



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2019



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The Role of the Economic Development Strategy

Economic Development is about improving a community's prosperity, sustainability and quality of life. Improvements are achieved through the process of developing, diversifying, and maintaining suitable economic, social, and political environments. These three environments are intertwined, meaning if they are to grow and change, they must do so together.

A common tool utilized by municipal government is an Economic Development Strategy that is adopted by Council to provide a roadmap towards long-term sustainable growth for current and new businesses. This type of strategy provides Clearwater County with guidance regarding the development and regulation of infrastructure, zoning, business regulations and support, community development and social support.

Clearwater County's Vision

Community, Prosperity and Natural Beauty - Connected.

Clearwater County's Mission

Through proactive municipal leadership, we will invest innovatively to generate and support economic and population growth, to position Clearwater County for a sustainable, prosperous future.

Background

In 2018 Clearwater County sought public input on the creation of an economic development strategy. The sources of public input were gathered through:

- An open house for business owners and managers,
- A survey for business owners and managers,
- A survey for County residents,
- And discussions with local real estate agencies and a residential and commercial property appraiser that works in Central Alberta.

Clearwater County also partnered with the Central Alberta Economic Partnership and McSweeney and Associates to perform an Investment Readiness Assessment, reviewing the ease with which a business could establish itself and grow within the County.

Recommendations have been incorporated into the Strategy with Priorities and Actions.

Results of the input sessions and the Investment Readiness Assessment have been included in the Appendix.



Strategic Areas of Focus

Based on business and community input, Council and Administration have identified four Strategic Areas of Focus to enable economic growth:

Foster a Culture of Growth

Position and engage the community regarding the benefits of economic development

Prepare for Business Growth

Grow and attract business investment

Prepare for People Growth

Attract and/or develop a skilled workforce to enable business investment and growth

Promote Opportunities

Identify and promote opportunities for business investment

Each Strategic Area of Focus has its own priorities to be acted upon over the next 5 years. As economic conditions are not static but rather dynamic, changes in priorities may be identified and added. Some Actions will support more than one Strategy and Priority.

Foster a Culture of Growth

The goal is to have a community that supports and invests in itself.

Priority – Position and engage the community regarding the benefits of growth

Actions

- Identify what people are looking for in a sustainable community
 - o Identified: Not knowing what people perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of living in Clearwater County is an obstacle to working with local businesses and residents in promoting it as a great place to live and invest.
 - o Plan: Engage the community in performing a SWOT analysis, looking at what they think the advantages and disadvantages are for the County's future.
- Provide recommendations on ways a community can grow
 - o Identified: A lack of information about the different ways a community can grow its population, its businesses, and its services is an obstacle to making Clearwater County more attractive to businesses and residents.
 - o Plan: Research thriving communities, their strategies and actions, and engage the local community to discuss the actions that would benefit and be embraced by residents of Clearwater County.
- Involve the community to promote and grow opportunities
 - o Identified: A lack of information and resources that enables residents to promote the businesses and lifestyle in Clearwater County is an obstacle to business and population growth.
 - o Plan: Develop material that can be used by the County, businesses and residents to boost the area's reputation as a place to live, invest and do business.



Prepare for Business Growth

The goal is to expand and attract business in the County, meeting the current needs of the community while investing and diversifying for sustainable growth tomorrow.

Priority – Make it easy for businesses to start, expand, or establish operations

Actions

- Zone and Service Land
 - o Identified: A lack of land ready for purchase and construction is an obstacle to investors.
 - o Plan: Prepare zoned and serviced land by working with Clearwater County’s Planning & Development Department and business developers to identify the most suitable geographical areas.
- Broadband Development
 - o Identified: A lack of broadband access and capacity is an impediment to growth, and potentially a deterrent to existing businesses and residents staying in the County.
 - o Plan: Work with local and national service providers to invest in more broadband infrastructure to increase access and capacity.
- Tourism Development
 - o Identified: The tourism industry is recognized as adding value with potential to increase investment and jobs.
 - o Plan: Execute the Regional Tourism Strategy action plan to grow the economy.
- Economic Development Website
 - o Identified: A lack of consolidated information with details about the local economy, labour force, land and housing prices that can come from a comprehensive community profile.
 - o Plan: Create an economic development website to assist investors with preparing business plans based on the community’s demographic statistics and assets.
- Skilled Labour Force
 - o Identified: Skilled workers contribute to the creation and maintenance of a diverse business industry.
 - o Plan: Survey local businesses and use provincial and federal information sources to look at the skills needed to grow and attract businesses.



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Prepare for Business Growth - Continued

Priority – Examine the economic atmosphere

Actions

- Create a comprehensive community profile
 - o Identified: Businesses make decisions on where to invest based on information about opportunity and risk management. A lack of information is an obstacle to attracting business investment.
 - o Plan: Develop and publish a comprehensive community profile that gathers and provides the information investors are looking for.
- Perform a labour force analysis
 - o Identified: Businesses invest in places where there is easy access to resources, with the local workforce being one of the most important resources. A lack of information about the breadth and depth of available skill sets is an obstacle to investors.
 - o Plan: Perform and publish a labour force analysis that will help identify the industries that would benefit by investing in Clearwater County.
- Perform an economic base analysis
 - o Identified: Clearwater County's economy has grown and evolved over the past 30 years, with businesses and industries growing and shrinking. Accurate information about what and how much industries employ and contribute to the economy will assist Council, Administration and investors in making better decisions.
 - o Plan: Perform and publish an economic base analysis to assist organizations with their decision-making processes.
- Collect business information (type and number of businesses operating in Clearwater County)
 - o Identified: A lack of information about the number and type of businesses in Clearwater County is an obstacle to Council's and Administration's ability to work with existing businesses.
 - o Plan: Develop a way to know more about the businesses operating in Clearwater County to assist the County's policy and bylaw development processes and the promotion of those businesses.



Prepare for People Growth

The goal is to make Clearwater County attractive for residents and future employees, with the skills needed to grow business, to live and stay here.

Priority – Make the area easy and desirable for people to move to or build in.

Actions

- Inventory available land for residential construction
 - o Identified: A lack of readily identifiable land for residential construction is an obstacle to people moving to and building in Clearwater County.
 - o Plan: Perform an inventory of land that is zoned and ready for residential construction.
- Review and compare residential zoning and land use bylaws with surrounding municipalities
 - o Identified: A lack of information about zoning and land use bylaws of surrounding municipalities is an obstacle to promoting the advantages of Clearwater County as a good place to build a home.
 - o Plan: Review zoning and construction bylaws in surrounding counties, especially those with growing populations.
- Compare cost of living with surrounding municipalities
 - o Identified: Cost of housing and food are major influencers when people choose a place to live. A lack of information regarding the cost of living in Clearwater County compared to surrounding municipalities is an obstacle to promoting the County's advantages.
 - o Plan: Compare the cost of living in Clearwater County and surrounding municipalities to identify Clearwater County's advantages.
- Perform a SWOT analysis concerning the County's attractiveness as a place to live
 - o Identified: Not knowing what people perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of living in Clearwater County is an obstacle to promoting it as a great place to live and invest.
 - o Plan: Engage the community in performing a SWOT analysis, looking at how to attract and retain people in Clearwater County.



Prepare for People Growth - Continued

Priority – Develop and attract people with skills that will enable businesses to grow

Actions

- Analyze current skill sets of population
 - o Identified: Businesses invest in places where there is easy access to resources, with the local workforce being one of the most important resources. A lack of information about the breadth and depth of skill sets is an obstacle to investors.
 - o Plan: Perform and publish a labour force analysis that will help identify the industries that would benefit by investing in Clearwater County
- Educate upcoming generations on opportunities and skills needed by local industries, both short term and long term
 - o Identified: Industry regulations and standards have been changing, and the skills industries are looking for in employees are not the same as there were in the past. Upcoming generations need to know the opportunities and skills sets that industries will be looking for in the future so that they can train and are able to choose to live in Clearwater County.
 - o Plan: Work with businesses and schools to identify and share skills and experience needed by local business.
- Review available education options for skills development
 - o Identified: A lack of information about available education resources is an obstacle to people staying in the community for training and schooling.
 - o Plan: Work with local and provincial organizations to identify education resources available to Clearwater County residents.
- Perform a SWOT analysis concerning the County's attractiveness as a place to live
 - o Identified: A lack of information about what people perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of living in Clearwater County is an obstacle in promoting it as a great place to live and invest.
 - o Plan: Engage the community in performing a SWOT analysis, looking at how to attract and retain people in Clearwater County.



Promote Opportunities

The goal is to work with businesses and residents to showcase why Clearwater County is a great area to live, work, and invest in.

Priority – Demonstrate there is a business case for filling existing and potential business and consumer needs

Actions

- Analyze business and consumer need shortfalls
 - o Identified: A lack of information about the commercial amenities and support that businesses and residents need is an obstacle to attracting or expanding businesses to provide those services.
 - o Plan: Survey businesses and residents on the services they need. Engage business to identify the services that could provide value to investors.
- Promote local business centric solutions to identified needs
 - o Identified: A lack of information about supply chain service providers is an obstacle to promoting the services of current local businesses.
 - o Plan: Develop a way to know more about the businesses operating in Clearwater County to promote the usage of those businesses.



Appendix

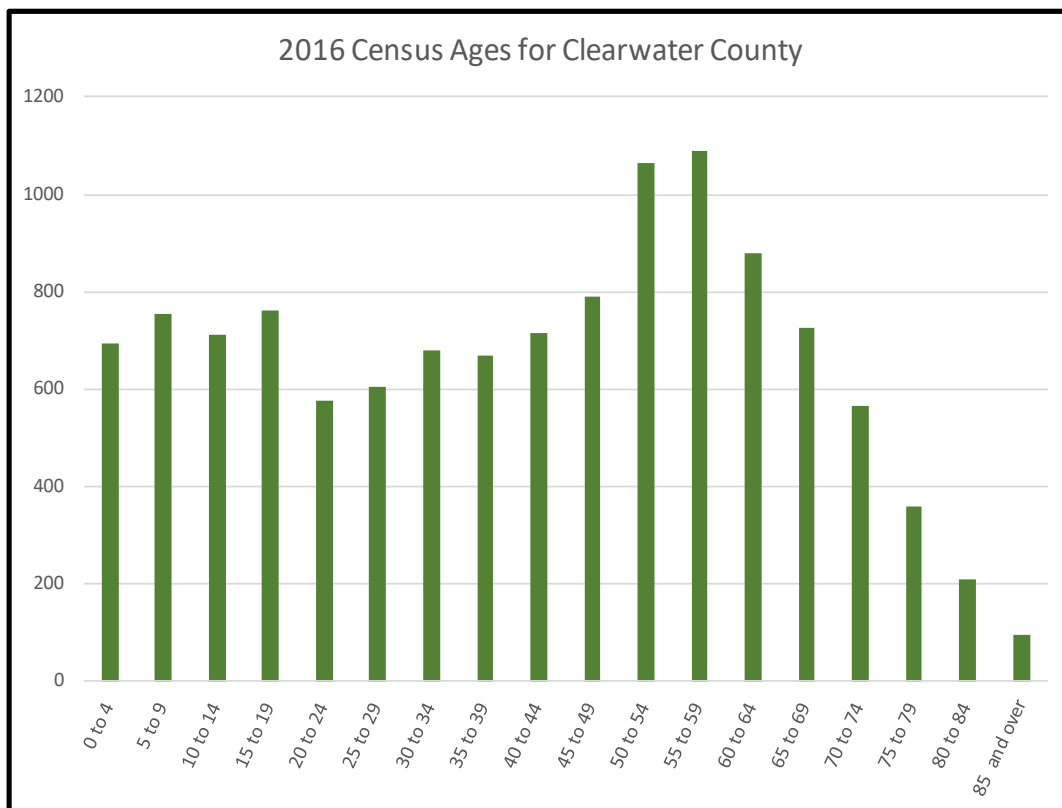
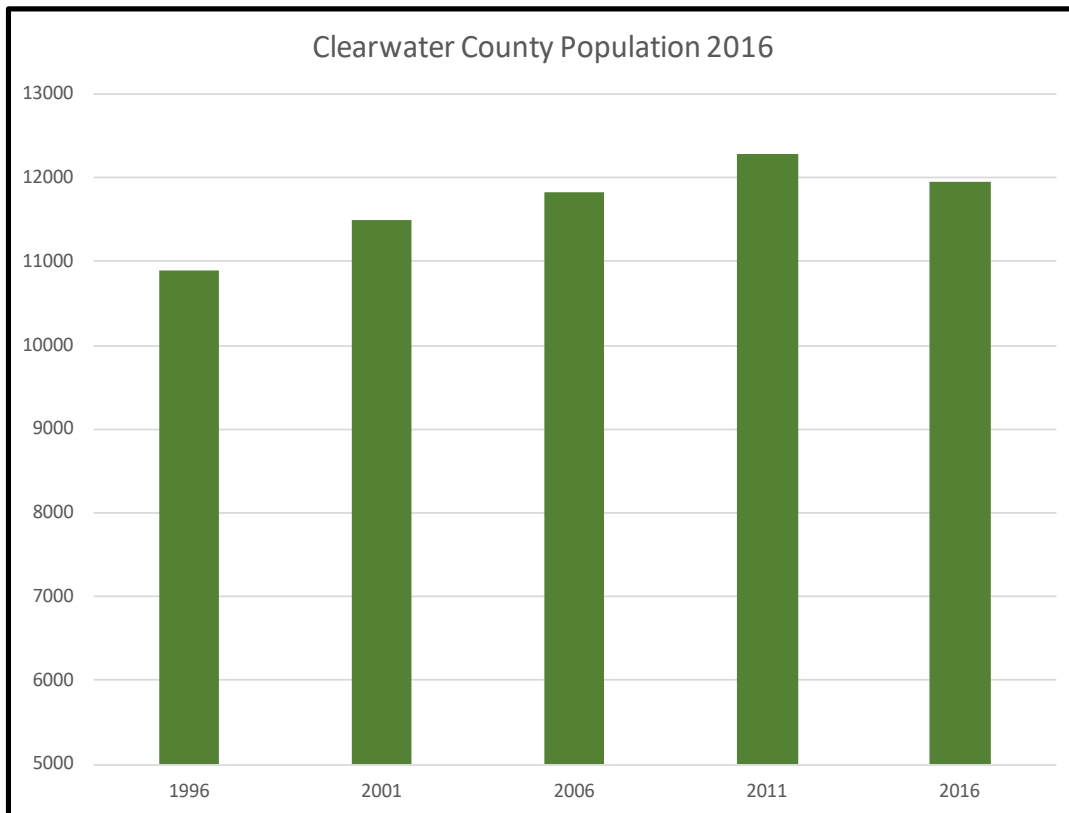
The Appendix contains information and reports referred to in the Economic Development Strategy.

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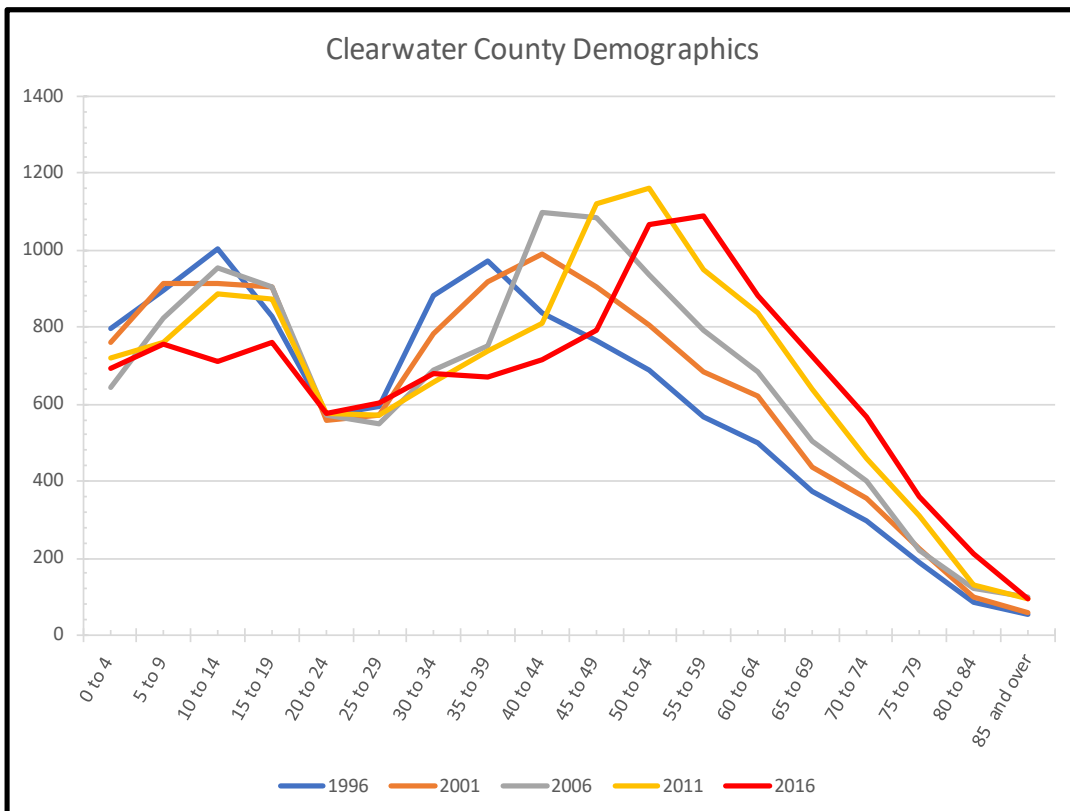
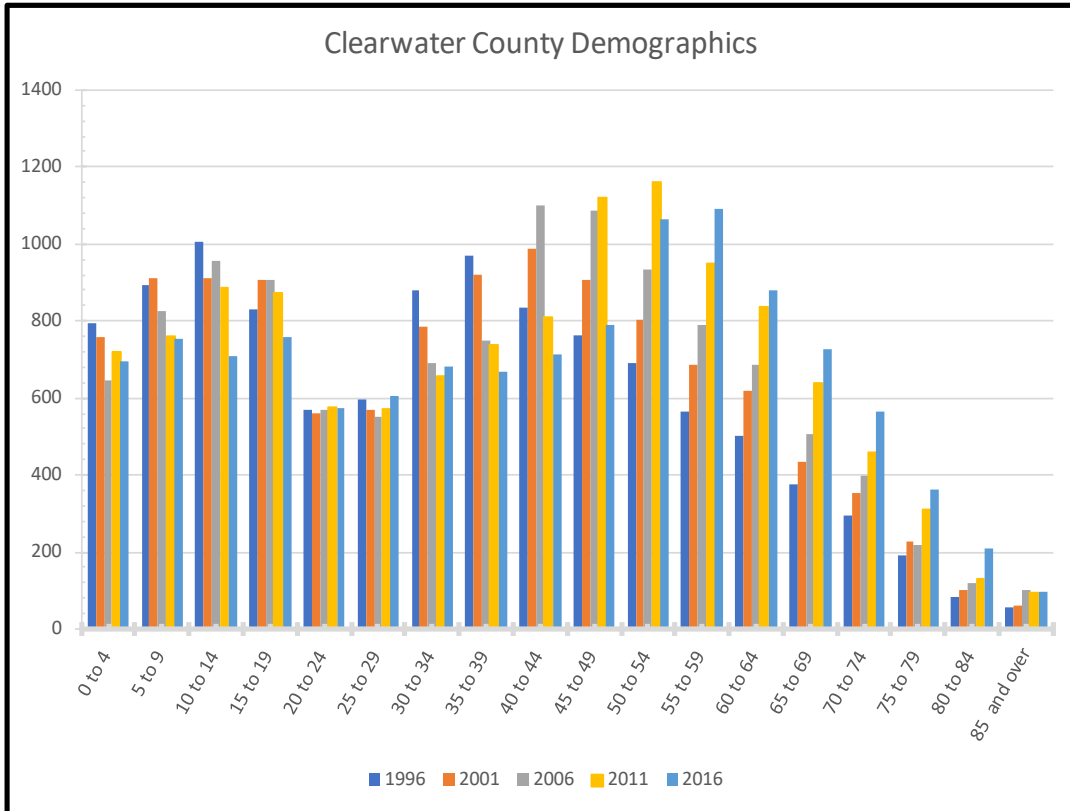


Demographic Information

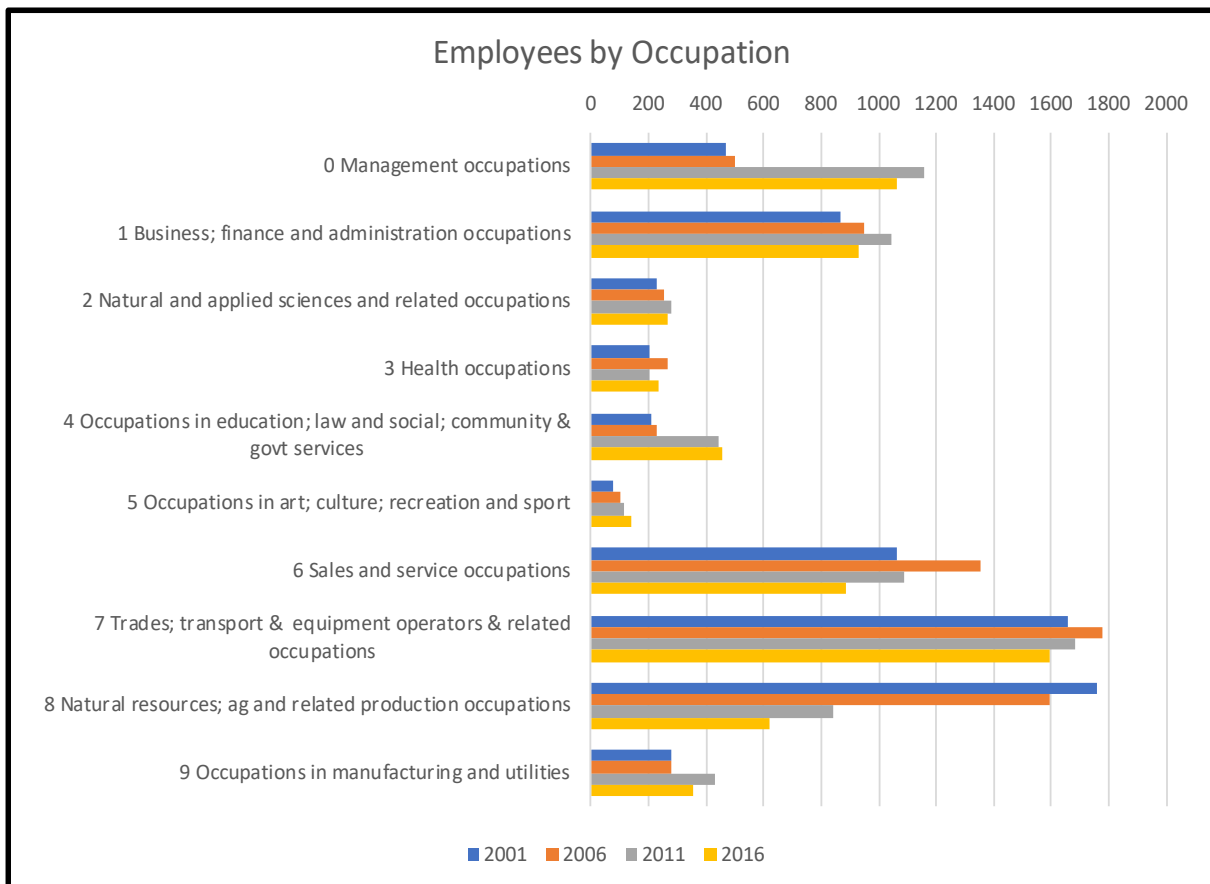
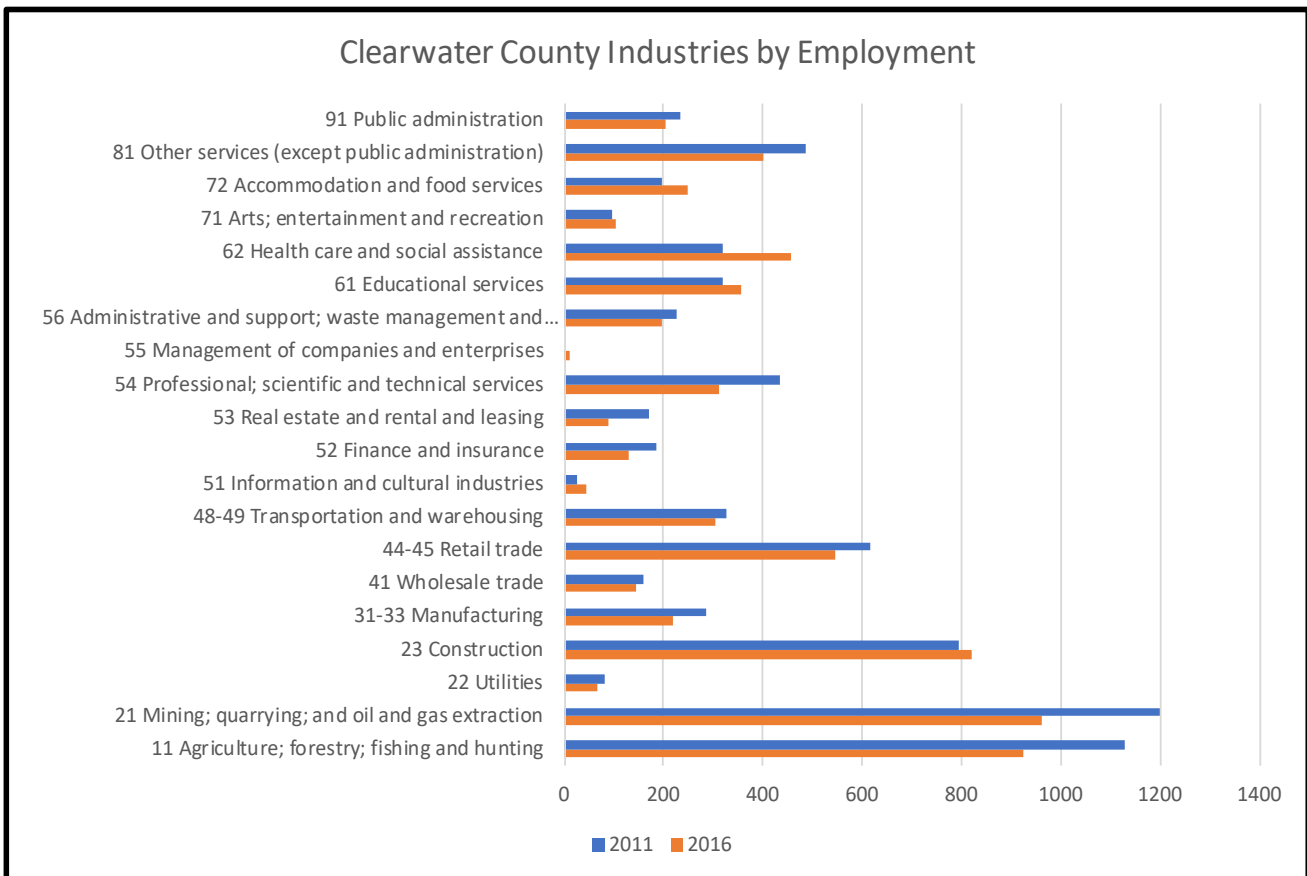
The following information is from Statistics Canada.



Demographic Information - Continued



Demographic Information - Continued



Summary of Open House with Business Owners

There were 28 people in attendance, representing a variety of sole proprietorships to large corporations based in Clearwater County. Statistical information about the County's population and demographics was presented to the group, and then the attendees split into 4 groups and were asked to discuss 4 questions about Economic Development in Clearwater County. The following is a summary of the feedback the groups provided:

1. What do you see as the largest barriers to business growth in Clearwater County?

- a. There is a general philosophy amongst residents in Clearwater County to not embrace development, change or innovation. A NIMBY philosophy is very prevalent and vocal, which makes it difficult for current businesses to grow, or even operate, and creates a poor reputation for investors/businesses considering coming here.
 - i. Many residents seem to want to be an agriculture community, even though practically all the job and business growth over the past 4 decades has not been Ag related.
 - ii. There are also people who retire from larger centers to the area who do not want to see anything change. When they decided to come here they liked what was here at that time.
 - iii. Several examples of protests against new developments were given, such as; Shell building their plant near Caroline, the construction of the Strachan Gas Plant, Weyerhaeuser trying to build a plant but ended up going to Drayton Valley, Meadow Ponds Estates residential subdivision, construction of the Dicorp storage facility, and currently the Repsol water diversion.
 - iv. Also mentioned was the lack of retail development in the region over the past 10 years because of an anti-development or anti-change sentiment, especially compared to neighboring municipalities.
- b. Lack of reliable high-speed internet is a barrier to the growth of existing businesses and to new ones coming to the area.
- c. Development policies/rules seem to be anti-development, the zoning process takes a long time and feels unclear. Why are so many of these rules in place? Are they current and relevant?
- d. Lack of commercial/industrial zoned and services land for purchase. If there is no shovel ready land available businesses seek out places that are ready for construction.
- e. Lack of employees in the area with the needed skills, experience and education. And if they move here, it is often difficult to keep them here because of housing costs and a perceived lack of social and retail amenities.

2. What are the strengths and opportunities for business growth in Clearwater County?

- a. The distance to most of Alberta's population makes Clearwater County a consideration for manufacturing/servicing to Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer.
- b. The potential for tourism attraction and growth is just beginning – with both the natural setting and the history of the area.
- c. The location allows for a generous lifestyle with a short distance to the West Country and quick access to the larger cities.
- d. There are 4 major industries in Clearwater County that usually help keep the economy going even in down times.

Summary of Open House with Business Owners - Continued

- e. There is a lot of land room to develop if that is the goal. Eastern Clearwater County is not constrained by bordering cities or undevelopable areas.
- f. The airport has potential for more tourism and shipping traffic.

3. What are the top things that Clearwater County could do to help improve the business environment for growth and attraction?

- a. Encourage/Develop highspeed internet access throughout the County.
- b. Have zoned and developed land ready for purchase.
- c. Review the zoning and permitting process. Make it faster and more understandable. A lawyer or engineer should not be needed right from the start of a permitting discussion.
- d. Work with the Town to have land ready.
- e. If getting into tourism, then invest in tourism assets – multiuse trails, RV sani-dumps...
- f. Promote the area with our advantages.
- g. Council should have goals and plans, communicate them, and get regular community feedback on the goals and plans.

4. What can local business owners and residents do to make the area more attractive for business growth and investment?

- a. Businesses should speak out more about the need for growth and what it takes for them to grow. Talk with employees and the community.
- b. Business owners should work together more, through the Chambers of Commerce or Ignite Rocky & Clearwater County group.



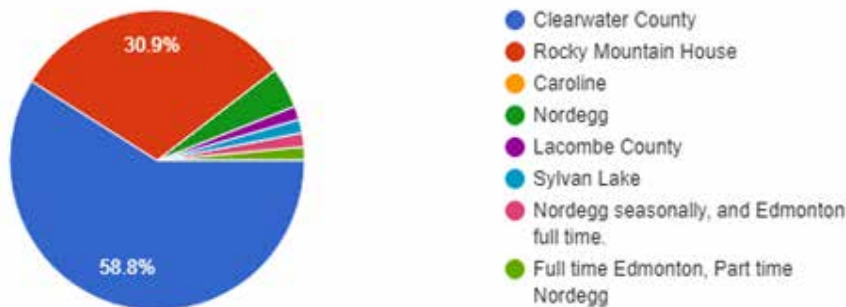
Summary of Online Survey for Business Owners / Managers

An Economic Development Survey for business owners or managers was published online for about 3 weeks at the end of May. It was promoted on the County website and social media pages. There were 68 survey submissions. The following is a summary of the responses.

1. Where do you live?

- 59% listed themselves as from Clearwater County
- 31% from Rocky Mountain House
- 3 from Nordegg,
- 2 seasonally from Nordegg, a
- 1 each from Sylvan Lake and Lacombe County.
- No submissions listed themselves as from Caroline.

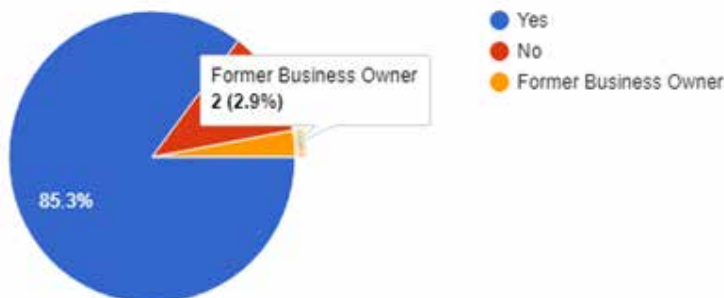
68 responses



2. Are you a business owner or manager?

- 85% said yes
- 12% said no
- 3% said they are former business owners

68 responses

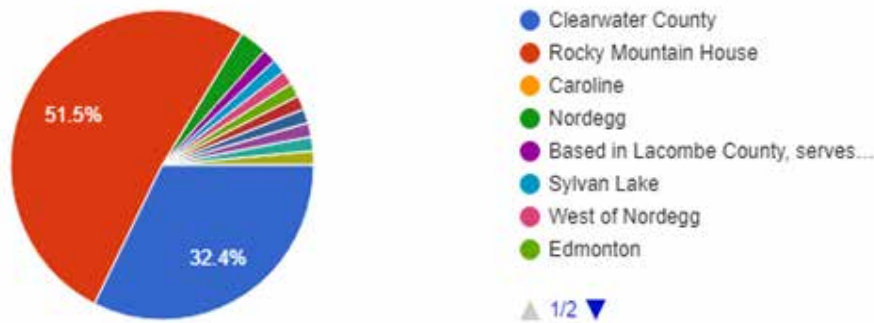


Summary of Online Survey for Business Owners / Managers - Continued

3. Where is your business located?

- 32% said Clearwater County
- 52% said Rocky Mountain House
- 5% said Nordegg
- 2% said both County and Rocky Mountain House
- 6% said Not Applicable
- 2% for each of Lacombe County, Sylvan Lake and Edmonton

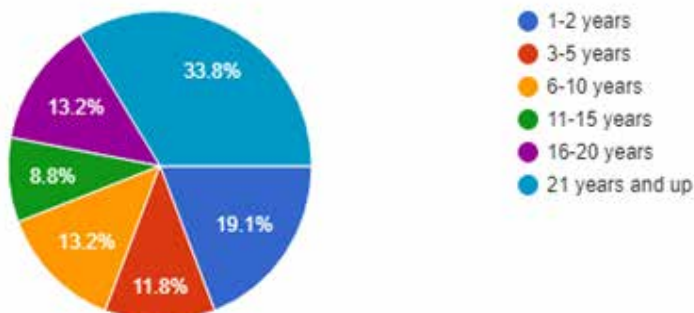
68 responses



4. How many years has your business been in operation?

- 1 – 2 year 19%
- 3 – 5 years 12%
- 6 – 10 years 13%
- 11 – 15 years 9%
- 16 – 20 years 13%
- 21 years & up 34%

68 responses



Summary of Online Survey for Business Owners / Managers - Continued

5. What Industry is your business involved in?

The question provided multiple answers for people to answer, with an option for Mainly Involved In and Somewhat Involved In, trying to give businesses a way to show they are often involved in numerous industries. Many respondents filled out most of the categories, making the results not specific enough to be helpful.

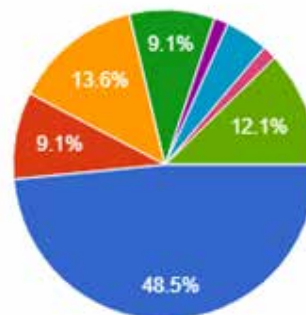
The 2 most common Main Industries were Accommodations and food services and Retail Trade. The 2 most common listed as Somewhat Involved In were Agriculture, fishing and hunting and Construction.

6. What is the average number of staff employed by your business?

a. Year round positions

0	12%
1 – 5	49%
6 – 10	9%
11 – 25	14%
26 – 50	9%
51 – 100	1%
101 – 200	3%
201 & up	1%

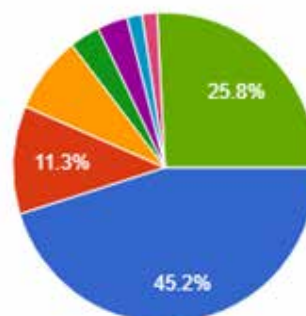
66 responses



b. Seasonal positions

0	26%
1 – 5	45%
6 – 10	11%
11 – 25	8%
26 – 50	3%
51 – 100	3%
101 – 200	1%
201 & up	1%

62 responses



Summary of Online Survey for Business Owners / Managers - Continued

7. When it comes to business growth and attraction, what do you view as Clearwater County's greatest challenge?

- a. Lack of high speed internet
 - i. Companies are using the internet to communicate, receive and transmit plans, and lack of broadband is making it difficult
 - ii. Tourism companies do almost all promotion, booking and customer communication online. Lack of service, especially in the busy summer, is hard on the business.
- b. Reputation of being closed for business
 - i. Some residents vocally oppose growth or change which gives the appearance of the County not being open for business.
 - ii. Bylaws giving the appearance of not wanting businesses to expand or attract new ones.
- c. Difficult to attract or retain employees in the area
 - i. Lack of affordable housing to purchase or rent for families
 - ii. Lack of land ready to build for residential houses
 - iii. Lack of shopping that is available in surrounding communities
 - iv. Lack of recreational facilities and activities for families
- d. Lack of land ready for construction
 - i. Where would a business go to expand or build
 - ii. Where would residential development happen that is affordable

8. When it comes to business growth and attraction, what do you view as Clearwater County's greatest strength?

- a. Beautiful West Country
- b. Short distance to much of Alberta's population
- c. Lots of room if it can be developed inexpensively

9. What do you view as your business' greatest challenge?

- a. The ups and downs of our natural resource industries (oil & gas, lumber, agriculture)
- b. Difficult to attract qualified employees and keep them here
 - i. The skills needed are not readily available locally
 - ii. Qualified employees often don't stay here long because of high housing costs or lack of housing and a lack of shopping and recreation facilities
- c. Lack of reliable high speed internet connections
- d. Competition with Red Deer stores and online stores
 - i. Lack of anchor store to help keep people shopping local
- e. Declining population decreases demand for services
- f. Cost of land or buildings – lease and rent rates are high

Summary of Online Survey for Business Owners / Managers - Continued

10. What do you view as your business' greatest opportunity?

- a. Location with access to Edmonton and Calgary only 2 hours away
- b. Tourism opportunities are plentiful
- c. Broadband will allow more A.I. systems allowing businesses to compete on more bids
- d. If business can attract and retain people with technical skills they can become more efficient

11. What industry or business do you think would be a good fit for Clearwater County, but is not here yet? Why?

- a. Walmart would help keep more dollars here and make the area more attractive for young families
- b. There are many tourism opportunities if there is land to operate on
 - i. Promote and develop more trails for OHV and Equine use
- c. Have more seniors retirement living/care homes
- d. Tech sector needs to grow if that is the future of jobs
- e. Specialty manufacturing should be able to work here with cities 2 hours away and a railway close by



12. What can Clearwater County do to make it easier

for local businesses to grow and possibly attract new businesses and industries to the area?

- a. Lower taxes for everyone, tax incentives for new businesses
- b. Streamline the permitting process because it takes a long time
- c. Improve internet connectivity
- d. Shovel ready land for industrial and residential development at a cost that is an attractive advantage
 - i. Land with services is more attractive than land without
- e. Make the community more attractive to help get employees to move and stay here
 - i. Lack of places to rent and lack of affordable housing
 - ii. Lack of shopping
 - iii. Lack of recreation facilities, more summer ones and year round
- f. Market the area to attract business
- g. Talk with residents about why we need business growth and more young employees moving here

Summary of Online Survey for Business Owners / Managers - Continued

13. What action should Clearwater County focus on most to create a more favorable environment for businesses growth and attraction?

- a. Lower taxes and have tax incentives for new businesses
- b. Reduce red tape and time for new developments and buildings
- c. Have land ready for building, serviced and with broadband
 - i. Build business corridors so business is not spread out everywhere
- d. Work on getting young families to come and stay, the quality of life side
 - i. Housing
 - ii. Recreation, activities and events for young families
 - iii. Shopping
- e. Make goals for where the county is trying to be in 20 years
 - i. Ask residents and businesses what they want the County to be like in 20 years

14. Please share any other comments about economic development in Clearwater County?

- a. Talk more about why business and population growth are important
- b. More recreation facilities and events are good for tourists and residents
- c. Work with the Town more to develop land, invite businesses and host events
- d. Market the positives to residents and to attract business
- e. Bring in Walmart

15. What can local business owners/managers do to help create a better pro-business growth atmosphere in Clearwater County?

- a. Serve our customers better
- b. Promote ourselves, each other and the region better
- c. Work together with our local chambers and positive community groups more
- d. Don't try to block other businesses



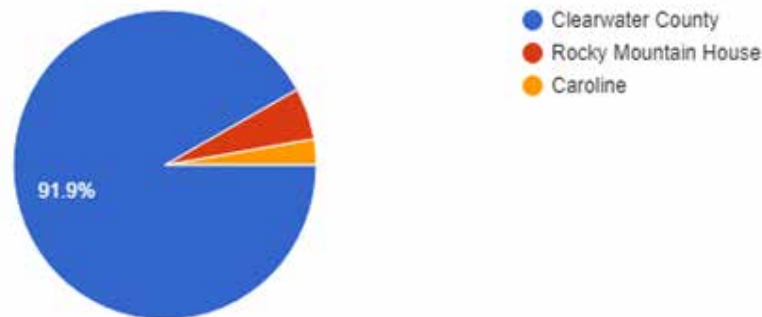
Summary of Online Survey for County Residents

An Economic Development Survey for County Residents was published online for 2 weeks at the end of June. It was promoted on the County website and social media pages. There were 37 survey submissions. The following is a summary of the responses.

1. ***Where do you live?***

- 92% listed themselves as from Clearwater County
- 5% from Rocky Mountain House
- 3% from Caroline

37 responses



2. ***When it comes to business growth and attraction, what do you view as Clearwater County's greatest challenge?***

- a. Not enough choices for clothing and food shopping
- b. The area has a reputation of not being open for business or accepting change
 - i. Zoning and permitting
 - ii. People are often vocal opponents to companies or development coming in
- c. Lack of affordable housing
- d. Lack of recreation facilities

3. ***When it comes to business growth and attraction, what do you view as Clearwater County's greatest strength?***

- a. Location
 - i. Close distance to mountains, rivers and lakes
 - ii. Close distance to the big cities
- b. Tourism opportunities
- c. The amount of space here, if it can be developed
- d. Being flexible for zoning (Cannabis facility zoning was mentioned specifically)

Summary of Online Survey for County Residents - Continued

4. ***What can Clearwater County do to make it easier for local businesses to grow and possibly attract new businesses and industries to the area?***
 - a. Attract more shopping options (Walmart and Costco were mentioned)
 - b. Lower taxes
 - c. High speed internet
 - d. Affordable land to develop, both residential and industrial
 - e. Promote the area to attract business development
 - f. Streamline development/zoning processes

5. ***What action should Clearwater County focus on most to create a more favorable environment for businesses growth and attraction?***
 - a. Attract larger shopping stores (Walmart, Costco, Superstore) to keep money here and be more attractive to young families
 - b. Work on being more attractive to young families (employees) with better shopping, recreation facilities, and affordable housing
 - c. Broadband for business and residents
 - d. Lower taxes
 - e. Promote the area by attending trade shows and contacting businesses to invite them here

6. ***Please share any other comments about economic development in Clearwater County?***
 - a. Bring in big box stores
 - b. A large truck stop would work
 - c. Are bylaws too restrictive to allow growth?

7. ***What can local residents do to help create a better pro-business growth atmosphere in Clearwater County?***
 - a. Promote successes more
 - b. Bring in big box stores
 - c. Shop local
 - d. Discuss why the community needs growth



Summary of Discussions with Realtors and Land Appraiser

The Economic Development Officer met with four local Real Estate Agencies and a property appraiser to discuss what potential buyers or developers of commercial and industrial land look for when inquiring about property in Clearwater County compared to development in surrounding municipalities. The following is a summary of the Realtors' and the Appraiser's input.

- Sales have been very slow over the past 4 years.
- Businesses can buy and build anywhere, but they want at least one of the following in the nearby area of their development. Businesses tend to develop where:
 - o Their customers are located, and/or
 - o Their employees with the needed skills are located, and/or
 - o They can access needed resources (natural resources, transportation, land...)
- A lack of available land and buildings was an obstacle to growth during the 2002 – 2007 oil boom and prevented development in the 2009 – 2014 boom. This shortage was for residential, commercial and industrial land. This trend is present to this day, where the lack of choice is detrimental to potential developers and local businesses looking to expand.
- Lack of serviced land is unattractive to developers and businesses coming from urban areas.
- While unserviced lots are less expensive, along the Highway 2 corridor there are almost no industrial lots that are unserviced. Demand seems to be for serviced land.
- Lack of low cost housing or rental properties is a deterrent to businesses developers. There are too few places for their employees to live locally. Business likes to be close to where qualified employees live because it reduces costs for attraction and retention.
- Lack of supply drives up prices, making us uncompetitive with surrounding communities.
- There is a lack of housing for aging population (55+ group).
- Lack of high speed internet is an obstacle for both industrial and residential purchasers.
- There is a growing need for small businesses to rent suitable properties as they move off their farm/acreage and try to grow. Highway frontage for access and visibility is important to this group.
- The area has a poor reputation with developers. This reputation has been for over 20 years.
 - o Difficulties with zoning or planning permits in the region
 - o Residents actively campaigning against development and business growth
- Working with County Administration has generally been a good experience.
- If almost no development is happening, does this indicate that a development plan is not doing what it is supposed to do? (discussion raised regarding Nordegg specifically)
- Developed and zoned land is not a guarantee to attract business, but having no developed land is almost a guarantee to not attract business. Surrounding communities have land ready for business to buy and build.
- Solutions will require the cooperation of the Town and the County as one will not grow without the other.

Summary of the Investment Readiness Assessment

In 2018 Clearwater County, with support from a CARES Grant through CAEP and the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, performed an Investment Readiness Assessment with the assistance of McSweeney & Associates.

The Investment Readiness Assessment involved performing a walk through of the County assets and abilities to attract business to the area. McSweeney & Associates created a mock Request For Proposal (RFP) of a small machine parts manufacturer with about 20 employees looking for a place to establish itself. The RFP provided details about the business requirements regarding land, buildings, utilities, work force skills and experience, transportation access, and community facilities and amenities. The County supplied information about land availability, zoning processes, costs, time frame for approvals, utilities, community resources and amenities, and demographic trends for the region, including skills and education.

McSweeney & Associates staff came out and visited the proposed development site, and interviewed County staff, local utility and service providers, and a local company that employs staff with similar experience as to the simulated business.

A summary of the results of the Investment Readiness Assessment include:

The County needs a comprehensive community profile to better communicate its advantages and assets to potential investors. A community profile can help the County understand what industries to target that will have the greatest opportunity for success. It can also help identify who the County's main competitors are and what advantages or disadvantages other municipalities have. A lack of land that is zoned, serviced and shovel ready is a significant barrier to businesses coming here, or even for local businesses to expand. Business owners typically want to purchase land and start building immediately, not go through a re-zoning process and the installation of utilities and services. There are many communities that are development ready where a business can purchase land and start building in just a few months, and those will be first on the list of choices.

Ideally, there should be a variety of land sizes and building types available to purchase or lease to attract businesses to the area. Having only one type of land available limits the diversity of businesses willing to come to the County. Land with minimal services has limited uses and is attractive to a narrow number of businesses, often more focused on bare industrial land than on creating jobs.

A website specifically for economic development may be required. This site would have and present relevant and up-to-date information to potential investors and developers, including maps for zoning and services, demographic trends, labour force information and current business statistics. It could also be used to target specific industries and businesses that the County is trying to attract. An economic development website would serve a different audience than the traditional municipal website meant for the County's ratepayers.

Summary of Investment Readiness Assessment - Continued

The municipality may want to look beyond just being ready for business development and also review what helps businesses to attract and retain the skilled employees they need to develop and grow. Businesses want to invest and build in communities where their employees want to reside. This includes looking at housing prices and availability, land available for construction, year-round recreation, health and education facilities, as well as general consumer services and retail amenities. Business needs people available with the appropriate skills to make an investment worthwhile.

McSweeney & Associates presented preliminary results to Council at a workshop and worked with Council and Administration to create some next steps that can be incorporated into an Economic Development Strategy.

These steps proposed at the workshop are:

1. Collect current data concerning population, demographics and business.
2. Develop a complete community profile.
3. Find out the number and type of businesses that are in the County. (licensing or registrations)
4. Create a business database for client and emergency management use.
5. Consider one Economic Development website for the region, name it so it supports growth.
6. Reach out to businesses more. Get stakeholders like the Chambers and the Ignite group together for input.
7. Plan for shovel-ready parcels for both industrial and residential use.
8. Develop consistent positive messaging from Council to ratepayers that economic development is good for the community.
9. Perform an economic base analysis.
10. Review the Investment Attraction Matrix and identify key sectors to focus on.
11. Look at ways to do more strategic planning for economic development together with the neighbors, including first Nations.
12. Review processes and assets to remove barriers for existing businesses.
13. Start regular focus groups/forums for businesses.
14. Review local supply chains and how they could be enhanced.
15. When reviewing Municipal Development Plans consider how business friendly they are.

Prepare for Business Growth

Grow and attract business investment

Prepare for People Growth

Attract and/or develop a skilled workforce to enable business investment and growth

Promote Opportunities

Identify and promote opportunities for business investment

Foster a Culture of Growth

Position and engage the community regarding the benefits of economic development





If you have any comments about this document or would like to learn more about the Economic Development Strategy please contact Clearwater County at 403-845-4444 or e-mail the Economic Development Officer at ecdev@clearwatercounty.ca