



COUNTY OF NORTHERN LIGHTS

Economic Development Strategy Overview

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Background

The County of Northern Lights retained the Western Management Consultants consortium to prepare an economic development strategy and communications approach.

Preparation of Northern Lights' Economic Development Strategy (the Plan) was supported by a combination of:

- Secondary research;
- Literature review;
- Interviews with key players, stakeholders and economic development-oriented agencies/organizations; and
- A strategic development session with Council and senior staff.

Included in the approach was:

- Community Competitive Analysis;
- Situational Analysis;
- Consultations;
- SWOT Analysis;
- Governance Review;
- Delivery Support; and
- Target Sector Identification.

Findings

Findings from the consultations indicated there is a strong desire to collaborate within the political and business community of the County of Northern Lights. There is also a clear appreciation of the need to be proactive and to work with the opportunities that exist. This desire for collaboration has driven some of the recommendations.

The County has many assets and despite facing some significant challenges, there are many opportunities for economic development success. In general, the County is an attractive area for developments in forestry, agriculture, tourism, and small to medium-sized industry. Being located within the heart of the oil and gas activity is a distinct bonus. Successful development in these sectors will contribute to the future growth of other commercial, residential and service development.

The key to the success of the Economic Development Strategy is proposed in governance, collaboration, and implementation. The leadership, human resources, experience, and knowledge required to be successful exists within the County. Leaders in business, government, and education must be encouraged and invited to participate. Additionally, it is recommended that existing advocacy agencies and organization be used to supplement the effort.

It is through economic development that the County's quality of life will be enhanced by improving the tax assessment base, generating more wealth and business, creating a diverse and stable economic base with an increase in amenities, and increasing employment opportunities.

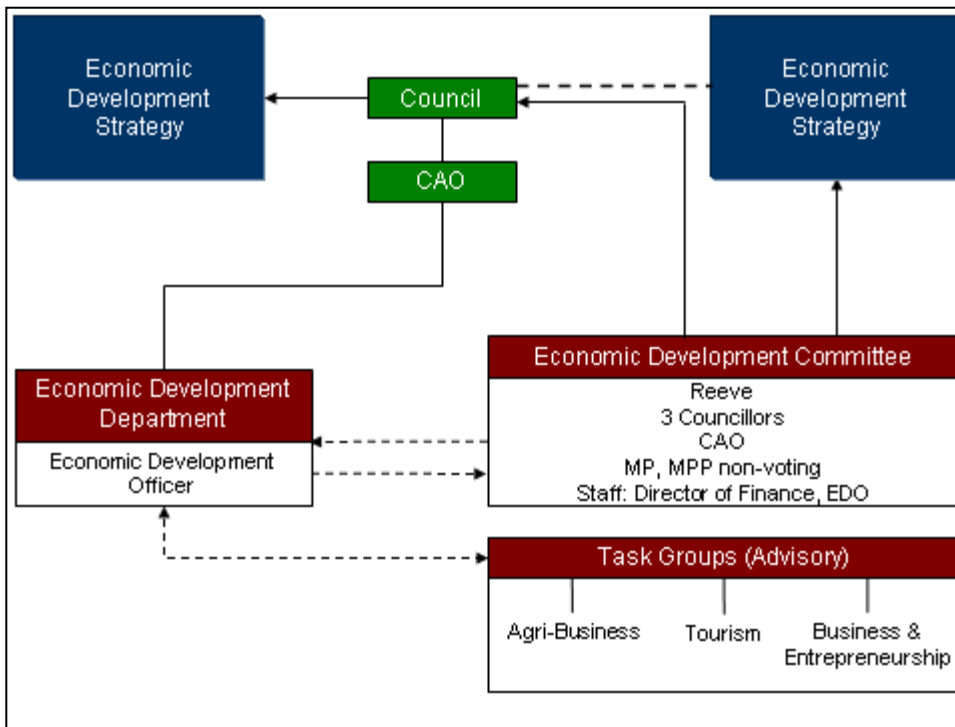
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An Economic Development Organization

A key finding of the strategy work was that the County needs to organize and prepare to deliver the Economic Development Strategy.

Economic development is a very competitive business. In North America alone, there are over 8,000 economic development organizations. In Canada, the delivery of economic development ranges from Federal Government Departments to Provincial Ministries to regional alliances to municipal departments to business re-development areas to neighborhood area projects.

Based on the characteristics of successful organizations and the consistent comments heard in the community, the following economic development delivery model was proposed. That is – an organization for economic development that centers around Council, ensuring the elected leaders remain the decision making body, while providing professional expertise and industry input to the process.



With the new organization in place, suggested roles for the key players are as follows:

Council: Council will create the atmosphere and work at the macroeconomic level.

Steering Committee will provide guidance and representation from various industries and demographics.

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Economic Development Officer. The EDO, the “sales person”, creating relationships with internal and external audiences.

County Departments & Staff: With an active EDO out in the community, County departments will no doubt begin to experience additional feedback and increased interaction with community stakeholders as a positive in the long-term strategy.

Economic Development Task Groups: The Economic Development Task Groups, within a three-way communication grid (EDO, Committee, and Task Group), becomes the “think tank” of the economic development structure. The Task Group members bring specific expertise to the table as follows:

- *The Task Group* provides valuable first hand, sector specific experience;
- *The EDO* provides comprehensive constituent, and external audience information and observations; and
- *Council members* provide comprehensive County insights as elected officials.

Combined, this body of knowledge provides the “intelligence” that supports both the Plan and the marketing communications. It has a combined micro and macro role to play in the process, demonstrating leadership and providing accurate and objective communication back to Council, as the Plan unfolds and opportunities present themselves.

The Strategy

It is intended that the Economic Development Strategy and sector-focused Action Plans be reviewed annually and be treated as a “living” document to ensure the County remains on track to accomplish its Mission and economic development priorities.

Mission Statement

Promote entrepreneurship, attract economic investment, and enable business development within the County of Northern Lights.

Sectors

The Strategy was streamlined to address four core sectors.

- Agribusiness;
- Tourism;
- Business; and
- Entrepreneurship (self-employed individuals).

Action Plans are influenced by four inter-related activities:

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1. Resources and actions which will assist in the retention of existing business;
2. Resources and actions which will lead to the expansion of existing business;
3. Resources and actions which will attract new business and investment; and
4. Resources and actions which will encourage entrepreneurship.

Strategic Priorities

Strategic priorities are those few actions, which, if done well and at the right time, will achieve Council's objectives of growing economic prosperity in the County. Six Strategic Priorities will drive the economic development strategy for the County:

Strategic Priority #1: Create an economic development program within the present financial means of the County of Northern Lights that can grow as success occurs.

Strategic Priority #2: Create a strong partnership between the public and private sectors that will advance the economic development strategy of the County of Northern Lights.

Strategic Priority #3: Lead in advocating and supporting partnerships and outreach opportunities.

Strategic Priority #4: Ensure the benefits of economic development occur throughout the County.

Strategic Priority #5: To make the County the preferred location to develop in the north Peace River region due to the County's helpful problem solving and results-oriented approach to development.

Strategic Priority #6: Develop the strategic Agri-business, Tourism, Business, and Entrepreneurship sectors in the County of Northern Lights.

CONCLUSION

The County of Northern Lights, as a smaller rural municipality in Canada, faces many challenges typical to communities of its size. However, it is also blessed with good locational attributes near natural resource-based opportunities. The way forward, as documented in the report, includes the following:

- Prepare and organize internally to move forward with economic development;
- Act inclusively, using the best creativity of business and citizens;
- Strive to achieve economic benefits across all the regions in the County by planning and executing strategies for each; and
- Nurture and encourage "growth from within" by building on the inherent entrepreneurialism within the county.

And remember.....*Economic Development is an "investment" not a cost.*

It will generate prosperity and an improved quality of life

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for the County of Northern Lights.