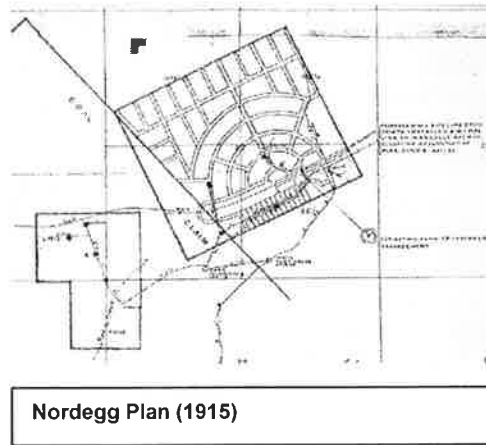


# Section 2 – Community Context

## 1. Historical Legacy

Nordegg maintains a rich history. The community is a former coal-mining town situated in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies 100 kilometers west of Rocky Mountain House (see Map No. 1). Nomadic First Nation Camps represented the first habitation in the area, with camps set up along Shunda Creek to take advantage of the rich hunting and fishing corridor. Settlement by Europeans followed in the early 1900s after Martin Nordegg, a German entrepreneur, staked claim to the area's coal deposits. He reached an arrangement with the Canadian Northern Railway, whereby they would build a rail line to Nordegg in return for a steady supply of coal for their locomotives. The Brazeau Collieries began mining coal in 1912 and the rail line into the area was completed in 1914.

Nordegg was one of many company coal-mining towns established in Alberta prior to World War I, however it proved to be unique among its rivals in the Province. Nordegg would be a totally planned community in which Martin Nordegg took great interest and pride. His commitment to create a suitable living environment for the miners and their families was in sharp contrast to the efforts made by other coal companies in Alberta at the time. Initially the community featured 50 modern miner's cottages arranged in a semi-circular pattern around a central business and service core on upper Centre Street. The layout was designed by Martin Nordegg and appears to have been an adaptation of Ebenezer Howard's "Garden City" concept. It was more in keeping with the hilly topography of the site than the traditional gridiron pattern that was prevalent at the time. The original layout is illustrated on the sketch.



The community thrived, employing up to 800 workers and supporting a population of 2,500. Nordegg was far ahead of its time in providing services and amenities to its residents, such as hot running water. The level of service was comparable to that provided in Calgary and Edmonton. It is in this spirit of innovation and leadership that Nordegg flourished.

Throughout the 1940s the community prospered, but the decline in the coal markets was imminent. Railroads were switching to diesel fueled locomotives and Albertans began heating with natural gas instead of coal. In 1950 a fire destroyed the briquette plant, and even though the plant was rebuilt by 1953, its life was short-lived as the coal market had all but collapsed. By 1955, the Collieries had closed and within three years Nordegg was a virtual ghost town. People abandoned the community, which had no titled land. From 1963 to 1995 the Province operated a minimum-security prison on the town site. During this period most of the town's structures were demolished.

The mine site was declared a Provincial Historic Site in 1993. Through the Nordegg Historical Society, improvements to the mine site continue and tours are operated each summer. In 1996 Clearwater County completed land swap negotiations with the Province and obtained title to the town site.

## 2. Carrying on the Vision

This Plan represents a rare opportunity to carry on the legacy that Martin Nordegg established. It is a chance to fulfill his dream, his vision. Some would argue his ideals were those of a romantic: admirable, but to a certain extent impractical. It was likely evident to Martin Nordegg that on paper and on the ground a plan can establish the physical form of a community.

## Section 2 – Community Context

However, over time, it likely became just as evident that the true evolution of this community came largely from one source, the people who lived here.

Residents past, present, and future have all shaped and will continue to shape the community's form and personality. They are the ones driving the streets, meeting in the café, buying the groceries, shoveling the walks, running the businesses, and strolling along the paths. Still, Martin Nordegg planted a seed and set the direction for a once thriving and prosperous community. His vision is worth holding onto. The impressive mine site and the town site's unique street pattern bear witness to his dream.

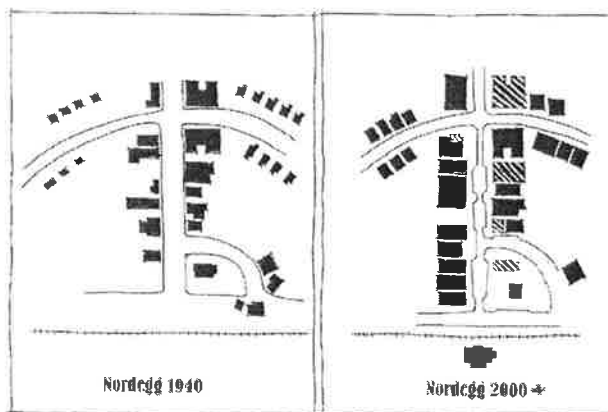
Nordegg is a special place with a special history. Each person who has tread upon the soil, or has toiled beneath its surface, has written a chapter. From aboriginal settlement, to mining town, to penitentiary, life was not always easy and there remains a rugged side to the community's history. Though isolated, it fostered innovation. Though tough, it was welcoming (after you had proven yourself). Those who moved on carried this spirit, and many of them return on a regular basis.

The residents of Nordegg, the wider County, and the lucky travelers from afar have long recognized that this is a special place worth sharing. To accommodate future travelers, to facilitate continued growth, and to provide a common foundation, both the residents of Nordegg and Clearwater County understand the need for a plan. The *Nordegg Community Outline Plan* was prepared in 1996 and provides the overall framework for the future. The *Nordegg Development Plan* carries on further.

It is not the intent of this Plan to recreate the exact town site as it existed in the late 1950s when the mine shut down. This is largely due to practical limitations, economic realities, modern technologies, and current regulations. However, some key elements that characterized the original Nordegg have been adopted into the Plan for the new Nordegg. It is the intent of this Plan to meld

the new with the old, and to create a community that gains from both.

While providing a common vision for the future, it must be remembered that this Plan remains a starting point rather than an end. It should and will evolve over time as circumstance changes. However the spirit and intent of the Plan, much like Martin Nordegg's vision, must be carried forward. A modern community founded on



Nordegg Past and Future (courtesy Habico)

Martin Nordegg's dream is worth striving for. The success of the community, and the remembered image that travelers take with them, will depend on a commitment to this dream.

### 3. Existing Situation

The document *Nordegg Development Plan – Baseline Information and Historical Data* provides a detailed overview of the physical and social background to Nordegg. A brief summary of the document is provided in this section. The reader is directed to the original document for more detailed information.

The baseline information document includes the following components:

1. **Biophysical Review** – includes an overview of the topography, slopes, vegetation and tree cover, wildlife and fisheries, undevelopable areas, watersheds and drainage, bedrock geology and mining

## Section 2 – Community Context

---

delineation, surficial geology and shallow bedrock, coal slag, and groundwater.

2. **Visual Quality Assessment** – includes an overview of the focal points, view corridors, view locations and vistas, and a photo inventory.
3. **Historical Review** – includes an overview of the general history of the community, a chronology of the Nordegg development, and a visual index of historical photographs.
4. **Existing Facilities and Users** – includes an overview of the existing building inventory (photographs), existing user profiles, recreation, and unique features.
5. **Infrastructure** – includes an overview of the existing roads, water treatment and distribution system, sanitary wastewater system, storm water system, and shallow utilities.

The following sections will overview the information contained in the document.

### 3.1 Biophysical Review

#### Slopes and Topography

Topographical information was generated from digital contour information (one meter contours) and an orthophoto prepared in 1997. The elevation of Nordegg varies between 1,308 meters and 1,535 meters above sea level.

Nordegg generally slopes toward Shunda Creek, which bisects the town site into North and South. Steep slopes at the north and south extremes preclude development. The slopes vary significantly as illustrated on Map No. 2. Areas under 15% slope are generally developable, excepting the flat wetlands adjacent to the lakes and Shunda Creek. The developable areas are often fragmented into small benches and ridges bounded by steep slopes. This is especially evident in South Nordegg, where the undulating terrain will make development a challenge. Slopes greater than 15% represent significant

restrictions to development, and those over 30% are generally undevelopable.

#### Vegetation and Tree Cover

Vegetation and tree cover vary throughout the town site. Only a small percentage is open grassland, typically on the site of the old town and in the existing development areas. Near Shunda Creek and along the shallow slopes leading up to the creek, groundwater discharge near the surface is common. Shrub-land bogs and marshland are typical. The remainder of the town site is generally heavily tree covered. Much of the timber is second growth.

#### Wildlife and Fisheries

The land in and around Nordegg supports a diverse wildlife population and is considered to be fair habitat for elk, moose, bear, and deer. A portion of low lying land adjacent to Shunda Creek has been designated as the Shunda Creek Critical Wildlife Zone in the *David Thompson Corridor Local Integrated Resource Plan*. This area is recognized as a critical wintering area for elk as well as a travel corridor for bighorn sheep. Numerous birds and smaller mammals also utilize the area, which is illustrated on Map No. 3. In addition, Shunda Creek supports naturally reproducing populations of brown trout, brook trout, mountain whitefish, and possibly bull trout although it is expected bull trout do not reach this far upstream. Shunda Creek is renowned for its brown trout fishery and is popular among anglers.

#### Restricted Development Areas

As part of the land negotiations with the Province, a number of areas were designated “undevelopable areas” as illustrated on Map No. 4. These areas were determined on the basis of both environmental sensitivity and development potential. The option remains open for the County to purchase some areas of lower environmental sensitivity for future consideration.

## Section 2 – Community Context

---

### Drainage

Drainage through the town site is all via surface channels towards Shunda Creek. Two major streams, Martin Creek and Miners Creek, flow on the south side of the town site while numerous seasonal streams flow on the north side. Martin Creek has been directed to a road ditch along Stuart Street in the developed area of Nordegg. Drainage areas outside of Nordegg drain into the town site, requiring proper storm water management in the design of the community.

### Geology and Coal Slag

The geology of the area is varied. Historically the mining operations were limited to the mine site area south and west of the town site boundaries. No mining was carried out within the Nordegg boundaries and so does not form an impediment to development. However, coal slag material and refuse coal was randomly hauled into the town site as a fill material and road surfacing material. Alberta Environment will regulate the treatment of this material.

### Bedrock and Groundwater

Some areas within the town site are subject to both shallow bedrock and shallow groundwater. Generally, within the old town site in South Nordegg, depths to bedrock are greater than 3.0 meters. Depth to groundwater varies both by location and during the year and can be within 2.0 meters of the surface in the developable areas. Groundwater movement is down-slope toward Shunda Creek.

### 3.2 Visual Quality Assessment

A number of focal points are important within the town site:

- Baldy Mountain,
- Coliseum Mountain,
- The wetland lakes (Long Lake and Carp Lake),
- Shunda Creek, and
- The Rocky Mountains.

Important view corridors and vistas have been identified for future consideration. A few of the key ones include:

- Highway 11 west toward the Rockies,
- Highway 11 north and south across the Shunda Creek floodplain and wetlands,
- Upper Centre Street north toward Baldy Mountain,
- Stuart Street south toward the historic Town Centre and the Mine Site,
- Shunda Creek Road north to Mount Baldy, and
- From South Nordegg north toward the slopes of North Nordegg.

With the predominant strong slope down from the historic Town Centre, many views from the higher elevations will be of rooftops on the lower benches. This must be sensitively treated.

### 3.3 Historical Review

As outlined previously the history of Nordegg is rich. Within the baseline document a number of historic aerial photographs and snapshots chronicle the community.

Throughout the community, a number of original buildings have been indexed and identified. Few original buildings remain.

### 3.4 Existing Facilities and Users

#### Existing Buildings

Within the baseline document, the remaining buildings and structures in Nordegg have been indexed into one of six categories:

- Ruins
- Abandoned
- Mobile Homes and Ancillary
- Conventional Residence and Ancillary
- Commercial / Tourism / Community
- Utility

This index will be useful in determining the desired treatment for each structure.

## Section 2 – Community Context

In addition to the above, a number of unique features exist within Nordegg which must be addressed:

- North Nordegg: Coliseum Trail Staging Area and Old-timers Campground.
- South Nordegg: Railway trestles, Martin Creek Dam and Reservoir, Cemeteries, and the United Church Hill.

### Existing Leases

Apart from recent development in North Nordegg, little has changed in the town site over the past few years. The main non-residential leases that are ongoing include:

- **South Nordegg:**
  - The Nordegg Resort Lodge.
  - The Nordegg Community Centre.
  - The Nordegg Heritage Centre.
  - Shanks Garage.
  - The Baldy Mountain Trail Rides lease east of the Nordegg Resort Lodge.
  - The Quarry Road.
- **North Nordegg:**
  - The Nordegg Recreational Association (Old-timers) campground (25 acres).

### Current Population and Employment

Over the past 15 years, while under Provincial jurisdiction, a number of non-Provincial employees were allowed to live in Nordegg on a lease basis. Several pockets of residential and small commercial areas in the old town site developed over time, including mobile home stalls, duplexes, security houses, and other uses. Currently the only titled properties include the 12 duplexes in South Nordegg, the former Fish and Wild Life residence on Stuart Street, and the 44 residential and 12 tourism commercial lots in North Nordegg.

Nordegg has a permanent population of approximately 60 to 100 persons. The Nordegg Resort Lodge and numerous small commercial endeavors provide employment in Nordegg. Outside of the town site, the Provincial Government, the Goldeye Centre, and the limestone quarry provide employment to

residents. Several residents in the town site are retired.

### Tourism and Recreation

Tourism continues to grow in the area. Many people pass through on their way to the Rockies, while others visit for the outdoor activities. The Brazeau Collieries is a major attraction, with tours offered through the summer. In 2000, over 13,000 visitors signed in at the museum. Most were from Alberta, with a large contingent from Europe.

Recreation in the area is facilitated by an informal but well used trail system throughout the town site, connecting to various trails in the West Country. Within the region, the four other development nodes identified in *the David Thompson Local Integrated Resource Plan* provide additional opportunities. In close proximity to Nordegg are a youth hostel, Camp Alexo, the Frontier Lodge, the Goldeye Centre, and the Centre for Outdoor Education (see Map No. 13). Some of the major regional attractions include Abraham Lake and the Bighorn Dam, Siffleur Falls, Crescent Falls, Ram River Falls, and the North Saskatchewan River. Recreation opportunities are provided in the Siffleur Wilderness Area, the Whitegoat Wilderness Area, the Bighorn Wildland Recreation Area, Banff National Park, and Jasper National Park.

## 3.5 Infrastructure

### Roads

The road system in Nordegg is generally to a rural standard with ditches for drainage. The paved main access to the town site is along Stuart Street south of Highway 11. Traffic volumes are light.

### Water System

Individual well supplies serve North Nordegg. Within South Nordegg, a new treated water supply system was constructed in 1998 to

## Section 2 – Community Context

---

replace the Martin Creek Reservoir (surface water) with a well supply (groundwater) from two wells located on the southern edge of the town site adjacent to Martin Creek (Wells No. 1 & 3). A new steel tank storage reservoir was constructed as well as a supply line to the historic Town Centre and a future well supply line. The future well supply line will be used to carry water from Well No. 4 or Springs No. 5 to the storage reservoir. Water is chlorinated and delivered by gravity to the old distribution system. The old distribution system consists of small diameter mains and hydrants. The system should be replaced as development proceeds in South Nordegg.

### Sanitary System

North Nordegg is served by individual on-site sanitary treatment systems. In South Nordegg, a sanitary collection system and an aerated lagoon serve the town site. Treated effluent is directed to Long Lake. A second independent lagoon services the Nordegg Resort Lodge. A 300 meter setback around the lagoons as set by Alberta Environment will impact future development. Prior to build-out of the town site, the lagoons and collection system will have to be abandoned and replaced with a new system. Alberta Environment prefers the effluent be directed to the North Saskatchewan River rather than Shunda Creek.

### Storm Water

Storm water management is via surface ditches and swales. In future, as urbanization occurs, ponds will be developed to store storm water and assist in its treatment prior to entering Shunda Creek. A number of permanent ponds will be developed throughout the community. Martin Creek will be realigned out of the existing road ditch. Within South Nordegg, a piped storm water system will be developed.

### Shallow Utilities

Power and telephone remain the only shallow utilities extended into Nordegg. Natural gas service is scheduled to be extended in the near future. Presently, heating is largely provided through the use of propane. Cable television is provided locally by an informal community system. Services can be extended and expanded as the community grows.

### Solid Waste Disposal

Solid waste disposal is currently handled by a local transfer station that hauls to the Regional Landfill located near Rocky Mountain House. An old landfill just west of the existing lagoons was reclaimed and capped in 1994 by Alberta Environment.

### Sour Gas Facilities

Sour Gas facilities exist within the West Country. Land in the vicinity of sour gas facilities is subject to varying degrees of restrictions for development. Restrictions can vary from adhering to setback requirements from existing facilities to dealing with abandoned on-site facilities within a development area. Information on specific requirements can be obtained from the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB). Where required, the EUB will be consulted regarding new development proposals.

## 3.6 Summary

A summary of the major development constraints for South Nordegg is illustrated on Map No. 5.

## Section 2 – Community Context

### 4. The Built Environment

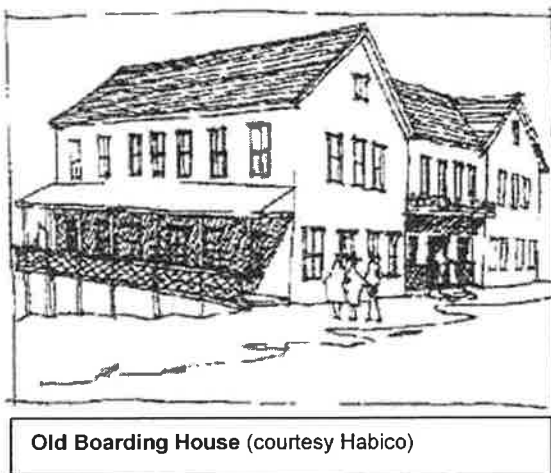
#### 4.1 South Nordegg

South Nordegg represents the location of the original town site and the future urban area. Very little of the original historical town site remains.

The community centre and abandoned curling rink are located on the main access road (Stuart Street), just north of the Quarry Road.

Most of the existing commercial development is also situated along the main access road into the south town site. The Nordegg Resort Lodge remains the largest facility, with a motel, restaurant, lounge, gas station and convenience store. A number of other smaller commercial uses are located along the main access road. A single privately owned residence is located across from the Nordegg Resort Lodge gas station.

The main urban residential area is just south of the commercial area. Mobile homes, duplexes, and cabin units comprise the main residences. Within the cabin area are two original houses from the old town.



Further south in the historic Town Centre, only the Boarding House, the butcher shop, the Bighorn Store, the old bank, Shanks Garage, and the former Catholic Church remain. The

condition of each structure varies, with the church the only building having been restored. A more contemporary metal building houses the fire hall and a garage is used for storage. Both buildings will likely not remain in place. Throughout South Nordegg smaller abandoned buildings are scattered over a wide area.

Most development within South Nordegg is on the flatter area of town between Martin Creek and Miners Creek. Outside of this area, the terrain is more challenging with steep slopes and undulating terrain.

#### 4.2 North Nordegg

The majority of developable land available north of Highway 11 is located on a high, forested bench at the base of Baldy and Coliseum Mountains north of Shunda Creek. Existing development is to a rural standard with large lots and private sewer and water systems. Buried power and telephone service has been provided to the front of each lot.

An existing 44-lot country residential subdivision is located immediately east of a tourism commercial subdivision on the same wooded bench land. The lots range in size from 1.86 to 2.5 acres in size. This subdivision, with two phases completed, is intended to accommodate conventional country residential uses. Development on the parcels is regulated through the Nordegg Rural Residential District “NRR” within the *Land Use Bylaw* along with associated Development Guidelines.

An existing 12-lot tourism commercial subdivision is located on the extreme western portion of the bench south and west of the Shunda Road. Created in 1998, the subdivision is intended to accommodate a combination of tourist related recreational activities and small scale fixed roof accommodation units. The lots range from approximately 3 to 5 acres in size. Development on the parcels is regulated through the Nordegg Tourist Recreation District “NTR” within the *Land Use Bylaw* along with associated Development Guidelines.

## Section 2 – Community Context

The historic architectural controls established south of the highway do not apply to these subdivisions. However, the design, character and appearance of buildings must complement the mountainous setting.

Some regulations on building materials and fuel reduction apply in order to minimise the possibility of ignition of a building from a wildfire and to minimise the spread of a structural fire to the wildland. Alberta Lands and Forest, in conjunction with Clearwater County, is carrying out fuel modification in the

highest risk areas of the town site. The north-west sector is the initial focus, as wind and fuel combinations make it the highest risk area. The next phases will include south and south-west of Nordegg.

Another prominent use in the northern town site is the Nordegg Recreation Association (Old-timers) campground. There are a large number of people who belong to this group resulting in numerous campers and trailers being parked on a permanent basis.



Baldy and Coliseum Mountains above Carp Lake (1999)