

# Economic DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



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# Municipal District of Willow Creek

## Economic Development Strategy

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The Municipal District of Willow Creek (MDWC) is located in the Southern part of Alberta, occupying an area of 4,485 square kilometers with a population of 6,081 (2021 Census). The Municipal District has an extensive rural area that includes the Hamlet of Granum and four towns, Claresholm, Fort Macleod, Nanton, and Stavelly.

Reaching from the Porcupine Hills in the west to Vulcan County and the County of Lethbridge in the east, the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26 boasts an enviable diversity of terrain, people and economic opportunity. Centrally situated on the CANAMEX corridor and one hour to a market of nearly 1.5 million people in Calgary, Lethbridge and the surrounding areas.

Primary agricultural production is the leading industry within the M.D. of Willow Creek. Blessed with rich agricultural land, the municipality is populated by multi-generation farm and ranch operations. Grain, forage and oilseed production account for the majority of crops grown within the municipality. Cow / calf, beef feedlots, pork and poultry operations are prevalent.





# Municipal District of Willow Creek

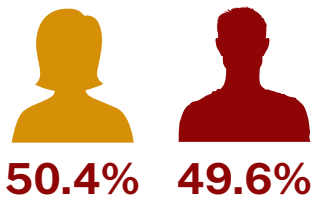
## Economic Development Strategy



### POPULATION



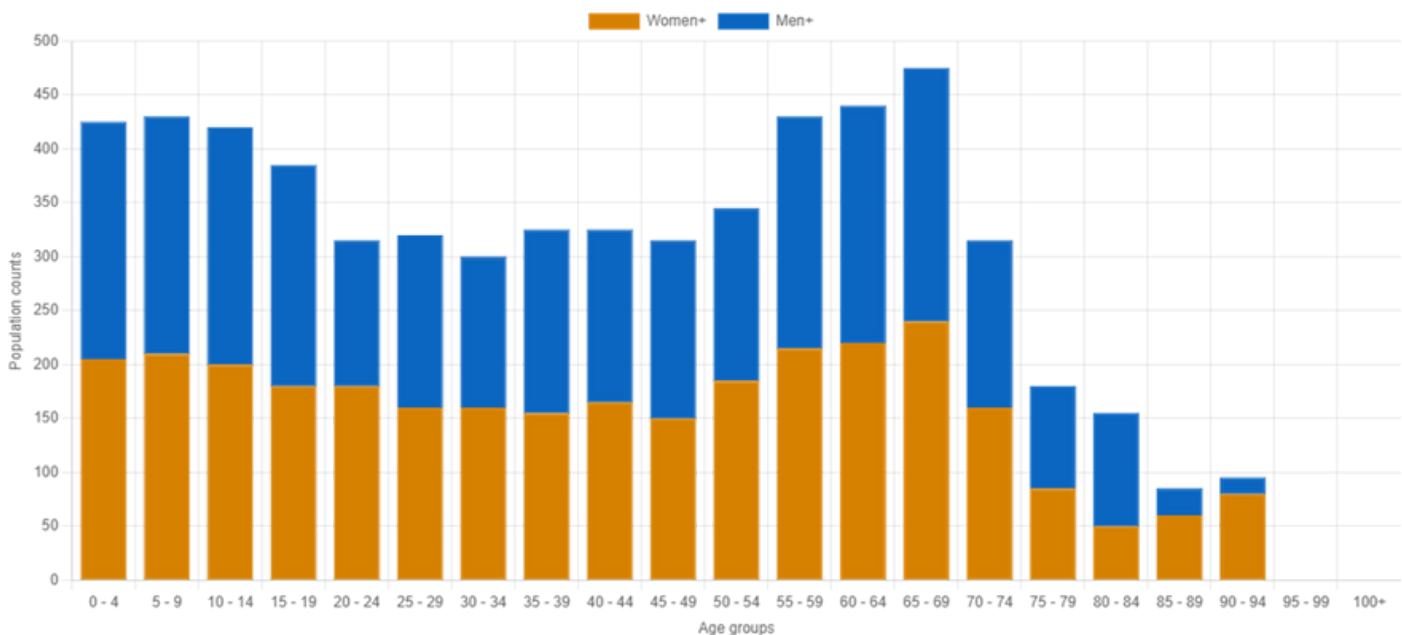
Up 9.1% from 2016



In 2021, there were 1,882 private dwellings occupied in Willow Creek No. 26, which represent a change of 0.8% from 2016.

In 2021, the enumerated population of Willow Creek No. 26, Municipal district (CSD) was 6,081, which represents an increase of 9.1% from 2016. This compares to the provincial average of 4.8% and the national average of 5.2%.

Population by five-year age groups and gender, Willow Creek No. 26, 2021



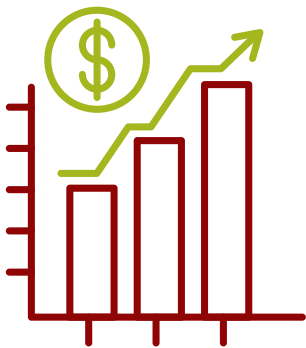
## LAND AREA



The land area of Willow Creek No. 26 is 4,485.05 square kilometres and the population density was 1.4 people per square kilometre.

4,485.05 Square  
Kilometres

## INCOME



**\$72,000**

In 2020, the median after-tax income of households in Willow Creek No. 26 was \$72,000, a change of 2.1% from \$70,500 in 2015.

The MD of Willow Creek had an unemployment rate of 3.0% in 2021, which is lower than the national average of 7.5% for the same year. The job market in the MD of Willow Creek was relatively strong in 2021 compared to the rest of the country.



## EDUCATION



15.6% of people aged 25 to 64 in Willow Creek No. 26 had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 31.1% in Alberta and 32.9% in Canada.



19.8% of people in Willow Creek No. 26 had a location of study outside Canada, out of those aged 25 to 64 with a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree. This compares to 22.2% in Alberta and 20.1% in Canada overall. The most common location of study outside Canada for Willow Creek No. 26 was the Netherlands.

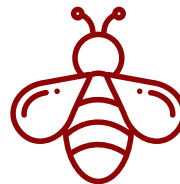
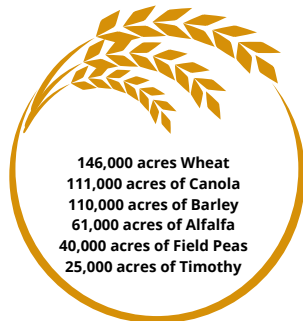


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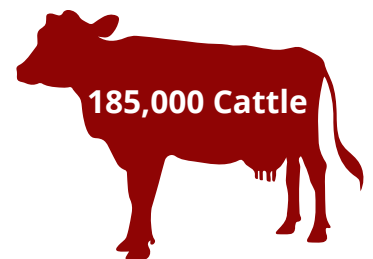
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## AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

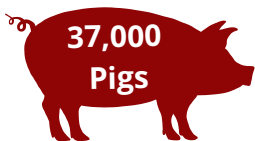
**\$ 583,000,000**  
ANNUAL FARM REVENUE



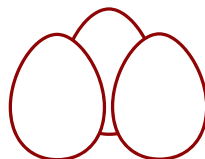
**25,000 Bee Colonies**



**185,000 Cattle**



**37,000 Pigs**



**45 Million Eggs produced annually**



**340,000 Chicken**

# Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results

The following comprehensive analysis was prepared by municipal staff based upon an objective review of the current state of readiness for economic growth as well as feedback from prior economic development inquiries.

## **Strengths**

- Existing business community is well established and receptive to opportunity
- Relationship with the Town of Claresholm for water / waste water / immigration pilot project provides great opportunity for the surrounding area in general and specifically for the M.D. of Willow Creek airport industrial area
- Fully serviced property within the Willow Creek airport industrial area provides a unique opportunity for development of any scale
- Availability of services within the Hamlet of Granum combined with the public and private land base provides a unique opportunity to host various scales of development
- Proximity to larger urban centers of Calgary and Lethbridge provide opportunity
- Reasonably priced land
- Location on Alberta's primary north / south highway corridor, the CANAMEX Corridor provides logistical advantage
- Municipality has become a focus for renewable wind and solar development
- Municipal property tax rates favor development within the M.D. of Willow Creek as compared to similar sized municipalities in region

## **Challenges**

- Availability of additional water license for commercial and industrial use will limit future growth
- Age of infrastructure in the Willow Creek airport industrial area and the Hamlet of Granum will require municipal investment in the coming years
- Demand for rural residential subdivisions increasing risk of fragmentation of agricultural land
- Renewable energy development is reducing the amount of good agricultural farmland
- Technical limitations for broadband and cellular coverage throughout the MD limits expansion of connectivity for technological based development
- Availability of affordable housing limits growth
- Loss of youth to larger centers due to limited potential for growth and development

## **Opportunities**

- Expansion of Willow Creek airport as a hub for flight training, aeronautical industry or recreational use
- Agri-tourism
- Value-added agricultural processing
- Greenhouses for food production
- Logistics and transportation
- Small business and entrepreneurship
- Attract industrial and commercial business and industry from larger centers
- Attract FDI (Foreign Direct Investment)
- Hamlet of Granum as a solution to affordable housing, commercial and industrial development
- Rural 'can-do' attitude provides opportunity as a source of skilled and dependable labor

## **Aspirations**

- Provide a business atmosphere that fosters opportunities for business development that results in the provision of skilled employment
- Maintain affordable property taxes that attract development
- Develop and maintain infrastructure that supports commerce and industry
- Leverage existing infrastructure in the airport industrial area and Granum that can support future commercial and industrial development

## **Results**

- Sustainable and safe community where people live, work and play
- Friendly and welcoming community
- Strong source of locally grown foods
- Large variety of entertainment and cultural events available
- Strong inter-municipal relationships between all communities in the region
- Thriving local economy which is open for business
- Strong, diversified and growing agricultural sector
- Serviced land available for residential, commercial and industrial development

# Willow Creek Economic Development Strategy

In 2019 the M.D. of Willow Creek adopted a municipal strategic plan and in 2022 the plan was updated as a result of significant success in completing objectives and initiatives. The guiding principles identified within the 2022-2026 M.D. of Willow Creek Strategic Plan were identified as follows:

## **Community**

We will honor our history and traditions while we plan and prepare our community for the future.

## **Accountability**

The principles of transparency, respect and honesty will guide the daily operations and conduct of municipal council and staff. We will make fair decisions. We will honor agreements and hold others to the same standard.

## **Economic Growth & Diversity**

We will seek to generate a business-friendly climate which aid in regional economic activity and prosperity. We will actively seek opportunities to attract new industry. We will seek to retain existing industry.

## **Municipal Infrastructure**

We will construct, operate and maintain municipal infrastructure which is safe and effective. We will seek opportunities to collaborate on essential public services with other organizations both private and public.

## **Collaboration**

Within our fiscal means we will seek opportunity for collaboration with other municipalities and organizations that will provide benefit to the citizens of the Municipal District of Willow Creek.

The 2022-2026 M.D. of Willow Creek Strategic Plan references the following Principles, Initiatives and Metrics directly related to economic development:

### **M.D. of Willow Creek Strategic Plan Principle: Economic Growth & Diversity**

We will seek to generate a business-friendly climate which aids in regional economic activity and prosperity. We will actively seek opportunities to attract new industry. We will seek to retain existing industry.

**Key Initiative:** Attract new citizens, commerce and industry to the MD.

**Metric for Success:** One new business or industry in the Claresholm Industrial Area each year during for the next 5 years.

**Metric for Success:** Population growth during the strategic planning period 2022-2026 demonstrates growth of population in excess of 1% and assessment growth of 2% year over year.

**Metric for Success:** Year over year increase in residential, commercial and industrial growth in the Hamlet of Granum.

**Key Initiative:** Participate in regional economic initiatives.

**Success:** The MD will actively participate in regional economic committees and initiatives which will promote local and regional growth.

**Metric for Success:** Regional initiatives lead to demonstrable growth of commercial and industrial development within the region on an annual basis.

**Metric for Success:** Annual growth of assessment base of the municipality.

Other Principles, Initiatives and Metrics that are not directly related to economic development but will support the future foundation of economic growth and development are:



## **M.D. OF WILLOW CREEK STRATEGIC PLAN PRINCIPLE: COMMUNITY**

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Keeping Governance Processes Current**

**Key Initiative:** Review municipal bylaws and policies to ensure continued relevance.

**Success:** In 2022 update the municipal land use bylaw to ensure integration of the Hamlet of Granum.

**Metric for Success:** M.D. of Willow Creek Land Use Bylaw is amended and updated.

**Success:** Ongoing review of the M.D. of Willow Creek Policy Manual to ensure relevancy

**Metric for Success:** Municipal policy manual size and complexity is reduced.

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Support Agriculture**

**Key Initiative:** Identify and deliver agricultural services that will benefit to both primary agricultural producers and the environment.

## **M.D. OF WILLOW CREEK STRATEGIC PLAN PRINCIPLE: MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Manage, Invest and Plan for Sustainable Municipal Services**

**Key Initiative:** Inventory of Infrastructure Assets.

**Success:** By the end of 2022 an inventory of municipal assets has been documented.

**Key Initiative:** Current Service Level Formalization.

**Success:** By the end of 2022 all municipal services have a defined and easily understood service level.

**Key Initiative:** Service Costs and Risks are Documented and Understood

**Success:** By the end of 2023 the costs and risks associated with service delivery is documented and understood.

**Key Initiative:** Asset Management is normal business

**Success:** By the end of 2025 Asset Management is fully implemented with a Council approved Level of Service complete with costs and risks established for municipal services.

**Success:** Full accountability to the public on realized service delivery through reporting mechanisms.

**Success:** Public feedback mechanisms are established.

**Success:** Service based budgeting for annual municipal operating budgets.

**Success:** Revenue supports sustainable service delivery

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Advocate for a regional waste to energy project.**

**Key initiative:** Examine options for waste to energy plant.

**Success:** Advocate for opportunities for a waste to Energy project

**Metric for Success:** by 2023 a proposal for regional review is developed that is both economically and environmentally sustainable

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Internet Service for Municipal Citizens.**

**Key Initiative:** Pursue internet connectivity for all municipal citizens.

**Success:** 90% of ratepayers have quality & affordable internet access by 2025 and 100% by 2030.

**Metric for Success:** Broadband grant to enhance connectivity in underserved areas of municipality

**Key Initiative:** Identify collaboration opportunities with the private and public sector.

# Economic Development Action Plan

The M.D. of Willow Creek Economic Development Action plan is based on the following separate but interconnected themes that will place the municipality on the pathway to successfully achieving its strategic plan priorities and include:

1. Investment Readiness
2. Community Development
3. Commercial and Industrial land availability

## Theme 1 – Investment Readiness

### **Key Initiative: Participate in Regional Economic Development Initiatives**

The M.D. of Willow Creek may utilize the combined resources of the following regional economic development initiatives to identify opportunity and leverage regional collaboration for the benefit of local business and industry:

- Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance
- Southgrow Regional Initiative
- Willow Creek Intermunicipal Collaborative Framework Committee

**Action Item:** Identify key opportunities for local economic development through participation in regional economic development resources

### **Key Initiative: Enhance Economic Development Web Presence**

The following initiatives will be utilized by the M.D. of Willow Creek to enhance web presence:

- Establish an online community profile that will assist site selectors and investors to become familiar with the positive aspects and opportunities within the municipality.
- Utilize the community profile as an economic development portal to bridge the gap on the existing municipal web page
- Develop various media types that may be utilized to enhance online presence
- Add an inventory of available municipal property for sale for residential, commercial and industrial development

### **Action Items:**

- Participate in the AB SW 'Group Deal on Community Profiles' project to create a municipal profile that will establish an economic development webpage that will provide a primary point of contact and information for municipal economic development
- Create a series of videos that highlight our key infrastructure, infrastructure upgrades, community safety and local economic development profile:
- Create video content that will promote and support municipal strategies and objectives for the following:
  - Municipal Asset Management
  - Municipal levels of service for governance, public works, agricultural service board, development and planning and administration
  - Promotion of investment
  - Attraction and retention of emergency services volunteers
  - Agricultural and environmental sustainability
  - Promotion of agricultural industry
  - Promote the Hamlet of Granum as a positive place to live, work and build
  - Promotion of the Willow Creek airport industrial area as a potential location for development

## **Theme 2 – Community Development**

### **Key Initiative: Plan, Manage and Invest in Municipal Projects that Encourage Economic Development**

- Through the asset management program of the M.D. of Willow Creek assess key transportation, telecommunication, water, waste water, stormwater and other infrastructure that supports current and future economic development.

#### **Action Items:**

- Identify potential to expand water license in the airport industrial area
- Identify condition of water / waste water, transportation and telecommunication infrastructure in airport industrial area and Hamlet of Granum – develop a plan to address opportunities for economic development
- Undertake transportation master plan to identify key transportation corridors and infrastructure requirements
- Update land use bylaw to ensure a wide scope of potential development may occur
- Identify and amend policy and bylaw barriers to economic development

### **Key Initiative: Business Retention and Expansion**

#### **Action Items:**

- Work with existing businesses and industries to optimize existing relationships to encourage retention and expansion
- Assess workforce needs and collaborate with other municipalities to address shortfalls

## **Theme 3 – Commercial and Industrial Land**

### **Key Initiative: Identify Key Commercial and Industrial Hubs for Future Development**

#### **Action Items:**

- Reduce the loss of agricultural land to development by making airport industrial lands and Hamlet of Granum property 'investment ready' which is defined as being ready for development immediately upon completion of the municipal development application process.
- Collaborate with neighboring municipalities to direct commercial and industrial development to urban centers to reduce fragmentation of agricultural land and eliminate land use conflict in areas where agriculture is the predominant industry.

### **Key Initiative: Engage Residents and Businesses on an Ongoing Basis to Create a Community Vision for the M.D. of Willow Creek**

#### **Action Items:**

- Review land use bylaw and policies to ensure alignment with community expectations and vision

## Economic Development Plan - Implementation

Theme 1 - Investment Readiness								
Key Initiative	Action Item	Approved By	Project Lead	FTE	Funding		Timeline	
Participate in Regional Initiatives	Southgrow	Council	CAO	0.1	Operating Budget		Annually	
	Alberta SW							
	ICF Committee							
Enhance Municipal Web Presence								
	Community Profile Project	Council	Dev. Officer	0.1	Operating Budget		2023	
	Internal integration of CPP		IT/GIS	0.1	Operating Budget		2023	
	Media Project	Council	Dev. Officer	0.1	Grants and Op Budget		2023	
	Collection of Video footage		Ag Field	0.1	Operating Budget		2023	
				Infra.	0.1			
				WCES	0.1			
				Dev. Officer	0.1			
Theme 2 - Community Development								
Key Initiative	Action Item	Approved By	Project Lead	FTE	Funding		Timeline	
Plan, Manage and Invest in Projects that Encourage Economic Development	Assess and Evaluate Key Infrastructure that Supports Economic Development	Council	Director of Infrastructure	0.25	Operating Budget		Annually	
Business Retention and Expansion								
	Business Survey	Council	Dev. Officer	0.1	Operating Budget		2024	
	Housing and Labor Study	Council	Dev. Officer	0.1	Operating Budget		2025	
Theme 3 - Commercial and Industrial Land								
Key Initiative	Action Item	Approved By	Project Lead	FTE	Funding		Timeline	
Identify Key Commercial and Industrial Hubs for Future Development	Prepare MD land in CIA and Granum for Development	Council	Dev. Officer	0.1	Op. and Cap. Budget		2023-25	
	Collaborate with other Municipalities to reduce Ag Land Fragmentation	Council	CAO	0.1	Operating Budget		Annually	
Engage Residents and Businesses on an Ongoing Basis to Create Community Vision								
	Review Land Use Bylaws and Policies	Council	CAO/Director of Planning/ ORRSC	0.2	Operating Budget		Annually	