

RIMBEY BUSINESS SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY



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INTRODUCTION

Rimbey is a thriving community of around 2500 people, ideally located in Central Alberta within close proximity to mountains, fields, forest and urban landscapes. There is a need to put forward a strategy for the sustainability and enhancement of the Town's business sector. Such a strategy must be one that leads to action in the form of tangible and measurable activities that will establish Rimbey as a community of choice for current and future business development.

Key to this process is stakeholder involvement. This involvement can take the form of strategic engagement in planning and executing activities promoting sustainability. It can also take the form of shared investment in the community. Stakeholder buy-in is critical to the success of any strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to sustain and enhance the Town of Rimbey's business sector, an organized approach is required. This includes the implementation of a number of strategies. The strategies within this report can be summarized as follows:

STRATEGY NO. 1

Draft and pass a bylaw for the formation of the Rimbey Business Sector Sustainability Advisory Committee. Cap Committee membership to a workable number not to exceed 11. Invite each stakeholder to include one or more representatives to serve on the Committee. Develop a Terms of Reference to identify the mandate of the Committee, which would be to provide advice and recommendations to Council on activities and programs which will promote and enhance business sustainability. Invite the media to attend and become involved.

STRATEGY NO. 2

In 2015, undertake an Area Redevelopment Plan through the assistance of a professional planning consultant, Rimbey businesses and involve the Advisory Committee in the process.

STRATEGY NO. 3

Establish an annual allotment in the capital budget for the next five (5) years for business sector improvement. The amount to allocate and the nature of the improvements will be established over time through the work of the Committee in concert with the Council.

STRATEGY NO. 4

Determine the manner in which the business sector improvements will be paid. Considers all options including the following:

- **Provincial/Federal/Corporate grant programs;**
- **Local Improvement Levies;**
- **Increasing the municipal tax rate;**
- **Direct allocation within the annual capital budget (derived from reserves);**
- **Corporate sponsorship;**
- **Support from community groups;**
- **A combination of the above.**

STRATEGY NO. 5

Through the work of the Advisory Committee, investigate possible forms of grant incentives that may be utilized in achieving and maintaining business sustainability. Grant incentives may take the form of policies regarding such things as:

- **Improvements to the exterior of existing buildings including standardized façades, awnings and building signage;**
- **Renovation of existing vacant buildings to accommodate a new business(es);**
- **Development of vacant lots for new buildings or expansions.**

STRATEGY NO. 6

Include within the Area Redevelopment Plan provisions for maximizing parking and signage/traffic lighting which will improve and enhance public safety.

STRATEGY NO. 7

Explore the creation of a Rimbey Business Sector FaceBook© group or groups, and/or other social networking opportunities to provide enhanced exposure to Rimbey businesses. Such a group would have to be moderated to ensure relevance and mitigate liability. Rules would need to be established. This strategy could include the popularization of hashtags such as #rimbeybusiness.

STRATEGY NO. 8

Explore the feasibility of developing a Rimbey Business Sector website, possibly in conjunction with the Rimbey Chamber of Commerce and/or CAEP websites. If such a site is considered, how it will be updated and maintained will have to be considered. This may or may not include outsourcing.

STRATEGY NO. 9

Carry-out a rebranding activity for Rimbey. While such an activity addresses a need for Rimbey as a whole, the business sector, as a significant community stakeholder, stands to benefit from the results of this process.



WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY? HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE GET THERE?

An important feature of any strategy is determining what “success” looks like. Business Sector Sustainability could have the following attributes:

- Business licenses for retail and service industry outlets are increasing each year;
- Vacant building rates are decreasing;
- Business real-estate values are stable or gradually rising;
- The number of Development permits issued for downtown businesses is consistent and rising;
- The downtown aesthetically is improved and enhanced in measurable increments from year-to-year through a concerted effort;
- There is evidence that commercial development has facilitated other related commercial development (store type “A” opens causing someone to open store type “B” that compliments the first store).
- Other communities have contacted us to ask what we did to get where we are.

WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS?

Identifying who the stakeholders are is critical in establishing proper stakeholder engagement processes. Business sector stakeholders include:

- Existing Rimbey businesses;
- Current customers of Rimbey businesses;
- Potential customers of Rimbey businesses (the “they” in “build it and they will come”);
- The Town of Rimbey (Council and Administration);
- The Chamber of Commerce;
- Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP).

FORMATION OF AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The centerpiece to stakeholder engagement should be a group assembled of stakeholders to provide insight, ideas and make recommendations to the Town of Rimbey Council and any other bodies which may benefit from their collective perspective.

STRATEGY NO. 1

Draft and pass a bylaw for the formation of the Rimbey Business Sector Sustainability Advisory Committee. Cap Committee membership to a workable number not to exceed 11. Invite each stakeholder to include one or more representatives to serve on the Committee. Develop a Terms of Reference to identify the mandate of the Committee, which would be to provide advice and recommendations to Council on activities and programs which will promote and enhance business sector sustainability. Invite the media to attend and become involved.

AREA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Municipal Government Act Provides a municipality with the opportunity to adopt an "Area Redevelopment Plan". This is similar to an Area Structure Plan in that it involves a specific, prescribed area in which planning for future development has been identified as important in order to allow for timely and orderly development. An Area Redevelopment Plan is different in that it focusses on redeveloping a currently developed area.

Area redevelopment plans can include many things which will help guide development of an existing area. The Act contemplates that such a plan will include:

- Preserving or improving land and buildings in the area;
- Rehabilitating buildings in the area;
- Removing buildings from the area;
- Constructing or replacing buildings in the area;
- Establishing, improving or relocating roads, public utilities or other services in the area; and
- Facilitating any other development in the area.

Such a plan could involve activities such as entering into discussions with landowners within the mandate area that have either vacant buildings or vacant land and determining possible uses or other dispositions of those properties.

The Committee created under Strategy No. 1 would become involved in development of this plan. Ultimately, such a plan would be adopted by Council by bylaw.

STRATEGY NO. 2

In 2015, undertake an Area Redevelopment Plan through the assistance of a professional planning consultant, for the Rimbey Business Sector and involve the Advisory Committee in the process.

BUSINESS SECTOR IMPROVEMENTS

The Committee should identify opportunities for enhancing the appearance of the business sector both for developing civic pride as well as for the benefit of visitors and potential business owners. Funding should be identified for carrying out downtown enhancements. One specific enhancement that should be considered is an electronic messaging sign. The Committee can determine the best location for such a sign (or "signs", potentially) and how industry could be involved in sponsoring the costs of the sign(s) and any business sector enhancements.

A study of other communities could assist in providing ideas while, at the same time, trying to establish improvements which speak to the "personality" of the community in some unique way.

STRATEGY NO. 3

Establish an annual allotment in the capital budget for the next five (5) years for business sector improvement. The amount to allocate and the nature of the improvements will be established over time through the work of the Committee in concert with the Council.

STRATEGY NO. 4

Determine the manner in which the business sector improvements will be paid. Considers all options including the following:

- **Provincial/Federal/Corporate grant programs;**
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- **A combination of the above.**

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

It may be desirable to implement policies which provide financial incentives to developers/businesses considering an investment in Rimbey. In considering the form that incentives would take, it's important to consider that the Municipal Government Act does not allow for direct tax incentives. It does, however, allow a municipality, on a case-by-case, year-by-year basis to cancel some or any portion of a tax when Council deems it equitable to do so. Because of this limitation, it is recommended that a different approach be taken in rather than through the taxation system. It is recommended that incentives take the form of grants as there are fewer legislative limitations on issuing grants.

STRATEGY NO. 5

Through the work of the Advisory Committee, investigate possible forms of grant incentives that may be utilized in achieving and maintaining business sector sustainability. Grant incentives may take the form of policies regarding such things as:

- **Improvements to the exterior of existing buildings including standardized façades, awnings and building signage;**
- **Renovation of existing vacant buildings to accommodate a new business(es);**
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"USER-FRIENDLY" BUSINESS SECTOR – PARKING, PEDESTRIANS AND PUBLIC SAFETY

While "build it and they will come" may be true, "build it *nicely* and more will come" is true as well. The Committee should look at improvements to the business sector that will enhance the Rimbey shopping experience. The focus here is not so much on aesthetics as it is about *logistics*. This means maximization of parking, effective signage/traffic lighting and any other measures which maximize the comfort and safety of Rimbey customers.

STRATEGY NO. 6

Include within the Area Redevelopment Plan provisions for maximizing parking and signage/traffic lighting which will improve and enhance public safety.

ONLINE BUSINESS SECTOR "PRESENCE"

Social Media provides an opportunity to further enhance and develop Rimbeys' downtown. Sites such as FaceBook© and Twitter© provide virtual meeting places where downtown businesses can advertise in a manner that is cost effective and instantaneous. Use of online presence could potentially be achieved in conjunction with the Rimbeys Chamber of Commerce, CAEP, or, alternatively, as a separate but complementary activity.

STRATEGY NO. 7

Explore the creation of a Rimbeys Business Sector FaceBook© group or groups, and/or other social networking opportunities to provide enhanced exposure to Rimbeys businesses. Such a group would have to be moderated to ensure relevance and mitigate liability. Rules would need to be established. This strategy could include the popularization of hashtags such as #rimbeysbusiness.

STRATEGY NO. 8

Explore the feasibility of developing a Rimbeys Business Sector website, possibly in conjunction with the Rimbeys Chamber of Commerce and/or CAEP websites. If such a site is considered, how it will be updated and maintained will have to be considered. This may or may not include outsourcing.

CORPORATE REBRANDING

While the corporate identity of the Town of Rimbeys is not *directly* tied to business sector sustainability, corporate identity can *indirectly* influence business development through its messaging. Corporate rebranding can take the form of adopting a new Town Logo and, potentially a new "tagline". Who are we? What message do we wish to convey about ourselves? For example, are we "a community for all ages", or are we "in the heart of industry", or are we, "fun and family friendly"? A tagline provides a message to those around us about what we stand for and what we value. Such messaging can have an impact on business sector sustainability.

STRATEGY NO. 9

Carry-out a rebranding activity for Rimbeys. While such an activity addresses a need for Rimbeys as a whole, the Rimbeys Business Sector, as a significant community stakeholder, stands to benefit from the results of this process.

SUMMARY

Rimbey's business sector may be sustained and enhanced through implementation of an organized approach (i.e. a strategy) which includes input from its stakeholders through the formation of an Advisory Committee. Such a Committee can be utilized to leverage community resources in every form including financial, community group involvement and corporate support. Key to the success of this strategy is the completion of an Area Redevelopment Plan, a beautification plan and even a corporate rebranding plan.

This strategy is, in itself, only the beginning of a process that must be implemented and then maintained in years to come if success is to be realized. Stakeholder buy-in is critical if momentum is to be achieved and maintained.

Upon adoption of this strategy, steps must be undertaken to carry-out its implementation in a timely and logical manner, starting with the creation of the Committee.

