

Municipal Development Plan & Land Use Bylaw

Stage 1: Introduction and Visioning
Public Engagement Summary

March 2021



Mackenzie County

Engagement Overview

Mackenzie County is preparing a new Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw to guide growth and development over the next 20+ years. These documents establish how Mackenzie County grows, what development looks like, and how to best support the daily needs of residents, visitors, and businesses.

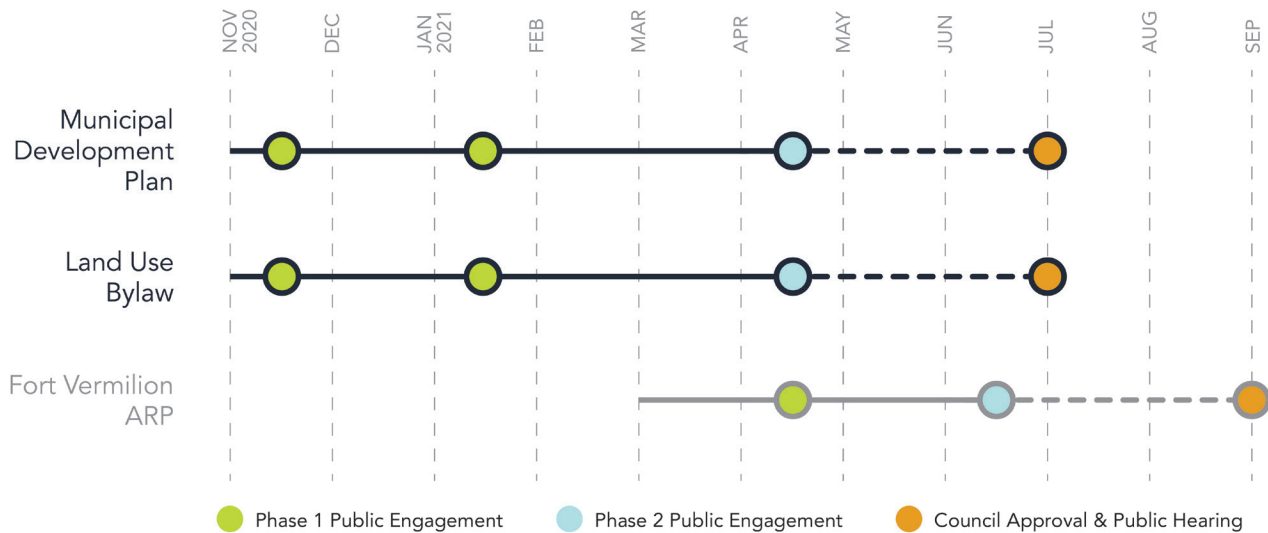
The **Municipal Development Plan (MDP)** is the road map for long-term development of the County. It establishes a shared vision for the future and outlines a path for getting there.

The **Land Use Bylaw (LUB)** provides clear regulatory direction for land uses and buildings to ensure successful implementation of the MDP. While the MDP provides the road map, the LUB provides the guidance to see it through by regulating use and development within the County. It sets out various zoning districts, acceptable uses within each area, and how decisions on development applications are made.

A third component of this project is a new **Area Redevelopment Plan for Fort Vermilion (ARP)**. In response to the April 2020 flooding, the new ARP will help to reimagine the future for Fort Vermilion’s waterfront and downtown through smart land use management and flood resiliency responses. The timing of the ARP project will be aligned with necessary flood recovery and response timelines, and is planned to commence in early 2021.

A timeline for the three separate project components, with public engagement events highlighted, is presented below:

Preparing a new Municipal Development Plan presents an opportunity for the County to re-visit what is most important, while the new Land Use Bylaw will help to ensure that it grows in the right direction.



Engagement Tactics & Communication

Due to COVID-19 and the need for physical distancing, Phase 1 engagement was conducted fully on-line and via telephone calls. The primary tool was an on-line survey (paper copies also made available), which covered a range of questions about residents' perceptions of the County today, opinions on the existing MDP vision, thoughts on possible new priorities, and hopes for the future.

ONLINE & PRINT SURVEY

Accessible through the project specific website, as well as directed traffic from County advertisement, the online survey included background information about the project and a series of questions. Due to the restrictions on in-person gathering, the survey was opened on two separate occasions to provide residents with multiple opportunities for involvement.

- » Dates: November 16 - 29, 2020 & January 25 - February 12, 2021



STAKEHOLDER PHONE CALLS

Through consultation with County staff, a list of local stakeholders was identified, including groups such as business owners, local area chambers of commerce, agricultural boards, recreation boards, and streetscape committees. The project team was able to reach a portion of the list of stakeholders during Phase 1 engagement, however stakeholders will be engaged again throughout the project, and specifically as part of future engagement phases.

PROJECT WEBSITE

A project-specific website has been developed that provides background information, project updates, links to relevant documents, information about upcoming engagement events, and contact details for the project team.

The website also hosts the link to the on-line survey. To-date the site has received almost **550 unique visitors**.



OFFICIAL COUNTY ADVERTISEMENT

Stage 1 engagement was promoted through a number of additional channels over the course of the engagement period, including:

- » Social Media Posts
 - > Mackenzie County Facebook and Twitter
- » Mackenzie County Webpage
 - > Link to project website
- » Billboards
 - > At County offices in La Crete and Fort Vermilion
- » Posters
 - > At all County offices and local bulletin boards throughout the hamlets

Key Findings

The following pages summarize the insights and ideas collected throughout Stage 1 engagement, with a particular emphasis on the survey. These findings will help to inform the draft MDP and LUB.

Key Themes & Takeaways

A number of key themes emerged from the Phase 1 Engagement, both through the survey and through individual conversations. The following overall engagement themes emerged through responses to often quite different questions, indicating that these topics are at the front of mind for residents.

People love living in Mackenzie County and want to stay. The new MDP and LUB's goals should be to ensure the County is enabling economic growth and business development that provides opportunities for the next generation to find adequate employment and housing in the region, and remain in place.

A **lack of affordable housing and community amenities** were identified by a not insignificant number of respondents as shortcomings within the County, and reasons that they would consider leaving the County. As the County's demographics continue to shift, the hamlets grow and change, and all residents continue to seek local opportunities, The County must contemplate whether it should play a greater role in advancing and providing these services.

Tensions within and between the County's diverse cultures and communities presents a potential risk to establishing a shared vision for the County's future. It is necessary for all residents to work together and build each other up. While this reality was identified by many residents, it was also made clear that these tensions and challenges are pervasive and will take sustained and concerted efforts to address.

Survey Q1: Do you think the existing vision from the MDP is still appropriate today?

Current Vision

Mackenzie County is a prosperous community that recognizes the value of its natural environment, local culture and history, and diverse economy. The County will encourage development that creates great places where people want to live and visit, develops economic opportunities, preserves the qualities people love about their communities, and protects natural areas. This vision is unified by a community spirit that makes Mackenzie County a desirable place to live and to raise a family.

Respondents were very supportive of the existing vision, with over two-thirds (70.2%) believing it is still appropriate today. When asked why or why not, the following themes prevailed:

- » Mackenzie County is a beautiful place blessed with bountiful natural resources;
- » There is opportunity in the County and the vision reflects this;
- » However, there is also division and indications of animosity between some regions of the County, including sentiments that the status quo is not fair for everyone.

Overall the responses indicate that the existing vision is generally appropriate, but may require some tactical updates to reflect differences between the County of today (and 20+ years from now), and the County of 10 years ago.

"It addresses who we are, and what we want to strive for."

"We live in a county with abundant natural resource with unlimited potential for economic growth if managed properly."

"The vision is great, just needs to be implemented in a way that is fair and equal to all communities and to actually protect the natural areas..."

Survey Q2: How important are these pillars to you in guiding the growth of Mackenzie County?

The project team identified four key pillars for guiding growth throughout the County, and asked survey participants whether they believed these pillars were very important, somewhat important, or not important.

The four pillars will provide the foundation upon which the MDP and LUB will be built, and include:

- » *Supporting Agriculture*
- » *Growing our Communities*
- » *Responding to a Changing Environment*
- » *Expanding the Economy and Industry*

All four pillars were overwhelmingly deemed important, with no pillar receiving less than a cumulative 89% of responses as “very important” and “somewhat important”.

The highest scoring pillar was “Expanding the Economy and Industry” with almost 74% of respondents identifying it as very important and another 21% identifying it as somewhat important. Closely behind this was “Growing our Communities”, with 66% of respondents identifying it as very important and another 30% identifying it as somewhat important.

The lowest scoring pillar was “Responding to a Changing Climate,” with 11% of respondents identifying this pillar as “not important”.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide further feedback, and thirteen additional answers were received. The majority of these responses were related to increasing environmental protections in the County, while other answers spoke to ensuring each pillar is given equal weight in the new plan, and partnering with first nations communities to identify potential partnerships for infrastructure development.

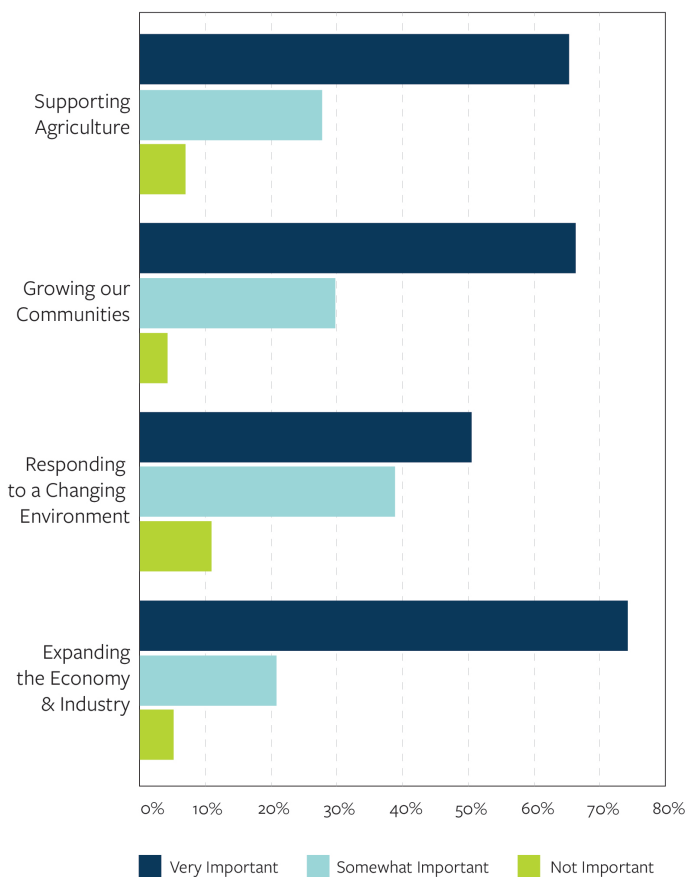
These results indicate that the four pillars largely reflect the priorities of the County’s residents, but should continue to be ground-truthed through engagement as the planning process progresses.

“Supporting low income residents, access to resources, community security.”

“Governing for the whole. Engaging the public and protecting and increasing industrial development.”

“Maintaining rivers and forest lands.”

“The weight given to each pillar has never been even.”



Survey Q3: What do you love about Mackenzie County?

In posing this question, the survey provided respondents with four categories to organize their responses, as well as one open-ended option. The following breakdown provides the percentage of total respondents who identified with the specific categories as something they love about life in Mackenzie County:

- » Community & Culture **81%**
- » Nature & Landscape **80%**
- » Economy & Jobs **63%**
- » Housing Options **46%**
- » Other **23%**

Responses from residents under each of these categories is summarized below.

Community & Culture

Respondents identified a deep pride in their heritage and culture, their faith, the First Nations communities in the area, and the strong sense of community. Respondents appear to often derive this pride from being a part of a particular community within the County, and not specifically as a resident of the County more broadly. The small town community spirit and strong social and community supports were noted by many respondents. Overall, residents love their community, their history, and the County's diverse heritage.

"The people are our greatest resource, small town feel."

"I love the freedom and ability to be myself in this community."

"This is my traditional territory."

"Sense of community that looks after each other better than anywhere."

Nature & Landscape

Residents displayed a strong connection to the County's expansive, wild, and powerful natural landscapes. Many specifically identified the Peace River and valley, vast forests and natural landscapes, the spectacle of the northern lights, and a connection to wildlife as reasons why they love Mackenzie County. Respondents also identified the need to enhance these important natural landscapes, particularly through protection of the boreal forest, providing more opportunities to interact with the Peace River, and providing more focus on beautifying the hamlets.

"Vast areas of forest and opportunity to explore."

"Northern Lights are beautiful and the long summer days."

"The natural rivers and forest being protected. The beauty of the river and surrounding forests."

"The seasons are part of our lives."

Economy & Jobs

Respondents seemed to be split on the current health of the local economy and the job market. Where many respondents identified that jobs are plentiful, others expressed anxieties about their economic prospects. County residents pride themselves on having a strong work ethic and being entrepreneurial. While agriculture continues to thrive, and small businesses continue to operate, additional opportunities should be encouraged wherever possible to provide good jobs and keep residents in the County.

"Still lots of jobs, would be great to see more farm products being processed here and then shipping it out."

"Need to encourage more business opportunities."

"A go get it done attitude."

Housing Options

As an indication of residents' concerns about the current housing options in the County, only 46% of respondents chose to provide an answer or identify this category as something they love about the County. While many people said that they love their homes, many others identified that rental housing and affordable housing options are limited.

"Housing is limited in some communities."

"Need to encourage more housing for rental."

"Housing options are great if you have money-needs lower priced options"

"Very beautiful residential developments."

Other Responses

Sixteen respondents chose to provide details outside of the four previous categories for why they love Mackenzie County. A variety of responses were provided, including: the high quality of local schools, a sense that they have a voice when it comes to County policy, and the community's resourcefulness and self-reliance.

"Small enough that we feel we can influence policy."

"Feel like the local government is part of the community and not above it."

"So many opportunities that you don't get in larger centers."

Q4: What challenges do you feel Mackenzie County is facing?

Respondents were provided with the same four categories to organize their responses as they were for Question 3, including the one open-ended option. The following breakdown provides the percentage of total respondents who identified the specific category as an aspect of the County that is facing challenges:

»	Community & Culture	74%
»	Nature & Landscape	63%
»	Economy & Jobs	64%
»	Housing Options	54%
»	Other	31%

Responses from residents under each of these categories is summarized below.

Community & Culture

By and large, residents expressed similar concerns related to community and culture, with four key themes emerging:

- » Some residents feel unheard, unrepresented, or ignored.
- » Different communities are not working together to achieve more.
- » Acceptance of new cultures and ways of life is a challenge.
- » There is a lack of community amenities to attract residents and keep those already in the County from leaving.

"As the populations grows at such incredible rates, it seems that there is not enough county support for expanding our recreational facilities."

"Lack of community unity, differing levels of resources available to hamlets."

"Having a hard time becoming a little more modern with the rest of the Country."

Nature & Landscape

With the recent fire and flood events that the County has experienced, many residents had resiliency and disaster response at the front of mind. Respondents also identified the need to strike a balance between supporting the economy and preserving natural landscapes. Overall, responses can be grouped into the following four key themes:

- » Natural disasters are a continued threat that need to be managed and mitigated.
- » More amenities within the County's natural landscapes are desired (hiking, camping, skiing).
- » Agricultural and industry expansion is a threat to the natural environments that County residents love.
- » More focus on preserving forests is needed.

"Adequate parks and walking trails, guard rails by the river, lack of development of natural areas for community leisure."

"Preparing for the next flood event. It will happen we need to get homes and businesses out of the flood plain."

"Balancing the desire for more agricultural and industrial with the need to leave natural areas unspoiled."

Economy & Jobs

Larger economic forces are impacting local jobs and opportunities. These include global shifts away from fossil fuels, COVID-19, and continued loss of manufacturing jobs within local economies. Combined, these factors result in the need to refocus on local opportunities and resources. Survey responses can be grouped into the following key themes:

- » There is a need to diversify the economy; process and refine resources within the County.
- » More jobs needed overall, but specifically more opportunities for young people.
- » More local education and training options needed.

"We are quickly running out of farming opportunities for the young people."

"There is a need to diversify and bring in new industry."

Housing Options

Much of what residents provided for responses in this category mirrors the concerns identified in Question 3 for Housing Options. These include:

- » More apartments and condos are needed to provide more affordable options.
- » Housing in general is too expensive and is a threat to attracting and retaining residents.
- » There is a market gap in multi-family buildings, and in starter homes.

"Housing prices are getting too much for young families to be able to afford a decent place."

"Lack of rental properties."

"More apartments and condos are needed."

Other Responses

Twenty-two respondents chose to provide details outside of the four predetermined categories regarding the challenges that they believe the County is facing. A variety of responses were provided, with some key themes emerging, including:

- » The existing animosity and division among the County's communities.
- » Infrastructure costs to support community growth are expensive and public dollars must be used wisely.
- » Additional medical and community safety services are needed - particularly a birthing centre and improved police presence in the hamlets.
- » There is a lack of community amenities and recreation opportunities.

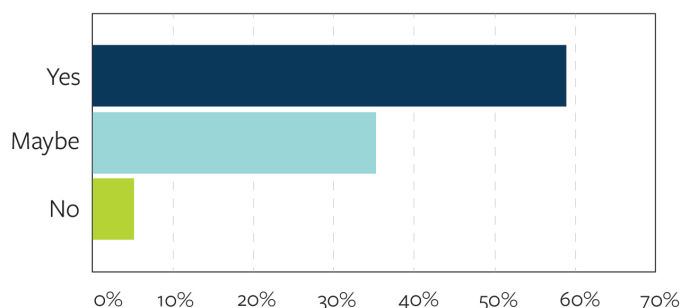
"Be more diligent and accountable with County dollars."

"Community activities for young kids! No recreation centre."

"Services such as gas, electricity, water and sewer - these are costly and take time to put in place."

Q5: Do you see yourself living in Mackenzie County in 10 years?

The Survey posed this direct question to residents about their long term plans and outlook for life in Mackenzie County. The graph below provides a breakdown of all 101 resident responses.



Over 58% of respondents indicated that they definitively plan to be in Mackenzie County in 10 years. Approximately 36% indicated they may still reside in Mackenzie County, while only 6% of respondents said that they don't see themselves as residents in 10 years.

When asked to expand on their answer, residents said that community and cultural ties in the region are a strong motivating factor for staying. The general perception is that if residents are able to stay, they will. However, factors such as a lack of employment opportunities, inadequate access to higher education, and a lack of recreation opportunities were all reasons identified by respondents that would lead them to consider leaving.

"Life's a rollercoaster ride , never know what can happen."

"Depends on my children."

"I want more opportunities for my children (post secondary education, recreation, etc)."

"My family has ALWAYS been here."

Q6: What are your hopes for the future of Mackenzie County?

Posed with the aspirational question about their vision for the future of the County, two-thirds of survey respondents shared their hopes.

A common theme throughout the discussion was a desire for **greater unity** throughout the County, and prioritizing working together instead of fighting between different communities. Some expressed their interest in having the County split into two separate entities, with some identifying that La Crete become its own municipality.

Growth was identified by many respondents as their hope for the County, although the form this growth takes differed. Some indicated a desire for guided change and development. Others sought expansion of not just the economy but also recreational opportunities in La Crete and elsewhere in the County.

Protection of the environment and nature was also frequently identified, with many respondents hoping the County will take steps to leave more land wild and protect forests from being cleared.

"To become a region that all our communities are thriving, and that we all get along as neighbors."

"Continued growth with a more diverse economy in particular, value added food processing facilities, developing our raw products into shelf ready products."

"Vibrant, community focused, simple yet the basics covered, opportunities for youth..."

"An open mind, to consider new and different ways of working on and with the land."

"Growth in recreational opportunities would help locals but also attract specialty jobs, doctors,

Optometrist etc."

Next Steps

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Stage 1 engagement process. Your feedback is essential to the development of the Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw. Stage 2 of the public engagement process will occur in Spring of 2021, when the key directions in the draft MDP and proposed updates to the LUB will be ready for your review and feedback.

Stay Informed

The project website will be your source of information throughout the project process. Visit planmackenzie.com to:

- » **Keep up-to-date** with project milestones and Stage 2 engagement opportunities
- » **Provide comments** on an ongoing basis throughout the project
- » Review draft materials