



Westlock County
Economic Development Strategy

June 2025

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Executive Summary	2
Competitiveness Assessment	3
Opportunities Assessment	5
Site Selection for Opportunities	8
SOARR Assessment	12
Strategic Framework	16
Action Plan	18
Recommendations on Financing the Strategy	42
Deloitte Disclaimer	43

Executive Summary

This Economic Development Strategy for Westlock County provides a comprehensive blueprint for fostering prosperity within the community, both now and in the future. By leveraging the county's existing competitive advantages and through identifying opportunities with significant future potential, this strategy will guide economic growth over the coming years.

Our comprehensive research and analysis provides a clear understanding of Westlock County's strengths, challenges, and growth opportunities. Key sectors identified for potential development include light manufacturing, construction, repair and maintenance, value-added agricultural processing, solar power generation, highway commercial enterprises, outdoor tourism, carbon capture, utilization and storage, and wood pellet processing. These opportunities offer significant short and long-term potential for economic development and investment attraction, which could lead to an increased tax base, more employment opportunities, and sustained population growth.

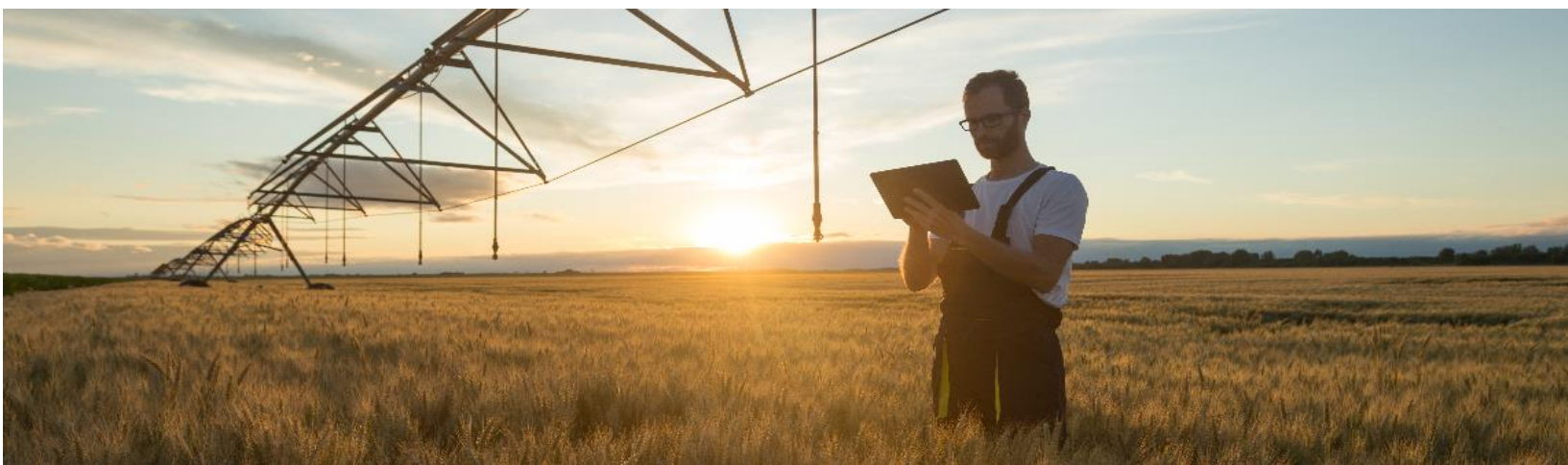
To capitalize on these opportunities, our Economic Development Strategy focuses on four main priorities:

1. **Enhancing Competitive Advantages:** Strengthening the county's position in key industries.
2. **Supporting Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) and Investment:** Ensuring the stability and growth of existing businesses.
3. **Pursuing Sector-Based Opportunities:** Targeting high-growth sectors for focused development.
4. **Facilitating Talent Attraction and Retention:** Building a skilled workforce to meet industry needs.

These priorities form the foundation of our strategy, guiding the county's efforts to optimize resource use and drive economic growth over the next five years. The action plan at the end of this strategy translates these priorities into specific initiatives, each with associated priority levels and timelines. This structured approach ensures that Westlock County can effectively manage its resources and achieve the greatest benefit for the community.

Additionally, the strategy includes recommendations for financing, such as exploring off-site levies, federal and provincial grants, and potential partnerships with developers to secure the necessary resources for implementation.

By focusing on these areas, Westlock County will be able to create a supportive environment for business growth and investment, positioning the region for a prosperous future.



Competitiveness Assessment

The Economic Development Strategy is built on an intensive engagement with local stakeholders and a review of economic fundamentals, targeted industries, market trends, and competitive advantages. These analyses reveal both the strengths and the challenges that shape the county's economic landscape and provide a roadmap for future growth and development.

Economic and demographic analysis

Westlock County has experienced a slight population decline in recent years and maintains a median age well above the provincial average. Beyond children (ages 0-14, 18.6% of the population), the largest generational cohort in the county is late career and early retirement (ages 55-64) at 15.7% of the population, suggesting there will be a shift in labour market dynamics in the near future. The housing market is relatively affordable, with many households enjoying cost-effective living conditions. This affordability, coupled with a predominance of single-detached homes, makes the county appealing for families and individuals seeking inexpensive living options. Education in the county reflects its rural character, with a strong focus on trades-related qualifications. The higher-than-average proportion of residents with trades certifications aligns well with local economic demands. In recent years, the local labour force has broadly declined, primarily due to the community's aging population. Despite this, key industries like agriculture, forestry, and construction remain strong. The workforce is primarily engaged in trades, transport, and natural resource-related occupations, reflecting the county's economic strengths and growth opportunities.

Stakeholder insights and community engagement

Insights from Westlock County's Council and senior officials have been instrumental in shaping this Economic Development Strategy. Participants highlighted the need for a more proactive economic strategies, enhanced promotional efforts, and improved development data. Concerns were raised about the outflow of young talent and the lack of available housing, which limits the influx of new residents. The existing tax framework was also critiqued for not adequately fostering residential and commercial development without overburdening the agricultural sector. The permitting process is generally viewed favourably, however some stakeholders noted that timing and wait times were the biggest hurdles throughout the process. Despite these challenges, there is a keen sense of optimism about the county's economic future. A proactive administration and a collaborative regional approach to economic development are seen as key drivers of growth. The Westlock Economic Region Committee (WERC) has the potential to enhance regional economic coordination. A unified marketing strategy involving Westlock County, the Town of Westlock, and neighboring communities is likewise recommended to effectively showcase the region's strengths and attract new investment.

Permitting and development

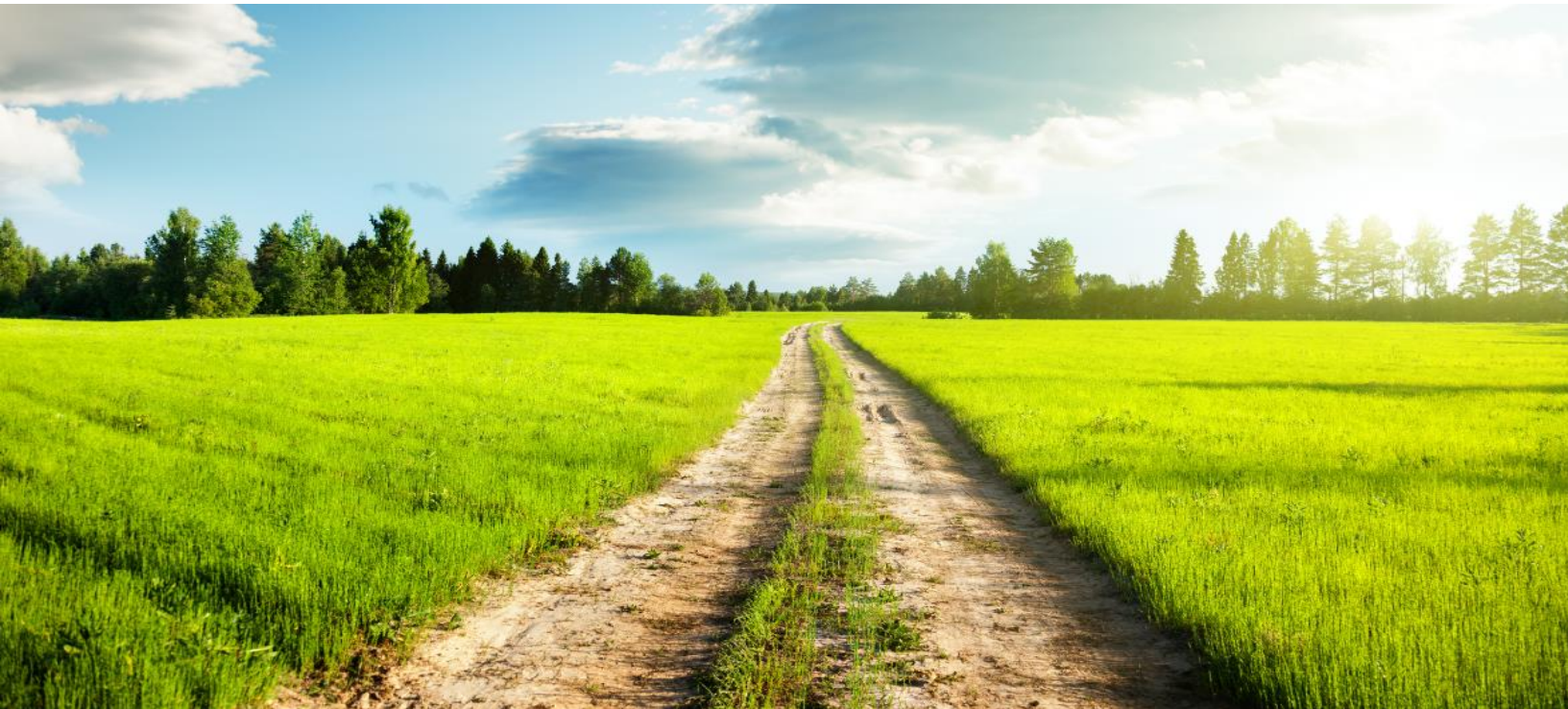
County staff have a hands-on approach to help investors navigate the permitting procedures which reduces barriers and increases investor confidence in the region. The Municipal Development Plan and Land-use Bylaw emphasize smart growth and sustainable development, particularly in designated industrial and commercial districts. The flexibility of the Land-use Bylaw in particular, which allows variances of up to 50%, sets Westlock County apart from neighbouring municipalities such as Sturgeon County and Barrhead County. The county's strong industrial base in agriculture and construction further bolsters its economic prospects. Sectors such as light manufacturing, construction, repair, and maintenance have been identified as prime areas for investment due to their job creation and export potential. These sectors generate external revenue, which helps to support local, service-oriented sectors.

Transportation infrastructure

Westlock County maintains strong connectivity for the transportation of goods. The Canadian National Railway passes through the community and provides shipping access for key commodities such as grain and lumber. In addition, Highways 2 and 44 are vital provincial north-south routes that pass through the county, allowing easy movement to Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary. There are also several existing and proposed 'high load corridors', as designated by the Government of Alberta, which pass through or near Westlock County and allow oversize and overweight loads to move through the province.

Utilities capacity

Utilities capacity in Westlock County includes water, power, and sewage systems. Business collaborations could potentially finance any future developments. The Westlock Regional Water Services Commission ensures a stable water supply, projected to meet regional needs until 2035, with additional capacity for growth. Water costs are competitive, although water pressure varies across the system. The Pembina River supplies an annual allocation of 1.5 million cubic metres of water to Westlock County and the Village of Clyde, representing a 17% surplus over current usage. Local stakeholders have identified upgrades to water and sewage systems as important to supporting local economic development. Electricity rates are aligned with those in surrounding areas, regulated by the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) to ensure fair pricing. However, electricity requirements may vary by industry, therefore, Westlock County may wish to connect with the AUC to discuss options. Constraints in natural gas supply have been noted, which may impact future industrial developments.



Opportunities Assessment

Through engagement and detailed research and analysis, several sectors were identified that we believe present short and long-term opportunities for economic growth and investment attraction in Westlock County. These sectors include light manufacturing, construction, repair and maintenance, value-added agriculture processing, solar power generation, highway commercial, outdoor tourism, carbon capture, utilization and storage, and wood pellet processing. Each of these sectors offers unique advantages and potential to contribute to the growth and prosperity for the community as outlined below.

Key Sector Opportunities for Westlock County



Light manufacturing

The light manufacturing sector in Westlock County includes sub-sectors such as wood product manufacturing and transportation equipment manufacturing. These same subsectors in Alberta have increased employment across the province by 16% between 2020 and 2023,¹ and are expected to continue their growth over the next several years. The sector requires relatively limited infrastructure investment to support growth and the county's existing industrial park already offers available land that is well-suited for light manufacturing activities. Additionally, the areas along the highways entering the Town of Westlock provide strategic locations for new investment. While there may be a need for additional development in the form of water pumping stations to enhance water pressure, the overall feasibility of expanding light manufacturing in Westlock County is high. The county's existing infrastructure and available land make it an attractive option for investors, with minimal additional resourcing required to attract new businesses.



Construction, repair and maintenance

The construction, repair and maintenance sector include sub-sectors such as commercial and industrial machinery and equipment (except automotive and electronic), repair and maintenance, as well as services to buildings and dwellings. Employment in these industries in Alberta has grown by 8% between 2020 and 2023.² the residential construction sector is expected to continue its employment increase until 2026 and then remain steady for the next several years.³ Non-residential construction employment is expected to be 9% above 2024 by 2034.⁴ Westlock County's strategic location between oil fields and supporting sectors positions it as an ideal service hub. Available land for this sector could be part of a highway commercial development or located within the industrial park, depending on the specific operational needs. While certain lands may require servicing, the cost is expected to be minimal,

¹ Lightcast data run 2024.3.

² Ibid.

³ BuildForce Canada, [Employment demands increase in Alberta to 2034, with growth greatest in the non-residential sector](#), 2025.

⁴ Ibid.

with no significant constraints anticipated. The feasibility of expanding this sector is high, given the availability of land and minimal expected infrastructure requirements.



Value-added agriculture processing

Value-added agriculture processing represents a significant opportunity for Westlock County, with the potential for a large economic impact through job creation and increased exports. Prairies Economic Development Canada has announced \$21 million to build on the province's strengths in commercializing innovative agricultural products, technologies and services for global markets. This investment speaks to the sectors growing importance for Alberta and represents an opportunity for Westlock County. Examples of specific opportunities include more traditional food processing activities such as dairy production, fruit and vegetable processing, as well as meat and poultry slaughtering and packaging. In addition, Westlock County could pursue the production of bioenergy and biofuels as well as emerging agricultural technology facilities such as vertical farming. The western portion of the county, particularly areas directly on the Pembina River, is well-suited for this type of investment. However, the sector would likely require a separate water allocation contract from the Pembina River, and significant infrastructure investment and planning would be necessary. Despite these challenges, the overall feasibility is considered medium.



Solar power generation

Alberta has a high potential for solar power production compared to other North American jurisdictions,⁵ and has seen an increase in the amount of solar generating capacity between 2020 (258.7mW) and 2024 (540.2 mW).⁶ Previous interest in local solar power generation projects and the availability of sufficient land make this sector a viable option for Westlock County. The utilities capacity required for solar projects is limited and outputs would feed directly into the overall electrical grid. However, the land used for solar power generation should ideally be undesirable land. Effective March 1, 2024, the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) will no longer permit renewable approvals on Class 1 or 2 agricultural lands unless proponents can demonstrate the ability of crops and/or livestock to co-exist with the renewable generation project. Municipalities are now automatically granted the right to participate in AUC hearings on renewable project approvals and recover costs associated with their participation. However, while the sector represents an opportunity for Westlock County, the potential benefits are more limited, as employment created would predominantly be short-term through the initial construction phase.



Highway commercial

The highway commercial sector leverages the high traffic counts along major highways in Westlock County (weighted annual average daily traffic counts of 4,210 along highway 44 south of the Town of Westlock and 4,880 along highway 18 going east from the town toward the Village of Clyde)⁷, which are crucial for moving goods across the province. There is underutilized land along these highways that could be developed for commercial purposes. Westlock County zoning and land uses delineate two areas as 'Highway Commercial Districts', which intend to serve the motoring public by offering service stations, gas stations, restaurants, and motels. There are opportunities to enhance the scope of services available to work and leisure travelers, including additional food service, entertainment, and rest stop amenities. Westlock County could seek to develop additional wayfinding signage and ensure that information online is up-to-date to guide travelers to local businesses and attractions. Additionally, Westlock County could seek to develop its industrial support sector, particularly for companies involved in transportation, logistics, and warehousing. While certain lands may require servicing, sites should be selected where these costs are minimal. The feasibility of developing this sector is high,

⁵ Government of Canada, [Alberta: Clean electricity snapshot](#), 2024.

⁶ Government of Alberta, [Renewable energy generation](#), 2025.

⁷ Government of Alberta, [Highway traffic counts](#), 2025.

given the available land and significant traffic along major highways. However, as commercial activity is not a goods-producing sector, there is limited potential for it to stimulate economic growth.



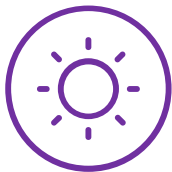
Carbon capture, utilization, and storage

Several companies in Alberta operate carbon storage projects under tenures provided by the Government of Alberta, aiming to capture carbon from heavy industries. The geology of the Westlock area is amenable to carbon storage activities, as the saltwater in the ground can be used to store dense carbon. The process involves drilling wells to store the carbon, with emissions-intensive industries in the Alberta heartland potentially utilizing a pipeline to these wells. While developments in CCUS technology are ongoing, the stored carbon could be used to generate power, which is important for heavy industries that need to supply their own power. Additionally, the stored carbon could be utilized by future industries, enhancing the economic viability of CCUS projects in the region.



Wood pellet processing

Wood pellet processing presents an opportunity for Westlock County, leveraging the region's natural resources. The sector requires proximity to sawmills for fibre supply and would benefit from the county's available land and strategic location. Alberta accounts for 16% of Canada's wood pellet production capacity⁸ indicating that there is an existing knowledge base and workforce ready to support this export-oriented sector. Forestry is already a strong industry north of Westlock County, with communities possessing both harvesting and processing capabilities producing pulp, oriented strand board, and dimensional lumber. While rail access and transportation costs are critical considerations, the sector's electricity, water, and natural gas requirements are manageable. Skilled labour is essential for the sector, and Alberta's supportive regulatory environment facilitates quick approvals. Moreover, despite competition for fibre from pulp mills, the potential for converting agricultural waste into pellets offers another avenue for innovation and development.



Outdoor tourism

Local investors are interested in expanding outdoor recreation assets, and Westlock County has existing ski hill infrastructure and open parcels available for additional development. The utility requirements for outdoor tourism are minimal, and the existing capacity is sufficient for most activities. The feasibility of developing the sector is high, as the community could offer outdoor recreation experiences typically found in the mountains, or much closer to urban centres such as Edmonton. The outdoor tourism sector presents a moderate opportunity for growth, although the industry generally generates low revenues as compared to other sectors.





Site Selection for Opportunities


Several potential sites have been identified through stakeholder engagement and the research completed by both Colliers and Deloitte. Colliers identified four core locations throughout the county that meet the criteria for desired economic growth. In addition to these areas, Deloitte has identified two additional locations within the county for potential economic development efforts and defined specific opportunities for each site.


The research undertaken by Colliers and Deloitte identified six strategic areas for economic development in Westlock County. The primary area for development is the area directly surrounding the Town of Westlock, including the North Sky Business Park and highway commercial opportunities to the east.

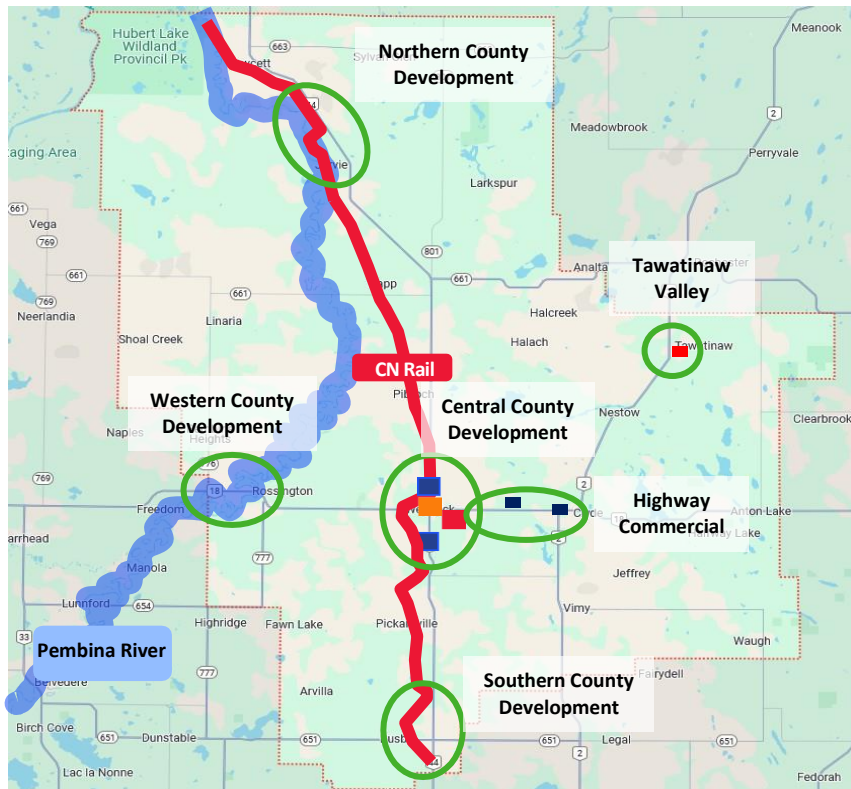
Site Options

 Identified areas where there is a confluence of highway, rail, and/or river along with labour present the best opportunities for locating a range of industries.

 **Highway Commercial and Industrial uses**
Expand North Sky business park and establish a commercial node to the north and east of the Town of Westlock.

 **Retail uses**
Encourage density of retail offerings adjacent to the Town of Westlock

 **Residential uses**
Denser housing forms will be best suited to land adjacent to the Town of Westlock



Prioritization of sites

The six identified areas for potential development exhibit different traits that can meet varied levels of requirements for investment as well as differing utility service levels and the abilities of Westlock County to upgrade the infrastructure. All of the identified sites may require land acquisition by the county, either outright, or in partnership with developers, and may require varying degrees of infrastructure upgrades depending on specific developer proposals for sites. The following table identifies the priority order for each site based on the strengths and opportunities that best match with its existing characteristics compared with the potential challenges or drawbacks for investors.

Site	Priority	Commentary	Opportunities
<i>Central County Development</i>	1	<p>The North Sky Business Park is the priority investment destination in the Central County Development area. The business park has existing utility servicing that could be improved upon to increase water pressure. If the county is unable to acquire surrounding lands to expand the business park, priority should be given to bringing service in the business park to standard levels expected of the land.</p> <p>The Intermunicipal Development Plan (IMDP) indicates that development adjacent to the Town of Westlock needs joint agreement. If the county can acquire lands for the business park that are part of the IMDP, there may be an opportunity for shared utility servicing costs.</p> <p>There may be opportunity for commercial operations along the highways near the Town of Westlock, however priority should be given to businesses that will export their goods out of the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light Manufacturing • Construction, Repair, and Maintenance • Value-added Agriculture Processing • Highway Commercial • Wood Pellet Processing
<i>Highway Commercial</i>	2	<p>The second priority area is the highway commercial corridor to the East of the Town of Westlock. This stretch runs parallel to the existing water infrastructure, and while it would require investment to bring forward proper servicing, it may not be cost-prohibitive based on the type of potential investment and investment site.</p> <p>While highway commercial may be best suited for this specific area of Westlock County, light manufacturing, and construction, repair and maintenance operations should be considered as potential investments as well. Ideally, these secondary investors would invest in the business park to ensure a strong concentration of industrial businesses in one location within the county that enables a lower per acre servicing cost.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highway Commercial • Light Manufacturing • Construction, Repair, and Maintenance

Site	Priority	Commentary	Opportunities
Northern County Development	3	<p>The northern development destination brings investors the unique confluence of nearby water access through the Pembina River and rail access. This location is the furthest away from the Town of Westlock, and its location near the northern border means that labour drawn from Edmonton will have a further commute and be less willing to work in the area.</p> <p>Priority should be given to large scale investors in this area since it has access to the two major factors that investors may consider essential to establishing a new facility (water and rail access).</p> <p>There is water infrastructure in this location, however it is expected that for any large-scale industrial project, investments will need to be made to increase water pressure, and agreements will need to be made on water usage.</p> <p>While wood pellet processing is the primary industry thought to be a good fit for the northern development area due to the ability of the rail to import raw materials, and export the finished product, the same can be said for large scale value-added agriculture processing operations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value-added Agriculture Processing • Wood Pellet Processing • Solar Power Generation
Western County Development	4	<p>The western development destination can use its proximity to the Pembina River to attract investment. Investment may become a priority in this region if the proponent does not require potable water and chooses to transport finished goods by highway. This location is nearest the county’s raw water intake and pumphouse and is likely to have the strongest water pressure throughout the county.</p> <p>The lack of rail access at this location could persuade investors of large-scale projects to look elsewhere, either in the county or the province.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value-added Agriculture Processing • Solar Power Generation • Wood Pellet Processing
Southern County Development	5	<p>The southern area identified for development benefits from its proximity to Edmonton compared to the rest of the county and the availability of railway. While there is access to water in this development, it is at the end of the infrastructure lines and has the lowest available pressure. This can be mitigated with upgrades that improve the pressure of water. However, for opportunities that require significant volumes of water, this location is unlikely to be immediately cost effective compared to other areas that are near a primary source of water.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar Power Generation • Wood Pellet Processing • Light Manufacturing • Value-added Agriculture Processing
Tawatinaw Valley	6	<p>The Tawatinaw Valley area is best suited for expanded tourism operations from the county-owned ski-hill or for expanded residential development. This area should be protected from industrial uses to preserve its appeal for local tourism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor Tourism • Solar Power Generation



SOARR Assessment

A SOARR assessment enables the methodology to pivot from ‘what has been learned’ to ‘what needs to happen’ to support economic development and diversification in Westlock County.

The SOARR model of ‘appreciative inquiry’, assessing strengths, opportunities, aspirations, risks, and results, represents an emerging best practice in strategic planning. As a forward-looking approach, the SOARR assessment borrows elements from a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), with greater focus on the risks and results associated with certain actions. Placing greater emphasis on risks and results ensures that contingency planning receives due attention and that outcomes are reflected in an action-oriented, measurable manner.

S	Strengths What are we doing well? What key achievements are we most proud of? What can we build on?
O	Opportunities What are our best possible future opportunities? What changes in demand can we expect in the future? What broader trends and policies may affect development and impact our aspirations?
A	Aspirations What are we deeply passionate about and want to achieve? What difference do we hope to make for all?
R	Risks What challenges do we need to be aware of? How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?
R	Results How we know we are succeeding? What are the key goals we would like to accomplish to achieve these results?

S

Strengths

What are we doing well? What key achievements are we most proud of? What can we build on?



- **Geographic Advantage:** Westlock County is centrally located in Alberta and is located less than 100 kilometres from Edmonton. The western part of the county has access to the Pembina River and rail facilities and holds potential for select land development that balances agricultural productivity with residential expansion. The areas proximal to resources can also facilitate economic scaling and support broader development.
- **Logistics and Transportation Advantage:** The county has strong logistics and transportation infrastructure to support movement between the Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray/Cold Lake oil fields.
- **Highway Access:** Highway traffic in the county can support additional highway commercial developments.
- **Local Tourism Assets:** The local ski-hill is a strong asset and attracts school trips from Edmonton as a low-cost option for downhill skiing in the direct vicinity of the Edmonton Metro Region.
- **Supportive Local Investors:** Local businesses, investors, and developers are supportive of the region and wish to invest in the county's economic future.
- **Flexible Permitting Process:** Westlock County has a structured yet flexible approach to development and permitting. The Municipal Development Plan emphasizes smart growth principles, efficient use of infrastructure, and sustainable development to meet current needs without compromising future generations.
- **Affordable Housing:** 86% of households in Westlock County report having affordable housing, exceeding the rate seen across the province (79%).
- **Major Employment and Concentration of Businesses:** Westlock County's largest industries by employment include agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (24%), public administration (11%), and construction (11%). The agriculture industry plays an outsized role in the community, with related positions accounting for around one quarter of all jobs locally. Relative to Alberta, a location quotient analysis of Westlock County shows that local employment is highly concentrated in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (LQ 8.36). The analysis also found above average concentrations of employment in wholesale trade (LQ 1.30) and construction (LQ 1.14).

O

Opportunities

What are our best possible future opportunities? What changes in demand can we expect in the future? What broader trends and policies may affect development and impact our aspirations?


- **Development Opportunities:** South of the Town of Westlock has opportunity for further development that serves as a midpoint between Edmonton and the Town of Westlock. Expansion of the business park has been identified as an opportunity that will allow the county to accommodate for larger developments and increase its industrial tax base.
- **Agriculture Processing:** Activities such as canola crushing were identified by stakeholders as a strong industrial opportunity, specifically in the western portion of the county near the Pembina River and existing rail line.
- **Expansion of Tourism Assets:** Tourism offerings near the ski-hill in partnership with local landowners and developers can be further explored to support additional tourism in the county.
- **Expansion of Water Infrastructure Capabilities:** Increasing water pressure throughout the system can support new developments and reduce costs for existing businesses (E.g. decreasing insurance costs). Westlock County can further work with the water commission to increase the allotment of water available for industrial developments.
- **Underutilized Assets:** There are several local assets that could be better marketed or invested in, including the relatively large livestock market, ski hill, and regional airport.

- **Commercial Development:** Westlock County serves as a midpoint between major urban centres and there is opportunity to develop a highway commercial area, pending a traffic study. The location could help to attract businesses as well as travelers.

A

Aspirations

What are we deeply passionate about and want to achieve?
What difference do we hope to make for all?




- **Shift to Proactive Economic Development:** Existing approaches are predominantly reactive, so greater attention is required in terms of marketing the county, attracting companies, and improving available information related to development opportunities (e.g., site selection).
- **Regional Approach to Economic Development:** There is a desire to work closer with WERC, Town of Westlock and the Village of Clyde on future economic development opportunities and to develop a shared agreement of shared utilities (fibre, water, sewage). WERC currently has a lack of resources and coordination, Westlock County can take a leading role in a regional approach.
- **Partner with Developers:** Identifying and partnering with land developers can support the development and servicing of property within the county. This can support the reduction of the cost per acre of servicing the land which can make investment more attractive in the county.
- **United Approach to Marketing:** Westlock County, the Town of Westlock, and surrounding communities possess complementary offerings. There is a desire to combine efforts and market the region's broader strengths, particularly in terms of attracting new investment. Businesses in the region can benefit from this joint effort.
- **Proactive Planning Efforts:** Westlock County should ensure there exist appropriate planning frameworks that establish sufficient serviceable land that has been appropriately zoned. These planning efforts can enable increased investment throughout the county.

R

Risks

What challenges do we need to be aware of? How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?



- **Water System Upgrade Financing:** If the county is unable to secure financing for water system upgrades to increase pressure throughout the system, there may not be interested investors due to the desirability of land in the county.
- **Water Licensing Constraints:** Being unable to acquire new water supply either through new licenses or amending the existing license could impact interest in development from industrial developments that require significant water supply.
- **Rail Spurs:** Rail companies may be unwilling or unable to add in rail spurs to relevant properties.
- **Resident Concerns:** Existing landowners and residents may oppose new industrial developments near them.
- **Lack of New Natural Gas Supply:** Natural gas suppliers are unable to deploy new industrial taps to local development sites.
- **High Tax Rates:** Westlock County has the highest taxation rate across non-residential, designated industrial property (buildings) and designated industrial property (M&E) among its neighbouring communities. It has the second highest tax rate for farmland among the same comparators.
- **Declining Labour Force:** Westlock County's labour force declined moderately between 2016 and 2021, falling by 7.1%.

R

Results

How we know we are succeeding? What are the key goals we would like to accomplish to achieve these results?



- **Increased Zoned and Serviced Development Land:** Increase the total amount of serviced industrial land with appropriate zoning in Westlock County, either through the expansion of the business park to the north or west or acquiring appropriate land elsewhere in the county.
- **Increased Development Throughout Westlock County:** Westlock County experiences an increased interest and development of its industrial properties that support an increase of the tax base, and resident attraction through new jobs being available.
- **Additional Rail Access for Businesses:** Businesses that are adjacent to railways are able to access rail spurs for increased ability to ship products to and from the county. Rail access can also be used as a competitive advantage when attracting investors that require this transportation method.
- **Diversified Economy:** Westlock County has diversified its economy from primarily agriculture based to include more industrial businesses that create value-added products from local inputs.
- **Working Partnerships with Neighbouring Jurisdictions and Private Sector:** Partnerships with neighbours and the private sector have been formalized and are working as intended for all parties. This can support additional collaboration and open new avenues for economic development in the broader region for Westlock County to participate and lead.

Strategic Framework

In the development of this economic development strategy, four strategic priorities were identified through our comprehensive economic analysis and extensive stakeholder engagement. These priorities will form the cornerstone of the Economic Development Strategy over the next five years.

These strategic priorities were designed to align with Westlock County’s existing strategic plan. Developing a strong business ecosystem, increasing collaboration with regional stakeholders and ensuring future environmental and infrastructure sustainability are three goals of the county’s strategic plan under the ‘Economic Strength and Viability’ and ‘Investing in our Built and Natural Environments’ pillars that align with the priorities and actions within this Economic Development Strategy, namely, to enhance competitive advantages, support business retention, expansion, and investment and to pursue sector opportunities. The ‘facilitate talent attraction and retention’ priority of this strategy aligns with the Westlock County Strategic Plan as the county aims to build strong and vibrant hamlets, support and grow community hubs, and to create a sense of belonging, well-being, and inclusion.

This alignment between the Westlock County Strategic Plan and Economic Development Strategy ensures that economic development staff are working toward the same goals of elected officials.

Strategic Priorities



Enhance competitive advantages

To support Westlock County's future competitiveness in the investment market, it is necessary for the county to prioritize and enhance its existing competitive position. Targeted efforts to upgrade essential infrastructure, such as water and natural gas supply, to ensure they meet the needs of both existing and prospective businesses are critical steps to ensure that the county can attract investment into the future. By addressing existing gaps and further establishing this competitive advantage, Westlock County can support operational efficiency and growth and continually highlight the county's commitment to creating a business-friendly environment that attracts and retains investment.

Support business retention, expansion, and investment

Business retention and expansion (BRE) efforts will allow the county to nurture strong relationships with existing businesses and gain a thorough understanding of their needs and the challenges they face. Understanding local business needs will enable the county to offer tailored and impactful support, while also identifying new opportunities for business growth to remain local. BRE methods are vital to create an environment where businesses feel valued and continually reinvest in the community. BRE activity from Westlock County should be completed in collaboration with other regional partners including the Town of Westlock and the Westlock Economic Regional Committee (WERC) to ensure that there is regional alignment and coordination to support local economic growth and development.

Pursue sector opportunities

Specific sector opportunities have been identified for the county. Key sectors such as value-added agriculture and light manufacturing present significant potential for future growth and investment. To harness these opportunities, the county will need to promote local assets and highlight specific opportunities and parcels of land. Showcasing the county's strengths, such as its strategic location, skilled workforce, and supportive business environment will highlight its advantages when attracting new investment. Understanding the needs of investors will be crucial in fostering a supportive environment for business growth. The county should proactively engage with potential and existing investors to gain insights into their requirements and challenges (see BRE above).

Facilitate talent attraction and retention

Talent attraction and retention is essential component for the county to be successful in its investment attraction efforts, as new investment will require nearby available talent. Talent attraction and retention requires a multi-faceted approach which includes developing diverse housing to meet the needs of the population, collaboration with training partners to ensure that the local population has the appropriate skills required for the local labour force and promoting the quality of life within the county to attract new residents. Westlock County will require a robust workforce to support future economic development efforts so attracting and retaining talent is a crucial element to support future successes.

Action Plan

Each of the following actions has an associated priority level and timing. This characterization of each action will allow Westlock County to appropriately manage the resources it uses for high impact activities in the short and long term, thereby ensuring that the greatest benefit to the community is achieved.

Priority levels

High priority: Actions that require immediate attention and resource allocation. These actions are foundational for future economic development efforts and/or are expected to have a substantial impact on the local economy.

Medium priority: Actions that will be addressed after high-priority items. While these actions may have a slightly lesser impact compared to high-priority items, they are still crucial for the overall economic development plan and will yield significant benefits once completed.

Low priority: Actions that can be undertaken after both- high and medium-priority items have been started. These actions are important but may depend on the completion of higher-priority tasks to ensure appropriate resource allocation and effectiveness.

Timing

Short-term: These may be actions that are currently in progress or should commence in the immediate future.

Medium-term: These actions will build off the short-term actions and start with years 2 to 3 of the strategy term.

Long-term: These actions will be a priority once short-term and medium-term actions have been completed and will build towards the vision within each strategic direction.

Strategic priority 1 – Enhance competitive advantages

To support Westlock County’s future competitiveness in the investment market, it is necessary for the county to prioritize and enhancing its existing competitive advantages. Targeted efforts to upgrade essential infrastructure, such as water and natural gas supply, and ensuring they meet the needs of both existing and prospective businesses will be critical steps to ensure that the county can attract investment into the future. By addressing existing gaps and developing its competitive advantage, the county can support operational efficiency and growth and continually highlight its commitment to creating a business-friendly environment that attracts and retains investment.

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
1. Work with the Westlock Regional Water Service Commission to determine specific levels of water availability that could be used for industrial developments	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to engage with the Westlock Regional Water Service Commission to understand current water availability and future projections Conduct a joint assessment to determine specific levels of water availability for industrial developments Develop guidelines for water usage in industrial developments based on the assessment Communicate the guidelines to potential industrial developers and other stakeholders 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) Westlock Regional Water Service Commission (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of initial discussions and joint assessment with the water commission Development and approval of water usage guidelines Communication of guidelines to stakeholders Compliance with water usage guidelines in industrial developments 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>
2. Review and adjust the existing tax framework to better support residential and commercial development without overburdening the agricultural sector	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review comparative municipal tax findings from summary report and investigate opportunities to improve competitiveness Analyze the impact of potential tax adjustments on different sectors Develop a proposal for tax adjustments that balance support for development with the needs of the agricultural sector Present the proposal to the Westlock County Council for approval Pending agreement, implement the approved tax adjustments and communicate changes to the public 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of a tax framework review Conduct stakeholder consultations in the county to understand low-level impacts of different tax changes Approval of tax adjustment proposal by Westlock County Council Pending agreement, implementation of new tax framework Increase in residential and commercial development applications 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>3. Explore opportunities to partner with industrial developers</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and identify potential partners by conducting market research to identify leading industrial developers • Compile a list of potential partners, including their key projects, market reputation, and areas of expertise • Assess the strategic alignment of potential partners with Westlock County’s business goals and values • Initiate contact with shortlisted developers to express interest in exploring partnership opportunities and discuss potential collaboration • Conduct periodic reviews of the partnerships to assess performance, identify areas for improvement, and optimize collaboration 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of industrial development partners • Development of memoranda of understanding with development partners • Development of new projects with industry partners 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>
<p>4. Explore purchasing land to expand North Sky Business Park or other industrial areas within Westlock County</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a needs assessment to determine the amount of land required to maximize investment that considers servicing costs • Engage with the community to address concerns regarding the expansion and communicate the overall benefits • Negotiate with landowners to purchase identified land parcels 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (Lead) • Industrial Developers <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of acres of land acquired adjacent to existing industrial land • Ability to service newly acquired land 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>5. Address constraints in natural gas supply by working with utility providers to enhance capacity and reliability</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with utility providers to discuss current constraints and potential solutions Conduct a joint assessment with utility providers to identify specific areas requiring capacity and reliability enhancements Develop a plan for enhancing natural gas supply, including cost estimates and timelines Secure funding for the enhancements through the municipal budget, grants, or public-private partnerships 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of initial discussions and joint assessment with utility providers Development and approval of enhancement plan Secured funding for the project Implementation of natural gas supply enhancements Increased capacity and reliability of natural gas supply 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Long</p>
<p>6. Continue to ensure that the permitting process is simple and timely by reviewing and updating regulations and reduce bureaucratic hurdles that can facilitate quicker development project approvals</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with developers, businesses, and other stakeholders to identify bottlenecks and inefficiencies in the current permitting process Develop a plan to update regulations and streamline the permitting process, where concerns have been raised Implement changes to regulations and processes 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of permitting process review and stakeholder consultations Implementation of updated regulations and streamlined processes Reduction in average permit approval time Increased satisfaction among developers and businesses, measured through consultation or survey 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>7. Explore off-site levy by-law adoption</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage off-site guide created by Rural Municipalities of Alberta • Determine capital infrastructure requirements and current capacity to fund their development. If there is a significant gap, an off-site levy may be required • Determine feasibility of an off-site levy bylaw by analyzing the expected revenue increases against the potential decrease in development over time • Engage in local consultation with landowners, development industry and other stakeholders to determine local considerations for an off-site levy for new developments 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Rural Municipalities of Alberta (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of analysis report that outlines the upcoming infrastructure costs, future land development expectation, and the identifies other cost recovery tools that could instead be utilized • Determination of pursuit of an off-site levy 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>
<p>8. Support investors in acquiring additional water allocation contracts from the Government of Alberta if required.</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with relevant provincial authorities to gauge ability and desire to provide additional water allocation contracts for individual industrial users where existing allocations are insufficient • Provide relevant information to investors on the process of acquiring an additional water allocation contract if the county does not have sufficient water for proposed development • Provide letter of support for industrial users in acquiring additional water allocation contracts by providing an estimated economic impact assessment for the county if the proposal is accepted 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Government of Alberta (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a formal understanding of the water allocation process for private businesses • Number of letters of support provided for private businesses seeking additional water allocation 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>9. Explore investing in water pumping stations or other alternatives to enhance water pressure in the industrial park and along the highways entering the Town of Westlock</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a feasibility study to identify the specific needs and optimal locations for new water pumping stations • Secure funding through municipal budget, grants, or public-private partnerships • Engage a partner (municipal or private) to design and plan the construction of the water pumping stations 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Westlock Regional Water Service Commission (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of a feasibility study and identification of locations • Secure funding for the project • Completion of construction of water pumping stations • Improvement in water pressure in the industrial park and along highways 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Long</p>
<p>10. Prioritize upgrades to sewage systems to support local economic development</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the current sewage system to identify areas requiring upgrades • Develop a comprehensive plan for sewage system upgrades, including cost estimates and timelines • Secure funding for the upgrades through the municipal budget, grants, or public-private partnerships • Tender and contract the upgrade work to qualified contractors 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of sewage system assessment • Development and approval of upgrade plan • Secured funding for the project • Completion of sewage system upgrades • Increased capacity and reliability of sewage systems 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Long</p>

Strategic priority 2 – Support business retention, expansion, and investment

Business retention and expansion (BRE) efforts allow the county to nurture strong relationships with existing businesses and gain a thorough understanding of their needs and challenges they face. Understanding local business needs can enable Westlock County to offer tailored and impactful support, while also identifying new opportunities for business growth within the county. BRE activities are vital to create an environment where businesses feel valued and continually reinvest in the community. BRE efforts from Westlock County should be completed in collaboration with other regional partners including the Town of Westlock and WERC to ensure that there is regional alignment and coordination to support local economic growth and development.

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
1. Create a ‘sell sheet’ or marketing document to share with investors and developers that includes benchmarked land prices, tax rates, and the availability and cost of industrial and commercial land	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review benchmark competitiveness data from the summary report(s) Design and produce a professional ‘sell sheet’ or marketing document Distribute these materials through various channels (e.g., website, social media, events, via partners) Track distribution and follow-up with interested parties 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) Invest Alberta (partner) Invest in Canada (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion and distribution of the sell sheet/marketing document Feedback from investors and developers on the usefulness of this material Number of investment inquiries and deals 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>
2. Develop relationships with federal and provincial departments and crown corporations tasked with investment attraction to improve opportunity identification	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key contacts within relevant departments and organizations Schedule introductory meetings to establish relationships Participate in industry events and networking opportunities 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) Global Affairs Canada, Regional Office for Alberta and the Northwest Territories (partner) Invest in Canada (partner) Alberta Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade (partner) Invest Alberta (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of initial outreach Creation of a regularized meeting schedule (e.g., quarterly, bi-annually) Number of opportunities identified through the new relationships 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>3. Develop a unified marketing strategy in collaboration with the Town of Westlock and neighbouring communities to effectively showcase the region’s strengths to attract new investment</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a joint marketing committee with representatives from each community • Develop a comprehensive marketing plan with clear objectives • Implement coordinated marketing activities and develop KPIs and methodologies to track results 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Town of Westlock (partner) • Village of Clyde (partner) • WERC (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of a joint marketing community • Completion of a unified marketing strategy • Increase in regional investment inquiries • Positive feedback from stakeholders on the marketing efforts 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>
<p>4. Promote the available land in the industrial park and along the highways to potential investors through targeted marketing campaigns</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy for marketing available land opportunities • Creation promotional materials (e.g., online advertising, social media etc.) • Identify and engage with potential investors, online and at regional events • Track and follow-up on leads generated from marketing efforts 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a strategy for marketing available land • Development and distribution of promotional materials • Number of inquiries related to available land • Completion of land sales or leases 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>5. Conduct ongoing employer retention and expansion interviews to understand business concerns and barriers to growth, in conjunction with WERC to create a holistic understanding of regional business trends</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule regular interviews with significant employers in the region Develop a standardized interview questionnaire to ensure consistency Collaborate with WERC to analyze and summarize findings Create a feedback loop to address planned expansions, concerns and barriers Report findings to relevant stakeholders and develop action plans 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) WERC (partner) Town of Westlock (partner) Village of Clyde (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of interviews on a regular schedule Reduction in reported barriers to growth over time Satisfaction among business owners, measured through consultation or survey 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>
<p>6. Promote economic development programming (qualified referrals, permits supported, inquiries supported, etc.) through local communication tools to build awareness among the business community</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and utilize local communication channels (e.g., newsletters, social media) Develop promotional materials highlighting economic programs Engage with local businesses and the chamber of commerce to disseminate information Track inquiries and referrals generated from promotional efforts 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) Westlock and District Chamber of Commerce (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of program inquiries and referrals Positive feedback from local businesses, measured through consultation or survey 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>
<p>7. Establish more regular touch points for members of the local business community to connect with senior representatives at the County, including administration and Council</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a communications plan for outreach and connection points with local businesses Schedule regular networking events for local business owners to discuss with Westlock County Council and administration Ensure that senior representatives are available and engaged during events 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) Westlock and District Chamber of Commerce (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of communications plan Completion of networking events with local businesses and county officials Implementation of feedback received from businesses during events 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>8. Develop a standardized lead management process (initial meeting, questionnaire, follow-up, etc.)</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define the stages of the lead management process Develop standardized templates for meetings, questionnaires, and follow-ups Implement a CRM system (formalized or unformalized) to track and manage leads Define roles of other County departments and identify where in the process they are required for input or support 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of the lead management process Number of leads managed through the process Conversion rate of leads to investments Feedback from municipal colleagues or investors on the process' effectiveness 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>
<p>9. Establish a site-visit protocol for investors visiting the County to explore identified investment opportunities</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a site-visit itinerary template Identify sites and stakeholders to include in visits Train staff, if applicable, on hosting and guiding site visits Collect feedback from investors after site visits 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) Town of Westlock (partner) Village of Clyde (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of site visits conducted Investor satisfaction with the site-visit experience Successful investments resulting from site-visits 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>
<p>10. Work with WERC to expand the current business directory to include public and private organizations in Westlock County that provide business services (e.g., accounting, legal, real estate)</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a comprehensive review of businesses providing commercial services in the region Collaborate with WERC to identify and include additional businesses and organizations Develop an online platform, perhaps in consultation with the chamber of commerce, to host an updated business directory Promote the directory to local businesses and service providers 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) WERC (partner) Westlock and District Chamber of Commerce (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of new additions to existing online business directory Feedback from local businesses on the directory's usefulness 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>11. Improve information sharing with municipal partners through WERC, including non-confidential development and investment trends, site selection information, and changes to county policies and strategic directions</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a regular meeting schedule with municipal partners • Develop a standardized process for reporting development and investment trends • Ensure timely updates on policy changes and strategic directions 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Town of Westlock (partner) • Village of Clyde (partner) • WERC (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a regular meeting schedule • Partner satisfaction with the information-sharing process • Increased collaboration on regional economic development initiatives 	<p>Priority: Low</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>
<p>12. Ensure that information about local businesses and attractions is up-to-date and easily accessible online</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review online information related to Westlock County to determine breadth of information available • Collaborate with local businesses with absent or incorrect information 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Westlock and District Chamber of Commerce (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from local business indicating an increase to activity attributable to additions or updates 	<p>Priority: Low</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>

Strategic priority 3 – Pursue sector opportunities

Specific sector opportunities have been identified for the county, with key sectors such as value-added agriculture and light manufacturing presenting significant potential for future growth and investment. To harness these opportunities, the county will need to promote local assets and highlight specific opportunities and parcels of land. Showcasing the county's strengths, such as its strategic location, skilled workforce, and supportive business environment can highlight its advantages when attracting new investment. Understanding the needs of investors will be crucial in fostering a supportive environment for business growth. The county should proactively engage with potential and existing investors to gain insights into their requirements and challenges (see strategic priority 2).

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
1. Encourage investment in agricultural processing facilities (e.g., canola crushing facility) as well as emerging agricultural technologies such as vertical farming	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify firms operating large agricultural processing facilities in Alberta and Canada Conduct outreach to identify potential investors and companies interested in establishing agricultural processing facilities Develop investment incentives and support packages for interest parties Host site visits to showcase applicable land and location opportunities in Westlock County Monitor and manage inquiries from developers of agricultural processing facilities 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) Invest Alberta (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of applicable agricultural processing firms Completion of outreach to agricultural processing firms Number of investment inquiries related to agricultural processing facilities Establishment of one or more agricultural processing facilities in Westlock County Growth in local agricultural processing capacity 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>2. Conduct targeted outreach to combine in the oil fields and supporting sectors, highlighting Westlock County’s strategic location as a construction, repair, and maintenance centre as well as available land</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct outreach to identify regional companies in the oil fields and supporting sectors • Develop targeted outreach materials highlighting Westlock County’s advantages • Schedule meetings and presentations with company representatives • Offer site tours and highlight available land and facilities • Provide ongoing support and follow-up to interested companies 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of companies engaged through targeted outreach • Number of inquiries and interest from companies in construction, repair, and maintenance • Number of business and employment in construction, repair, and maintenance in Westlock County 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>
<p>3. Identify and allocate undesirable or least desirable agricultural land (low yield) for solar power generation projects</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a land assessment to identify low-yield agricultural land • Conduct outreach to identify and engage with renewable energy companies and investors interested in solar power projects • Develop proposals and business cases for solar power generation on identified land • Secure necessary permits and approvals for solar projects • Oversee the development of solar power facilities 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Alberta Utilities Commission (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of solar power projects established on low-yield agricultural land • Increase in renewable energy generation capacity 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>4. Connect with Travel Alberta to identify opportunities for collaboration and access to regional visitor data to focus advertising</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule an introductory meeting with Travel Alberta representatives to discuss potential collaboration • Identify areas where Travel Alberta can support Westlock County’s tourism initiatives • Request access to regional visitor data to inform local targeted advertising strategies • Develop joint marketing campaigns with Travel Alberta • Monitor the impact of collaborative efforts on visitor numbers 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel Alberta (lead) • Westlock County (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of a collaborative initiative with Travel Alberta • Access to and utilization of regional visitor data • Increase in targeting advertising effectiveness • Growth in visitor numbers and tourism revenue 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>
<p>5. Engage with Invest Alberta to ensure that Westlock County is known as a prime location for carbon storage projects among investors</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule a meeting with Invest Alberta representatives to discuss carbon storage investments in Alberta, and where Westlock County is competitive • Develop promotional materials highlighting Westlock County’s suitability for carbon storage projects for investor distribution • Participate in investment forums and economic development events related to carbon capture to promote the county 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Invest Alberta (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of meeting with Invest Alberta • Number of investment inquiries related to carbon capture projects • Successful establishment of carbon storage projects in Westlock County 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>6. Promote Westlock County’s tourism assets and local businesses through targeted online marketing</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and curate engaging content that highlights the unique characteristics of county-owned tourism assets, natural attractions, and local businesses • Allocate budget for targeted social media advertising aimed at students, youth, and summer travelers in the Edmonton Region • Create a content calendar for regular social media posts and collaborate with local businesses for joint promotional campaigns • Identify and use high-quality images and videos showcasing Westlock County’s natural beauty and amenities, integrating them into broader online marketing efforts • Monitor and analyze performance of all promotional posts and advertising campaigns 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Westlock and District Chamber of Commerce (partner) • Travel Alberta (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of impressions (likes, shares, comments) on social media posts • Number of advertising impressions and click-through rates • Number of visitors entering Westlock County • Number of local businesses featured on the County website and social media • Feedback from local business owners on the effectiveness of promotions 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>
<p>7. Develop additional wayfinding signage to guide travelers to local businesses and attractions</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an internal assessment to identify key locations for wayfinding signage • Design or replicate and produce clear and attractive signage • Collaborate with local businesses and attractions to determine signage content • Install the signage at strategic locations • Maintain and update the signage as needed 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Westlock and District Chamber of Commerce (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of wayfinding signage • Increase in visitor traffic to local businesses and attractions • Positive feedback from travelers on the ease of navigation 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>8. Continue to invest in ski-hill infrastructure (including Nordic and downhill) to accommodate growth in the number of visitors</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a needs assessment to identify infrastructure improvements required for ski-hill infrastructure • Develop a phased investment plan for ski-hill infrastructure upgrades • Secure funding and allocate budget for planned improvements • Implement infrastructure upgrades and ensure regular maintenance 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of ski-hill infrastructure upgrades • Increase the number of visitors to local ski-hills • Positive feedback from visitors regarding the improved facilities • Growth in revenue generated from ski-hill activities 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Long</p>
<p>9. Seek developers for summer recreation assets, including ziplines and bike trails to expand year-round offerings</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct local and regional outreach to identify potential developers and investors interested in summer recreation projects • Develop detailed proposals and business cases for the recreation assets • Negotiate contracts and memoranda with selected developers • Oversee the development and construction of recreation assets 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful agreements and contracts signed for recreation projects • Completion of new recreation assets • Increase in visitor numbers attributable to new recreation assets 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Long</p>

Strategic priority 4 – Facilitate talent attraction and retention

Talent attraction and retention is essential component for Westlock County to be successful in its investment attraction efforts, as new investors require nearby available talent. Talent attraction and retention requires a multi-faceted approach which includes developing diverse housing to meet the needs of the population, collaboration with training partners to ensure that the local population has the appropriate skills required for the local labour force and promoting the quality of life within the county to attract new residents. The county will require a robust workforce to support future economic development efforts and attracting and retaining talent is a crucial element to support future successes.

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
1. Work with planning professionals at Westlock County to ensure that housing diversity in the community meets the needs of the current and future workforce	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a housing needs assessment to identify current and future housing requirements • Collaborate with planning professionals (municipal or contracted) to develop a housing strategy that includes diverse housing options • Engage with developers and builders to promote the construction of varied housing types • Implement zoning changes or incentives to encourage the development of affordable and diverse housing 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of a comprehensive housing needs assessment • New housing developed that meets identified needs • Increase in the diversity of housing types of available in the community • Number of affordable housing units • Feedback from residents and newcomers on housing satisfaction 	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Timing: Long</p>
2. Advertise Westlock County as eligible to receive nominees from the Government of Alberta's Rural Entrepreneur Stream	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify informational materials related to the Government of Alberta's Rural Entrepreneur Stream • Advertise Westlock County as eligible to receive nominees through the program, through official channels as well as partners 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Alberta Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation and distribution of promotional materials related to the Rural Entrepreneur Stream • Increase in inquiries or applications related to the Rural Entrepreneur Stream • Successful nominations and business establishments/succession in the county 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>3. Stay up-to-date on federal workforce development programming to support the reskilling, upskilling, and transition of workers to new occupations</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Employment and Social Development Canada website quarterly to review available programming Share programming information with relevant local businesses as identified through the BRE program (strategic priority 2) 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment and Social Development Canada (lead) Westlock County (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of relevant programming Number of businesses that are shared workforce programming information 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Short</p>
<p>4. Develop marketing materials and/or promotional campaign that highlights Westlock County’s quality of life and economic opportunities</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify selling points of Westlock County’s quality of life and economic opportunities, referring back to summary report Develop a marketing plan, including targeted audiences and channels (e.g., social media) Create marketing materials Launch promotional campaign across identified channels 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation and distribution of marketing materials Reach and engagement metrics of promotional materials, where measurable (e.g., social media impressions) Increase in the number of inquiries from potential residents and businesses Positive feedback from members of the community and stakeholders Growth in population and business investment 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>
<p>5. Identify businesses that are hiring and support them in attracting talent by providing relevant marketing materials and information (e.g., cost of living, local amenities, economic profile)</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide promotional materials on quality of life to businesses seeking new talent Share business opportunities in Westlock County through official channels (e.g., Westlock County website, social media) and through partner organization 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Westlock County (lead) Westlock and District Chamber of Commerce (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of quality-of-life promotional materials Job opportunities in Westlock County distributed through official and partner channels Increase in inquiries from potential residents Positive feedback from local businesses receiving support 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Action Items	Implementation	Performance Measures	Management
<p>6. Work with regional training providers to support local employers in upskilling new and existing employees in Westlock County</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify regional training providers and identify applicable offerings • Promote training programs to residents and businesses in Westlock County • Facilitate direct referrals to training providers from residents and businesses 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) • Regional training providers (partner) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of regional training providers • Development and distribution of promotional materials related to available training programs • Completion of referrals between residents and businesses and training providers 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>
<p>7. Explore working with an immigration consultancy to advertise local business opportunities or vacancies to foreign entrepreneurs</p>	<p>Implementation steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and identify reputable immigration consultancies • Establish a partnership with a selected consultancy • Develop a strategy to advertise local business opportunities and vacancies to foreign entrepreneurs 	<p>Lead and partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westlock County (lead) <p>Performance measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and partnership with an immigration consultancy • Number of inquiries from foreign entrepreneurs • Successful business establishments or succession resulting from the partnership 	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Timing: Medium</p>

Recommendations on Financing the Strategy

Securing funding for the Economic Development Strategy is essential for Westlock County to successfully execute on the identified actions. While some actions we have identified only require staff commitment, others will require small or more significant investments.

Off-site levies can provide Westlock County with additional revenue to pursue major infrastructure upgrades. However, these levies cannot be used for general county revenue. If the costs of expected infrastructure upgrades are too high for the county to manage, off-site levies should be considered to reduce future tax burdens on the population.

Given Westlock County’s current taxation structure, raising taxes is unlikely to promote future development or attract new talent. Instead, the county should explore relevant federal and provincial grants and incentives aimed at municipalities and regions for infrastructure and community development. Regularly reviewing grants and funding opportunities from federal and provincial sources will enable the county to apply for appropriate funding before it is fully utilized. It may become prudent to investigate and pursue the hiring of external contractors (either at a flat fee or percentage of total grant) to identify and apply to funding programs that will allow County staff to maintain their existing service levels.

Federal Programs			
Canada Community-Building Fund	Federal Small Communities Fund	Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program	
Provincial Programs			
Alberta Community Partnership	Grants in Place of Taxes Program	Local Government Fiscal Framework	Local Growth and Sustainability Grant
Municipal Stimulus Program	Municipal Sustainability Initiative	Alberta Municipal Water/Wastewater Partnership	Community Revitalization Levy Program
Loans to Local Authorities		Clean Water and Wastewater Fund	

Westlock County has resources available to either acquire land for business park expansion and future developments or to upgrade existing water systems. Both options offer significant benefits for the county. However, challenges in acquiring land from unwilling landowners may make infrastructure upgrades the best path forward to spur local development. Upgrading infrastructure will increase the value of existing county-owned industrial land and create additional advantages for investing in the county. It is advisable to explore potential partnerships with developers before making infrastructure upgrades, as developers may be willing to help offset some of the costs if a favourable tax structure can be agreed upon with the county.

Deloitte Disclaimer

This report was provided to Westlock County. Deloitte does not assume any responsibility or liability for losses incurred by any party because of the circulation, publication, reproduction, or use of this report contrary to its intended purpose. This report has been made only for the purpose stated and shall not be used for any other purpose. Neither this report (including references to it) nor any portions thereof (including without limitation the identity of Deloitte or any individuals signing or associated with this report, or the professional associations or organizations with which they are affiliated) shall be disseminated to third parties by any means or included in any document without the prior written consent and approval of Deloitte.

Our report and work product cannot be included, or referred to, in any public or investment document without the prior consent of Deloitte LLP. The analyses are provided as of March 2025 and we disclaim any undertaking or obligation to advise any person of any change in any fact or matter affecting this analysis, which may come or be brought to our attention after the date hereof. Without limiting the foregoing, if there is any material change in any fact or matter affecting the analyses after the date hereof, we reserve the right to change, modify or withdraw the analysis.

Observations are made based on economic, industrial, competitive, and general business conditions prevailing as at the date hereof. In the analyses, we may have made assumptions with respect to the industry performance, general business and economic conditions and other matters, of which many are beyond our control, including government and industry regulation. No opinion, counsel, or interpretation is intended in matters that require legal or other appropriate professional advice. It is assumed that such opinion, counsel, or interpretations have been, or will be, obtained from the appropriate professional sources. To the extent that there are legal issues relating to compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies, we assume no responsibility, therefore. We believe that our analyses must be considered as a whole and that selecting portions of the analyses, or the factors considered by it, without considering all factors and analyses together, could create a misleading view of the issues related to the report. Amendment of any of the assumptions identified throughout this report could have a material impact on our analysis contained herein. Should any of the major assumptions not be accurate or should any of the information provided to us not be factual or correct, our analyses, as expressed in this report, could be significantly different.

© Deloitte LLP and affiliated entities.



www.deloitte.ca

About Deloitte

Deloitte provides audit and assurance, consulting, financial advisory, risk advisory, tax, and related services to public and private clients spanning multiple industries. Deloitte serves four out of five Fortune Global 500® companies through a globally connected network of member firms in more than 150 countries and territories bringing world-class capabilities, insights, and service to address clients' most complex business challenges. Deloitte LLP, an Ontario limited liability partnership, is the Canadian member firm of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited. Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee, and its network of member firms, each of which is a legally separate and independent entity. Please see www.deloitte.com/about for a detailed description of the legal structure of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited and its member firms.

Our global Purpose is making an impact that matters. At Deloitte Canada, that translates into building a better future by accelerating and expanding access to knowledge. We believe we can achieve this Purpose by living our shared values to lead the way, serve with integrity, take care of each other, foster inclusion, and collaborate for measurable impact.

To learn more about Deloitte's approximately 330,000 professionals, over 11,000 of whom are part of the Canadian firm, please connect with us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), or [Facebook](#).