Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)

Phase Two Focus and Action Report

Strathmore, Alberta

June 2010

Wheatland Busine$$ Women

STRATHMORE & DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Community Futures Wild Rose

AUMA

Alberta

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The Business Vitality Initiative

The Business Vitality Initiative (BVI) helps communities to assess their capacity to work with and support entrepreneurs, and to foster small business growth. The BVI measures the perceptions of community leaders, business people and citizens about the current business environment in their community and compares the results to an average of other communities to determine possible short and long-term actions the community can undertake to improve its business friendliness.

The Strathmore BVI was initiated by a partnership between the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and CIEL. The Rural Community Adaptation Program (RCAP) of Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development (ARD) funded it. The community sponsors are Community Futures Wild Rose, Strathmore and District Chamber of Commerce, the Town of Strathmore, and Wheatland Business Women. The project is coordinated locally by Jennifer Brooks.

Strathmore is the twenty-first community in Canada that has taken part in the BVI, in addition to five communities in Australia.

Strathmore Phase 1 Assessment Results

In the Assessment Session, held on April 29, 2010, participants were asked to give three words to describe their community. Two-thirds of the responses were positive. According to many respondents, Strathmore is a *friendly, growing, family-oriented,* and *safe* community. When participants were asked to identify key strengths not used to potential in the community, the top responses were *proximity to Calgary, the people, volunteers,* and *youth.*

When participants were asked to name their predicted top economic drivers for the community in the next five years, the most common responses were *agriculture, oil and gas,* and *small business/retail.* When asked about untapped business opportunities in the community, *industrial development, downtown revitalization*, and *closeness to Calgary* were the top responses.

When asked for suggestions on how to improve Strathmore, the top responses were *downtown revitalization, more restaurants,* and *affordable housing.*

 More detail can be found in the Strathmore Phase 1 Assessment Report.

Section Scores

From highest to lowest, section scores were as follows:

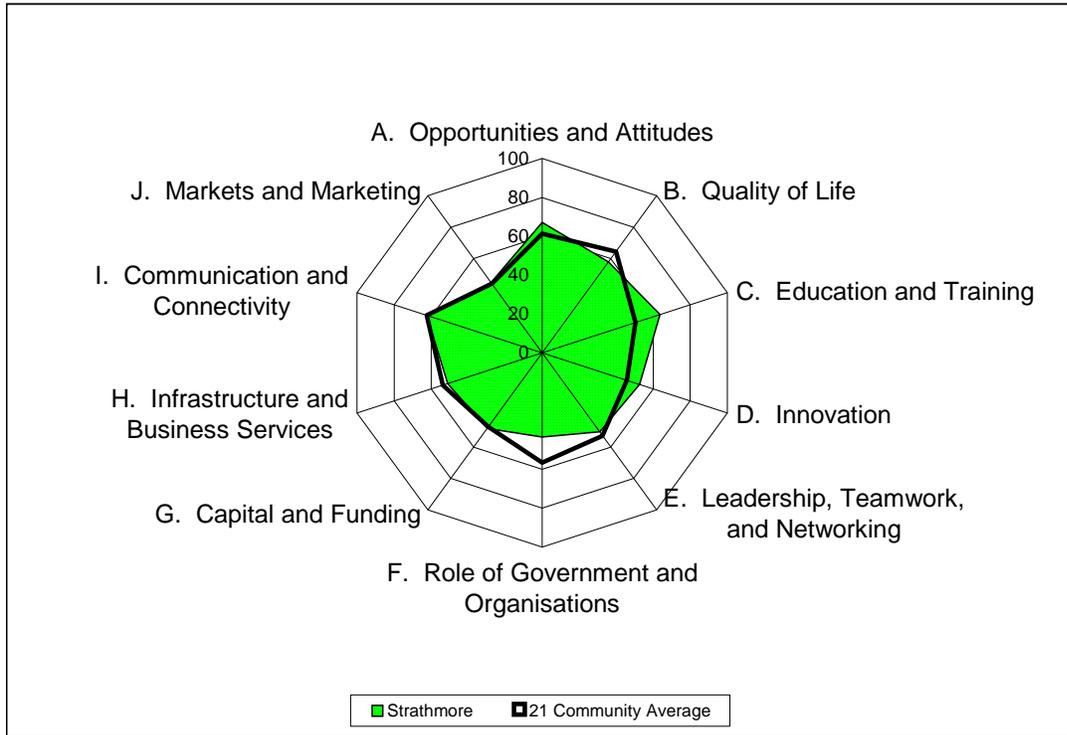| Section	Score out of 100
Opportunities and Attitudes	67
Education and Training	64
Communication and Connectivity	62
Quality of Life	58
Innovation	53
Infrastructure and Business Services	51
Leadership, Teamwork, and Networking	50
Capital and Funding	48
Markets and Marketing	45
Role of Government and Organizations	43

Overall, Strathmore had a full survey score of 54 out of 100, equal to the 21-community average of 54.

Particular strengths for Strathmore are its two highest scores in the *Opportunities and Attitudes* and the *Education and Training* sections.

The lowest scoring sections of the survey are *Markets and Marketing* and *Role of Governments and Organizations.*

The radial graph below contrasts Strathmore's section scores with the average score for other communities that have done the BVI in Canada. The closer the shaded section is to the outside ring, the higher Strathmore's score, and the greater the business friendliness.

Strathmore and All-Community Section Scores

A. Opportunities and Attitudes
B. Quality of Life
C. Education and Training
D. Innovation
E. Leadership, Teamwork, and Networking
F. Role of Government and Organisations
G. Capital and Funding
H. Infrastructure and Business Services
I. Communication and Connectivity
J. Markets and Marketing

Strathmore   21 Community Average

Strathmore Phase 2 Results

The Phase 2, or Focus and Action Session, held on June 9, 2010, was open to the entire community with the purpose of setting priorities for improvement and jump- starting the community to action. See Appendix 1 for an attendance list.

During that session, the assessment scores and other results, as described in the Phase 1 Assessment Report, were presented. The community was then given a series of possible courses of action, derived from focus groups and questionnaire responses from the Focus and Action Session (and the group was asked to add their own suggestions to that list) to improve the community's environment for business. All of the actions were posted on sheets of paper throughout the room, and participants were given 5 votes to identify their priorities and select actions that they were interested in investing their time and energy into. The results are presented below with the number of votes for each. They are divided into four categories: capacity building, networking, marketing, and research/ administration/ planning.

Possible Short Term Actions *Shaded items were chosen as priorities and became the subject of action groups.*			Votes
Capacity Building	▪	Broad community leadership program beyond the elected representatives to build capacity/ links/ collaboration	5
	▪	'Buy Local' initiative	12
	▪	Youth & young adult BVI or opportunity identification session(s) to identify recreational, educational, and business opportunities	1
	▪	Junior Achievement, youth business mentorship and/ or other youth entrepreneurship initiatives	3
Marketing	▪	Downtown beautification project (e.g. improve signage from highway, "gateway"/link to down town, or Town history theme, etc.)	14
	▪	Branding initiative	12
	▪	Co-ordination/communication/promotion and expansion of summer festivals (also take advantage of 100th)	4
	▪	Tourism Centre feasibility	6
	▪	Triathlon	2
	▪	Highway corridor beautification	10
Networking	▪	Strengthening B2B networks possibly utilizing Chamber – possible initiatives include businesses sharing innovation successes, business peer mentorship breakfast meetings, highlighting success stories through local media, etc.	6
	▪	New resident welcoming program	5
	▪	Business friendliness consultations between Town & business community	13
Research, Admin, & Planning	▪	Define town & county economic development focus – decide whether economic development function &/or economic development officer needed.	21
	▪	Publish under-utilised/ needed businesses in order to fill niches (e.g. restaurants, low-prices shuttle to airport).	1

Short Term Actions-- Action Group Summary

Following the priority setting exercise, participants formed three discussion groups in order to assess the viability of the three courses of action that were chosen.

The 'Reality Check' exercise revealed that the three initiatives had sufficient energy and resources to proceed. Highlights from the discussion/action groups are outlined below.

Reality Check
1. Downtown Beautification

Action Group Members: Ryan Parkins, Laura Hicks, Marie Bauhuis, Robert Breitwieser, Jesse Traquair

Question	Answer
Success—Describe what the successful action might look like.	- Downtown identification - Attraction - Visibility/ highway/ signage directing to areas - Advertising saturation, cohesive
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	- Identify the downtown area/ commercial areas. - Attraction and retention strategy
Commitment – Can we get commitment and energy from the town and community to undertake this? If not, what do we have to do?	Certainly, we need to involve the town and general population, engaging and gathering thought and insight
Leadership – Who has the skills to lead (organizations, individuals)? Who else do we need to involve to ensure success who isn't in the room right now?	There is a great deal of leadership— Town, Downtown Assc.
Time Frame – How long will it take to accomplish? Are there any political, economic or funding factors which might hurt/help the timing?	100th Anniversary would be a great opportunity .
Finances/ Resources – What, if any, financial resources do we need to tap into? Are there any organizations that can assist this action? Any other resources?	Community Futures Wild Rose, Town of Strathmore, sustainability grant
Your recommendation	Take action, get more info
Next Steps	First meeting between now and mid-summer

Reality Check

2. Business Friendliness Consultations (between Town & business community)

Action Group Members: Heather Roberts, Paul Ventura, Eric Heuver, Michael Ell, Jennifer Brooks, Glen Randall

Question	Answer
Success—Describe what the successful action might look like.	- Increased awareness of local businesses and services - Annual/ biennial visitations/ consultations
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	- Improve avenues of communication - Liaison role - Foster trust and collaboration to create a business-friendly community - Address issues early - Awareness and promotion of business - Recognition of contributions of business as economic drivers, etc. - Business/Economic diversity, PROACTIVE action
Commitment – Can we get commitment and energy from the town and community to undertake this? If not, what do we have to do?	Yes, partners (e.g. CF Wild Rose, WBW, Chamber, "neutral" liaison/volunteer(s) option)
Leadership – Who has the skills to lead (organizations, individuals)? Who else do we need to involve to ensure success who isn't in the room right now?	- Business community and business owners on behalf of Chamber - Strengthen Chamber to speak as 'voice' of business - Open up notion of business - Business group activities, not service group activities
Time Frame – How long will it take to accomplish? Are there any political, economic or funding factors which might hurt/help the timing?	6 months
Finances/ Resources – What, if any, financial resources do we need to tap into? Are there any organizations that can assist this action? Any other	

resources?	
Your recommendation	Take action
Next Steps	Mtg. in early Fall

Reality Check
3. Define Economic Development Focus & the Need for an EDO

Action Group Members: Kirsten Mundy, Kevin Keegan, Stephen Johnson, Mona Kado, Ron Cox, Chuck Weissig, Lorinda Weissig (also invite Claude Gauvin, Mike Lloyd)	

Question	Answer
Success—Describe what the successful action might look like.	- Develop plan - Liaison with business community - Hire an EDO—dedicated to the position
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	- Promote the vitality of the business community - Advertise that vitality and attract new businesses and residents - One point of contact
Commitment – Can we get commitment and energy from the town and community to undertake this? If not, what do we have to do?	The business community is very much willing to spearhead this and form a committee
Leadership – Who has the skills to lead (organizations, individuals)? 1 Who else do we need to involve to ensure success who isn't in the room right now?	The business community, clubs, and organizations AND a dedicated EDO to implement or lead action items: 'If they all work together they will all benefit'
Time Frame – How long will it take to accomplish? Are there any political, economic or funding factors which might hurt/help the timing?	2011 start date, but start lobbying <u>now</u> to get it into the town's budget - Part of the 2011, 100th anniversary plan
Finances/ Resources – What, if any, financial resources do we need to tap into? Are there any organizations that can assist this action? Any other resources?	- Search out research grants - EDO interns? - Need long-term commitment-permanent town staff funding
Your recommendation	Take action
Next Steps	Noon Wednesday June 23

Next Steps

The most important element of successfully completing an action is the presence of strong community leadership and energy. The community must identify human resources to champion and lead each action. The facilitator asked that those in attendance identify working group members. The Community Sponsors will also continue to work with the working groups in order to follow through on the identified courses of action. Most working groups made a commitment at the meeting to schedule and attend a follow-up meeting.

Long-Term Actions

The following long-term actions were proposed in the Phase 1 Assessment Report, but were not voted on at the Focus and Action meeting on June 9.

Possible Long Term Actions (actions taking more than 12 months to complete)	
Capacity Building	- Community leadership strategy - Buy local program (ongoing) - Young family retention/attraction strategy - Strategy to attract satellite post secondary campus
Marketing	- Downtown beautification strategy - Branding strategy and follow-through with targeted marketing - Community tourism strategy that includes history, arts & culture
Networking	Business think tank several times per year, strategy & initiatives to keep business vitality on the front burner in community
Research, Admin. and Planning	- Investigate arts & cultural centre/ museum - Convention centre feasibility - Investigate extended care facility feasibility - Investigate public transport link to downtown Calgary

Appendix 1: Attendance List

- Laura Hicks
- Glen Randall
- Lin Walker
- Kevin Keegan
- Marie Bauhuis
- Claude Gauvin
- Mona Kado
- Wes Braden
- Paul Ventura
- Michael Ell
- Landon Hurlburt
- Heather Roberts
- Kirsten Mundy
- Robert Breitwieser
- Jesse Traquair
- Eric Heuver
- Marcy Field
- Jennifer Brooks
- Ron Cox
- Ryan Parkins
- Charles Weissig
- Lorinda Weissig
- Stephen Johnson
- Jamie Walker
- Bruce Thom

Appendix 2: Examples of How BVI Communities Have Taken Action

Community 1

- o Marketing Coordinator for the whole valley (to find emphasis/ strengths, facilitate cooperation & networking)
- o Make community "Horticultural Centre of B.C."
- o Clean up and develop the downtown area and community core
- o "Buy Local" program
- o Develop recreational potential (facilities, bike paths)

Community 2

- o Formation of a community business group to look at possibilities
- o Use community watershed story to create a community "brand". (Market the story)
- o Renovate community hall(s)
- o Plan around ideal set-up of community art(isan's) gallery
- o Accommodation and camping facility development

Community 3

- o Local economic development organization to offer more business courses in the area around needs of community business
- o Opportunity identification session with young people (under 40)
- o Customer service training

Community 4

- o Create community foundation
- o Increase cooperation between business, government, and citizens by working together on a project
- o Opportunity Identification Sessions (one for youth and one for broader community)
- o Buy local campaign or program

Community 5

- o Buy local campaign
- o Networking sessions more regularly among community groups and businesses
- o "Did you know" citizen ambassador program
- o Joint marketing session – best practices - with Chamber as catalyst

Community 6

- o Improve cooperation and communication between stakeholders (business, council, residents)
- o Promote tourism and cultural assets
- o Buy local program

Community 7

- o Joint marketing of products and services by business
- o Education of community on benefits of new business
- o Develop community brand / market the community
- o Build community spirit through festivals / projects

Community 8

- o Draft some short-term tourism actions & striking a tourism action group specifically around addressing high quality recreational opportunities
- o Develop strategy to attract more capital / possibility of cooperative financing for services community identifies as needing / community identifies potential sources of equity in the community/ Meetings between area lenders and businesses to raise awareness of lending options
- o Improve telecommunications / develop telecommunications plan (look at cooperative structure for bringing in high speed (fibre optics))
- o Develop brand around beauty / work ethic / independent attitude / creativity / seclusion ('find us if you can' where arts & a pioneer spirit meet the mountains)
- o Coordinated or cooperative marketing effort for local products or services (i.e. tourism operators, artisans)

Community 9

- o Use landfill/methane/waste management as a catalyst for innovation, education & economic development
- o Increase presence of night policing
- o Work on a beautification/pride project that increases cooperation among business, residents and government
- o Create volunteer attraction/retention/recognition and leadership identification program for community to combat burnout
- o Improve customer service (training for front-line employees)

Community 10

- o Improve the image of the town by revitalizing main areas and entrances starting with beautification and cleanliness.
- o Develop a regional event to promote and unify the town.
- o Buy local program.

Community 11

- o Review and revise promotional strategy and identify local attractions, to increase tourism and population growth.
- o Beautify main street (including public toilet improvements), to make the main town centre more attractive to visitors, travellers, and the community.
- o Form a committee to consult with major industries to assess what those industries require of the community.

Community 12

- o Develop a youth retention and engagement strategy to give youth a reason to return to the community.
- o Targeted outreach marketing strategy to attract more people.
- o Make the community a commercial hub for the arts, including a dual/multi facility for historical arts precinct and museum and a working space for artists and craftspeople.
- o Buy local campaign.

Community 13

- o Develop a loyalty shopping program to give consumers a reason and incentive to shop locally.
- o Improve town entrance, to encourage highway travellers to visit the community and to create a pride in the town by local residents.
- o Develop a marketing package to attract new residents and businesses.
- o Revive "heritage river" and "gateway" concepts and provide recreation to the town i.e. fishing, camping, swimming, to get people talking about the town.

Community 14

- o Buy local program
- o Develop festivals and events, e.g. Italian festival, power boat competition

o   Improve streetscape and capital works including parking/roundabout and bridge treatment.

Appendix 3: About CIEL

The Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL) strengthens communities by helping them become more business-friendly, more culturally vibrant, and more sustainable. We also assist them in improving leadership and enhancing community involvement.

CIEL is located in Nelson, British Columbia, in a region featuring many communities that are quickly having to make transitions to survive in a fast-changing global economy.

Our early work assisted small communities in the neighbouring mountain valleys. We developed innovative assessments coupled with strategic processes that helped communities focus, leverage assets and energy and, most importantly, jumpstart action. Then our ideas attracted the attention of communities farther afield, and we began working with communities across the rest of B.C. More recently we have been invited into communities across Canada, the U.S, New Zealand and Australia.

Our Communities Matrix – a one page tool for assessing stages of community readiness – has now been used in many countries across the globe. The Government of Canada contracted CIEL to research, develop and build a collaborative leadership program as an effective means of building capacity for rural communities in Canada.

CIEL continues to develop practical, engaging and innovative tools and processes that strengthen communities. In 2008, CIEL won the award for the region's most innovative organization from the Kootenay Association for Science & Technology.

Our network of facilitators and trainers allows us to be responsive to the needs of communities across the world. CIEL's conference presentations have inspired at the local, regional, state/province and international level. Our work has been featured on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canadian Living Magazine and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Contact us to help build a custom solution to engage your community and move it to action.