

HORSESHOE CANYON

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT



February 4th, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the first phase of the Feasibility Study and Conceptual Design for Horseshoe Canyon, GGA and Colliers facilitated a Visioning Workshop on December 12, 2024, with Council and Administration from Kneehill County. The project team prepared a presentation that gave an overview of the findings from the available reports and data for this exercise as well as precedents, project objectives and financial considerations. The Council engaged with the project team in thoughtful discussion, helping the team better understand the broader community and the overarching goals of developing Horseshoe Canyon.

After breaking for lunch, GGA led the Council through two interactive activities. In the first activity, Council members voted on their preferred precedents through dotmocracy. The second activity was a SWOT Analysis of the current master plan for the site, which had Council collaboratively identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for future development and how this would impact visitors and locals.

GGA has analyzed the feedback from this Visioning Workshop and presented the findings in the following What We Heard report.

PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

One goal of the Visioning Session was to better understand the Council's vision for the site, which would inform the design and financial analysis of a facility at Horseshoe Canyon. Before reviewing design precedents, GGA led a discussion with the Council on long-term goals, tourism, local culture and other key topics that will help inform three conceptual options in the next project stage. The following themes arose during the discussion:

WHAT MAKES KNEEHILL COUNTY UNIQUE?

- **Sense of Community:** Residents feel a deep connection to the area and are proud to live here. The community focuses on fostering belonging and engagement.
- **Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Locals are entrepreneurial and are willing to take risks on new opportunities across sectors like agriculture, energy and commerce to create growth.
- **Proximity to Urban Areas:** While Kneehill County enjoys a quieter lifestyle, it is close to Calgary (the YYC Airport), Red Deer and Drumheller and has access to highways for convenient travel.
- **Unique Landscape:** The County's natural features, including canyons and valleys, are an asset that could be better utilized for tourism and business development.
- **Economic Stability:** The region is financially stable and supported by diverse sectors (e.g., agriculture). Kneehill County residents show interest in sustainable growth, including supporting local tourism.

WHAT ARE THE LONG-TERM GOALS FOR HORSESHOE CANYON?

- **Funding and Sustainability:** Concern about avoiding taxpayer burden while creating a sustainable facility that attracts visitors and supports the local economy.
- **Tourism and Community Integration:** The goal is to make Horseshoe Canyon more than a stopover by encouraging visitors to spend more time and money in the area through spaces like a cafe, interpretive centre, gift shop and events centre, among others.
- **Infrastructure and Commercial Development:** Emphasis on creating a functional and commercial space around the canyon, including potential partnerships for nearby businesses like campgrounds and gas stations.
- **Conservation and Architecture:** Development must respect the landscape by ensuring buildings blend into the environment and support ecological preservation.
- **Community Involvement:** Horseshoe Canyon should serve as a gathering space for the county's southeast corner by offering recreational, educational and functional spaces for residents and tourists.

SHOULD THE SITE OPERATE SEASONALLY OR YEAR-ROUND?

- **Year-Round Use:** Support for operating the site year-round with winter activities like snowshoeing, winter camping and glamping, but there are cost and staffing concerns.
- **Sustainable Growth:** There's an interest in starting small and expanding as foot traffic grows with a focus on sustainable, phased development.
- **Third-Party Involvement:** The County seeks external investors and developers to fund and operate certain facilities, such as glamping and/or an interpretive centre with cafe, to reduce reliance on taxpayer funding.
- **Community and Tourism Integration:** Residents strongly desire and support year-round community gatherings and events.
- **Operational Concerns:** Challenges around long-term maintenance, funding and staffing are acknowledged, but there is also a possibility of providing diverse revenue-generating activities.

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HORSESHOE CANYON AND TOURISM?

- **Leveraging Nearby Attractions:** The goal is to encourage visitors to spend multiple days visiting both Drumheller and Horseshoe Canyon while supporting other attractions within the County.
- **Revenue Generation:** Creating business opportunities inside and outside the Canyon is essential for the area's economic sustainability, with a focus on local revenue staying within the county.
- **Collaboration with Urban Areas:** Collaboration with nearby urban centres could boost tourism without directly competing.
- **Business Ecosystem:** There is a belief that "business feeds business," meaning that one local business's success can drive others' success.
- **Revenue-Generating Ideas:** Innovative ideas like the "Friends of Horseshoe Canyon" membership program and a pavilion that can generate income through diversifying revenue streams.

WHAT WOULD AN INTERPRETIVE CENTRE MEAN TO YOU? OR A COMMUNITY CENTRE?

- **Economic Catalyst:** The interpretive centre could drive economic development, focusing on ROI and community benefit.
- **Balance of Community and Education:** The ideal center would combine community spaces, flexible event areas and educational programming about local heritage and natural history.
- **Local Engagement:** Markets for local artisans, event spaces and retail spaces are ways to foster engagement and support local businesses.
- **Public and Private Collaboration:** Emphasis on creating a space not solely dependent on municipal funding, with a preference for third-party investment and involvement in operating experiences.

The overall themes throughout the discussion highlight a strategy that balances community needs with sustainable economic growth and tourism development, focusing on leveraging Horseshoe Canyon's unique attributes. Following this, GGA presented similar facilities that provide services and experiences in three categories: community, interpretive and experience. Three precedents were prepared for each category to show what is possible with the Horseshoe Canyon site, depending on how much intervention the County would like to pursue.

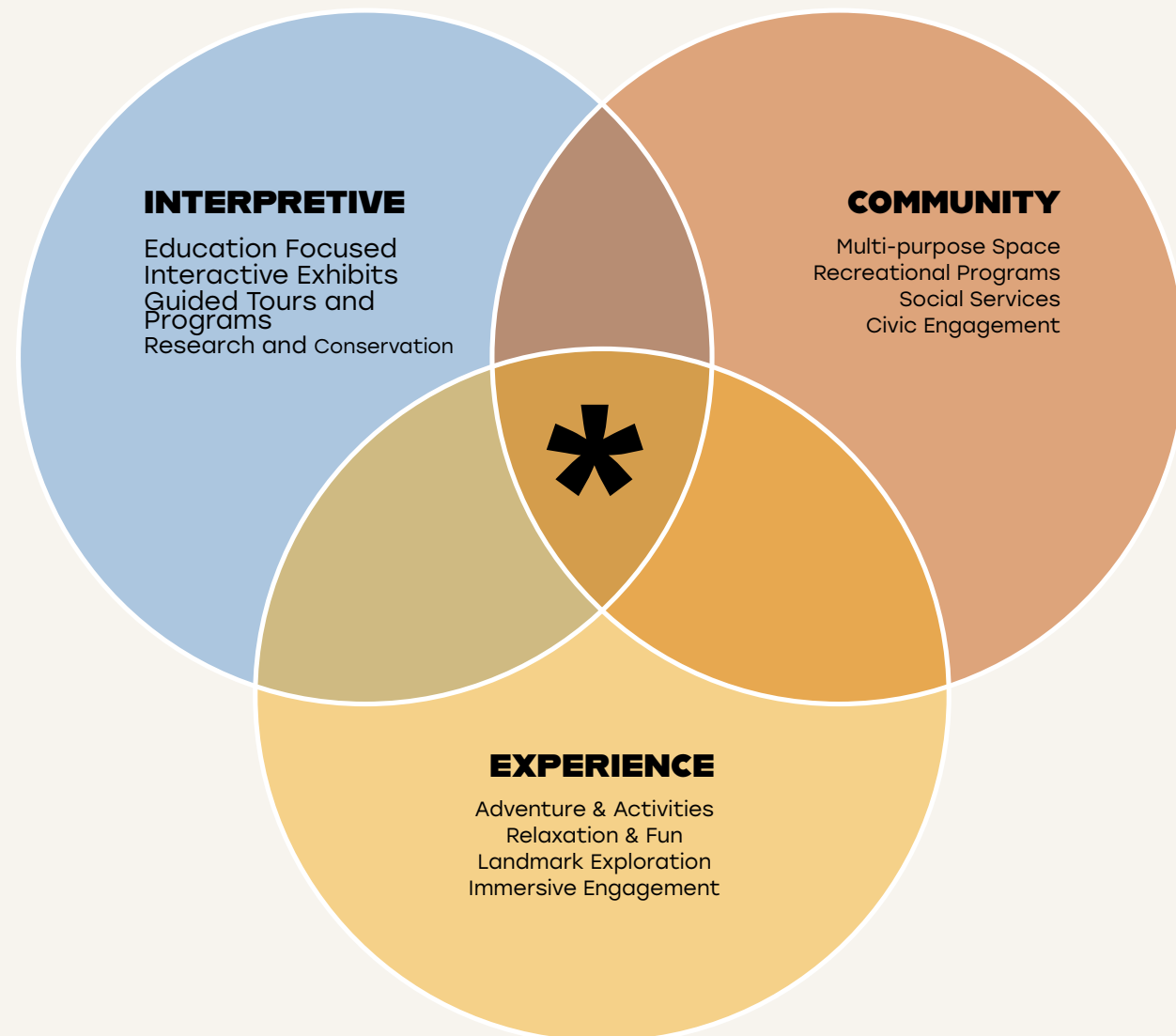


Diagram: Where Would You Position Horseshoe Canyon on this Diagram?

Diagram: Eco-Tourism Precedents

Following this, Colliers presented a financial model on how activities offered to visitors and residents support development on this site. For example, a development with high intervention and more interactive activities could potentially draw in more visitors, which would create higher revenue. In the next stage, Colliers can provide more detailed financial forecasting for the three concept designs to help Council make an informed decision.



Funding Source: Mainly municipal funding and community efforts.

Features: Minimal infrastructure, like picnic areas, signage, and basic trails, supporting a conservation-focused vision.

Operations: Modest revenue, mainly from parking or small services. Low ongoing costs, preserving the site's natural appeal.



Funding Source: Moderate grants, local business partnerships, and community fundraising.

Features: Essential amenities like interpretive exhibits, event spaces, and marked trails, balancing usability and cost.

Operations: Streamlined operations, often supported by volunteers or seasonal staff for cost-efficiency.



Funding Source: Federal/provincial grants, private sponsorships, and commercial operators.

Features: Interpretive centers, adventure tourism (e.g., glamping, zip lines), and premium event spaces, making the site a regional destination.

Operations: Relies on a strong visitor base, marketing, and skilled staff to cover costs and ensure steady revenue.



Phased Approach: Starting with low intervention features and scaling up over time allows Kneehill County to test ideas, adapt based on feedback, and manage financial risks while pursuing long-term goals.

Diagram: How Are Facilities Supported Financially?



DOTMOCRACY

Activity 1

Council members reviewed a set of precedents displayed on the back wall of the Council Chambers, categorized into three groups: Community, Interpretive and Experience. Each member used four stickers to vote on the images that best aligned with their vision for the project. This was followed by a group discussion to add further commentary to these selections. Members from GGA wrote discussion points on sticky notes and placed them on the corresponding images.

OCCUPANCY AND SPACE CONSIDERATIONS

Several themes emerged during the discussion that will help shape the project. A strong emphasis was placed on flexibility since the space should be able to serve a variety of purposes and cater to different groups. The design should also connect to the natural environment to blend seamlessly with the surrounding landscape. Council members favored a design with minimal environmental intervention, preferring natural elements over excessive construction. In addition, the building should reflect the unique identity of Kneehill County with a focus on local businesses, agriculture and history. There was also a suggestion to include food services, such as a cafe, within the space to enhance the visitor experience. In addition, Council liked the idea of having a phased project to accommodate the project budget as well as expand based on community need.

OCCUPANCY AND SPACE CONSIDERATIONS

GGA will determine the appropriate square footage based on this occupancy goals and develop the programming to suit the space's capacity. The design should be functional and offer multi-purpose areas that accommodate various activities, like private areas that can function as boardrooms and more public spaces for events, exhibitions and other community activities.



Engagement during Dotmocracy Activity



Curated Imagery of Council Selections from Dotmocracy Activity

SWOT ASSET MAPPING

Activity 2

In this activity, Council members collaboratively identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (“SWOT”) associated with the current master plan. Using colored dots, members marked areas on a map corresponding to each category while members from GGA recorded their reasoning based on the project’s vision and goals.

STRENGTHS

- 1 Highway #9: Provides key accessibility and is an important transportation route.
- 2 Adjacent Campground: A significant asset for attracting visitors.
- 3 Valued Competition: Sufficient traffic to support healthy competition between businesses.
- 4 Resident Proximity: Close enough for residents to benefit from increased visitor activity.
- 5 Nature Conservancy of Canada (“NCC”): Ensures the area remains authentic to its natural and cultural heritage.

WEAKNESSES

- 1 Established Area: Existing infrastructure makes reconstruction and redesign challenging.
- 2 Erosion Issues: Current erosion affects the Canyon and its access point, potentially limiting the vision for future development.
- 3 Parking Challenges: Parking occupies valuable space and can be inconvenient, with some areas far from buildings.
- 4 Covenant Restrictions: Limits development flexibility while still respecting preservation goals.

OPPORTUNITIES

- 1 NCC Development Land: Potential for future growth and sustainable development.
- 2 Educational Potential: Opportunity to preserve untouched land for educational programs, particularly agriculture.
- 3 Strategic Building: Potential for expansion across the road near the campground.
- 4 Relocated Parking Lot: Reclaim parking space for building, programming and visitor experiences.
- 5 Market Pavilion Area: Strong access, with potential for events, activities and new developments
- 6 Third-party Investors: Various programs can be invested in, managed, and maintained by third parties, contributing to economic growth in the area with minimal maintenance required from Kneehill County.

THREATS

- 1 Highway #9: While a strength, it could also lead to challenges like traffic congestion and over development risks.



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- NCC’s Vision: Emphasis on preserving the area’s natural, uninterrupted landscape.
- Desire for NCC Landscape: Strong support for maintaining the natural landscape managed by NCC.
- Friends of NCC: Well-connected group that can assist in decision-making and negotiations.
- Education Component: Potential for a museum or programs focusing on themes like oil/gas.
- Architecture: Consideration of designs that integrate indoor and outdoor spaces or allow flexibility in how spaces are used.

NEXT STEPS

With the information gathered from this Visioning Workshop and our analysis of the existing master plan, traffic volumes and other data, we will complete the Discovery Report and develop conceptual options for the Interpretive Centre. A high-level capital cost analysis will support the creation of preferred development options. We will also provide a comprehensive design document laying the groundwork for the feasibility study.

As we move into **'Phase 2: Envision'** key tasks include creating base drawings for existing and potential development sites, analyzing infrastructure and servicing strategies as well as validating functional programs through further stakeholder engagement. We will also develop study models, plans, and renderings to present different development options.

The roadmap/timeline on the following pages offer an overview of past, present, and future tasks related to the Horseshoe Canyon project and GGA's collaborative work with Kneehill County.

DISCOVERY

Phase 1

1. Review previously completed documentation
2. Understand project objectives from Kneehill County
3. Record and document discussion from visioning session into a What We Heard Document
4. Use this information to develop a functional program (list of spaces and areas) in the following phase.

ENVISION

Phase 2

1. Develop three versions of a functional program based on What We Heard feedback
2. Understand high-level construction costs for each option
3. Create financial model for each option
4. Provide SWOT analysis for each option
5. Present to council and identify preferred option

VALIDATE

Phase 3

1. Finalize data review and costing modeling
2. Develop conceptual plans and conceptual renderings
3. Preparation of final feasibility study
4. Review with Kneehill County
5. Engage with community as directed
6. Submission of Final Feasibility Study

2024 NOV. DEC. 2025 JAN. FEB. MAR. APR.

DISCOVERY

1. Review Background Information
2. Analyze Site Conditions and Data
3. Visioning Session
4. What We Heard Report (Phase 1 Document)
5. Report Presentation at Kneehill County

NOV. 4, 2024 - JAN 15, 2025



ENVISION

1. Develop Base Drawings
2. Develop Functional Program
3. Develop Three Conceptual Options
4. Presentation of Development Scenarios
5. SWOT Analysis on Concept Options to Develop Preferred Option(s)
6. Develop Financial Model

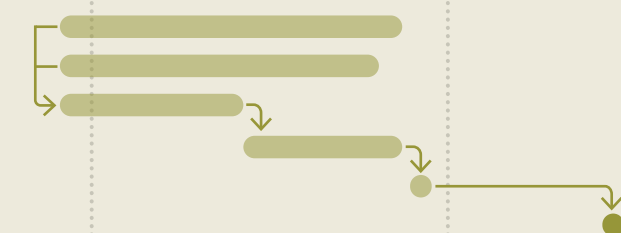
JAN. 9 - MAR. 21, 2025



VALIDATE

1. Data Review and Costing Modeling
2. Analysis of Funding Strategy
3. Preparation of Final Feasibility Study
4. Review by Kneehill County
5. Submission of Final Feasibility Study
6. Committee of The Whole Meeting

FEB. 24 - MAR. 24, 2024



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