



MEDICINE HAT & DISTRICT
Chamber
of **COMMERCE**

VOLE PROSPERITY

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE.

The background of the page is a photograph of a construction site at sunset. A large crane is visible on the left side, and a multi-story building is under construction. The sky is filled with large, dramatic clouds illuminated by the setting sun, creating a warm orange and yellow glow. The building's windows are dark, but some are lit from within, and the overall scene is silhouetted against the bright sky.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We created the Vote Prosperity Platform so that people can familiarize themselves with the issues our region is facing and see where local candidates stand on these issues. It's important that everyone starts to think about how we can build a strong foundation moving forward. To ensure the 2021 municipal election addresses the most important issues for economic growth, 'Building for the Future' outlines the Chamber's five fundamental pillars for a strong and prosperous Southeast Alberta Region.

Our region needs to focus on both short-term and long-term solutions. It's important to address the immediate barriers to growth businesses shared such as high taxes, regulations, and the impact of the pandemic. But to build for the future, our region must also work together tackle issues like infrastructure development, talent attraction and innovation. As a result, five pillars were identified for the 2021 Vote Prosperity platform: innovation and competitive strategy, infrastructure development, image and branding, workforce development as well as business and financial support.



2021 VOTE PROSPERITY

PLATFORM DOCUMENT

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medicinehatchamber.com

INNOVATION & COMPETITIVE STRATEGY

Fostering long term prosperity in our region by implementing and applying cutting-edge technologies and methods.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Keeping our region vibrant and welcoming, and improving the region to invite growth and new residents.

IMAGE & BRANDING

Ensuring that our region is always putting its best foot forward in advancing positive perceptions of the area.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Ensuring employers and employees in the region have access to the resources to improve themselves and their businesses.

BUSINESS & FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Facilitating a smooth transition into a strong and prosperous economy as the region emerges post-pandemic.

INNOVATION & COMPETITIVE STRATEGY

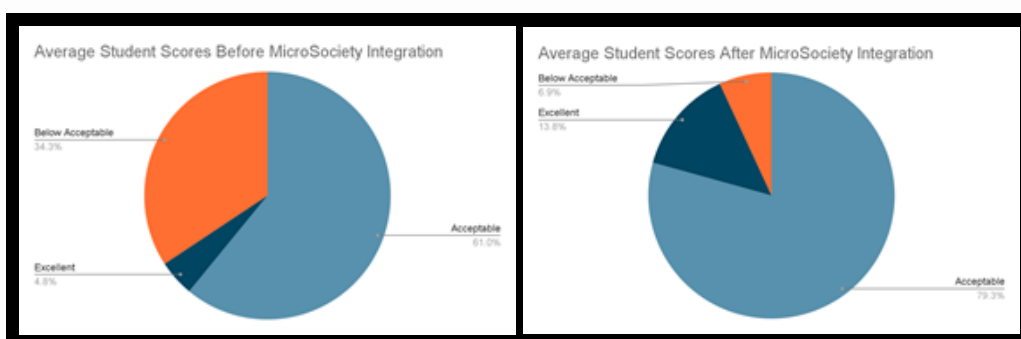
One of the main priorities in our region should be keeping residents and businesses that make up our robust and diverse regional economy, as well as attracting and incentivizing new businesses. Some of the main barriers to entry for businesses looking to start up in our region include political red tape, a lack of transparency, and limited accountability.

Medicine Hat is among the highest for residential property taxes. In 2020 the non-residential municipal mill rate in Medicine Hat was 15.7% increasing from 15.1% in 2019. 2021 tax rates are 6.80 for single family and vacant residential, 8.31 for multi-family, farmland is at 16.48 and non-residential is 15.28. Medicine Hat has a tax gap of 2.31 as of 2018. Higher taxes contribute to a lower rate of economic growth, reduced rates of personal income, lower rates of capital formation and reduced entrepreneurship. Market assessments need to be consistent, transparent and predictable to foster prosperity.

When starting a business, confusion stemming from having to contact government representatives at multiple points could be circumvented by centralizing government contact points using the “one window” approach, and by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of government officials so that business owners know who to contact regarding their concerns. Decentralized government contact points often requires hiring external consultants to make sense of the requirements and paperwork. These artificial barriers in starting and maintaining a business negatively impact the region by making startup companies less viable and keeping business operations more complicated than in some other regions.

An ideal municipal candidate should demonstrate a commitment to advocating for improvements to our educational curriculum. The current educational budget is undergoing a large-scale restructuring resulting in trimming down staffing, overtime, and availability of supplies for education. The massive cuts introduce a need for the community to advocate for the integration of innovative strategies and assets into the educational curriculum. Without a new approach, the quality of education for youth in our region will degrade.

A new and very promising means of approaching educational development for youth is the use of Microsocieties in the classroom. MicroSociety integration creates learning environments in grades K-12 that allow students to apply classroom knowledge to a setting that better reflects the modern workforce. Students get an authentic, hands-on learning experience of dynamic miniature societies, reinforced by educators. Schools include government, entrepreneurial hub, non-profits, and marketplaces all created and managed by students and facilitated by teachers. A pilot launch of the program launched in Red Deer showed significant boosts to attendance, student engagement, average grades, student satisfaction and parent satisfaction.





INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT



The future of economic prosperity should be supported by the decisions of our municipal elected officials. This includes making sure the roads in industrial areas are safe and capable of carrying heavy loads, providing tax incentives to allow local businesses to grow and thrive, and investing in civil infrastructure to keep our district vibrant and welcoming. Some investments of this nature could include parking infrastructure, publicly accessible transportation services providing transit to commercial areas, and allocating funds to the downtown business revitalization program.

One of the main concerns of citizens in our region is the limited availability and prohibitively high cost of broadband services. Over 40% of respondents in the 2020 BREWD report for Southeastern Alberta residents said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the costs of available broadband services, the lowest scoring factor of any element in the survey. Street maintenance was rated moderately well, with 66% of respondents stating they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service. Highway accessibility, railroad services and air service were all highly rated. Some additional data from the BREWD survey is included below.

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Fire Department	0.29%	1.47%	6.19%	52.80%	36.28%
Sewer & Water	0.59%	6.21%	10.95%	53.25%	24.85%
Street Maintenance	4.45%	12.76%	15.73%	49.65%	16.02%
Environmental Regulators	1.19%	7.12%	26.41%	40.65%	15.13%
Planning and Zoning	3.85%	18.05%	26.04%	34.32%	8.28%
Code Enforcement	2.99%	12.87%	28.74%	37.43%	6.89%

A significant infrastructure project that would help create sustainable prosperity in our region is the twinning of Highway 3. Twinning the highway would make travelling around the region safer and faster, would increase tourism and benefit the agriculture industry in transporting goods. A 2017 analysis report shows that for every dollar spent on the highway, a projected \$2.97 in long term benefits are gained.

Derelict buildings in the region detract from our overall image, make tourism less appealing, and impede overall growth. To address this issue, the municipal official chosen should plan to manage the empty lots and dilapidated buildings that are detracting from the beauty of our region. The success of a city can often be captured based on how lively, well-maintained and busy their downtown is. Construction of beneficial locations for the residents like parks, playgrounds and tourist attractions can help to shift downtown towards the most ideal version of itself. A promising municipal candidate should help advocate for better planned growth and development, especially in Downtown Medicine Hat.



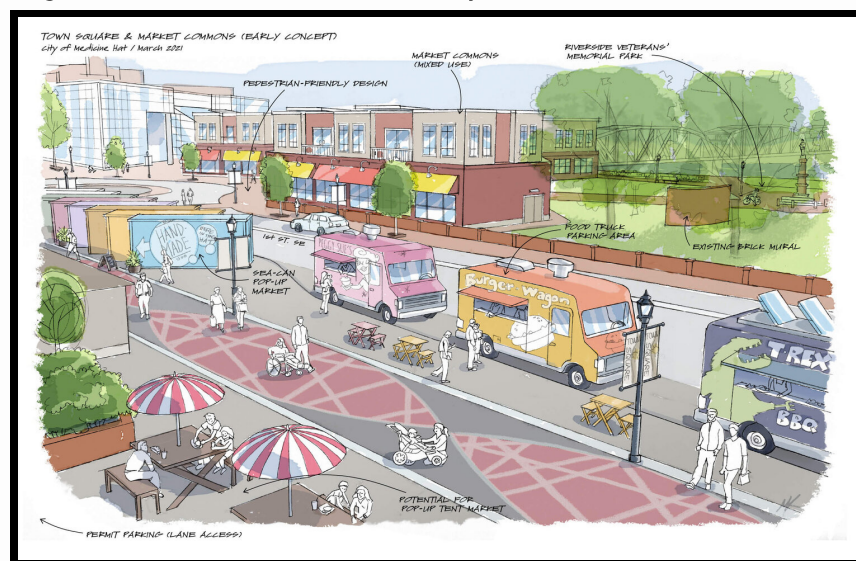
IMAGE & BRANDING




A priority for electoral candidates in our region should be the funding of projects to promote a healthy, vibrant future for the region as well as to attract newcomers and tourists. The businesses and citizens of Southeastern Alberta are a diverse community with countless different backgrounds and ideals. Our long-term prosperity requires the strategic integration of this information to combat the notion that our region appeals exclusively to older citizens.

In recent years, Medicine Hat has noticed a stagnated population growth, showing only a moderate growth of approximately 5.5% growth in the last 10 years with only 1.8% between 2014 to 2018. By comparison, the City of Lethbridge had a population growth of 1.5% in 2020 alone despite being in a similar area within Southern Alberta and offering comparable amenities to those available in our region. This is likely not an issue that will resolve itself over time, and requires action by the decision makers we choose to represent our community. The growth rate of Medicine Hat is projected to experience an extremely low rate of population growth, with estimations rating growth at approximately 0.8% per year over the short-term, with a gradual decline to 0.6% per year by 2050.

Our region has many facilities and areas that could draw an increase in citizenship and tourism. Some of these areas include the beautiful waterfront district which many residents consider the most visually striking spot in the city, and the downtown development which presents an opportunity to attract new industries and residents. The waterfront district currently has an in-progress redevelopment project coordinated with Invest Medicine Hat, promising an impressive host of new attractions like food trucks, amenity spaces, and a leisure promenade for pedestrians to relax. Municipal candidates should demonstrate a long-term commitment to projects like these that have the potential to attract young families, students and skilled workers to our community, as they built a new brand for the future of the region, not as a retirement community but as a rapidly growing center of commerce, industry and tourism.

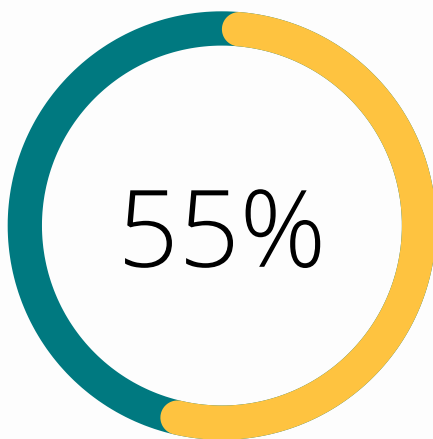


Invest Medicine Hat's Waterfront Proposal



Our municipal candidates should also have a commitment to embracing immigration, as new citizens coming from international communities as well as other parts of Canada should be able to find a long-term future and home for themselves in our region. Young and skilled immigrating citizens look for communities that offer job opportunities and an open-minded locality. In 2017, there were 82 young people for every 100 people over the age of 55. As a result, some newcomers to the city see the disproportionately large ratio of older working adults and do not see the region as a favorable location for families. This issue affects not only the workforce but also the employers and the entrepreneurs that start and operate small and medium-sized enterprises. There are 1,800 self employed people in Medicine Hat and over 40% of them are over the age of 55.

This mindset can be combated by electoral candidates through a devotion to development of the professional and recreational opportunities that exist within Southeastern Alberta. There are many ways that a successful political representative could implement this, including allocating funding for advertising campaigns to allow regional events and groups to reach a wider audience. Provisions for advertising local events such as concerts into surrounding communities have been shown to provide a long-term return on investment as it increases tourism, brings in revenue to circulate within the community, and raises awareness of the appeal of the region. Some organizations, like Stay In Medicine Hat are already working to spread awareness of the many opportunities that exist in the community for newcomers and current residents, but municipal support for these types of groups is limited. It may also be beneficial to raise awareness of the long-term plans for the community, to show that the district is not stagnant and is in fact on the brink of massive growth in terms of population, diversity, and financial prosperity. These plans already exist, with some documents like the 30-year myMH plan showing that the City is very active in planning a future for the municipality. Candidates putting their name forward this election season should show a similar dedication to our future.



Citizens over the age of 55



Year-over-year population growth

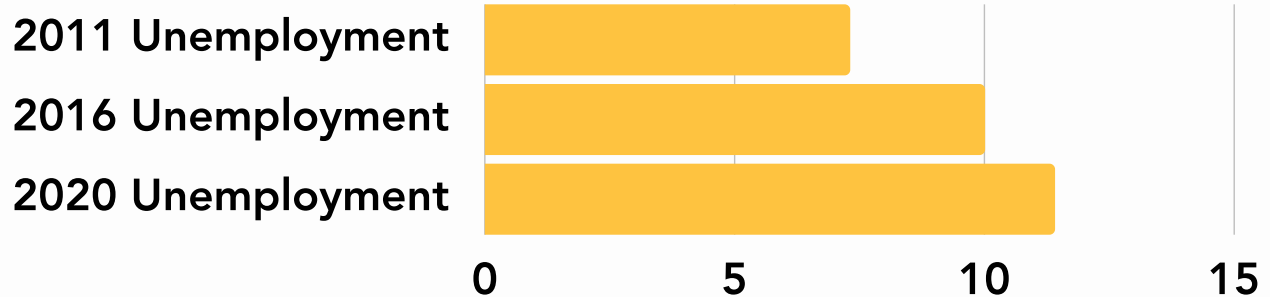


WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



Approximately 40% of businesses in the region have experienced hiring challenges and 24% have had issues retaining talent. According to Stats Canada Medicine Hat's unemployment rate was listed at 11.3% for August 2019, up 10% from July 2019. A few of the key challenges of workers/job seekers are age, lack of education, lack of jobs/training, lack of experience and low wages. The key challenges that employers are experiencing include influence of the oil and gas industry, the recent increase in minimum wage, competition with neighboring metropolitan centers, muscle drain, and lack of central resources to search for local candidates.

Attracting and retaining businesses and highly skilled people in Southeastern Alberta is essential for the development of the area. Increasing the opportunities for skill development, and can be accomplished by providing funding and increasing awareness for skill development programs such as the YMCA Skills Link Program. Government grants for funding are another way to increase the opportunity for skill development.



The promotion and retention of highly skilled people influences the level and amount of skill available in the area. Creating post graduate courses with the Medicine Hat College should be promoted as current graduates of the College might not see staying in the region as a priority when choosing employment. Dual graduate programs such as implementing college level courses in high school that transfer over, shortening the length of time students spend in university as well as creates interests in fields prior to graduation and motivates students not only to attend post-secondary but also, stay for employment in city post-graduation. Another way to promote the city as the place to work is to change the idea that Medicine Hat is a retirement community. Ensuring that Medicine Hat is viewed as a place to live and work will aid in attracting new talent as well as retaining existing talent.

As stated above 40% of businesses in the area have experienced hiring challenges. Creating regional job fairs and or municipal job boards would aid in closing this gap. Employers would have better access to talent available in their area and employees would have the opportunity to meet with employers. Creating mixers for employers and employees would create a better flow of talent.



BUSINESS & FINANCIAL SUPPORT

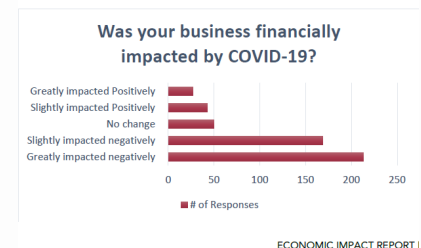


Every business in the region is facing some challenges from the recent pandemic. Some of the challenges that small business owners are facing are decreases in profits and decreased sales. Small businesses are more likely to experience a year-over-year decrease in revenue, are less likely to be able to take on more debt and adopt or incorporate various technologies.

Fostering collaborative relationships within the business community will ensure that businesses in Southeastern Alberta have equal opportunity to recover from the recession and to build intracommunal connections. (While international trade exports constitute roughly 30 percent of Canada's GDP, more than \$1 billion in trade moves within Canada everyday as interprovincial trade reaches approximately \$385 billion per year. Interprovincial trade barrier removals would promote collaboration between small and mid-sized producers.)

Establishing a line of communication and engagement between the business community of our region and their representatives assist in maintaining accountability and open discussions with the business community in South East Alberta. A line of communication that is accessible at a business and residential level would ensure equity and fair representation. Many Albertans and business owners do not know how to reach out to their elected representatives which leads to a lack of comprehensive dialogue between elected representatives and their constituents.

To ensure an environment of fair, transparent and reliable information on candidates a document is required in which an incumbent's track record on council would be highlighted, as well as any information related to new candidates' policies and positions. This document would provide an accurate source of information for the community and the electorate as they prepare to vote in the future municipal elections.



COVID Recovery for Businesses (Taxes, grants, repayments, funding information). Supporting businesses through COVID recovery is an essential aspect of the future of our region. Distributing information and providing accessibility to federal and provincial funding or COVID recovery are essential as well as creating municipal grants where possible.

The next steps of COVID recovery will need to include the Alberta Recovery Plan. This plan will need to be implemented on a municipal level and provide communally excessive framework, planning and implementation. This involves making sure businesses have the resources they need and are aware of the resources that they are able to access. Providing programs for re-hiring employees, reopening and integrating the hybrid model are a few essential aspects for the recovery of small businesses in the Southeastern Alberta.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION

The Medicine Hat & District Chamber of Commerce suggests that our incumbent municipal electorate:

- Advocate for the use of innovative and competitive strategies to benefit businesses and education in our region.
- Allocate time and funding to improve the infrastructure of the region.
- Create a plan to address the issues related to image and branding that may slow the growth in our region.
- Demonstrate a commitment to growing our workforce by promoting the use of professional development and talent attraction programs.
- Clarify taxation and regulatory rules and ensure equal opportunity for business growth after the financial recession and pandemic.

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ADVOCACY?**



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