



Rural Economic Development Support Programming Summary

Existing Programming

1. **Dedicated Rural Economic Development Staff:** The Economic Development Department currently has approximately 1.5 full time equivalent staff dedicated to rural economic development programming.
2. **Business Support Network (BSN):** The BSN is a platform for business support organizations, small medium sized businesses (urban and rural) and stakeholders to identify common challenges and address current trends through information sharing, referrals, and partnering initiatives. The first two BSN events were held on July 22, 2015 and September 21, 2015 with a total of 98 businesses participating. Partners on the BSN include the Government of Alberta, Community Futures Wood Buffalo and the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce.
3. **Business Visitation Program (BVP):** The BVP is a one-on-one engagement tool where Economic Development staff members meet with business operators (urban and rural) in their place of business. The Program seeks to forge strong relationships between the Municipality and the business community and ensures that Municipal staff is as informed as possible with respect to the regions business environment.
4. **Urban Market:** The Municipality hosted a total of ten markets in 2015, averaging 15 vendors per market. Three rural vendors participated in the market over the course of the season, including one youth entrepreneur. In order to increase the diversity of product offerings, as well as provide additional support to businesses, efforts will be undertaken to attract other rural vendors for the 2016 season.
5. **Capacity Building and Partnership Facilitation:** A key component of the Municipality's rural economic development programming is the development of additional capacity and stronger interconnectedness across the region. Examples of the Municipality's engagement include:
 - a. **Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI):** Through the Economic Development department, the Municipality has partnered with SCI and works with Fort Chipewyan (Lake Athabasca Youth Council) and Janvier (Sekweha). SCI facilitates youth empowerment, leadership development and experiential learning. This programming is in support of the shared vision of co-creating safe, healthy, sustainable communities where people can work, live, play and raise their children.

- b. **Wood Buffalo Career Committee (WBCC):** The WBCC is a collaboration between the Municipality, Northlands School District, Careers Next Generation, Keyano College, Alberta Human Services and the YMCA. The purpose of the committee is to listen, collaborate and support rural schools regarding the career development needs of students.
- c. **Fort Chipewyan Tourism Assessment:** The Fort Chipewyan Tourism Assessment is being led by the Government of Alberta, Tourism Division, with support from local partners including the Municipality. The projects purpose is to identify and assess tourism opportunities that would contribute to the growth of tourism in the community while providing economic diversification, innovation and employment opportunities for residents. In addition to the Municipality's participation, other local stakeholders include community residents, Canada Parks, Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association, Fort Chipewyan Historical Society and Fort McMurray Tourism.
- d. **Right to Play:** The Fort Chipewyan community has been selected to partner with the Right to Play (RTP) program. RTP is an Ontario based organization which provides programming focused on engaging children and youth with four long-term outcomes in mind: improved education through empowerment, enhanced physical health, healthier relationships and increased employability.

Enhanced Programming

- 1. **Wood Buffalo Entrepreneurship Initiative (WBEI):** The WBEI is the Municipality's newest effort to support business development across Wood Buffalo. The primary focus of WBEI is the provision of programs and services aimed at building a stronger and more diverse business base in the region. The WBEI has multiple components including:

- a. **Business Accelerator:** The Business Accelerator will work primarily with existing businesses to provide support for business improvement and expansion. A key component of the Business Accelerator will be the continuation of the Executive in Residence (EIR) program. Through the EIR program, the Municipality will continue to assist local businesses with:

Financial modelling	Initial market assessment;
Connection to innovation networks	Mentorship;
Request for Proposal (RFP) advice	Business plan feedback;
Business structure advice;	Strategic development;
Connection to funding (loans, grants, investors, etc.)	

The Business Accelerator is a new service offering for the Municipality. Project implementation will begin in Fall 2015. While the Business Accelerator is intended to be a region wide initiative, there will be a particular focus on identifying potential rural clients who may benefit from EIR support.

- b. **Interactive Learning Events:** Through the WBEI, the Municipality will continue to offer strategic learning events for local business people. Examples of these events include:

Event	Date	# of Attendees
Social Media for your Business	March 24, 2015	25
Business Process Mapping	May 20, 2015	20
Wages at Work	June 2 & 3, 2015	15
Wages at Work	November 3 & 4, 2015	TBD

Initial reception by participants is positive. As a result, additional learning events are currently under development, including those that are to be hosted outside Fort McMurray, in other communities across the region.