



HAMLET OF IRON SPRINGS GROWTH STUDY REVIEW

2024

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LETHBRIDGE COUNTY

HAMLET OF IRON SPRINGS GROWTH STUDY REVIEW

Part 1

Overview

From 2018 to 2020, Lethbridge County created a series of hamlet growth studies for each of its hamlets. These studies were prepared by the Oldman River Regional Services Commission on behalf of the County. The purpose was to analyze the existing conditions, demographics and available lands of each hamlet to determine strategies to encourage and support its residential and economic viability. The studies also analyzed present and future servicing needs along with identifying logical areas to support growth with and/or surrounding the hamlet.

The Lethbridge County Municipal Development Plan (MDP) identified that planning for future hamlet growth areas is desirable within its land use management strategy. The MDP is a long-range statutory document providing a framework of policies for decision makers regarding future growth and development opportunities. As part of the growth policies in the MDP, one of the County's objectives is to sustain the hamlets within the County and continue to protect agricultural land uses by encouraging residential development in and around the hamlets. In particular, the MDP outlines the following policies:

- The County shall support hamlet growth provided appropriate servicing provisions exist to facilitate expansions.
- The County shall, where required, undertake servicing master plans and the development of infrastructure required to facilitate growth.

To ensure that the hamlet growth studies remain relevant guiding documents, they are to be reviewed every four years to evaluate growth and development within the community and any new strategies needed to accommodate changing community context.

1.1 Intent

This report reviews how the Hamlet of Iron Springs has changed since the original Hamlet Growth Study was published in May 2019. **Since the data that supported the previous growth study was largely collected in 2018, this report will include development in 2019 as part its data set.**

1.2 Objectives

- Review how Iron Springs has changed in the past 5 years, and how effective the growth study was in guiding its long-term growth and vitality.
- Examine any changes to existing land use and how development has progressed in the infill area outlined in the previous growth study.
- Compare population and development changes in Iron Springs against the resident survey to ensure the needs of the community are being met.
- Identify opportunities for expansion of municipal services/ community resources.
- If there are substantial changes, create a set of recommendations on how Lethbridge County can adapt the Hamlet Growth study to encourage the sustainable and prosperous growth of Iron Springs.



Figure 1 – Groundbreaking of the New Huntsville School Playground

Part 2

Changes Since the Last Growth Study

2.1 Population Growth

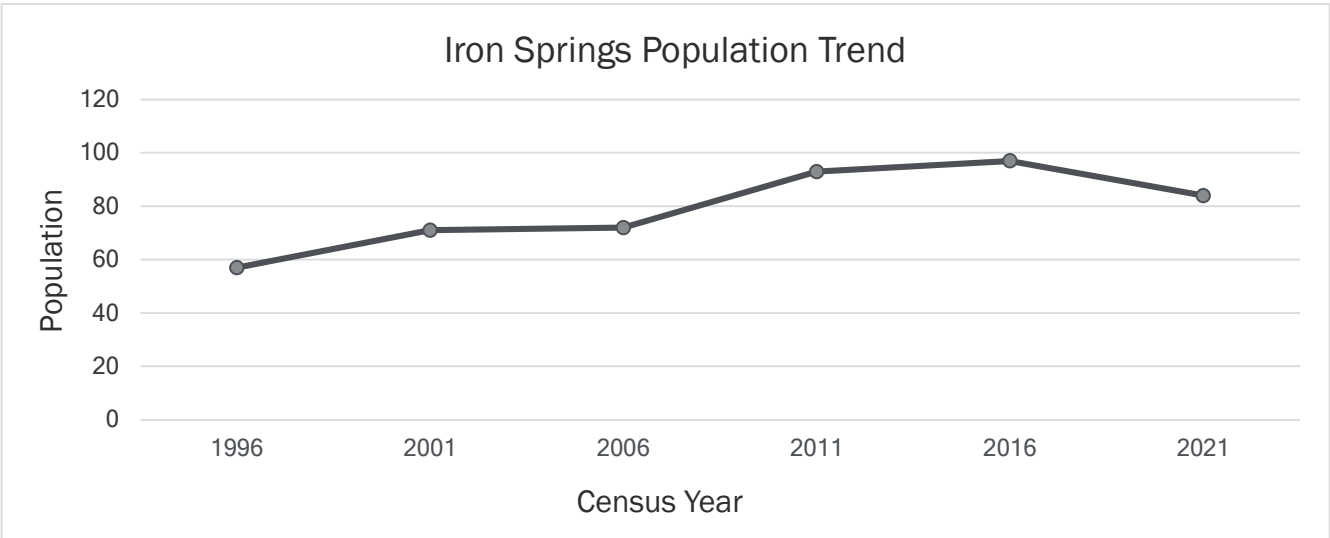
Since the last growth study, the reported population of Iron Springs has declined from 97 in the 2016 census to 84 in the 2021 census, with the average rate of decline being -13.4%. This is a departure from the hamlet’s typical growth trend, which had seen sporadic rises and plateaus since 1996. Iron Springs currently has the third smallest population in Lethbridge County, with only one more person than the Hamlet of Chin.

Between the two censuses, the number of private dwellings has remained the same at 26, with 24 of these dwellings being occupied. There have been no new residences constructed since 2021, meaning the demographics are likely similar in 2024 to what they were in the last census period.

Table 1

Census Population and Growth

	2021	2016	2011	2006	2001	1996
POPULATION	84	97	93	72	71	57
5 YEAR TOTAL GROWTH (OR DECLINE) %	-13.4%	4.3%	29.2%	1.4%	24.6%	-
NO. OF PRIVATE DWELLINGS	26	26	24	26	-	-

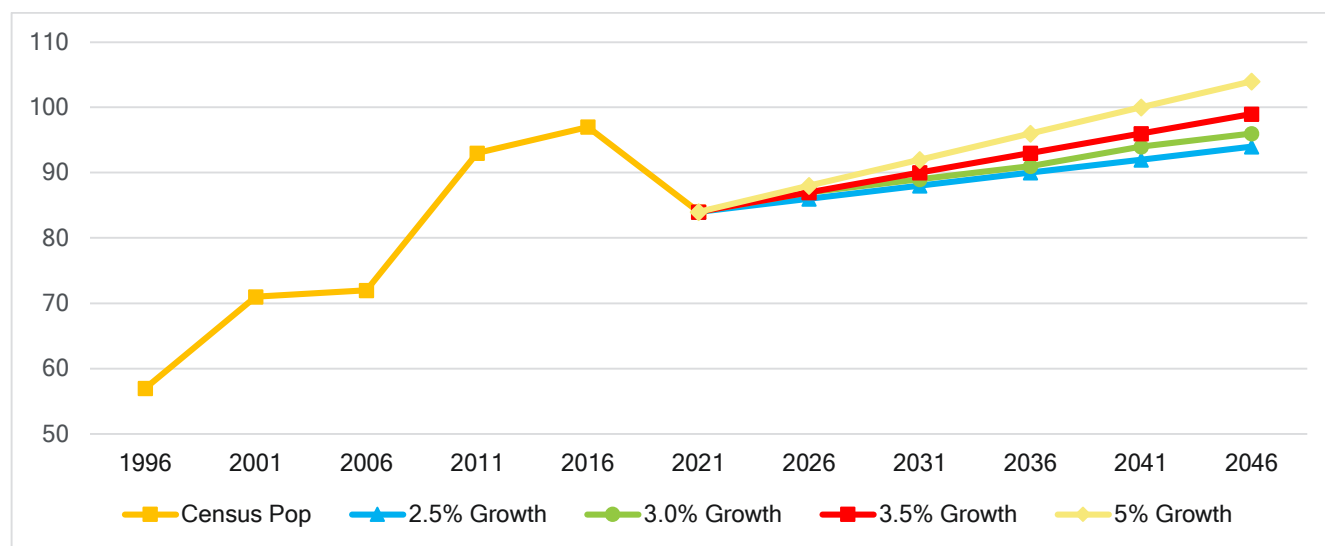


If Iron Springs returns to a positive growth rate, its population could range between 94 and 105 by 2046. It will take several census periods to regain the 2016 population numbers (possibly 2036 at a 5% growth rate or up to 2051 at a 2.5% growth rate).

Table 2

Updated Growth Projections Per Census Period

Year	2.5% Growth	3.0% Growth	3.5% Growth	5% Growth
2021	84	84	84	84
2026	86	87	87	88
2031	88	90	90	92
2036	90	93	93	96
2041	92	96	97	100
2046	94	98	99	105



2.2 Residential Assessment

The residential character of Iron Springs has remained largely unchanged from its 1970s to 1980s vintage appearance. Well landscaped properties are still the norm, and a lack of development has kept the hamlet a rural bedroom community. The lot sizes have also generally remained consistent with the last growth study, aside from one lot realignment that expanded residential space in the north of the hamlet.

No new residences have been added and no demolitions have been applied for. The only type of residential development in the past 5 years has been an addition to an existing residence in the south of the hamlet.

2.3 Commercial/ Industrial Assessment

There has been a small rise in commercial/ industrial activity with the development of one new auto/machine repair shop and a change in use to a tire shop/ automotive service. The latter business also expanded their operations in the same year.

2.4 Community Services

Christian Reformed Church is still the only community service active in the hamlet. Activities like government or health care services are still only accessible in the Town of Picture Butte.

There have been no changes to land designated as Hamlet Public Institutional, a land use district which supports development related to community services.

2.5 Parks and Recreation

The previous growth study found that Iron Springs was underserved in terms of recreational features (largely due to resource constraints). The small playground/ park space on County owned land has remained unchanged since its renewal in 2019.

This is balanced out by the available equipment in the Huntsville School playground, located immediately outside of the hamlet. Huntsville School updated their playground equipment in 2020 with a new play structure and new paved surfaces for basketball and pickleball. This update was carried out by Pallister School Division rather than the County, but it's proximity to the hamlet makes it a relevant change for residents.



Figures 2 and 3 - County Owned Playground (Left) versus Huntsville Playground (Right)

2.6 Confined Feeding Operations (CFO'S) – Proximity and Effects

Feedlot operations surrounding Iron Springs have remained relatively consistent since the last growth study was published. There have been two expansions to existing feedlots within a 1-mile radius of the hamlet. See **Map 1**.

- One cattle-based feedlot less than 1 mile west of hamlet expanded its operations to add 2000 calves.
- One mixed species feedlot a little over 1 mile northwest of the hamlet expanded its operations to add 800 cattle but reduced poultry by 11000 and ceased farrow to finish sow production.

In the Resident Engagement Survey, Iron Springs residents had mixed opinions on the impact of feedlots in their community. Some cited concerns such as dust and odour while others took a more ambivalent stance. The proximity of these two expansions may be seen as a negative change by some community members. However, minimal expansions in an area with a large number of feedlots may also be seen as a net positive.

Part 3

Growth and Land Use

Since the 2019 growth study, Iron Springs has had a small and sporadic amount of development. **Map 2** displays this growth through the different categories of development permits Lethbridge County issued between the publishing of the growth study and the present. Standalone waiver applications were not included in this survey.

In this 5-year period, the County received:

- 3 applications for commercial/industrial uses, including one change in use application. These applications are shared between two parcels and were related to the automotive/ trucking industry.
- 1 application for a residential use (additions to an existing residence).
- 1 application for signage (for commercial use).
- 1 application for an accessory use (hobby barn).

Diagram 1 - Development by Types of Uses

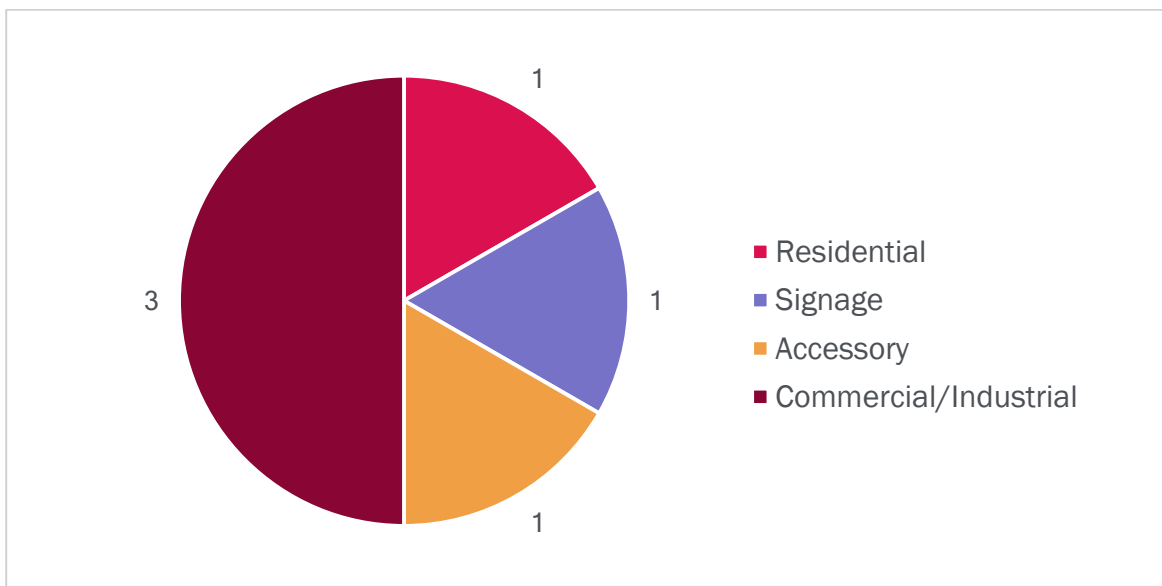
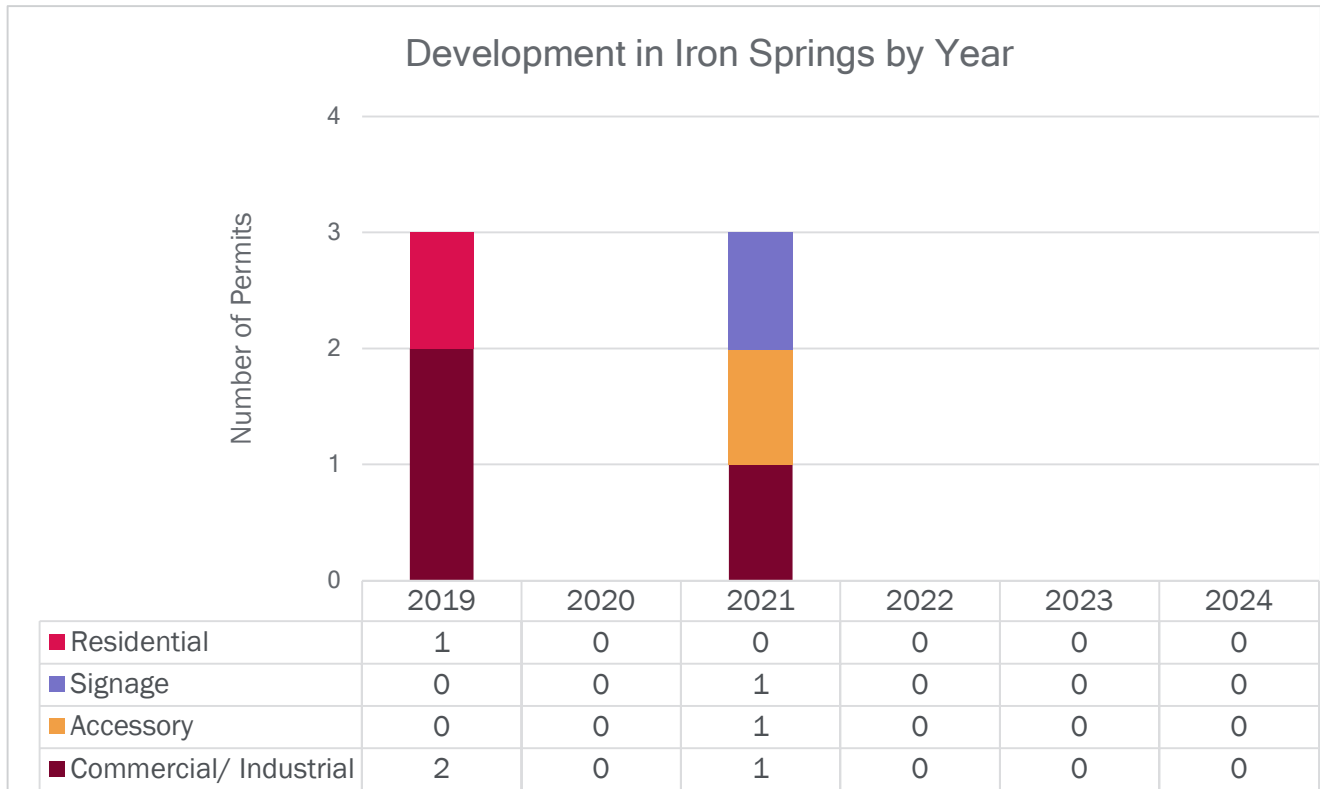


Diagram 2 - Development in Monarch Per Year



2019 and 2021 were the only years in which development permits were applied for, with 3 permits in each year.

The amount of investment into the community this development has brought in is not well documented, as only 3 applications included this information. In total, development costs are estimated to be \$623,000. Commercial/ industrial uses make up most of this amount at \$550,000, while residential and accessory development make up \$35,000 and \$38,000 respectively.

3.1 Infill

No residential infill has occurred through subdivisions or occupying vacant lots. Since Iron Springs does not have a piped water/sanitary system, there is also less opportunity to subdivide larger lots into smaller ones due to the need to accommodate private septic systems. A large decrease in the number of vacant lots has also minimized potential land for infill.

Vacant Lots

In the 2019 Growth Study, there were 10 vacant lots concentrated to the east of the hamlet. One consolidation of several lots has reduced this number to 2. See **Map 3**.

- 8 vacant lots have been consolidated into a neighbouring residential parcel, creating one larger occupied lot.
- 2 lots have remained vacant since the last growth study and are located on the far east end of the hamlet.

Lots Undersized for Development

The previous growth study also identified 3 residential titles deemed too small to be developed for residential use.

- 2 of these lots have since been consolidated into neighbouring properties.
- The one remaining lot is owned by the county and is not intended for residential use.

3.2 Future Expansion

Residential Expansion:

- The average number of persons per dwelling unit in Iron Springs has dropped from 3.7 in the 2016 census to 3.2 in the 2021 census. The average number of dwelling units per acre has stayed the same.
- There is also still sufficient space to accommodate future growth in the agricultural land bordering the hamlet if needed.
- A lack of demand for housing in the community means that expansion is not an immediate concern for the hamlet, and will likely not be for many years unless growth is actively promoted.

Commercial/Industrial Expansion:

- The two new commercial developments in the north of the hamlet could potentially signify the slow growth of a commercial/industrial area.
- The community is somewhat ambivalent towards more land being used as light/general industrial, as some prefer Iron Springs to stay as a bedroom community and others would like to see a growth in commercial business.

3.3 Future Municipal Services and Infrastructure

WATER: Iron Springs residents still access their water through the County's distribution system on the border of the hamlet. The previous growth study estimated that the current water supply would accommodate 20 years or more of growth at the projected rate of 2.5%. Considering that the population dip has pushed back these numbers, expansions to water servicing will likely not be needed for an even longer period.

SEWER: Iron Springs still relies on on-site private septic systems as its sewage infrastructure. A decline in population numbers and lack of residential growth means that Iron Springs is unlikely to reach a stage where a piped sewer system is a feasible option for the County.

DRAINAGE: There have no changes to the existing drainage scheme of the hamlet. Since there is no new development and there are existing vacant lots that can still be filled, considerations for new drainage infrastructure have not been needed.

ROADS: During the last growth study, the roads were considered to be in average to poor condition. Some of the roads were experiencing surface breakup, cracking, and potholes. Road improvement was also a prevalent theme in the Resident Engagement Survey.

In 2023, Lethbridge County completed the Iron Springs Road Improvements Project. It involved upgrading the existing gravel road to the new Huntsville School to a paved standard, as well as reconstructing Center Street and a portion of 1st Street in Iron Springs. This has a positive impact on the current commercial/industrial activities of the hamlet, as seasonal road bans impeded traffic to businesses in this area. These roads will also require less regular maintenance by the County.

A large portion of the undeveloped road allowances in the east portion of the hamlet have been closed and consolidated into the same property that absorbed most of the vacant lots in this area.

There are no sidewalk provisions on streets within the hamlet.

Part 4

Analysis

The strategies for expansion in the Hamlet of Iron Springs Growth Study will likely not be relevant for several years and possibly decades. However, the growth study still has relevance as a long-range plan for expansion if the hamlet does eventually grow to need it.

- It is unlikely that there will be a significant enough change to population size to warrant outward expansion. This would require extensive effort to promote growth, such as a new industry or large development near the hamlet.
- The two remaining empty lots can still potentially accommodate housing demand given the Hamlet's slow growth rate (if their owner chooses to sell them).
- A decline in population numbers and lack of residential development means that there is little need to expand municipal services. The County has also already taken steps to improve existing infrastructure in the past few years, such as improving roads and updating playground equipment.
 - The quality and cost of the current water infrastructure was viewed negatively by the residents who responded to the growth study's survey. However, the small population size and lack of growth likely means that service changes are not feasible at this time.
- The small growth in commercial/industrial activity could generate future demand in the hamlet, leading to the potential to revisit municipal servicing and/or the establishment of other commercial uses secondary to the automotive sector.

Negligible growth is also not necessarily a negative feature for the residents of Iron Springs, since the small size and quiet atmosphere was a frequent reason for satisfaction in the Resident Engagement Survey.

Appendix

Chart 1 – List of Development in Iron Springs (2019 -2024)

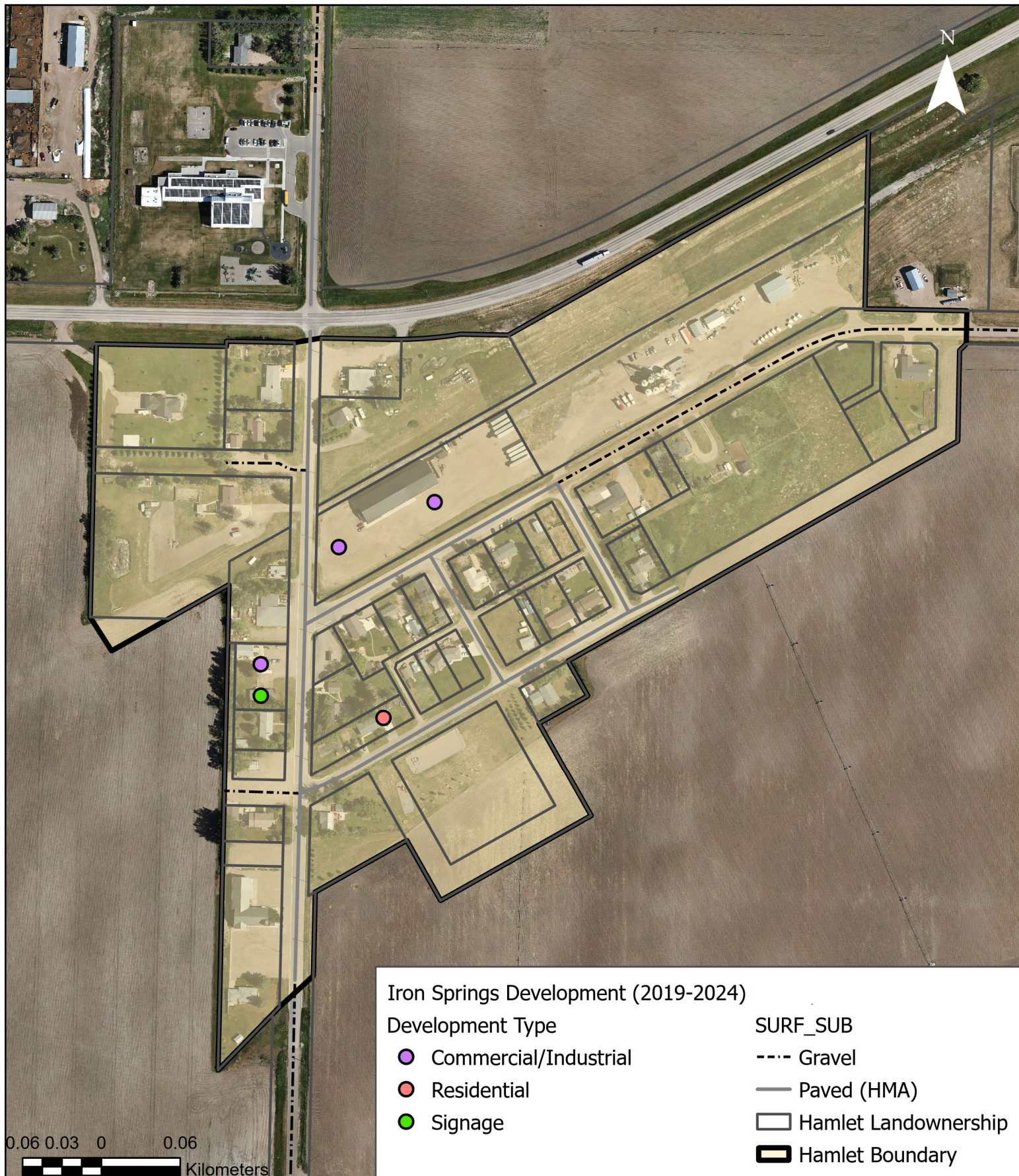
Municipal Address	Permit Number	Development Type	Description	Cost of Development	Year
115 1 Avenue, Iron Springs	2019-165	Residential	Replace existing deck, new attached garage by roofline over deck	35,000	2019
Bay G, 45 Centre Street, Iron Springs	2019-177	Commercial/Industrial	Tire shop with minor auto service	0	2019
45 Centre Street, Iron Springs	2019-079	Commercial/Industrial	Industrial shop for roofing and trucking business (truck depot)	550,000	2019
112 Centre Street, Iron Springs	2021-063	Commercial/industrial	Change in use: auto/machine repair	0	2021
112 Centre Street, Iron Springs	2021-064	Signage	Signage	0	2021
203048 Township Road 11-4	2021-084	Accessory	Hobby barn	38,000	2021



Map 1: Expanded CFOs Near Iron Springs

Created by: Hannah Laberge, Planning Intern

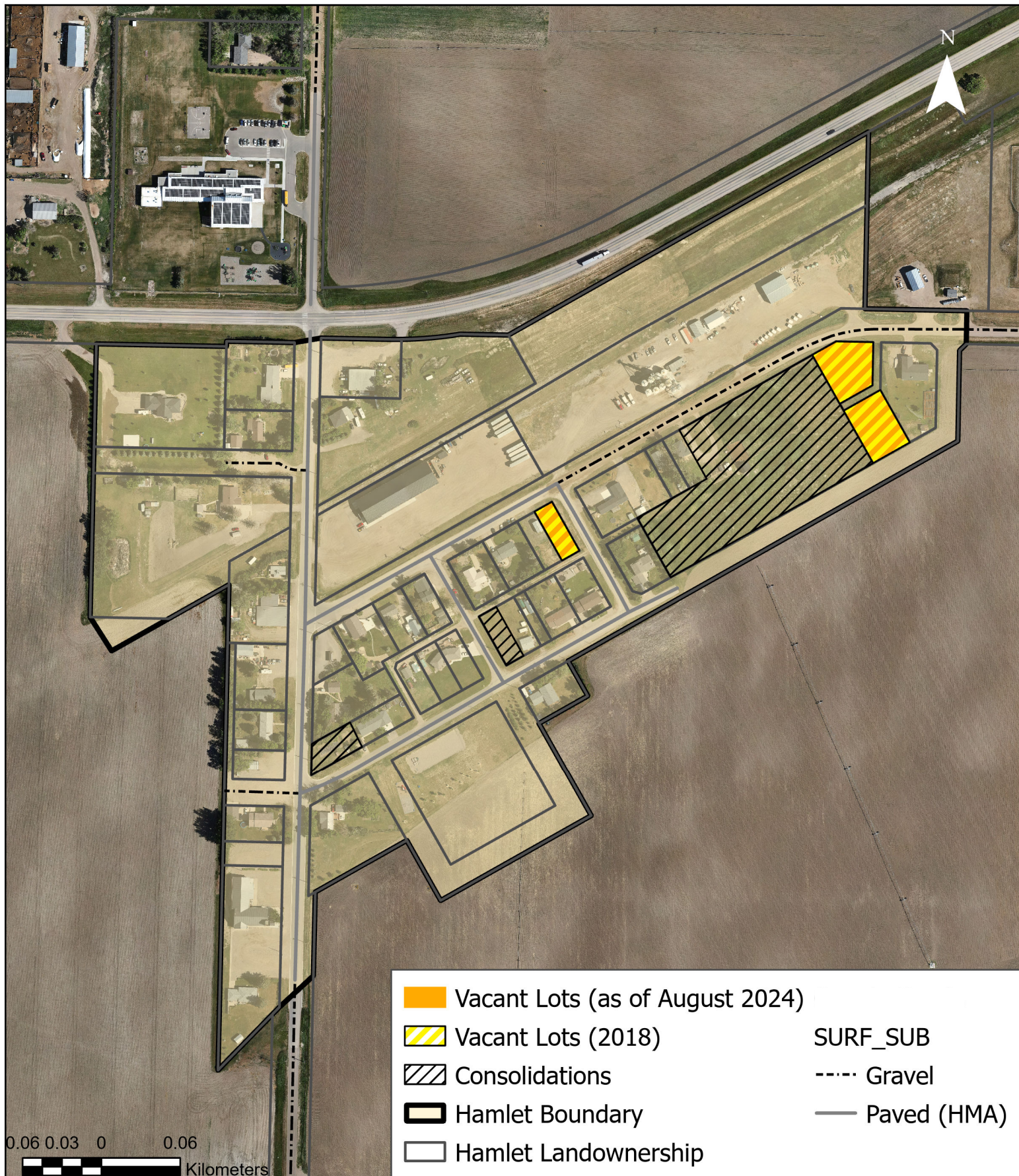
Data Source: Lethbridge County Development Permit Applications (2019 - 2024)



Map 2: Development in Iron Springs by Permit Type

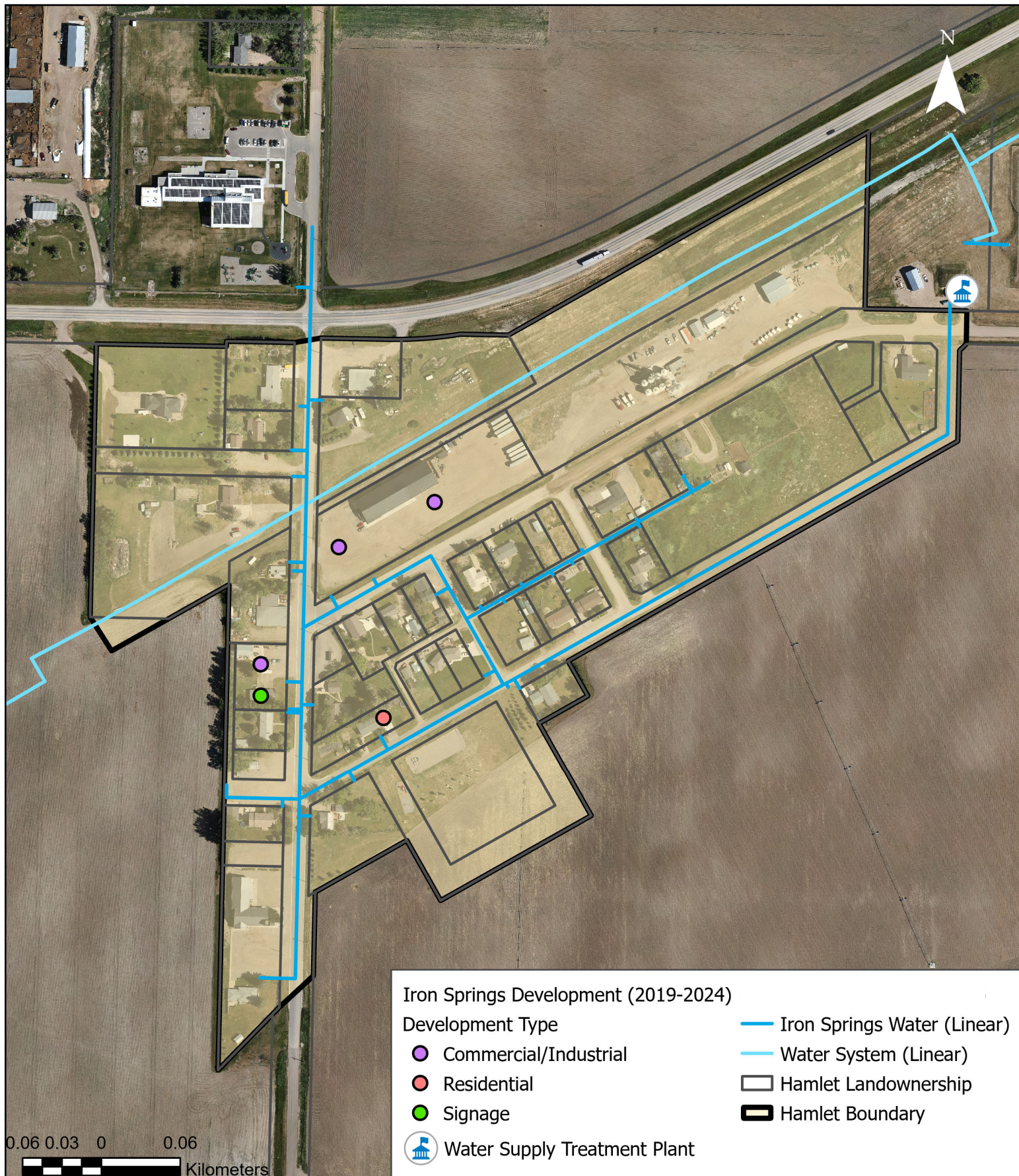
Created by: Hannah Laberge, Planning Intern

Data Source: Lethbridge County Development Permit Applications (2019 - 2024)



Map 3: Vacant Lots in 2018 versus Vacant Lots in 2024

Created by: Hannah Laberge, Planning Intern
 Data Source: Lethbridge County Development Permit Applications (2019 - 2024)



Map 4: Water Utility Infrastructure

Created by: Hannah Laberge, Planning Intern

Data Source: Lethbridge County Development Permit Applications (2019 - 2024)