

Woodlands County Strategic Plan

2015 - 2021



Revised October 26, 2016

Message from County Council:

In 2015 Woodlands County Council determined that it was necessary to have a serious look into the long term strategic future of the County. We found that although the County had been very successful much of the planning that the County had done was somewhat tactical and not focused on the long term. The organization has evolved significantly since it became a County in 1994, therefore Council believed it was time to step back and evaluate how the County could better operate in the future and to focus energy on planning for the next 10 years.

Council and the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) felt that it would be prudent to be more strategic in its business and undertook a Strategic Planning process beginning in early 2015. This document represents the outcome of several days of our Council and CAO's energy in ensuring that the County will be more long term focused in its business practices in the future.



Jim Rennie
Mayor



The following diagram gives an overview of the Strategic Planning Process that County Council has adopted.



Strategic Planning is an important process for any modern organization. As Henry Ford stated:

If you always do what you have always done...You will always get what you have always got.

County Council utilized the following hierarchical framework to guide its strategic planning for 2015 – 2021.



Vision

In planning for the future, leaders of an organization need to look well into the future so that they can set the course for a desired outcome. This is referred to as a Vision. It is the desired future state or Council’s vision of what the County will be like 20 – 25 years in the future. After considering input from the community and staff, Council’s Vision for the County is:

Woodlands County continues to be a well-planned, successful and family oriented community that balances its high quality of life with diverse economic opportunities.

Mission

In order to achieve a farsighted vision an organization must express its core purpose through an enduring Mission. The Mission is what the County will do to achieve the Vision. In this case it is what Council will ensure the organization and stakeholders will do over the next 6 years in order to move closer to achieving the 20-25 year Vision.

Through community partnerships and by planning strategically; Woodlands County provides quality municipal services, residential and business development opportunities in a progressive and fiscally responsible manner.

Values

Core values are enduring principles or beliefs that guide individual and collective behavior and relationships. They are the acceptable behaviours and norms that guide the actions of Council and the corporation. County Council believes that there are values that are essential to how Council members interact with each other, staff, and the community. They are also the values that they expect of staff in their interactions. The following are the key guiding values of Woodlands County:

Ethics:

We make decisions based on fairness, respect and equity.

Opportunity:

We are innovative, creative and capitalize on opportunities that help people achieve their aspirations.

Communication:

We communicate openly, honestly and with respect while actively listening to views and opinions of others.

Volunteerism:

We deeply appreciate, encourage and support the contribution that people, not for profit organizations and businesses make to our community.

Diversity:

We respect the diversity of needs of the different geographic and socio-demographic sectors of our community.

Healthy Lifestyles:

We invest in people by creating an environment that is safe and promotes a positive emotional and physical well-being.

Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priorities are those areas that County Council believes the corporation needs to focus its attention in the development of the Annual Budget over the 2015 to 2021 period. We also recognize that these topics are fluid and open to change depending on what occurs over time. They will be reviewed during the CAO's Council quarterly update and will be formally updated at an annual strategic planning workshop.

Providing ongoing services to our residents and businesses is eighty to ninety percent of what we do. Key to this is maintaining current service levels, regularly evaluating services and continually looking for more efficient and effective ways to provide these services. Council also believes that it is very important to regularly evaluate the needs of ratepayers and evaluate what the true needs are for current and new services.

For each Strategic Priority, goals and actions are identified to address current and future needs. Notwithstanding this strategic direction, Council realizes that the organization needs to be nimble in order to address emerging priorities. This delicate balance of addressing the needs of today while planning for the future is one of the biggest challenges of Council and the CAO.

The following Strategic Priority categories were identified for 2015 – 2020.

- ❖ Quality of Life through Collaboration
- ❖ Economic Development
- ❖ Organizational Excellence
- ❖ Infrastructure and Asset Management

Quality of Life through Collaboration

We will grow partnerships with other levels of government, municipalities, government agencies, stakeholders and not for profit organizations in our region to increase the quality and expand the variety of services in the County and to accomplish more than what we can do on our own. In doing so we will ensure that there is equitable treatment of the geographic regions within the County.

Goals

1) Enhance the quality of community services in our community and our region.

Action

- Make a decision regarding the development of a Performing Arts Center in cooperation with Whitecourt by the end of 2016. (Cross reference with Infrastructure and Asset Management) – ***COMPLETE and waiting future council decision and funding options***
- Advocate for and support Seniors and Health Services
 - Advocate with regional municipalities to obtain an ASLI Grants from the Province for a Seniors Extended Care and Hospice in 2015/16 as well as other facilities required for other areas in the County. – ***COMPLETE and waiting construction***
Promote new opportunities in Barrhead senior housing
 - Advocate to the province for a new Hospital in Whitecourt. (Start in 2015 and continue until it is achieved)
 - Enhance transportation for seniors to provide for north end and east end bus access to Whitecourt. – ***Partially complete – (Handibus type concept level of service)***
 - Work with the Hillcrest Foundation to construct seniors housing facilities.

- Develop a new library and community use facility in Blue Ridge by 2016/17. – **COMPLETE**
- Develop walking and biking trails throughout the County.
 - Partner with the Town of Whitecourt to develop plans for trails in the area in and around the Town by 2017.
 - Partner with community organizations and business to develop trails in other areas of the County by 2020.
 - Partner with the Province, community organizations and business to build a trail to the “Centre of Alberta” by 2018.
 - Develop the Fort Assiniboine Trail by 2018.
- Evaluate the formalization of the Blue Ridge gravel pit camping area by 2022.
- Collaborate with the Provincial Sustainable Resource Development Department (SRD) to create additional campground and recreation opportunities in the County. (ongoing)

2) Complete and implement a Recreation Master Plan

Action

- Plan completed by end of **2017**
 - Engage the public and other stakeholders in a discussion about the concept of centralized community halls vs decentralized community halls in the Plan.
- Implement the Master Plan once complete

3) We will assist our Community Organizations in providing services for County residents. This capacity building is called “community development.”

Action

- Monitor and review the Community Grant Program to ensure that it outlines the support that the County provides to not for profits that provide services on behalf of the County. (Ensure the policy recognizes the retention and attraction of volunteers in organizations such as our community halls, fire services, agricultural societies and recreation services)

4) Engage the citizens and community stakeholders in Fort Assiniboine in identifying and developing strategies to address their recreation needs.

Economic Development

Having an environment of openness, creativity and innovation is critical to the continued economic growth of the County. Through this growth we will have continued prosperity for residents and business.

Goals

- 1) Ensure that our Land Use Planning Bylaws and Policies are current so that we can expedite desired development opportunities when they arise.

Action

- Review and Update the LUB by the end of **2016/17**
 - Review the possibility of smaller County residential lots
 - Review and update the MDP by 2016/17
 - Review the possibility of smaller County residential lots
 - Review and update the IDP by 2016/17
 - Review the possibility of smaller County residential lots
- 2) Develop further Industrial Opportunities in the County including the concept of an Industrial Corridor.

Action

- Work with the Province on a process that will allow for and expedite the conversion of former gravel leases to large scale industrial developments
 - Review other opportunities for industrial growth in the County. This should include zoning under the MDP review in 2016/17 and ongoing attraction efforts by Council and the Administration.
- 3) Enhance, attract and promote diversified agricultural, forestry, oil & gas and manufacturing industry that ensures our community has a wide spectrum of economic drivers:

Action

- Advocate with the Provincial Government for planned resource development throughout the County. (ongoing)
- Meet regularly with the Oil, Gas and Forestry Industries to encourage development in the County. (ongoing)
- Maintain a committee structure that is flexible and responsive to the needs of industry. (ongoing)

4) Facilitate opportunities for increased residential growth in the County.

Action

- Expand residential development opportunities in Blue Ridge and Fort Assiniboine.
 - Ensure land planning initiatives provide a framework for growth.
 - Ensure there is a good level of quality infrastructure that supports current and future residents. (cross reference Infrastructure)
 - Evaluate the need to pave the Old Blue Ridge Highway by 2018.
- Expand Country Residential opportunities
 - Ensure that the IDP, MDP and LUB provide a framework for orderly and logical county residential development.

5) Initiate a plan for the redevelopment of the BRIAR Patch property in Blue Ridge by 2017/18.

6) Measure the Economic Development Strategic Priority in 2017 against the following measures:

- Growth better than the Provincial average
- Higher income than the Provincial average
- Lower municipal taxes than the provincial average

Organizational Excellence

The functions and services that Council and staff provide are “What the County does”. The goal of the County is to provide residents and businesses with the highest quality of service possible at the lowest possible cost. Council believes that the best way to ensure that this is achieved is to foster and encourage organizational excellence through timely and appropriate staff training and a safe workplace:

Goals

1) Governance

Governance is the establishment of policies and continuous monitoring of their proper implementation by County Council. It includes the mechanisms required to balance the interests of Council with associated accountability without negating their primary duty of enhancing the prosperity and viability of the County.

Action

- Develop a formal Corporate Planning Framework and Policy by July **2017**.
- Develop a 10 year Capital Plan in **2016**

- Review and update all Financial Planning Policies and Processes during 2015-2017 (i.e. Reserve Policy)

2) Communication

Communication is integral to all public and private sector organizations today. For the County; citizens, business, stakeholders and staff all have an expectation that they will be afforded with the opportunity to communicate on issues that affect them and they will also want to be able to obtain information on County topics of interest on a 24hr a day, 7 days a week and 365 days of the year basis.

Action

- Council has an ongoing open door policy and encourages input from the public through open houses, website, surveys, attending community events, general discussion with the public and any other means available.
- Council wants staff input, through meetings, staff events etc.

3) Environmental Balance

We will do our utmost to balance the needs of residents, industry and government.

Infrastructure and Asset Management

The maintenance and development of County infrastructure is of paramount importance to Council. Given that this is a key function of the organization we are committed to ensuring that we have solid long term and short term plans for all County owned infrastructure. Our assets include roads, facilities, water, sewer, the airport, communications towers, etc.

- Facilities
 - Build a new County Shop: choose location, design and construct in 2015/16. - **UNDERWAY**
 - Review alternatives for the Blue Ridge Fire Hall and make a decision for action by 2016. - **UNDERWAY**
- Transportation
 - Update County Road Plan in 2017 (10 year rolling plan)
 - Develop a 10 year Bridge Strategy (10 year rolling plan)
 - Advocate for the Province to complete the improvement of the intersection of Hwy 32 & 43 and the widening of 658 from Blue Ridge to Cottonwood.
 - Finalize the Service Road Study for the area south/east of Whitecourt.

- Utilities
 - Complete an assessment of existing water and sewer servicing in the Hamlets (2017)
 - Implement assessment recommendations (2017-2021)
 - Review the cost/benefit of solid waste collection by 2020
 - Evaluate the potential of water servicing in the Highway 32 corridor. (2021)
 - Develop a Communications Tower Strategy by 2017

- Airport
 - Finalize a cost sharing agreement and management plan for the airport with the Town of Whitecourt (2017)
 - Work with partner to develop strategy to develop long term strategies for the Airport development
 - Implement future phases of development (ongoing)
 - Review future growth opportunities outside current boundary