



# RESOURCEFUL FORT ST. JOHN

City of Fort St. John  
Economic Development Strategy  
2023-2028

This strategy was created for  
the City of Fort St. John by





“I came here for two years. I’ve now been here for 22 years.” It’s a common refrain in Fort St. John. Permanency is real.

“Great strategies aren’t about everything we do on a day-to-day basis; they solve challenges or step into opportunities. Great strategies are about catalytic intention and ambitious vision, connected to stepping-stone initiatives with best return on investment in achieving vision.”

This strategy was created with input from:

- Industry sector analysis
- 15 key stakeholder interviews and focus groups
- One key stakeholder workshop
- A community survey
- Five issue-specific focus group sessions
- Extensive Planning and Economic Development Department interaction
- Two in-person Council workshops
- An Economic Development Summit

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Resourceful Fort St. John. Industrious, hard-working, and proud. A destination for good jobs and people who dream about a better future for themselves and family - and achieve it. Fort St. John has worked hard in the last decade to build a city people are proud of – a place where people... stay. Downtown enhancement, and additional recreation amenities and community events have led our energetic pathway in recent times. Check any perception of near north Fort St. John at the door; Fort St. John is on the rise.

While our Big Two energy and forestry industries have built a strong economic foundation, they are both in an era of stable employment.

## Challenge 1:

We need to be able to feed the energy, forestry and general economic machine by working together on workforce attraction – from workplace incentivization to a more aggressive, uplifting community brand and marketing.

## Challenge 2:

The world is rapidly evolving and we need to explore energy 2.0 and forestry value-add opportunities.

## Challenge 3:

We need to nurture economic diversification. Entrepreneurship – which can live anywhere and offer products and services to the world – will lead our diversification path forward. From home to business incubator space to market, we aim to be an entrepreneur hub in business-friendly Fort St. John. Did you know the Peace region represents 30% of land farmed in BC? How about Fort St. John having 1400 hotel rooms, and being one of a small handful of Canadian destinations for speedskating events? Agriculture value-add and tourism offer diversification pathways. We can grow our

own in Fort St. John – be it entrepreneurship, sports centre of excellence, or agriculture. All it takes is our get ‘er done attitude and elbow grease. For us, anything is possible.

Build an indoor multi-purpose recreation facility. Aggressively work to resolve our healthcare access challenge. The carts and the horses matter; we need to address key community development issues to achieve a prosperous economic future.

There’s tremendous opportunity for Indigenous partnerships, and we can sell City land to make amazing things happen – two of six BIG moves that can be transformative for our community if we make progress.

Welcome to the City of Fort St. John Economic Development Strategy (2023-2028), the ONE plan that works to connect the dots between our economic and community development aspirations for an ambitious future. Power up. Let’s go get it.

# VISION STATEMENT

Resourceful Fort St. John in a land that provides, and the spirit of our people.

## OUR STORY

Fort St. John is an inclusive, resourceful city with an outdoor community-driven culture and a young, entrepreneurially-spirited population of hearty “get it done” souls. We will leverage our status as BC’s energy capital while nurturing a new energy future and a more diversified tourism, agriculture, forestry and small business economy.

Our vibrant downtown, excellent healthcare, housing affordability, community animation in art, culture and place, and nurturing of entrepreneurialism, are core building blocks on a dynamic path forward that has people come to the community for some of the best, well-paid jobs in the province, but stay long-term in a community that is “home.”

Our most compelling resource for the future... is us.



# VALUE PROPOSITION

## WHY DO WE MATTER?

Answer this question and 80% of a community's economic development pathway is defined via connection to people and enterprise who best connect with value proposition. And the more unique or powerful the value proposition, the further the lengths people will go to pursue it.



High Performance  
Energy Cluster



Business  
Friendly



High Income



Deeply Affordable  
Housing

## LIFESTYLE FACTORS

Community Survey Top 5:

1. Work-life balance
2. Income potential
3. Professional opportunities
4. Natural environment
5. Outdoor recreation opportunities

Lifestyle factors deeply valued by local residents are a value proposition for resident attraction strategy (digital nomads, remote workers, creators, independent entrepreneurs).

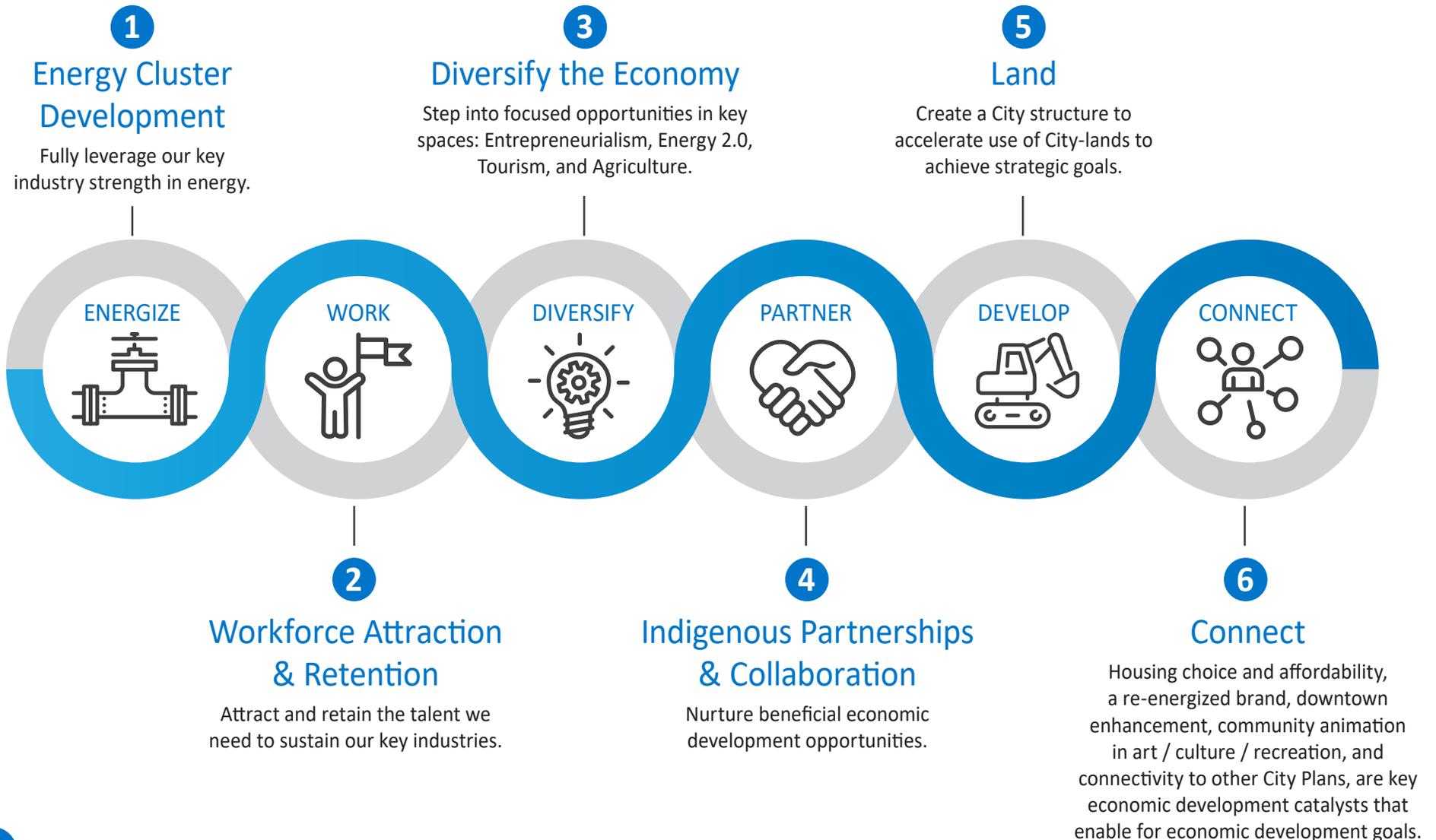
## MATTER OF FACT

The City of Fort St. John has 125% of median household income of BC and Canada and 118% of the metro Vancouver median, with house prices that are 33% of the metro Vancouver average, 44% of the BC average, and 74% of the Canadian average

*Source: Census Canada, median value of dwellings, 2021*

# GOALS

Goals are the way we will achieve our Economic Development Strategy. These goals are interconnected, ambitious, and achievable in pursuit of the transformative.



# BIG MOVES

BIG Moves define bold priorities that step into an elevated set of opportunities for Fort St. John that offer greatest potential for the most transformative community progress.



## Brand New

A new Municipal & Regional District Tax Program (MRDT) will enable tourism-based economic diversification while connecting the dots between tourism, economic development, and workforce attraction & retention with a re-energized Fort St. John brand that includes placement of more frequent and positive Fort St. John messaging in the marketplace.



## Making It Work

The City will work to establish a collaborative (City, College, business community), initiative-based approach to workforce attraction & retention to address significant challenges in key sectors, including healthcare, energy, and retail / accommodation / food services.



## Taking Care of Business

We will “grow our own” in Fort St. John in a key diversification initiative that empowers entrepreneurs with a holistic space, programs, and policy action agenda.



## Land on Fort St. John’s Feet

The City will establish a more aggressive land development mechanism to acquire and sell lands to meet transformational strategic objectives – including housing choice, mixed-use downtown enhancement, entrepreneur enablement, and employment lands development.



## Energetic Fort St. John

We can better leverage and future-proof our energy economy via entrepreneurship supports, horizontal and vertical value chain new business development, sector procurement opportunities, and “Energy 2.0” pathways identification amidst global change.



## Indigenous Partnerships

Fort St. John will enable open dialogue with each of the region’s indigenous communities to nurture economic and community development opportunities, including but not limited to entrepreneurship, new land development, and housing.



# GOAL 1 Fully leverage our key industry strength in energy.

# Energize

Fort St. John is BC's ENERGY CAPITAL for a reason. Oil and gas extraction, petroleum product manufacturing, and support activities in Fort St. John each represent approximately 40% of the BC energy industry, increasing to roughly 50% of the BC energy industry for natural gas distribution. However, the local industry is mature, with only 2% employment growth over the last 10 years.

This Strategy seeks to: a) more fully leverage what's already in Fort St. John with new opportunity identification; b) fully empower the sector with good workforce supply; and c) nurture local dialogue about what "Energy 2.0" looks like for a Fort St. John of the future.

## Why Energy ?

- #2 sector by employment (2350).
- 2nd highest average wages.
- 2nd highest total wages.
- 2nd highest 10-year job growth (oil and gas extraction) in the Top 10 industries.
- 44% of total Fort St. John export activity.
- 89% of all industry sector in-region purchasing.
- 39% of total BC export activity.
- Wages 49% higher than the average across all sectors.
- Two of the sector Top 5 jobs multipliers.
- *BUT – low growth (2% in last 10 years).*

## Procurement Substitution as a Key Opportunity

Total oil and gas purchases (2022) \$700 million. Of that, \$351 million was in-region purchasing with 50% of oil and gas sector purchasing from out of region.

Key procurement opportunities:

- Architectural, engineering and related services (\$27 million / 84% imported),
- Architectural and structural metals manufacturing (\$13 million / 99% imported),
- Plastic product manufacturing (\$6.5 million / 100% imported),
- Computer systems design and related services (\$4.3 million / 88% imported),
- Management, scientific and technical consulting services (\$3.2 million / 69% imported).



# GOAL 1 Objectives & Initiatives

## Objective 1 – Support Workforce Development & Attraction Needs

### Initiatives

**1-1** Work with Northern Lights College to develop and sustain program training – including apprenticeships – that addresses the needs of energy industry and supports workforce growth and development.

**1-2** Facilitate local, and attend external, job fairs / trade shows featuring skills and knowledge required in the sector.

**1-3** Create a more singular job board for Fort St. John jobs to meet energy sector labour force demand.

## Objective 2 – Enable Objective 2 – Energy Sector Cluster Development

### Initiatives

**1-4** Create an industry-led and City-facilitated Fort St. John Energy Sector Working Group to:

- a) identify strategic priorities to accelerate sector growth;
- b) identify shared issues and opportunities;
- c) identify innovation pathways including an Energy 2.0 roadmap for economic opportunities in Fort St. John (*carbon capture, renewables, hydrogen, ammonia, batteries and tech-based sector efficiencies / opportunities*);
- d) develop an advocacy platform for shared current issues / future energy industry evolution opportunities with municipal, provincial, and federal government; and
- e) improve connections between companies, government, NGO's & academia.

**1-5** Host an annual Energy Leadership Summit and Retreat in Fort St. John focused on invitation to corporate head offices (Calgary) – with focus on strategic pathways dialogue. *Note: can be stand-alone or an extension of Creating Energy Conference.*

**1-6** Adopt a circular economy energy sector development approach via:

- a) matchmaking to align energy sector procurement opportunities with local business;

- b) nurturing development of input / output relationships that can be developed within the region to minimize waste and reuse resources.

**1-7** Sustain the annual Creating Energy conference to nurture local energy thought leadership.

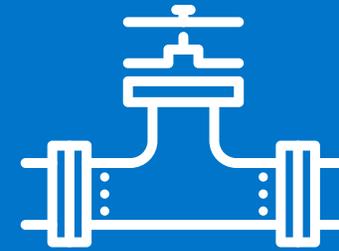
**1-8** Identify vertical and horizontal value chain diversification new business opportunities within the energy sector & related economic activity.

**1-9** As an extension of value chain development, develop a web-based visual Fort St. John energy ecosystem and value chain that shows companies and organizations, and how products and services relate to each other (which can reveal opportunities).

**1-10** Prioritize & support initiatives and investment in reduction of oil and gas extraction carbon footprint, including processing and manufacturing that can generate new revenue streams for the energy sector.

**1-11** Place special focus of business visits component of business retention and expansion program on energy & related enterprise.

## Objective 3 – Market Energy Sector Growth Opportunities



### Initiatives

**1-12** Re-energize Fort St. John’s brand, including intentional use of “energy” as a sector diversification intent (*instead of just oil and gas*), Energy 2.0 investment and workforce attraction storytelling, and branded recruitment campaign development.

**1-13** Add sector targeting – featuring Energy to:

- a) City of Fort St. John website;
- b) City of Fort St. John Investment Profile;
- c) production of Energy Sector Profile.

**1-14** Produce energy sector business profiles via a new dashboard on the City website that conveys economic impact and value of the energy & and related sectors as an extension of the on-going energy literacy initiative

**1-15** Showcase local products, innovations, and successes in public buildings and spaces to demonstrate pride in local businesses and entrepreneurs.

**1-16** Conduct energy sector investment attraction programs in support of downstream energy efficient technologies.

**1-17** Develop a business resources guide to support entrepreneurship start-ups and expansion in the energy sector.





# GOAL 2

Attract and retain the talent we need to sustain our key industries.

# Work

Fort St. John is a place of opportunity. Type of job, income, and professional opportunity to get ahead\* attract people to Fort St. John. Add work-life balance and job security as reasons those who work here feel Fort St. John stands apart from other communities.

Fort St. John has made great lifestyle-living strides in the last decade, from downtown enhancement to recreation amenity. This is reflected in residents who say\* Fort St. John stands apart from other communities with its small community feel, housing affordability and choice, friendly people / welcoming culture, natural environment, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Fort St. John will work to: a) tell this story in a world seeking comfort in communities that provide; b) work on amenity enhancement; c) deepen housing affordability; c) nurture the most dynamic downtown of any northern community; d) lead efforts to partner to strengthen community recruitment to available jobs; and e) generate solutions for a critical issue – healthcare service availability.

*\*Source: Community Survey, 2023*



## MATTER OF FACT

The City of Fort St. John has 125% of median household income of BC and Canada, and 118% of the metro Vancouver median

*Source: Census Canada, 2021*

# GOAL **2** Objectives & Initiatives

Objective 1 – Increase the number of healthcare practitioners in Fort St. John and the Peace Region including doctors, nurses, support staff, and related professionals

## Initiatives

**2-1** Create a Healthcare Working Group that includes Northern Lights College, the City, private recruitment agencies, First Nation Health Authority, and health professionals to develop an attraction & retention incentivization program.

**2-2** Partner with public and private Colleges in BC and Alberta that specialize in health care training, and create co-op work and practicums in the Peace Region.

**2-3** Host a series of job fairs and recruitment events both in person and online, and develop specific tools and materials that help raise awareness about health career careers in Fort St. John.

**2-4** Partner with the Provincial / Federal Government & Work BC to fund a comprehensive North Peace community Labour Market Study, including alignment of industry need with education opportunity.

**2-5** Create a hiring and attraction toolkit for the healthcare sector to be used to attract healthcare professionals to the area. Conduct resident attraction marketing program.

**2-6** Create a database of all health care professionals and create regular information and communication updates on the efforts and actions the City is taking to support recruitment.

**2-7** Enable youth pathways into healthcare via: networking opportunities, start-up help, mentorship programs, high school health career talks, and learning opportunities about careers in healthcare / health services.

**2-8** Through regular sector-specific surveys and in-person meetings, document “missing” services, policies and needs that, if in place, would support increased employee attraction and retention.

**2-9** Promote job training, educational programs and professional opportunities throughout the region.

**2-10** Create a careers page on city website. Provide City website links to:

- a) energy careers;
- b) WorkBC – industry sector job boards, cost of living calculator, career research, etc.

**2-11** Create a single online events calendar and develop a comprehensive / online app Program and Activities Guide to effectively shine a light on activity opportunities.

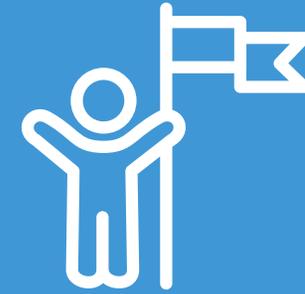
**2-12** Research, support and implement a “future of work” speaker series as part of regular opportunities to hear about current trends in workplace innovations, flex scheduling, and remote working.

**2-13** Embrace inclusive and diverse workplace cultures that support underrepresented groups, indigenous peoples, and from diverse ethnicities, to increase the potential for attracting and retaining top talent.

**2-14** Place a priority on understanding the advantages and limitations of utilizing the Federal immigration program, Provincial Nominee Program and temporary worker streams to fill positions.

**2-15** As the Fort St. John Economic Development Department creates expertise and resources in workforce attraction for the health sector, expand on successes into other key sectors facing labour shortages.

## Objective 2 – Generate supporting foundations for workforce attraction



### Initiatives

**2-16** Establish a collaborative recruitment partnership with industry, health, education organizations, and local recruiting firms. Create a City-branded multi-sector recruitment package, and advocate for / participate in – when advantageous for the City – partnered job fair and other recruitment events in the City or externally.

**2-17** Establish an industry-led working group to explore a “shared”, made-in-Fort St. John job incentivization framework that establishes a “nature of work” competitive advantage for relocation to Fort St. John.

**2-18** Transportation:

- a) Support expansion of additional taxi, ride share and related transportation services. Advocate for policy adjustments and incentivization of more housing choice and deeper housing affordability.
- b) Advocate for enhanced air service levels.

**2-19** Develop a more aggressive integrated (workforce recruitment, investment attraction, tourism) brand / marketing campaign.

**2-20** Conduct ongoing research with workforce partners regarding workforce infrastructure issues (such as a need for more *laundromats*) and partner to resolve issues.

**2-21** Use the quantitative income / housing cost value proposition in all marketing materials.



# GOAL **2** Workforce Attraction Pathways

## Workforce Strategy Framework: Options

- Job training and education programs.
- Continuous learning and professional development opportunities.
- Investment in technology and automation to increase efficiency and productivity.
- Flexible work arrangements (flex work, tele-commuting) to attract and retain talented employees.
- Partner with local schools and post-secondary to develop internship and apprenticeship programs.
- Competitive compensation and benefits packages to attract and retain top talent.
- Diverse and inclusive workplace culture to attract and retain a diverse workforce.

## Workforce Attraction Priorities: Business

1. Better / quicker healthcare access
2. Better / quicker access to healthcare specialists
3. Lower taxes / cost of living
4. Childcare availability
5. More / better flights from airport

Source: Community Survey: Economic Development Strategy 2023

## Workforce Attraction Priorities: Community

1. Better / quicker healthcare / specialist access
2. More / better recreation amenity / recreation options for adults
3. Four-day work week
4. More / better airport flights
5. Education Opportunities

Source: Community Survey: Economic Development Strategy 2023

## Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Pillars

- Engage key enabling organizations.
- Create supporting policy environment.
- Foster education and skill development.
- Provide access to funding.
- Develop incubators and accelerators.
- Promote collaboration & networking.
- Support start-up friendly infrastructure.
- Encourage research & development.
- Cultivate culture of entrepreneurship.
- Evaluate and iterate entrepreneurship initiatives.

## Permanency

Perception: Fort St. John is a temporary place to live to make good money.

Reality: The population age 65+ increased by 570 people and a proportionate 1% between 2011 and 2021. At 29.6%, those residents who have moved in the last 5 years is only marginally above the BC average of 27.7%. A common refrain in Fort St. John is “I came for two years and have been here for 22 years.”

## Workforce Demand

The BC Labour Market Outlook (Northeast Region, 2021-2031) provides valuable projection of workforce demand over the next ten-year period.

Source: [www.workbc.ca](http://www.workbc.ca)

# GOAL 3

Step into focused opportunities in key spaces: Entrepreneurialism, Energy 2.0, Tourism, and Agriculture.



# Diversify

Diversification is an important strategic consideration for the Economic Development Strategy in context of anticipated significant presence, but static growth, of Fort St. John’s #1 oil and gas industry, and #2 forestry industry. A key challenge to address is how to retain / incorporate the 1000 region-workers currently employed by Site C when construction is complete. There are no easy solutions when a single industry is dominant and resource-based economic structuring is past a heady growth period and has possibly entered a generational status quo period. Diversification is gritty, long-term work. Connecting the dots between data-indicated strengths and opportunity spaces and strategic actions and policy that enable economic development generates a diversification agenda:



Sector	Sector Opportunity	Enablers	Economic Development Programming	% Economic Development Program Effort	
Oil and Gas	SUSTAIN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issues advocacy &amp; positive value of energy awareness</li> <li>Sector working group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infrastructure – community amenity</li> <li>Workforce attraction, retention &amp; development</li> <li>Entrepreneur ecosystem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investment attraction</li> <li>Business retention &amp; expansion</li> </ul>	20%
Energy 2.0 (clean-tech, renewables, new energy & decarbonization pathways)	NURTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sector working group</li> <li>Entrepreneur ecosystem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investment attraction</li> <li>Business retention &amp; expansion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investment attraction</li> <li>Business retention &amp; expansion</li> </ul>	10%
Forestry	GROW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issues advocacy</li> <li>Transportation access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workforce attraction, retention &amp; development</li> <li>Infrastructure – community amenity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business retention &amp; expansion</li> <li>Entrepreneur ecosystem</li> </ul>	25%
Tourism	SUSTAIN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MRDT</li> <li>DMO organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workforce attraction &amp; retention</li> <li>Product development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marketing</li> <li>Entrepreneur ecosystem</li> </ul>	5%
Agriculture	NURTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entrepreneur ecosystem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entrepreneur ecosystem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entrepreneur ecosystem</li> </ul>	5%
Small business (entrepreneurship)	GROW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing</li> <li>Air service</li> <li>Business costs</li> <li>Planning policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Downtown enhancement (space options)</li> <li>Entrepreneur ecosystem</li> <li>Infrastructure – community amenity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business retention &amp; expansion</li> <li>Entrepreneur ecosystem</li> </ul>	35%

# GOAL **3a** Tourism

Tourism is a significant economic contributor to Northern BC. The region's natural beauty, wilderness areas, outdoor recreational opportunities, and cultural attractions draw visitors from around the world. Destination development and marketing opportunity areas include natural attractions, wildlife and ecotourism, indigenous culture and heritage, and adventure tourism.

Fort St. John has a number of tourism elements that can be inter-connected to accelerate sector growth, including location on the Alaska Highway, significant accommodation and food services presence, significant business travel market, general attractions that nurture quality of experience (Charlie Lake, 5k

community trail, float on Beaton River, river boating, hunting, fishing, Whiskey Jack Nordic Ski Club, and signature community events). There is potential to establish clear product differentiation in key spaces that leverage recreation infrastructure: national and provincial speedskating, hockey provincials, and ability to host baseball provincials. There is potential to nurture downtown-as-destination via niche stores and unique activities. Location on the Alaska Highway is amenable to packaging of Stop 'n Play amenities (*trails, disc golf, golf, park / picnic, off-leash dog park, skate park, signature events*).

Bringing together the capacity and expertise at the City of Fort St. John along with support from local accommodation providers and tourism stakeholders,

will increase focus on tourism marketing, programs, and specific tourism development projects. Introduction of a Municipal Regional District Tax (MRDT) on fixed-roof accommodation is catalytic for growth of tourism industry revenue, visitation, and jobs. A key enabler is housing affordability given tourism sector wages are significantly lower than leading sector wages in Fort. St. John.

Objective – Nurture a niche tourism industry, and use tourism as a marketing means to shift perception of Fort St. John in the marketplace.

## Initiatives

**3A-1** Pursue and support an application for implementing a 2% or 3% MRDT in the City, and potentially portions of the Regional District, through the creation of a 5-year Tourism Master Plan and related engagement requirements as set out in the act.

**3A-2** Create a Tourism Commission Bylaw that includes a detailed terms of reference, roles, selection process and related governance.

**3A-3** Advocate for enhanced air service and winter road maintenance.

**3A-4** Refresh and re-energize an integrated City brand.

**3A-5** Place information guides in all hotel lobbies, and direct (*with a QR code*) to online calendar of events and activities to do.

**3A-6** Deepen collaboration with the Visit Northeast BC (Northern British Columbia Tourism).



# GOAL **3<sub>a</sub>** Tourism in Fort St. John: A Snapshot

## What is a Tourist?

“The activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.”

## Why Tourism?

- Spending in local businesses.
- Municipal revenue (*rentals / facility admission fees*).
- Entrepreneur opportunities.
- Source of new investment and residents.

More broadly....and importantly:

Tourism celebrates our community at its best – the elevated experiences that: shape community pride, quality of life, and happiness; cements what it means to be “home”; and creates the deeper connection to people and place. For this reason, tourism product development and marketing is a means to an end for locals as well.

## What Does Tourism Look Like?

Canada’s tourism industry is comprised of several distinct – but complementary – activities:

1. Transportation: including passenger services via air, rail, boat, trail, as well as interurban, charter and tour busses and vehicle rental.
2. Accommodations: including hotels, motels, inns, hostels, guest ranches, camping, and short-term rental properties.
3. Food and Beverage: (*restaurants, cafes, brewpubs, catering*).
4. Meetings and Events: conventions and business meetings, major events and festivals.
5. Attractions: recreation and entertainment activities, as well as cultural, natural and historical attractions.
6. Travel Services (*travel agencies, tour operators, wholesalers, visitor information services*).
7. Sharing Economy (*peer-to-peer accommodation, peer-to-peer travel experiences, rideshare*).

We often under-value the role of tourism in our economies because it is part of many economic sectors.

## What Does Tourism Look Like in FORT ST. JOHN?

Sector analysis indicates that tourism as a stand-alone industry would be the 15th largest of 20 industry sectors in Fort St. John, with the 13th fastest growing job growth between 2012 and 2022. Accommodation and Food Services – a bellwether for the tourism industry – as a stand-alone industry is the 7th largest (1252 jobs) of 20 industry sectors. There are approximately 1420 hotel rooms in Fort St. John, generating roughly \$28 million in annual revenue and \$43 million in additional discretionary spending\* (3% of total estimated Fort St. John annual consumer spending).

## 7% of Canadians

say a tourism visit was the major driver of their decision to live where they do now.

*Source: Zinc Research, statistically representative poll of 1200 Canadians, 2011*

Tourism is a major source of new residents. We need to connect a tourism visit to economic development actions that facilitate a Fort St. John relocation decision.

\*According to a report published by Statistics Canada in 2019, the average expenditure per overnight visitor in Canada was approximately CAD \$209 per night. This figure includes expenses for accommodation, meals, transportation, shopping, entertainment, and other activities.

A rough estimate of \$100 for the accommodation unit generates estimate discretionary additional spend of \$109 per night.



# GOAL **3<sub>a</sub>** A Key Connector: Downtown As Destination

Can we converge energy, tourism, youthful Fort St. John spirit, active lifestyle and experiences, and indigenous opportunities in a unique thematic downtown experience that residents and visitors will be motivated to visit?

**YES!**

We can create a unique “Bright Lights” downtown Fort St. John initiative focused on interactive gaming, lighting, and storytelling.

- Downtown gaming centre
- Outdoor escape room experiences
- Outdoor projection mapping
- Indoor active gaming centre
- Indigenous storytelling

We can augment and enhance this core Bright Lights experience with supporting experiential destination experiences:

- Co-locate restaurants in a food hall
  - Such as Calgary Farmers Market.
- Instagrammable restaurants
  - Such as 94 Take the Cake in Okotoks.
- Nurturing of unique retail / food
  - Identify your unique businesses.
- Brand and thematic words to name signature events
  - Such as the northern BC and AB car show and shine event called REV or the Columbia Valley Classics Show & Shine in Radium Hot Springs.
- A “Tag You’re It” intentional graffiti art initiative
  - Consider business backs on 100th Street.
- Creation of a downtown brand and pageantry

# GOAL **3<sub>b</sub>** Entrepreneurship

A growing share of the workforce is “independent” (a catch-all to describe creators, digital nomads, tech, knowledge workers, hybrid workers, entrepreneurs, and professional services) out of intent and desire – the product of forces including but not limited to enabling technology like network connectivity and advanced network speeds, diminishing corporate loyalty, millennial and Gen Z interest in more fluid work relationships, globalization that has translated to global competition for and movement of talent, ease of transportation, and societal shift to a knowledge-based economy that is more conducive to footloose working relationships. Add the influence of a pandemic that will have a legacy impact on the nature of flex work.

Key economic development enablers for a self-employed / home-based segment of economy are: advanced broadband, housing choice, affordability and flex form amenable to enterprise space, placemaking initiatives, downtown vibrancy, quality of life amenities (breadth, quality, uniqueness, quality of experience in both recreation and entertainment), cultural diversity and openness, and enabling policy. Specific economic sectors like transportation, technology, creative industries, and professional, scientific, and technical services are more conducive to self-employment or work from home.

Key community benefits to nurturing self-employment and work from home include: reduced commuter ratio and more local spending that grows retail and services opportunities, reduced crime via increased full-time population, stronger social and cultural connectivity, and environmental benefit of reduced commuting.

Roughly 12% of the Fort St. John workforce is self-employed or works from home. While this is significantly below BC average, “growing our own” via entrepreneurial enablement offers a KEY means to diversify the local economy.

Objective – Grow our own business talent with enabling policy, spaces, and programs.

## Initiatives

**3B-1** Conduct a retail gap analysis with a focus on filling vacancies in the downtown core. Survey the community to establish market demand for niche, experiential types of desired business. Consider development of a retail attraction strategy.

**3B-2** Conduct marketing to attract experiential business (*food, beverage, specialty retail*) to the downtown.

**3B-3** Encourage the growth of home-based business – enabling temporary use space, shared space, and mixed-use options.

**3B-4** Grow entrepreneurs through business coaching, providing connections to resources, and training options geared to employers.

**3B-5** Promote existing “regulation-lite” home-based business regulation in attraction marketing.

**3B-6** Accelerate BRE through the Provincial Executive Pulse Program.

**3B-7** Start a Fort St. John franchise of the City of Airdrie – developed entrepreneur SMARTStart program

# GOAL **3<sub>b</sub>** Entrepreneurship



## Initiatives

**3B-8** Develop and accelerate implementation of Clean City and Safe City initiatives.

**3B-9** Advocate for enhanced air service.

**3B-10** Create a Business Resources Guide in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce.

**3B-11** Create a Downtown Revitalization Tax Incentive Bylaw to encourage downtown investment.

**3B-12** Consider flexible engineering standards (*road widths, swale and ditch vs curb and gutter, one-side or no sidewalk*) and up-front costing to enable business models for larger scale development.

**3B-13** Review and consider modification of Zoning Bylaw commercial and industrial policy with a focus on downtown, to enable business models.

**3B-14** Conduct a Business Walks program at X% visitation annually to better understand business issues and opportunities for purpose of initiative formation / advocacy.

**3B-15** Consider partnership with Community Futures to create and operate an annual Entrepreneur Bootcamp.

**3B-16** Conduct investment attraction for mixed-use developments and buildings.

**3B-17** Author business success stories for use in marketing.

**3B-18** Consider lowering business license fee for home-based business to encourage more registration and ability to establish contact to enable accelerated business growth.

**3B-19** Permit more commercial patios, including use of public realm in a permanent Open Streets program.

**3B-20** Identify more permitted uses in Zoning Bylaw to promote mixed use and fast-track development approvals.

**3B-21** Nurture a private, public and or public-private formation of a downtown market building that aggregates small business products in a retail enterprise. – *Look at Main Street Market, Okotoks*

**3B-22** Create an Enews (economic development news) newsletter using a digital platform 1-2 x annually. Circulate to business license list. Add a newsletter sign-up on City website as a key lead generation tool.

**3B-23** Complete a development process review to develop fast-tracking processes for new enterprise.

**3B-24** Add manufacturing as a permitted use to downtown zoning to encourage craft manufacturing (*such as brewpub or craft food*) associated with retail.

**3B-25** Consider mixed use vs straight commercial zoning downtown to shift emphasis to mixed-use developments. Include policy to place professional services and residential floors on floors 2+ to animate streetscapes.

**3B-26** Complete a comprehensive business cost analysis to understand, and establish and maintain, a competitive business cost value proposition.

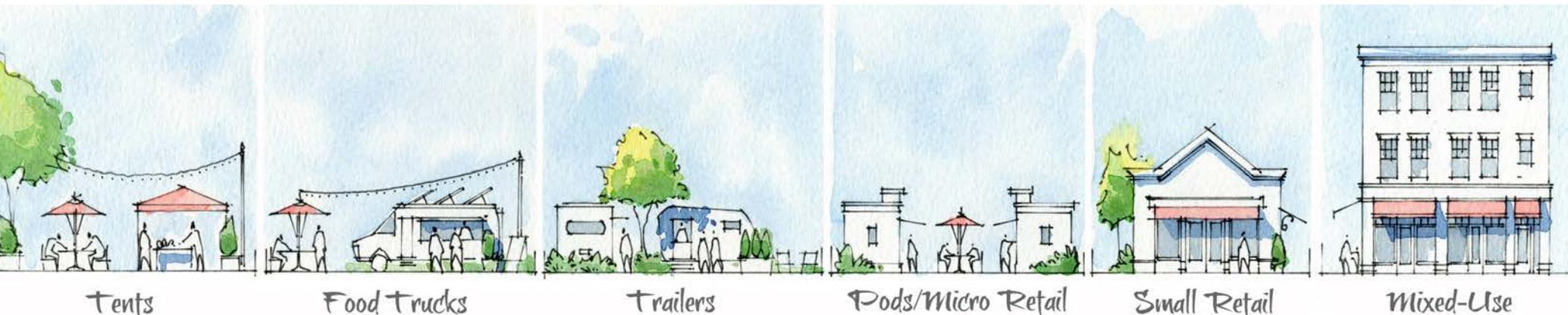
# GOAL **3b** Entrepreneurship – Housing Affordability

## Innovation Forms:

- Attached secondary suites
- Limited home-based business regulation
- Work-live units
- Generational / adaptive housing, smaller lot / minimum house sizes
- Detached accessory dwelling / commercial units
- Mixed use
- Up to quads in single family zoning
- Innovative neighbourhood design (*eco-village or agrihood*)
- Downtown density

## Innovation Policies

- Power of 3: Principal + attached secondary + accessory dwelling unit on single property transitions housing from cost to investment revenue generator, enabling residents to participate directly in economic development.
- Greater site coverage.
- All things smaller (*such as principal 750 sq. ft., ADU 400 sq. ft.*).
- Work-live mixed-use is more affordable single mortgage for entrepreneurs...and a lifestyle choice.
- There is no “R1” – duplex up to 3 units / property permitted use.
- Reduced parking standards...and no non-residential parking standards (incl. home-based business...is game changing for business model viability).
- Minimal home-based business regulation.
- More permitted uses, fewer total land uses reduces development application conflicts... is more predictable for investors.
- Up to 10 units per acre (with Master Plan) for larger aggregated properties.
- No development fees for infill. Accelerated permitting for multi-unit builds.
- Pre-approved accessory dwelling unit designs aligned with builders (online portal).



# GOAL **3<sub>b</sub>** Entrepreneurship Enablement – Space to Grow

## Desired Business Retention & Expansion Initiatives: (Top 5)

1. Love local marketing campaigns
2. Business successes / good news – web / online
3. Tax incentives for specific kinds of desired development
4. Advocacy for business issues
5. Signature events that attract visitors/residents

Source: Economic Development Community Survey, 2023

## Desired Business Growth Support Programs: (Top 5)

1. Financial investment / larger scale venture capital
2. Location to start a business affordably
3. Networking / business connection opportunities
4. Ongoing business-related learning opportunities
5. Mentorship / coaching from another business owner

Source: Economic Development Community Survey, 2023

## Desired Middle Spaces: (Top 5)

1. Expand allowance for temporary uses
2. Mixed-use buildings
3. Open Streets
4. Permanent indoor City-owned market space
5. Temporary road closures for pop-up commerce / City-owned indoor market space (tie)

Source: Economic Development Community Survey, 2023

## Planning Policy:

1. Hybrid Code (performance standards focused more on visual / less on functional, fewer zones, more permitted uses, reduced parking standards, no R1 zoning).
2. Lower to zero non-residential parking standards to re-energize business models.
3. Less home-based business regulation (performance-standards based).
4. Manufacturing as a permitted use to enable craft manufacturing associated with retail storefront).
5. Market spaces (public or private).

## Form:

1. Smaller / micro spaces;
2. Pop-ups (tents, trailers, temporary structures);
3. Accessory Commercial Unit (commercial edges);
4. Co-work spaces;
5. Incubators / accelerators / tech hub space;
6. Market spaces / buildings;
7. Arterial neighbourhood gateway road;
8. Work-live;
9. The “corner store.”

## Function:

Look at youth entrepreneurship programs, a micro investment fund, mentorship or start-up programs.



# GOAL **3c** Forestry

Forestry is Fort St. John's second key export sector at 8% of total exports (5-8% of the BC forestry sector depending on sub-sector). As of 2022 there are 880 forestry jobs (including logging) located in Fort St. John. The majority of this employment is generated by the LP OSB plant and the Canfor dimensional lumber mill, representing 4% of the total workforce. However, this sector is no longer on its growth trajectory following 30% employment growth in the last 10 years owing to construction of the LP plant. Employment is anticipated to remain stable, but not grow. The LP plant has recently expanded into specialty products as a means of diversifying operations.

Many mills throughout the province are seeing closures due to lack of economical fibre and low lumber prices. BC Government policy is important to the future of the sector. Recent announcements include a \$25M Forest Landscape Planning program to better protect old-growth forests and encourage innovation in the industry. The new funding will create eight regional forest landscape planning tables that will include 50 B.C. First Nations that will shape decisions on where harvesting and road building will occur. Forestry legislation is being shaped to include more Indigenous engagement in resource management in line with the principles outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples passed in 2019. The BC

Government is also doubling its BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund to \$180 million to support the value-added forestry sector and create products such as mass timber structural lumber using smaller-dimension trees. Opportunities should be explored locally to help local industry solution seek around local issues, and to identify where to capitalize on these policies and funding programs to support the growth and further diversification of the Fort St. John Forestry sector.

Objective – Advocate for existing forestry industry, and nurture craft forestry manufacturing opportunity.



## Initiatives

**3C-1** Identify vertical and horizontal value chain diversification new business opportunities within the energy sector & related economic activity.

**3C-2** Purchase data and complete a leading industry procurement analysis to identify import replacement business opportunities.

**3C-3** Address via advocacy or initiative current forestry industry issues: CN rail car supply, strengthen indigenous relationships re timber licenses, health service enhancement, partnerships with Northern Lights College and high schools re recruitment / job fairs, education programs.

**3C-4** Meet with Canfor and LP on an annual basis to discuss and address local sector issues and enablement.

**3C-5** Create a forestry Opportunity Sheet to nurture entrepreneur investment in mass timber, cellulose fibre, craft manufacturing, re-manufacturing.



# GOAL **3<sub>d</sub>** Agriculture

The Peace River region is a critical agricultural production centre for the province. There are approximately 825,000 hectares (2.04 million acres) of land farmed in the region, accounting for 31% of the land farmed in BC. In 2016, the 1335 farms in the region generated \$195M in sales from a capital investment of \$2.6B in land, livestock, and machinery. The majority of farm receipts were from oilseeds, grain and wheat (42%), followed by beef cattle and hay farming (39%).

The Peace River region produces 98% of the province's canola crop, and 75% of the grain crop. There is also a well-established cattle industry. Game farm production is growing, and the region has four slaughter facilities. There are many opportunities in the Peace for new / expanded agri-business operations. Sub-sectors with future potential include:

- Expansion of the game farming and cow-calf and beef finishing industries.
- Further production of hogs, forage seed, pulse crops, and other oilseed.
- Organic products.
- Secondary processing of primary products.
- Local production of fresh in-season fruits and vegetables.

*Source: industrial Land Strategy*

Objective – Nurture Fort St. John as a regional agriculture processing and logistics hub in the north.

## Initiatives

**3D-1** Conduct further agriculture sector research (region, BC, Canada) to explore local opportunity spaces.

**3D-2** Create structured information sharing and supply / value chain opportunities identification with the Ministry of Agriculture office in Fort St. John, with key agriculture industry associations: North Peace Cattlemen's Association, BC Grain Growers Association, and with the Farmers Institute.

**3D-3** Consider an innovation stream for agriculture and agriculture technologies in the North in partnership with BC Innovation.

**3D-4** Hold a Summit with local industry associations and key agriculture stakeholders (owners, operators, the province, etc.) to identify 2-3 key agriculture industry opportunities.

**3D-5** Using online research and interaction with the local agriculture industry and industry associations, establish a visualization of the regional agriculture ecosystem (supply chain, input suppliers, transportation linkages, and similar) to develop opportunity insights and to connect agriculture needs to other sectors.

**3D-6** Establish a permanent Farmers Market to support growth in agriculture, to create linkages in local food systems, and to nurture a local craft product industry with linkage to the tourism sector.

**3D-7** Add Agriculture as a key sector with associated opportunity content in the business section of the City of Fort St. John website. Include agriculture planning resources.



## Initiatives

**3D-8** Consider land positioning (location, zoning, site servicing, transportation linkage, site location criteria alignment) for investment consideration of value-added processing, farm supply, and warehousing & distribution operations in Fort St. John.

**3D-9** Advocate for a provincial update of economic impact analysis for the agriculture industry in the North Peace, including gap analysis and a growth strategy.

**3D-10** Support marketing campaigns for small farm markets and farm tours.

**3D-11** Explore geothermal opportunities for agriculture.

**3D-12** Encourage craft-scale niche agriculture that supports community placemaking, tourism and small-scale ag sector development such as brewpubs, distilleries, honey production, jams, craft food production, and authentic local products.

**3D-13** Increase the “visibility “ of North Peace agriculture for residents, agencies and visitors through greater community engagement and awareness.

**3D-14** Encourage agricultural careers via education programming.

**3D-15** Nurture consideration of greenhouse and other investment that supports local food security.



# GOAL 4

Nurture beneficial economic development opportunities in collaboration with regional indigenous communities.



# Partner

The City of Fort St. John will demonstrate, and have deep respect for, Indigenous peoples' inherent rights, including their right to self-determination, consultation, and participation in decision-making processes.

The City of Fort St. John will foster meaningful and respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples based on mutual trust, understanding, and collaboration. This includes establishing protocols for engagement, building long-term relationships, and acknowledging the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization and systemic injustices.

The City of Fort St. John will build positive economic and community development relationships with Indigenous peoples and their communities, creating opportunities for the benefit and shared prosperity of all region residents.

The City of Fort St. John is located on the traditional territory of the Dane-zaa, signatories of Treaty 8, and the Métis Nation BC Region 7. We value the significant contributions of Indigenous Peoples who have lived and worked on the land for time immemorial and are committed to meaningful reconciliation to continue building a future based on relationships and mutual respect, beginning with acknowledging, reflecting and learning the truths.



## MATTER OF FACT

13% of Fort St. John residents identify as indigenous, up a proportionate 1% since 2016.

Source: Census Canada, 2021

# GOAL 4 Objectives & Initiatives

Objective: Collaborate with Treaty 8 Nations and individual Indigenous communities to support the acceleration of investments, servicing needs and new opportunities in the City of Fort St. John.



## Initiatives

- 4-1** Establish economic development partnership agreements with Indigenous communities that enable and enhance economic opportunity within the City and regionally.
- 4-2** Support advanced planning and streamlined process that encourage urban reserve(s) within the City boundary.
- 4-3** Socialize City land purchase / development opportunities with regional indigenous communities.
- 4-4** Explore indigenous opportunities in tourism development (such as events a learn-to guided experiences).
- 4-5** Showcase Indigenous culture, art & history in City buildings, and public spaces, and include partner nations economic development priorities and projects on the City's website / business & development page as they arise.
- 4-6** Create opportunities for the City of Fort St. John, its businesses, residents and visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of Indigenous rights and culture within the region, and the importance of reconciliation and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA).



# GOAL 5

Create a City structure to accelerate use of City-lands to achieve strategic goals.



# Develop

The City of Fort St. John has a significant land holding beyond utility lots, parks, and civic infrastructure. The City has key strategic objectives that would accelerate community and economic development: 1) Housing choice and affordability; 2) Mixed-use downtown enhancement; 3) Entrepreneur enablement; 4) Employment lands development.

The “market” may or may not be aligned with strategic objectives. Even if the market is aligned, return on investment (ROI) may not meet standard ROI, or suffice for purpose of financing. A benefit of municipal investment in strategic initiatives is that investment can be more patient. Control via property ownership has a powerful additional benefit: the ability to make sale conditional on achieving the City’s strategic objectives. A more formal and purposeful land acquisition and sale structure can accelerate ability to meet strategic objectives.

Municipal land models range from passive to aggressive – from direct sale to third party broker representation, to land corporations (*look at Surrey Land Corporation and Calgary Municipal Land Corporation*).



# GOAL 5 City-owned Marketable Lands



# GOAL 5 Initiatives

Create a City structure to accelerate use of City-lands to achieve strategic goals.



## Initiatives

**5-1** Employ legal counsel (such as Fasken in Vancouver) to explain model options, process, and timelines.

**5-2** Discuss desired governance structure and its objectives / outcome expectations with Council (workshop session suggested... ability to make it your own – within the legal parameters – and examine a variety of successful models and the level of controls required).

### 5-2 Notes:

- Identify seed funding that would be required for starting up operations, hiring of staff etc. Once land sales are occurring, it is envisaged the corporation would then become self-funding.
- Estimate ROI from profits (land sales, increased tax revenue to the municipality).
- Estimated profit distribution annually from corporation to its shareholder.
- Note: often the investment by the municipality in return for its shares in the corporation will be the donation of initial land stock into the development corporation.

**5-3** Once the Business Plan is approved by Council, move forward with establishing Corporation with the appointed legal team.

**5-4** Municipality recruits appropriately experienced CEO / staff to lead the corporation and identifies office facilities.





GOAL **6** Enable economic development.



# Connect

Housing choice and affordability, a re-energized brand, downtown enhancement, community animation in art / culture / recreation, and connectivity to other City Plans are key economic development catalysts that enable achievement of economic development goals.



# GOAL 6 Objectives & Initiatives

Objective: Empower key housing, downtown, brand, and art / culture / recreation economic development enablers.



## Initiatives

- 6-1** Advocate (province) for enhanced healthcare service levels is a key community surveyed priority for workforce & resident attraction and retention.
- 6-2** Conduct and deepen a City water and waste conservation program and connection to energy retrofit grant and other efficiency programs to reduce cost of living and assist with perception shift.
- 6-3** Nurture a Youth Sports Centre of Excellence. Develop a Centre of Excellence Strategy.
- 6-4** Hold an annual Economic Development Summit to talk about achievements and 12 month tactical next steps – *Look at Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Development and Tourism invites you to Momentum 2020 | Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo.*
- 6-5** Hire an Economic Development Manager to resource Strategy implementation.

- 6-6** Showcase Indigenous culture, art & history in City buildings, and public spaces, and include partner nation economic development priorities and projects on the City’s website / business & development page as they arise.
- 6-7** Conduct a business survey every two years to better understand business issues and perceived opportunities.
- 6-8** Communicate a downtown Vision: “Entrepreneurial people living affordably.” Key mechanisms: Municipal Land Development Corp., Revitalization Tax Incentive, densification, planning policy enablement of business models.
- 6-9** Implement a public art program.
- 6-10** Focus on additional / larger signature community events downtown, including street festivals, parties, pond hockey, Octoberfest.
- 6-11** Update the Recreation Master Plan with increased focus on recreation and sports for all ages, with a specific plan for pool & splash pad, ice availability, pump track, and indoor recreation.
- 6-12** Build an indoor multi-purpose recreation facility (#1 surveyed recreation amenity desire).

**6-13** Foster cultural inclusion and diversity in all projects and partnerships.

**6-14** Refresh business section of City website with investment decision making hierarchy: value prop, key sectors, data, relocation information (corporate site selection factors, “creators” location criteria), dynamic news.

## City Plan Connectors

- 1. 2023-2027 Council Strategic Plan**  
Implement Economic Development Strategy, Downtown Action Plan
- 2. Downtown Action Plan policies**  
Prioritize implementing policies supporting downtown as strategic priority infill and mixed use, housing, organization, incentivization, and policy enablement.



# KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

## 1 Positive Net Promoter Score

**Current: -3**

Net Promoter score is a well-used measure of loyalty to products and place. A positive-trending score, surveyed every three years, has a number of positive community and economic development benefits.

## 2 Lower Mobility. More Seniors

**Current 5 Year Mobility (2016-2021): 29.7%**

Lower mobility and more seniors means people appreciate the community, and stay for more than the job. Positive movement indicates the community has been successful at motivating longer-term residency.

Metrics: 25% 5-year mobility by 2026. Proportionate increase of 1% age 65+ 2021-2026.

## 3 Business Licenses Per Capita

With a baseline established in 2023, a positive trending number indicates a key diversification strategy (entrepreneurship) is generating success.

# POWER UP!

**No fuss no muss. Entrepreneurial Fort St. John just gets on with things every day with its get 'er done attitude.**

For those thinking it's hard to get ahead these days, Imagine this... you can get a great job and live very affordably here, and recreate in the great outdoors and indoors to your heart's content. The near north. A new north. Fort St. John is making the future happen.



**Resourceful Fort St. John. Join us.**



[fortstjohn.ca](http://fortstjohn.ca)