities

- Tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs
- Opportunities for leisure, recreation, sport and other activities
- Low levels of crime and anti-social behavior with visible, effective and community-friendly policing
- Sufficient range, diversity and affordability of housing within a balanced housing market

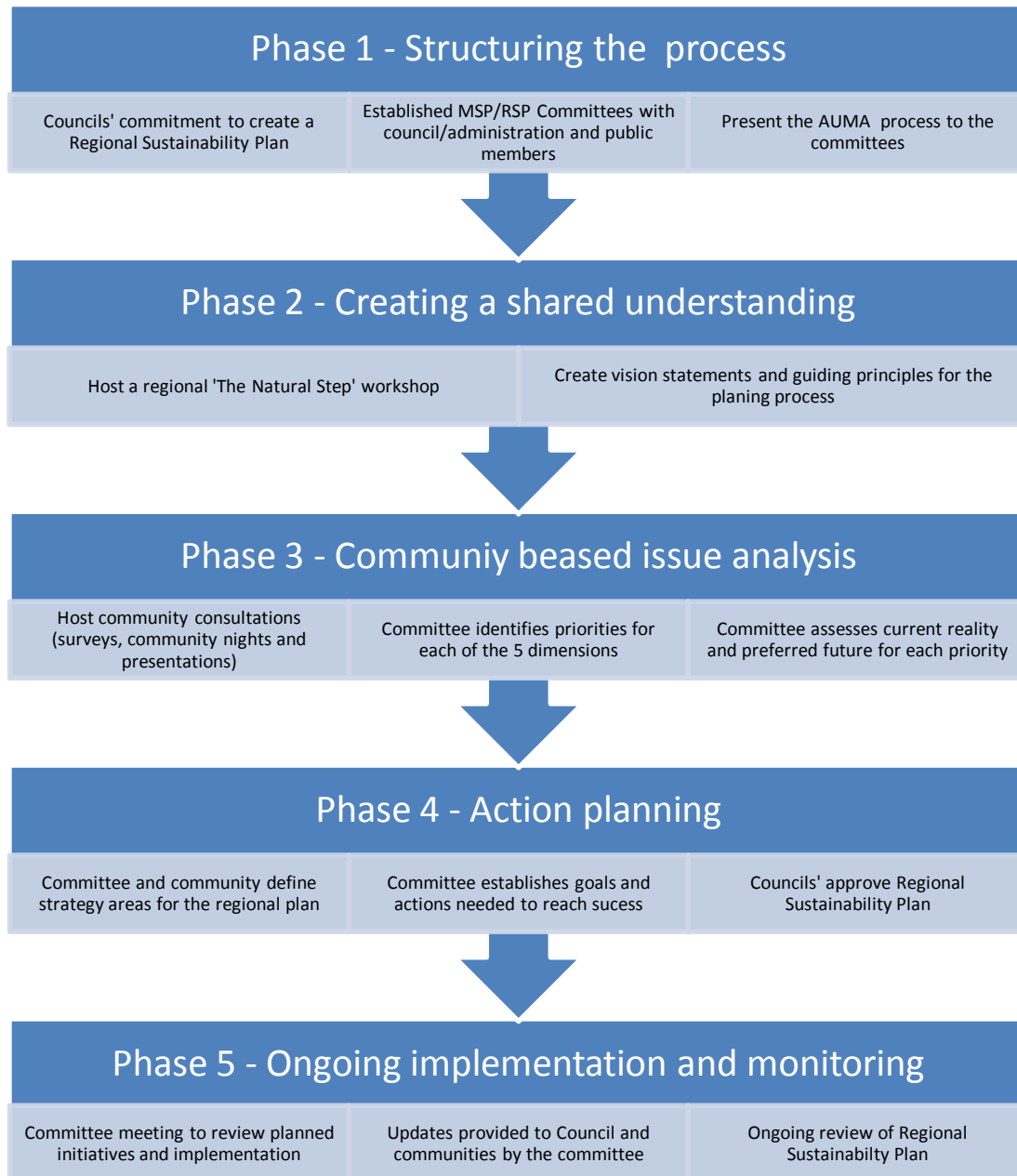
## **Culture** – vibrant and festive communities

- A sense of community identity and belonging
- Opportunities for expression via a variety of art forms (visual, dramatic, musical, etc)
- Strong sense of community heritage
- Pride in community





## 5 Phases of Sustainability Planning





## What is The Natural Step?

The Natural Step (TNS) is a non-profit organization founded in Sweden in 1989. Following from their role in the development of a municipal sustainability planning guidebook in 2005, The Natural Step Canada (TNSC) had been assisting AUMA with its initiative to pilot the planning process in five initial communities in Alberta.

Since then, the MSP process has grown and TNSC has played a supporting role throughout the process. TNS has pioneered the 'backcasting' approach to effectively advance society towards sustainability and further developed, through a consensus process, a systematic principle-based definition of sustainability as follows.

1. The concentration of substances extracted from the earth's crust
  - ❖ eliminate our contribution to the progressive buildup of substances extracted from the Earth's crust (for example, heavy metals and fossil fuels)
2. Concentration of substances produced by society
  - ❖ eliminate our contribution to the progressive buildup of chemicals and compounds produced by society (for example, dioxins, PCBs, and DDT)
3. Degradation of physical means
  - ❖ eliminate our contribution to the progressive physical degradation and destruction of nature and natural processes (for example, over harvesting forests and paving over critical wildlife habitat);
4. People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs
  - ❖ eliminate our contribution to conditions that undermine people's capacity to meet their basic human needs (for example, unsafe working conditions and not enough pay to live on).



## **How TNS is used in Regional Sustainability Planning?**

We began the planning process by understanding the principles and looking through the sustainability lens to ensure that we were making informed and educated decisions towards creating a sustainable and viable region.

Backcasting is used in TNS and applies the A-B-C-D method, which allows us to progress through the planning process.

### **A = Awareness and Visioning**

We started by developing a common understanding of sustainability through common language and by creating a vision of a sustainable future for the region.

TNS principles of sustainability offered a basic science and whole-systems approach to develop strategies for living in balance with nature and our global community.

### **B = Baseline Mapping**

The four sustainability principles were used to conduct a sustainability gap analysis of the major flows and impacts in relation to those principles. The analysis includes an evaluation of products and services, energy, capital and human resources.

### **C = Creative Solutions**

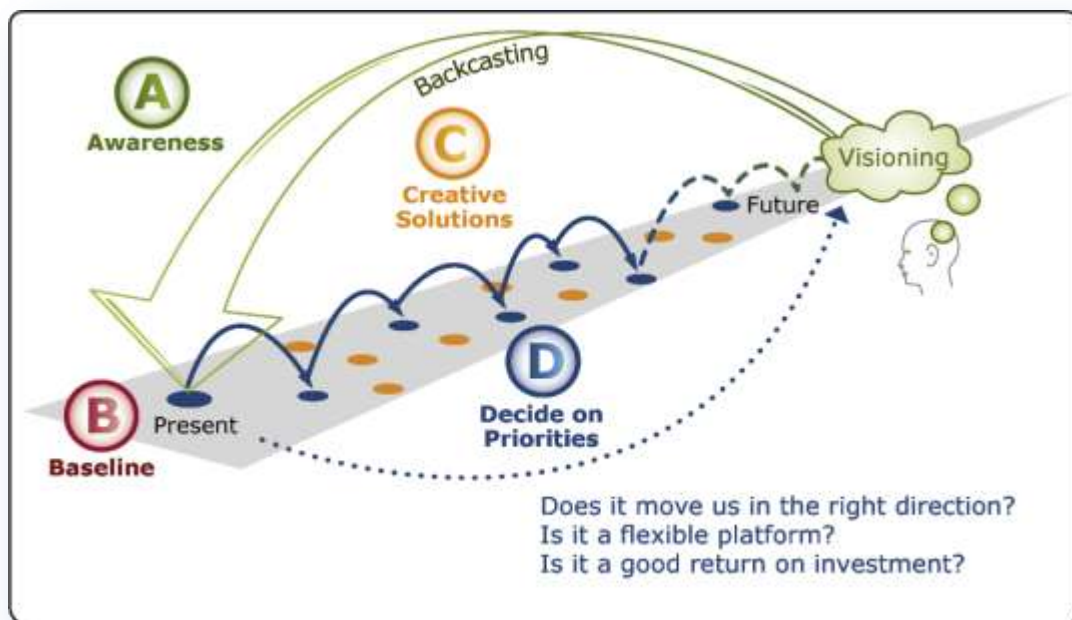
Then potential solutions to the issues were highlighted in the baseline analysis without any constraints. With the vision of success and potential actions, we look backwards from the vision to develop strategies toward sustainability. This is called ‘backcasting’ and it prevents people from developing strategies that just solve the problems of today. Instead, they begin with the end in mind, moving towards a shared vision of sustainability, with each action providing a platform for further improvement.





## D = Decide on Priorities

Then we set priorities to measure and move us towards sustainability, while optimizing flexibility as well as maximizing social, ecological and economic returns. Backcasting was used to continually assess decisions and actions to see whether we were moving towards the desired outcome identified in step ‘A’ (Awareness and Visioning)



The Natural Step “Applying the ABCD Method”



## REGIONAL PROFILE

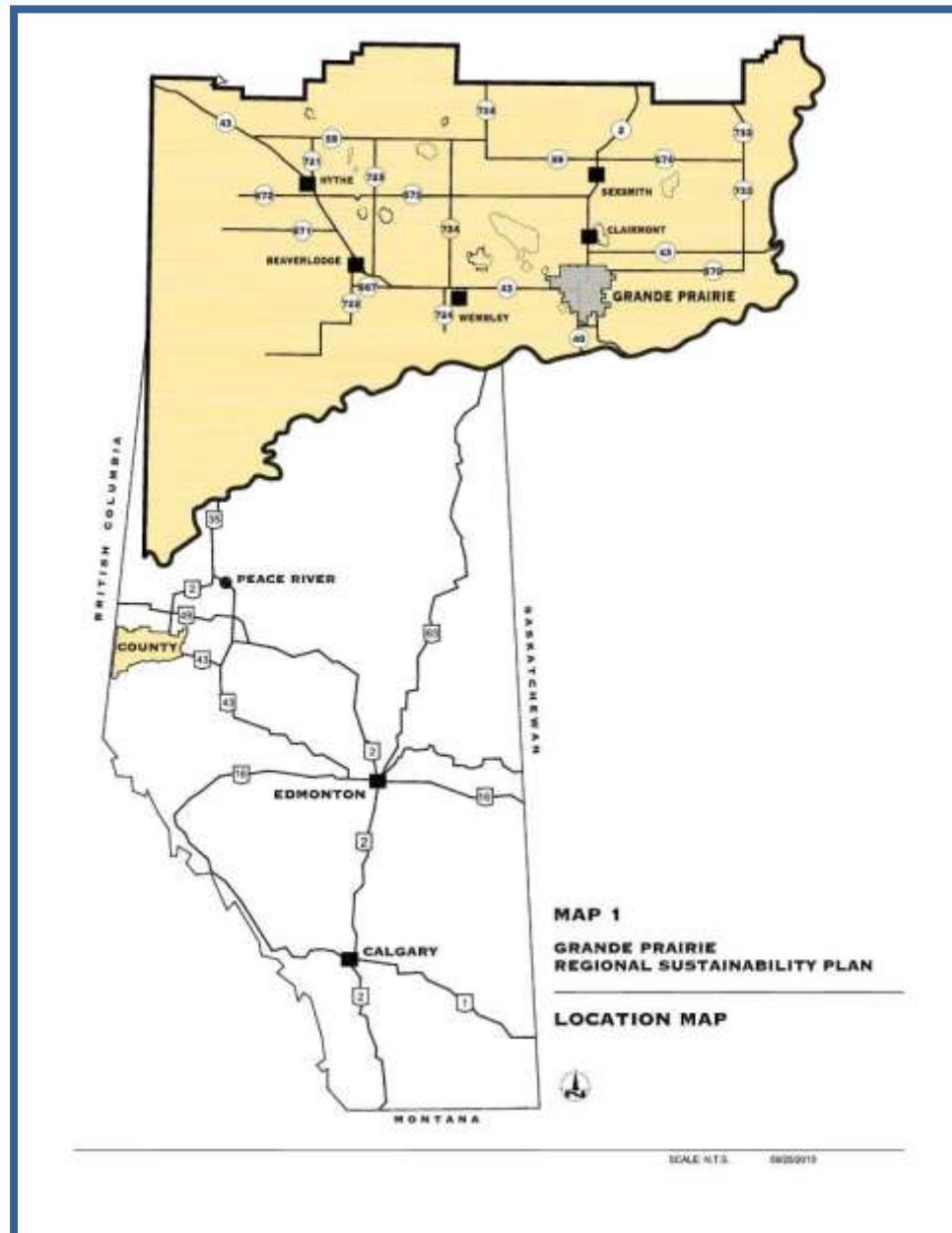
The Grande Prairie Region is situated in the northwest corner of Alberta, approximately 450 kilometres west of Edmonton and serves a trading zone of more than 200,000 people. Major economic generators include agriculture, oil and gas, forestry, manufacturing, construction, regional institutions/commerce and tourism. The Regional Sustainability Plan includes the following municipalities:



- City of Grande Prairie – population 50,227
- County of Grande Prairie #1 – population 17,989
- Town of Sexsmith – population 2,255
- Town of Beaverlodge – population 2176
- Town of Wembley – population 1,443
- Village of Hythe – population 821
- **Total population of region: 74,911**

According to the 2006 federal census data, the average median age of the region's population is 33. The City of Grande Prairie and Town of Sexsmith's median ages are both under 30. When seen through the lens of sustainability this means a population cohort that depends on strong economic diversity, social and cultural programming for young families and individuals, along with strong environmental focus for future generations.







The Regional Sustainability Committee (RSC) was established in May 2009 to formulate and create the Regional Sustainability Plan (RSP). During the meetings the Committee decided the best way to identify the strategy areas was to focus efforts on the MSPs for the individual communities. This would provide accurate and relevant information to the RSC during the planning process to identify which regional priorities needed to be established. .

The RSC created a mission statement for the plan and five vision statements for the region's preferred future in 50 years. Under each dimension allocated a vision statement, determined collective issues, described the current reality and the preferred future and identified goals and actions to reach success.

### Mission Statement:

The Regional Sustainability Committee will fulfill an advisory role by indentifying and compiling common priorities and coordinating efforts to address issues that cross municipal boundaries.





## SOCIAL

### Vision

Residents can access a range of programs and services which assist in achieving an enhanced quality of life.

### Issues

The current social issues within our region include, health care, mental health, affordable housing, declining volunteerism, education; day-care and youth engagement.

### Current Reality



The Alberta Health Services Board visited the region in May 2010 and began breaking ground for the Grande Prairie Care Centre replacement building, which will be located on 94 Avenue.

A growing population in the region places concern on the aging health care facilities, resulting in new facilities and services in all areas being quickly over-subscribed.

Low graduation rates and the need for more physical space for students, in terms of more schools are needed to achieve better student/teacher ratios.

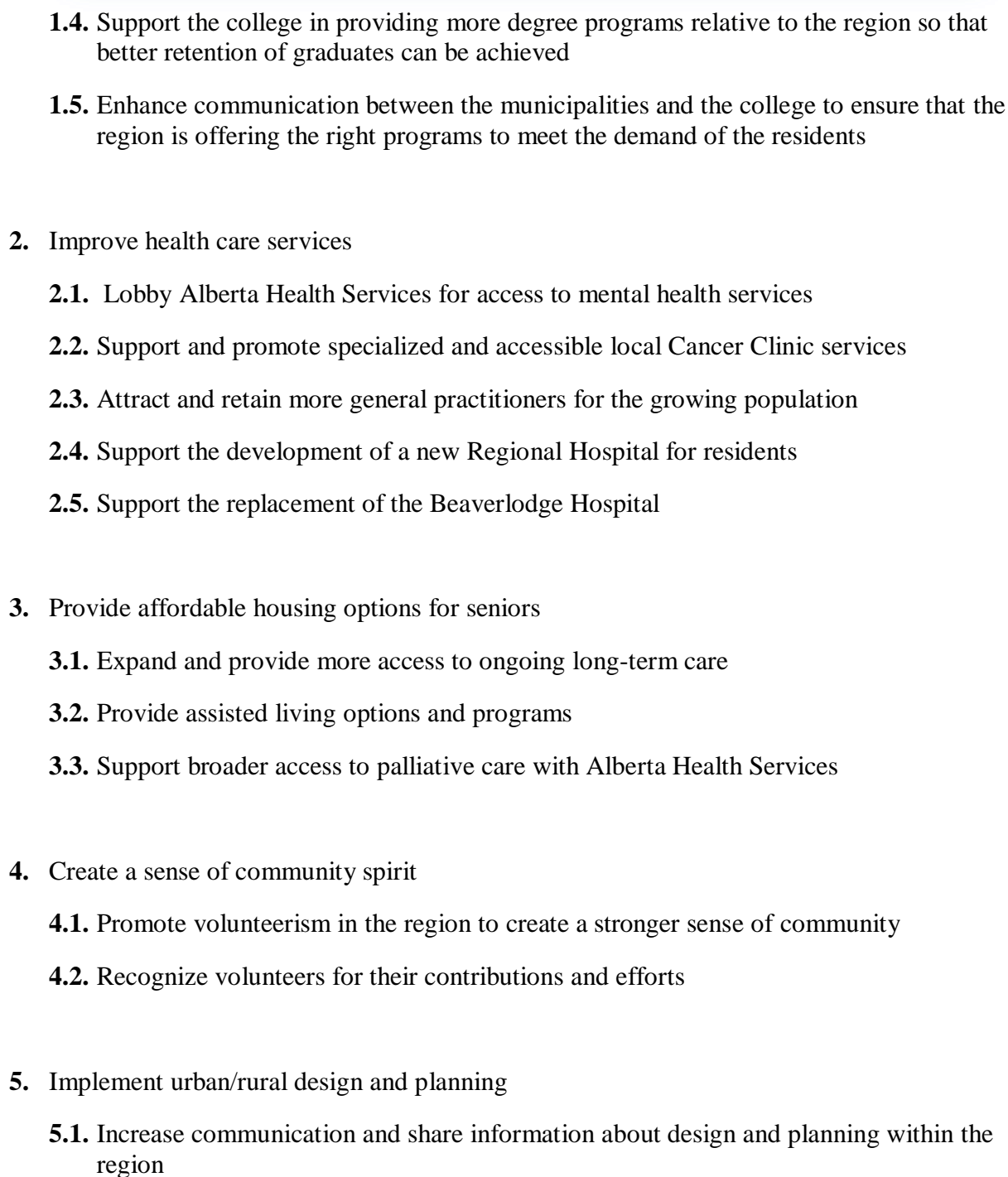
There is a lack of youth engagement in present opportunities, for example, voting and voicing opinions on crucial issues.

### Future Success

#### 1. Support Grande Prairie Regional College

- 1.1. Support and promote enrolment numbers to increase to 2700 by 2018
- 1.2. Encourage the college or affiliate organizations to provide more diverse training to accommodate the present trades in the region and the growing workforce
- 1.3. Support and assist the college in achieving university status







## ENVIRONMENT

### Vision

Celebrate and continue achieving a sustainable built and natural environment that contributes to clean air, water, forest, agricultural land and energy.

### Issues

Regional environmental issues mainly pertain to stronger and more prominent education and awareness. The issues that need attention are: recycling; reduced pollution; water and energy; elimination of litter; waste management; continuity of walking/hiking trails; green spaces and urban wet land protection.

### Current Reality

The Wapiti Corridor Planning Society (WCPS) is a non-profit society formed by regional stakeholders, including the County of Grande Prairie No.1, the City of Grande Prairie and the Municipal District of Greenview, which guide the development of a multi-use plan for the Wapiti River Valley corridor. The WCPS's goal is to create, through an open, transparent, and inclusive process; a multiuse vision, plan, and recommendations for the Wapiti River Valley - Pipestone Creek to the Smoky River. Also ensuring to accommodate, protect, and balance both the current and future needs of the area and its people.

Peace Air Shed Zone Association (PASZA) was formed in March 1999 in response to concerns about air quality in the Grande Prairie Region. PASZA is a multi-stake holder organization consisting of industry, local government, environmental organizations, Alberta Health, Energy and Resources Conservation Board,





Natural Resources Conservation Board, Alberta Environment and the public. Members work together to produce scientifically defensible data that can be used to manage air quality, protect environmental health and influence public policy.

Aquatera's Bear Creek Water Shed project manages the water shed with the intent of creating a plan of how to manage that across City and County boundaries.

Beaverlodge River watershed management/restoration project is a partnership with PRT and Forestry Canada to pilot a willow-bed irrigation system. This system uses the effluent from the sewage lagoon to grow willows and poplar trees. The trees are harvested every 3 years and can be used as biomass in biomass heating systems. The creation of an irrigation system and tree belt along the banks of the Beaverlodge River will reduce runoff and trap runoff that comes from the erosion and silt buildup in the river.



Beaverlodge Riparian Project, that the Town is a minor partner in, supplied trees for bank stabilization along the Beaverlodge River. This project is being undertaken by a private group and we were invited to participate by Energy in Action.

Lake Saskatoon Environment Policy is concerned about banning motorized boats in Lake Saskatoon, as this limits local areas for recreation. We need to explore options and work with Alberta Environment to create a plan for this area.

The Bear Lake Watershed Society has been recently formed by residents located within the vicinity of Bear Lake and has a mandate to restore and maintain the health of the watershed

Clairmont Hybrid Poplar/Effluent Project has been undertaken by the County at the Clairmont Landfill and Lagoon. The facility utilizes sub-surface irrigation to provide effluent/treated water produced at its lagoon to a plantation of hybrid poplars. The long-term project will explore alternative methods of dealing with effluent and bio-solids.

## Future Success

### 6. Develop a regional waste and recycle strategy

#### 6.1. Explore options of regionally managed landfill(s)



**6.2. Evaluate options for monitoring dumping**

**6.2.1.** Consider cameras in established dumping areas

**6.2.2.** Implement fines and enforcement

**6.2.3.** Develop community policing policy

**6.2.4.** Develop a strong corporate partnerships with Aquatera and West Grande Prairie County Solid Waste Authority

**6.3. Support and expand current environmental groups/organizations (for example, regional watershed protection – extension of wapiti corridor)**

**7. Town's storm sewer system. The belt will also further stabilize the banks and prevent further Enhance communication between municipalities to explore regional opportunities**

**7.1.** Collaborate efforts to educate and introduce more recycling programs

**7.2.** Introduce community clean ups (for example, garage sales, city scrub, highway cleanup and secure your load programs)

**8. Balance quality of life (Air, Water, Forest, Agricultural Land and Energy)**

**8.1.** Explore regional water conservation initiatives

**8.2.** Develop air quality policies (for example, anti-idling zones)

**8.3.** Create policies to preserve forest and agricultural land as identified in the IDP

**8.4.** Explore efficient energy principles and apply to municipal facilities

**8.5.** Explore options and programs for renewable energy sources

**9. Ensure future municipal plans and documents increase and protect green space in the region**

**9.1.** Review and comply with Alberta Land Use Policy





## GOVERNANCE

### Vision

An open transparent environment which provides opportunities for inter-municipal partnerships and increased community engagement.



### Issues

Regional issues around governance include the need for enhanced communication between municipalities, decreasing community engagement, continuation and expansion of regional governing bodies (recreation, fire, economic development and GP regional emergency preparedness).

### Current Reality

The Intermunicipal Development Plan (IDP) was created by the City of Grande Prairie and County of Grande Prairie to guide growth and development in the area over the next 30-50 years. The plan has been developed through the work of a joint committee involving Council and administration of both municipalities and co-ordinates in key areas such as land use, environmental policy, transportation, recreation, roads, sewer and water while laying the groundwork for a framework for economic growth.

Inter-municipal communication is currently present in the region in the form of quarterly meetings between Councils and CAOs; events, such as Municipal Government Day and Northern Alberta Elected Leaders Group, which provides an opportunity for mayors and reeves of the Northwest area to come together and discuss opportunities for lobbying and share information. Currently with sporadic attendance we have not been able to take full advantage of this opportunity.

Aquatera Utilities is the first regional utility corporation in Alberta. Aquatera provides the City of Grande Prairie with water and wastewater treatment, garbage collection and recycling services. Aquatera also provides water and wastewater treatment services to some areas within the County of Grande Prairie, including the Town of Sexsmith.





The region has already taken steps in sharing some municipal services, for example, safety code inspectors from the City of Grande Prairie conduct inspections in Beaverlodge.

Road maintenance and infrastructure development is a project in which the region and Province are working closely on. There are proposed plans for updating and creating new networks around the region to mitigate congestion and accommodate the growing population.

## Future Success

### **10. Continue a strong relationship with the Provincial Government**

#### **10.1. Lobby jointly as a region**

#### **10.2. Collaborate efforts to create an economic development plan to attract and retain businesses, as well as bring more professionals to the area**

### **11. Explore shared services across the region and create a communication system to allow more access to opportunities**

#### **11.1. Create regional purchasing initiatives**

#### **11.2. Explore options to share resources or services to achieve greater efficiency**

#### **11.3. Explore shared staffing solutions for part time employment opportunities**

#### **11.4. Synchronize budget cycles and council meetings**

#### **11.5. Maintain use of social media to communicate with the region**

### **12. Continue strengthening regional partnerships (GPREP, Fire, Policing, FCSS, Library)**

### **13. Implement and monitor the Regional Sustainability Plan**

#### **13.1. Review progress annually, at a minimum**



## CULTURE

### Vision

Foster and maintain a vibrant, festive and inclusive region with a diversity of culture which is rich in, arts, entertainment and recreation.



### Issues

Regional issues around culture include heritage preservation, sense of community, cultural events (plays, ballet, and music), affordable sports and recreation.

### Current Reality

There are two new major facilities currently in construction phase, including the City's Multiplex and the County's Sportsplex.

There are a variety of museums in the region that provide information on decorative and fine arts, human history, and natural science.

Immigrants and newcomers to our area have little connection and lack of access to the whole region.

The River of Death & Discovery Dinosaur Museum Society (RDDDM) was formed in 2010 by the County. The Society was created to develop the Pipestone Creek Dinosaur Bone bed and to design, fund and build the museum within the Town of Wembley.

Across the region there are many local festivals and events, including, the GP Street Performers, Country Music, Reel Shorts Film Festival, and Heritage Days.

### Future Success

#### 14. Enhance cultural events (plays, ballet, music)

##### 14.1. Create festivals for the region (for example, folklore and ethnic foods festival)



**15. Create sufficient facilities for sports and recreation**

**15.1.** Provide ample playing fields

**15.2.** Support and provide free/low cost options for residents





## ECONOMIC

### Vision

We are a fiscally responsible and open for business region which supports business viability, diversity and prosperity.

### Issues

Economic issues within the region include, diversifying the economy (attracting and retaining business), transportation networks, tourism, infrastructure needs (roadways, transportation – open airways policy), regional water lines, power lines, airport).

### Current Reality

Community Futures Grande Prairie and Region offers a wide range of services to entrepreneurs, not-for-profit organizations and communities in the Grande Prairie Region. Their services include, business counseling, business development, assisting young entrepreneurs and community economic development.

The Peace Region Economic Development Alliance (PREDA) is a network of municipalities and organizations across northwest Alberta who has an interest in designing and managing a regional economic development strategy for the area.

Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association works with industry partners to create marketing opportunities that will increase tourism and spending in the Grande Prairie Region. Specifically, they coordinate industry marketing programs with Alberta North, promote local current events, publish tourism marketing materials and represent the membership at trade shows and high profile events.

We have a very diverse economy which consists of many major industries, forestry and agriculture, oil and gas, retail/services, tourism and institutions.

The Province has agreed to support the Centre for Research and Innovation in Beaverlodge with the assistance of the Grande Prairie Regional College. This initiative also offers great



opportunities for the college to expand its programs and take another step towards becoming a university.

Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC) offers a wide variety of programs, including university studies; options for degree completion; certificate, diploma and trade programs. Instruction is based on campuses in the City of Grande Prairie and the Town of Fairview.



We have a broad and diverse range of retail options within the region. There are many big box stores which have created jobs for the community, alongside many entrepreneurs and small business owners who have encouraged a flourishing local economy.

The County has partnered with private industry (GPN Wireless Network Solutions) to provide wireless high speed internet service to

County residents. Several wireless internet towers have been constructed throughout the County. The recent focus has been on extending service into areas that cannot receive a proper signal due to isolation or unique geographical features.

## Future Success

### 16. Support Inland Multi-Modal Logistics Centre

- 16.1. Support the development of a multi-modal logistics facility in the County
- 16.2. Improve opportunities for rail service to the region and to businesses
- 16.3. Improve the movement of regional resources and products to market

### 17. Explore and support competitive energy cost structures for local businesses

- 17.1. Research lower electrical costs options





**17.2.** Educate about programs and/or incentives available

**18.** Support and encourage more diversity for manufacturing businesses operating in the region

**18.1.** Expand value added service options

**19.** Attract/Retain Businesses

**19.1.** Implement Regional Economic Development Plan to attract and retain businesses

**19.2.** Continue to support the Regional Chamber of Commerce

**20.** Actively attract and retain professional and semi-professionals for all industries

**20.1.** Develop a shared strategy for the region to accommodate and provide opportunities

**21.** Continue support for the “Growing the North Conference”





## Ongoing Implementation and Monitoring

Phase 5 of the AUMA process includes:

- Review and ongoing monitoring of the identified initiatives
- Updates to the community and Councils on a regular basis
- Review of the Regional Sustainability Plan for alignment and revision annually, at a minimum

### Committee Responsibilities

**a) Structure:**

The Committee members will be appointed by their respective Councils

**b) Membership:**

The Committee will consist of at least one Council or Administrative representative from each participating municipality

**c) Chair:**

The Chair shall rotate to accommodate the hosting municipality

**d) Meetings:**

The Committee shall meet annually at a minimum, unless the Committee agrees to meet more frequently

**e) Voting:**

The Committee will provide a motion when further action is required from the discussion or a discussion item is closed. The motion will be tabled and the Chair will call for the vote. A majority vote is a carried motion.



### **Committee Objectives:**

- i. Establish a budget for priority projects or initiatives
- ii. Review the Regional Sustainability Plan annually
- iii. Evaluate the progress of the current initiatives
- iv. Measure success by determining completion of assigned tasks
  - a. Make changes to scope, budget, and timelines, if necessary
  - b. Determine new priorities or update current priorities as required
- v. Generate an annual report from the Regional Sustainability Committee meeting
  - a. Complete within 30 days of the meeting and present to all participating Councils

### **Committee Meetings**

#### **Agenda Development**

The agenda will be developed by the Chair of the municipality responsible for hosting the meeting.

The Committee may also deal with emergent items of a regional nature that are deemed to be of benefit to the membership.

#### **Reporting to the Councils**

The Committee with administrative support will generate a report to Councils when background information is required on a new initiative or project. Once the project or initiative has consent to proceed and the Councils have granted the Committee the authority to make operating decisions and share resulting documents with the Councils, further consultation will only occur if the scope of the project significantly changes or there is a need for additional funding.



### Project/Initiative Management

Project/Initiative Management may be provided by the Committee, sub-committee if assigned or by a consultant if necessary. If funds are required they may be provided through external and/or municipal contributions.

### Sub-Committees

It may be necessary to assemble a sub-committee to complete administrative tasks for the Committee. From time to time the Committee may appoint sub-committees to undertake a task and report back to the Committee.

