
2021 Minister's Awards for Municipal Excellence



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Contents

Message from the Minister	4
About the awards.....	5
Award categories	
· Building Economic Strength	6
· Enhancing Community Safety	9
· Partnership	13
· Service Delivery Innovation	19
· Smaller Municipalities	22
Special recognition: red tape reduction initiatives	25

Message from the Minister



Congratulations to the 2021 Minister's Awards for Municipal Excellence Winners! This year, the review committee evaluated 64 submissions, and I know the selection process wasn't easy. The submissions highlighted hard work and out-of-the-box thinking. The awards truly are a celebration of local government ingenuity and the continuous drive to improve the services and programs they offer to Alberta residents. I commend you on your efforts and congratulate you on this recognition by your peers.

I continue to be impressed by the new and innovative ways municipalities are finding to streamline services and ensure Albertans have strong and vibrant communities to call home. I would like to thank every municipality that took the time to submit initiatives for consideration for this year's awards – each one of these initiatives highlight promising practices and are a great way for municipalities to learn from each other and improve services they provide to Albertans.

Alberta's municipalities create, implement, and manage many unique initiatives and practices that help make our communities strong, prosperous, and resilient. I appreciate your willingness to share your municipality's accomplishments and wish you all continued success with your initiatives.

I would also like to thank the municipal representatives from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, Rural Municipalities of Alberta, the Government Finance Officers Association, the Local Government Administration Association, the Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators' Association, and the Society of Local Government Managers for giving their time to review and evaluate this year's submissions. These are the people who really understand the importance of the work done in municipalities, and we were very fortunate to have benefited from their time and thoughtful contributions.

Congratulations, again, to this year's winners!

Ric McIver, Minister of Municipal Affairs



About the awards

Since 2002, the Minister's Awards for Municipal Excellence program has encouraged municipalities to share their successes by recognizing accomplishments in the provision of municipal services in Alberta.

Each year, municipalities, whether individually or in partnership with other organizations, have highlighted promising practices including new and unique approaches to issues, streamlined processes for existing practices, and creative community partnerships. Submissions must demonstrate the practice addressed a community need and has been in place for a sufficient length of time to produce verifiable results.

Awards are presented in the categories of: Building Economic Strength, Enhancing Community Safety, Partnership, Service Delivery Innovation, and Smaller Municipalities. In addition, special recognition for red tape reduction initiatives is also being awarded along with this year's program.

Submissions were evaluated by a panel of municipal representatives from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, Rural Municipalities of Alberta, the Government Finance Officers Association, the Local Government Administration Association, the Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators' Association, and the Society of Local Government Managers.

Review committee members considered how submitted initiatives demonstrated measureable and sustainable impacts, used innovative approaches to meet community challenges and needs, the transferability and applicability of the initiative for other municipalities to support learning and knowledge sharing, and the quality of the submission.

Award categories

Building Economic Strength

The Building Economic Strength category is open to all municipalities. The award is given for an innovative initiative involving the municipality and business community that addresses a challenge affecting community economic strength.

2021 AWARD RECIPIENT

City of Medicine Hat: *“Innovative Approach to Economic Supports”*

The City of Medicine Hat took innovative approaches to sustaining the local economy and encouraging the community to shop local during the pandemic. This included the development of the Medicine Hat Business Innovation Grant, which provided \$500 to \$15,000 grants to local businesses that experienced a material adverse impact on their operations due to COVID-19. The grant encouraged business innovation, maintained or enhanced new revenue streams, and reduced barriers for businesses to remain open as a result of increased costs associated with new guidelines put in place to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

As another way to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 for small businesses, Community Futures-Entre Corp, Invest Medicine Hat, the Medicine Hat & District Chamber of Commerce, and the municipality partnered with Google on their ShopHERE powered by Google program to provide businesses the opportunity to get a free e-commerce Shopify store. This partnership was the first of its kind within the region to bring a proven e-commerce website solution to Alberta-based businesses. One hundred and fifty businesses participated in the ShopHERE program, which eventually led to a second phase of this digital initiative called Shop YXH. Shop YXH is an online “one-stop-shop” to source and buy creative products and services from small businesses located in Medicine Hat, Brooks, and the Southeast Alberta region. It has become the largest “mall” in southeastern Alberta, with more than 120 businesses participating.



Shop YXH merchant, recipient of the City of Medicine Hat Business Innovation Grant

BUILDING ECONOMIC STRENGTH: SHORTLISTED INITIATIVES

City of Leduc: “COVID Recovery Grant Collaboration”

The city collaborated with the Leduc, Nisku and Wetaskiwin Regional Chamber of Commerce to develop the COVID Recovery Grant. The grant provided funding for local small businesses to connect with local bookkeeping and accounting firms to obtain professional advice and support to assess their options and apply for government supports to assist them with maintaining business operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The grant addressed two major gaps identified by the city’s COVID-19 economic support and recovery taskforce: local businesses lacked awareness of the provincial and federal government funds available to them as part of the governments’ response to the pandemic, and businesses lacked the resources and capacity to successfully complete the applications for these supports (some of which were complicated and/or required considerable coordination and effort to pull together the relevant supporting documentation).

Sturgeon County: “Villeneuve Landing Network and Growth Initiative”

The Villeneuve Airport, the region’s primary general aviation airport (complementing Edmonton International Airport), was identified as a key county asset with the potential to serve as a focal point for sustainable growth. The Villeneuve Landing Network (VLN) was created in 2019 as part of Sturgeon County’s economic growth and diversification strategy. It is a collection of municipal, aerospace, Indigenous leaders, and regional economic development focused entities that have come together in partnership to enhance the economic potential of the Villeneuve Airport. What resulted was a partnership that actively pursued means to support the area as a general aviation, manufacturing, transportation, and logistics hub that connects specialized regional products and services with global markets.

Town of Claresholm: “Community Takes Roots”

In 2019, the community, through its arms-length economic development organization, qualified for and became one of the sites for a Rural and Northern Immigration pilot to address labour shortages and promote rural settlement in Canada. In combination with the immigration pilot, the town also undertook the Community Takes Root initiative to create an environment that supports the settlement and integration of newcomers and immigrant entrepreneurs in Claresholm. The town recognized the need to increase the capacity of local service providers, to welcome and retain international student graduates, temporary foreign workers, family immigrants, refugees, and all newcomers to Claresholm. Maintaining active community engagement, partnership with local and regional service providers, and a commitment to a robust business retention and expansion program, the Town of Claresholm has achieved tremendous results in the areas of settlement, integration, welcome, and inclusivity.

BUILDING ECONOMIC STRENGTH: OTHER INITIATIVES

City of Airdrie: “Developed and Implemented an Economic Strategy”

In 2018, based on community input, the City of Airdrie developed a 10-year Economic Strategy setting out a vision for Airdrie in 2028. The bold 10-year vision is that Airdrie’s small town feel, entrepreneurial ambition, and superior location make it the place to be for businesses and talent in Western Canada. The strategy outlines three objectives, supported by nine priorities and 11 key actions to meet these objectives, with the intent of ensuring Airdrie’s future as an economically stable and sustainable city so residents can continue to enjoy a high quality of life. The strategy is specifically designed to increase the non-residential tax base to create new tax revenue, create jobs, and build community. City Council endorsed the strategy, and it is actively being implemented and monitored.

City of Calgary: “City of Calgary Efforts in Building Economic Strength for Citizens, Customers and Businesses”

To help build the city’s economy, the City of Calgary waived fees and expedited processes to enable temporary outdoor patios; allowed for no-penalty bill payment deferrals and payment plans for City utilities; waived and deferred planning and development application fees; supported the expansion and efficient deployment of fibre optic; supported the design of a wireless infrastructure framework and future state business processes; created a #SupportLocalYYC campaign and ShopHERE powered by Google program; developed an online toolkit to help frontline workers and an online COVID-19 hub for businesses; and worked with partners to showcase local art, music, theatre, sport and recreation at the Chinook Blast winter festival, while increasing business activity in the downtown core.

Mackenzie County: “Response to Disasters”

The county has been hit with an array of disasters in recent years ranging from multiple overland floods, natural gas shortages in winter, the Chuckegg forest fire, and ice jams on the Peace River that flooded Fort Vermilion. These events taxed county staff, yet they performed to the highest level.

Strathcona County: “Collaborative Approach to Reducing Red Tape”

Strathcona County established a Planning and Development Red Tape Reduction Task Force made up of various stakeholder groups and members of the public to review opportunities to reduce red tape for applicants, including streamlining the permitting process and reviewing departmental policies that create bottlenecks to reduce costs to applicants, ensuring projects proceed more quickly and affordably. The review highlighted the need to continue developing/expanding online application technology, to be nimble in using resources effectively (cross training, being able to mobilize resources when necessary to deal with permit volumes and the narrow construction season), and highlighted some areas where the municipality could take some marginal risks to assist applicants from a security perspective.

Town of Cardston: “1.9 Mega Watt Solar Farm”

Southern Alberta is one of the top places in Canada for solar generation. Given its location, Cardston does not have a strong attraction for new commercial or industrial investment, so the town is branching out to other methods of revenue generation. The Town of Cardston built a 1.9 megawatt solar farm on 8.5 acres in its industrial park. It is designed to offset 100 per cent of the electrical consumption of town-owned infrastructure, and in 15 years when the loan is paid in full, it will provide expected net revenues of approximately \$250,000 annually. This initiative leverages the community’s location to address two of the town’s long term goals: environmental responsibility and creating alternate sources of sustainable revenue to reduce the need for taxation.

Town of Drayton Valley: “Zero Fee Tuition Initiative”

The boom-bust cycle of the main industry (oil and gas) driving the local economy has resulted in a decline in economic activity, increasing unemployment, and residents leaving the area to seek employment elsewhere. Many residents lack the funds to access post-secondary education and training opportunities that will enable them to realise work and career opportunities. The Town of Drayton Valley’s Zero Fee Tuition Initiative was implemented in an effort to remove the financial barrier for its residents to access post-secondary education that will enable them to acquire workforce relevant training, whether pursuing professional development or new career opportunities. This initiative was started to help remove the financial barrier to a post-secondary education for residents, as well as to attract new residents to the community.

Award categories

Enhancing Community Safety

The Enhancing Community Safety category is open to all municipalities. The award is given for an innovative initiative that engages the community to address a safety issue. This could involve crime prevention, infrastructure enhancements, and community services initiatives.

2021 AWARD RECIPIENT

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo: “*Vulnerable Persons Self-Registry (VPR)*”

Lessons learned from the 2016 wildfires identified a void in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo’s practices when it came to vulnerable populations such as those with disabilities, those dependent on life-sustaining technology, and the elderly living alone in their homes. Protecting those that may be more adversely affected by emergencies, disasters, or when facing imminent increasing threats to life safety, has come to the forefront of Regional Emergency Services’ (RES) approach to providing initial and ongoing assistance in times of need. The implementation of the Vulnerable Persons Registry (VPR) has been a key enabler of such a commitment. The VPR is a centralized, current, accessible, and secure information source that RES and other municipal departments regularly use to ensure the continuous provision of essential services to vulnerable registrants and account for their special needs during an emergency response or evacuation.



The municipality’s VPR is the first of its kind in Alberta, and one of four implementations of the program in Canada. The uniqueness of the municipality’s VPR implementation is its integration into all facets of the municipality’s Regional Emergency Services, which includes Emergency Management, Emergency Social Services, Fire, Rescue and Emergency Medical Services. It has also been leveraged by other municipal departments, including the Underground Services group to identify registrants who may require bottled water during potable water outages. Through the VPR Coordinator, Emergency Management regularly contacts registrants to check on their welfare, thus providing assurance of assistance to the elderly, those with disabilities, and those dependent on life-sustaining equipment who continue to live in their homes, should emergency situations arise.

ENHANCING COMMUNITY SAFETY: SHORTLISTED INITIATIVES

City of Calgary: “*COVID-19 Response: Innovation and Collaboration at the City of Calgary*”

The City of Calgary quickly responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with innovative and effective ways of keeping staff safe and sharing accurate, up-to-date information with the public. The organization rapidly mobilized resources in the workplace and collaborated between departments in new ways to ensure a strong, unified response to the pandemic. The COVID-19 Joint Information Centre was established to create a shared source of communications best practices and resources to support sharing high-quality, consistent public health information. The COVID-19 Rapid Response Team (RRT) was established to

coordinate cross-corporate pandemic response actions within the City of Calgary organization, with an operational focus. The RRT is comprised of enabling partners and impacted operational services and with a broad mandate, including: helping employees navigate the evolving provincial restrictions and changing ways of working, developing mental health supports, communication tools and ergonomics education materials to support them, establishing safe access to key sites and facilities, including safeguarding against supply shortages, responding to COVID-19 cases with proper cleaning, internal contact tracing and employee support, and enabling key business functions to continue important work with as minimal impact as possible.

City of Edmonton: “Community Safety Deployment Model”

The Community Safety Deployment Model is a technology solution that brings together data from the Edmonton Police Service, the City of Edmonton and the 24/7 Crisis Diversion Team (REACH Edmonton). This common operating picture positions partners to deploy the right resource, at the right place, at the right time, with the right information for a safer city. The Community Safety Deployment Model project vision was led by the City of Edmonton’s Corporate Security team, developed in-house by the Data Science and Research unit and guided by the wisdom of the Advisory Team. Built with data ethics and privacy in mind, it leverages data void of personally identifiable information — focusing exclusively on the time, location and incident type. The Community Safety Deployment Model was completed and officially launched for partner use September 15, 2020. The Model has been operational since this time and has over 65 users ranging from call dispatch to security advisors.

Lac La Biche County: “Safe Place Program”

Lac La Biche County’s Enforcement Services Department identified harassment as a concern in the municipality and region. In 2020, the County implemented the Safe Place Program initiative (developed by the Seattle Police Department in 2014 to address the problems experienced against the LGBGT2S+ community) that coincided with Anti-Bullying Day (Pink Shirt Day). The goal of the project is to offer a safe referral service for our vulnerable population who may need medical attention, police assistance, addictions help or medical help, but to also get the business community involved. The county sought businesses, community groups, educational and governmental departments who wished to partner and identify themselves as a Safe Place in this program. The county has also had Seasonal Ambassadors (two seasonal positions within the Enforcement Services department) to promote the program in communities within the county. The program has gained success especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ENHANCING COMMUNITY SAFETY: OTHER INITIATIVES

City of Red Deer: “City of Red Deer Community Safety Summit”

Coordinated efforts to progress community safety in Red Deer have been underway for a number of years. There is significant documentation of how the city and community as a whole have come together to share ideas and best practices to address some of the issues faced. Led by the newly formed Systems Leadership Team (a team which provides consistent, visible, systems-wide leadership as part of a broad spectrum approach to community safety), community stakeholders came together to transform current thinking and practices regarding community safety. One outcome was the June 2019 Community Safety Summit, which aimed to co-determine shared priorities among a broad scope of community stakeholders and mobilize a shift in the traditional way of approaching community safety. Over 100 people attended the summit and the feedback received created the pathway for the Systems Leadership Team to progress together in stride with the community to address the identified priorities together.

Town of Bonnyville: “RCMP General Investigative Services (GIS) Unit”

The RCMP General Investigative Services (GIS) Unit was formed as a partnership between the town and the RCMP, with assistance from the M.D. of Bonnyville and the Government of Alberta. The GIS Unit was formed in response to community concerns over increased drug and property crimes in the community and region. The purpose of the new GIS Unit was to have a team of professionals dedicated to covert and overt investigation of these types of crimes. As a cumulative effect of combined community and policing programs in the region, total criminal code offences dropped by over 45 per cent in 2020 compared to previous years.

Municipality of Crowsnest Pass: “Emergency Management Training”

The Municipality of Crowsnest Pass implemented mandatory emergency management training for all employees. Basic Emergency Management (BEA) and Incident Command System (ICS) 100 are now part of the initial onboarding to avoid the conflict of scheduling people once they are busy in their jobs. By treating this training no differently than occupational health and safety or timesheet orientations, it helps to change the mentality of what is being committed to. The primary goal was for all staff to have a basic level of ICS training so common terminology could be used effectively during an event. The secondary goal was to provide additional training to all staff that would be part of the Municipal Incident Command Post during larger events, thus giving them more skills to assist in the response. The third goal was to integrate with partners/stakeholders beforehand so they, too, understood their roles and how each could assist.

Northern Sunrise County: “Community Impact Statements”

Northern Sunrise Rural Crime Watch (NSRCW) was formed to help address residents’ concerns with increased rural crime in the area. In 2020, the committee learned during a Crime Prevention Training Session that they could compile and submit Community Impact Statements. Similar to Victim Impact Statements, Community Impact Statements are a voluntary process that allow for affected residents and communities to have input to the Courts during sentencing. Individual names are not shared or included in a Community Impact Statement. These statements give the community an opportunity to tell the court how it has been affected by the crime. The committee felt this could be a viable tool to give the community a voice during the judicial process for some of the most chronic repeat offenders. The statement needs to be relevant to the harm or loss suffered by the community, taking into consideration the following four possible categories: emotional impact, physical impact, economic impact, and fears and psychological wellness. The Community Impact Statement gives residents who have been traumatized by crime a voice without adding further emotional/psychological stress, as they do not have to appear in court before the accused. NSRCW has taken the ownership of letting the accused know how their actions have impacted the community.

Town of Olds: “COVID-19 Response”

The Town of Olds was an early adopter of provincial changes to the Emergency Management Act and Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation. As a result, the town has a strong Emergency Management program and Incident Command structure. Throughout the pandemic, the Incident Command managed community priorities including, but not limited to, public health, access to facilities and services, business continuity, small business support, and community messaging. The successful management of these priorities has provided a safe and supportive community to weather this healthcare crisis. The town added value for staff by providing opportunities to participate in the Incident Command structure for those who were interested. In order to help share the benefits of this Incident Command process and ensure regional partners are successful, the town continues to engage with community stakeholders, neighbouring communities, and nearby counties.

Town of Fort Macleod: “Safe Communities Task Force”

The Town of Fort Macleod was experiencing an increase in crime, drug trafficking and abandoned homes, all of which was threatening the safety of residents and the community. Residents voiced concerns about the safety of their families and the security of their possessions and property. The Safe Communities Task Force was initiated to collectively identify issues, develop solutions, and establish a systematic and sustainable approach to eliminate root causes of these observed threats to the safety of those within the town.

The task force collaborates with key stakeholders to utilize a variety of resources, knowledge, and legislation to best address local issues impacting residents and the sustainability of the community. The Safe Communities Task Force is comprised of the Chief Administrative Officer representing the Town of Fort Macleod, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods (SCAN), Alberta Health Services, Park Enterprises Ltd. (as the town’s partner for the delivery and enforcement of safety codes services), Community Support Services, Town Bylaw Officer, and the RCMP.

Village of Edgerton: “Enhanced Rural Community Safety”

In an effort to deter crime, assist in police investigations, instill a sense of safety in the community, and create a tangible decrease in property crime, mischief and thefts, the village purchased and installed a network of security cameras across the community. To date, nine cameras have been installed, and community camera surveillance signs are posted throughout the village to deter crime. Edgerton has been able to provide security to the main street business community, public works shop, storage facility, drinking water reservoir, hockey arena and curling rink, and fire hall.

Award categories

Partnership

The Partnership category is open to all municipalities. The award is given for an innovative initiative involving a local or regional partnership that achieves results that could not have otherwise been accomplished by the municipality alone. This could involve cooperation, coordination, and collaboration with other municipalities, businesses, Indigenous communities, non-profit organizations, community groups, and other orders of government to achieve a specific outcome.

2021 AWARD RECIPIENT

Town of Devon: “Indigenous Engagement and Relationship Building”

Partner: Enoch Cree Nation (Maskêkosihk)

Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action were announced in 2015, Devon Town Council has made it a priority to work on reconciliation throughout the community and administration. Through continued relationship building, the town created unique opportunities that bring people together through the Treaty Relationship. The primary goals of this initiative were: to create educational opportunities for the community, staff, and leadership that focused on Treaty, Indigenous cultures, history, and reconciliation; to create a framework that would help guide the town down its path of reconciliation and relationship building with Indigenous peoples: strengthen relationships with the Treaty Six Nations whose traditional territories the town lies within, as well as the Confederacy of Treaty Six Nations and Métis Nation of Alberta; and to create partnerships and collaboration with neighbouring First Nations, including the town’s closest neighbours: Maskêkosihk (Enoch Cree Nation).

The town hired an Indigenous Engagement Coordinator and undertook actions to actively engage and collaborate with neighbouring First Nations and Métis communities, including providing opportunities for education and awareness of Indigenous peoples and cultures to municipal leadership, staff, and residents, and collaborated with First Nations and Indigenous peoples to bring cultural awareness events, workshops, and programs to Devon. Since 2019, Devon has hosted and co-hosted 41 Indigenous-based events for the community and staff. All community events have included Enoch First Nation members in attendance, which helps to create new friendships and cross-cultural understanding between community members. Staff and council have been invited to attend pow-wows, tour the Band administration office, grounds, and school. Enoch elders have attended Devon events such as a Seniors’ Tea and Jingles and a feast for the Chief and Council to begin positive conversations.



Chief Morin and Mayor Ralph, increasing Indigenous engagement and building relationships.

PARTNERSHIP: SHORTLISTED INITIATIVES

City of Chestermere: “*Calgary-Chestermere Intermunicipal Development Plan*”

Partner: City of Calgary

The City of Calgary and the City of Chestermere adopted The Calgary – Chestermere Interface Intermunicipal Development Plan (IDP), which was jointly developed by both municipalities and represents a unique approach to intermunicipal development plans. The Interface IDP is a localized intervention that supports intermunicipal collaboration and provides a framework for development and streetscape elements along the shared boundary. The IDP recognizes opportunities to create a critical mass of residential density, jobs, and activity at key intersections, with coordinated development on both sides of the interface street to maximize positive synergies. It builds on the strong east-west connections, focuses on protection and preservation of natural features, and emphasizes the pedestrian experience throughout the interface area.

City of Fort Saskatchewan: “*Implementing Bills 7 & 29 - Heartland Incentive Policy*”

Partners: Lamont County, Sturgeon County, Strathcona County, City of Edmonton

To address a competitive market gap, the five municipal partners of the Alberta’s Industrial Heartland Association collaboratively developed the Heartland Incentive Policy. This policy sets guidelines and ground rules for municipalities interested in offering multi-year property tax incentives to attract non-residential development. Through collaboration, these municipalities enabled the use of industrial tax incentives in a manner that is fair, supports regional goals, and ultimately promotes industrial investment in Alberta. The outcomes of the initiative have the potential to result in billions of dollars of new investment in the Alberta economy and the creation of several thousand jobs. The municipal property tax incentives avoid inter-municipal competition between neighbouring municipalities.

City of Grande Prairie: “*Street Outreach Services (SOS)*”

Partners: Rotary Club of Grande Prairie, Wapiti Dorm Society (St. Lawrence)

Street Outreach Services (SOS) is a City of Grande Prairie led initiative to address service gaps that existed in responding to homelessness and social disorder. SOS consists of two inter-related components: the Mobile Outreach Program and the Street Outreach Centre. This combined initiative provides rapid intervention and diversion focused on mitigating the impacts of street level social disorder, loitering, encampments, public intoxication, and addiction. The programs provide immediate support for a client’s basic needs and navigation through local service systems such as emergency shelters, health care, addictions treatment, and housing. The traditional municipal approach to addressing these concerns would be to direct more focused law enforcement attention toward the problem in an attempt to mitigate the impacts. A more human-centred and effective solution was to provide a place of community that makes available basic needs such as shelter from inclement weather, washrooms, showers, laundry, water, snacks, and navigation to additional services.

City of Red Deer: “*Rapid Protections for Vulnerable Red Deerians*”

Partners: Government of Alberta (Community and Social Services), the Government of Canada (Employment and Social Development Canada), Safe Harbour Society of Central Alberta, the Mustard Seed (Central Alberta), Turning Point Society of Central Alberta, Canadian Mental Health Association (Central Alberta), Youth HQ, Central Alberta Women’s Emergency Shelter, Golden Circle, Red Deer Food Bank Society

One of the primary objectives of Red Deer's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) throughout COVID-19 response was to ensure the community's most vulnerable populations were not overlooked. The work of the EOC's Emergency Social Services Branch was paramount in ensuring coordination between other levels of government, securing funding for necessary supports and initiatives related to vulnerable populations, and addressing challenges as they arose in a collaborative and sensitive manner. The results were a suite of community solutions co-created with various levels of government, health authorities, and service providers. The goal of this work was to create a variety of responses that would best protect already vulnerable populations from the COVID-19 virus, prevent and limit community spread of COVID-19, and limit the impact of social isolation, homelessness, food insecurity, and mental illness broadly in the community.

City of St. Albert: “Edmonton Metropolitan Region Transit Services Commission”

Partners: Cities of Beaumont, Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Spruce Grove, and the towns of Devon and Stony Plain

Eight municipalities within the Edmonton Metropolitan Region voluntarily came together to legally form the Edmonton Metropolitan Transit Services Commission on January 28, 2021. The Commission will integrate transit services across the region, providing new and improved connectivity across the region. The Edmonton Metropolitan Transit Services Commission will provide convenient, cost-effective, and extensive transit services across municipalities and a more integrated customer experience. A regional transit entity allows the participating municipalities to pool their resources and commit to a future where people are better connected, communities are stronger, and services are more resilient to disruption.

Lacombe County: “Sylvan Lake Intermunicipal Development Plan”

Partners: Red Deer County, the Town of Sylvan Lake, summer villages of Birchcliff, Half Moon Bay, Jarvis Bay, Norglenwold, and Sunbreaker Cove

The Sylvan Lake Intermunicipal Development Plan (IDP) represents a significant achievement for municipal collaboration in Alberta. The vision of the Sylvan Lake IDP is to create a fair, equitable and transparent IDP that protects environmental assets, ensures development supports the region, and honours the diversity and uniqueness of the five summer villages, two counties and one town. The IDP provides high-level policy that ensures development and growth are undertaken in a sustainable and responsible manner. It provides all partnering municipalities with a comprehensive, mutually beneficial land-use plan and development framework, while reducing potential conflict.

PARTNERSHIP: OTHER INITIATIVES

County of Grande Prairie: “Regional Ice Capacity & Behavior Guidelines”

Partners: City of Grande Prairie, Municipal District of Greenview, towns of Beaverlodge, Wembley and Sexsmith and the Village of Hythe

In 2020, the Grande Prairie Regional Recreation Committee (GPRRC) collaborated to help displaced user groups obtain ice due to the closure of two rural ice arenas in the region. GPRRC explored how each partner municipality allocates, schedules and charges for ice by facilitating regional ice arena manager meetings. The focus was to investigate the true ice capacity in the region prior to additional capital investment, rehabilitation or replacement of existing facilities. In addition, in response to Ice Manager feedback and the enhanced COVID-19 cleaning requirements, a need was identified to create standardized messaging on expected behaviour in all ice arenas in the region. Guidelines were released in fall 2020. Both examples fulfilled the implementation goals of the 2016 Grande Prairie Joint Recreation Master Plan.

County of Wetaskiwin: “Ice and Water Rescue”

Partners: Leduc County, summer villages of Argentia Beach, Crystal Springs, Golden Days, Grandview, Itaska Beach, Ma-Me-O Beach, Norris Beach, Poplar Bay, Silver Beach, Sundance Beach

The County of Wetaskiwin Fire Departments at South Pigeon Lake and Mulhurst provide ice and water rescue by volunteer firefighters trained to rescue users on Pigeon Lake and surrounding lakes. The joint initiative is funded by the County of Wetaskiwin, Leduc County, the ten summer villages on Pigeon Lake, and funds raised through donations. The partnership evolved when the Fire Chief requested they be authorized to assist the RCMP. The RCMP are typically responsible for rescue in Alberta; however, the RCMP did not have the resources and/or were unavailable to assist in a timely manner to incidents. The result was a jointly funded and locally trained resource to provide emergency assistance with increased lake usage and increase in calls for help.

Town of Bonnyville: “Bonnyville/Cold Lake Regional Waterline”

Partners: Cold Lake Regional Utility Services Commission, Bonnyville Regional Water Commission, City of Cold Lake, Municipal District of Bonnyville, Cold Lake First Nation, federal and provincial governments

In the last 20 years, communities in the region were faced with challenges to provide potable water resources to residents due to aging water treatment infrastructure. This initiative enabled the design and construction of a regional waterline system to serve the City of Cold Lake, Town of Bonnyville, Municipal District of Bonnyville, and Cold Lake First Nations. This project required multiple levels of support from partner members to ensure the water was safe and accessible for all.

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo: “Tawâw Housing First Partnership”

Partners: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society, Wood Buffalo Housing, and McMurray Métis Local #1935

The Tawâw (a Cree word meaning “Come in, you’re welcome, there is room for you here.”) Housing First Partnership is an innovative collaboration bringing together the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Wood Buffalo Wellness Society, Wood Buffalo Housing, and McMurray Métis Local #1935 to provide rapid access to 22 beds for homeless Indigenous individuals. The conversion of two eight-plexes into transitional and supportive housing spaces and holistic individual-focused services will be provided under the leadership of McMurray Métis and Wood Buffalo Wellness Society. Transitioning from intergenerational trauma resulting from colonial impacts, ongoing inequity and oppression, and marginalization requires wrap-around and culturally appropriate support, consistent mentorship, and presence in a culturally safe environment with a trauma informed team and approach. The collaboration creates a unique, culturally sensitive, and supportive environment utilizing recovery-oriented wellness principles and the Housing First model.

Town of Black Diamond: “Intermunicipal Economic Development Committee”

Partner: Town of Turner Valley

The Towns of Black Diamond and Turner Valley created an Intermunicipal Economic Development Committee (IEDC) to further the development of business and investment in the two communities. Current councils believed it was beneficial to the region as a whole to lay down differences and work together to grow the economy and ensure future economic investment through development and economic growth. Reducing red tape and duplication of municipal work provides a hope for the future, significantly increases the non-residential tax assessment base of both communities, supports maximization of financial and human resources, and demonstrates a sincere desire to build a collaborative and effective partnership to further regional economic growth.

Town of Blackfalds: “Ice Expansion Initiative”

Partners: Dual Ice Development Society, Eagle Builders, Lacombe County, ATCO Gas, Blackfalds Library Board, and the Jr A Blackfalds Bulldogs Hockey Team

The arena expansion project will provide additional recreational and cultural space in the community that has been needed for several years. The Town of Blackfalds only had one rink which caused a bottleneck of scheduling for all local and regional organizations that use the facility. By building the second ice surface, the town was able to increase the amount of time each current user group receives. The second ice surface also gives new user groups opportunity to schedule time, which may bring new sport teams to the community (i.e. recreation/pond hockey, girls hockey, and ringette). The addition will meet the needs of the fast-growing community for the next 20 to 25 years and be a hub for both sports and recreation, as well as the arts and culture communities.

Town of Fort Macleod: “Intermunicipal Collaborative Framework”

Partners: Towns of Claresholm, Nanton and Stavely and the Municipal District of Willow Creek

The Town of Fort Macleod and partners negotiated and developed a five-year Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework (ICF) overarching agreement for the provision of regional services that share a common boundary. The agreement is known as the Willow Creek Regional Intermunicipal Collaboration. The focus of this agreement is to advance, promote and encourage opportunities and programs for collaboration amongst the municipalities and the surrounding communities. Goals of the project include: the creation and adoption by all five municipal councils for a five-year ICF agreement to benefit the region and all taxpayers; ensuring all municipalities' voices and viewpoints would be heard and respected; public participation and public engagement; the ability to cooperate and to spend taxpayers money more efficiently and effectively; and maximizing regional buying power in a cost-sharing effort.

Town of High Level: “Dene Tha’/Town of High Level Community Development Cooperation”

Partner: Dene Tha’ First Nation

Originally through the First Nations-Municipal Community Economic Development Initiative, the Town of High Level and the Dene Tha’ First Nation entered into a collaborative partnership to improve and strengthen open and respectful communication between the two governments and to pursue goals to the mutual benefit of both communities. The senior elected officials and administration of the two communities meet on a monthly basis as a working group to discuss programs and projects, and on a quarterly basis with the entire Council of both parties. The partnership has created smaller, focused working groups to pursue the agreed upon priorities and joint initiatives.

Town of Innisfail: “Elemental Energy Community Partnership Funding”

Partner: Elemental Energy

In 2017, the town entered into discussions with Elemental Energy about the private development of a 20 megawatt solar generation facility on town-owned lands. Along with the long-term lease of the lands, a Memorandum of Understanding was eventually struck between both parties providing for the annual financial contribution by the developer toward a Community Benefit Fund, along with ongoing financial assistance to community members through a Fee Assistance Program. Now in place, the programs together provide support to eligible community-based projects and initiatives promoting awareness, well-being and capacity building in environmental, social, cultural and recreational realms.

Town of Penhold: “Isolation Activity Kits Project”

Partners: Red Deer and District FCSS, the Town of Penhold Community Service Department, Red Deer County

The Town of Penhold Community Services Department, specifically Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), developed activity kits for seniors, youth, and families with young children. Included in these kits were age appropriate resources, activities, and food snacks to help occupy time and encourage connection, maintain regular contact with community members, and provide information including support numbers. Kits were delivered to the door of registered participants. This project serviced the local FCSS region (Penhold, Red Deer County, Elnora and Delburne). In total, 1,516 kits were planned, shopped for, packed, and distributed in-house on behalf of the Town of Penhold Community Services Department. The project was made possible through a Government of Alberta grant: Social Services Support for Covid-19.

Town of Strathmore: “Siksika Nation – RCMP – Town of Strathmore Tri-Partite Agreement”

Partners: Siksika Nation, RCMP (Strathmore Detachment)

Our tri-partite agreement is meaningful progress toward reconciliation in our region. Two years of work in the spirit of trust and reconciliation culminated in the signing of a unique Letter of Understanding (LOU) on October 28, 2020. The LOU highlights the formation of ongoing consultation between the Siksika Nation, the Town of Strathmore and the RCMP aimed at achieving “POMIKAPI” – the Blackfoot word for peace and harmony – amongst the communities they serve. This agreement responds to issues of systemic and overt racism through a cooperative approach that provides a high level of commitment by all parties. Serious incidents in the past have caused preventable deaths, neglect and overt racism. The agreement provides a framework for shared responsibility that will result in positive changes and fair treatment of all residents and visitors in Strathmore. One important example from the agreement is the safe release of Siksika Nation members from the custody of the RCMP through an assured ride service to the Nation. The Town of Strathmore and Siksika Nation jointly share the costs of making sure that Siksika Nation members can safely return to the Siksika Nation during times of adverse weather, thus protecting Siksika members from exposure to extreme weather conditions and potential harm.

Town of Westlock: “Partnerships”

Partners: County of Westlock and Village of Clyde

The Town and County of Westlock and Village of Clyde have adopted a Tri-Municipal Protocol to frame weekly meetings to foster the ongoing dialogue for relationship building and growth opportunities. These meetings are founded on agreed values of communication, truth, respect, sustainability, partnership, and trust. This has generated new discussions about ways to deliver services to the public in a regional fashion. Regionally, this unified understanding of issues, and consistent messaging minimizes the potential for confusion amongst stakeholders and administrations. Streamlining of the decisions and discussions has occurred, thus freeing up time from all administration and ensuring collaborative decisions benefitting the region are made quickly. This protocol was created as a tool to be used in the future and is a guide-post for future administrations from each municipality. This protocol can and should be leveraged to build leadership capacity around genuine relationships for generations to come.

Villages of Irma, Chauvin and Edgerton: “Municipal Collaboration for Product Purchases and Grants”

The Villages of Irma, Chauvin and Edgerton worked collaboratively to qualify for special grants and update Land Use Bylaws. The goal for each community was to obtain updated Land Use Bylaws without having to rely on utilizing taxpayers’ dollars. Through a collaboration grant, essential bylaws were updated and savings were realized. Through sharing of best practices and purchasing practices, the villages have been able to purchase in bulk, which saves money and provides better services for the communities. As well, the three municipalities collaborated on acquiring necessities like water treatment chemicals and by purchasing together, saved each municipality money.

Award categories

Service Delivery Innovation

The Service Delivery Innovation category is open to all municipalities. The award is given for an innovative initiative that improves the delivery or reduces the cost of a program or service through a more efficient process or through the use of an alternate delivery approach.

2021 AWARD RECIPIENT

Town of Okotoks: “Okotoks Transit On-Demand”

Okotoks launched a curb-to-curb on-demand public transit service. A feasibility study that included comprehensive public engagement indicated a significant demand for some form of local transit that was right-sized to a town with a population just under 30,000. Fixed route transit presented multiple challenges that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to overcome in the short term. These included high capital cost outlay, lower population density, and route coverage challenges compounded by some isolated built-environments. Based on a theoretical service offering, residents were strongly in favour of some form of an on-demand type transit service. The primary goal was to provide equitable, accessible public transit to support the town’s objective of providing equal opportunities for all residents to work and play in Okotoks. A high level of service needed to be achieved within tight budgetary constraints.

Using demand management technology to manage all parameters of the system (including pickup location boundaries, pickup window time, allowed waiting time, trip times, total trip time from beginning of pick up window to drop off, total maximum seating, child seats, booster seats, and wheel chair seating), transit users can now use the Okotoks Transit App to book their trip or contact the call centre to book on their behalf. The algorithmic technology, which manages demand, efficiently allocates vehicle supply to users who have booked a ride, with almost zero human intervention. The high level of information visibility enables a demand-responsive system, continuously providing opportunities to fine-tune supply to meet demand and achieve a lean transit environment.

The adaptability of the transit system allowed the town to adjust its service within minutes in response to public health measures for social distancing. In addition, Okotoks transit was also able to fill a gap in the community during the early months of the pandemic by assisting local stores with the delivery of food and essential supplies to self isolating residents. This allowed the transit service to provide another essential service, sustain transit revenue and retain staff.



SERVICE DELIVERY INNOVATION: SHORTLISTED INITIATIVES

Camrose County: “Online Fire Permit Request Form”

Camrose County developed an online request that facilitated resident submission of Fire Permit requests. This system routes the requested permit directly to the Fire Chief for that area, as well as to the County Peace Officers. The resident receives an emailed confirmation of their permit quickly. The approved fire permits are able to be mapped for the Peace Officers, so they can easily see if a reported fire is a permitted burn or not. Finally, if a fire ban is put in place, all permits can be quickly cancelled and the permit holders can be easily notified that their permit is voided by the fire ban. This initiative streamlined the request process, improved access for residents outside of normal hours (as they no longer had to come into the office), and improved the availability and accuracy of information for Peace Officers and Fire Chiefs.

Camrose County: “Online Snowplow Request Form”

Camrose County developed an online request form that facilitated resident submission of driveway snowplow requests (including after hours and on weekends). This request is then routed directly to the specific grader operator for the area. This system removed the need for a resident to go to the county office to request the service and sign the waiver, and gave the operator the ability to plow the driveway when going past the location, therefore saving money on the cost of return trips to various locations after road plowing was complete.

City of Edmonton: “Digitization of Permanent Sign Permits”

The primary goal of this initiative is to support the success of local business by making it easier to work with the City while still adhering to safety codes regulations when requesting permits for permanent signage. Permanent sign permits are a combined development and building permit. Customers accessing City services sometimes experience longer processing timelines or inconsistent service, which can impact the success of a business because timelines are either unexpected or the customer has a harder time scheduling other trades or suppliers in a way that does not disrupt business flow. Gains were achieved by partnering with the Alberta Sign Association to transition to a digital service that increased efficiency through automation, reduced delays, and enhanced client convenience and guidance. The building permit requirement for all signs was also removed from the process, electrical permits were reinstated based on industry feedback, and professional engineering involvement is determined based on risk. Timelines for permanent sign permits were reduced by 50 per cent and process delivery costs were reduced through process efficiencies.

City of Grande Prairie: “Transit Solar and E-Bus Project”

The Transit Solar and E-Bus project was developed to reduce green house gas emissions by replacing diesel buses with smaller electric buses. An additional improvement of a solar photo voltaic (PV) and battery energy storage system (BESS) increased emissions reduction. The City shifted from reliance on a grid where 40 per cent of the energy is coal-generated, to a more sustainable and cleaner renewable system for most of the year. The Transit Solar System and existing electric bus fleet (consisting of five 30-foot buses) is cost-competitive with the existing fleet of diesel buses. Operational cost data, including fuel, parts, and labour, are approximately 50 per cent less for electric buses versus diesel buses. PV solar and the BESS will educate the community on the possibilities of utilizing renewable energy, even in the north, where you can experience darkness 15 hours per day in December and January. Utilizing solar panels to charge the e-buses and a BESS to store energy for a minimum of eight months of the year creates an unprecedented green system.

City of Leduc: “Walk with a Doc and Seniors Active Afternoons”

The City of Leduc identified the need to better support older adults' participation in regular physical activity by offering programs uniquely catered to their interests, availability and financial barriers. The “Walk with a Doc” program is a partnership with the Primary Care Network. A local physician leads weekly sessions that include a short health-related presentation followed by a walk outdoors on the trails. The program is free and demonstrates how easy it is to incorporate physical activity into your routine and is appealing to those getting started on their health journey. “Seniors' Active Afternoon” is a free Leduc Recreation Centre membership for those 60 years+. It brings people together to participate in social and healthy activities each weekday from noon to 4 p.m. These programs provide a vital social element for Leduc's older adults who may live alone or are separated from their support network. Through activity comes connection when enrolled in these programs, which supports the Leduc Recreation Centre's mandate as Leduc's meeting place.

Service Delivery Innovation: Other Initiatives

City of Airdrie: “Defining and Aligning Organizational Direction”

'Our Path Forward' is the output of significant strategic planning work with the City's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Senior Leadership Team in 2019 and in 2020 to provide clear direction and focus to the organization, define success, strengthen corporate alignment, and assess progress. It translates the CAO's vision for the organization so the entire corporation understands what is important to the CAO for the organization to be successful, and why. Four foundational pillars were identified for the organization's success: 1) customer experience, 2) fiscal stewardship, 3) people & culture, and 4) continuous improvement. The plan was conceived to address the need for a strong business focus, especially during a downturn in the economy. As demonstrated by the adjustments made during the pandemic, this plan has already proved its value, with few changes needed to the plan to help the organization navigate the uncertainty of 2020/21 and beyond.

Town of Olds: “Annual Service Level Review”

Held early in the spring, the Town of Olds Annual Service Level Review (SLR) kicks off the budget process, beginning with a two-day workshop that completes an organizational wide review of programs and services with Council and the administrative Executive Team. It is based on environmental scans, Council strategic goals, performance measures, but most importantly, the SLR is influenced by an annual citizen budget survey. A “What We Heard” report is confirmed with council. Business cases are then prepared for budget discussions in the fall. This cycle ends one and a half years later with the audit report.

Town of Rocky Mountain House: “Service Delivery for Environmental and Financial Savings”

Council identified Environmental Leadership as a strategic goal in 2018. Since then, it has made forward strides in environmental leadership, while also reducing costs of services to residents. The town has focused on five major projects which together meet Council's goals of having programs that demonstrate the town's environmental leadership, as well as cost-savings for residents, including installation of LED lighting at its sports and wellness centre, a new combined heat and power unit at its aquatic centre, opening of an eco centre, roll out of a curbside organics collection program, and the development of a clean energy improvement program.

Town of Vauxhall: “Solid Waste Management Procedures”

The Town of Vauxhall needed to find a solution to the rising costs of shipping waste from the Vauxhall transfer site to the larger landfill 100 km away. In an attempt to lower costs, the town purchased a large truck and trailer with the help of Municipal Sustainability Initiative funding in order to haul their own domestic waste to the landfill.

Award categories

Smaller Municipalities

The Smaller Municipalities category is open to municipalities with populations less than 5,000. The award is given for a municipal initiative that demonstrates leadership, resourcefulness or innovation, or both, to better the community.

2021 AWARD RECIPIENT

Town of Bruderheim: “Climate Resilience Action Plan”

To better prepare for the potential impacts of climate change, the Town of Bruderheim developed a Climate Resilience Action Plan, which identifies several anticipatory measures to manage priority risks and opportunities expected to result from climate change over the next several decades. The Town used this plan as a stepping stone to initiate the “Resilient Rurals - Regional Resilience Plan.” As part of this action plan, Bruderheim worked with the towns of Gibbons and Lamont to develop capacity for regional climate change adaptation and resilience.

Through this partnership, Bruderheim was able to develop a small-town approach to addressing risks associated with climate change. The plan was built on the themes of flood management and drainage, infrastructure, ecosystems and natural areas, urban trees and landscaping, human health and safety, and agriculture and food security. The plan identifies measures to manage priority risks and opportunities expected to result from climate change over the next several decades. Each municipality’s risks and opportunities were assessed in relation to the environment and other factors, such as economy, infrastructure, communication, and emergency response. These assessments were examined to find shared risks and opportunities to capitalize on establishing a regional climate adaptation plan. The result was a unique adaptation plan with a small-town focus and a regional scope that identifies shared risks and opportunities for collaboration with neighbouring municipalities. The goal is to pool resources, determine common risks, and discover opportunities for support.



SMALLER MUNICIPALITIES: SHORTLISTED INITIATIVES

Town of Nanton: “Establishment of a Vacant Non-Residential Assessment Sub-Class That Applies to Improvements”

Like many smaller towns, Nanton experiences the challenge of vacant properties, particularly in its commercial core. The challenge was to design an initiative to address vacant properties in a way that was fair and balanced to property owners impacted. Based on recommendations in the town’s Business Retention and Expansion Strategy, the town drafted and adopted a bylaw in 2020 that created the first ‘Vacant Non-Residential Subclass’ in Alberta that targeted improvements in the commercial core that were lying vacant or otherwise disused to the disadvantage of the local economy. The bylaw sets criteria by which properties are defined as vacant and made part of the assessment subclass. Council can then set a tax rate that can be up to double the ‘other/regulation’ Non-Residential tax rate.

Town of Penhold: “Winter Warm-Up Care Packages”

Penhold prides itself on its community activities and events. The pandemic made hosting community gatherings unsafe. By the end of 2020, the town realized the entire community was struggling to feel connected and with winter coming it would be even more difficult to safely connect. The town initiated this project to keep residents connected, build community spirit, and to remind residents the Town of Penhold cares about their well-being. Town staff members and volunteers created 1,360 Winter Warm-Up Care Packages that were delivered to every home in Penhold. Packages included treats purchased from local businesses, activity items and ideas, and information about resources in the community.

Village of Hythe: “Fibre Optics - Innovative Public Private Partnership to Develop Broadband Internet”

After extensive research and community consultation, a Request for Proposal process was used to attract the best proponent for a fiber optics project in the community. As a result, the private-public partnership Hythe-Net Co. was formed and is ensuring gigabit fiber optics capacity is available to every property (residential and business) in the community.

*The Village of Hythe dissolved and became a hamlet in the County of Grande Prairie as of July 1, 2021.

SMALLER MUNICIPALITIES: OTHER INITIATIVES

Lamont County: “Web Based Timesheet System”

As part of the county’s digital transformation strategy, Lamont County approached its new Geographic Information System provider to assist with the development of a web-based timesheet system. The main objective was to create an innovative timesheet solution that offers ease of use, a high degree of automation, and ease of integration with other county information technology and financial systems. The county’s implementation of an advanced timesheet system with the ability to integrate with work order and job costing modules represents the state-of-the-art in a small municipality in Alberta. The integration of the work orders and job costing modules is under consideration by the county if both financial and manpower resources become available.

Smoky Lake County: “Smoky Lake Pumpkin Patch Daycare Co-op”

Smoky Lake County was an early supporter and greatly assisted in launching the now highly successful Cooperative Pumpkin Patch Daycare in 2018, being the first cooperative daycare anywhere in Alberta. The Smoky Lake Pumpkin Patch provides greatly needed, accredited, before and after-school childcare service for residents of the Town of Smoky Lake and Smoky Lake County. Prior to the establishment of the Pumpkin Patch Co-op, the community was chronically under-served in terms of accredited child-care, which could not otherwise be obtained within 50 kilometers. The co-op model has proved its worth, giving people control of something that matters greatly to them personally, allowing community members to tailor the service to the community’s specific needs.

Town of Bon Accord: “Sustainable Solar Farm Project”

Bon Accord’s innovative solar farm project aims to provide net-zero returns for the town’s yearly power expenses. The savings realized from the project will benefit the community in several ways. The town will be able to direct these cost savings towards other areas such as reserves for future projects or needed infrastructure repair and contribute to reduced impact to the environment. With this project, the town will be able to attract increased economic development and enhance the quality of life for residents. Utilizing sheep to “mow” the grass at the solar farm is a complimentary renewable, sustainable way to maintain grass with limited staffing and to keep costs low, while providing local farmers with a place to pasture their sheep free of charge.

Town of Bowden: “Economic Growth”

By recognizing potential and proactively marketing that potential to new investors, the town wants to attract new development that will provide long-term community sustainability and growth. This, in turn, will ultimately attract new residents and generate the provision of improved services and community amenities. Town administration, working in conjunction with the town’s Economic Development Committee, set the objective of creating a framework that focused on developing the town’s potential as a place for organizations, businesses, developers, vendors, and entrepreneurs to do business. The goal is to devise and implement strategies and policies to assist in the development of a successful business climate that ultimately encourages new economic investment in the town.

Town of Fairview: “COVID-19 Business Support Grant”

The Town of Fairview developed a grant program to directly support the businesses affected by mandatory shutdowns due to health measures in place to manage COVID-19. The purpose of the grant is to cover some of their building operating expenses to prevent possible closures. As a small town, any business closure has major ripple effects. The overall intent is to sustain current businesses and avoid possible business closures. The affected businesses have been very appreciative and supportive of the program. This program shows the municipality is supportive and understands the importance of our small businesses.

Town of Mayerthorpe: “COVID-19 Pandemic Business Support Grant”

The town sought to save jobs and retain services hit hardest by the pandemic, particularly given that there are only a small number of retailers, restaurateurs, and small business service providers in the community. To achieve this goal, the town developed a COVID-19 Pandemic Business Support Grant in the summer of 2020. If the local businesses could demonstrate a financial impact of at least 30 per cent reduction due to the pandemic and planned to continue to remain open to the public, they were eligible to apply for support from the town, even if operating with reduced hours or through curbside pickups. Due to the 2020 demand for support and the ongoing pandemic, the town has reinvested in the COVID-19 Pandemic Business Support Grant for 2021 in an effort to retain services and local employment.

Town of Smoky Lake: “Smoky Lake Broadband Internet Project”

The Smoky Lake Broadband Internet Project is an initiative to provide improved internet service to the Smoky Lake town and county. As a rural community, internet service was lacking prior to the introduction of this project. Broadband internet is a high-speed internet access point that will be valuable for all as technology is extremely important in everyone’s day-to-day activities. Future plans include enhancing connectivity and technical capabilities throughout the municipality.

Village of Edgerton: “Residential and Non-Residential Incentive Programs”

The Village of Edgerton has created and implemented aggressive incentive programs for new property owners and new (and existing) non-residential businesses with the goal of creating an increased taxpayer base, increasing residential development, and a strengthened and enlarged business community.

Special recognition: red tape reduction initiatives

The Government of Alberta is committed to cutting red tape to reduce costs, speed up approvals, and make life easier for hard-working Albertans and businesses. Municipalities have also demonstrated their commitment to finding efficiencies, reducing unnecessary red tape, and encouraging private sector investment. As such, the Minister of Municipal Affairs is also pleased to provide special recognition for red tape reduction initiatives along with this year's program.

Three initiatives were selected from information received through the ministry's Red Tape Reduction reporting template, as part of the wrap-up to the first year of Municipal Stimulus Program funding. A cross-ministry committee recommended these initiatives as ones which demonstrated strong efforts on the part of municipalities to reduce red tape requirements in their organizations and communities.

URBAN MUNICIPALITY UNDER 10,000: VILLAGE OF ELNORA

The Village of Elnora undertook efforts to improve electronic access to information for residents so they can keep up-to-date on council activities, including updating and simplifying municipal documents for ease-of-use by current and potential businesses, and providing other services such as online payments. An extensive amount of effort went into enhancing services provided to residents, particularly when public health restrictions were in place and access to the village office was reduced.

URBAN MUNICIPALITY OVER 10,000: CITY OF LLOYDMINSTER

The City of Lloydminster undertook a LEAN project to review the city's business licence process in consultation with the Chamber of Commerce, Community Futures and Start-up Lloydminster. The city made it easier for new businesses to establish themselves by extending the vacancy period from six to 12 months so seasonal businesses are not required to reapply for a licence and adopting a 12-mile permit radius around Lloydminster within which non-resident businesses are offered a reduced fee.

RURAL MUNICIPALITY: RED DEER COUNTY

Red Deer County worked to make it easier for businesses to start up in the municipality by streamlining business approvals and establishing a Concierge Business Development Service to guide developers and businesses through the full development process. The county took a collaborative approach to this work with an overall goal of helping businesses succeed in the community.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2021 ALBERTA MINISTER'S
AWARDS FOR MUNICIPAL EXCELLENCE RECIPIENTS!**