

Foothills County

Strategic Plan

January 2026

Introduction

The Foothills County Strategic Plan is a foundational document in support of our municipality's journey towards even greater effectiveness, efficiency, and focus. This document includes the vision, mission, key priorities and actions that will guide our efforts over the coming years.

This strategic plan serves as a compass, providing clear direction and focus for future projects and initiatives. By outlining our key priorities, it ensures that every action we take aligns with our overarching vision of fostering a thriving community.

It is purposefully concentrated on the most critical aspects and priorities that will drive our municipality forward. We aim to build a solid foundation upon which we can grow and adapt to the evolving needs of our residents, businesses, and partners.

Vision:

What Foothills County intends to achieve

Foothills County is a diverse rural landscape dedicated to supporting strong communities, a resilient business sector, long-term viability, and responsible management.

Mission

What Foothills does to carry out the vision

Our mission is to deliver practical and responsible services that meet the needs of the community, ensuring fiscal sustainability and effective management of resources. We are accountable to the public interest with a focus on transparency. Our focus on implementing realistic solutions ensures all projects and initiatives support the long-term well-being and growth of Foothills County.

Environmental Scan

An assessment of current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

To craft the priorities for Foothills County, we conducted an environmental scan ensuring the strategic plan is informed by a comprehensive understanding of both internal and external factors. This environmental scan involved detailed discussions with all Council members and key administrative leaders enabling us to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that shape our current context.

The findings from these discussions highlighted several critical areas that require focus.

Strengths:

- Clear industrial growth policies
- Proactive infrastructure development
- Fiscal management

- Effective budgeting
- Rigorous financial tracking
- Existing municipal road network is of a high standard and is well maintained
- World class, robust and diversified agricultural and agribusiness sectors

Weaknesses:

- Dated Municipal Development Plan (MDP)
- Administrative capacity is challenged to keep up with current expectations
- Staff turnover and recruitment challenges
- Dependency on predominantly residential tax base

Opportunities:

- Highway 2A utility projects including Foothills Fibre
- Regional water project
- Highway 2A industrial corridor development
- Tax base diversification
- Continued neighbour and external partner collaboration and shared services
- Geographic location and residential and non-residential growth pressures

Threats:

- Residential and non-residential growth pressures
- Demand on existing infrastructure and public facilities
- Potential for delays or cost overruns in infrastructure projects
- Societal trends of a general decline in community volunteerism and mistrust of government
- Loss of agriculture due to land conversion and land use conflicts

These insights inform our strategic priorities, guiding us towards a balanced approach that uses our strengths, addresses our weaknesses, capitalizes on opportunities, and mitigates threats. By focusing on these strategic priorities, we aim to ensure the long-term well-being and growth of Foothills County, fostering a sustainable and prosperous community.

Strategic Priorities

What Foothills will focus on

Four main pillars were identified as priorities:

- A Clear Vision for Development
- Key Infrastructure Projects and Utilities

- Responsible Management
- Community Relations

Key Actions

What actions Foothills will take to achieve the vision

1. A Clear Vision for Development

The County has a robust vision for non-residential development in the MDP, the Highway 2A industrial Area Structure Plan and the Foothills Crossing ASP. Residential growth pressure is occurring primarily in the central district as noted in the Growth Management Strategy.

Actions:

- Diversify the tax base through planning for non-residential land uses.
- Proceed with economic development planning to leverage existing investments in infrastructure and attract and retain businesses.
- Undertake various pre-development analysis which would support a review of the Municipal Development plan as well as various forms of more detailed planning such as ASPs and non-statutory concept plans to provide a clear vision of future growth in the County.
- Support agricultural uses and overall sector, and limit fragmentation of lands in areas where the dominant land use is agriculture.

2. Infrastructure Delivery and Utilities

Several major infrastructure projects are underway. Delivery of fundamental services including roads, water and wastewater remain priorities. The fiber network has proven profitable and should be expanded to reach more users. Infrastructure and service delivery must be prioritized with clear asset management plans.

Actions:

- Maintain existing infrastructure to current standards.
- Continue to focus on delivering current infrastructure projects, leverage these investments to secure additional industrial and commercial development that will maximize economic benefit to the County.
- Expand and improve fiber infrastructure services. This infrastructure is economically beneficial to the County and provides an essential modern-day service to residents and businesses.
- Prioritize undertaking development of an asset management plan.

3. Responsible Management

The County has a strong mandate for responsible management and has a disciplined approach to financial decisions. Challenges in staff capacity are rising because of

increased service delivery pressure and societal changes in employment patterns; these challenges are not unique to Foothills County.

Actions:

- Continue to develop the offsite levies policy to ensure up front infrastructure development costs are recuperated and borne by future development.
- Review current administrative resource capacity and building space availability. The intent is to proactively plan for potential increases in staffing associated with the implementation of Council's strategic plan, as well as increases in growth and development within the community. If a need for a new administration building is determined, communicate with the public well in advance.
- Modernize processes and policies, incorporating best practices, systems, and information technology for each department.

4. Community Relations

Community relationships are generally strong. Relationships with neighbouring municipalities can be challenged from time to time, however it is acknowledged that working together provides more efficient services to residents. Existing shared services agreements are in place and will continue to be reviewed and initiated as needed. There is room for further collaboration with external partners.

Actions:

- Enhance community communications by developing a baseline understanding of the effectiveness of current practices and explore alternatives that will more effectively reach County residents.
- Communicate with the public clearly and consistently on infrastructure decisions and implementation. Transparency is key to maintaining public support and ensuring the success of infrastructure projects.
- Communicate upcoming projects, budgets and timelines to the public to build awareness of these initiatives and the expected benefits.
- Continue to maintain relationships with neighbouring municipalities and key regional partners.
- Engage community volunteers effectively by considering incentives, managing scope of volunteer commitments, ensuring volunteer efforts are valued, and reaching out personally to invite residents to participate.

Measures for Success:

Assessing progress is essential for any strategic plan's success. Foothills County will track its progress by focusing on key indicators. These measures can include both qualitative and quantitative evaluations of Foothills' performance.

Municipalities function on an annual budget and producing an annual progress report is a customary practice. The annual report should provide an update on each success metric, including additional details that provide context and summarize trends.

Each year, based on the insights from the annual report, the strategic plan could be adjusted, as necessary.

Success Metrics:

Development Vision

- Completion of MDP review
- Completion of pre-development analysis and detailed planning activities
- Tangible progress in developing the industrial corridors
- Growth in local employment opportunities
- Increase in diverse housing options
- Council and citizen agreement on residential growth areas
- Annual reporting on the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural land uses

Infrastructure and Utilities

- Completion of water capital projects with active service delivery occurring
- Successful recovery of infrastructure costs
- Increased private industry development applications in serviceable areas
- Decrease in complaints about servicing
- Increase in fiber service connections
- Reduction in maintenance costs for infrastructure
- Adherence to infrastructure standards

Responsible Management

- Increase in total number of non-residential assessments
- Implementation of off-site levy bylaw and adequate development fees being charged
- Decrease in staff turnover rates
- Meeting or exceeding emergency response service standards
- Effective public engagement/communication efforts

Community Relations

- Positive feedback from community groups
- Qualitative assessments of community relations

- New methods of communicating and number of engagement opportunities provided to the community, including quarterly newsletters