

# Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)

## Phase One Summary Report

### Strathmore, Alberta

June 2010





# Strathmore Assessment Summary

## The BVI

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 were the Strathmore and District Chamber of Commerce, Wheatland Business Women, the Town of Strathmore and Community Futures Wild Rose, which invited the participants.

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

This report summarizes the Strathmore Phase 1 or Assessment Session of the BVI, where a questionnaire and a focus group assessed the community's small business resources and potential on April 29, 2010. The phase 2 or Focus and Action Session will be open to the entire community with the purpose of setting priorities for improvement, and jump-starting the community to action. That session will be held on Wednesday, June 9 at 7pm at the Civic Centre.

## Key Findings

From highest to lowest, section scores out of 100 were as follows: 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.

The BVI section results as shown on pages 3 and 4 show that 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*.

In the Assessment Session, 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 four responses were *downtown revitalization, more restaurants, and affordable housing*.

### Sponsored by:

Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Wheatland Business Women, Strathmore and District Chamber of Commerce, Community Futures Wild Rose, and the Town of Strathmore

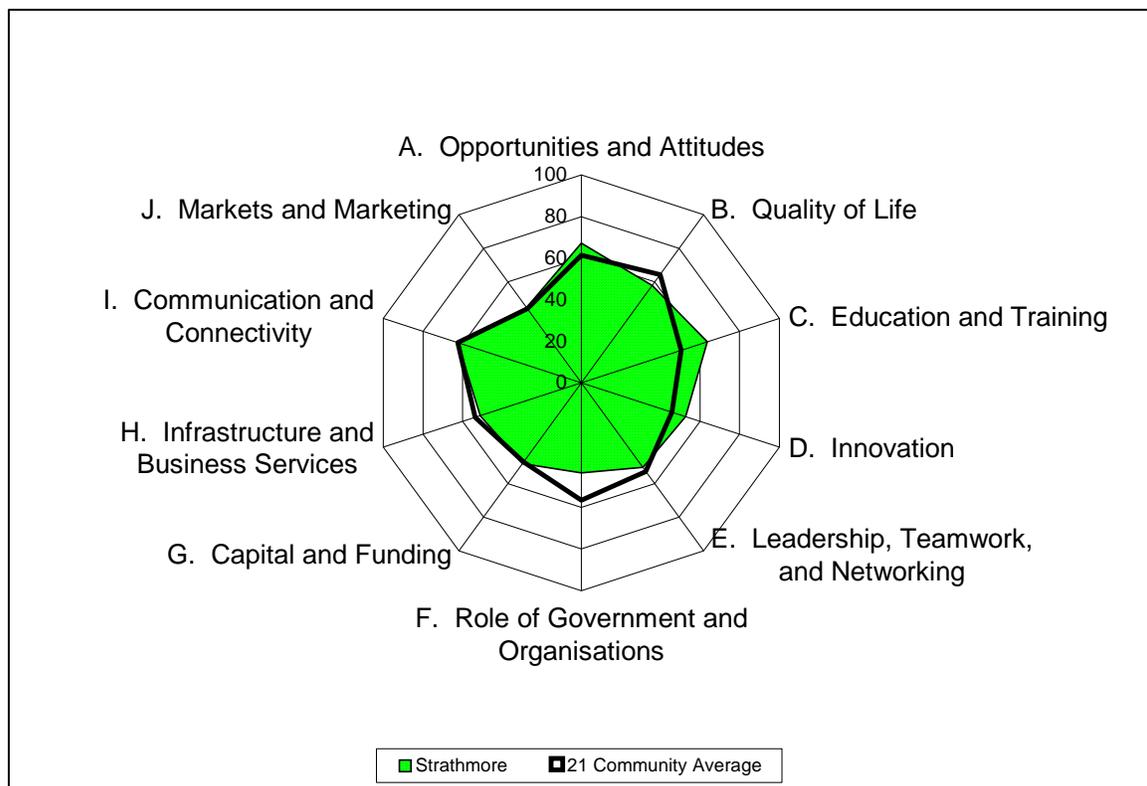
## The Assessment

The multiple-choice section of the two-part questionnaire asked the participants to rate their community by agreeing or disagreeing with a series of statements related to entrepreneurial capacity. Each statement was framed in a positive context (e.g. *marketing services in my community are affordable and accessible*). Participants were asked to rate the statement with one of the following: *completely agree*, *somewhat agree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *somewhat disagree*, *completely disagree*, or *don't know*.

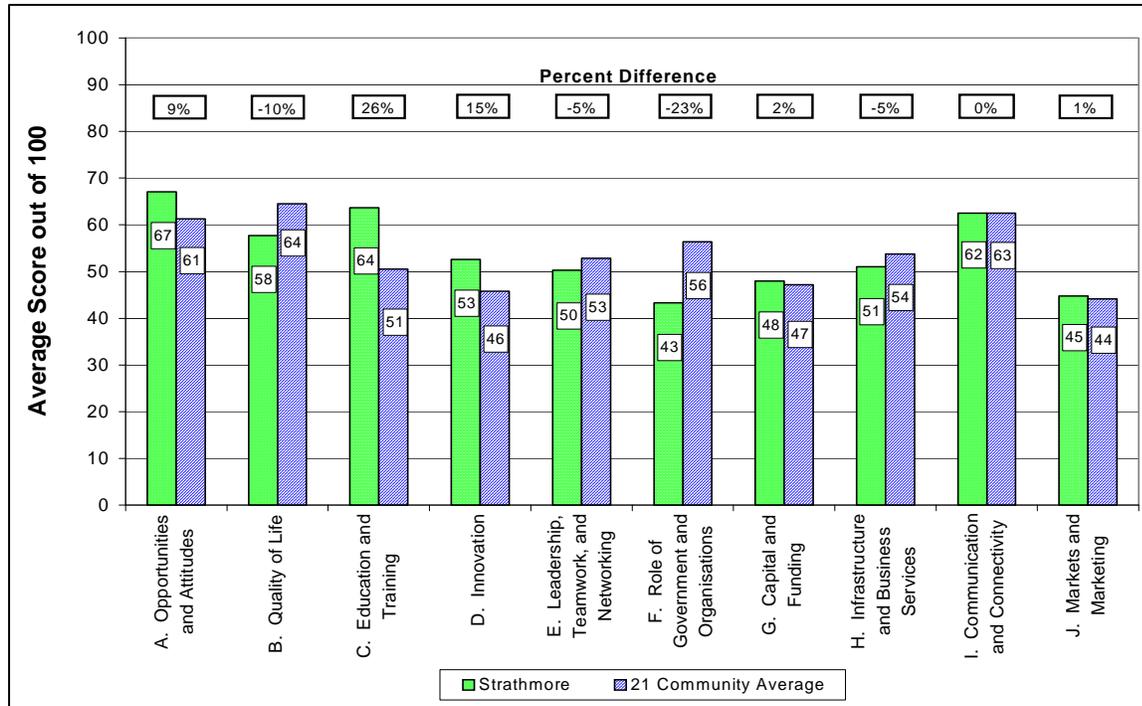
If all respondents *completely agreed* to a positively worded statement, the question score would be 100. If all respondents *completely disagreed* with the statement, the question score would be 0. A neutral response (*neither agree nor disagree*) would be scored as 50. A score over 50 would indicate that there is a perceived good capacity, while a score less than 50 would indicate a perceived lower capacity.

## Strathmore and 21-Community Average Section Scores

The full report on the Strathmore BVI consists of 70 pages of analysis of the ten BVI sections, illustrated by charts and graphs such as the one on the next page and the one below which shows the score out of 100 for each of the ten BVI sections. The area circumscribed by Strathmore's scores is shaded. The darker black line connects the 21-community average scores.



## Strathmore and 21-Community Average Section Scores



## Recurring Themes

The qualitative (written answer) section of the questionnaire collects information about the issues, strengths and weaknesses within the community. (e.g. *What are 3 words or phrases that describe your community? What is your community's greatest strength in terms of its markets?*), as well as additional comments in each of 10 sections. The following themes were particularly prominent throughout those sections of the Strathmore BVI.

- Downtown revitalization needed.
- No brand or distinct image limits ability to promote/attract/market.
- 100th anniversary provides opportunities (volunteers, sense or “spirit” of community, promotion of community, building brand, etc.)
- The area has significant economic opportunities and has reached a critical point in its maturity.
- Collaboration/ cooperation/ dialogue needed between/ among business organizations, town/ county and other organizations on initiatives that lead to the good of town/ county.
- Perception that Town is not supportive of business community.
- Young families need to be targeted as new residents— also need to ask them (and youth) what they want.
- Assess growth realistically (strains on housing, sense of community, infrastructure, etc.)

# Recommended Short-term Actions

The following are some possible courses of action that the community could undertake to improve business friendliness.

Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad community leadership program beyond the elected representatives to build capacity/ links/ collaboration</li> <li>• 'Buy Local' initiative</li> <li>• Youth &amp; young adult BVI or opportunity identification session(s) to identify recreational, educational, and business opportunities</li> <li>• Junior Achievement, youth business mentorship and/ or other youth entrepreneurship initiatives</li> </ul>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown beautification project (e.g. improve signage from highway, "gateway"/link to down town, or Town history theme, etc.)</li> <li>• Branding initiative</li> <li>• Co-ordination/communication/promotion and expansion of summer festivals (also take advantage of 100<sup>th</sup>)</li> </ul>
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New resident welcoming program</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Business friendliness consultations between Town &amp; business community</li> </ul>
Admin., Research, Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define town &amp; county economic development focus – decide whether economic development function &amp;/or economic development officer needed</li> <li>• Publish under-utilised/ needed businesses in order to fill niches (e.g. restaurants, low-prices shuttle to airport).</li> </ul>

**On June 9, 2010, Strathmore residents will be asked to select priorities and form working groups around specific actions.**

## Recommended Long-term Actions

The following are some possible courses of action that the community could undertake to improve business friendliness.

Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community leadership strategy</li><li>• Buy local program (ongoing)</li><li>• Young family retention/attraction strategy</li><li>• Strategy to attract satellite post secondary campus</li></ul>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Downtown beautification strategy</li><li>• Branding strategy and follow-through with targeted marketing</li><li>• Community tourism strategy that includes history, arts &amp; culture</li></ul>
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Business think tank several times per year, strategy &amp; initiatives to keep business vitality on the front burner in community</li></ul>
Research, Admin. and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investigate arts &amp; cultural centre/ museum</li><li>• Convention centre feasibility</li><li>• Investigate extended care facility feasibility</li><li>• Investigate public transport link to downtown Calgary</li></ul>

**On June 9, 2010, Strathmore residents will be asked to select priorities and form working groups around specific actions.**

# The Ten Highest Scoring Questions

		Score out of 100		
#	Question	Strathmore	21 Community Average	% Difference
C6	There are quality elementary and secondary schools in the area.	88	80	9%
A4	Successful businesses want to remain in the area.	83	82	1%
B1	A quality health care facility is accessible, well serviced and within a reasonable distance.	82	69	18%
I3	Quality communication services (phone, cell phone, high speed internet, etc.) are adequate for business.	80	61	32%
A6	The area is facing a significant economic opportunity.	76	61	26%
H3	Adequate business services (e.g. printing services, computer help, graphic design, etc.) are available.	73	58	25%
J2	Products and services are reasonably priced in comparison to regional and big city competitors	71	57	25%
A2	Individuals are capable of thinking creatively and developing unconventional solutions and innovative business opportunities.	70	66	7%
C1	Business skills training is available (e.g. business plan development, marketing, accounting, etc.).	68	53	28%
A5	There are employees available to meet business needs.	66	50	32%

# The Ten Lowest Scoring Questions

Score out of 100				
#	Question	Strathmore	21 Community Average	% Difference
J3	The area has a distinctive or unique brand or marketing image.	17	41	-59%
J4	Businesses in the area /region jointly market their products and services as a group, locally and in other regions.	26	31	-17%
I4	Public transportation within the area is adequate.	27	31	-13%
H1	There are vibrant, active downtown areas or community cores.	28	48	-42%
B3	There are frequent high quality cultural events (e.g. festivals, concerts) catering to a range of ages.	34	59	-43%
E4	We collaborate and cooperate with neighbouring communities.	34	37	-10%
F5	Local regulations, policies, rules, bylaws and zoning are easily understood by business people, making it easy/reasonable for businesses to expand or start up.	40	47	-16%
F4	Officials make it easy/reasonable for businesses to start or expand.	40	50	-20%
F2	The governing body is committed to recruiting or attracting businesses to the area, and uses strategies or incentives to do so.	42	56	-26%
E5	Cooperatives and joint community initiatives are encouraged and respected.	43	56	-24%

# The “Gut Check 12”

The following 12 questions provide a snap-shot of a community’s business vitality. These key questions can be used to inform future efforts aimed at improving business friendliness. They are taken from the 60 BVI questions.

Question Number	Question	Score out of 100		
		Strathmore	21 Community Average	% Difference
A6	The area is facing a significant economic opportunity.	76	61	26%
B5	Young adults (25-34) consider the area to be a desirable place to live.	55	50	10%
A4	Successful businesses want to remain in the area.	83	82	1%
C4	The education and business communities work together to provide convenient training for businesses.	51	42	22%
A3	Citizens are motivated to learn new skills and to develop existing ones.	52	51	3%
F1	The governing bodies (town councils, regional district) recognize that businesses are important and valuable for the development of the area.	49	74	-34%
H1	There are vibrant, active downtown areas or community cores.	28	48	-42%
J2	Products and services are reasonably priced in comparison to regional and big city competitors	71	57	25%
J5	People prefer to purchase local products and services.	46	42	9%
D3	Local businesses demonstrate creativity and innovation in seeking new customers.	51	52	-2%
E6	There is a pool of talented leaders with diverse skills, cultural experiences and backgrounds who are available for leading area initiatives.	64	66	-4%
G1	Lenders are willing to take chances based on individual character and good business ideas	49	47	5%