

SMOKY LAKE COUNTY



Title: Recreation and Wellness Program	Policy No: 06-01
Section: 07	Page No.: 1 of 54

Legislative Reference:	Alberta Provincial Statutes
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Purpose:	Smoky Lake County partnered with the Town of Smoky Lake, Village of Waskatenau and Village of Vilna to initiate a regional Recreation and Wellness Program to encourage recreation through collaborative coordinated governance, community development and service delivery approach within the Smoky Lake Region.
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Policy Statement and Guidelines:

<p>1. OBJECTIVES:</p> <p>1.1 Smoky Lake County in partnership with the Town of Smoky Lake, the Village of Vilna and the Village of Waskatenau – initiated a joint research-based study and best-practices review of the recreational assets, programs and services currently available within the region under a Regional Collaboration Program (RCP) Grant.</p> <p>1.2 Smoky Lake County chose to take on a regional approach to enhance rather than compete regionally for the provision of Recreation; and accepted the final Joint Municipal Regional Recreation Master Plan Project, dated March 2013 completed by Shane Pospisil under the 2011/12 Regional Collaboration Program Grant in joint partnership with the Town of Smoky Lake, Village of Waskatenau and Village of Vilna on April 25, 2013.</p> <p>1.3 Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master Plan, as per Schedule “A”: Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master Plan is a process through which Council determines the municipality’s long-term vision and goals, and developing an action plan from its recommendations for “Recreation” regionally; and will be the principle guiding living document for governance, community development and service delivery for the County to achieve fundamental change for future recreation and wellness sustainability.</p> <p>2. DEFINITION:</p> <p>Recreation: The occasion of a person to participate in a specific recreation activity is inclusive of play, physical activity, sport, arts and culture and outdoor pursuits in order to enjoy a desired recreation experience and gain the healthy benefits that accrue.</p> <p>Regional Recreation: Providers collaborating to maximize the scope, effectiveness and efficiency of recreation services.</p>
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Policy Statement and Guidelines:

3. GUIDELINES:

3.1 Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master Plan, as per **Schedule “A”**: **Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master Plan** “Recommendations” will guide for the implementation of strategic planning and coordinated approach to the development and enhancement of Recreation and Wellness.

3.2 Smoky Lake County will consider the following Regional Recreation Master Plan Recommendations when creating budgets and work plans.

3.2.1 **Recommendation 1:**

All recreation stakeholders – not just the front-line recreation services providers – need to commit to strengthening the long-term health and well-being of residents through their involvement in *active recreation* and increased levels of physical activity.
 In answering the question Who does what?...the answer is all recreation stakeholders must share in this responsibility, based on their resource capabilities and core competencies to deliver effective, cost-efficient recreation programs and services.

3.2.2 **Recommendation 2:**

Municipal governments need to transition and build on the existing financial and operation support (direct and indirect) they currently provide to the region’s main recreation service providers, taking a more hands-on, active role as a service delivery “partner” rather than just a “funding provider”.
 The region’s volunteer sector – which should be recommended for its ongoing efforts and contributions – continues to carry far too much of the work load in the all-important operational, information and awareness, and service delivery areas.

3.2.3 **Recommendation 3:**

More specifically, municipal governments should increase their involvement and monitoring of regional recreation service delivery to ensure that existing core service providers are better equipped – financially, administratively and strategically – to sustain the range of programs, services and “amenities” required to address identified community-wide needs.
 The guiding principles should be:

- 1) Facilitating Education and Awareness
- 2) Maintaining Accessibility and Affordability
- 3) Enhancing Quality of Service
- 4) Maintaining Quality Infrastructure (Facilities and Related Amenities)
- 5) Providing Increased Program/Service Delivery Capacity
- 6) Transitioning to Multi-Party Accountability
- 7) Ensuring Long-Term Financial Sustainability
- 8) More Effective Leveraging of Senior Levels of Government

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Policy Statement and Guidelines:

3.2.4 **Recommendation 4:**

Fiscal capacity and long-term fiscal sustainability are always the two key considerations in moving beyond a discussion of “wants” and focusing attention instead on actual community “needs” and, more importantly, what is doable.

Prior to any major capital project being approved a thorough analysis of operating budget implications and possible partnership options must be undertaken to ensure that sufficient annual operating funds will be available.

A case in point, a detailed capital and operating cost budget was developed as part of this study to look at the possibility of building a basic, no-frills 5-6 lane, 25 metre competitive/recreational swimming pool, with water slide and adjoining kids pool, steam room, sauna and changing facilities.

The total capital cost of such a basic facility, aside of any land acquisition costs, was any where between \$6 million and \$8 million, but the facility’s annual operating cost shortfall (user pay) was estimated at between \$550,000 and \$600,000 a year (i.e., on annual projected operating costs of about \$800,000, and a user pay fee schedule consistent with other similar Northern Alberta benchmark facilities).

Aside of where the capital budget would come from, the longer term challenge is obviously who - or how – such a large and ongoing operating deficit would be covered?

3.2.5 **Recommendation 5:**

Municipal governments should lead in the facilitation of a broad-based public information and awareness campaign, with a particular focus on those groups with relatively low *active recreation/physical activity* participation levels.

3.2.6 **Recommendation 6:**

Municipal governments should continue to look at new and innovative ways to strengthen their role in encouraging, supporting and recognizing the region’s many volunteers. Volunteer Alberta and volunteer Canada are both great contact organizations for best-practices approaches that have worked well in other comparable jurisdictions.

3.2.7 **Recommendation 7:**

The recruitment, training and mentoring of the next generation of volunteers and not for-profit organizational leaders is one area that needs to be given a higher priority especially given the feedback received during the recent phone survey. Once again, this is a task for all recreation stakeholders – not just the existing volunteer-based recreation service providers.

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3.2.8 **Recommendation 8:**

Municipal governments – as employers and “organizational leaders” in the community should look at available opportunities to encourage and support healthier lifestyles, improved nutrition and diet and increased physical activity among their employees.

This includes setting aside specific time during working hours to facilitate these types of initiatives – all of which have been shown to contribute to a healthier and more productive workforce.

3.2.9 **Recommendation 9:**

It will be important to not overlook additional opportunities which may be available to improve public access to schools for after-hours recreation programs and user groups. Again, this was an opportunity that many respondents raised during the recent phone survey.

3.2.10 **Recommendation 10:**

Recreational programming and services aimed at more effectively engaging seniors, children and youth in *active recreation* must be a community-wide priority.

3.2.11 **Recommendation 11:**

Developing additional outdoor recreation capacity is not necessarily a bricks and mortar challenge, but it would appear to represent a significant and affordable opportunity to address the strong and seemingly growing demand of these types of recreational experiences.

3.2.12 **Recommendation 12:**

Avoid taxpayer-funded competition against privately-owned and operated service providers, especially where these entrepreneurs are effectively and efficiently addressing priority recreational needs and demands. In fact, all recreation stakeholders should be cross-promoting each other, rather than trying to duplicate services or programming that is already being offered.

3.2.13 **Recommendation 13:**

In terms of how to “operationalize” many of the findings, action items and recommendations emerging from this study, the overriding recommendation is that the new Smoky Lake Region Economic and Community Development Committee assume this coordinating collaborative role – effective immediately.

It may be that this eventually leads to the establishment of a “permanent” multi-stakeholder Regional Recreation Advisory Board, or even implementation of regional recreation-specific levies, but these are decisions that are clearly down the road.

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Policy Statement and Guidelines:	
4. PROCEDURES:	
4.1	A regional approach for the implementation of the Regional Recreation Master Plan Recommendations will be facilitated through the Regional Community Development Committee, as per Policy Statement No. 61-07: entitled "Regional Community Development Committee (RCDC): Terms of Reference" for the provision and development of a Recreation and Wellness Program.
4.2	Smoky Lake County Council will continue to monitor and evaluate its operations and budgeting to ensure for the provisions for funding decisions of the Recreation and Wellness Program.
4.3	Decision-making process for the Recreation and Wellness Program for the implementation of specific projects and services will require approval by resolution of Smoky Lake County Council.

	Date	Resolution Number
Approved	August 22, 2013	# 852-13 - Page #10735
Approved		
Amended		
Amended		
Amended		



**SMOKY LAKE REGION
FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**REGIONAL RECREATION
MASTER PLAN**

Submitted To:

Smoky Lake Region JEDI Committee

and

**Smoky Lake Region
Joint Municipalities Committee**

Submitted By:

**Mr. Shane Pospisil
Smoky Lake Region JEDI Committee/CEDO
Phone: 1-780-860-5100**

March 2013

**Smoky Lake Region
Joint Economic Development Initiative
(JEDI)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2012, the four municipalities which make up of Smoky Lake Region – Smoky Lake County, the Town of Smoky Lake, the Village of Vilna and the Village of Waskatenau – initiated a joint research-based study and best-practices review of the recreational assets, programs and services currently available within the region. More specifically, the extensive consultations-based, community-needs-focused study was aimed at:

- Assessing and evaluating current **active recreation** participation levels among residents of Smoky Lake Region.
- Identifying gaps in current recreational programming and service delivery.
- Developing a series of recommendations to enhance the quality of life of all residents through their participation in **active recreation**, sport and – in general – through increased physical activity and higher levels of overall physical fitness.
- Better equipping regional recreation service providers with the resources they need to effectively and efficiently deliver a range of programs and services that respond – first and foremost – to current and evolving community needs and priorities.

Broad-based community consultations – primarily conducted through a comprehensive, random phone survey of Smoky Lake Region individuals and households (i.e., a statistically-significant sample size of 368 household members was covered by the two main survey components)¹ – were essential to assessing and evaluating current *active recreation* participation levels among residents and to identifying regional recreation priorities and needs.

Clearly, there are individuals within Smoky Lake Region who, regardless of their age, continue to maintain acceptable, good or excellent levels of physical fitness and continue to meet their recommended daily/weekly moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity targets.² The survey identified these individuals (and households), their existing recreation patterns and preferences, and their recreation priorities and needs.

What the survey also identified, however, was a relatively large segment of Smoky Lake Region’s population – cutting across all major demographic groups – that has become increasingly more inactive and sedentary in its behavior patterns.

In fact, given the scope, breadth and seriousness of the trends identified, this would indeed appear to represent the most significant recreation-focused challenge currently confronting Smoky Lake Region.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (Continued)

Major population-based health studies continue to show that inactivity and increased levels of sedentary and passive behavior directly contributes to higher levels of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, depression and, ultimately, a reduced quality of life and a higher likelihood of premature death.

These findings are not unique. They have been widely recognized as one of the most fundamental public policy challenges confronting governments at all levels – municipal, provincial/state and federal – and certainly across North America.

The main Regional Recreation Master Plan action items/recommendations which follow are both a reflection and a response to what was heard during the community consultations.

As such, they reflect the broader community's stated preferences, perceptions, needs, wants and priorities when it comes to recreation, sports and related community-wide amenities, programming and services – rather than those of the consultant, the four municipal governments or any other stakeholder groups(s). They are also financially doable and fiscally sustainable.

There is a wide recognition that to be effective this Plan must be viewed as a living document and that the active participation and continued engagement of all stakeholders in implementation and execution imperative.

The local service clubs, organizations and the regional Agricultural Societies are all important players, as are the four municipal governments within the region, but it must be recognized that each (individually) is only one player when it comes to contributing to the broader and more collaborative effort which this Plan is recommending.

The Regional Recreation Master Plan action items / recommendations are outlined in *Section 10*, which begins on Page 47.

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SMOKY LAKE REGION REGIONAL RECREATION MASTER PLAN

Final Report and Recommendations

1. Preface

In April 2012, the four municipalities which make up of Smoky Lake Region – Smoky Lake County, the Town of Smoky Lake, the Village of Vilna and the Village of Waskatenau – initiated a joint research-based study and best-practices review of the recreational assets, programs and services currently available within the region. More specifically, the extensive consultations-based, community-needs-focused study was aimed at:

- Assessing and evaluating current **active recreation** participation levels among residents of Smoky Lake Region.
- Identifying gaps in current recreational programming and service delivery.
- Focusing on regional recreation priorities and needs.
- Developing a series of recommendations to enhance the quality of life of all residents through their participation in **active recreation**, sport and – in general – through increased physical activity and higher levels of overall physical fitness.
- Better equipping regional recreation service providers with the resources they need to effectively and efficiently deliver a range of programs and services that respond – first and foremost – to current and evolving community needs and priorities.

Funding assistance for this study and development of the Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master Plan was provided under a Regional Collaboration Program (RCP) grant from the Government of Alberta (Alberta Municipal Affairs), to which the four participating regional municipalities – Smoky Lake County, the Town of Smoky Lake, the Village of Vilna and the Village of Waskatenau – are grateful.

The detailed Terms of Reference, submitted along with the original RCP grant application, provides additional background information and context on the key drivers and final project deliverables expected from the study.

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1.1. RCP Grant Application Terms of Reference

- ▶ *“Urgent concerns have been raised by our local service clubs and organizations, who are struggling to own, operate and maintain the many recreation facilities in Smoky Lake Region.”*
- ▶ *“Rural depopulation and aging demographics continue to put an intense strain on the volunteer sector”.*
- ▶ *“The four municipalities have been implored to find solutions to sustain the valued recreation services that improve our citizen’s quality of life.”*
- ▶ *“This Regional Recreation Master Plan will assess our current circumstances, identify opportunities for alternative methods of collaboration, and provide implementation steps towards achieving a sustainable framework of our recreation facilities and services to succeed into the future.”*
- ▶ *“Following feedback from the four municipal partners, the consultant will further develop the suggested alternative measures and implementation steps required to make these alternatives a reality.”*
- ▶ *“Upon adoption, the Regional Recreation Master Plan will be used as a policy guide to give direction to both municipal government and non-government organizations.”*
- ▶ *“The Plan will outline a structured commitment to provide the vital assistance needed to strengthen the communities’ ability to sustain the region’s recreation facilities and services and to enhance the quality of life of all residents through their participation in recreation.”*

Mr. Shane Pospisil, a highly-experienced, Alberta-based recreation and recreational programming consultant, was contracted to work with and report through the Smoky Lake Region Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI) Committee on work plan implementation and execution.

Members of the JEDI Committee essentially acted as the steering committee and participated in 10 separate progress report/feedback sessions over the course of the study. The progress report / feedback sessions were also held within intermunicipal Smoky Lake Region Joint Municipalities Committee, consisting of municipal councilors and senior administration from each of the four regional municipalities.

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It is important that JEDI Committee members be recognized and acknowledged for the important role they played in providing input and guidance to the consultant over the course of the study and in the development of the Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master Plan.

While the plan obviously reflects much more than just the views, perspectives and priorities expressed by JEDI Committee members – or, for that matter, any other particular stakeholder or group of stakeholders – each member of the JEDI Committee deserves to be acknowledged and commended for the time they committed to this project and for their collaborative efforts to enhance community well-being within Smoky Lake Region.

Members of the Smoky Lake Region JEDI Committee include:

- Mr. Randy Orichowski**, Smoky Lake County Division 5 Councillor (Chair)
- Mr. Frank Barry**, Councillor, Village of Vilna (Vice-Chair)
- Mr. Ron Bobocel**, Smoky Lake County Division 2 Councillor
- Mr. Rick Cherniwchan**, Smoky Lake County Division 3 Councillor
- Mr. Hank Holowaychuk**, Mayor, Town of Smoky Lake
- Mr. Mark Watson**, Councillor, Town of Smoky Lake
- Mrs. Sherri Frankard**, Councillor, Village of Waskatenau
- Mr. Cory Ollika**, Chief Administrative Officer, Smoky Lake County

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2. A Community-Wide Self-Examination of Recreation and Wellness

Broad-based community consultations – primarily conducted through a comprehensive, random phone survey of Smoky Lake Region individuals and households (i.e., a statistically-significant sample size of 368 household members was covered by the two main survey components)¹ - were essential to assessing and evaluating current *active recreation* participation levels among residents and to identifying regional recreation priorities and needs.

By taking directly to a representative sample of residents from across Smoky Lake Region, the survey was able to identify existing recreation patterns and preferences as well as perceived gaps in current recreational programming and service delivery. Most importantly, the survey identified a number of urgent and, for some at least, unexpected regional recreation priorities and needs.

Interviews with key recreation service providers, community leaders and volunteers were also an important component of the community consultations phase of the study, but one overriding theme coming from the comprehensive, random phone-based survey continued to resonate – overall physical activity and *active recreation* participation levels across all demographic groups are relatively poor and, in fact, appear to be diminishing over time.

Clearly, there are individuals within Smoky Lake Region who, regardless of their age, continue to maintain acceptable, good or excellent levels of physical fitness and continue to meet their recommended daily/weekly moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity targets.² The survey identified these individuals (and households), their existing recreation patterns and preferences, and their recreation priorities and needs.

What the survey also identified, however, was a relatively large segment of Smoky Lake Region's population – cutting across all major demographic groups – that had become increasingly more inactive and sedentary in its behavior patterns.

In fact, given the scope, breadth and seriousness of the trends identified, this would indeed appear to represent the most significant recreation-focused challenge currently confronting Smoky Lake Region.

¹New West Market Research *Comprehensive, Random Phone Survey of Smoky Lake Region Individuals and Households*, July-August 2012.

²As currently recommended by health, fitness and wellness advocacy organizations such as ParticipAction, Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Alberta Centre for Active Living, Health Canada, etc.

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Major population-based health studies continue to show that inactivity and increased levels of sedentary and passive behaviour directly contributes to higher levels of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, depression and, ultimately, a reduced quality of life and a higher likelihood of premature death.

These findings are not unique, They have been widely recognized as one of the most fundamental public policy challenges confronting governments at all levels – municipal, provincial/state and federal – and certainly across North America.

On the other hand, the benefits of **active recreation**, increased physical activity and higher levels of overall fitness have also been proven in study after study:

- ✓ Lower levels of obesity.
- ✓ Reduced risk of disease.
- ✓ Reduced risk of premature death.
- ✓ Improved mental and emotional health.
- ✓ Improved quality of life and community well-being.

Those residents who took the time out of their busy schedules to participate in the comprehensive phone-based survey, undertaken to better inform and help guide in the development of the Regional Recreation Master Plan, deserve a special thanks. Their input and the feedback they so willingly provided – in many cases blunt, unvarnished and direct to the point – has proven invaluable to enhancing the quality of research supporting this study and the direction set forth in the recommendations.

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3. Regional Recreation Master Plan Phases and Critical Path

The work plan for the Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master Plan consisted of the following five phases, conducted between April 2012 and February 2013. The final Regional Recreation Master Plan action items/recommendations were presented to the JEDI and Smoky Lake Region Joint Municipalities Committees in March 2013

<p>Phase 1: Background Research</p> <p>(1) <i>Socio-Demographic Profile of Smoky Lake Region</i> (2) <i>Recreational Amenities/Facilities Inventory and Assessment</i> (3) <i>Current Recreation/Sport Programming and Related Services</i> (4) <i>Identification of Regional Recreation Asset Gaps</i> (5) <i>Assess the Need for New Regional Facilities and/or Programming</i></p>	<p>> Completed April-May 2012 > Completed April-June 2012 > Completed May-July 2012 > Completed July-August 2012 > Completed July-August 2012</p>
<p>Phase 2: Community Consultations</p> <p>(1) <i>Comprehensive Closed-End Phone Survey</i>¹ (2) <i>Comprehensive Open-Ended/Discussion-Based Phone Survey</i>¹ (3) <i>Self-Selected Resident/Community Stakeholder Interview</i>³</p> <hr/> <p>¹New West Market Research <i>Comprehensive, Random Phone Survey of Smoky Lake Region Individuals and Households</i>, July-August 2012. A statistically-significant sample size of 368 household members was covered by survey components (1) and (2). ³83 separate resident/community stakeholders interviews undertaken over the course of the study.</p>	<p>> Completed July-August 2012 > Completed July-August 2012 > Ongoing/Completed January 2013</p>
<p>Phase 3: External Stakeholder Consultations/ Discussions</p> <p>(1) <i>Leading Municipal Recreation Service Providers (Northern Alberta)</i>⁴ (2) <i>Health, Fitness and Wellness Advocacy Organizations (Canada-Wide)</i>⁴</p> <hr/> <p>⁴ 26 separate external stakeholder consultations/discussions undertaken over the course of the study.</p>	<p>> Ongoing/Completed January 2013 > Ongoing/Completed January 2013</p>
<p>Phase 4: Review/Discuss Draft Regional Recreation Master Plan</p>	<p>> January-February 2013</p>
<p>Phase 5: Final Regional Recreation Master Plan Action Items/Recommendations Presented to JEDI Committee and Smoky Lake Region Joint Municipalities Committee</p>	<p>> March 2013</p>

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4. Recreation, Quality of Life and Community Sustainability

Like many other rural jurisdictions in Alberta, Smoky Lake Region has a fairly diverse range of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, other recreational amenities and recreation/sport programming and related services. There is no doubt that these make an important contribution to the region's overall quality of life.

There is a recognition, however, that a new Regional Recreation Master Plan is required to ensure that recreation, sport and other initiatives aimed at promoting increased physical activity continue to remain relevant to the current and future needs of Smoky Lake Region residents – e.g., well-targeted senior's programming; youth wellness, sports and fitness; and the provisions of a diversity of amenities, facilities and opportunities that encourage *active recreation* and increased physical activity.

The provision of recreation, sport, leisure and related community infrastructure and amenities, regardless of whether we are talking about rural Ontario, rural British Columbia or rural Alberta, usually involves many of the same issues.

- ▶ Ever-demanding and changing expectations of residents.
- ▶ Many facilities in need of major repair.
- ▶ Escalating maintenance and operating costs.
- ▶ Questions surrounding the optimal number of locations of various facilities.
- ▶ Refurbishment versus new-build?
- ▶ Limited funding and a multitude of competing priorities.
- ▶ A narrower range of highly-motivated volunteers.
- ▶ Over-worked volunteers and a growing sense among many that their efforts and contributions are not fully appreciated and recognized within the community.
- ▶ Where will the future operational and capital refurbishment resources come from?
- ▶ What alternative financing and service delivery arrangements could –and should – be explored?

These are issues and questions that are far from being unique to Smoky Lake Region and, in fact, arise in most rural jurisdictions.

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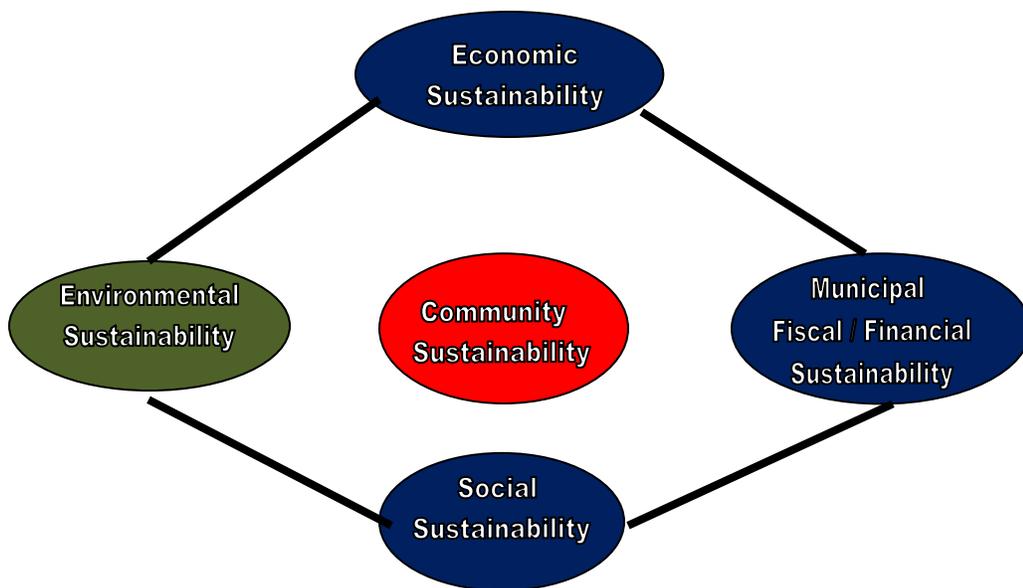
4.1 The Importance and Integrated Nature of Community Sustainability

Retention and growth of existing businesses, new business attraction, jobs, investments, residential development and new commercial/industrial assessment – these are all key and often stated economic and community development priorities of each of the four municipal governments within Smoky Lake Region.

We all know that sustainable economic development directly contributes to a municipality’s fiscal capacity which, in turn, supports the ability of that municipality to deliver on the other two and equally important objectives of environmental and social sustainability.

What is critical to remember is that this relationship is far from one-way, as environmental stewardship, the natural environment, and the community’s social fabric and social infrastructure (e.g., recreation, sports, cultural amenities, etc.) have also become key determinants in influencing locational decisions – for businesses and households alike.

Building Blocks of a Sustainable Community



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Research has shown that *communities of choice* are increasingly replacing *communities of necessity* for many households in the more rural parts of North America. These individuals are increasingly looking to live in affordable, high quality of life communities – with excellent recreational amenities and clean, safe and family-oriented neighbourhoods – but they are also looking to minimize commuting times associated with travel to and from work.

Ultimately, community sustainability depends on the ability to maintain a healthy balance and harmony between economic, municipal fiscal/financial, social and environmental sustainability. Each is equally important, but all are required for true community sustainability and a high level of community well-being.

Municipal governments typically find themselves in the position of trying to seek out and find the “healthy balance and harmony” alluded to above, often with resources that fall short of the competing demands being made on it.

It is critical that municipal governments ensure they are acting in the broader and longer term public interest when it comes to recreation, sports and proposals for new, expanding and/or refurbished recreational and sports facilities. The key question which must always be asked – ***Is there a fiscally responsible capital and operating plan that meets the highest priority recreational needs of residents, and is the plan sustainable?***

4.2 Community of Choice Drivers

A recent online questionnaire sought to identify some of the perceived strengths and locational advantages of various Northern Alberta communities in attracting new residents.⁵

These are what contribute to making these *communities of choice* – not just for residential development, but increasingly for attracting business and industry who are also seeking many of these same attributes and amenities as part of their workforce development and retention strategies.

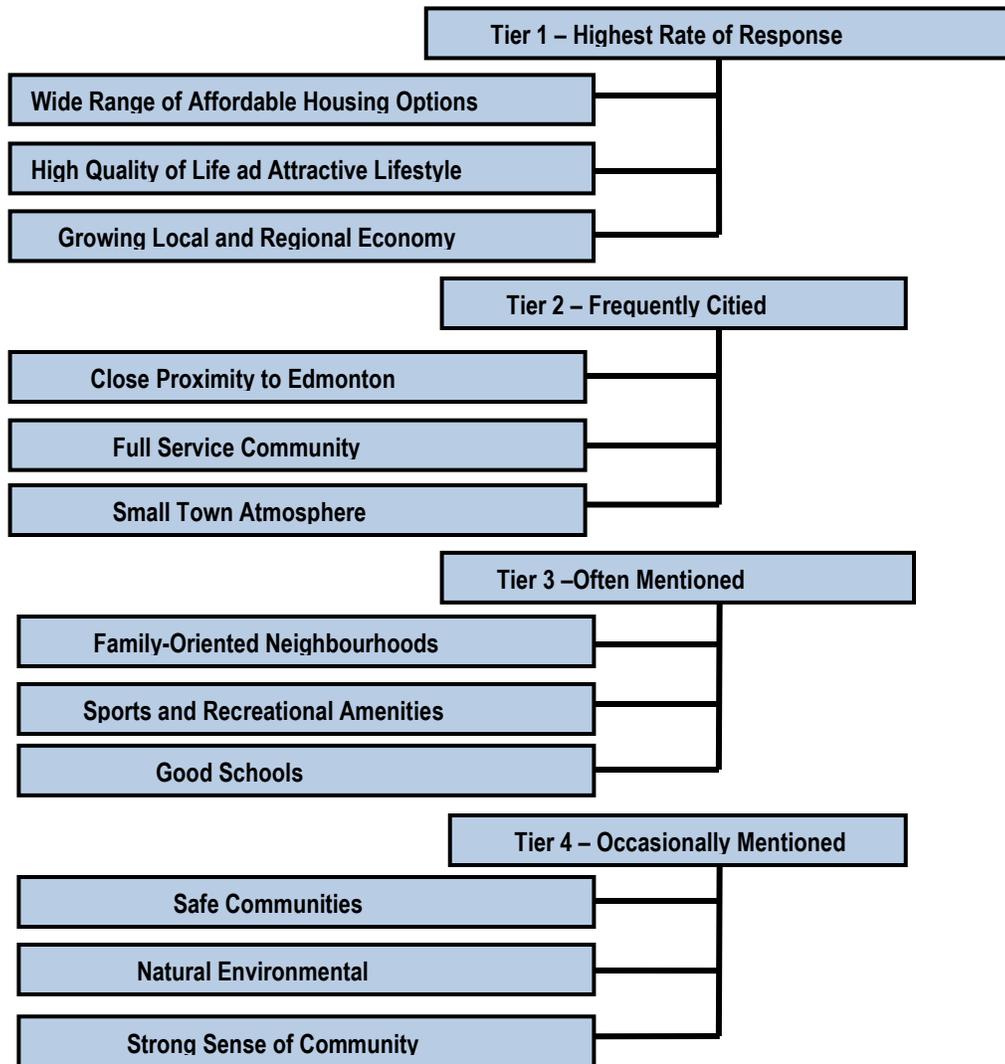
The most frequently-mentioned responses relating to Smoky Lake Region (i.e., from both regional business respondents and external respondents who have previously accessed regional services) have been grouped and ranked – one through twelve – in the graphic on the next page. These are what respondents had to say when asked to identify the various attributes and amenities that attract residents (and businesses) to the region and, as such, they provided an insightful perspective on Smoky Lake Region’s key *communities of chose* drivers.

⁵Windspire Business Analytics Northern Alberta Community of Choice Drivers Survey, July/August 2011.

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**Northern Alberta Community of Choice Drivers
(Ranked by Frequency of Response)**



NOTE: These are the twelve attributes that were most frequently-mentioned during the recent Windspire Business Analytics Northern Alberta Community of Choice Drivers Survey (1,056 heads of household), July/August 2011.

4.3 Smoky Lake Region’s Community of Choice Advantage

It is interesting to note that **High Quality of Life and Attraction Lifestyle** ranked in Tier 1, the second most frequently-mentioned response, and that **Sports and Recreational Amenities** ranked in Tier 3, as the eighth most frequently-mentioned response.

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It is readily apparent that Smoky Lake Region's **Wide Range of Affordable Housing Options, Growing Local and Regional Economy, Natural Environment and Close Proximity to Edmonton** also contribute to the region's high quality of life. Directly and indirectly, these quality of life attributes and perceptions will continue to be a major locational draw.

4.4 Smoky Lake Region's Fiscal Sustainability Challenge

As the North American economy continues to pick-up momentum in the aftermath of the recent global recession, many Alberta communities are becoming more proactive – and, in some cases, much more aggressive – in promoting and pursuing economic and community development. In most cases, there is a strong fiscal dimension involved – the need to grow the commercial and industrial assessment base to maintain a stable assessment mix across all ratepayer categories.

Assessment composition, and trends in the assessment mix, is an important indication of municipal fiscal capacity. It is now widely accepted that non-residential properties typically yield municipal revenues that are higher than associated expenditures. Residential properties, on the other hand, generally yield municipal revenues that are lower than associated expenditures.

A 2011 cost of service analysis undertaken for a range of urban, suburban and rural Alberta municipalities indicates that for every dollar of revenue from non-residential developments, the range of municipal service-based expenditures was only between \$0.20 and \$0.60. ⁶

In comparison, the analysis found that for every dollar of revenue from residential developments, the range of municipal service-based expenditures was typically in the range of \$1.10 to \$1.20. ⁶

Even though these are aggregated figures across 42 Alberta municipalities, they still underscore the importance of attracting new commercial and industrial development (and assessment), the success of which would certainly expand a municipality's fiscal capacity and ability to fund recreational programming and services.

Fiscal prudence, however, calls for a diversified and sustainable local taxpayer-supported fiscal capacity (e.g., not just based on one-time provincial/federal grants) to be proven before any smaller rural municipality should even consider getting involved in building, operating and/or maintaining any major community-wide recreation asset.

⁶Nichols Applied Management *Cost of Service Analysis of Select Alberta Urban, Suburban and Rural Municipalities*, 2011.

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The overall fiscal capacity of Smoky Lake Region – and its individual municipal partners – to continue providing the services, programs and infrastructure that residents expect, while maintaining reasonable levels of taxation for both residential and non-residential ratepayers, will be critical to future community sustainability.

4.5 Who does what?

This study identifies an urgent community-wide need to encourage and support a more physically-active population in which *active recreation* and sport contributes to enhanced community well-being and overall quality of life.

With the local service clubs/organizations and the regional Agricultural Societies historically having had primary responsibility for owning, operating and maintaining the many recreation facilities across Smoky Lake Region – and effectively delivering the bulk of the region’s non-school-based recreation programming and services – a number of fundamental questions inevitably arise.

- ***Who does what when it comes to meeting priority community recreational needs?***
- ***Are stakeholders – individually or by working collaboratively with others – adequately addressing the fundamental public health and community well-being challenges currently confronting the region’s population?***
- ***Is Smoky Lake Region effectively organized, resourced and positioned to meet these challenges?***
- ***What can and should the municipal governments do to more effectively equip and partner with regional recreation service providers?***
- ***Is the not-for-profit and volunteer-based model of service delivery the right go-forward strategy?***
- ***Or does this model need to be supplemented through expanded partnerships with the municipalities, with private entrepreneurs, or through a new and re-invigorated commitment to expanding and more effectively coordinating – and recognizing the potential of – volunteer-driven networks across the region.***

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5. Socio-Demographic Profile of Smoky Lake Region

As with population in other Canadian provinces, U.S. states and developed nations around the world, the age profile of Alberta's population is steadily increasing. This is due to a combination of factors, including decreasing fertility rates among what have traditionally been core population groups, longer life expectancies and the advancing age of the Baby Boom Generation.

The Alberta Government's *Aging Population Policy Framework* (November 2010) outlines the magnitude of the socio-demographic shifts currently taking place within the province.

- ▶ Alberta still has one of the youngest populations in North America, but the province's residents are getting older and the proportion of seniors in the overall population mix is projected to rise significantly.
- ▶ Alberta's first Baby Boomer officially turned 65 in 2011.
- ▶ The Baby Boomers, those who were born between 1946 and 1965, accounted for almost one quarter of Alberta's population in 2011.
- ▶ As this demographic group ages, the greying of the population is expected to accelerate until 2030, when the last group of Baby Boomers reach the age of 65.
- ▶ Currently, about one in ten Albertans are 65 years of age or older. Each month, another 2,000 Albertans reach the age of 65.
- ▶ It is estimated that between 2011 and 2021, the number of seniors will increase from 413,000 to 642,000. In that time, the percentage of seniors will increase from approximately 11 per cent to 15 per cent of Alberta's total population.
- ▶ In 2031, it is projected that there will be more than 923,000 seniors in Alberta. In other words, about one in five Albertans will be 65 years of age or older by 2031.

The impacts and implications of these trends will have profound and lasting economic, social and public policy (fiscal) implications for decades to come. They will directly affect the labour force, financial markets, pension systems, consumer demand, the housing sector, the demand for health services and supports, and the need for community-based supports and services.

From the perspective of this study, they will directly impact the provisions and societal preferences for recreational programming and services that meet the needs, priorities and interest of this growing population of aging citizens.

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Smoky Lake Region's demographics reveal an even older and more rapidly-aging population, when compared to the province as a whole.

Whereas the median age of Alberta's population was about 36 years in 2011, and is forecast to climb to 37 years by 2020, Smoky Lake Region's median age was estimated to be just over 45 years in 2011, and is forecast to increase to over 46 years by 2020.

This aging demographic also characterizes many other smaller, rural-based non-oil-and-gas-dependent communities and regions across Alberta. What they all appear to have in common, at least over the past couple of decades, is a steady and ongoing out-migration of younger residents in pursuit of post-secondary education, employment and career opportunities elsewhere in the province – and particularly to Alberta's larger urban centres.

A consequence of these out-migration patterns is lower rates of new family formation within these rural communities and regions, and hence relatively stagnant population growth and rapidly-aging local/regional populations.

5.1 Smoky Lake Region Demographics – Highlights

- 2011 Smoky Lake Region Population: 5,436⁷
- 2006 Smoky Lake Region Population: 4,919⁷
- 2011/2006 Increase in Population: 517 or 10.51%
- Land Area: 1,319.89 Square Miles
- Persons Per Square Mile: 0.61⁷
- Persons per Family: 2.9⁷
- Per Cent Population by Age (2006 Data) ⁷

0 – 4 years	5%
5 – 19 years	20%
20 – 24 years	4%
25 – 34 years	9%
35 - 44 years	13%
- Per Cent Population by Age (2006 Data) ⁷

45 – 54 years	15%
55 – 64 years	14%
65 – 74 years	11%
75 – 84 years	7%
85 years +	2%

⁷Federal Census. Includes Smoky Lake County, Town of Smoky Lake, Village of Vilna and Village of Waskatenau.

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6. Recreation Asset Assessment and Program/Services Review

Site visits were undertaken to the following recreational amenities and facilities within Smoky Lake Region. Preliminary life-cycle assessments were also informally and confidentially conducted – where indicated – by senior architectural/building engineering staff from three major construction/building restoration firms.

- Smoky Lake Agricultural Society Complex^s
- Smoky Lake Curling Club^s
- Smoky Lake Town and Country Golf Course
- Smoky Lake Rodeo Grounds
- Smoky Lake Seniors Drop-In Centre
- Smoky Lake Playfields and Playgrounds
- Smoky Lake Ball Diamond
- Smoky Lake and District Cultural and Heritage Museum
- Smoky Lake Kinsmen Gazebo
- Algonquin Shooting Sports Association/Club
- Iron Horse Trail
- Victoria Trail
- Metis Crossing^s
- Vilna and District Cultural Centre^s
- Vilna Agri-Plex Arena and Curling Rink^s
- Vilna Golf Course
- Vilna Lions Club Rest Area and Village Park

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- Vilna Seniors Drop-In Centre
- Waskatenau Arena^s
- Waskatenau Skateboard Park and Ball Diamond Facilities
- Waskatenau Community Hall (Hall Facility)
- Waskatenau Curling Rink
- Waskatenau Lion's Club Playgrounds
- Waskatenau Senior Citizens Drop-In Centre
- Waskatenau Nature Trail
- Pine Creek Campground
- Other nearby resort/recreation areas visited included: Smoky Lake Campground and RV Park, Victoria Picnic Grounds, Hanmore Lake Campground, Warspite Picnic Grounds, Island Lake Campgrounds, Mons lake Campground, Bellis Beach Lake Campground, Garner Lake Provincial Park, Whitefish Lake, and Bonnie Lake Campground.

^sPreliminary life-cycle assessment undertaken.

A review of current recreation/sport programming and related services was also undertaken, as was a review of perceived regional recreation asset gaps, and an assessment of the need for new regional facilities and/or programming.

Feedback from these supplementary research components is reflected throughout the study and, specifically, in *Phase 3: External Stakeholder Consultations/Discussions* and *Phase 5: Final Regional Recreation Master Plan Action Items/Recommendations Presented to JEDI Committee and Smoky Lake Region Joint Municipalities Committee*.

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7. Community Consultations / Quantitative Feedback

The community consultations were largely focused around a comprehensive, random phone survey of Smoky Lake Region individuals and households, conducted over July-August 2012. A statistically-significant sample size of 368 household members was covered by the two survey components.

- **Closed-End Phone Survey
(178 Individual Heads of Households)**
- **Open-Ended / Discussion-Based Phone Survey
(Representing 368 Household Members)**

7.1 Closed-End Phone Survey

In addition to the standard demographic profile information, the first (closed-end) component of the phone survey focused on the following six questions.

- 1) ***In your view, what are the qualities that make Smoky Lake Region (Smoky Lake County), Town of Smoky Lake, Village of Waskatenau, Village of Vilna) attractive to you?***

Nineteen options provided...please check up to five that you feel are the most important.

Response Profile Highlights:

Rank 1 – A pleasant place to live, work and raise a family (chosen by 61% of respondents)

Rank 2 – Quality of life (chosen by 57% of respondents)

Rank 3 – Proximity to Edmonton (chosen by 53% of respondents)

Rank 4 – Affordability (chosen by 51% of respondents)

Rank 5 – Outdoor recreation opportunities/attractions (chosen by 43% of respondents)

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- 2) ***In your opinion, how important are the following recreational opportunities, attractions and/or facilities to your community?***

Ten options provided...please rate.

Response Profile Highlights:

Rank 1 – Social/Cultural Activities (54% ranked as being “Important/Very Important”)

Rank 2 – Hockey (49% ranked as being “important/Very Important”)

Rank 3 – Trails / Outdoor Recreation (46% ranked as being “Important /Very Important)

Rank 4 – Trails (44% ranked as being “Important/Very Important”)

Rank 5 – Curling (38% ranked as being “Important/Very Important”)

- 3) ***In your opinion, how important are the following recreational opportunities, attractions and/or facilities to your household/family?***

Ten options provided...please rate.

Response Profile Highlights:

Rank 1 – Social/Cultural Activities (56% ranked as being “Important/Very Important”)

Rank 2 – Trails/Outdoor Recreation(45% ranked as being “important/Very Important”)

Rank 3 – Hockey (38% ranked as being “Important/ Very Important)

Rank 4 – Trails (33% ranked as being “Important/Very Important”)

Rank 5 – Golf (32% ranked as being “Important/Very Important”)

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- 4) **Which of the following words or phrases best describe a "healthy, sustainable community" to you?**

Nineteen options provided,..please check up to five that you feel are the most important.

Response Profile Highlights:

Rank 1 – Small business development (chosen by 57% of respondents)

Rank 2 – Business retention and growth (chosen by 54% of respondents)

Rank 3 – Quality of life (chosen by 50% of respondents)

Rank 4 – New jobs/investment (chosen by 48% of respondents)

Rank 5 – A growing economy (chosen by 46% of respondents)

- 5) **In your view, how important are each of the following to expanding and attracting business/industry to Smoky Lake Region?**

Fifteen options provided...please rate.

Response Profile Highlights:

Rank 1 – Quality of life (92% ranked as being "Important/Very Important")

Rank 2 – Business climate (89% ranked as being "important/Very Important")

Rank 3 – Affordable housing (87% ranked as being "Important/ Very Important)

Rank 4 – Property taxes (86% ranked as being "Important/Very Important")

Rank 5 – Outdoor Recreation (85% ranked as being "Important/Very Important")

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6) **What do you feel should be the Top 3 recreation priorities within Smoky Lake Region?**

No options provided...respondents rate.

Response Profile Highlights:

Rank 1 –“Outdoor Activities” (chosen by 53% of respondents)

Rank 2 –“Expanding and promoting the Iron Horse Trail and the region’s other multi-use trail networks” (chosen by 42% of respondents)

Rank 3 –“What do seniors want/need?” (chosen by 41% of respondents)

Rank 4 –“Hockey” (chosen by 40% of respondents)

Rank 5 – “Being able to afford what we’ve got” (chosen by 38% of respondents)

Once again, standard demographic profile information was also obtained and showed a very strong correlation to recent Statistics Canada data on population by municipality, household structure, age and gender. This is important and further validates the overall statistical significance of the two survey components utilized in this study.

Detailed response profiles on each of the closed-end questions are provided over the next several pages.

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1) In your view, what are the qualities that make Smoky Lake Region (Smoky Lake County, Town of Smoky Lake, Village of Waskatenau, Village of Vilna) attractive to you?

Please check up to **FIVE (5)** that you feel are the most important.

a)	Quality of life (RANK 2)	57%
b)	Good schools	27%
c)	Strong sense of community	33%
d)	Safe, walkable neighbourhoods	14%
e)	Natural environment	31%
f)	Sports and recreation facilities	29%
g)	Cultural attractions	12%
h)	Scenic/historic river valley	24%
i)	Vibrant businesses, services and shopping	22%
j)	Full range of retail/commercial services available	13%
k)	High-quality community services and infrastructure	14%
l)	Strong economy	23%
m)	Good location for doing business	19%
n)	Outdoor recreation opportunities/attraction (RANK 5)	43%
o)	Affordability (RANK 4)	51%
p)	Availability of good jobs	23%
q)	Proximity to major transportation routes	11%
r)	Proximity to Edmonton (RANK 3)	53%
s)	A pleasant place to live, work and raise a family (RANK 1)	61%

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2) In your opinion, how important are the following recreational opportunities, attractions and/or facilities to your community?

Please rate the following.

	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important
a) Boating/Fishing Watersports	36% 15% 21%		35%	29% 23% 6%	
b) Quadding	43% 12% 31%		20%	37% 25% 12%	
c) Snowmobiling	57% 14% 43%		13%	30% 19% 11%	
d) Hockey (RANK 2)	26% 9% 17%		25%	49% 31% 18%	
e) Curling (RANK 5)	29% 12% 17%		33%	38% 24% 14%	
f) Golf	27% 3% 24%		38%	35% 26% 9%	
g) Trials/Outdoor Recreation (RANK 3)	33% 6% 27%		21%	46% 20% 26%	
h) Social/Cultural Activities (RANK 1)	30% 8% 22%		16%	54% 30% 24%	
i) Trails (RANK 4)	34% 6% 28%		22%	44% 26% 18%	
j) Other (please describe)*	--% --% --%		--%	--% --% --%	

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3) In your opinion, how important are the following recreational opportunities, attractions and/or facilities to your household/family?

Please rate the following.

	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important
a) Boating/Fishing Watersports	52%		23%	25%	
	16%	36%		20%	5%
b) Quadding	41%		29%	30%	
	8%	33%		20%	10%
c) Snowmobiling	57%		13%	30%	
	14%	43%		19%	11%
d) Hockey (RANK 3)	40%		22%	38%	
	11%	29%		27%	11%
e) Curling	45%		29%	26%	
	12%	33%		18%	8%
f) Golf (RANK 5)	29%		39%	32%	
	11%	18%		26%	6%
g) Trials/Outdoor Recreation (RANK 2)	31%		24%	45%	
	9%	22%		23%	22%
h) Social/Cultural Activities (RANK 1)	25%		19%	56%	
	5%	20%		35%	21%
i) Trails (RANK 4)	39%		28%	33%	
	4%	35%		23%	10%
j) Other (please describe)	--%		--%	--%	
	--%	--%		--%	--%

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4) Which of the following words or phases best describes a “healthy, sustainable community” to you?

Please check up to **FIVE (5)** that you feel are the most important.

a)	New jobs/investment (RANK 4)	48%
b)	Business retention and growth (RANK 2)	54%
c)	New business attraction	21%
d)	Small business development (RANK 1)	57%
e)	Self-employment opportunities	9%
f)	Tourism business development	11%
g)	A sustainable economy	27%
h)	Sustainable recreation (indoor/outdoor) opportunities	38%
i)	A green economy	5%
j)	A diversified economy	10%
k)	An attractive business climate/infrastructure	14%
l)	Affordable taxes	27%
m)	Quality of life (RANK 3)	50%
n)	A more comfortable lifestyle	29%
o)	A stable lifestyle	11%
p)	A growing economy (RANK 5)	46%
q)	A stable economy	39%
r)	A growing population	25%
s)	A stable population	26%

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5) In your view, how important are each of the following to expanding and attracting business/industry to Smoky Lake Region?

	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important
a) Available and affordable commercial / industrial sites	40%			20%	
	3%	37%	40%	15%	5%
b) Business climate (RANK 2)	3%			89%	
	0%	3%	8%	38%	51%
c) Property taxes (RANK 4)	5%			86%	
	1%	4%	9%	48%	38%
d) Government rules and regulations	20%			56%	
	1%	19%	24%	37%	19%
e) Municipal Infrastructure	42%			42%	
	2%	40%	16%	29%	13%
f) Affordable Housing (RANK 3)	3%			87%	
	1%	2%	10%	38%	49%
g) Living close to where you work	32%			54%	
	3%	29%	14%	29%	25%
h) Government programs/Services	63%			23%	
	14%	49%	14%	15%	8%
i) Sports and recreation facilities	18%			61%	
	3%	15%	21%	46%	15%
j) Quality of life (RANK 1)	4%			92%	
	1%	3%	4%	50%	42%
k) Proximity to Edmonton	6%			82%	
	2%	4%	12%	51%	31%
l) Outdoor recreation (RANK 5)	4%			85%	
	1%	3%	11%	54%	31%
m) Growing economy	1%			73%	
	0%	1%	26%	45%	28%
n) Growing population	9%			69%	
	1%	8%	22%	41%	28%
o) Skilled labour force	33%			38%	
	3%	30%	29%	18%	20%

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6) What do you feel should be the Top 3 recreation priorities within Smoky Lake Region?

NOTE: Highest-frequency related/unprompted responses (20% response threshold).

- a) "Outdoor Activities" 53%
- b) "Expanding and promoting the Iron Horse Trail and the region's other multi-use trail networks" 42%
- c) "What do seniors want/need?" 41%
- d) "Hockey" 40%
- e) "Being able to afford what we've got" 38%
- f) "Not duplicating or competing against other destination facilities within the region" 32%
- g) "Curling" 25%
- h) "Golf" 21%

7) Where do you live?

- a) Smoky Lake County 56.8%
- b) Town of Smoky Lake 21.9%
- c) Village of Waskatenau 10.3%
- d) Village of Vilna 9.6%
- e) Not Sure 0.7%
- f) Other 0.7%

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- 8) Which of the following best describes your household:
- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|-----|
| a) | a single person | 8% |
| b) | a number of single people | 9% |
| c) | a couple | 44% |
| d) | a family | 39% |
- 9) Are there any children under the age of 18 living in your household?
- | | | |
|----|-----|-----|
| a) | Yes | 41% |
| b) | No | 59% |
- 10) How old are you?
- | | | |
|----|------------|-----|
| a) | under 18 | 1% |
| b) | 18-24 | 7% |
| c) | 25-34 | 15% |
| d) | 35-49 | 30% |
| e) | 50-64 | 33% |
| f) | 65 or over | 14% |
- 11) Are you:
- | | | |
|----|--------|-----|
| a) | Male | 49% |
| b) | Female | 51% |

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7.2 Open-Ended/Discussion-Based Phone Survey

The second (open-ended) survey component was structured specifically to discuss, assess and evaluate current **active recreation** participation levels among residents of Smoky Lake Region.

Poor, acceptable, good and excellent levels of physical activity were discussed within the context of recommended daily/weekly moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity targets – e.g., 60 minutes daily for 5-11 and 12-17 year olds and 150 minutes a week for 18-64 year olds, as currently recommended by health, fitness and wellness advocacy organizations such as ParticipAction, Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Alberta Centre for Active Living, Health Canada, etc.

Body Mass Index (BMI) was also discussed and approximate based on self-reported respondent data on weight and height and the fundamental relationship between these two key BMI variables. Thresholds were set for defining “overweight” and “obese” and gender-specific thresholds established for children and youth.

Indeed, this survey approach parallels the methodology used in the *2005 Statistics Canada Canadian Community Health Survey* of 80 major health region across Canada.

The second survey component also provided respondents with an opportunity to raise other top-of-mind issues, concerns or preferences related to recreation and future recreational programming and services in Smoky Lake Region. Over sixty per cent of respondents took advantage of the opportunity to provide additional input – a relatively high percentage for this type of fairly in-dept phone survey.

Response profiles on this open-ended/discussion-based survey component – together with the not-for-attribution input, comments and suggestions for the 83 residents and community stakeholders interviewed over the course of the study – are provided in *Section 8*.

7.3 Community Physical Activity Benchmarks

The *2005 Statistics Canada Canadian Community Health Survey* generate a series of Canada-wide regional rankings based on overall physical activity levels and Body Mass Index (BMI) thresholds, as discussed above.

A total of 80 major health regions were ranked – from those with the highest levels of (sufficiently) active residents to the lowest levels of (sufficiently) active residents.

At the time, Smoky Lake Region fell within the Aspen Regional Health Authority. While the data are still illustrative, it should be remembered that other population centres in an around Smoky Lake Region are also included in these results.

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Aspen Regional Health Authority (Alberta: 2005)

- Proportion of Adults Who are Sufficiently Active: 51.1% Rank: 23
- Proportion of Youth Who are Sufficiently Active: 29.5% Rank: 12
- ▶ ***“Sufficiently Active” defined as 60 minutes a day of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity for 5-11 and 12-17 year olds, and 150 minutes a week for 18-64 years old.***

Source: Statistics Canada *Canadian Community Health Survey, 2005.*

Health regions were also ranked from the highest levels of overweight and obese residents to the lowest.

Aspen Regional Health Authority (Alberta: 2005)

- Proportion of Adults Who are Overweight or Obese: 58.4% Rank: 26
- Proportion of Youth Who are Overweight or Obese: 25.5% Rank: 48
- ▶ ***Body Mass Index (BMI) thresholds were set for defining “overweight” and “obese” and gender-specific thresholds established for children and youth . Those exceeding the thresholds were categorized as being either “overweight” or “obese”.***

Source: Statistics Canada *Canadian Community Health Survey, 2005.*

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7.4 Smoky Lake Region Physical Activity Survey (2012)

The same methodology and approach used in the 2005 Statistics Canada Canadian Community Health Survey was also used in the recent Smoky Lake Region open-ended/discussion-based phone survey. This time the survey involved a total sample size of 368 household members – once again, all from Smoky Lake Region.

Smoky Lake Region (Alberta: 2012)

- Proportion of Adults Who Agree Physical Activity is Important to Long-Term Health: 92.1%
- Proportion of Adults Who are Sufficiently Active: 46.3%
- ▶ *“Sufficiently Active” defined as 60 minutes as day of moderate- to vigorous-Intensity aerobic activity for 5-11 and 12-17 year olds, and 150 minutes a week for 18-64 year olds.*
- ▶ *Body Mass Index (BMI) thresholds were set for defining “overweight” and “obese” and gender-specific thresholds established for children and youth. Those exceeding the thresholds were categorized as being either “overweight” or “obese”.*
- ▶ *About 70% of adults do some walking for leisure, transportation or at work, but not enough to reach a moderate level of physical activity.*
- ▶ *Regionally, about 59.8% of resident adults can be considered “overweight” or “obese”.*

Source: New West Market Research *Comprehensive, Random Phone Survey of Smoky Lake Region Individuals and Households*, July-August 2012. A statistically-significant sample size of 368 household members was covered by the two survey components.

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Smoky Lake Region (Alberta: 2012)

- Proportion of Youth Who Agree Physical Activity is Important to Long-Term Health: 47.3%
- Proportion of Youth Who are Sufficiently Active: 26.4%
- ▶ ***“Sufficiently Active” defined as 60 minutes as day of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity for 5-11 and 12-17 year olds, and 150 minutes a week for 18-64 year olds.***
- ▶ ***Body Mass Index (BMI) thresholds were set for defining “overweight” and “obese” and gender-specific thresholds established for children and youth. Those exceeding the thresholds were categorized as being either “overweight” or “obese”.***
- ▶ ***The average Smoky Lake Region teen would appear to spend an average of just over 5 hours per day – outside of school and doing homework – watching television, playing video games and using the computer.***
- ▶ ***Regionally, about 29.8% of residents youth can be considered “overweight” or “obese”.***

Source: New West Market Research *Comprehensive, Random Phone Survey of Smoky Lake Region Individuals and Households*, July-August 2012. A statistically-significant sample size of 368 household members was covered by the two survey components.

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8. Community Feedback / Qualitative Feedback

This section provides a short summary of some of the higher-frequency themes and comments made by respondents during the study's open-ended/discussion-based phone survey and through the self-selected resident/community stakeholder interviews.

Although presented as actual (Verbatim) statements made by individual respondents, these comments are intended more to be illustrative of similar or like-minded themes and comments raised with a high degree of frequency across all respondents. The frequency weighting factor used in compiling this summary was 20 per cent, which means that at least one-in-five respondents would have raised a similar or related issue or theme, or made a similar comment when discussing a given issue.

8.1 Regional Physical Activity Levels

- ▶ *"A lot of farm work these days is mechanical...and all we ever do is drive to where we're going. No wonder we're not as fit as we used to be."*
- ▶ *"Where can I go for a walk in the middle of winter when it's minus 30 C? My excuse I guess."*
- ▶ *"Summer is good to be burning calories...winter is where it all unravels."*
- ▶ *"As I get older I know it's easy to put on the pounds...but a bugger to try and get it off."*
- ▶ *"We love our food in Smoky Lake, but are killing ourselves through the epidemic of overweight people...kids, adults, everyone it seems. Just take a look around."*
- ▶ *"Being a retiree, I now have more time for exercise...but wouldn't have a clue where to start or how to get going."*
- ▶ *"We need to look at more walking, hiking and outdoor activities, with way-finding posts, distance measures and even better and more level sidewalks in the Town and Villages. We can afford this, and it will make a big difference."*
- ▶ *"Walking is the most common form of exercise as we get older. We are completely overlooking this simple but effective solution."*
- ▶ *"I am a senior and would like to see more organized and affordable recreation for seniors...and that includes outdoor and indoor walking activities like in the Ag Complex."*

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- ▶ *“I hope this study does not forget the elderly residents who built this country, we need a recreation plan that helps us age with vitality, dignity and makes our last few years healthy ones.”*
- ▶ *“All our young people do these days is stare at a computer or smart phone screen, watch TV, or generally sit on their ass.”*
- ▶ *“Many of our kids are overweight, out of shape and many couldn’t walk up a flight or stairs without huffing and puffing...what are the schools doing about this, giving everyone As for effort?”*
- ▶ *“Most recreation is social and doesn’t get the heart going. I think our goal should be to encourage more active recreation...heart-pumping recreation and activity...for all ages. I would be honoured to see these words in your report because I think they capture what needs to get done.”*

Note to Reader: The theme of *active recreation* – aimed at increasing population-wide physical activity levels and, in turn, overall community health and well-being – is one of the key underlying themes of the Smoky Lake Regional Recreation Master Plan.

- ▶ *“The County needs to educate people on what’s happening, because when the doctor does it’s usually way late.”*
- ▶ *“Sports, getting sweaty and running around ain’t cool...social media, video games and the internet, that’s cool.”*
- ▶ *“You don’t always need a new building or fancy new gazebo that nobody uses to get something done. Heck, we can all do basic stretching and exercise at home with the right information and a little help to get started.”*

8.2 Gaps in Current Recreational Programming and Service Delivery

- ▶ *“I think the service clubs and Ag Societies have done a fantastic job of running the show for the past few decades...but this small circle of volunteers needs to be expanded and newcomers welcomed and brought into the fold.”*
- ▶ *“There are three things you need to know about sports and recreation in Smoky Lake... volunteers, volunteers and volunteers!”*

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- ▶ *“Our volunteer groups are irreplaceable, but increasingly stretched and overworked...and some are definitely feeling unappreciated these days. The fun needs to be put back into it and the politics need to be sent packing.”*
- ▶ *“The municipalities need to do a better job of supporting and recognizing the volunteer who...year after year...continue to operate the facilities we are still fortunate to have.”*
- ▶ *“The biggest gap we face for recreation is money...others got it, we don’t.”*
- ▶ *“There is an urgent need to more effectively monitor and regularly report on facility usage levels and capital maintenance requirement for facilities, particularly the older facilities.”*
- ▶ *“With cash-strapped non-profits driving the bus, quality infrastructure and quality of service are always ongoing concerns.”*
- ▶ *“Given the importance of improving physical activity across the region, maybe it’s time to look at some type of a recreation levy of a regional recreation coordinating group to better organize things.”*
- ▶ *“We just moved here from a community where the municipality ran all the sports facilities and parks... we’re still trying to sort through how a volunteer group of people is expected to do most of the heavy lifting in Smoky Lake...including raising money for facility operations.”*
- ▶ *“Is the not-for-profit administration of recreation the right-way to go in 2013. I don’t know, but I do know that buying raffle tickets to support basic community infrastructure still seems a little troubling, to me at least.”*
- ▶ *“Growing expectations of the vocal coffee-shop crowd can sometimes be a problem...they want something and want it bad, but expect someone else to pay for it.”*
- ▶ *“The County, the Town and other municipalities, our schools and our senior’s lodges need to step up and help out more to guarantee that basic recreational opportunities...waling trails, trail networks, general health and wellness information, and senior’s activity programs are there when we need them.”*
- ▶ *“Let’s not forget that cash is king as you consider all those grandiose plans for new pools, new multiplexes and any other new Taj Mahal project that some Councillors seem to think will bet them re-elected. Be smart and keep it simple.”*

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- ▶ *“Stay focused on the immediate recreation needs and priorities and not on what special interests are telling you needs to be built.”*
- ▶ *“Escalating maintenance and operating costs continue to be a big drain...even with grants and charities it sometimes is challenging to pay the bills. Hopefully the County understands this.”*
- ▶ *“Basic fitness and fitness education is missing and must be Job One...let’s get on with it.”*
- ▶ *“We can probably build most things we grant monies, especially in an election year, but should always ask how we will pay for operating it.”*
- ▶ *“The cultural dance groups have been super and have really connected with our young girls and boys...giving them a strong connection to the region’s heritage. This is recreation too.”*
- ▶ *“I have noticed that teenage girls are typically less active than boys in the same age group...I am a mother of one such teenage girl and am at my wits end trying to get her and her girl friends more actively involved in sport and exercise...help!”*
- ▶ *“Recreation in Smoky Lake has to be more than just hockey and curling. Outdated thinking!”*
- ▶ *“All of our energies seem to go to the elite organized sports teams or clubs...we need to get the message across to everybody that health and healthy lifestyles are for everybody.”*
- ▶ *“Information on the importance of diet and exercise needs to be made available...what happened to ParticipAction?”*
- ▶ *“The big issue to me is the classic issue of wants versus needs...we all want an indoor swimming pool in our backyard, but can we afford it?”*
- ▶ *“Smoky Lake can’t be all things to all people when it comes to sports and recreation. Let’s pick our sport, make sure we can afford it, and deliver as any great team would.”*
- ▶ *“I don’t mind taking the family into the Dow Centre once a week...we look forward to it. But let’s make sure we have some basic, cost-effective recreation available for our seniors, at our schools and in our natural environment.”*
- ▶ *“The new privately-run fitness centre in Smoky Lake is a god-send. Professional staff, great hours, excellent equipment and private capital...let’s not have government or the Ag Society trying to duplicate something we just got and is working well.”*

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- ▶ *“Social marketing should be used to better inform our young people of the benefits of exercise and proper diet?”*
- ▶ *“Hockey is an expensive undertaking...let’s not forget that providing affordable recreation experiences is important to many families.”*
- ▶ *“Corporate culture sends messages to employees about the value an employer places on an active workforce through its day-to-day policies, working style and activities...out municipal governments should do more to support and encourage physical activity and show real in-house leadership.”*

8.3 Regional Recreation Priorities and Needs

- ▶ *“Recreation is and will remain critical to the social, cultural and economic well-being of our community.”*
- ▶ *“Based on what I know your phone survey told you, the overriding goal needs to be to get more people, more active, more often.”*
- ▶ *“Some of my neighbours and their families are in great physical condition, but it used to be that we all were. Your study needs to look at what we can do to get through to those that aren’t that physically active any more.”*
- ▶ *“We need to explore new and more cooperative, collaborative ways of encouraging and supporting healthy and socially active lifestyles.*
- ▶ *“Your strategy must pay particular attention to inactivity, obesity, disease prevention and health well-being...in my view, these will be the priority public health issues confronting us now and into the future.”*
- ▶ *“Today’s Canadian children and youth are heavier, fatter, rounder and weaker than they were a generation ago...this is an embarrassment to Canada.”*
- ▶ *“I hope by recreation you remember seniors. People say they are doing things for us, but it needs to be better...we need to do moving things with our friends and not just play cards and watch TV.”*

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- ▶ *“Studies suggest that the extra expense of simple exercise programs for seniors can be more than met through savings in both medical expenses and the demands for institutional support.”*
- ▶ *“Active living and wellness programs for older adults should be expanded...we need to do more outreach in this area.”*
- ▶ *“Participation in organized sport seems to be holding steady or even losing ground...what can and should we do to attract new entrants? What role can or should our schools play?”*
- ▶ *“Rather than trying to build new facilities, or add on to existing ones, it may be better to look at ways of further improving public access to schools for after-hours recreation programs and user groups. No need for anyone to get defensive, but we can do better.”*
- ▶ *“Youth drop-in opportunities, open gym time and other unstructured activities should be expanded to connect with low participation groups.”*
- ▶ *“There is increasing interest in pathways, trails and walking routes for seniors...how can these be further encouraged and supported.”*
- ▶ *“Hopefully, your survey is more than just finger-pointing and justifying the status quo...cause the status quo is definitely under considerable stress, financially and from a volunteer group that is fast burning out.”*
- ▶ *“Recreation and leisure are key entry points for belonging in our community and support strong families and individuals, both young and old, in building strong neighbourhoods.”*
- ▶ *“Parks, open space and natural areas are important to ecological survival, in addition to being great and cost-effective recreational assets.”*
- ▶ *“Outdoor recreation...trails, boating, camping, golf, the gun club, quadding, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, bird-watching and even just plain walking...these are all things we can do to increase physical activity.”*
- ▶ *“Let’s rediscover the great outdoors in Smoky Lake County.”*
- ▶ *“Hockey is Canada and our hockey programs should be the highest priority.”*
- ▶ *“Curling, golf and hockey are the key building blocks of sport and recreation in Smoky Lake...please figure out a way to make sure they survive.”*

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- ▶ *“Participation in golf encourages healthy outdoor activity and important social interaction for all ages.”*
- ▶ *“The Iron Horse Trail and the County’s trail networks are an amazing regional jewel...government support must continue.”*
- ▶ *“Social activities for seniors are recreation...they exercise the mind. We will not be running a marathon, but maybe take a short walk or do some stretching.”*
- ▶ *“Smoky Lake needs to develop a local active community strategy...we need to get people out of their vehicles, out from the dinner plate, and our children away from their video games for a while.”*

9. External Stakeholder Consultation/Discussions

In addition to the community consultations, external stakeholder consultations and discussions with the following organizations also helped guide in the development of the Regional Recreation Master Plan action/recommendations, outlined in *Section 10*.

- Alberta Agricultural and Rural Development
- Alberta Centre for Active Living
- Alberta Health Services
- Alberta Health and Wellness
- Alberta Recreation and Parks Association
- Alberta Senior Citizens Sport and Recreation Association
- Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation
- Allan and Jean Millar Centre (Town of Whitecourt)
- Bold Centre (Lac La Biche County)
- Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute
- Canadian Institute for Health Information
- Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology
- City of Edmonton, Neighbourhoods, Parks and Community Recreation Branch
- Cold Lake Energy Centre (City of Cold Lake)
- County of Barrhead

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- Health Canada
- High Prairie and District Regional Recreation Board
- National Seniors Council
- ParticipAction
- Strathcona County, Recreation, Parks and Culture Department
- Town of St. Paul, Culture Parks and Recreation Department
- Town of Vegreville, Recreation, At and Facilities Department
- TransAlta Tri-Leisure Centre (City of Spruce Grove and Tri-Municipal Leisure Board)
- Volunteer Alberta
- Volunteer Canada
- Westlock Aquatic and Fitness Centre (Town of Westlock)

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10. Regional Recreation Master Plan / Action Items and Recommendations

The preceding pages of this report have outlined a number of key challenges for all recreation stakeholder in Smoky Lake Region – including our local service clubs, organizations and Agricultural Societies, other recreation service providers, our volunteer sector and, of course, the four municipal governments.

- ▶ Although 92 per cent of adult respondents to the recent Smoky lake Region phone survey agreed that physical activity is important to long-term health, only 46 per cent are sufficiently active.
- ▶ About 70 per cent of adults do some walking for leisure, transportation or at work, but not enough to reach a moderate level of physical activity.
- ▶ About 60 per cent of resident adults can be considered “overweight” or “Obese”.
- ▶ Only 47 per cent of youth respondents agreed that physical activity is important, and only 26 per cent are sufficiently active.
- ▶ The average Smoky lake Region teen is estimated to spend an average of just over 5 hours a day – outside of school and doing homework – watching television, playing video games and using the computer.
- ▶ Almost 30 per cent of resident youth can be considered “overweight” or “obese”.

While these numbers now appear to have moved into the “middle-of-the-pack” when it comes to ranking with other Canadian health regions, this should not be taken as an excuse for failing to act on what is clearly a significant challenge to long-term community health and well-being.

- ▶ According to the World Health Organization, physical inactivity is now one of the five leading global risk factors for mortality and is estimated to account for about 2.6 million premature deaths per year.
- ▶ Inactivity contributes to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, depression and, ultimately, a reduced quality of life and higher likelihood of premature death.

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- ▶ Childhood and youth obesity in Canada have tripled over the past three decades and Smoky Lake Region appears to be closely tracking this national trend.
- ▶ The Canadian Institute for Health Information reports that, on average, obese male and female patients incur physician-related costs that are 15-18 per cent higher than normal-weight patients.
- ▶ According to ParticipAction, physical inactivity now costs Canadian taxpayers almost \$6.9 billion a year representing an estimated 3.9 per cent of total Canadian health care costs.
- ▶ **Bottom Line:** The benefits of physical activity have been proven in study after study, helping to reduce the risk of disease, improve quality of life and reduce the risk of premature death.

The main Regional Recreation Master Plan action items/recommendations which follow are both a reflection and a response to what was heard during the community consultations.

As such, they reflect the broader community's stated preferences, perceptions, needs, wants and priorities when it comes to recreation, sports and related community-wide amenities, programming and services – rather than those of the consultant, the four municipal governments or any other stakeholder group(s). They are also financially doable and fiscally sustainable.

There is wide recognition that to be effective this Plan must be viewed as a living document and that the active participation and continued engagement of all stakeholders in implementation and execution is imperative.

The local service clubs, organizations and the regional Agricultural Societies are all important players, as are the four municipal governments within the region, but it must be recognized that each (individually) is only one player when it comes to contributing to the broader and more collaborative effort which this Plan is recommending.

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□ RECOMMENDATION 1

All recreation stakeholders – not just the front-line recreation services providers – need to commit to strengthening the long-term health and well-being of residents through their involvement in *active recreation* and increased levels of physical activity.

In answering the question Who does what?...the answer is all recreation stakeholders must share in this responsibility, based on their resource capabilities and core competencies to deliver effective, cost-efficient recreation programs and services.

□ RECOMMENDATION 2

Municipal governments need to transition and build on the existing financial and operation support (direct and indirect) they currently provide to the region’s main recreation service providers, taking a more hands-on, active role as a service delivery “partner” rather than just a “funding provider”.

The region’s volunteer sector – which should be recommended for its ongoing efforts and contributions – continues to carry far too much of the work load in the all-important operational, information and awareness, and service delivery areas.

□ RECOMMENDATION 3

More specifically, municipal governments should increase their involvement and monitoring of regional recreation service delivery to ensure that existing core service providers are better equipped – financially, administratively and strategically – to sustain the range of programs, services and “amenities” required to address identified community-wide needs.

The guiding principles should be:

- 1) Facilitating Education and Awareness
- 2) Maintaining Accessibility and Affordability
- 3) Enhancing Quality of Service
- 4) Maintaining Quality Infrastructure (Facilities and Related Amenities)
- 5) Providing Increased Program/Service Delivery Capacity
- 6) Transitioning to Multi-Party Accountability
- 7) Ensuring Long-Term Financial Sustainability

More Effective Leveraging of Senior Levels of Government

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□ **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Fiscal capacity and long-term fiscal sustainability are always the two key considerations in moving beyond a discussion of “wants” and focusing attention instead on actual community “needs” and, more importantly, what is doable.

Prior to any major capital project being approved a thorough analysis of operating budget implications and possible partnership options must be undertaken to ensure that sufficient annual operating funds will be available.

A case in point, a detailed capital and operating cost budget was developed as part of this study to look at the possibility of building a basic, no-frills 5-6 lane, 25 metre competitive/recreational swimming pool, with water slide and adjoining kids pool, steam room, sauna and changing facilities.

The total capital cost of such a basic facility, aside of any land acquisition costs, was anywhere between \$6 million and \$8 million, but the facility’s annual operating cost shortfall (user pay) was estimated at between \$550,000 and \$600,000 a year (i.e., on annual projected operating costs of about \$800,000, and a user pay fee schedule consistent with other similar Northern Alberta benchmark facilities).

Aside of where the capital budget would come from, the longer term challenge is obviously who - or how - such a large and ongoing operating deficit would be covered?

□ **RECOMMENDATION 5**

Municipal governments should lead in the facilitation of a broad-based public information and awareness campaign, with particular focus on those groups with relatively low *active recreation/physical activity* participation levels.

□ **RECOMMENDATION 6**

Municipal governments should continue to look at new and innovative ways to strengthen their role in encouraging, supporting and recognizing the region’s many volunteers. Volunteer Alberta and volunteer Canada are both great contact organizations for best-practices approaches that have worked well in other comparable jurisdictions.

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□ **RECOMMENDATION 7**

The recruitment, training and mentoring of the next generation of volunteers and not for-profit organizational leaders is one area that needs to be given a higher priority especially given the feedback received during the recent phone survey. Once again, this is a task for all recreation stakeholders – not just the existing volunteer-based recreation service providers.

□ **RECOMMENDATION 8**

Municipal governments – as employees and “organizations leaders” in this community should look at available opportunities to encourage and support healthier lifestyles, improved nutrition and diet and increased physical activity among their employees.

This includes setting aside specific time during working hours to facilitate these types of initiatives – all of which have been shown to contribute to a healthier and more productive workforce.

□ **RECOMMENDATION 9**

It will be important to not overlook additional opportunities which may be available to improve public access to schools for after-hours recreation programs and user group. Again, this was an opportunity that many respondents raised during the recent phone survey.

□ **RECOMMENDATION 10**

Recreational programming and services aimed at more effectively engaging seniors, children and youth in *active recreation* must be a community-wide priority.

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□ **RECOMMENDATION 11**

Developing additional outdoor recreation capacity is not necessarily a bricks and mortar challenge, but it would appear to represent a significant and affordable opportunity to address the strong and seemingly growing demand of these types of recreational experiences.

□ **RECOMMENDATION 12**

Avoid taxpayer-funded competition against privately-owned and operated service providers, especially where these entrepreneurs are effectively and efficiently addressing priority recreational needs and demands. In fact, all recreation stakeholders should be cross-promoting each other, rather than trying to duplicate services or programming that is already being offered.

□ **RECOMMENDATION 13**

In terms of how to “operationalize” many of the findings, action items and recommendations emerging from this study, the overriding recommendation is that the new Smoky Lake Region Economic and Community Development Committee assume this coordinating collaborative role – effective immediately.

It may be that this eventually leads to the establishment of a “permanent” multi-stakeholder Regional Recreation Advisory Board, or even implementation of regional recreation-specific levies, but these are decisions that are clearly down the road.

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