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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

(DRAFT - REV 2)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kneehill County initiated a comprehensive 3-year Economic Development Plan aimed at driving sustainable growth and prosperity while prioritizing residents' well-being. The plan, shaped with input from diverse stakeholders and facilitated by Tara Zeller, Economic Development Consultant, outlines actionable strategies aligned with community aspirations.

In the pursuit of economic development, Kneehill County recognizes it will be necessary to identify developable lands (agricultural or otherwise) in which to pursue investment attraction. For successful investment attraction to occur the plan will undergo an investment readiness process and develop a business retention program to identify growth opportunities for businesses and the region.

Kneehill County will build capacity amongst community leaders, Council, businesses and stakeholders in which to partner and while building the County's brand through marketing awareness and campaigns to achieve economic development goals to ensure a resilient, culturally rich, and economically prosperous future for generations to come.

The following key sectors are areas of focus while continuing to identify and pursue additional opportunities:

Agri-Business: With favorable conditions for agricultural processing and ag-tech innovation, the county aims to capitalize on Alberta's status as a major agri-food exporter.

Tourism: Leveraging proximity to major urban centers and unique attractions, the County targets wellness tourism and film industry investments.

Energy: Positioned in the Western Canadian Sedimentary Basin, Kneehill County is positioned to identify opportunities through the energy supply chain for development.

Manufacturing & Logistics: The county's strategic location provides easy access to transportation routes, making it an attractive destination for manufacturing businesses.

The plan will outline the four (4) strategic priorities and ten (10) goals over the next 3 years to achieve economic resilience and diversity.



PRIORITIES

01

Build Leadership Capacity

02

Strengthen Existing Businesses

03

Enhance Investment Readiness

04

Elevate Kneehill County's Brand

GOALS

- 1** Increase awareness and understanding of economic development principles for elected officials, senior staff, businesses and residents
- 2** Foster community stakeholder engagement and input to stimulate economic opportunities
- 3** Support and inspire youth entrepreneurs and leaders to establish Kneehill County as a desired community to remain, return and establish
- 4** Design and deliver a business retention and expansion program that initiates engagement between the County and businesses
- 5** Encourage diversification and innovation in industry sectors to stimulate economic growth and job creation
- 6** Achieve an intermediate to advanced investment readiness status to attract investments to drive economic growth
- 7** Develop a targeted investment attraction strategy by engaging the community
- 8** Promote and elevate the quality of life to attract and retain residents, attract visitors, workforce and business investments to the County
- 9** Identify and collaborate with regional partners and stakeholders to promote and amplify the region
- 10** Continuously monitor progress and gather input to update the plan



Guiding Principles

The County's vision, mission, and values reflect the importance of economic development to the community. These foundational guiding principles were utilized in creating the economic development plan.

Vision

At the intersection of history and opportunity, Kneehill County is a forward-looking community that celebrates its rural roots.

Mission

A rural community that embraces its agricultural lifestyle and an economically diverse future.

Values

INNOVATION

We focus on the future by seeking out new and creative solutions, and support entrepreneurship in our community.

INTEGRITY

We do what we say we will do.

RESILIENCE

We help our community withstand challenges and adapt in the face of adversity.

OPENNESS

We engage stakeholders, respect all opinions, and keep our community informed of the decisions we make.

TRADITION

We uphold and promote the unique agricultural history of Kneehill County.





BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE



Background

Kneehill County initiated an Economic Development plan to foster sustainable growth and prosperity. In 2023, an economic development investment readiness was completed and while many elements are in place, it is necessary to review the recommendations in the economic development reports to prepare for attraction. One of the County's key recommendations was to proceed with an economic Development to provide future direction for economic development.

Economic Development Consultant, Tara Zeller, was retained to support the creation of the plan. The results are a thoughtfully created plan with insights from residents, business owners, local organizations, staff, and Council to ensure a holistic understanding of the County's unique needs and aspirations.

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to provide an actionable 3-year strategic roadmap to guide the County towards sustainable economic growth. To accomplish this, we need long-term planning, collaborative solutions and a commitment to investing in our community.

The Plan outlines actionable strategies and objectives aligned with the community's vision and aspirations. The Plan sets a realistic timeframe for implementation, allowing for measurable progress utilizing S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Action Oriented, Relevant, and Timely) goals and objectives. The Plan is a working document and Economic development will continuously monitor progress and update the Plan as we engage with businesses and as guiding documents are updated and as initiatives are brought forward for consideration.

The Plan aligns with the County's Strategic Plan, 2019 Municipal Development Plan, Land Use Bylaws and all through open engagement with stakeholders, businesses, residents and Council.

Through this plan, Kneehill County aims to build a resilient and diverse economy by enhancing the livelihoods of its businesses and residents to position the County as an attractive destination for investment and growth.

Planning Process and Methodology

1



Document Review (2023 - 2024)

A review of existing Kneehill County documents and related websites was completed. These documents contained internal goals and external recommendations and were used as a baseline in determining the overall economic development strategic direction suggested in this plan. Economic Development provided Additional documents and website reviews to this plan to add to Kneehill's overall economic development "story."

2



Community Engagement (Sept - Nov 2023)

Community engagement is a crucial step to provide guidance and direction and through the engagement process responses were received from 77 businesses in the Business Retention and Expansion survey completed by Deloitte, responses from 658 residents, 7 stakeholder organizations and 3 regional partners, and input from Council and staff members.

3



Data Analysis (Nov - Dec 2023)

Findings from the community engagement were compared with previous reports and strategies to identify changes, progress, and areas needing improvement. Information was organized and summarized to identify key insights and trends as well as to identify gaps between current findings and past strategies.

4



Develop Priorities & Action Plan (Jan - Mar 2024)

As priorities were developed and the assessing the feasibility of various initiatives considering considering available resources, regulations, and potential challenges. A detailed action plan outlining specific objectives, tasks, timelines, responsible parties, and performance indicators were drafted to ensure alignment with the broader economic development strategic framework and goals.

5



Prepare Economic Development Plan (Apr - May 2024)

Information was compiled and organized in collaboration with Economic Development to create strategic directives for the Economic Development Plan. This information was reviewed and revised by Kneehill administration to ensure alignment with municipal priorities before presenting to Council in June 2024.

Findings

The following economic development documents, websites and organizations were reviewed as part of the overall research process. This process was critical to ensure plan alignment, identify partners and their services and how Kneehill County can support and development partnerships to support economic development initiatives.

Kneehill County Strategic Plan

| Priorities | Goals |
|--|---|
| Build and maintain infrastructure that meets the ongoing needs of the County’s residents and businesses (utilities) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainably manage existing infrastructure. • Maintain a high-quality road network. • Ensure the County is prepared for future waste management needs. • Understand current and future rural water/requirements. |
| Build a robust and adaptable economy (economic diversification, zoning, support for agriculture) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow economic activity in Kneehill County. • Prioritize hamlets and encourage targeted growth. • Foster an economic environment where local business can grow while maintaining resilience to external market and environmental forces. • Be recognized as a leader in the provision of quality agricultural products. |
| Maximize quality of life for people who choose to live in Kneehill County (recreation, County’s uniqueness, history, youth and seniors) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and sustain Kneehill County’s unique rural lifestyle. • Maintain responsive fire services in Kneehill County. • Continue to be responsive to the needs of youth within the County. • Attract new citizens and retain existing residents. |
| Provide effective, respectful and efficient leadership (Council, environmental change, partnerships, finance, bylaws and policies) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Kneehill County remains fiscally sustainable and resilient to external events. • Authentically engage with and communicate to County’s residents. • Continue respectful and collaborative relationships with regional partner municipalities and other orders of government. • Be recognized as a provincial leader in good municipal governance. |

Recommendations to consider:

- Build and maintain infrastructure to meet ongoing needs of County residents & businesses.
- Identify and target lands for future non-residential development.
- Build a robust and adaptable economy.
- Grow economic activity in Kneehill County.
- Foster an economic environment where local business can grow while maintaining resilience to external market and environmental forces.
- Attract new citizens and retain existing residents.
- Maximize Quality of Life for People Who Choose to Live in Kneehill County.
- Promote and sustain Kneehill County’s unique rural lifestyle.
- Prioritize hamlets and encourage targeted growth.
- Be recognized as a leader in the provision of quality agricultural products.
- Address wastewater and critical infrastructure.

Kneehill County Municipal Development Plan (2019, Draft 2024)

The purpose of the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) is to provide guidance and clarity to ensure future growth is sustainable, orderly, appropriate, complementary, efficient and enhances the quality of life for the citizens of Kneehill County.

A new MDP is currently under review and revision. The process began in February 2023 and compiled recommendations from engagements will be brought to Council for consideration in Spring/Summer 2024. The full review involved engagement from five (5) working groups to gather input on Agriculture, Economic Activity and Growth Management, Environment and Recreation, Transportation and Utilities, Residential and Hamlet and Natural Resources and Renewable Energy.

In Spring/Summer 2024 (dates to be determined), compiled recommendations will be brought to Council for consideration. Future dates will be determined where:

- Administration will present a revised Municipal Development Plan document.
- The revised MDP document will be distributed for public comments and feedback.
- A public hearing for the MDP bylaw will be held in Council Chambers.

Initial findings heard in the plan and taken into consideration during the development of the Economic Development Plan:

- Residents wish for development decisions be made on a case-by-case basis.
- Developments to be encouraged on marginally producing lands and protecting high producing land.
- Partner with adjacent municipalities to work regionally on future developments to share servicing.
- Recognizing the importance of home-based businesses that could occur in both residential and agricultural areas.
- Protection on the “right to farm”.
- Opportunities to provide tax incentives, access to roads and servicing.
- Through the Land Use Bylaws, the County shall ensure negative impacts are mitigated through adequate buffers or transitional land between industrial and non-industrial uses.

Competitive Land Analysis (2020)

Kneehill County partnered with the Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP) to conduct a Competitive Land Analysis to examine Kneehill's industrial land supply while determining what industrial land-related issues and/or opportunities needed to be addressed.

Industrial development is a key contributor to the economic development, employment base, economic sustainability, and prosperity of the municipality as well as the prosperity of the private sector. The report identified the County as having a wide range of environmentally significant lands, environmentally sensitive lands and hazardous lands. The following considerations and recommendations were identified:

- Kneehill County holds very little land for re-sale (begin to engage landowners in discussions around industrial land).
- To attract development there needs to be low risk for investors/businesses:
 - Reduce layers, simplify process and ensure timelines are completed as legislated. Rezoning of subdivisions for industrial lands and establish terms and conditions around industrial lands based on sectors.
 - Develop an inventory of all privately owned industrial lands and buildings in the County and ensure it is accurate, detailed and current.
- The County could become more competitive in terms of attracting and retaining industrial investment if the County's strategies and policies were better aligned with each other.
 - Align plans and policies with Council's desire to attract the desired target industries.
- There are strategies or documents in place to outline economic development direction and priorities or specific targets/sectors for investment attraction.
- There is a need for one single comprehensive map of the entire County - having it both digitally and in hard copy to show where each district (AB – Agriculture Business District, HI – Hamlet Industrial District, HG – Hamlet General District, LI – Light Industrial District, I – Industrial District) is located and how they interact with each other. (see Land Use Bylaw - LUB)
- Review the discretionary uses and permitted uses in LUB to reflect what the County really wants to attract to these specific districts.
- In LUB – define what "reasonable distance" means – clarify for the investor.

Currently, agriculture is the backbone of the local economy. Located at the centre of a high-volume grain and beef production area, the region is ideally situated to grow its footprint in agricultural product processing. Based on the raw materials produced in the region, sophisticated food or plant processing operations, including growing niche categories of specialized food, products, composites, or medicines/supplements have been identified as a strong growth sector.

After reviewing the Central Alberta Economic Partnership Factors Matrix, and consulting with staff at Kneehill County the following three sectors were identified as areas of focus:

1. Ag/Construction/Mining Machinery Manufacturing
2. Commercial, Industrial Machinery Repair
3. Warehousing & Storage

Recommendations from this report to consider:

- Review recommendations and update land analysis report.
- Define a new set of recommendations.
- Review development process, update sector profiles and website, update maps, review LUB.



Investment Readiness Review (January 2021)

An internal Investment Readiness Review was developed with an in-depth analysis on Kneehill County's current situation and considerations with moving forward. The review suggests that "Focusing on investment-friendly plans and policies, aligning plans and strategies, and addressing land and infrastructure concerns will assist in building a solid foundation for future Business Investment & Attraction Success."

- Reduce or replace "discretionary" use with "permitted" in low-risk sectors to improve development timelines.
- Re-zone high potential growth areas to improve development timelines.
- Reconsider the regulations surrounding home occupation business.
- Provide clear timelines and explanations of development process.
- Improve inter-department collaboration.
- Investment readiness training for municipal staff.
- Determine what privately owned lands may be available for future sale or development and build agreements with landowner accordingly.
- Develop a land strategy to address the lack of available lands.
- Amend policies and develop future growth strategies for servicing and infrastructure.
- Improve broadband connectivity.
- Consider regional projects to pool funds for strategies and studies to improve investment attraction opportunities in the region.

Recommendations from this report to consider:

- Review and undergo an investment readiness process to establish a current state of readiness and achieve an intermediate to advanced level as outlined by Economic Developers of Alberta Readiness Toolkit 2012 (Economic Developers of Alberta, 2012).
- Develop a land strategy to identify privately owned lands.
- Review LUB, development process.
- Work regionally on growth strategies.
- Develop a list of recommendations and incorporate into the Investment Attraction Strategy.



Economic Base Analysis and Sector Report (2021)

AMDB Insight completed an Economic Base Analysis and Sector Report that provided great insight into the region's current economic state and sector breakdown. Trends were identified and recommendations were selected based on the following three sectors: Tourism, Energy, and Agriculture.

Recommendations resulting from this report:

- Build agri-tourism activities on existing farm operations and create a network of complementary attractions.
 - Increase discussions with regional partners (producers, Community Futures Wild Rose)
 - Promote more tourism training opportunities (via Travel Alberta)
 - Identify what events work provincially and replicate / modify
 - Investigate culinary tourism opportunities (food festivals, farmers markets)
- Build off Drumheller and regional visitor attraction. Develop and promote complimentary products.
 - Partnerships with Drumheller and other regional players
 - Profile opportunities for reinvestment in dated landmarks and new businesses
 - County to invest in campgrounds (many other Counties/MDs are in the business)
 - Promote through new tourism directory
- Further develop primary and secondary oil and gas services.
 - Connect with local producers and find out where they are procuring equipment and services
 - Attract these businesses to establish local operations
 - Engage with local firms to expand operations
 - Attract these businesses to establish local operations.
 - Engage with local firms to expand operations.
- Take advantage of current high concentration of primary inputs and expand into entire agri-food chain.
 - Work with existing producers to understand what they need to expand operations
 - Support existing producers to begin value-added processing.
 - Existing firms are leveraging the local transportation and logistics infrastructure, showcase these assets to complementary producers
 - Invest in business parks
- Leverage logistics networks to export high value, easily transportable agri-food goods.

Recommendations from this report to consider:

- Review and update the Economic Base Analysis and Sector Report and reassess the current recommendations for consideration.
- Pursue the current Economic Outlook Series as committed by Council in April 2024.

Community Futures Wild Rose Regional Workforce Development Report - DRAFT (2024)

Community Futures Wild Rose, partnered with Kneehill County, Wheatland County, Rocky View County, Strathmore, the Province of Alberta and Prospect Employment Agency to participate in a regional labour market assessment. The project began in April 2023 and will conclude in June 2024. The purpose was to identify regional labour challenges and opportunities and to create an action plan.

The report identified employers are experiencing general and skill labour shortages. Addressing structural barriers to labour attraction, such as housing availability and skills mismatches will demand proactive measures. Enhancing education and training through public initiatives, coupled with incentivizing affordable housing development will play a pivotal role in maintaining a stable labour supply. Immigration can help close labour shortages through programs such as rural renewal program or temporary foreign worker programs. Prioritizing skills training and education will address deficiencies in skilled labour.

Supporting employers through learning initiatives to refine recruitment and retention strategies will be important to equip employers to successfully attract and retain qualified job seekers. Stakeholders will need to foster collaboration to bolster the regional labour market and engage with the community to facilitate connections between employers and potential employees, by adopting strategies that integrate policy interventions, educational support and community engagement.

The DRAFT report has produced the following recommendations of which will be determined for action based on a level of timeline priority, linkage to strategic plans and available resources:

High Priority

- Participate in the Rural Renewal Stream
- Centralize regional collaboration for the Rural Renewal Stream
- Create a proactive land development environment
- Develop a regional housing strategy
- Investigate affordable housing initiatives
- Optimize labour events
- Regional outreach campaign
- Increase the number of job fairs
- Create a regional employment portal
- Market the regional employment portal

Medium Priority

- Improve apprentice and trade availability
- Assist with Basic training
- Create a grant to reduce off-site levies (affordable housing)
- Create property tax incentives (affordable housing)
- Provide HR training programs to small businesses
- Increase direct engagement
- Create promotional videos of apprenticeship and trades job marketed to youth

Low Priority

- Launch internship programs, connecting interested businesses with post-secondary institutions
- Sell land for a small fee (affordable housing)
- Promote skilled trades careers and opportunities at high schools
- Create opportunities for high schoolers to shadow apprentices or trade employees
- Create opportunities for local businesses to share experiences related to HR management

Recommendations to consider:

- Support a regional action plan with partners to address labour needs where possible and in alignment with the County's priorities and resources.
- Identify housing needs and barriers and work to identify solutions.
- Work with partners to address employer and workforce training, employment opportunity and skill matching needs.
- Support opportunities that assist youth in career development.

Kneehill County Tourism & Recreation Master Plan (2017, 2020)

The Kneehill County Tourism and Recreation Master Plan was originally developed in 2017 and updated again in 2020. The two primary objectives of the plan are to: 'increase residents' quality of life through effectively delivering recreation services' and 'establish a tourism economy through the development of tourism sites and programs.'

Recommendations were split into 11 key focus areas, with several recommendations under each area of focus. It is encouraged that the County re-visit this master plan and incorporate the recommendations into the overall Economic Development Strategy. For the sake of this overview, the following two goals are noted:

- Develop tourism and recreation infrastructure (campgrounds, trails, river amenities).
- Develop a tourism marketing strategy – to include short and long-term descriptions of product development and partnership opportunities, and be built on a clear understanding of resident and visitor experiences.

Recommendations from this report to consider:

- Consider a review and refresh of the plan be only a Recreation Master Plan and that consideration be made into the development of Tourism Master Plan of which the Horseshoe Canyon could be aligned.

Horseshoe Canyon Master Plan (2019 & 2024 Draft)

Version one in February 2019 has been revised in 2024. Horseshoe Canyon plays a critical role in greeting and introducing visitors to the County and the Canadian Badlands region. This plan was created to define how the Canyon would be strategically and thoughtfully developed, managed, and marketed over the following 10 years while embracing its conservation significance.

Recommended strategies to consider:

- Ensure operations protect the natural ecology of the Canyon.
- Enhance brand recognition.
- Increase and align signage for information and wayfinding throughout the Canyon.
- Integrate and collaborate with the nature conservancy of Canada and other adjacent landowners.
- Establish a voluntary Friends of Horseshoe of Canyon.
- Implement a visitor pavilion with washrooms and other amenities.
- Continue parking fee collection.
- Continue trail development, enhancement, & maintenance within and around the perimeter.
- Continue to enhance day use, market & event spaces and implement furnishing, fixtures and amenities.
- Continue to actively manage visitors and visitor use of the Canyon through on-site ambassadors.
- Consult and develop an Area Structure Plan for further development.
- Attract target markets to the Canyon.
- Encourage private sector opportunities through investment attraction and other activities that ensure a reasonable return on investment for the County.
- Strengthen the focus on Indigenous relationships and history and development relationships with Indigenous leaders.
- Collaborate with nearby regional tourism locations.
- Allow a diversity of overnight experiences to be implemented and operated by a third party.

Recommendations from this report to consider:

- Consider a review and refresh of the plan be only a Recreation Master Plan and that consideration be made into the development of Tourism Master Plan of which the Horseshoe Canyon could be aligned.

Travel Alberta - Canadian Badlands Tourism Destination Zone Discovery Report (2023)

The area has been identified as a high growth potential region as outlined in the Canadian Badlands Discovery Report 2023. Through this plan, the goal is to grow and diversify the economy, support jobs, preserve cultures, foster innovation, conserve the environment; and improve resident quality of life.

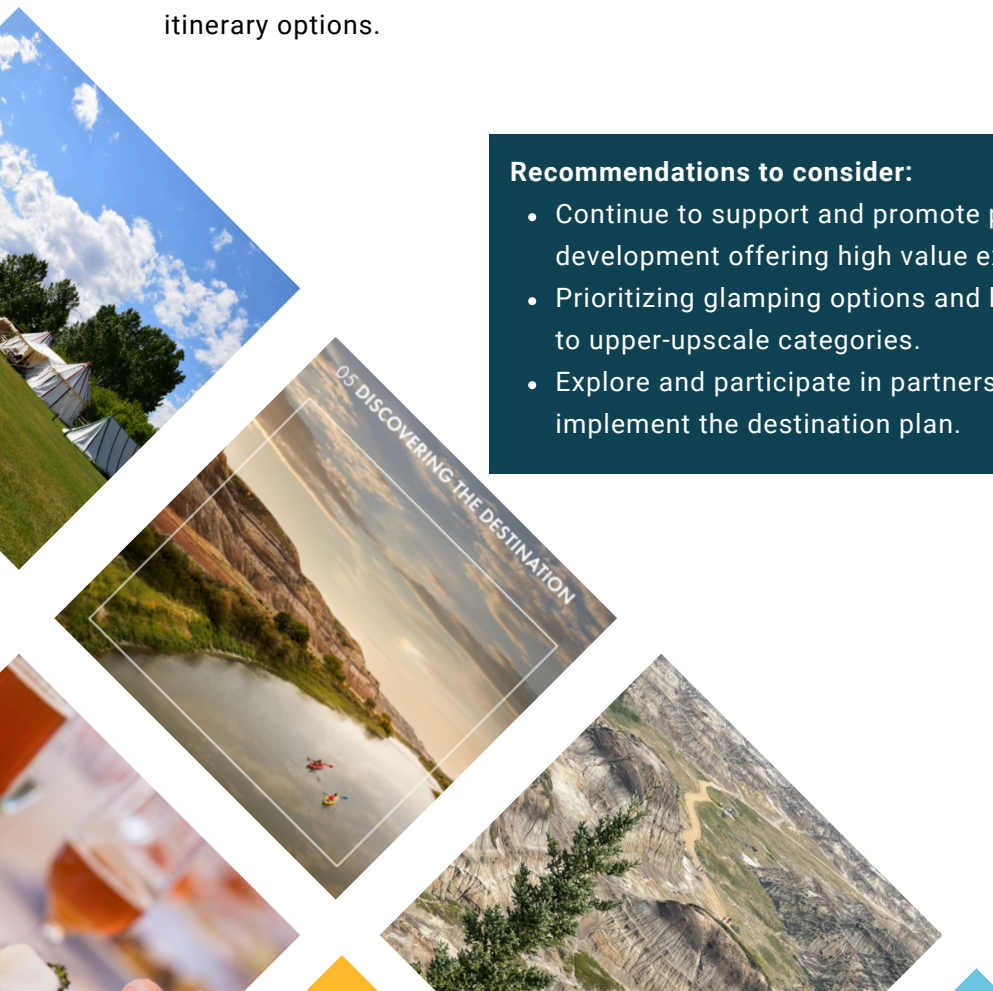
The zone is rich in scenic vistas (Horseshoe Canyon, Orkney Viewpoint, Dry Island Provincial Park), historical discoveries, arts and culture, agriculture and culinary experiences, soft adventure (hiking, biking, river), and Film Tourism. While there are a variety of products, there is a lack of quantity year-round experiences and there is significant opportunity for the development of iconic and signature products such as boutique hotels and unique accommodations to support growth of top-tier products to create an iconic destination.

The zone offers a supply of 1,500 economy-branded rooms and many campgrounds, B&B's and unique accommodations. There is continued demand and opportunity to expand and provide glamping and hotel development in the upscale to upper-upscale categories. Increasing the supply of accommodation will be key to increasing overnights stay, the overall appeal and increased spending in the TDZ.

Albertans have stated that 51% are familiar with the zone and 69% of visitors have a positive impression of the destination and only 38% are likely to visit the zone. Internationally, there is limited inventory of experiences valued by international visitors and the zone is well positioned to attract international markets by creating immersive products, experiences, packages and itinerary options.

Recommendations to consider:

- Continue to support and promote programs to attract product development offering high value experiences to businesses.
- Prioritizing glamping options and hotel development in upscale to upper-upscale categories.
- Explore and participate in partnerships with Travel Alberta to implement the destination plan.



Travel Drumheller - Destination Development Plan (2023)

This plan identifies Drumheller's desire to become a year-round destination to strengthen the dinosaur foundation and to support and enhance community vibrancy including live theater and events, sports tourism, soft adventure, wellness, culinary and beverages that are of significant interest to prospective visitors from Canada, US and around the world.

Kneehill County, particularly the Horseshoe Canyon area has been identified within this region and expands to Rosebud and as far as Dorothy and the southern portion of Starland County.

Building partnerships and working collaboratively in tourism is critical as visitors know no boundaries. Kneehill County resides on the Travel Alberta Steering Committee that supports the executive director and staff to implement the Destination Development Action Plan. The following short-term (2 years) priorities and initiatives have been identified:

Destination Leadership

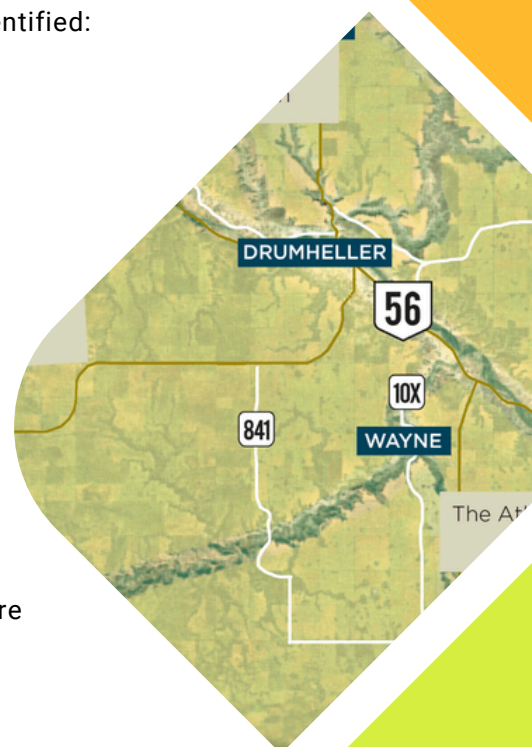
- Committee creation
- Communicate strategy
- Conduct and share industry, market and social tourism research
- Support tourism innovation, entrepreneurship and investment
- Address labour issues
- Strengthen partnerships

Destination Development

- Create more multi-day, year-round experiences
- Development of new and existing experiences
- Creative industries and infrastructure
- Identify and support enhancement of tourism/social infrastructure
- Train businesses in product and experience development
- Provide incentives to support training
- Build a marketing collective to increase brand awareness
- Create and implement a marketing strategy to attract target audiences

Recommendations to consider:

- Remain on the Travel Drumheller Steering Committee to drive and strengthen Kneehill's position within the region and tourism market.
- Communicate the plan and outcomes to stakeholders.
- Support initiatives that support businesses to develop new and expand existing experiences.
- Support in their initiatives to promote brand awareness of not only the region but Kneehill County.



Kneehill County “Doing Business” Webpage

Kneehill County’s webpage “Doing Business” [1] has an abundance of relevant information available to businesses consisting of data (Townfolio), land maps (Munisite), grants and funding, business supports, business and community listings, planning permits and process to assist businesses.

Investment attraction documents such as sector profiles, land analysis and maps have been professionally designed and conducted and are a great start to strategically attracting investments and industries. There is an agri-preneur and business spotlight in which businesses can participate. These spotlights were then promoted on various social media channels. There is also a business directory and a supply of resources to support and direct businesses to for support in starting and expanding their business.

Kneehill does not have a designated published investment website for investment attraction purposes.



Recommendations and Opportunities to consider:

- Update “Kneehill County Business Guide”, sector profiles [2], business list, events, land analysis and inventories.
- Opportunity to continue business spotlights.
- Continue promoting the items and assets on the website on social channels.
- As the County prepares for investment readiness and expansion it should consider a marketing strategy which includes a competitive analysis, target market identification and creating a value proposition.
- The County should consider a stand alone website for economic development for business retention and investment attraction.
- Review of Townfolio to other providers such as LocalIntel and CityViz for access to current and relevant economic development data.

[1] Kneehill County Doing Business: <https://kneehillcounty.com/2276/DOING-BUSINESS>

[2] Kneehill County Sector Profiles: <https://kneehillcounty.com/2476/Sector-Profiles>

Research Findings - Local Economic Development Partners

Partners at all levels of government, local community, non-profits and industry are essential for a healthy community, businesses and for long-term sustainability within the municipality.

Partners are essential for all sectors as each has it's own set of challenges and barriers. Mobilizing partners and community champions create a stronger foundation for economic development and long term prosperity.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP)</p> | <p>CAEP [3] is a regional economic development organization whereby municipalities pay an annual membership fee to address regional challenges and access to initiatives.</p> <p>Their website provides access to a regional data centre provided by Localintel and populated by Statistics Canada and is provided through membership fees.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training, networking • International summits, regional data, industry profiles • Broadband connectivity • Regional Land Database - ongoing • Investment Attraction Readiness Program • Economic Development Member Training - ongoing • NEW - Sector Committees – 2024 Launch |
| <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Community Futures Wild Rose (CFWR)</p> | <p>CFWR [4] is a non-profit community economic development organization serving 15 rural municipalities and is governed by elected officials. Kneehill County has an appointed official to the Board of Directors and on various committees.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lending • Business Coaching and Training • Youth Entrepreneur Training • Community Business Investment Program • Regional Workforce Project • Skills in Action, Digital Economy Program, • Business Mentorship Program (Spring and Fall 2024 Cohort) |
| <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Three Hills & District Chamber of Commerce</p> | <p>The Chamber [5] is regionally positioned to support Three Hills, Trochu, Linden, Acme, Carbon and Kneehill County.</p> <p>A chamber's main purpose is to advocate for business and can do so in a variety of formats. Alberta's provincial chamber is the overarching body in which chambers drive support from to provide services to businesses.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group benefits & insurance, office supply discounts, payroll, legal and HR solutions, payment processing programs • Shop Local Programs (Call Kneehill, #lovingmylocalkneehill) • Community Events (Small Business Week, Golf Tournament, Christmas Market and more) |

Recommendations and Opportunities to consider:

- Continue to promote/attend CAEP functions to industry, community leaders, staff.
- Access regional data for the Central AB region for investment attraction and retention purposes.
- Participate in the sector committees to amplify Kneehill's presence within the central Alberta region.
- Explore collaboration initiatives to support business retention and investment readiness/attraction.
- Promote access to capital and training programs.
- Incentives through the Community Business Investment Program.
- Promote and encourage youth to become entrepreneurs through the YETI Program.
- Continue to foster and support the regional workforce action plan.
- Shop local programs.
- Small business weeks events.
- Engage in discussions to explore #lovingmylocalkneehill.

[3] Central Alberta Economic Partnership: <https://caepalberta.com/>

[4] Community Futures Wild Rose: <https://wildrose.albertacf.com/>

[5] Three Hills and District Chamber of Commerce: <https://threehillschamber.ca/>

Research Findings - Social Organizations

Kneehill County has local social partners who work to ensure the social well being of the community remains strong, healthy and vibrant. Our communities and businesses require these supports to ensure a healthy workforce and quality of life for our residents.

Kneehill FCSS and Kneehill Adult Learning Centre have a variety of programs, supports and services to serve a diversity of residents and businesses.

Kneehill Regional FCSS KRFCSS

KRFCSS [6] is a regional partnership between municipal and provincial governments established to develop, support and fund preventive social programming to enhance the well-being of individuals, families and communities. The program is municipally driven and governed by the Family FCSS Act which emphasizes prevention, volunteerism, and local autonomy.

- Programs and events to children, youth and adults/seniors
- Family wellness
- Income tax
- Family and marriage counselling
- Volunteerism

Kneehill Adult Learning Society (KALS)

KALS [7] is a non-profit organization dedicated to lifelong learning and settlement support and provides access to services to Kneehill County and surrounding communities.

KALS supports in areas of learning, resource connection, job seeking and development, newcomer supports and much more.

- Adult Literacy services
- Digital Learning
- ESL classes and tutoring
- internet and computer access
- Exam supervision (invigilation)
- Resume and cover letter support
- Education/upgrading planning and resources
- Health and Safety workshops
- Newcomer resources



Recommendations and Opportunities to consider:

- Continue to support and promote the KRFCSS and KALS programming.
- Continue to collaborate and identify opportunities with KRFCSS to support the social well-being of individuals (volunteerism, mental health, etc.)
- Support and promote to businesses and residents the access to the learning supports to create a strong workforce.
- Promote newcomer programs to businesses accessing temporary foreign worker or immigration programs.

[6] Kneehill Regional FCSS: <https://www.krfcss.com/>

[7] Kneehill Adult Learning Society: <https://www.kals3hills.ca/>

Research and Findings - Government Economic Development Plans and Partners

“Selling Alberta to the World: An Investment and Growth Strategy” complements and builds on Alberta’s Recovery Plan to put the province back on course for long-term financial sustainability after the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and crash in oil prices.

Investment attraction into Alberta is essential to help drive our economy by creating stability, supporting existing jobs and creating new ones, expanding business opportunities, accelerating innovation, and increasing our exports globally.

The investment and growth strategy identifies three core outcomes, each with key initiatives that contribute to meeting those outcomes.

Outcome 1: Increase Alberta’s competitive advantage.

Outcome 2: Improve Alberta’s investment attraction ecosystem.

Outcome 3: Raise Alberta’s reputation as an investment destination.

Investment Attraction Partners

| | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Invest Alberta Corporation (IAC) | <p>Expedite business operations & foster collaboration to ensure long-term success for businesses. Work directly with global investors & site selectors to start or scale up in Alberta. Break down barriers & offer assistance to investors to achieve success.</p> <p>Have supported investments totaling nearly \$20 billion and creating more than 23,000 jobs.</p> <p>Attract targeted industries: Agriculture, Aviation & Aerospace, Energy & Renewables, Financial Services, Life Sciences, Petrochemicals and Technology & Innovation [8].</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Provincial data & resources • Facilitate investment calls & investment proposals • Attract targeted industries to Alberta • Access to business resources including taxes, incentives, visa processing, supports & profiles |
| Invest Canada (IC) | <p>Connect multinational corporations to opportunities to grow, expand and succeed in Canada. Offer personalized, single-window access to the information, insights and services to make informed business investment and expansion decisions. Access to data and resources pertinent for investment attraction and primarily targets high value foreign direct investments [9].</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International investment summits • Access to date & resources (businesses, governments) • High value investments (excluding tourism) |



Recommendations and Opportunities to consider:

- Collaborate and connect with Invest Alberta to help prepare Kneehill County’s investment readiness and expansion.
- Help identify new stakeholders and connections to promote brand awareness and business development.
- Attend investment calls to seek potential for proposal submissions.
- Collaborate and connect with Invest Canada to identify potential investment opportunities for Kneehill County (when readiness level has been achieved).
- Access the available resources to develop investment attraction materials and increase brand awareness with IAC and IC.

[8] Invest Alberta Corporation: <https://investalberta.ca/>

[9] Invest Canada: <https://www.investcanada.ca/>

Community Engagement Results

Engaging the local community is essential for effective economic development planning, forming the foundation for the growth of vibrant and sustainable communities. This plan acknowledges and prioritizes the active involvement of the community in its development process. Through a collaborative effort, a diverse range of stakeholders were involved including residents, business owners, local organizations, staff, and Council members.

Input for the economic development plan was gathered through a variety of surveys, reflecting the commitment to understanding the County's unique needs and aspirations. This engagement process provided invaluable insights into the challenges, opportunities, and priorities that shape the community's economic landscape.

A Business Retention and Expansion survey was completed to understand how to best support local businesses. Deloitte was commissioned to complete a **Triage Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E)** report to engage the broader business community, while also allowing for the identification of potential expansion or retention opportunities for follow-up on a business-by-business basis. A total of 77 businesses were reached.

Further engagement followed through a **community-wide economic development survey**, with a total of 658 surveys received and analyzed. Tailored surveys were completed by organizations operating within the County (7 received) as well as by Municipal Council members. Regional organizations including CAEP, Travel Drumheller, and Community Futures Wild Rose were also engaged to share their initiatives to determine potential collaborations.

By harnessing the collective wisdom and expertise of the stakeholders, the foundation was laid for an economic development plan that is truly reflective of the aspirations of Kneehill County.



Full findings reports can be found in the Appendices.

When it comes to supporting economic development initiatives, what does it mean to:

Figure 1: What it means to residents to support economic development

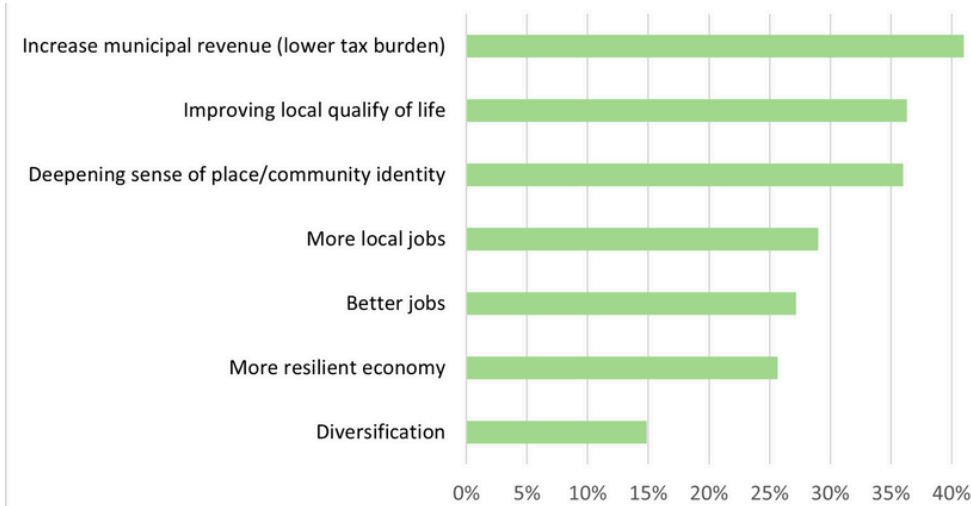
| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| The Community: | Developing Tourism and Recreation Infrastructure |
| Local Organizations: | Developing Tourism and Recreation Infrastructure Attracting more Visitors |
| Council: | Improving the overall attractiveness of living and working in Kneehill County |
| What it means for Residents: | Developing tourism and recreation infrastructure |



Community Engagement - What we heard (cont'd)

Why residents want to see growth in local economic development?

Figure 2: Reasons why residents want to see growth in local economic development

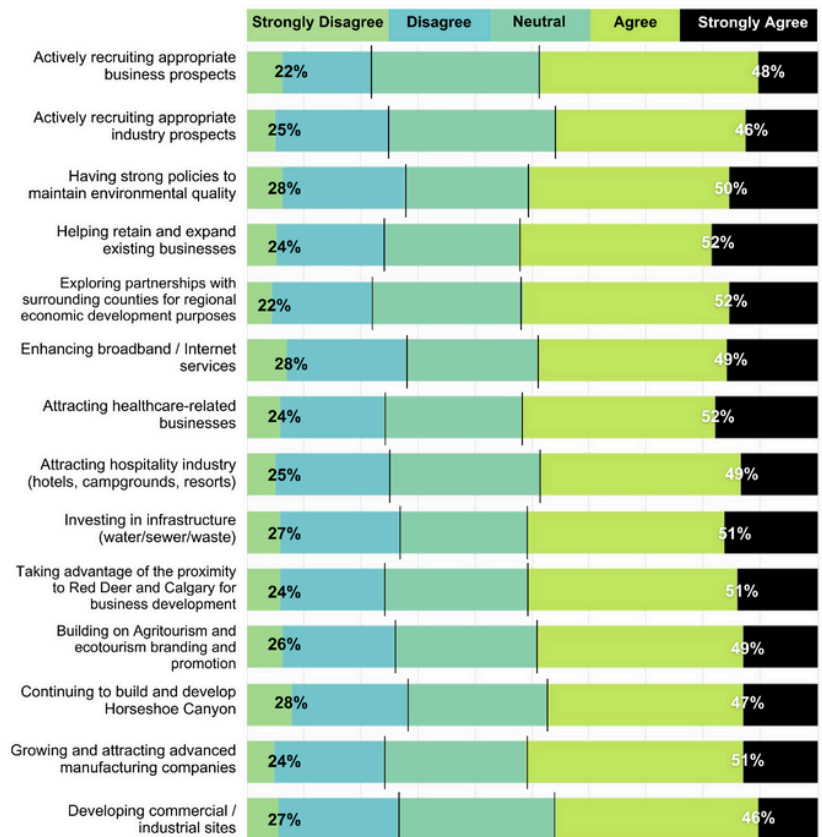


- Majority of residents wanted to see growth to increase municipal revenue to lower the tax burden.

Economic development priorities

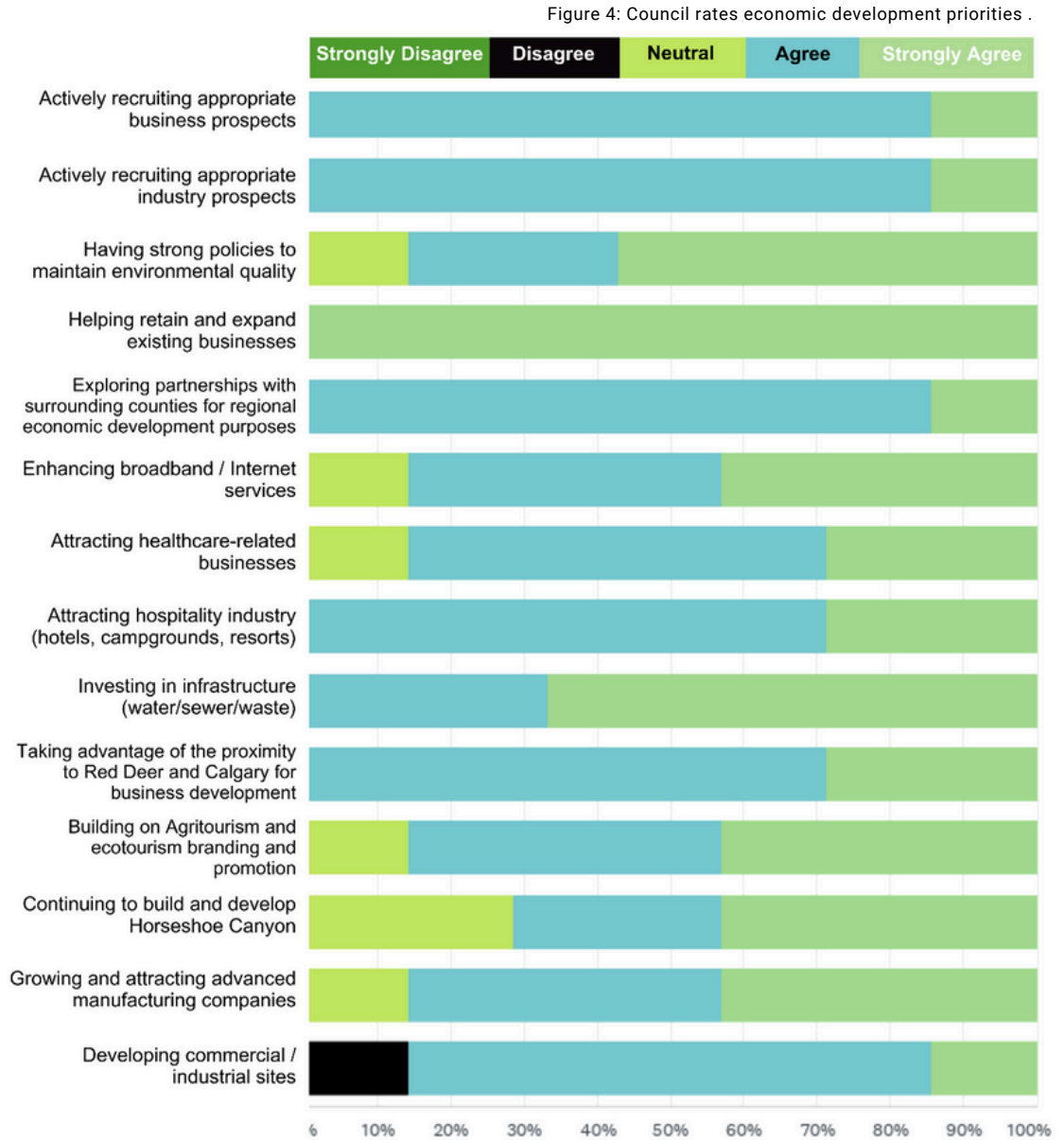
- For the most part, people agree with all the listed priorities.
- Although some people strongly disagree or disagree with them, all priorities have a higher percentage of support

Figure 3: Residents rated economic development priorities



Community Engagement - What we heard (cont'd)

Council was asked to rate economic development priorities.



Council agreed with all priorities with “developing commercial/industrial site” being the only one to receive a disagree. While there is disagreement, the majority were in agreeance/strong agreed on development

Community Engagement - What we heard (cont'd)

Business Retention and Expansion Survey Priorities:

This priority matrix is a list of business factors to focus economic development efforts for Kneehill County. Each priority was calculated using the level of satisfaction and the importance of each item. Factors with lower satisfaction scores and higher importance became the top priorities. Making improvements to the top priorities will have the greatest impact.

Figure 5: Priority Matrix by Performance, importance and rank.

| Factor | Performance | Importance | Priority Rank |
|--|-------------|------------|---------------|
| Availability of funding programs for business and property improvement | 47% | 9.4 | 1 |
| Availability of post secondary programming that aligns with business needs | 51% | 7.8 | 2 |
| Availability of adequate housing | 50% | 7.6 | 3 |
| Availability of skilled labour | 41% | 6.4 | 4 |
| Cellular phone service | 51% | 6.6 | 5 |
| Availability of unskilled labour | 51% | 6.6 | 6 |
| Ability of internet service to support current and future business needs | 64% | 7.4 | 7 |
| Availability of appropriate work-related training | 65% | 6.8 | 8 |
| Availability of health and medical services | 70% | 6.4 | 9 |
| Affordability of commercial space for rent or lease | 72% | 6.2 | 10 |
| Municipal property taxes | 74% | 6.6 | 11 |
| Availability of property for purchase or lease | 74% | 5.8 | 12 |
| Existing road network | 84% | 7.0 | 13 |
| Development/building permit process | 81% | 5.8 | 14 |
| Zoning | 87% | 6.0 | 15 |



Derived Importance & Priority Matrix

Derived Importance

- A statistical calculation of importance
- Far more accurate relative to asking importance
- Calculates the correlation coefficient of business factors with the KPI
- Factors with a high derived importance will have the greatest impact on the KPI

Priority Matrix

- A list of business factors to focus efforts
- Each priority is calculated using the level of satisfaction and the importance of each item (Derived Importance)
- Factors with lower satisfaction scores and higher importance become the top priorities
- Making improvements to the top priorities will have the greatest impact on improving the overall KPI

Example:



Community Engagement - What we heard (cont'd)

Summary of Challenges and Concerns

Below is a summary of challenges and concerns from the various community members within the County.

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Businesses: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Availability of funding programs for business and property improvement• Post secondary programming that aligns with business needs• Availability of adequate housing• Availability of skilled labour |
| The Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finding enough land or space for new or growing businesses• Communication and cooperation with municipality• Availability of employment opportunities |
| Local Organizations: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication and cooperation with municipality• Availability of employment opportunities• Availability to hire qualified employees |
| Council: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Availability to hire qualified employees• Current infrastructure |

Kneehill County Statistics

Kneehill County is a rural municipality in south-central Alberta situated between Red Deer County to the north, Mountain View County to the west, Wheatland County to the south, and Starland County to the east. Primary access to the region is provided via the Highway 21 and Highway 27 corridors, CN Rail and the Three Hills Municipal Airport. Calgary, Red Deer, Stettler, Strathmore and Drumheller can all be accessed with an hour's drive of the County.

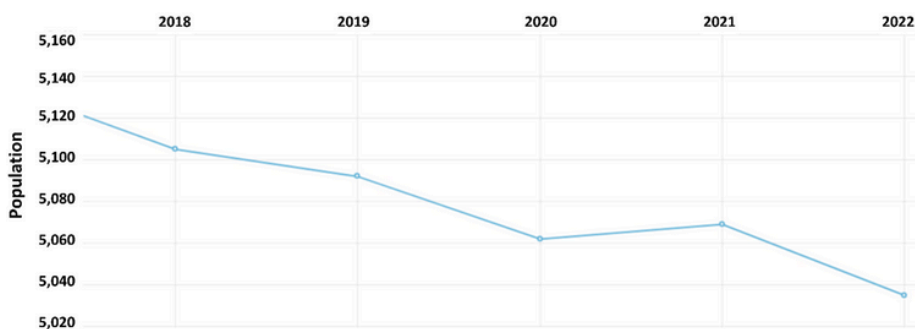
The County has approximately 814,653 acres of land, a population of 5,035 residents and a trade area of over 11,000 people. There are five urban municipalities within its borders, including Acme, Carbon, Linden, Three Hills and Trochu and 4 hamlets (Torrington, Huxley, Swalwell, and Wimborne).[10]

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy with 751 farms and 628,009 acres of cropland[11]. The majority of the land is zoned for agriculture uses, which gives residents the opportunity to enjoy a rural way of life and community. Oil and gas is the other major industry in the region. The eastern border of the County runs along the Red Deer River Valley down to Drumheller in the heart of the Canadian Badlands, making tourism a viable market opportunity.



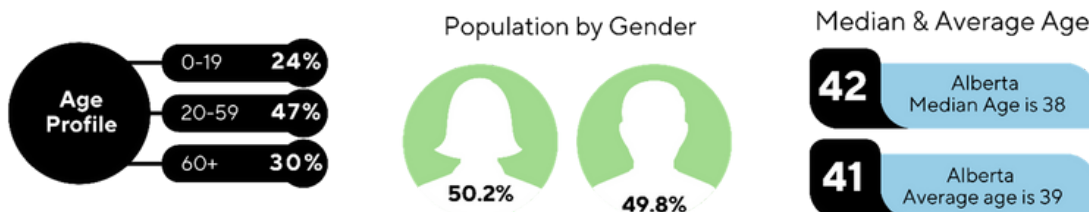
Population

Figure 6: Kneehill Population over 5 years



In 2022, Kneehill County's population was 5,035. The population of Kneehill County declined -0.67% year-over-year, and decreased -1.99% in the last five years.[12]

Figure 7: Kneehill Demographics



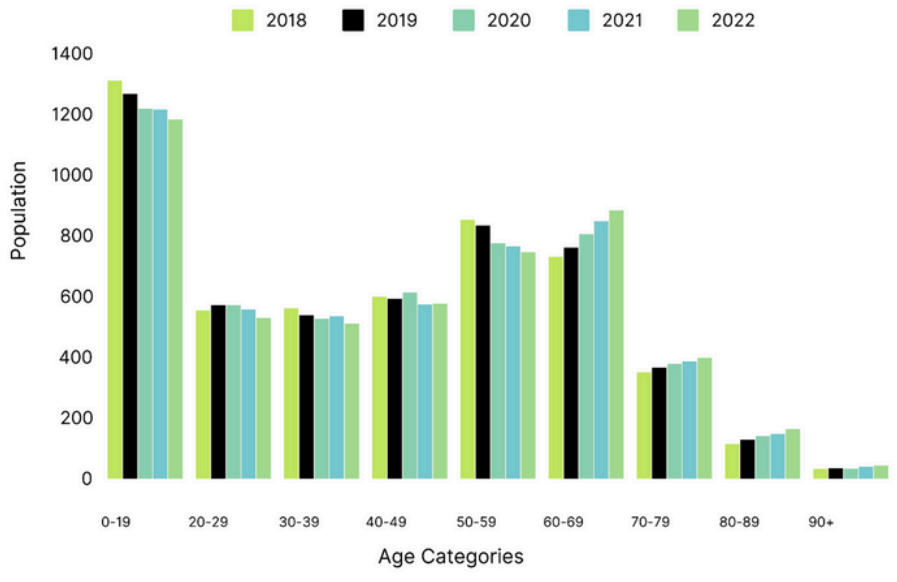
[10] townfolio.co/ab/kneehill-county/overview

[11] regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/kneehill-county

[12] regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/kneehill-county

Population

Figure 8: Population by Age over 5 years



The graph outlines the changes in population by age group over a five-year period from 2018 to 2022. There is a noticeable decline in the population of younger age groups, especially those under the age of 60.[13]

Education

Kneehill County had 1,600 people with a post-secondary degree or other qualification in 2021, declining -8.31% from 1,745 in 2016. The less than high school segment had the largest increase over last five years, increasing 5.20% to 810.[14]



[13] regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/kneehill-county

[14] regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/kneehill-county

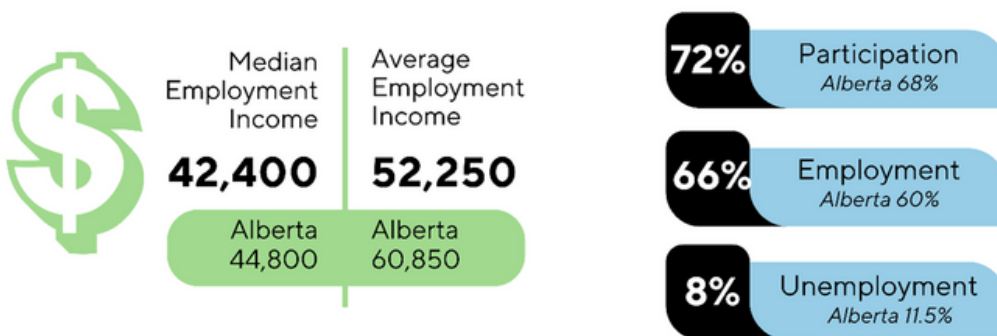
Kneehill County Statistics - Labour Force

Labour Force

Kneehill County is below the median and average of employment income in Alberta. Participation, employment and unemployment rates are higher than those throughout Alberta.

Agriculture and Health Care are the top two (2) industries by labour force within the County with it's top two (2) occupations by labour force in Natural Resources and Trades and Transportation.

Figure 9: Labour Force Statistics



The participation rate refers to the total number of people or individuals who are currently employed or searching for a job. Participation Rate indicates the number of people interested in working, and the number of people, indicating the active economic workforce and country's unemployment, respectively.

Top 5 Industries by Labour Force



Top 5 Occupations by Labour Force



Kneehill County Statistics - Number of Businesses

Number of Businesses

Kneehill County had 22 businesses in 2022 with employees and in 2023 the number grew to 39 with employees. The agriculture, transportation and warehousing and other services remain the top industries with employees within the County.[15]

The following graph shows the number of businesses and industry in Kneehill County from 2014 - 2022 and in 2023 the table below shows an increase in businesses to the County. [16]

Note: Further examination into the number of businesses and industry sectors is required to understand fluctuations.

Figure 10: Number of Kneehill Businesses over the past 10 years

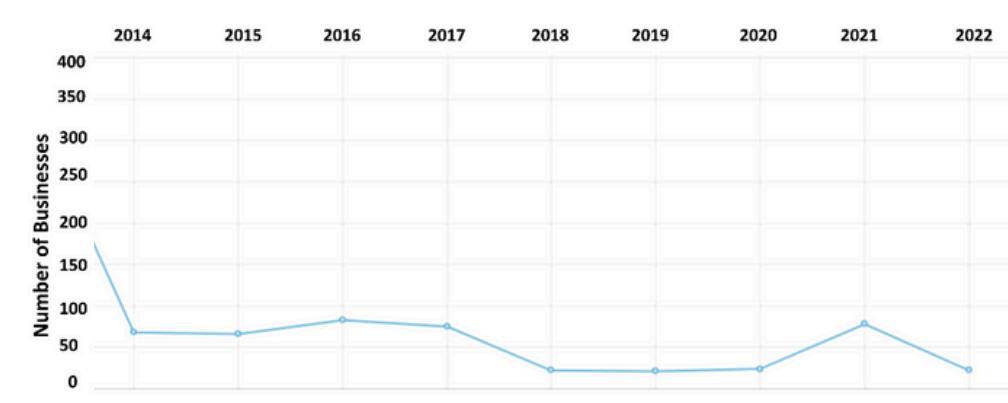


Figure 11: Kneehill County Business Counts by Industry

| | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | Annual Change |
|--|-----------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| | | With employees | With Employees | |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting [11] | 18 | 13 | 19 | 6 |
| Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction [21] | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Utilities [22] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Construction [23] | 7 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Manufacturing [31-33] | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Wholesale trade [41] | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Retail trade [44-45] | 7 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Transportation and warehousing [48-49] | 7 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| Information and cultural industries [51] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Finance and insurance [52] | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Real estate and rental and leasing [53] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Professional, scientific and technical services [54] | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Management of companies and enterprises [55] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services [56] | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Educational services [61] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Health care and social assistance [62] | 7 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Arts, entertainment and recreation [71] | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Accommodation and food services [72] | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Other services (except public administration) [81] | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Public administration [91] | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Unclassified [2] 7 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total All Industries | 70 | 22 | 39 | 17 |

[15] Statistics Canada. Table 33-10-0808-01 Canadian Business Counts, with employees, census metropolitan areas and census subdivisions, December 2023. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3310080801>

[16] regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/kneehill-county

Kneehill County Statistics - Municipal Finances

The 2022 non-residential municipal mill rate in Kneehill County was 16.1%, increasing 6.04% from 15.2 in 2021. The non-residential segment had the largest increase over last year, increasing 6.04% to 16.1.[17]

The significant increase in Kneehill County's municipal mill rate over the past five years is likely due to cover offsets in other municipal expenses throughout the past years.

Figure 12: Kneehill Mill Rate over 5 years

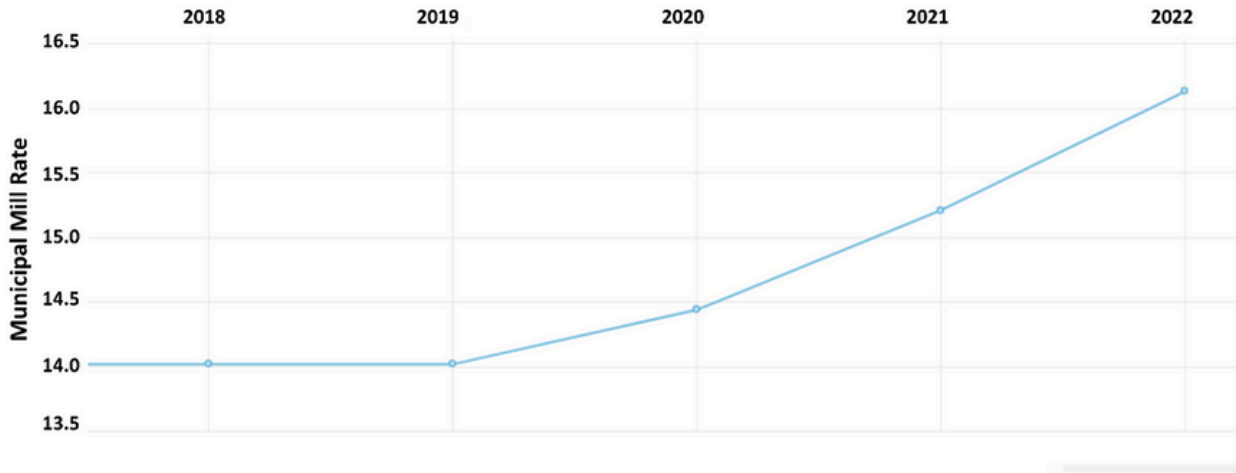


Figure 13: Kneehill Tax Levy over 3-years

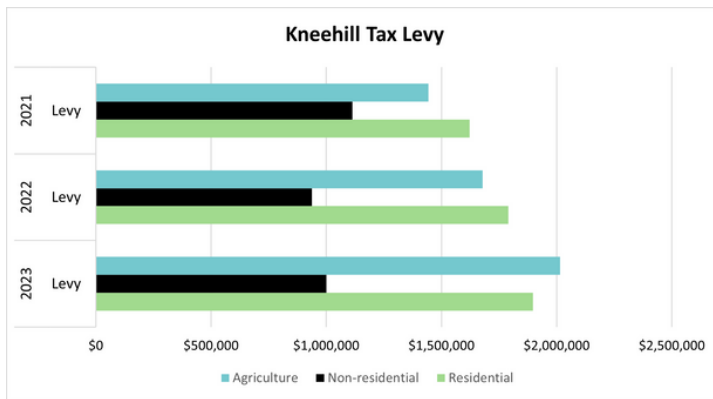
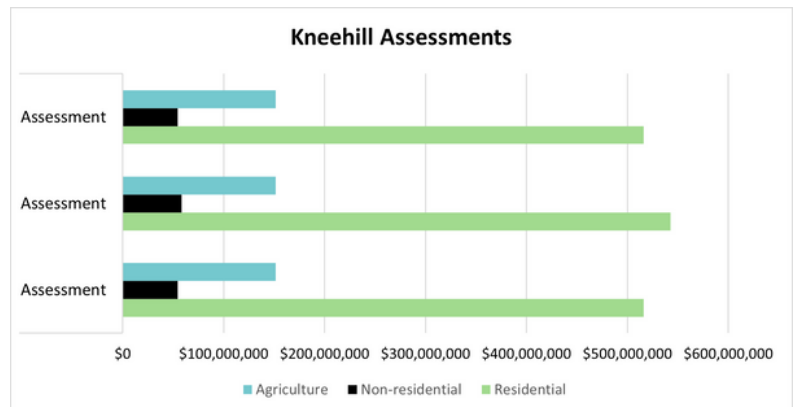


Figure 14: Kneehill Assessments over 3-years



[17] Mill Rate: regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/kneehill-county

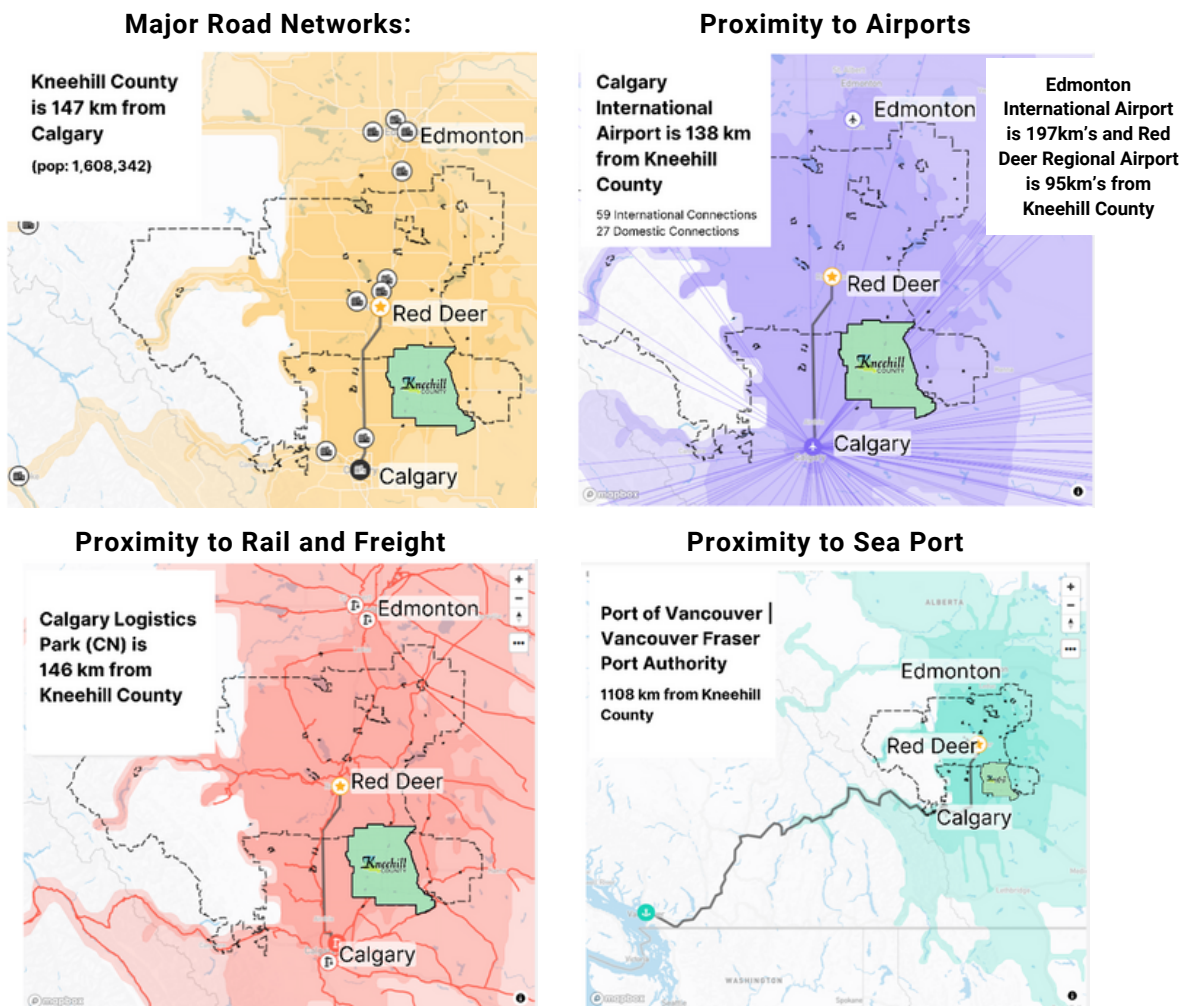
Kneehill County Statistics - Market Access

Market Access

Kneehill County has excellent access to international trade markets. The region is adjacent to the CANAMEX corridor allowing companies to reach millions of consumers within a one-day trip. Served by two continental rail lines, goods are easily moved to ports in Vancouver, Prince Rupert, and Halifax. Central Alberta is served by the Red Deer Regional Airport (95km's) and both Calgary and Edmonton International Airports (197km's). Proximity to Calgary's Intermodal facilities provide efficient access to consumer markets worldwide. Time is estimated from Kneehill County's head office (Three Hills) to Calgary Airport – 1 hour 16 mins, 138 kms.[18]

The following maps show Kneehill's proximity to major road networks, airports, rail and freight, seaports, as well as the broadband network.

Figure 15: Market Access Maps

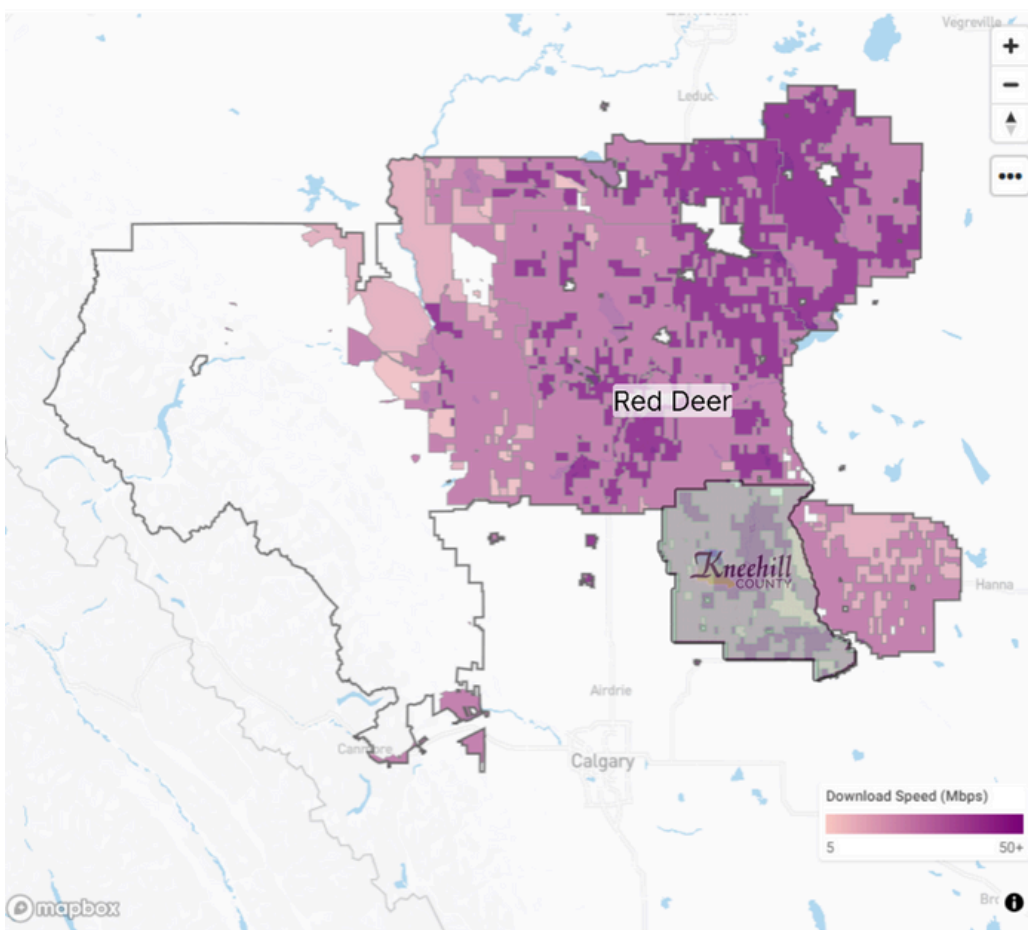


[18] Localintel – OAG Aviation Worldwide Limited, 2022 - 2023, Homeland Infrastructure Foundation – Level Data (HIFLD) - Railroads published in 2023 and Localintel Labs – Seaports, published in 2020

Broadband Network

Kneehill County's and Central Alberta's broadband access. [20]

Figure 16: Broadband Network



[20] Open Canada National Broadband Data, published in 2023

Economic Trends

Understanding economic trends is essential to navigating current and future municipal challenges. This data provides a comprehensive overview of Alberta's economic landscape, highlighting key indicators and trends that shape our province's economy. By examining these trends, Kneehill County can uncover opportunities for growth, innovation, and strategic investment. From the impacts of technology on economic development to the macroeconomic variables influencing market dynamics, this analysis offers valuable insights for planning and development efforts to ensure the County will thrive well into the future.

Kneehill County's close proximity to Calgary provides an opportunity to capitalize on Calgary's record population growth. Home to over 1.6 million people, Calgary is the 4th largest city in Canada and has experienced the largest population growth among major cities in the country for the last ten years. [21] Record population along with strong commodity prices and consumer spending are expected to position Alberta well in the year ahead. Alberta is expected to navigate 2024 relatively well despite global economic headwinds.

The province's economic outlook is more favorable compared to other regions due to its strategic positioning and resource management. [22] Alberta retains its status as Canada's least indebted province. Its net debt-to-GDP ratio is projected to fall, giving it a financial advantage over other provinces facing higher debt levels. [23] While there are signs of a slowdown due to weakening global demand for key commodities, Alberta's economy is still better positioned compared to other regions that are more severely affected by the global economic downturn. [24] Despite the challenges, Alberta's economic decline is expected to be milder.

The overall Canadian GDP showed a slight decrease, but Alberta's strategic economic measures help mitigate some of these adverse effects. [25] While expecting slowed growth, Alberta is comparatively more resilient than others across Canada with diversification across the energy sector, higher investment trends and the influx of migrants. [26]

Emerging strengths in delivering innovation in oil and gas, electricity, food and agriculture, are improving the competitiveness of Alberta's leading economic sectors and companies while exporting solutions to the world.

[21] calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com/insights/demographics

[22] calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com/newsroom/2024-economic-outlook-calgary-set-to-navigate

[23] economics.td.com/provincial-economic-forecast

[24] thoughtleadership.rbc.com/the-canadian-economic-slowdown-is-not-over

[25] thoughtleadership.rbc.com/canadas-economic-engine-is-gearing-down

[26] calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com

Economic Trends (cont'd)

Agri-Business:

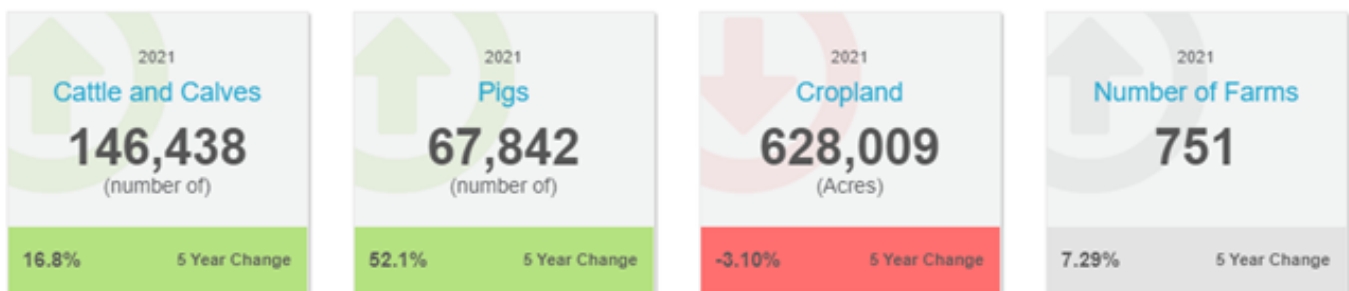
Agribusiness consists of all farming and farming-related commercial activities, across the Agribusiness Value Chain, from sourcing through sale. Alberta's agricultural sector is foundational to the province's economy – contributing \$10.2 billion in GDP in 2022 and employing 69,000 Albertans. The province offers high-quality primary products and is the third largest exporter of agri-food products in Canada.[27] Alberta's agricultural sector is foundational to the province's economy – contributing \$10.2 billion in GDP in 2022 and employing 69,000 Albertans. The province offers high-quality primary products and is the third largest exporter of agri-food products in Canada.[28]

Alberta is a leading center for sustainable farmland practices and food production, catering to the global demand for food manufacturing exports. Its agricultural sector thrives on traditional farming methods and innovations such as biomass utilization, vertical farming, and alternative protein operations. These innovative practices support the agribusiness value chain, contributing to GDP by increasing the efficiency and output of the sector. Alberta offers unmatched access to North American and international markets, through being strategically located on the CANAMEX Corridor and accessible via Canadian Pacific Railways and three international airports. Its expansive agricultural land supports farming and industrial development.[29]

Meat product manufacturing accounts for over half of Alberta's food manufacturing. Grain and oilseed manufacturing is the second largest component of Alberta's food manufacturing sales. Alberta produced 33% of Canadian wheat, 29.9% of Canadian canola and 53.9% of the nation's barley (2022).[30]

Kneehill is located at the centre of a high-volume grain and beef production area. The region is ideally situated to grow its footprint in agricultural product processing. Based on the raw materials produced in the region, sophisticated food or plant processing operations are identified as a strong growth sector (including specialized food, products, composites, or medicines/supplements).[31]

Figure 17: Agricultural Statistics



[27] investalberta.ca/agriculture

[28] investalberta.ca/agriculture

[29] investalberta.ca/agriculture

[30] investalberta.ca/agriculture

[31] [Kneehillcounty.com](https://kneehillcounty.com)

Economic Trends (cont'd)

The following agriculture statistics are taken from the Alberta Regional Dashboard[32]:

- Kneehill County had 628,009 acres of cropland in 2021, declining -3.10% from 648,129 acres in 2016. The oats segment had the largest increase over last five years, increasing 20.4% to 5,066 acres.
- Kneehill County had 751 farms in 2021, greatly increasing 7.29% from 700 in 2016. Kneehill County's growth rate ranks 15th provincially.
- Kneehill County cattle and calve population was 146,438 in 2021, the 8th highest in the province. The cattle and calve population for Kneehill County increased 16.8% in the last five years.
- Kneehill County had a pig population of 67,842 in 2021, the 8th highest in the province. The number of pigs in Kneehill County greatly increased 52.1% in the last five years.

Figure 18: Kneehill Agriculture Statistics[32]



Number of Farms
751



Cattle & Calves
146,438



Number of Pigs
67,842



\$12.4 billion

Alberta's total exports of primary and processed agricultural and food products in 2020



40% of Canada's total

Alberta leads the nation in cattle and calf inventory



22 facilities

Alberta has over 22 research and innovation facilities specializing in crops and cereals, poultry, swine and other meats, agronomy, biomaterials and food safety

[32] regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/kneehill-county

Economic Trends (cont'd)

Ag-tech & Agriculture are a cleantech subsector with significant potential to attract investment, talent and generate startup companies. Setting a net-zero pathway in Alberta aligned with global climate targets could generate almost 170,000 jobs in the cleantech sector and contribute \$61 billion to provincial GDP by 2050.[33]

Kneehill County is well-positioned to attract the ag-tech and agriculture cleantech subsectors. The County's strong agricultural heritage provides a solid foundation for innovation, supported by ample land and high-quality soil ideal for both traditional and modern farming practices. Proximity to research institutions and universities fosters collaboration and R&D opportunities, while the region's strategic location ensures excellent connectivity and access to larger markets. By leveraging these strengths, Kneehill County can effectively attract investment, talent, and startups in the ag-tech and agriculture cleantech sectors, contributing to economic diversification and sustainable development.

Post-secondary institutions around the region are educating the next generation of agricultural leaders. Schools offering specialized training in horticulture, food safety and quality, livestock genetics, crop science and veterinary sciences contribute to a vibrant talent base. These research and training institutions have demonstrated an interest in collaboration and strengthening the training offerings of the region and are home to promising applied research facilities like the Smart Farm at Olds College of Agriculture & Technology.[34] Through a combination of expertise, specialized facilities, product development, applied research, and interim processing, the Food Processing Development Centre (FPDC), located in Leduc, fosters growth and commercialization of food, beverage and ingredient manufacturing companies. Working with industry stakeholders and companies of all sizes, the FPDC helps build Alberta value-added processing capacity and supports industry as it pursues new and existing opportunities.[35] The region's agricultural training institutions also help to create a potential workforce with relevant knowledge and training in agriculture.

Alberta has introduced the Agri-Processing Investment Tax Credit (APITC) which provides a 12% non-refundable tax when corporations invest \$10 million or more in a project to build or expand a value-added agri-processing facility in Alberta. Up to \$175 million in tax credits is available for each project.

This tax credit is making the province a preferred destination for large scale projects, building on the competitive advantages and reasons why agri-processing companies invest in Alberta.[36]

[33] calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com/assets/Reports/Sectors/Energy-Environment/CED-2021_Calgary-Energy-Transition-Study-Flatsheet.pdf

[34] CalgaryEconomicDevelopment.com

[35] alberta.ca/services-and-facilities

[36] alberta.ca/alberta-agri-processing-investment-tax-credit



Economic Trends (cont'd)

Tourism:

Kneehill County is home to the Horseshoe Canyon where visitors can witness its unique and rugged landscape of the Badlands. The area has been identified as a high growth potential region as outlined in the Canadian Badlands Discovery Report 2023. Through this plan, the goal is to grow and diversify the economy, support jobs, preserve cultures, foster innovation, conserve the environment, and improve resident quality of life.

Alberta's visitor economy recovered to pre-pandemic levels in 2022 and Travel Alberta has moved beyond recovery and is now on the path to resilience and high growth. The Alberta government is investing in tourism across the province through Travel Alberta's Tourism Investment Program and through the development of the 10 tourism development zones.[37]

Figure 19: 2022 Travel Alberta Tourism Spend



The Canadian Badlands zone, within Kneehill County, is plentiful of scenic vistas, historical discoveries, arts and culture, agriculture and culinary experiences, soft adventure and film tourism opportunities. Kneehill County's Horseshoe Canyon has strong potential to be a prime anchor for the zone and sought by many for its scenic vistas and is home to a strong agricultural sector making farm visits and culinary a prime opportunity for growth. Kneehill County is also host to arts and culture, unique accommodations, strong historical roots and is home to many well-known films, music and documentary productions.

Every year, over 400,000 visitors visit the Canyon and 38% of Albertans have indicated they would be likely to travel to the Badlands and that 26% of them are most likely to go hiking while 24% are most likely to go camping. Fifty-three percent of Alberta's population lives within a 3-hour drive of Kneehill County. Over 69,000 Albertans reside within a one-hour drive and nearly 1.8 million Albertans are within a 2-hour drive.

Given the strong assets in the County and region, Travel Alberta is committed to supporting investments to attract high-value travelers by increasing accommodations, increasing year-round product offerings and package and itinerary development. With the supports of Travel Alberta, surrounding tourism regions, businesses and government, Horseshoe Canyon is well position to become a "signature must-experience gateway to the Canadian Badlands" by 2029 as outlined in the Horseshoe Canyon Master Plan.

[37] Travel Alberta Badlands Tourism Destination Zone Discovery Report 2023:
<https://industry.travelalberta.com/research/tourism-development-zone-reports/Canadian-Badlands>

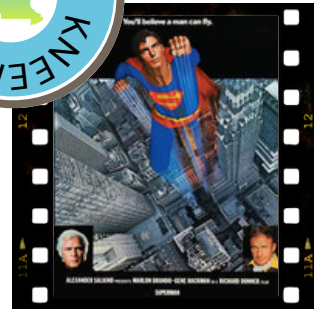
Tourism (cont'd):

Wellness tourism is on the rise with opportunities to create and promote new experiences within the County. The wellness tourism industry is expecting to reach a global value of \$1.4 trillion by 2027. On average, international wellness travelers spent 41 per cent more than typical international travelers in 2022 [38]. Outdoor adventures (walking and trekking tours), nature and conservation-based travel as well as cultural travel are trending with travelers looking more at shoulder season travel versus peak season.

Alberta has set the stage for some of the most beloved and successful films in history. More than 100 films and television shows have been shot in Alberta. This vibrant and growing made-in-Alberta film industry provides significant opportunities to promote travel and investment in the province. The film industry contributes hundreds of millions annually to Alberta's economy through job creation, tourism, hotel bookings, spending at local restaurants and attractions, vehicle rentals, and more. Kneehill County has an opportunity to explore this sector, with its previous filming of Superman III, Lost in Space and the Heartland series, as examples.

The province supports this industry through the Film and Television Tax Credit (FTTC), which offers a refundable Alberta tax credit (22% or 30%) certificate on eligible Alberta production and labour costs to corporations that produce films, television series and other eligible screen-based productions in the province.[39]

**Kneehill County is home to a
thriving film production
destination
60+ movies, television and music
video productions**

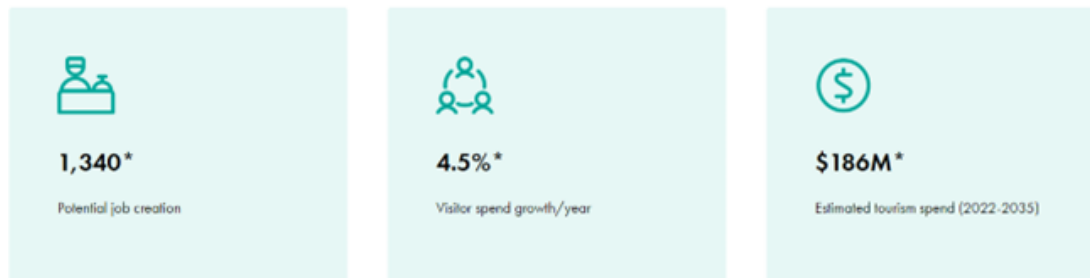


[38] TravelAlberta.com: <https://industry.travelalberta.com/posts/articles/the-future-is-calm-exploring-the-wellness-tourism-industry>

[39] Government of Alberta Film and Tax Credit: <https://www.alberta.ca/film-television-tax-credit>

Tourism (cont'd):

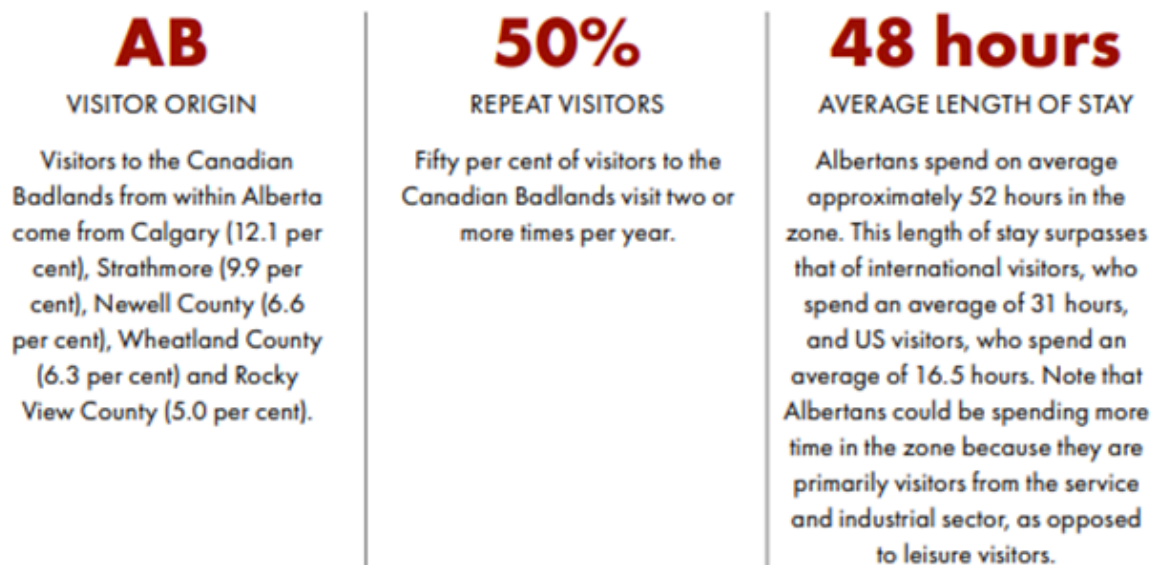
Figure 20: 10-year potential of the Canadian Badlands TDZ [40]



*These figures represent the additional growth potential for the zone under the TDZ initiative.

Figure 21: 2019 Visitors to the Canadian Badlands TDZ

According to Travel Alberta's anonymized mobile data, in 2019, 98.1 per cent of visitors to the Canadian Badlands TDZ were Canadians, while only 1.6 per cent of visitors hailed from the US. At the provincial level, Albertans made up approximately 88 per cent of the visitors, followed by residents of Saskatchewan at just under five per cent, British Columbia at two per cent and Manitoba and Ontario at 1.4 and 1.3 per cent, respectively. In comparison to other TDZs, this zone sees relatively diverse visitation from across Canada.



[40] TravelAlberta.com: <https://industry.travelalberta.com/posts/articles/the-future-is-calm-exploring-the-wellness-tourism-industry>

Tourism (cont'd):

Figure 22: Travel Alberta Traveler Profiles[41]

Demand: International Travellers

While the zone's existing inventory of products and experiences that are valued by international visitors is minimal, the Canadian Badlands are well-positioned to attract — and capitalize on — an increase in tourism from international markets. There is an opportunity to create a host of top "trip anchors" (activities a visitor would centre their trips around) targeting visitors from the US and around the world. Immersive products, experiences, packages and itinerary options would all be valuable additions to this TDZ's suite of assets.

Natural attractions and historical/archeological/world heritage sites are the

Badlands trip anchors with the greatest short-term potential to be developed into immersive or extended experiences.

Natural attractions rank second as trip anchors favoured across all international markets (especially Japan and France). The Canadian Badlands' unique landscape, in which hoodoos and coulees combine with wide open skies and river access, provides visitors with views and experiences like no other in Canada. Currently, only two companies provide guided landscape tours within the zone. An expansion of guided tour offerings could entice visitors who are unaware of the Canadian Badlands' natural wonders.

Historical, archaeological or world heritage sites are the seventh most popular trip anchors worldwide. The Canadian Badlands is home to three extraordinary sites:

- The Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology,
- Atlas Coal Mine National Historic Site
- Dinosaur Provincial Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site)

These signature assets already drive demand for international visitation to the Badlands.

[Source: Global Tourism Watch, 2021]

Demand: Alberta's Target Travellers

Travel Alberta has identified "Curious Adventurers" and "Hotspot Hunters" as the high-value travellers likely to spend more per visit, yield the highest return on investment, and contribute the most to the province's economic growth. Tourism businesses, communities and associations can attract these valuable visitors by tailoring products and experiences to their unique travel styles.



Dinosaur Provincial Park

For Curious Adventurers, travel is about getting a different perspective on the world. Curious Adventurers will be drawn to the paleontological history of the Drumheller Valley and Dinosaur Provincial Park's UNESCO status. Immersive guided programs on geology, history, palaeontology and Indigenous studies would give visitors a more nuanced sense of the Badlands. There is also the opportunity to attract educational and international student travel to this zone.



Hoodoos Trail, Drumheller Valley

For Hotspot Hunters, travel is about achievement and accomplishments. They want to visit the top attractions, participate in unique experiences, and connect with local experts. These travellers are also likely to appreciate unique accommodations. Experiences for Hotspot Hunters should provide travellers with opportunities to earn a sense of accomplishment — for instance, by finding a dinosaur bone. Photography and social media content opportunities will allow for this audience to engage with the landscapes. Products should also support younger families in this group. Development of unique accommodation options would further support attracting these travellers to the zone.



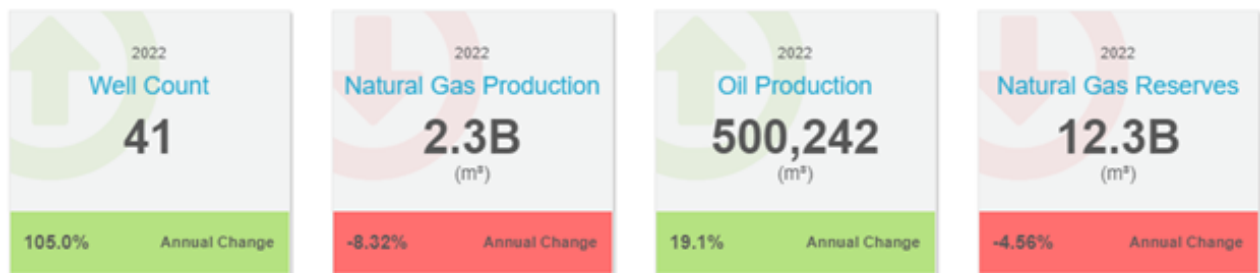
[40] TravelAlberta.com: <https://industry.travelalberta.com/posts/articles/the-future-is-calm-exploring-the-wellness-tourism-industry>

Economic Trends (cont'd)

Energy:

Alberta's energy sector is recovering and is forecasted to grow over the next three years. Alberta is Canada's largest oil and natural gas producer, home to roughly 3/4 of Canada's crude oil and natural gas production and has the 3rd largest crude oil reserves in the world. Oil and natural gas development supports 30% of all economic activity in the province, with over 415,000 jobs, 20,000 businesses, and generates over \$4.8 billion in royalties. Alberta's Natural Gas Vision and Strategy envisions Alberta as a global supplier of clean, responsibly sourced natural gas and related products.

Figure 23: Kneehill Energy Statistics



Kneehill County produced 2.3 billion m³ of natural gas in 2022, the 10th highest in the province. Natural gas production declined -8.32% year-over-year, and decreased -11.3% in the last five years. The County had 12.3 billion m³ of natural gas reserves in 2022, the 10th highest in the province. Natural gas reserves declined -4.56% year-over-year, and decreased -7.88% in the last five years.[41]



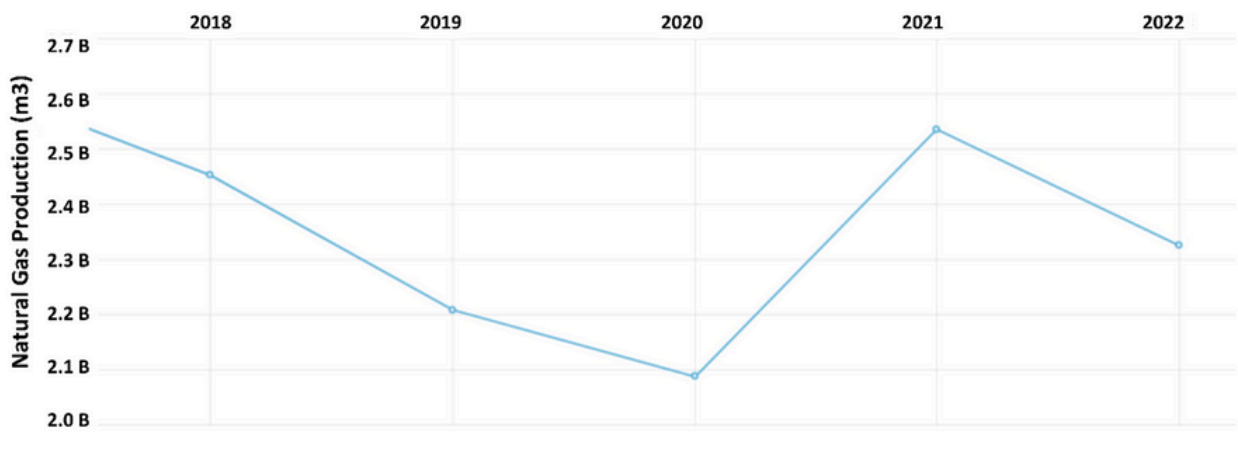
[41] regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/kneehill-county

Economic Trends (cont'd)

Energy (cont'd):

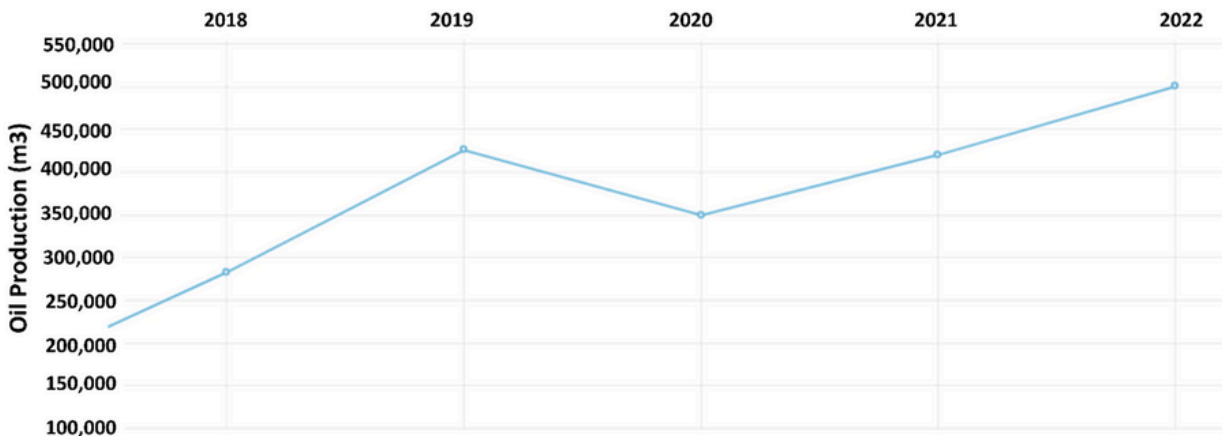
Kneehill County produced 500,242 m³ of oil in 2022. Oil production increased 19.1% year-over-year, and increased 221.4% in the last five years. Alberta produces approximately three-quarters of Canada's crude oil and natural gas, holding the third largest crude oil reserves in the world. In 2022, the energy sector contributed approximately \$135 billion Canadian to Alberta's GDP.[42]

Figure 24: Kneehill Natural Gas Production over 5-years



There were 41 wells in 2022, which increased 105.0% year-over-year, and increased 64.0% in the last five years.

Figure 25: Kneehill Oil Production over 5-years



The region has an above average concentration of businesses in mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction compared to the provincial average.[43] Kneehill County is strategically located in the Western Canadian Sedimentary Basin which contains one of the world's largest reserves of conventional oil and natural gas.[44]

There has been over \$1.5 billion in capital expenditure allocated to approved projects slated for construction between 2019 to 2022 in Alberta.[45] The transition to cleaner energy and innovation within the energy sector, including in Kneehill County, is projected to create up to 170,000 jobs and contribute \$61 billion to Alberta's GDP by 2050.[46] Innovation in the energy industry is a key opportunity for the Province and Kneehill County.

[42] [statista.com/statistics/916986/gdp-of-canada-by-energy-sector-by-province](https://www.statista.com/statistics/916986/gdp-of-canada-by-energy-sector-by-province)

[43] Kneehill County Base Analysis and Sector Report

[44] Kneehill County Energy Profile

[45] calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com/sectors/energy-environment

[46] calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com/newsroom/alberta-energy-transition-study-a-61b-opportunity

4.3 Economic Trends (cont'd)

Manufacturing and Logistics:

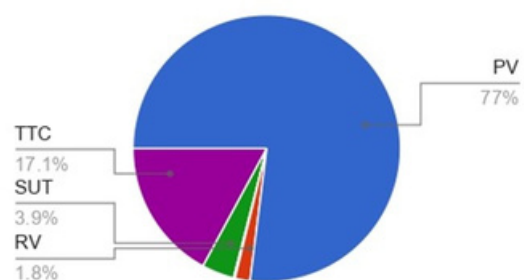
Kneehill County and central Alberta have experienced notable growth in the manufacturing sector (a result of increased employment, higher GDP contributions, substantial investments, and enhanced export activity in the sector). The County's strategic location provides easy access to transportation routes, making it an attractive destination for manufacturing businesses[47]. The manufacturing sector in Alberta contributed \$23.4 billion, accounting for 8% of the province's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021, with one in twenty workers employed in this sector[48]. Additionally, manufacturing sales in Alberta increased by 1.0% from February 2023 to February 2024, reaching a total value of \$8.8 billion.[49]

This positive trend highlights the overall upward momentum in the manufacturing sector within the region. The sector's expansion is fueled by diverse sub-industries, including machine manufacturing and agri-processing[50]. According to the Kneehill County Economic Base Analysis and Sector Report, machine manufacturing and metal fabrication are significant subsectors driving this growth. In particular, fabricated metal product manufacturing, including forging, stamping, forming, turning, and joining activities, is prominent. With a focus on innovation and technology, local manufacturers are enhancing productivity and product quality, contributing to the region's economic vitality.

As of the latest data, the manufacturing industry accounted for 5.9% of total employment in Alberta in 2020 with 125,800 jobs[51]. Occupations in manufacturing and utilities in Kneehill County accounted for 3.1% of the employed labour force.[51] Current research in manufacturing is dated, therefore the County will need to reexamine this sector in more detail to determine its potential moving forward.

The logistics sector in Kneehill County and central Alberta has potential given the area's robust transportation infrastructure and proximity to major markets[52]. This sector supports other industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, and energy, contributing to overall economic vitality. Highway traffic counts at the intersection of highways 21 and 27 have increased over 10 years the total weighted average annual daily traffic up to 2,990 in 2023 from 2,410 in 2014. 77% were passenger vehicles, 17.1% tractor trailer units, 3.9% single unit trucks, and 1.8% recreation vehicles.[53]

Figure 26: Alberta Highway 21 & 27 Traffic Count
Vehicle Classifications



[47, 48, 49, 50] Kneehill County Competitive Land Analysis

[51] Alberta Manufacturing Industry Profile 2020 - alberta.ca

[52] www.kneehill.ca

[53] transportation.alberta.ca/mapping

Economic Trends (cont'd)

Manufacturing and Logistics (cont'd):

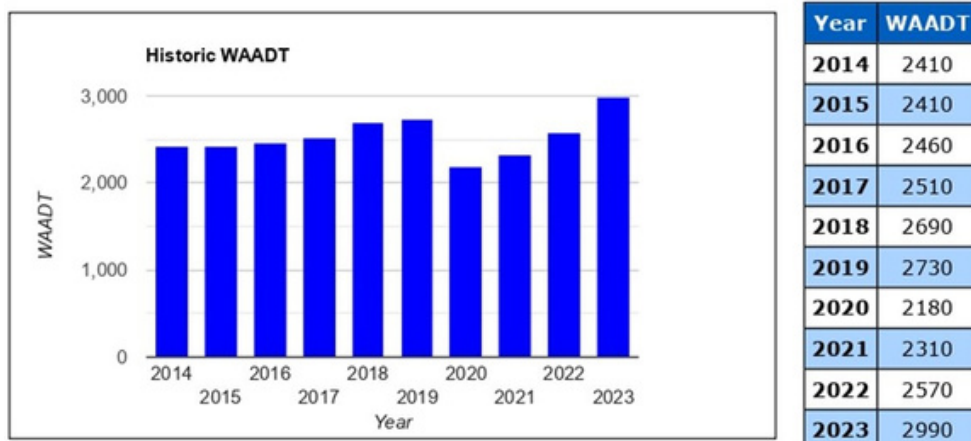
Businesses benefit from efficient access to railways, highways, and airports, facilitating the movement of goods across the province and beyond. Additionally, the County's favorable business environment encourages investment in logistics and distribution facilities, driving job creation and economic growth.[54]

The Kneehill County Economic Base Analysis and Sector Report states that this growth is fueled by the rise of rural logistics, including online shopping and fulfillment centers, catering to the evolving consumer demands. The sector's importance is underscored by its vital role in supporting other industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, and energy.

The truck transportation sector (NAICS 484) contributes approximately \$3.52 billion to the province's GDP, accounting for just over 1.1% of total GDP in Alberta.[55] Total employment in the trucking and logistics sector in Alberta has averaged 95,300 workers over the past decade, accounting for 4.3% of employment in the province. Alberta accounts for 14.3% of employment in trucking and logistics across Canada.[56]

As the manufacturing and logistics sectors continue to evolve, there are emerging opportunities for collaboration and innovation. Kneehill County's Economic Base Analysis highlights the potential for synergies between manufacturing and other key sectors, such as energy and tourism. By leveraging these connections, businesses can capitalize on supply chain efficiencies and market diversification, strengthening the region's competitive advantage.

Figure 27: Historic Weighted Annual Average Daily Traffic [57]



WAADT stands for Weighted Annual Average Daily Traffic. It represents the average daily two-way traffic volume for a section of highway expressed as vehicles per day for the period of January 1 to December 31 (365 or 366 days).

[54] Kneehill County Competitive Land Analysis

[55] Statistics Canada. Table 36-10-0402-01 Gross domestic product (GDP) at basic prices, by industry, provinces and territories

[56] Trucking HR Canada, Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom data request, 2022

[57] transportation.alberta.ca/mapping

Manufacturing and Logistics (cont'd):

To sustain the momentum in manufacturing and logistics, targeted investment and support initiatives are crucial. Fostering an environment conducive to business growth would ensure that Kneehill County remains a dynamic hub for manufacturing and logistics activities.

The Competitive Land Analysis reveals ample opportunities for investment and development in manufacturing and logistics-related activities. Types of industries poised for growth include large-scale food processing, fabrication, warehousing, transportation, and industrial activities. Government incentives, supportive infrastructure, and access to skilled labor further enhance the region's attractiveness for businesses seeking to establish or expand their manufacturing and logistics operations.

The manufacturing sector's focus on innovation and technology enhances productivity and product quality, further contributing to GDP. Sub-industries such as machine manufacturing, metal fabrication, and agri-processing are key drivers of this growth.[58] Ample opportunities for investment and development in manufacturing and logistics-related activities exist. Government incentives, supportive infrastructure, and access to skilled labor enhance the region's attractiveness for businesses, promoting further economic growth.

[58] economicdashboard.alberta.ca/topics/gdp/

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

A SWOT analysis is a compilation of the results from the document review, community engagement and the statistical analysis. The SWOT is a practice of exploring and interpreting Kneehill County's internal and external environment to better understand the trends and drivers of change and how they will impact Kneehill County. It also provides valuable information that helps in making decisions and creating a meaningful analysis of the potential economic development opportunities available for the County.

STRENGTHS

- Alberta has the lowest tax rate for businesses in Canada
- Alberta saw an overall increase in total exports in past year, with specific growth in construction, education services, arts, entertainment and recreation sectors
- Strong community agricultural culture and heritage
- County boasts 814,653 acres of land and 628,009 acres of cropland
- Kneehill is located at the centre of a high-volume grain and beef production area
- Proximity to multiple major urban centres (Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Olds, Drumheller)
- Strategic access to Canamex corridor and major transportation routes (Highway, rail, airport (Calgary Edmonton, Red Deer and local airports in Three Hills and Beiseker)
- Proximity to Calgary's Intermodal facilities and international trade markets
- The region has an above average concentration of businesses in mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction compared to the provincial average
- Oil production increased 19.1% in 2022 and total well counts increased 105% in 2022
- Healthcare top employment
- Strong entrepreneur support system within the region (i.e. Community Futures Wild Rose, CAEP, Kneehill Adult Learning) and strong social support system withing the region (i.e. FCSS)
- Numerous economic development documents and studies previously completed
- Municipal Development Plan update and Horseshoe Canyon Master Plans are currently under revision
- Access to regional post-secondary institutions (Olds, Red Deer Polytechnic, Calgary, Edmonton, Lloydminster)
- Proximity to Leduc Food Processing Development Centre
- 53% of Albertans reside within a 3-hour drive, approximately 1.8 million reside within 2 hours and 69,000 reside within 1-hour drive of Kneehill County
- Horseshoe Canyon is one of the best places to see the unique and rugged landscape of the badlands (over 400,000 visitors stop to enjoy the view)
- Existing website with information pertinent to business retention and expansion
- Reasonably affordable in comparison to larger communities and closer to the city
- Representation on the Central Alberta Economic Partnership and on the Community Futures Wild Rose board of directors.
- Interest by land owners to rezone land.

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of diversity of businesses given the strong agricultural community leaving the community vulnerable to sudden changes in agriculture
- Inconsistent communication and ability to engage with businesses with no CRM or Business License to assist with business retention, emergency management or disaster recovery. Current infrastructure needs updating to support growth (broadband, utilities)
- Little awareness and education on economic development opportunities and potential
- Communication and cooperation with municipality
- Minimal economic development municipal budget to support policy framework (social, economic, environment, incentives)
- No shovel ready lands and maps to identify green and brownfield developments to develop to allow for business expansion and attraction opportunities.
- Perception of Council not involving community in decision-making
- Diminishing employment opportunities and talent
- Economic development knowledge and awareness throughout the community and leadership
- Declining population, industry workforce and Business counts

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

OPPORTUNITIES

- Explore agricultural processing and ag-tech innovation opportunities
- Build agri-tourism activities on existing farm operations and create a network of complementary attractions
- Take advantage of provincial support to grow tourism in the Canadian Badlands and Travel Drumheller
- Continue engagement with Drumheller and Travel Alberta to develop and promote the County's tourism assets through the destination zones to attract new markets
- Review recommendations from the Horseshoe Canyon Master Plan and adopt plans as directed by Council
- Revisit Kneehill County Tourism & Recreation Master Plan and incorporate the recommendations (including, but not limited to: Develop tourism and recreation infrastructure; and develop a tourism marketing strategy
- Expand current success in the film industry
- Seek renewable energy opportunities and innovation within the energy sector. Central Alberta is one of Canada's sunniest and windiest places, making it the ideal location for renewable energy projects
- Leverage logistics networks to export high value, easily transportable agri-food goods
- Target growth in hamlets
- There is a need for one single comprehensive map of the entire County
- Upgrade and invest municipal infrastructure
- Participate in an investment readiness process to understand the land requirements and infrastructure upgrades necessary to attract and expand desired markets. Complete an update Competitive Land Analysis to reflect new MDP
- Take advantage of CAEP's initiatives
- Access regional data available on the CAEP website for investment attraction and retention
- Participate in CAEP's upcoming sector committees to amplify Kneehill's presence within the central Alberta region
- Take advantage of Community Future Wild Rose programs and initiatives
- Promote access to Community Future's access to capital and training programs
- Utilize Community Future's incentives through the Community Business Investment Program
- Promote and encourage youth to become entrepreneurs through Community Future's YETI program

THREATS

- Resident's desire to maintain agricultural heritage
- Concern over development having negative impact on agriculture
- Opposition from residents on renewable energy projects
- Minimal lack of funding programs for business and property improvements
- Available housing shortage
- Availability of skilled labour
- Availability of employment opportunities to keep young people
- Lack of broadband/fibre optics internet access
- Proactive and forward-thinking neighbouring municipalities may be more attractive to investors



5

Vision

Summarizing the responses from the community engagement, the vision for Kneehill County's future should involve a balance between economic growth, environmental sustainability, and community well-being.

Kneehill County Economic Development Vision Statement:

Kneehill County is a diverse and thriving community, celebrating economic prosperity while maintaining the County's rural way of life and achieving a balance between economic growth, environmental sustainability, and community well-being.



6

Strategic Priorities

The following **four (4) strategic priorities** and ten (10) goals focus on providing initiatives necessary to prepare Kneehill County for investment. These initiatives are aimed at strengthening the community and economy between 2024 – 2027. Kneehill’s Municipal Development Plan is expected to be completed in Summer 2024 which may potentially impact the County’s Economic Development, therefore these priorities may be revised to align with the new governing documents.

- o 1** **Build Leadership Capacity**
- o 2** **Strengthen Existing Businesses**
- o 3** **Enhance Investment Readiness**
- o 4** **Elevate Kneehill County's Brand**

- 1** Increase awareness and understanding of economic development principles for elected officials, senior staff, businesses and residents
- 2** Foster community stakeholder engagement and input to stimulate economic opportunities
- 3** Support and inspire youth entrepreneurs and leaders to establish Kneehill County as a desired community to remain, return and establish
- 4** Design and deliver a business retention and expansion program that initiates engagement between the County and businesses
- 5** Encourage diversification and innovation in industry sectors to stimulate economic growth and job creation
- 6** Achieve an intermediate to advanced investment readiness status to attract investments to drive economic growth
- 7** Develop a targeted investment attraction strategy by engaging the community
- 8** Promote and elevate the quality of life to attract and retain residents, attract visitors, workforce and business investments to the County
- 9** Identify and collaborate with regional partners and stakeholders to promote and amplify the region
- 10** Continuously monitor progress and gather input to update the plan






GOALS AND TACTICS

01

Build Leadership Capacity

Inspire, inform and motivate to community leaders by increasing economic development capacity through training for elected officials and senior staff and fostering meaningful engagement through awareness with community stakeholders.

-  **GOAL #1:** Increase awareness and understanding of economic development principles for elected officials, senior staff, businesses and residents
-  **GOAL #2:** Foster community stakeholder engagement and input to stimulate economic opportunities
-  **GOAL #3:** Support and inspire youth entrepreneurs and leaders to establish Kneehill County as a desired community to remain, return and establish

Tactics:

1. Economic development training for elected officials and senior staff.
2. Equip officials and staff with the necessary skills to effectively plan, execute, and manage economic development initiatives through rural economic development and training on the social side of economic development for municipal leaders.
3. Engage with youth stakeholders to deliver youth entrepreneurship programs.
4. Create structured avenues for regular dialogue with a diverse range of community stakeholders, including local businesses, educational institutions, non-profits, and residents.
5. Establish working groups and advisory committees that include community representatives to collaborate on economic development projects and initiatives.
6. Implement transparent communication channels to keep stakeholders informed and engaged.

Strengthen Existing Businesses

Build a strong and resilient local business economy by cultivating an entrepreneurial culture through initiatives aimed at innovative and growth.



GOAL #4: Design and deliver a business retention and expansion program that initiates engagement between the County and businesses



GOAL #5: Encourage diversification and innovation in industry sectors to stimulate economic growth and job creation

Tactics:

1. Business visitation programs, including asset mapping exercises to identify businesses, natural asset inventory, programs and supports; develop a Business Support Program.
2. Build relationships with education institutions, government, associations and Chamber of Commerce to connect businesses with programs and supports.
3. Business resiliency and disaster recovery programs.
4. Conduct a Supply chain optimization review.
5. Offer incentives for innovation and development.
6. Collaborate and promote CAEP's Business Support Network.
7. Implement a Shop Local Campaign and collaborate with the Three Hills & District Chamber of Commerce #LovingMyLocalKneehill's initiative.
8. Facilitate access to funding programs to improve the availability of funding for business and property improvement.
9. Gather Workforce Development insights from both employers and employees on the challenges and opportunities related to attracting and retaining workers in the area as well as housing needs.
10. Facilitate a Work Integrated Learning Program to align programming with business needs.
11. Work with educational institutions and industry stakeholders to develop training programs that meet the demands of local businesses.
12. Establish a robust framework for economic disaster recovery, including contingency plans, support systems, and partnerships to mitigate the impact of economic disruptions and facilitate swift recovery.

Enhance Investment Readiness

Prepare the County for investment attraction through the investment readiness process to prepare for long-term investment attraction and growth.



GOAL #6: Achieve an intermediate to advanced investment readiness status to attract investments to drive economic growth




GOAL #7: Develop a targeted investment attraction strategy by engaging the community

Tactics:

1. Update community profile, and sector profiles (statistics, asset inventory of developers, realtors, land available, site selectors, maps, stakeholders, etc.).
2. Conduct a comprehensive analysis of available land for commercial/industrial development.
3. Conduct a complete community SWOT Analysis.
4. Streamline regulatory processes to create a more investor-friendly environment.
5. Identify strategic sectors focusing on attracting investments in high-potential industries (such as advanced manufacturing, agribusiness, renewable energy, and technology).
6. Establish partnerships and collaborate with regional development projects by actively engaging with neighboring communities and organizations to create synergies.
7. Collaborate with industry associations to promote the County as a favorable business location.
8. Develop and implement a detailed Business Investment and Attraction Study to identify key sectors for investment attraction and industry development. Utilize the Business Investment and Attraction study findings to formulate targeted marketing strategies for business attraction.
9. Prioritize infrastructure development to meet the needs of growing industries. Ensure alignment with the new Land Use Bylaw to capture economic development requirements.
10. Prioritize Hamlet revitalization to facilitate targeted growth.
11. Develop a Filming Attraction report to encourage Kneehill County as an ideal place to film movies and series.
12. Create a municipal tax incentive program to attract industries.
13. Develop and implement strong policies to maintain environmental quality.
14. Investigate looking into creating a Certified Site Program.
15. Enhance connectivity and transportation infrastructure.

Elevate Kneehill County's Brand

Elevate Kneehill County's brand as an attractive place to live, work and play locally, regionally and nationally.

-  **GOAL #8** Promote and elevate the quality of life to attract and retain residents, attract visitors, workforce and business investments to the County
-  **GOAL #9** Identify and collaborate with regional partners and stakeholders to promote and amplify the region
-  **GOAL #10** Continuously monitor progress and gather input to update the plan

Tactics:

1. Develop tourism and local business campaigns utilizing #explorekneehill and promote key stakeholders.
2. Promote the business development and permitting process.
3. Communication campaign to connect businesses with regional programs and supports.
4. Feature testimonials and success stories from residents to highlight the quality of life.
5. Foster a sense of community through effective communication through an integrated engagement and communication strategy for residents.
6. Showcase local amenities and community events through various promotional materials.
7. Develop branding materials that emphasize the benefits of rural living.
8. Update Business Guide currently available on website.
9. Enhance the "Doing Business" section on the Kneehill County Website.

SUCCESS MEASUREMENT

To ensure the effectiveness of this strategy and to track progress, a robust evaluation framework is necessary and will include a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures, regular monitoring, and stakeholder feedback mechanisms. By doing so, Kneehill County can make informed adjustments to our strategies and ensure initiatives are driving sustainable growth and prosperity.

Key Performance Indicators

Build Leadership Capacity

- **Training Participation Rates:** Number of elected officials and senior staff completing economic development training programs.
- **Stakeholder Engagement Sessions:** Frequency and attendance of stakeholder engagement meetings and workshops.

Strengthen Existing Businesses

- **Business Retention Rate:** Percentage of businesses retained annually (only do this if we proceed with a business license program).
- **Expansion Projects:** Number and scale of business expansion projects initiated or completed (development permits approved, projects supported/funded).
- **Business Satisfaction Surveys:** Feedback from local businesses regarding support services and business climate (business visitation program).
- **Job Creation:** Number of new jobs created as a result of expansion initiatives (employment rates).

Enhance Investment Readiness

- **Investment Readiness Level:** Achieve an intermediate to advanced score.
- **Investment attraction strategy Completed:** Creation of a strategy and implementation plan to attract investment.

Elevate Kneehill County's Brand

- **Website and Social Media Analytics:** Increase in website traffic, social media engagement, and inquiries from potential investors and tourists.
- **Resident Satisfaction:** Survey results measuring resident satisfaction with economic development efforts and quality of life.
- **Population Growth:** Net population growth rate, indicating attractiveness as a place to live and work.

Success Measurement (Cont'd)

Monitoring and Reporting

- **Annual Reviews:** Comprehensive annual assessments to evaluate overall performance and impact of the economic development plan.
- **Stakeholder Feedback:** Regular feedback sessions with community stakeholders, including businesses, residents, and partner organizations, to gather insights and suggestions.
- **Adjustments and Adaptation:** Using data from monitoring and feedback, make necessary adjustments to strategies and initiatives to better align with goals and emerging opportunities.

Success Milestones

- Year 1:** Establish baseline metrics, launch training programs, initiate key investment attraction campaigns, and begin brand awareness efforts, updated municipal and intermunicipal plans, update website.
- Year 2:** Achieve measurable improvements in business retention, begin investment readiness process, updated land use bylaws, uptake and increase in access to supports for businesses, access to workforce training.
- Year 3:** Available land, updated development processes.



CONCLUSION

Kneehill County's 3-year Economic Development Plan represents a holistic approach to fostering sustainable growth and prosperity in the region. Through collaboration with stakeholders and insights from the local community, the Plan has been meticulously crafted to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities, aiming to enhance the well-being of residents and create a vibrant local economy.

The County's unique position in south-central Alberta, surrounded by key transportation routes and neighboring municipalities, presents an advantageous landscape for economic development. With a strong focus on agriculture and the oil and gas industry, Kneehill County stands poised to leverage its natural resources and strategic location for continued growth. Additionally, the region's potential in tourism, particularly in showcasing attractions like Horseshoe Canyon, adds another dimension to its economic prospects.

Respecting the County's agricultural heritage is a crucial strategic imperative, not only for economic stability but also for fostering the County's quality of life. As Kneehill County moves forward, prioritizing capacity building, business retention and expansion, attracting investments, and enhancing branding and marketing efforts will be pivotal in realizing its economic development objectives. By aligning these priorities with the community's vision, Kneehill County aims to build a resilient and diverse economy that enriches the lives of its residents and attracts investment and growth.

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APPENDICES

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- B. Community Survey Findings Report
- C. Organizations Survey Findings