

VILLAGE OF EMPRESS  
STRATEGIC PLAN  
2014-2017



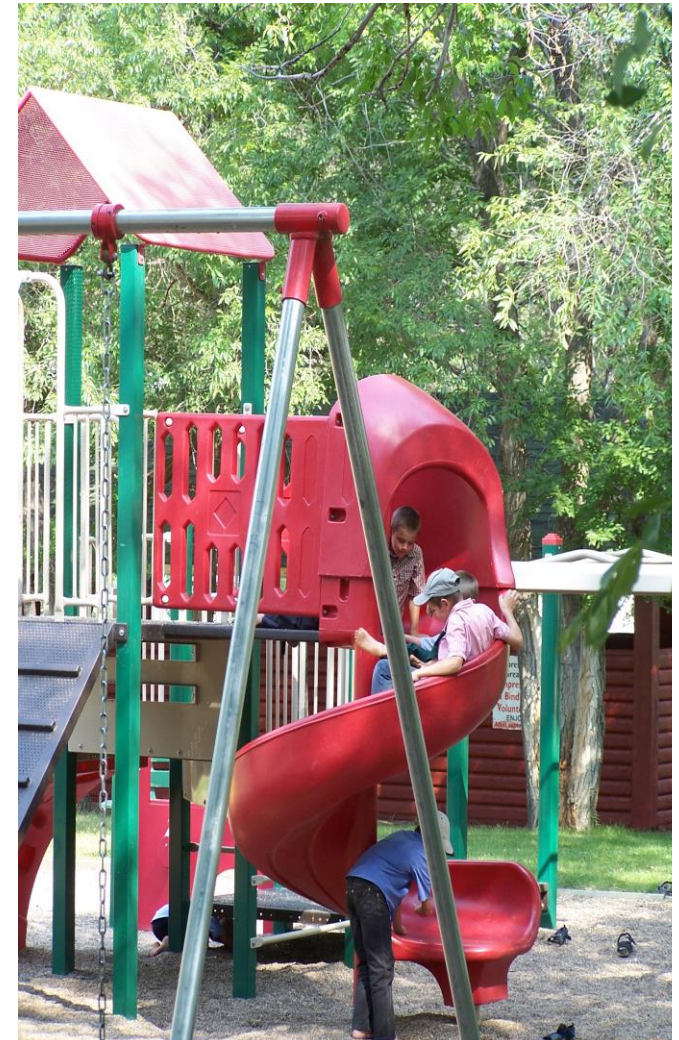
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## WELCOME TO EMPRESS

- The Village of Empress is a municipal corporation within the Special Areas that was created by the Province of Alberta to be responsible and accountable for matters within its jurisdiction.
- The role of any municipal corporation is to:
  1. provide the services that the municipality considers are necessary or desirable for the municipality;
  2. manage and preserve the municipality's public assets;
  3. foster the current and future economic, social and environmental well-being of the municipality; and,
  4. deliver and participate in Provincial programs and initiatives.
- The Village is governed by a Council that is elected every four years (beginning in October 2013). Their role is to make decisions on how the services that are within their jurisdiction are to be provided, based on the needs of the municipality and the requirements of the Province.
- For the services the Village provides, it is the responsibility of the Village to make decisions on service delivery on the basis of the best available information, in a manner that is in the best interest of Empress residents and business owners and which is in conformity with Provincial requirements.
- In 2014, the Corporation of the Village of Empress was responsible for over-seeing the activities of 5 full-time employees and has an operating budget of \$459 thousand and a capital budget of \$593 thousand.





- As the Village of Empress has the potential to continue growing well into the future, there is a need to ensure that the services the Village delivers are provided in the most effective and efficient manner. In addition, there is a need for there to be a context that provides the basis for service delivery with this context representing an overall vision of the Village and its future.
- In order to provide this context and to establish the basis for making decisions on service delivery, a new Strategic Plan has been prepared.
- The intent of the plan is to establish, at a relatively high level, the over-arching Vision, Goals and Directions the Village will consider in making decisions that are within its sphere of influence.

## Prioritization and Balance

- No priority has been assigned to any of the Goals, Directions or Initiatives in the Strategic Plan.
- This is why no component of the Strategic Plan should be read in isolation since all of its parts contribute and work together to implement the Vision established by Council.
- The prioritizing of the Goals, Directions and Initiatives in the Strategic Plan will always be an element in the decision making process on a yearly basis, when municipal budgets are being formulated and needs are assessed.
- In some years, a higher priority may be placed on certain Goals than in others and the balance struck between two competing Goals and Objectives may also be different, depending on the circumstances and other internal and external factors.
- In addition to the above, the ability of the Village to prioritize and balance Goals and Directions will be impacted by the level of control Empress has over the delivery of services. In many cases, the Village does not have direct control over services that many Empress residents use (such as waste management) since the services are under the control of the Federal, Provincial or Regional governments.
- These other levels of government also create rules and processes (some of which are legislated) which also have to be taken into account in the local decision making process. In some instances, it may be difficult to implement some of the Directions and Initiatives fully in the Village of Empress as a result of these constraints.



## VISION

A description of the Village as it should be. In dictionary terms, *it is a mental image created by the imagination.*

## THE CONTEXT

- There are three broad components to the Strategic Plan:
  - 1) there is a visioning component that identifies what the priorities of the Village should be with respect to quality of life and service delivery;
  - 2) there are yearly business plans that rely upon the vision to develop short and medium term action plans to ensure that the right services are being provided; and,
  - 3) there is a land use component that will implement the vision on the ground through land use policy.
- The Strategic Plan will help direct Empress action and decision-making
  - at a corporate level;
  - at a departmental level; and,
  - at a personal staff level.

## Consultation and Research

- Internal activities included:
  - Small group meetings with Council members
  - Planning Session with Facilitator, Staff and Council November 18, 2013

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1) Some residents have a negative impression of the Village.
- 2) The small-Village character, the friendliness of the people and the open space character of the rural area have all been cited as attributes.
- 3) The location situated between the 2 rivers was mentioned as one of the main defining feature of the Village.
- 4) Some indicated that we need to expand on the artisan theme.
- 5) Some have indicated that the Village does not have a definitive identity that is known.
- 6) Many indicated that there was a shortage of shopping, entertainment and cultural opportunities in the Village.
- 7) Many of the Village's new residents do not associate with the Village of Empress.
- 8) There is a compelling need to commit time and resources to both an internal and external communications strategy.

- Empress's appeal is multi-dimensional — participants identify a range of things they like most about the Village. Chief among them are:
  - A sense of a caring population and 'small Village' character;
  - Proximity to both major urban centers and rural/natural areas;
  - A sense of safety and security; and,
  - Greenspace, parks, recreational areas and natural assets.
  - Great collaboration with local organizations and surrounding municipalities
- Among the perceived most important issues facing Empress today, the top-five are all at least somewhat growth-related:
  - The pace of development/growth;
  - roads;
  - Insufficient services, programs, events and community amenities;
  - Lack of marketing; and,
  - Down town business core.



## Moving Forward - Developing a Vision for the Community

- Simply put, a vision is a desired end state — it embodies collective aspirations and stands as a beacon to guide Village planning and initiatives on the road to realizing a richly imagined future. It is something for which all of us can strive and participate in helping to achieve. As such, a vision both inspires and challenges.
- On the basis of the work completed to date, a comprehensive vision statement has been prepared:

### **Empress: engaging, balanced, connected**

- But what does it mean to be *engaging*, *balanced* and *connected*? The following provides an overview of the key ideas that underlie this vision.

### **As an engaging community, we see an Empress that is...**

- Attractive and pleasing to the mind and eye — a Village defined, in part, by both:
- Its natural and physical beauty (from the River Valleys, to built forms, to open spaces); and
- Our engaging residents — their caring, friendly, courteous, generous, respectful nature.
- A place with a desirable personality that can attract and hold one's attention — a Village that is charming, appealing and a model of civility.
- A place that seeks to fully involve people in Village life — an engaged population that contributes to matters of civic interest, enjoys our programs and amenities, participates in our celebrations and fully experiences all that Empress has to offer.
- Genuine, vibrant, safe and secure — a Village that values its roots, embraces diversity and provides for an exceptional quality of life.

### **As a balanced community, we see an Empress that is...**

- In harmony — different aspects of the Village pleasingly combined to create an enriched whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Well planned and provides for an appropriate mix of land uses that contribute to a clearly defined sense of place.
- Characterized by a willingness and ability to exhibit good judgment and prudence — with decisions made in the collective interest of residents and that respect a bigger picture, Village-wide view.
- Meeting the needs of residents of all life-cycle stages and that offers a range of activities to address diverse interests.
- Tradition-based, but not tradition-bound.

### **As a connected community, we see an Empress that is...**

- Safely, effectively and efficiently moving people and goods — and enhancing travel to, from and within the community.
- Prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century — fully maximizing the use of information technology and electronic communication to serve resident, business and community-wide interests.
- Characterized by a shared sense of concern about and pride in our Village — where people choose to join together in common cause.
- Plugged-in to societal trends and issues of the day — an influential contributor to regional and provincial affairs.

## The Goals

On the basis of this Vision, five goals have been established. They are:

- A responsible, cost effective and accountable local government;
- Well managed growth, well planned spaces;
- A safe, livable and healthy community;
- A diverse and sustainable economy; and,
- A thriving natural environment

The above goals are intended to provide the basis for the Directions and Initiatives that are intended to implement the Vision. The Vision and the Goals are presented on the next page





## Directions and Initiatives

- On the basis of the Vision and the Goals presented on the diagram on the previous page, a number of Directions under each goal have been developed.
- Each Direction is intended to provide the basis for Initiatives that are ultimately intended to implement the Vision.
- Each of these Initiatives will be considered as part of the Service Area Master Plan Process and the Implementation Plan.
- The Directions and Initiatives under each Goal are presented on the following pages.



## GOAL - A responsible, cost effective and accountable local government

### DIRECTION 1

Establish priorities that support the municipal service requirements of the majority of local residents

- Ensure that the services the Village provides are reviewed annually
- Ensure that the cost effectiveness of service delivery is a priority when making decisions on how services are to be delivered and by whom
- Ensure that the concept of 'service excellence' serves as the basis for service delivery
- Ensure the effective and regular communication of municipal objectives to staff for implementation
- Ensure that municipal staff are able to effectively and efficiently deliver required municipal services
- Ensure that municipal human resource needs are factored into decisions on what services are to be provided and how



## **GOAL - A responsible, cost effective and accountable local government**

### **Direction 2**

#### **Engage in transparent and accountable decision-making processes and actions**

- Use technology to expand/enhance the delivery of on-line services.
- Enhance communication between the government and its citizens.
- Educate the public about what is within and outside of the Village's direct control/sphere of influence.
- Increase the use of electronic communication to ensure that residents and business owners are aware of municipal opportunities and initiatives.
- Encourage the community to become more actively involved in civic affairs.
- Engage newcomers to the Village to participate in community activities and the municipal decision making process
- Encourage openness in the decision-making process.
- Enhance the customer service function to respond to the needs of the community.

## **GOAL - A responsible, cost effective and accountable local government**

### **DIRECTION 3**

**Properly fund municipal services and community infrastructure through a combination of fiscally responsible operating budgets, capital budgets, effective reserves and reserve fund management**

- Ensure that fiscally responsible operating and capital budgets are established and maintained on a yearly basis
- Ensure the maintenance and effective management of reserve funds
- Ensure the efficient management of capital assets and municipal services to meet existing and future demands
- Enhance communication and coordination with the Region and other levels of government in the provision of services
- Require that an annual report be prepared to provide an overview on how the municipality's objectives have been met and how funds were budgeted, allocated and spent.

## GOAL - A responsible, cost effective and accountable local government

### DIRECTION 4

#### Demonstrate leadership on matters that affect Empress

- Participate fully in Region-led exercises that are intended to maintain and enhance quality of life
- Engage other levels of government to ensure that the interests of Empress residents and business owners are known
- Ensure that Federal and Provincial programs that may benefit Empress are considered whenever possible
- Ensure that Empress's interests and needs are known at the Regional level
- Continue local political and staff participation on Boards and Committees both within and outside the Empress community



## GOAL - Well managed growth, well planned spaces

### DIRECTION 1

Encourage the provision and maintenance of an appropriate mix of residential, commercial, industrial and recreational uses

- Encourage the development of a range of uses that will support Empress as a place to live, work and play
- Create a sense of civic identity and pride through a high standard of urban design for all new development
- Encourage the provision of a full range of housing opportunities for present and future residents of all ages and incomes
- Encourage infilling and intensification in the existing urban area
- Encourage the development of home based businesses in the area
- Maintain a reasonable amount of commercial and industrial land for future expansion
- Assure appropriate recreational and cultural opportunities for residents and visitors

## GOAL - Well managed growth, well planned spaces

### DIRECTION 2

Encourage cost effective and timely municipal/ community infrastructure development

- Encourage the efficient use of land to make the best use of infrastructure and services
- Ensure that the Village demonstrates leadership in any future urban expansion to ensure that new development is as cost effective as possible
- Ensure that appropriate financial plans and infrastructure strategies are in place before development occurs

## GOAL - Well managed growth, well planned spaces

### DIRECTION 3

#### Encourage well timed service delivery

- Ensure that hard and soft service needs are identified up front and then appropriately prioritized and delivered either before or at the same time as new development
- Encourage the development of public facilities in appropriate locations at the right time to meet the needs of present and future residents
- Ensure that appropriate capital works forecasting/planning is done before the works are required

## GOAL - A safe, livable and healthy community

### DIRECTION 1

#### Promote and facilitate active and healthy lifestyles and life long learning

- Promote the development of a strong arts and cultural community that builds upon local knowledge, history and experience
- Encourage the establishment of a healthy community that is made up of an interconnected system of open spaces, walking trails, bicycle routes and natural heritage features
- Facilitate involvement for people at different life-cycle and physical activity stages and of varying socio-economic status - including youth and senior oriented initiatives
- Enhance leisure, cultural and educational opportunities/experiences that contribute to personal enjoyment, growth and development
- Encourage the exploration of all partnership opportunities in the delivery of leisure/community/library services
- Encourage the development of new partnerships and maintain existing partnerships and strategic alliances to encourage community ownership and responsibility
- Encourage the consolidation of community and recreational uses, such as cultural facilities, libraries, and recreational facilities when possible
- Encourage residents to play an active role in the decision making process by participating on boards and committees

## GOAL - A safe, livable and healthy community

### DIRECTION 2

#### Maximize community safety and security

- Encourage the development of fire service facilities that provide the maximum benefit to all residents/businesses
- Enhance relationships with regional emergency service providers in adjoining jurisdictions so that cost effective and timely emergency response and support functions are maintained
- Maintain an ongoing open dialogue with RCMP
- Ensure the preparation and implementation of comprehensive emergency plans
- Encourage the establishment of public facilities and open spaces that are designed to be safe and which provide for appropriate emergency support services and/or equipment, lighting, visibility and for public surveillance/open sight lines

## GOAL - A safe, livable and healthy community

### DIRECTION 3

#### Protect and enhance our heritage, identity and character

- Respect and honour the Village's rich history
- Protect, maintain and enhance the open space character of lands outside of the urban area for enjoyment by present and future generations
- Encourage key community events (e.g. Summer Curling/Stirling bonspiel, Ball Tournament, Canada Day Celebrations, Christmas celebration, Art Tour, Apple Festival, Train Museum ) that help shape identity and contribute to community spirit
- Establish and maintain a community identity that sets Empress apart from others through the holding of community events, promotion and branding
- Encourage the development of public spaces that foster community involvement and interaction
- Build on the strengths of our urban and rural character
- Foster civic pride by recognizing the contribution that cultural heritage resources make to the urban and rural fabric
- Encourage economic activities in the area that support the values and character of our region
- Recognize and value diversity



## GOAL - A diverse and sustainable economy

### DIRECTION 1

Attract and retain employers that provide a range of employment opportunities and assessment growth

- Leverage Empress's high quality of life and community identity to attract investment
- Encourage the development of the business infrastructure required to attract uses that will contribute to the quality of life in the Village
- Enhance the Village's economic development role.
- Work with other levels of government to encourage additional investment in Empress
- Work with existing businesses to establish initiatives to attract additional investment
- Continue to encourage the availability of an appropriate supply of land for future employment uses



## GOAL - A diverse and sustainable economy

### DIRECTION 2

Encourage the private sector to meet the retail needs of a growing population in a reasonably timely manner

- Encourage the further development of retail and service uses in the Downtown Village Business Core.
- Provide opportunities for a wide range of retail uses in the Village
- Encourage the development of home based business and e-commerce utilizing the high speed internet services available in the region
- Encourage the development of appropriate commercial and tourist uses in the region.



**GOAL - A thriving natural environment that is a valued community asset to be protected, maintained and enjoyed**

**DIRECTION 1**

**Protect and enhance natural features**

- Encourage the decision-making process to be supported by an understanding of the natural environment including values, opportunities, limits and constraints
- Protect and enhance significant natural heritage features and their associated ecological and hydrological functions
- Maintain, restore and where possible, enhance or improve the diversity and connectivity of natural heritage features and ecological functions



## GOAL - A thriving natural environment that is a valued community asset to be protected, maintained and enjoyed

### DIRECTION 2

#### Promote the enjoyment and responsible use of natural areas

- Encourage the integration of the parks and open space system with the natural heritage system wherever possible
- Encourage through proper planning that the features and related functions of natural environment areas are not negatively impacted by public use
- Educate the public on the benefits of the natural environment and the positive contribution the natural environment has on the Village

