

LETHBRIDGE COUNTY

Strategic Plan
2026–2031

September 2026



CONTENTS

Lethbridge County at a glance **04**

Message from the Reeve & Council **06**

1.0 Executive summary **07**

2.0 A shared vision **10**

3.0 Situation analysis **13**

4.0 Strategic Priorities **15**

5.0 Governance **23**

This plan sets out the strategic priorities and supporting actions that will guide Council's decision-making as we pursue Lethbridge County's vision from 2026 to 2031 and beyond.

Strategic planning is about defining success and establishing a clear path toward it. This plan is intended to serve as a long-term compass—a framework for evaluating opportunities, allocating resources and measuring progress.

The plan is intentionally strategic rather than operational. Council establishes the direction, and Administration develops departmental business plans, budgets and initiatives that support and advance the priorities identified in this document.

Together, these priorities will help ensure that Lethbridge County remains financially sustainable, economically competitive and responsive to the needs of residents while continuing to embrace innovation and growth.

Lethbridge County
at a glance

Land area
2,816 square kilometers

Population
10,160

Median age
32.8 years

Hamlets (7)
Chin
Diamond City
Fairview
Iron Springs
Monarch
Shaughnessy
Turin

Primary Industry
Agriculture & Agri-Food

Key Crops
Potatoes, sugar beets, corn, barley, canola, wheat, alfalfa

Cattle
More than 700,000—the highest concentration in Alberta

Emerging Strengths
Ag-tech innovation, greenhouse production, value-added agri-food processing, advanced manufacturing

Climate Advantage
One of the sunniest regions in Canada, ideal for crop growth and renewable energy production

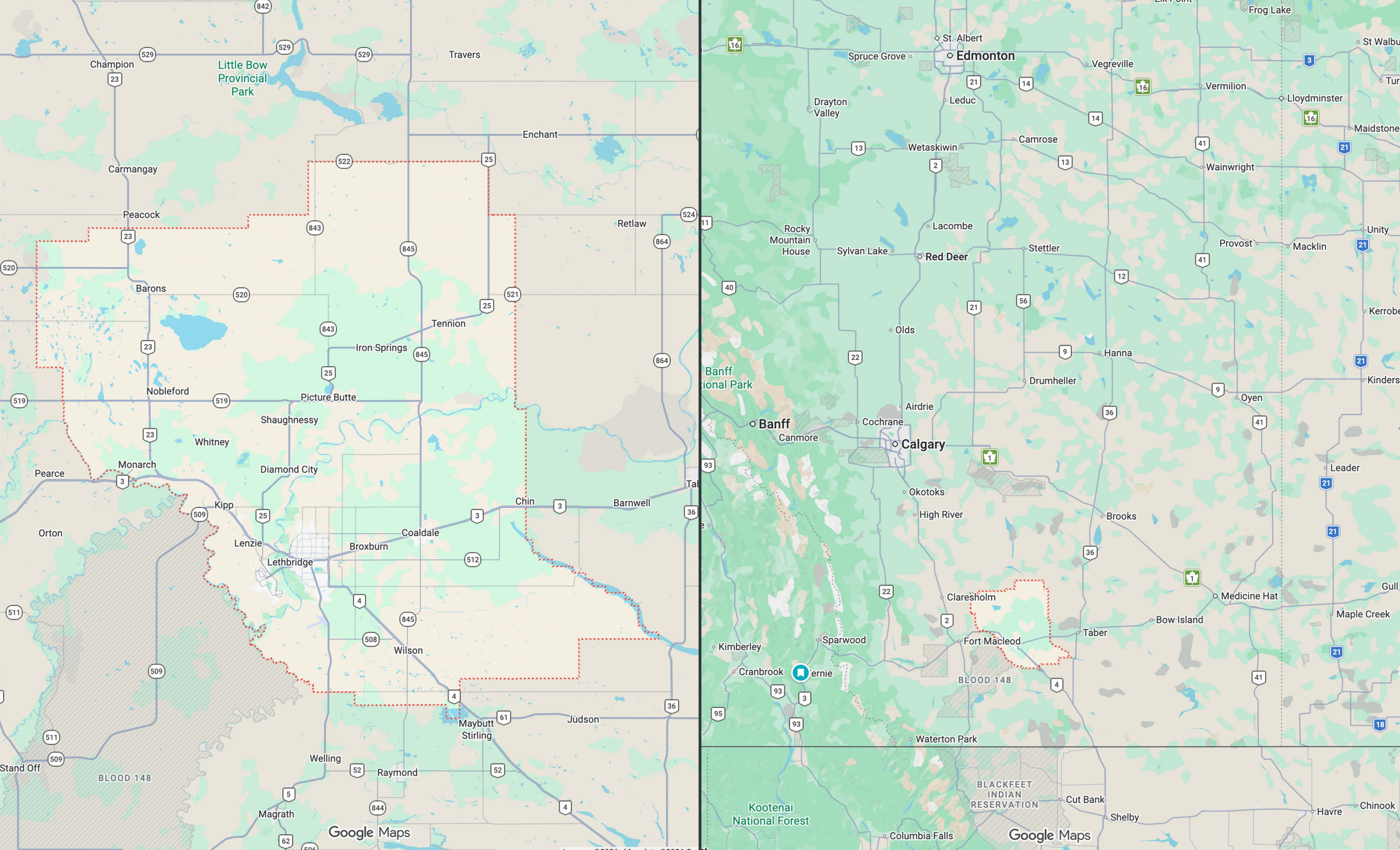
Key Employers
Lethbridge Research & Development Centre – one of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's largest research facilities

McCain Foods – Frozen potato processing

Whole Leaf – Greenhouse lettuce production (20 million heads/year)

Southland Trailers – Trailer manufacturing

Precon – Precast concrete infrastructure


Champion
Little Bow Provincial Park
Travers
Enchant
Carmangay
Peacock
Retlaw
Barons
Tennion
Iron Springs
Nobleford
Picture Butte
Shaughnessy
Whitney
Monarch
Pearce
Diamond City
Kipp
Chin
Barnwell
Orton
Coaldale
Lenzie
Broxburn
Lethbridge
Wilson
Maybutt
Stirling
Judson
Welling
Raymond
Stand Off
BLOOD 148
Magrath
Google Maps
Frog Lake
St. Albert
Spruce Grove
Edmonton
Vegreville
Vermilion
Lloydminster
Drayton Valley
Leduc
Wetaskiwin
Camrose
Wainwright
Maidstone
Rocky Mountain House
Sylvan Lake
Red Deer
Lacombe
Stettler
Provost
Macklin
Unity
Olds
Hanna
Drumheller
Oyen
Banff National Park
Banff
Airdrie
Cochrane
Canmore
Calgary
Okotoks
High River
Brooks
Leader
Claresholm
Medicine Hat
Bow Island
Taber
Fort Macleod
Maple Creek
Kimberley
Sparwood
Cranbrook
Waterton Park
BLOOD 148
Kootenai National Forest
BLACKFEET INDIAN RESERVATION
Cut Bank
Shelby
Havre
Chinook
Columbia Falls
Google Maps

Message from the Reeve & Council

Lethbridge County is entering a period of tremendous opportunity.

Strong agricultural roots, strategic transportation connections, growing investment interest, emerging development opportunities and a talented team position us well for the future. At the same time, we face increasing pressure to invest in infrastructure, maintain service levels, respond to growth and ensure every tax dollar delivers value.

This plan provides a strategic roadmap for the next five years. Grounded in the priorities that matter most, it establishes a common direction for Council and Administration—a direction that reflects our commitment to responsible stewardship, thoughtful growth, economic diversification, strong regional partnerships and innovative solutions that aim to strengthen the County and prepare it for tomorrow.

Above all, this plan is about people. It's about creating the conditions that allow our residents, businesses, agricultural producers, partners and communities to thrive.

As Council, we're committed to working together, staying focused on the long term and making informed decisions that serve the best interests of the entire County.

We invite residents, partners and stakeholders to join us as we continue building Canada's most innovative rural community.

Reeve
Tory Campbell

Deputy Reeve
John Kuerbis

Councillors
Tony Ankermann
Lorne Hickey
Mark Sayers
Kevin Slomp
Eric Van Essen



1.0 Executive summary

Lethbridge County is a community built on innovation, resilience and seizing opportunity.

As one of Alberta's leading rural municipalities, the County is uniquely positioned to capitalize on emerging economic opportunities while continuing to deliver exceptional service to residents, businesses and agricultural producers.

This strategic plan establishes the direction for the next five years and provides a framework for decision-making, investment and organizational focus. It reflects Council's commitment to balancing growth with stewardship, embracing innovation and ensuring long-term sustainability.

The plan is grounded in six strategic priorities:

1 **Economic diversification & investment readiness**

Strengthening the County's economic foundation and resilience by supporting existing business growth, attracting investment and diversifying our economic opportunities

2 **Strategic partnerships & regional collaboration**

Building productive partnerships across municipal, institutional and industry boundaries to advance regional prosperity and shared economic success

3 **Infrastructure delivery & growth planning**

Planning and delivering infrastructure that supports responsible growth and long-term sustainability

4 **Service delivery & organizational excellence**

Maintaining a high-performing organization focused on efficiency, responsiveness and value creation

5 **Effective governance**

Providing clear leadership, accountability and disciplined decision-making

6 **Community building & rural identity**

Supporting vibrant communities and a high quality of life throughout the County

These priorities will guide departmental planning, budgeting and performance measurement over the coming years. Together, they represent Council's commitment to ensuring Lethbridge County remains a thriving, innovative and prosperous rural community for generations to come.



The County's vision

Lethbridge County is Canada's most innovative rural community.

Innovation has long been part of Lethbridge County's identity.

From agriculture and irrigation to infrastructure, economic development and municipal service delivery, the County has consistently embraced new ideas and practical solutions that improve outcomes for residents and businesses.

Innovation does not mean change for the sake of change. It means finding better ways to serve our communities, strengthen our economy, prepare for future opportunities and respond to emerging challenges.

As Canada's most innovative rural community, Lethbridge County will continue to lead through collaboration, thoughtful planning, responsible stewardship and an unflagging willingness to explore and pursue new possibilities.

Innovation is not simply what we do. It's how we think, how we solve problems and how we create a stronger future.

2.0 **A shared vision**

Lethbridge County aspires to be Canada's most innovative rural community by embracing growth with purpose, confidence, and respect for the land and people that built this region.

Here, innovation isn't about becoming something different. It's about supporting the County's agricultural sector, nurturing its entrepreneurial spirit and growing its sense of community while creating new opportunities for future generations of residents. It recognizes that prosperity over the long term depends on sustaining our roots while embracing broader solutions for economic stability.

Council's role is to strengthen the County's long-term resilience by fostering a more diverse and competitive economy that can adapt to changing economic conditions and capitalize on new opportunities. Recognizing that growth is already happening across the region—from industrial and business investment to increasing residential interest—Council will steward that growth thoughtfully through strong partnerships, investment attraction, responsible infrastructure planning, intelligent land-use planning and policy-making, and disciplined long-term decision-making that keeps the organization focused on its north star.

At the same time, Lethbridge County remains deeply rooted in the values and character of rural life.

The County's vision reflects a commitment to enlarging the resilience and pride of our hamlets, farm operations and rural communities while ensuring residents continue to receive strong value, reliable services and a high quality of life.

Innovation means finding better ways to support producers, businesses, residents and regional partners without losing sight of affordability, growth, stewardship of the land, and the importance of community connection. By balancing progress with practicality and opportunity with responsibility, the County aims to remain a place where rural heritage and forward-thinking leadership work hand in hand.

What success looks like

Success means Lethbridge County is recognized as a leader in rural innovation while remaining financially responsible, agriculturally strong and highly livable.

While we remain proudly agricultural, we actively pursue economic diversification where it makes sense to build a sustainable region and economy.

Growth is intentional rather than reactive, with infrastructure, land use and investment decisions aligned to a clear long-term vision.

Residents and businesses see evidence of progress through strong regional partnerships, reliable services, strategic development, modernized infrastructure and continued economic diversification.

At the same time, the County maintains the character, independence and quality of life that residents value while building trust through consistent decision-making, accountability, strong communication and visible results.

Alignment with County values

The vision aligns with the County's core values by reinforcing stewardship of the land, respect for agriculture, fiscal responsibility, collaboration and community leadership. It reflects a belief that innovation is not limited to technology or urban-style growth but includes smarter planning, proactive governance, strong relationships, and practical solutions that strengthen rural communities over time.

The vision also recognizes the importance of balancing opportunity with sustainability, ensuring smart growth that does not compromise the County's rural identity, service standards or long-term resilience.

Innovation is the County's vision. Our core values convey how we work together to achieve it.

Adaptability

Adaptability means being flexible, resilient, and ready to adjust when things change. It helps us handle new challenges, deal with uncertainty, and take advantage of new opportunities, making sure our services stay valuable and relevant to the community.

Candor

Candor means being open, honest, and respectful when communicating, with a focus on finding solutions. This builds trust and transparency, helping us solve problems better, make solid decisions, and keep things running smoothly.

Collaboration

A collaborative culture means working together, sharing knowledge, and helping each other out across different roles. We all work toward the same goals—whether it's within our department, on project teams, or with outside partners.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness means being responsible and considerate, leading to a team that's reliable, hardworking, and thoughtful. We focus on doing quality work and being aware of what's happening around us, which builds trust, teamwork, safety and morale.

Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement means always looking ahead, finding better ways to do things, being open to learning and creating a safe environment to do so. This helps us grow on the job and hit our goals as a team.

Empowerment

Empowerment means giving people the freedom and flexibility to make decisions and have a real impact in their roles. We build systems that work well for everyone, knowing that what works best can vary depending on the job.

Integrity

Integrity in what we say and do builds a team you can trust. By making ethical choices, we create a safe and accountable workplace and strengthen our organization's reputation.

People-centred

People-centred customer service is how we meet the needs and expectations of those we serve. By understanding the customers we work for/with and designing our services around them, we make sure we deliver real value, stay relevant, and build strong relationships.

Results-oriented

A results-oriented approach helps us keep our work on track, making sure everything we do is aligned with our goals. By regularly reviewing and evaluating our work, we stay safe, accountable to the County's residents and use our resources wisely. We measure success by looking at both the numbers and what we learn along the way.

Sustainability

Sustainability means keeping our services and operations running smoothly, using resources wisely, and investing in future projects that keep us relevant and strong. This approach also looks out for employee safety and well-being, helping us focus our efforts where they matter most.

Harnessing our strengths

A clear understanding of our current reality is essential to achieving our vision of becoming Canada’s most innovative rural community.

This condensed SWOT analysis highlights the strengths that position Lethbridge County for success, the opportunities that can accelerate our progress, the weaknesses we must address and the external threats that demand our vigilant attention. Together, these factors provide valuable insight into the environment in which we operate and the choices we must make in the years ahead.

Our strengths and opportunities reveal significant potential for growth, innovation and regional leadership. At the same time, understanding our challenges helps ensure we remain proactive, resilient and prepared to respond to changing conditions.

By building on what we do well, addressing areas for improvement and remaining mindful of emerging risks, Lethbridge County can make informed decisions that strengthen our communities, support long-term prosperity and advance our vision.

3.0 Situation analysis

Key strengths

- Strong financial stewardship/position
- Capable and experienced administration
- Strategic location and transportation connections
- Agricultural leadership
- Culture of innovation
- Strong regional partnerships
- Clear, unifying vision
- Track record of success with large, complex projects

Prime opportunities

- Economic diversification
- Investment attraction
- Regional collaboration with like-minded partners
- Population growth
- Emerging technologies
- Provincial infrastructure investments

Weaknesses

- Limited municipal revenue tools
- Large geographic area and infrastructure demands
- County labour and workforce challenges
- Dependence on property tax revenue
- Limited servicing capacity in some areas

Threats

- Inflation and rising costs
- Water availability constraints
- Competition for investment
- Regulatory uncertainty
- Skilled labour shortages in the County
- Increasing infrastructure costs

Growing a strong and sustainable County

Strategic priorities are the key areas of focus that will guide our decisions, investments and actions. They represent the outcomes we're working toward in support of our long-term vision. Together, they help ensure Lethbridge County's leadership, administration, and resources remain aligned and focused by creating a clear framework for planning, decision-making, accountability and measuring progress over time.

The six strategic priorities identified here are intended to support consistent decision-making, help evaluate opportunities, and ensure resources are directed toward the areas that matter most to the future health and prosperity of the County.

Success will be measured not simply by the number of projects completed but by the County's ability to demonstrate meaningful outcomes—sustainable growth, responsible infrastructure planning, strong partnerships, quality service delivery, effective governance, and continued confidence from residents and stakeholders.

Ongoing measurement, reporting and review will help ensure the County remains aligned to its vision while adapting to changing conditions and future opportunities.

4.0 Strategic priorities

1

Economic diversification & investment readiness

Economic strength creates opportunity.

Building on our agricultural foundation and regional strategic advantages, Lethbridge County will actively strengthen and diversify our economic base by supporting existing business growth, attracting investment, enabling new industry and creating conditions for long-term regional prosperity and resilience.

Key focus areas

- Reducing dependency on any single sector and encouraging development that fosters economic resilience, long-term assessment growth and sustainable economic value
- Supporting agriculture, agri-business, logistics, industrial, and commercial growth
- Attracting investment that aligns with the County's long-term vision and land use objectives
- Expanding broadband, utilities, transportation, and enabling infrastructure
- Positioning the County as investment-ready and proactive rather than reactive
- Attracting and retaining top talent

2

Strategic partnerships & regional collaboration

Many of the County's greatest opportunities depend on strong relationships. Lethbridge County will pursue, build and strengthen partnerships that advance regional prosperity, improve service delivery and unlock opportunities that cannot be achieved alone.

Key focus areas

- Strengthening regional partnerships that are practical, collaborative and mutually beneficial
- Pursuing joint development opportunities with neighbouring municipalities
- Strengthening relationships with municipalities, industry, institutions and private-sector partners
- Exploring shared infrastructure and service delivery opportunities where beneficial
- Supporting regional prosperity through collaboration rather than competition
- Encouraging partnerships that create long-term value for the County and the region

3

Infrastructure delivery & growth planning

Infrastructure is the foundation of long-term prosperity. The County will plan strategically for growth, ensuring that investments in roads, utilities and public assets support responsible growth, protect long-term sustainability and maximize community benefit.

Key focus areas

- Infrastructure investment extends asset life, reduces long-term costs, and supports the County's growth and investment-readiness (roads, water systems, utilities, servicing, transportation planning)
- Coordinated land use and infrastructure planning
- Strategic capital planning and asset management
- Balancing development pressures with the preservation of agricultural land and rural character
- Supporting growth in hamlets, industrial areas and agricultural operations
- Moving from reactive infrastructure delivery toward proactive planning

4

Service delivery & organizational excellence

Residents expect reliable, responsive and efficient services. Lethbridge County will continue to modernize operations, strengthen organizational capacity and deliver exceptional value to the communities it serves.

Key focus areas

- Building a strong customer-service-oriented organizational culture through responsive, people-centred service
- Stewardship of taxpayer resources
- Modernization of systems, processes, and communications through innovation, advanced technologies and organizational efficiency
- Emergency preparedness and organizational resilience
- Updating land use frameworks and municipal processes
- Transparency, accountability and consistency in service delivery

5

Effective governance

Strong governance creates confidence and clarity. Council will provide strategic leadership, foster a culture of accountability and make disciplined decisions that support long-term success.

Key focus areas

- Stewardship of long-term strategic direction
- Purpose-driven, best-practice governance
- Alignment between strategic priorities, business plans, projects and budgets
- Clear decision-making frameworks and investment filters
- Ongoing governance reviews, professional development and organizational learning
- Regular reporting, review and organizational accountability

6

Community building & rural identity

Great communities are built through connection, shared opportunity and quality of life. Through initiatives that strengthen community pride and belonging, we will support healthy, connected hamlets and rural vibrancy to sustain a high quality of life across the County.

Key focus areas

- Building community through shared understanding, and resources, collaboration, investment in hamlets, and partnerships
- Strengthening local identity, heritage, and rural character
- Fostering safe, welcoming, and inclusive communities
- Enhancing vibrancy through recreation, gathering spaces, and everyday livability
- Supporting quality of life for residents, families, and businesses
- Advancing environmental stewardship and long-term sustainability

Implementation framework

This strategic plan establishes the direction as we seek to realize the County's vision.

Annual departmental business plans, budgets and work programs will establish the actions required to achieve it.

Implementation will be supported through:

- Alignment of departmental plans and budgets with strategic priorities
- Performance measures and annual reporting
- Ongoing monitoring and accountability
- Regular review of progress and priorities by Council
- Periodic strategic plan updates to ensure continued relevance



Our ways of working:

Key responsibilities and ‘decision filters’

5.0 **Governance**

Council's role is to establish direction, set priorities, allocate resources and monitor results.

Administration's role is to develop and implement plans, deliver services and provide advice that supports informed decision-making.

Council commits to working together with honesty, transparency and respect while making decisions that serve the long-term interests of the entire County.

When evaluating opportunities, Council will follow this framework to assist in transparent and accountable decision-making.

- Value for residents and taxpayers
- Alignment with the Strategic Plan
- Long-term financial sustainability
- Impact on future generations
- Contribution to innovation and continuous improvement
- Regional and community benefit.

Our primary decision filter:
value for residents

Every decision made under this Strategic Plan must ultimately demonstrate clear and lasting value for residents. While Council will consider many factors in its decision-making, the final measure of success will be whether a decision advances responsible stewardship, financial sustainability and effective service delivery for the people and communities we serve.

LETHBRIDGE COUNTY

lethcounty.ca