



ENVISION GIBBONS

Gibbons' Municipal Sustainability Plan: A Community Rooted in Family

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Municipal Sustainability Plan outlines the steps necessary to build a strong economy that protects environmental integrity and that contributes to both a vibrant culture and to strong social cohesion in the community, one that is based on an effective model of participative governance. The Alberta government has given notice that as of April 1, 2010, municipalities throughout the province will be required to have a fully developed Municipal Sustainability Plan to access certain types of federal and provincial funding. Despite dramatic growth in Alberta communities in the past decade, some communities continue to face depopulation and/or a lack of employment, educational and cultural opportunities. To build a strong and vibrant province, all municipalities are expected to plan for long-term sustainability.

As a first step, a wide variety of documents were reviewed to ascertain the community's character and profile. A variety of tools were developed to present objective data to community residents to obtain feedback on the interpretation of these data (e.g., graphs of Gibbons' demographic profile, economic information).

The Town of Gibbons is situated along the banks of the Sturgeon River, near the junction of Highways 28 and 28A. It is minutes from Alberta's Industrial Heartland in Sturgeon County and a ½ hour north of downtown Edmonton. A seven-member elected municipal Council governs the Town with their authority deriving from Alberta's *Municipal Government Act*. Gibbons was a hamlet under the jurisdiction of the Municipal District of Sturgeon until January 1, 1959 when it was incorporated as a Village with 157 residents.^{1,2} During the period 1969 to 1979 however, the village saw a 417% population increase and was incorporated as a Town in 1977. The growth spurt in Gibbons settled down in the early 1980s and its population has remained very stable over the past 30 years.

While Gibbons' stability for the past thirty years is a positive indication of its inherent fundamental strengths, the fact that it has not grown despite the Capital region's mostly vibrant economy during that period, raises questions

¹ Alberta Official Population Lists. Retrieved 2009 11 03 from <http://www.altapop.ca/opl.htm>

² Alberta Municipal Affairs. Gibbons Location and History Profile. Retrieved 2009 11 03 from <http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/cfml/MunicipalProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=BasicReport&MunicipalityType=TOWN&stakeholder=124&profileType=HIST>

about its long-term sustainability. As Edmonton and its surrounding communities continue to grow and change, the cumulative effects may eventually have a profound impact on the Town. Gibbons may become less attractive in relation to other communities, thereby reducing the level of its tax base and its capacity to sustain the level of service provided to its citizens. Gibbons does not yet have a large enough population to support a sound and attractive base of local commercial and support services that establishes its position as a suburban community.

Gibbons' overall sustainability in the long term will be based on its capacity to adapt to changing conditions while maintaining the unique small town, family-based culture that roots its identity. To accomplish this, it will be necessary to:

- attract in-migration in sufficient numbers to justify the demand to support a higher level of services within a reasonable time period from home, a phenomenon which in turn, will attract new in-migration
- strengthen its identity as a community “rooted in family” and strengthen the services that authenticate that identity, both as means to sustain and enhance the community’s culture and its unique character

Based on discussions with the members of a Citizens’ Advisory Group, the following vision is proposed:

Gibbons’ small-town atmosphere remains “rooted in family” even as the Town transforms into a self-sufficient, suburban community.

Given that Gibbons' infrastructure has the capacity to absorb considerable population growth, the plan for its long-term sustainability focuses largely on social and economic elements:

- building a “sense of place:” a concentrated area of social, economic and cultural activity that defines the community's character, enhances economic opportunities and uses the Town's planned community centre as its anchor
- providing concrete evidence of community values: demonstrating to potential newcomers the unique character of the community's deep roots in family life
- strengthening the viability of community organizations: building strong organizations that support the community provides an increased level of services that will retain existing residents and attract new ones

Several smaller communities near Gibbons have more local services than it does. Since many Town residents commute to nearby cities to work, they have access to a broad array of retail outlets and services near their places of work that are not available in their home community. These outlets have a much broader range of choice than a similar outlet in Gibbons could ever afford to offer to its patrons. The Town then will require a higher population than most communities do, to support similar levels of retail and community services. The challenge is to work simultaneously to attract both population and services at the same time, even though they are each dependent on the increased availability of the other.

The pattern of economic activity in the Gibbons region will soon face great change as the extension of Edmonton's ring road from the Yellowhead to Highway 15 is completed and as the Alberta Industrial Heartland area east of Gibbons takes its full place in the region's economy. Strategies are discussed to assist Gibbons to position itself in the face of these changes both in terms of community promotion and commercial development.

To assure the Town's long-term sustainability, other areas that require consideration include its physical environment, its culture and its governance. Environmental strategies in the plan address the Town's natural environment, its environmental footprint, its pattern of land development and its transportation needs.

Strategies related to the natural environment include ways to ensure that the river valley remains in its natural state in perpetuity and that the river has sufficient water levels to flow continually throughout the year. To continue to address the Town's environmental footprint, the plan outlines ways to reduce the consumption of natural resources. For the Town's pattern of land development, the plan focuses on where to position the Town's concentrated core of social, economic and cultural activity, and on long-term priorities for the form of local housing development. Gibbons is a highly auto-dependent community. The plan addresses strategies to balance the use of vehicles with alternative strategies both to reduce their use and to increase access to transportation for those who have limited or no transportation options.

The Town has limited space for visual and performing arts as well as community cultural activities. While space for such events can be obtained in surrounding communities, Gibbons' culture could benefit significantly from a multiple-use facility. As mentioned earlier, the planned community centre will address this need and, as an anchor, it will be a vital draw to build activity in the community's concentrated core area.

Effective participative governance can be nourished by:

- helping community organizations to groom/recruit/elect strong leaders
- using existing leaders to reach out to recruit "new blood" and working with them to identify those who might eventually gravitate toward the municipal political system
- building partnerships and relationships with neighbouring municipalities and explore opportunities to forge new ones to maximize opportunities for enhanced levels of service for local residents
- continuing to plan and make decisions in the face of current uncertainties around the Alberta Industrial Heartland and the highway realignment

To assure a healthy long-term future for the community, Council needs to initiate a community discussion on the steps necessary for Council, community residents and stakeholders to transform the community. The plan discussed in this report recommends the establishment of a concentrated area of social, economic and cultural activity in the vicinity of 50th Avenue and Highway 28A as essential to effect such transformation. Because of

uncertainties around planned changes to Highway 28A's alignment, it may be decades before the proposed location is fully ready for development. For this reason, short-term strategies to foster the necessary transition include:

- advocating with the province for an adjustment to the highway's planned realignment
- driving/attracting more activity to the current core area
- keeping vacant store fronts active in the current core area

Goals and strategies for each of the five pillars of sustainability are highlighted in grey throughout the report. A complete listing of the plan's goals and strategies is available in Appendix A.

INTRODUCTION

The Alberta government has given notice that as of April 1, 2010, municipalities throughout the province will be required to have a fully developed Municipal Sustainability Plan in order to access certain types of federal/provincial funding. Despite dramatic growth in Alberta communities in the past decade, many communities continue to face issues such as depopulation and a lack of employment, educational and cultural opportunities. In order to build a strong and vibrant province, all municipalities are expected to plan for long-term sustainability.

According to the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, a Municipal Sustainability Plan is a specific type of strategic plan. It outlines the steps necessary to build a strong economy and participative governance models that protect environmental integrity and that contribute to both a vibrant culture and strong social cohesion in the community.

The strength of these five variables, economy, governance, environment, culture and social cohesion, are considered the fundamental components of a sustainable community. Collaboration with citizens and municipal stakeholders in the development of the plan is considered essential to ensure that the community is behind the plan's vision and the strategies that will be used to implement it.

In the fall of 2008, Gibbons' Town Council requested that Activation Analysis Group Inc. (AAGI) assist them in the development of its plan. Within one month, Council was faced with the need to recruit a new Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). Since the involvement of a CAO is critical to the development of the plan, AAGI's president recommended that the development of the plan be put on hold until a new CAO was in place. The project was resumed in spring/summer 2009. Unfortunately, another event delayed the plan even further. As a draft report was being prepared in fall 2009, a public session was held to inform the community of new provincial plans to realign Highway 28A. Since these plans would have an enormous influence on Gibbons' future and its sustainability, another meeting was held with the Citizens' Advisory Group to discuss the implications of the new plans, and the draft report took on new directions.

APPROACH

AAGI team members first reviewed a wide variety of documents to orient them to Gibbons, its surrounding communities and to other municipal sustainability planning projects in Alberta (see Appendix B).

Citizens Advisory Group

Members of the community were then invited to participate in a Citizens' Advisory Group. Gibbons' Mayor sent an invitation to approximately 25 residents that represented various sectors of the community. It was especially important to ensure that the following sectors were represented:

- Business
- Education
- Recreation
- Social Services
- Community organizations
- Industrial Heartland stakeholders
- Community leaders
- Public at large: commuter, environmentally conscious person, young adult, senior

The Citizens' Advisory Group initially met seven times. The first meeting introduced members to the project, the Terms of Reference for the committee (see Appendix C), and the goals and procedures for its work. Five subsequent meetings involved discussions of community strengths, gaps, and strategies to address them in each of the five target areas: social cohesion, environmental integrity, economic viability, cultural vibrancy and participative governance (see Appendix D). In a meeting about two months after the sixth meeting, a subsequent Citizens' Advisory Group meeting was held to test the main concepts that would be addressed in the draft report. At this time, the AAGI team members learned of an imminent public information session being held where Alberta Transportation's engineering consultants would unveil the province's new plan for the realignment of Highway 28A east of Gibbons. Following this public session, another meeting of the Advisory Group was held to discuss the sustainability plan in the light of the new plans

for Highway 28A. The report was presented to Council at a Council meeting on February 24, 2010.

Communication

The project was given a name to enhance its profile and visibility: *EnvisionGibbons*. Since Gibbons' Canada Day parade is a popular, local event, an *EnvisionGibbons* kiosk was set up near the Town office that day as a first step to raise public awareness of the project. Postcards were later created and mailed to every post office box serviced by the Gibbons Post Office. They referred residents to a web site developed to keep the community informed of the project's purpose and its activities (see Appendix E). An AAGI team member and a member of the Citizens' Advisory Group hosted a second *EnvisionGibbons* kiosk during the Town's Garage Sale day in mid-September. Its purpose was to encourage citizens to respond to community questionnaires either on site, on paper, or later at home on the web site.

The web page included:

- A brief description of the project
- Background information on Gibbons' demographics
- Links to background information on the process of municipal sustainability planning
- Opportunities to use Twitter, Facebook and e-mail as a means to facilitate communication between residents and the AAGI team
- Surveys on social, economic and environmental sustainability
- Background information to prepare participants in Citizens' Advisory Group meetings for specific meeting topics
- Proceedings of Citizens' Advisory Group meetings (see Appendix D)

Responses to surveys were insufficient to draw statistically valid conclusions about community perceptions. A number of anecdotal responses were received however, that provided valuable background information. For this reason, few references to the surveys will be made in this report.

The next section provides a profile of Gibbons obtained both through the extensive document review and the Citizens' Advisory Group discussions.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

The Town of Gibbons is situated along the banks of the Sturgeon River, near the junction of Highways 28 and 28A. It is minutes from the Alberta Industrial Heartland in Sturgeon County and a ½ hour north of downtown Edmonton. A seven-member, elected, municipal Council governs the Town with its authority deriving from Alberta's *Municipal Government Act*.

The area was first settled as a river crossing in the late 1880's. It acquired a new status as a railway station and gradually became an agricultural service centre. The Town was a hamlet under the jurisdiction of the Municipal District of Sturgeon until January 1, 1959 when it was incorporated as a Village with 157 residents.^{3,4} During the period 1969 to 1979 however, the Village saw a 417% population increase (see Appendix G3). It is not surprising then that in 1977, Gibbons was incorporated as a Town. Gibbons' growth during that period paralleled boom growth in many municipalities surrounding the City of Edmonton. Gibbons' growth spurt settled down in the early 1980s and its population has remained very stable over the past 30 years. In contrast, several communities west and south of Edmonton, continued to grow dramatically well past the period where Gibbons' population stopped growing. The growth in the southern communities can probably be explained by their proximity to the Edmonton-Calgary corridor. For reasons that are not immediately apparent, communities west of Edmonton seem to have been more attractive to people looking to relocate, than communities north-east of the city.

During the recent economic boom (2004-2008), there were announcements of plans for several bitumen upgraders to be built in the Alberta Industrial Heartland near Gibbons. These announcements were widely expected to translate into thousands of new jobs created and a population explosion in the municipalities north and east of Edmonton. Many communities began planning for potential growth. The recession that began in late 2008 however, meant that some of those projects were canceled and others put on hold.

³ Alberta Official Population List. Retrieved 2009 11 03 from: <http://www.altapop.ca/opl.htm>

⁴ Alberta Municipal Affairs. *Gibbons Location and History Profiles*. Retrieved 2009 11 03 from: <http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/cfml/MunicipalProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=BasicReport&MunicipalityType=TOWN&stakeholder=124&profileType=HIST>

A Town's physical structure plays a significant role in understanding a community's profile. The land use map in Appendix H1 provides a visual image as a reference point for the following discussion. Gibbons is bounded by highways on its eastern and northern edges and they meet at a point at the Town's northern tip. A river runs east-north-east through the Town's centre and there are railway tracks a few hundred metres to the west of the river. The Town has designated a 300-metre green belt along both sides of the river. The river, green belt, railway tracks and highways form natural boundaries. These structural limitations will play an important role in the coming discussions of the Town's future.

According to a 2007 municipal census, Gibbons' population was 2848.⁵ The Age of Population graphs in Appendix G4 suggest that it is a community of predominantly young families and that they tend to start leaving the town at early retirement age a little more often than do their counterparts in other communities in the greater Edmonton region. This tendency however has decreased over the decade between 1996 and 2006. In 1996 for example, the population of 45-49 year-olds represented 6% of the population but by 2006, they made up 8% of the population. This tendency repeats itself in each of the subsequent age groups until the 60-64 group where the population is proportionately very similar to the 1996 population. In other words, the population appears to be aging and residents are not leaving as early as they used to.

Another important trend is the disappearance of young people in the 20-24 year age group, very likely for educational reasons, followed by a significant reappearance of residents in the very next age group, 25-30 year olds. These may not always be new residents to Gibbons. An anecdotal report suggests that young people from Gibbons return to the community after their education to settle and have families.

We find in Appendix G9 that almost 10% more Gibbons residents lived at the same address five years ago than residents in the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) of Edmonton (62% vs 53%). This represents a significant difference and is a strong reflection of the community's stability. It is a source of validation for one of Gibbons' deepest values, being a community that is "rooted in family." Families need safe communities, where they can trust their neighbours and build relationships with other residents. That two thirds of

⁵ Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing. *2007 Official Population List*. ISBN 978-0-7785-6839-1

residents have remained in place for over five years is evidence of their overall confidence in the community.

Although there is no official data to support it, Gibbons' reputation in the region is one of a bedroom community serving Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan. The Town's commercial tax base is limited⁶ and there are relatively few jobs in Gibbons.

With a modest grocery store, two convenience stores and a pharmacy, it is likely that residents do most of their regular shopping outside of the Town. Although a downtown plan was created in the late 1980's, it was not able to reach its potential. While there are a number of flourishing businesses, they are spread out over five blocks without a central point that creates a synergy between them.

Municipal services include a library, several natural areas and a spray park, an arena, a small community hall, a curling club, a cemetery, Family and Community Support Services, a regional business association, a historical society and a food bank. For a town its size, Gibbons hosts a significant number of volunteer organizations that enhance the quality of life for its citizens (e.g., Lion's Club, Scout troop, sports organizations, preschools, community computer access program).

As indicated earlier, Gibbon's growth from 1968 to 1985 saw the Town's population move from 600 to 2,800 (see Appendix G3). Since that time the population has remained stable. Many municipalities in the Edmonton region experienced similar growth during that period but several communities the same size as, or smaller than Gibbons in 1970 continued to add dramatic population increases well past 1980 (e.g., Spruce Grove, Beaumont). This meant that they were able to reach a critical mass of population that could sustain increased levels of retail and other services. Gibbons has not been able to break through this population threshold to improve service levels.

The challenge now facing the Town is the question of whether it needs to change. If so, what needs to change and how? These questions are at the heart of "community sustainability" and will provide focus for the actions that would be incorporated into the plan. What makes a Municipal Sustainability Plan different from other planning instruments such as a Municipal

⁶ Gibbons' non-residential assessment was 7% of total assessment in 2008. Of 25 municipalities making up the Capital region, 21 municipalities exceeded this proportion (see Table I on page 55).

Development Plan or an Infrastructure Plan, is that the sustainability plan addresses change in a holistic manner. It incorporates the social, economic, environmental, cultural and governance elements of the community. It is an action plan. While many plans are based on anticipation, sustainability plans include guidance on the day-to-day decisions that communities and people make. The benefit of a sustainability plan is that it seeks to ensure that incremental decisions about allocation of resources are synergistic and contemplate long-term viability and sustainability of the community.

While Gibbons' stability for the past thirty years is a positive indication of its inherent fundamental strengths, the fact that it has not grown despite the Edmonton region's mostly vibrant economy during that period is a considerable cause for concern. The municipal corporation has the capacity to continue in a similar stream for a good number of years yet. In fact, interaction with some community residents suggest that many are happy with their community the way it is. Several even mentioned that they don't want the Town to grow, particularly at the speed required by rapid economic growth.

Maintaining the community's current size however, may put its long-term vitality at risk. As Edmonton and its surrounding communities continue to grow and change, the cumulative effects may eventually have a profound impact on the Town. Gibbons may become less attractive, in relation to other communities, reducing the level of its tax base and its capacity to sustain the level of service provided to its citizens. Gibbons does not yet have a large enough population to support a sound and attractive base of local commercial and support services that establishes its position as a suburban community.

If the Town could attract its share of the region's population, four to five thousand residents would be sufficient to support a basic order of services, it could remain a relatively stable community for quite a long time. At the same time, it would not be so large that major municipal infrastructure investments would be necessary nor would it bring the socio-economic problems that emerge with a much larger population. Rapid growth is not necessary or even desirable, but the Town does need moderate growth to remain sustainable.

Gibbons' overall sustainability in the long term, even its very survival, will be based on its capacity to adapt to changing conditions while maintaining the unique small town, family-based culture that roots its identity. This means that the Town must:

- attract in-migration in sufficient numbers to enhance the level of local services, a phenomenon which in turn, will attract new in-migration
- use the vision's phrase "rooted in family" as a means to guide decision-making and to identify strategies to enhance and further strengthen family life in the Town

These two themes serve as the pivots around which Gibbons' Municipal Sustainability Plan is built.

THE MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN AND ITS RATIONALE

The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association defines sustainability⁷ in its broadest terms as:

living in a way that meets our needs without undermining the ability of our children and our children's children to meet their needs. (p. 11)

A Municipal Sustainability Plan's purpose is:

- to project a picture of what the community expects to look like in the future
- to plan the means to achieve that future

Unlike other planning documents that focus on specific projects and programs, a sustainability plan addresses each of the major influences that build a community. Plans for specific projects and programs are all strategies to achieve the overall sustainability plan. These multiple influences can be summarized in terms of their capacity to influence sustainability in five domains that are known as the Five Pillars of Sustainability:

- Social Cohesion
- Cultural Vibrancy
- Environmental Integrity
- Economic Viability
- Participative Governance

EnvisionGibbons' Vision

A key component of an MSP is its vision statement. It expresses the nature of the community in which citizens wish to live and provides a standard by which to judge the merit of potential decisions that the community must make.

⁷ Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. *Comprehensive Guide for Municipal Sustainability Planning*. June 2006.

Building community is a continuous process of incremental decision-making, each decision being subject to short-term pressures and emergent conditions.

A good vision statement has several characteristics. It must be characterized by a *measurable standard*. This provides a benchmark to judge the merit of emerging community decisions. In other words, the vision must be worded in such a way that any future Council decisions being made should be seen as having the capacity to contribute to the advancement of the vision. Community-building is a continuous process of incremental decision-making and is subject to short-term pressures and to emerging conditions.

The vision must also remain *consistent* over time so that current decisions contribute to, and build upon the outcomes originally envisioned by the community. While the vision needs to have *long-term validity*, there may be the rare situation where the vision needs re-examination. To be *authentic*, the vision must have deeply personal meaning for the community's residents and for its commercial sector. A fifth characteristic of a good vision statement is that it must be *actionable*. It must be worded in such a way that it is possible to develop strategies to reach it. The vision must be *internal to the community*. Individuals from outside of the community cannot impose a vision on its residents. It must come from the hearts of members of the community. Finally, the vision must be *value-based*. It should be a statement of the community's deeply-held values and not a comparison with other communities. Ideally, the vision should roll off the tongue as naturally as ABC.

Based on the discussions with the members of the Citizens' Advisory Group, the following vision is proposed:

Gibbons' small-town atmosphere
remains "rooted in family" even
as the Town transforms into a
self-sufficient, suburban community

The word *family* in this context is focused on multi-generational units. Besides today's varying types of nuclear family, it includes parents whose children have left home as well as seniors. A *suburban community* is one that has a high level of self-sustainable services available within a reasonable distance from home even though a majority of the residents may be employed in other jurisdictions. A *small-town atmosphere* reflects a community:

- where residents recognize most of those they run into during the day
- where community needs are addressed by residents
- where activities are accessible to all

While the vision is a long-term standard against which actions can be measured, the MSP's long-term objective is to deal with more immediate conditions necessary to achieve the vision.

EnvisionGibbons' Long-Term Objective

To increase Gibbons' population to achieve a critical threshold necessary to attract a level of local services sufficient to ensure the Town's self-sufficiency

The overall focus of Gibbons' sustainability plan then, is to develop strategies to cultivate community growth while maintaining the elements that make up its unique character. While community growth can be a considerable challenge for many towns of a similar size, Gibbons has a choice location in the province's Capital region. This makes it ideally positioned to take advantage of the myriad opportunities that arise during the region's growth cycles as long as Council undertakes careful planning and a systematic approach to address needs.

There may be several reasons for the Town's lack of growth:

- possible difficulty of potential newcomers to discern Gibbons' identity and what the Town has to offer
- apparent lack of commercial services in proportion to the Town's size
- significant structural limits inherent in the natural barriers that shape the Town's Land-Use Plan

A recurring theme that arose in discussions on the five pillars of sustainability with the Citizens' Advisory Group was the need for the community to enhance the level of available local services. Unfortunately, the Town's physical structure is not conducive to the establishment of a recognized focal point, a formal and informal place of assembly around which major services can be clustered.

With the rapid population increase in the 1970's, the only direction to grow was to the south. This meant that residential areas moved progressively further away from the Town's original core. Had it been possible for Gibbons to grow in multiple directions, it is likely that a more concentrated core or place of assembly could have developed.

The phrase, a "place of assembly," is used here to connote a place where people are coming together for a variety of purposes. Such a concourse or hub or community square often defines the character of a community. Through a concentration of activity, it creates opportunities to enhance the availability of local services. Anything that can increase pedestrian traffic in the target area is highly desirable. Whatever the terminology, this place of assembly is essential as it addresses all components of sustainability.⁸

- It deepens identity by nourishing a common image in the minds of citizens of the community they call home, one that holds warm and loving memories. (social sustainability)
- It provides the concrete image needed by potential new citizens to discern the nature of the community's vitality and its distinctive personality. (economic sustainability)

⁸ Most of the Town's citizens already have a strong sense of identification with the Town, but the its unique character is not readily apparent to potential newcomers. The depth of residents' attachment to their community is most evident, even as they find it difficult to articulate why. Words used to describe it are similar to those used by residents of a large number of small communities to describe their own . The Town must find a means to express its uniquely attractive identity to potential newcomers.

- A convergence of social, cultural, and commercial activities builds a synergy that increases opportunity for new commercial activity thereby building Gibbons' self-sufficiency and its economic sustainability.
- The availability, in close proximity, of a variety of meeting places that have the capacity to host small, large, and very large groups nourishes cultural and social sustainability.
- Because of ready pedestrian-access to its location from any neighbourhood and the potential for multi-purpose trips, environmental sustainability is enhanced by the reduced need for motorized transportation.
- Potential new and existing community leaders benefit significantly from a busy place that provides a regular opportunity to interact informally with constituents. Cultivating leadership renewal is essential to nourish the sustainability of participative governance.

A sound sustainability plan must be oriented toward the future without being bound by past or existing limitations. While downtown development has been a continuing concern,⁹ it has resurfaced in this plan because it plays a pivotal role in achieving a sustainable vision for Gibbons.

This plan will go far beyond the place of assembly however, even if many of its elements will be related directly or indirectly to it. To further enhance both social and cultural sustainability, the plan will address means to enhance services that strengthen the family unit, Gibbon's strong family orientation being a fundamental element of the community's identity. By strengthening these services, the Town increases its appeal to just the type of new residents that it is trying to attract.

Gibbons' natural environment and its enhancement through sound development planning are good foundations to further the community's environmental sustainability. This can be done by strengthening bylaws, policies, land use plans and ensuring their consistent application, by making plans for the reduction of consumption of local natural resources, and by addressing local transportation practices.

The Town's vitality can be attributed, in part, to the efforts of its leadership in the voluntary, business and municipal governance sectors. To sustain such vitality on a long-term basis requires the application of explicit strategies to

⁹ Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission. *Gibbons Downtown Plan*. 1988.

ensure the ongoing renewal of the community's leadership at all levels (i.e., informal, unorganized leadership; leaders of Gibbons' significant non-profit sector; business leaders; elected leaders).

The first two pillars of sustainability to be discussed are the Town's social cohesion and cultural vibrancy. Since they are so closely related in Gibbons' case, they are being considered together.

Social and Cultural Sustainability

A socially sustainable community is one that is characterized by:¹⁰

- Respectful engagement with people from different backgrounds
- Social inclusiveness where all citizens have similar life opportunities
- Friendly, helpful behaviour in neighborhoods
- Opportunities for leisure, recreation, sport and social support activities
- Low levels of crime and anti-social behavior
- Diversity and affordability of housing

A culturally sustainable community is one that is characterized by:

- A sense of community identity and belonging
- Opportunities for expression via a variety of art forms (visual, dramatic, musical, etc.)
- A strong sense of community heritage
- Pride in the community

These characteristics will be incorporated into Gibbons' social and cultural sustainability by focusing on four elements:

- Building a “sense of place”
- The cultural component to a “sense of place”
- Providing evidence of strong community values
- Strengthening the viability of community organizations

Social and Cultural Sustainability: A Sense of Place (S)

Residents need opportunities to meet and interact with others in a neutral way, one that builds relationships and more importantly, trust. When parents trust the residents of their community, they can allow their children to roam, and be confident that if they run into a problem, someone will be available to help and contact the parents.

¹⁰ Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. *Overview: Five Dimensions of MSP*. Retrieved 2010 02 17 from <http://msp.auma.ca/Overview/Five+Dimensions+of+MSP/#Society>

A “sense of place” where community relationship-building occurs creates a setting to meet and greet others in public spaces and at public events. Parks, cultural events, formal social activities, coffee shops, restaurants, lounges and recreation activities are examples of places for people to get to know one other and to spend time together. A major area of assembly is of fundamental importance in creating a small town atmosphere and a family-friendly environment but it would require a considerable concentration of activity:

- Concentrate multiple uses (the more there are, the more likely it will be to succeed)
- Provide places for residents of all demographic characteristics to gather both in demographically distinct groups (e.g., youth) and in heterogeneously blended groups
- Provide a place for informal and formal, social, cultural, recreational and commercial activities
- Be designed to be people-friendly (e.g., has protected spaces to sit in the sun in comfort, is “senior friendly,”¹¹ has a layout that minimizes walking distance between popular locations)
- Be readily accessible from and to all neighbourhoods via a multi-use path network that would encourage the use of non-motorized modes of transportation
- Create a welcoming atmosphere for community residents and visitors

The more concentrated the core, the more people there will be. The more people there will be, the more commercial outlets will be attracted to locate there. The more commercial outlets that provide high priority services, the more attractive the community becomes to newcomers. This is not the only attraction for newcomers, but the Town has already addressed many of the other amenities that are sought by potential newcomers (e.g., recreation facilities, reasonably-priced housing, reasonable taxes).

In a place of community assembly, the myriad interactions that sustain and create “community feeling” are expressed. Everyone must feel that they have a

¹¹ Alberta Seniors and Community Supports. *Senior Friendly™ Program*. Retrieved 2010.02.17 from http://www.seniors.alberta.ca/about_ministry/senior_friendly/

personal interest in the space so it should be designed to attract all population groups. This does not mean that everyone always shares the same activity areas. There would be separate spaces where different community groups have a place to meet, greet and socialize (e.g., seniors and youth). It would be designed as a people-centred area yet be auto-accessible. Unfortunately, the need to accommodate parking often dominates such areas of a community which decreases ready access between businesses and services. Many are attracted to traditional commercial areas in smaller communities because they offer a streetscape with storefronts abutting the sidewalk and limited street parking. In other words, they are pedestrian-friendly.

The Town hub must be active from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily, consistently triggering sufficient hourly activity to draw new, added-value commercial services. While the intensity of activity may vary throughout the day, the more diversity in the area's functions, the greater its use and viability will be.

One essential community amenity that is still in Gibbons' planning stages is its Community Centre. There has spark a synergy between recreational and other types of social activity. This would be an excellent idea, if the Town's core area was already strong. Given that it is not,

The Town must position its planned Community Centre as an anchor and as a catalyst for developing its new hub of activity.

This facility must be more than a building to accommodate meeting spaces but a dynamic gathering place where many people want to be, even when there are no scheduled events taking place. It would be an incubator for:

- private and public activities
- social and cultural activities
- informal and formal activities

Further details on the Town’s major place of assembly will be addressed in the economic, environmental and cultural portions of this report.

The Goals and Strategies for Social Sustainability: A Sense of Place

S1.1	<i>Gibbons’ social fabric benefits from a confluence of social, cultural and commercial activity in one strategic location that is easily accessible to all neighbourhoods</i>
S1.1.1	Determine the feasibility of locating the Community Centre at the intersection of 50 th Avenue and Highway 28A and position it as an intelligent, inviting configuration of social, cultural and commercial spaces
S1.1.2	Design the proposed Town Concourse to provide various types and size of spaces for public assembly

Social and Cultural Sustainability: The Cultural Component (C)

To build cultural sustainability is to strengthen what is uniquely common to a clearly defined group of people. This contributes significantly to strengthening the common sense of place mentioned earlier that is unique to the community and that nourishes shared attachment to that sense of place. A community’s culture is built layer-by-layer as more and more people add their pieces of history over time. While Gibbons is currently a young community, it does have a long history. Among its cultural activities, the following can be considered of special merit:

- preservation of Town history in its museum and “park”
- heritage buildings that are still in use (e.g., a local Church)
- a community-wide garage sale every September, an idea that originated in Gibbons, but has now spread to other provincial municipalities
- installation of a mural depicting the community’s evolution (Fire station wall next to the Town Office)
- a strong core of active volunteers

Unfortunately, the Town has limited space for visual and performing arts as well as cultural activities. While space for such events can be obtained in

surrounding communities, Gibbons' culture could benefit significantly from a multiple-use facility. Even arranging space for the Citizens' Advisory Group meetings would have been difficult, had it not been that they were held during the summer when most organizations were not looking for meeting space.

One important goal for the Community Centre then, is to provide a diverse selection of physical spaces:

- to rehearse and to hold cultural activities and performances and that include space for both performances and spectators
- to host small, medium and large community groups
- to host a large number of people for a catered meal and accompanying event such as a dance or silent auction

The development of a strong community culture must be driven from a community's grassroots or it cannot thrive.

The Town's role in nourishing its culture can be to provide organizational support to community groups and to provide a means to access community facilities within the Town or provided in partnership with others. Organizational support may take many forms but one of the most important is assisting with communication and cultivating community awareness.

The Goals and Strategies for Cultural Sustainability

C1.1	<i>Gibbons has diverse physical spaces to hold cultural activities and performances and to provide space for both performances and spectators</i>
C1.1.1	Identify existing, and create new physical spaces of various sizes and characteristics where cultural activities, classes and performances can be held for residents of all ages (e.g., dance, theatre, art)
C1.1.2	Plan to anchor Gibbons' Community Centre in the Town's planned concentrated core area

C1.2	<i>Gibbons' residents have local access to cultural performances</i>
C1.2.1	Establish and provide organizational support ¹² for a local or regional Cultural Council made up of volunteers whose responsibility is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to make the necessary arrangements to host cultural events using performers from the Gibbons area and to bring in performers from around Alberta for cultural events • to identify cultural and sporting events that would be suitable for Gibbons' sports fields, golf course and other such facilities with the aim to explore the possibility of hosting such events

Social and Cultural Sustainability: Highlighting Community Values (S2)

While many communities emphasize a strong family orientation, their demographic profiles often show the departure of its young people and a disproportionately high number of seniors. Gibbons' profile tends to be quite the opposite. While it's young people leave the town for employment and post-secondary opportunities, there is a significant surge in population starting at the 25-year age group that continues through the 60-year age group. In addition, there is a high proportion of children in the 0-15 year age groups. There are disproportionately fewer seniors in Gibbons, than one would expect if seniors remained in Town to live out their life span.

¹² e.g., marketing, access to office equipment

Building families is a major preoccupation in Gibbons and residents tend to be quite explicit about this as a core community value. Strategies to attract new residents must provide evidence that Gibbons' family orientation is authentic, that it is unique to Gibbons despite how other communities might describe themselves.

One approach to building unique qualities into Gibbons' character is to reflect in depth on what families need and to find creative ways to build an environment that makes family life easier. The first requirement of family life is time. Parents, particularly in dual-income or single parent families, face pressures both from work and from taking care of family needs within a limited number of hours. Establishing a higher level of local services is just one way to help parents use their time more effectively.

Parents are also very interested in providing educational, social, athletic, and other recreational opportunities for their children. How can the Town build a structure and a process that supports these aspirations? Gibbons currently enjoys the benefits of a core of active citizens that are willing to volunteer their time and resources to organize these activities. Three areas that the Town could explore to optimize support include fund-raising, organizational, and facility supports. These three areas will be discussed in more depth during the discussion in the next section on strengthening community organizations.

An AUTHENTIC community
“rooted in family” must take steps
to think through what it takes to
attract and retain families.

One approach to this would be to take the perspective of a mother and consider what it would take to keep her happy in her community. The real estate industry understands that the mother must be happy with her neighbourhood. Mothers' considerations will likely include:

- safety and security of the home and neighbourhood
- availability of private yard space that is visible from inside the home
- social places nearby to get together with others with/without children
- ability to move around the community during the day (for single-income families that have one vehicle that leaves Town each morning; for single mothers without vehicles that are at home with children)
- the availability of organized activities where mothers know that their child's time and attention are taken care of while she does other things

Parks, schools, and community appearance are all factors that contribute to meeting moms' needs. The Town can contribute in many ways to ensuring that the community has an appeal for mothers. It should review how subdivisions are planned to ensure that specific family needs are addressed. Some of the key components are reviewing where children will play. Are there active park areas close enough for informal supervision? Are there safe pedestrian circulation systems for children to get between home and activity areas such as parks and schools? Are community standards maintained and enforced? Are there problem properties where people either can not or will not keep their property maintained to a community norm?

In each of its planning processes, the Town must take the step to ask itself what it can do to enhance its land use planning, its Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) programs, its park system, and its other services to address these needs creatively so that Gibbons stands out from other communities in what it can offer.

In the environmental section of this report, there will be discussions of:

- maintaining a priority focus on single-family housing rather than making extensive efforts to diversify local housing types
- diversifying transportation options

There is one current gap in Gibbons that probably prevents a significant number of families from relocating there: its minimal availability of licensed child care services. To provide evidence of the authenticity of its family orientation, this is one gap that Gibbons must address.

While the Town may not be in a position to open its own day care centre, there are a number of strategies that could be used to enhance the availability of good quality, licensed child care. One example would be to provide incentive funding for local mothers to take the necessary training to set up a licensed private day home in their own home. Should this program be successful, the Town could provide occasional funding for networking opportunities for local day home providers. The FCSS program director could also explore the possibility of inviting an award-winning, private, licensed day care organization to set up a “branch” day care program in the community. The Town could also assist licensed day home and day care providers with marketing their services in Gibbons and other nearby communities.

The Goals and Strategies for Social Sustainability: Community Values

S2.1	<i>Gibbons is a community “rooted in family” and provides services that strengthen the family unit</i>
S2.1.1	Make the provision of various types of child support a high priority for the Town’s Family and Community support Services Board
S2.1.2	Continue the current emphasis on family-based housing in new developments, with a particular focus on single family homes
S2.1.3	Develop municipal bylaws and policy that ensure that design features in subdivisions and housing prioritize: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family safety and security • private yard spaces • social spaces • proximity to a local park

***Social and Cultural Sustainability:
Maintaining/Strengthening Community Organizations (S3)***

Community strength can often be measured by:

- the vitality of its community groups, and
- the initiative of its residents to organize themselves and to take care of their own needs through volunteer efforts

In sustaining community, local organizations are as important or even more important than the Town's physical infrastructure.

Gibbons has a strong local base of organizations that deliver social, recreational and compassionate services. They cover a wide range of interests and needs and their contribution to the community's viability is immense. At the same time, Gibbons faces the reality that its population base is too small to meet all of its residents' needs.

While community organizations have a long history in Gibbons, they are not immune to current social trends which include:

- more and more limited financial resources to manage organizations
- increasing time constraints placed on heads of families that limit their time for volunteer activity
- competing activities which limit involvement in local organizations.

In addition, new regulations are restricting the way in which volunteers can be used. Understandably, more and more volunteers must be certified for certain duties making it difficult to recruit those with the appropriate certification. Many activities that could once be handled by volunteers now require that people be hired for that activity. One example is transportation where insurance requirements and liability now necessitate the use of paid contractors. Informal car pooling is limited as well.

The challenge is for the community to broaden its base of support, both in terms of volunteer time and of sources of funds. Several trends that are assisting businesses and NGO's to broaden that base are:

- collective fund-raising
- partnership-building

- sharing of facilities
- regionalization of services

To strengthen its current community organizations, the Town can offer coordination support for any or each of the four strategies mentioned above.

Fund-raising is both a perpetual need and a perpetual challenge for community groups. There are many deserving causes and a limited number of people to ask for support. Community organizations are increasingly finding success by joining with a group of other organizations to implement collective fund-raising programs. Such a “community chest” or United Way approach to funding core volunteer organizations has the benefits of:

- reducing the number of approaches to potential donors
- creating opportunities to widen the base of potential supporters
- reducing volunteer time for fund raising

The initiative could also result in a vehicle that has charitable status and that can issue tax receipts for donations.

Another form of organizational support would be to assist community organizations to negotiate partnerships with other organizations, both locally and in nearby communities to create more opportunities or to diversify the types of service they can provide. The task of managing relationships with other groups or communities is very-time consuming and requires communication skills and tools that small organizations often do not have at their disposal. Much of such organizational work is ordinarily conducted during business hours limiting the contribution of many volunteers.

The Town is uniquely positioned to provide such organizational support by playing a key role in developing and managing such partnerships. It can provide personnel to support the day-to-day administration of such partnerships and negotiate agreements on sharing facilities with other municipalities.

Municipalities traditionally provide recreational facilities for example, because of their overhead costs. In many cases, their actual utilization rate may be relatively low, but residents and especially potential newcomers value the fact that the facilities are available if they want to use them. The Town can act as a

catalyst by identifying potential opportunities and exploring the means to create shared facilities. Depending on the nature of the need, the Town may even take an active role in developing such facilities or in facilitating a private sector initiative.

A comment at a Citizens' Advisory Group meeting was that Gibbons has good facilities for field sports such as baseball and soccer and is known for them in the municipalities north-east north-east of Edmonton. This would be an ideal type of facility to use to start building partnerships. It would be better to build on these strengths rather than to start with other activities.

Another emerging trend is the regionalization of service delivery. Like commercial services, community organizations require a critical population mass to ensure their viability. The critical population threshold for viability is actually increasing. Increasing specialization of services for example, means that a higher population threshold is needed to ensure sufficient population with the particular need being addressed. Businesses and NGOs are searching for opportunities to reduce costs through economies of scale for example.

Regionalization of service delivery has been a popular strategy in recent years to address these needs. The Capital Region Board for example is becoming increasingly important for the co-ordination of land use planning, the establishment of a regional transportation system that sole municipalities could not afford on their own, geographic information systems and affordable housing. Alberta Health has collapsed its administration into a single entity while making efforts to maintain a regional focus for service delivery. In the private sector, many businesses are consolidating their operations while using new methods to ensure service delivery is tailored to individual and regional requirements (e.g., Internet). In assisting community organizations with such collaborative initiatives, it is important that the Town develop a strategy to protect the best interests and the unique needs of the community.

By creating a thriving environment for residents to assemble in a wide variety of circumstances, by identifying the community's most cherished values and finding ways to make them more visible to outsiders, and by building strong organizations that can increase their support to the community, Gibbon's social fabric becomes ever more tightly woven and increasingly attractive to potential newcomers.

The Goals and Strategies for Social Sustainability: Community Organizations

S3.1	<i>Gibbons benefits from a wide variety of both local and regional services offered by strong community organizations that work together to support mutual interests</i>
S3.1.1	Create shared use facilities to attract services that would not be able to operate on a stand-alone basis (e.g., health-related services, personal service businesses that require a private office)
S3.1.2	Develop strategies to consolidate fund-raising activities for the Town's volunteer groups into a single entity
S3.1.3	Provide resources to assist local organizations to build partnerships with adjacent communities to expand the depth and variety of services available
S3.1.4	Monitor and advocate with regional public service agencies to ensure that the delivery systems recognize the unique character of Gibbons' residents' needs

Environmental Sustainability (N)

Environmental Sustainability in Gibbons will be considered in terms of its natural environment, its pattern of land development, the Town's environmental footprint, and transportation practices in the Town.

Environmental Sustainability: Natural Environment (N1)

The Sturgeon River originates approximately 140 km west-south-west of Gibbons near Entwistle. It turns north-east in St. Albert, southeast near Gibbons and then enters the North Saskatchewan River near Fort Saskatchewan. A major tributary of the North Saskatchewan River, its full length is approximately 260 km and the river's discharge ranges from 0.4 to 3 cubic meters per second.¹³ Sturgeon County's 1999 Area Structure Plan gives its river valley recreation lands priority to provide access to, buffering of and extension of environmentally sensitive areas of the river's shorelands and tributary ravines, becoming greenways for informal extensive recreation and non-motorized recreational trails.

The river and its valley run north-east through the Town crossing Highway 28A near the municipality's northern and eastern boundaries. Policies are provided in Gibbons' 2007 Municipal Development Plan (MDP):

to protect the river valley for its outdoor recreation potential while ensuring that the stream, shoreland, and valley are protected from erosion, degradation and development encroachment. (p. 28)

Thus, approximately seven hectares of parkland along the Sturgeon River valley is protected. Included is Echo Glen Park containing two kilometers of hiking/skiing trails, a picnic area, rest areas, lookouts, a playground and a fish pond. An Area Structure Plan, adopted jointly by the Town and Sturgeon County in 1983, guides area development. According to the MDP, the Town currently meets the minimum standards for the provision of tot lots or small neighbourhood parks and exceeds the standards for neighbourhood to

¹³ Alberta Environment Map. *Sturgeon River near Villeneuve: Monthly discharge rates in historical quartiles: 1969-2001*. Retrieved 2010 03 08 from: http://www3.gov.ab.ca/env/water/ws/data/hydro/figures/_RSTURVIL.gif

community level parks for a community of its size (in comparison with accepted land area standards for parks and open space). “With park development along the river, Gibbons has the potential to provide park amenities normally expected in a much larger community” (MDP 2007, p. 27).

The Municipal Sustainability Plan echoes the sentiments outlined in the MDP. The stated goals are for the valley to remain in its natural state in perpetuity and for the river to have sufficient water levels to flow continually throughout the year. Strategies to meet the goal include regular review and updates to bylaws and policies to ensure they are legislated to provide strong protection.

Included in the strategies to meet the goal are:

- the eventual acquisition of all lands in the valley
- the protection of the valley’s natural state with strongly worded bylaws that prevent development
- the development of strong municipal policies to ensure sound environmental maintenance and utilization practices and to support continuing public access to the valley
- the formation of a Sturgeon River valley alliance to enhance the river’s annual average water level

The Goals and Strategies for the Natural Environment

N1.1	<i>Gibbons’ Sturgeon River Valley is maintained in its natural state and is legislated to remain as such in perpetuity</i>
N1.1.1	Acquire all lands in the Sturgeon River Valley within the Town’s boundaries from top of bank to top of bank
N1.1.2	Protect the natural state of the Sturgeon River Valley with strongly worded municipal bylaws that prevent development
N1.1.3	Develop municipal bylaws and policy to ensure that sound environmental protection, maintenance and utilization practices serve to preserve the health and safety of the valley (especially sound practices to guide the development of any future roadways that must be built over the river)
N1.1.4	Develop municipal bylaws and policies to support continuing public access to the valley

N1.2	<i>The Sturgeon River has sufficient water levels to flow through Gibbons continually throughout the year</i>
N1.2.1	Initiate the formation of an alliance between all municipalities that host the Sturgeon River and encourage it to prepare a detailed strategy to enhance the river's annual average water level

Environmental Sustainability: Pattern of Land Development (N2)

Pattern of Land Development: Location of the community's concentrated core area (N2.1)

To create a community where key services, events and activities are concentrated in one area and are accessible to the whole Town requires some adjustments to the Town's pattern of land development:

- concentrating the Town's commercial, social and cultural activities in a compact area no more than two square blocks, that is accessible on foot from local neighbourhoods
- developing a linked trail system between the parks in the Town, to enhance access of the core area to neighbourhoods

Several locations can be considered for the creation of a compact central core of activity. The first is to find new solutions to accommodating development in the ***existing core area*** and improving its accessibility. While the existing core area has some infill opportunities, it has a linear development pattern in combination with several strip mall formats and other buildings set well back on each property. All of these patterns increase the distance between destinations thereby discouraging concentration of activity and pedestrian circulation. They make it difficult to create a node of activity that would serve as an attractor to a wide diversity of users.

A second option is to determine the feasibility and desirability of establishing a ***new core area*** to concentrate new services. The current areas for new residential development are mostly south and east of the Landing School:

- the land form has not been compromised by any development
- natural features can be incorporated into a multi-use centre (e.g., wet lands)
- the area is central to both new development and a large portion of the existing established community

It is unlikely however, that the community could support a new core area without detrimentally impacting the current core. Because of this, a Council decision to choose this option could face considerable opposition from the business community. Should Council find it necessary to choose this option anyway, Council could establish a Business Advisory Group to obtain input on strategies to minimize the financial impact for its current commercial sector.

A third option is to determine if the Town's physical constraints can be modified by removing one of them: Highway 28A. Since neither the Sturgeon River nor the railroad tracks can be rerouted, that Highway is the only constraint that could be modified. In its long-term infrastructure plans, Alberta Transportation has long expressed its intent to the Town of Gibbons to twin Highway 28A and to provide space to accommodate an interchange with Highway 643 at the northern tip of Town.

Late in the development of this Municipal Sustainability Plan, Alberta Transportation announced a new conceptual plan¹⁴ for the Highway's realignment, one that could have a significant impact on options for positioning a new or revitalized core area in Gibbons. The plan is to move Highway 28A further east of the Town and to build an interchange with Highway 643 near the corner of the "old" Highway 28A and 50th Avenue. While the province's concept plan is based on achieving a number of objectives related to traffic flow, it does take into consideration new opportunities for development. The lands available between the proposed alignment and the existing Highway 28A are insufficient to achieve optimal development. While the base criteria for its position must be respected,

the Town should pursue the
submission of a request to shift the
new alignment for Highway 28A
several hundred meters to the east

¹⁴ Government of Alberta and CastleGlenn Consultants. *Highway 28A/28 Functional Planning Study*. November 9, 2009.

This will permit a block of land to be released for development on the east side of the Highway 28A's current alignment that would be large enough to accommodate the comprehensive development needed for the proposed concentrated core of commercial, public and residential activities. Should the existing Highway 28A become a service road for the Town, strategies to narrow it on the approach to its intersection with 50th Avenue should be considered. As it is, the highway is too wide there to provide the small-town atmosphere desired for that corner.

It should be noted that the realignment of Highway 28A also presents opportunities to design additional access points onto the existing Highway 28A and to create new routes for intra-community transportation. This could improve accessibility from the Town's concentrated core to all areas of Town.

To succeed in negotiations with the province, the Town must demonstrate its need as soon as possible so that the province can respond before it gets too deeply entrenched in the plan that it has recently finalized. It should be noted however that:

- There are no capital funds set aside for Highways 28A or 15 projects during the 2009-2012 period.¹⁵
- There are no plans in Treasury Board's 20-year Strategic Capital Plan for these highway projects either.¹⁶

The Town must act quickly to negotiate the proposed changes with the province. To do so will require the compilation of evidence to demonstrate why the change is vital to the Town's future. This would include changes to the Town's development plan to demonstrate the intent and the rationale for why the proposed realignment is the only solution that makes sense for the Town's future. Show why it works and why it is the only way.

The proposed change would also require a change to the expected timing of construction. The current concept is a long-term plan that will be implemented as traffic demand and resources justify construction. To be of

¹⁵ Alberta Transportation. *2009-12 Tentative Major Construction Projects*. Retrieved 2010 02 17 from <http://www.transportation.alberta.ca/Content/docType181/production/ProvincialHighways2009-2012.pdf>

¹⁶ Government of Alberta. *The 20-Year Strategic Capital Plan*. Retrieved 2010 02 17 from <http://www.treasuryboard.alberta.ca/docs/20YSCPweb.pdf>

benefit to the Town, a shorter time frame would be required to permit the Town to make its investment commitments.

Ideally, a commitment to both an alignment and early implementation of phase one construction could be made. By constructing two lanes of the new alignment now and releasing the current roadway to the Town, Gibbons could then proceed with its plans for new development for its new concentrated core. This first stage would require a new grade separation for the CN Rail, a new river crossing and the realignment of Highway 643, but the investment in the interchanges and the additional lanes could be done when resources and demand warrant it. It would be essential to obtain the province's agreement as early as possible, in order for the early construction period to be included in the province's 2012-15 Tentative Major Construction Project Plan.

Other principal impacts include:

- more landowners are affected
- the need to modify the structure crossing the river (different valley width)
- possible impact on location of the proposed interchange at Range Road 564

The Goals and Strategies for Land Development/ Core Area

N2.1	<i>Gibbons is a community where key services, events and activities are concentrated in one area and are accessible to the whole Town</i>
N2.1.1	Develop a negotiation strategy to request that Alberta Transportation realign its long-term plans for Highway 28A to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locate it approximately 500 metres east of the existing highway • construct two lanes of the new alignment in the near future so as to release the current roadway to the Town
N2.1.2	Develop plans to modify the existing Municipal Development Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to incorporate a new core activity area to be centred at the intersection of 50th Avenue and the current Highway 28A that will eventually be redesignated as a local service road • to narrow this redesignated road as it approaches the 50th Avenue intersection to create a walkable, small-town main street atmosphere • to narrow 50th Avenue leading into the intersection • to bring buildings up to the property line to create a streetscape • to create narrow entryways to larger parking areas behind buildings

Pattern of Land Development: Housing (N2.2)

Gibbons is one of many communities in the Edmonton region that is trying to attract new residents to their communities to improve their quality of life. To accomplish this, these communities must:

- understand their strengths and weaknesses
- determine what can make their community successful
- take initiatives that support those strengths

Since one of Gibbons' social sustainability goals is to be a community "rooted in family," then the community's housing options must reflect that.

What type of housing options then, do families want to choose from?

- Single-family housing (families with children living at home)
- Townhouses (families with children living at home and who may not be ready for investing in a single family home)
- Condominiums (seniors and empty-nesters looking to downsize)
- Affordable housing

Gibbons' traditional strength has been to provide single-family housing at an affordable price. It should continue to focus on that priority until it can enhance its transportation options for those who have minimal or no access to a vehicle. Once this has been addressed, the community will be able to retain its seniors longer for example, and more diverse housing options may be necessary.

It should be noted however, that the expectations of those seeking to relocate to family-friendly communities have changed. The Town must incorporate design features in their subdivisions and housing that will address safety, security, private yard spaces, and nearby public spaces for social activity as well as some of the other features considered in this report.

Gibbons has advantages over other communities with respect to putting single-family housing on the market at an affordable price. While many advocate for higher density housing and greater diversity of housing types, the Town's strength is with traditional single-family housing. Communities that face higher costs need to achieve higher densities to cover them, but Gibbons has the capacity to absorb considerably more growth within its current infrastructure. The Town does need to address its design requirements however, to determine how to make new development highly attractive to new families.

While population diversity is an important value in many communities, it may not be achievable in Gibbons' short or medium-term future. The Town's historical demographic is concentrated in two major age ranges: under 18 years and between 25 and 55 years (see the Age of Population graphs for 1996, for 2001 and for 2006 in Appendix G). There are substantial gaps in the 18-to-25 and the over 55 cohorts. While the lack of suitable accommodation may be a small contributing factor, other factors are more likely to account for these gaps. The 18-to-25 year cohort have many other reasons for leaving the community such as the need for education and training in other larger centres, specialized employment opportunities, and desires for a different lifestyle. It is unlikely that Gibbons could meet these needs in the foreseeable future.

What is encouraging is that Gibbons is very attractive to the next age cohort (over 25) who are moving into the age range that is typified by family formation. What is not known is whether they are former residents returning or newcomers to the community. While some may wish to see housing forms that would accommodate the 18-to-25 year olds, the best strategy may simply be to make it easy and attractive for them to return when they are prepared to move onto the family formation stage of their lives.

The over 55 age cohorts present a special challenge because the factors influencing their decisions are varied and complex. Once they have left the community, they rarely return. Housing form is one of the least important variables, although at the higher end of the age range, the task and cost of maintaining a single-family home does become more onerous. Two of the

factors that influence decisions to move include the need for housing upgrades or for alternative forms of transportation. The post-55 age cohort have significant equity in their homes after 25 years. If their children have all left home, they may have the means to change or upgrade their housing and look to other areas to achieve these goals. Since Gibbons is auto-dependent, either the lack of access to a vehicle or the inability to drive are critical limitations. Residents who are no longer able to drive need access to services and transportation alternatives which are not available locally. Transportation needs are discussed further in the transportation section of the environmental sustainability pillar.

The Goals and Strategies for Land Development: Housing

N2.2	<i>Traditional single-family housing remains the highest priority form of housing</i>
N2.2.1	Charge developers with offering an increased variety of traditional single-family housing options with private yard space (avoid zero lot lines and megalots)

Environmental Sustainability: Environmental Footprint (N3)

The consumption of natural resources such as electricity, landfills, natural gas and water (incl. wastewater) has been seen some reduction due to informal and formal efforts made over a number of years to reduce the Town's footprint. It is not necessary to reiterate here the conventional rationales for reducing resource consumption.

The Goals and Strategies for Gibbons' Environmental Footprint

N3.1	<i>The consumption of natural resources such as electricity, landfills, natural gas, water and waste-water has been reduced</i>
N3.1.1	Develop a plan to motivate a community-wide effort to reduce resource consumption
N3.1.2	Establish strategies, a target level, a timeline and key performance indicators for the reduction in the consumption of each resource used in Town-owned infrastructure
N3.1.3	Establish incentives for residential and commercial property owners to reduce consumption of water, electricity and natural gas
N3.1.4	Research new technologies and engineering concepts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to reduce flow of wastewater into the regional system • to enhance water conservation
N3.1.5	Work with the regional partnership for municipal recycling to increase and enhance the existing recycling service using the following steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify reasons for Gibbons' current usage rates for recycling • Identify strategies for, and promote waste reduction • Enhance recycling service based on community feedback • Promote the enhanced services widely
N3.1.6	Establish municipal policy and bylaws that require that land-use plans in new residential and commercial development be designed to minimize energy consumption

<i>N3.2</i>	<i>Gibbons has an integrated park system that is accessible from every community neighbourhood</i>
N3.2.1	Establish policies that will ensure that every neighbourhood in the community has access to a neighbourhood park site that is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easily accessible from neighbourhood housing • Observable from the interior of neighbourhood homes • Linked to at least one other park in a fully-linked park system
N3.2.2	Develop a plan to link individual park sites and recreational areas as part of a community pedestrian path system
N3.2.3	Develop policies and plans to preserve existing tree stands and natural areas

Develop a plan to link individual park sites/recreational areas as part of an overall pedestrian path system.

Link it all to the Town's concentrated core area as directly as possible.

Environmental Sustainability: Transportation (N4)

Since the majority of the labour force commutes to work and neither local nor regional public transit is available, personal motorized transportation has been essential for commuters. As discussed earlier, the Town's land use pattern is not currently conducive to walking between local destinations.

Vehicles are vital for living in Gibbons. This presents significant obstacles for certain demographic sectors. Seniors facing the decision about whether or not to continue driving must do so in the context of having to decide whether to move to another community that has more local services available. This may well be one explanation for the Town's disproportionate loss of residents in the age categories starting at 60-65 years. Anecdotal reports suggest that when seniors leave town however, their children and grandchildren often relocate with them so that they can be more available during years when they may be needed.

If transportation alternatives were available, there would be opportunity to keep people in the older age cohorts in the community, for example. To do so requires breaking into the cycle of supply and demand. Alternative transportation modes are not viable until the demand is there and demand cannot be created until the supply is there. If for example, Gibbons enjoyed a commuter train service into Edmonton, the community could potentially flourish. Everyone in the community already has one or two automobiles however, and they work in many different areas, so there is no demand for a commuter train service. Hence, that service is not viable.

The Town must create intermediate steps to build a transition between independent travel and shared travel.

The preliminary steps taken are then used to demonstrate the existence of a market for shared travel. The Town can start by researching the feasibility of municipal strategies and sources of funding to provide alternative modes of transportation. There are alternatives available for various demographic sectors (e.g., car co-op, bicycle and scooter rentals, bicycle garages, organized regional carpooling). Given that the Capital Region Board (CRB) has made

regional transportation one of its priorities, it will be essential that Gibbons aligns its own plans with those of the regional plan.

One example could be to provide daily return service in a minibus from a central meeting spot in Town to a stop along the proposed regional bus routes heading into Fort Saskatchewan and to Edmonton. To assist seniors who may not want to spend an entire day shopping, the pick-up point in each of the cities could be strategically located near a senior's drop-in centre for example. This could permit a warm space to rest and relax while waiting for the regional bus.

In addition, the Town must maximize opportunities to use energy-efficient modes of transportation such as walking as much as possible. Hence another reason for the need for the Town's concentrated core that can be reached on foot within 15 minutes from all Town neighbourhoods during any season of the year.

A first step towards addressing transportation alternatives could be to develop a municipal policy that prioritizes walkability and other forms of energy-efficient movement in the land-use designs for all new residential and commercial development in Gibbons. In addition, local promotion of, and the provision of incentives for, walking and energy-efficient transportation alternatives are key to addressing population growth and environmental sustainability at the same time. The Town must identify linkages between key destinations and then develop a plan to improve the linkages between parks and between neighbourhoods and the Town's core service area. New sidewalk design, the enhancement and maintenance of existing sidewalks and trails can play a key role in this effort.

The Environmental Goals and Strategies for Transportation

N4.1	<p><i>Residents use energy-efficient modes of transportation such as walking as much as possible. To this end, the Town's services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Are sufficiently concentrated to provide efficient access between services</i> • <i>Can be reached on foot within 15 minutes from all Town neighbourhoods during any season of the year</i>
N4.1.1	Promote walking and energy-efficient alternatives for transportation to ratepayers and provide alternatives and incentives to do so
N4.1.2	<p>Identify links between the Town's main destinations and develop a plan to improve these linkages and add to them as a means to increase the community's attractiveness. This strategy would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve sidewalks that are too narrow or not direct enough • include links between parks • include links between neighbourhoods and the Town's core service area • ensure that all links are direct, comfortable, safe, easy to walk, and quick
N4.1.3	Develop a municipal policy that prioritizes walkability and other forms of energy-efficient movement in the land-use designs for all new residential and commercial development
N4.1.4	<p>Develop maintenance standards and practices that ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Town keeps all natural walking trails clear and safe to navigate on foot during all seasons • residents keep sidewalks clear and safe to navigate on foot during all seasons

N4.2	<i>Gibbons’ “No one left behind” policy promotes secondary means of transportation within the region for those with limited or no access to an automobile</i>
N4.2.1	Research feasibility of municipal strategies and sources of funding to provide alternative modes of transportation both within the community and between communities in the region; ensure these strategies are in alignment with the Capital Region Board’s regional transit plan (e.g., car co-op, bicycle and scooter rentals, bicycle garages, organized regional carpooling)
N4.2.2	Negotiate with the Capital Region Board Transit Committee to obtain a decision in principle to place a sheltered inter-municipal (IM) bus stop at the corner of Highway 15N and Highway 28A North for an IM bus between Edmonton-Fort Saskatchewan
N4.2.3	In collaboration with the Capital Region Board, develop an inter-municipal partnership with Bon Accord and Sturgeon County for a return trip bus service going from Bon Accord to Gibbons and on to the corner of Highways 15 and 28A
N4.2.4	In collaboration with the Capital Region Board, Sturgeon County and the Town of Bon Accord, initiate feasibility and costing studies and determine how fee schedules would tie in with the Capital Region Board transit fees
N4.2.5	Negotiate with the province for the use of provincial land at the corner of Highways 15 and 28A for the installation of a bus stop

Economic Sustainability

As has been mentioned earlier in this report, a base of local services that builds local self-sufficiency requires a critical population threshold. Unfortunately, there is not necessarily a magic number that applies to all communities. There are several smaller communities that surround Gibbons that have more local services than it does. Since many Gibbons' residents commute to nearby cities and towns to work, they often have access to a broad array of retail outlets and services near their places of work that are not available in their home community. These outlets have a much broader range of choice than a similar outlet in Gibbons could ever afford to offer to its patrons. The Town then, will require a higher population than do most communities to support similar levels of retail and community services. The challenge is to work simultaneously to attract both population and services, even though they are both dependent on the increased availability of the other.

Concerted efforts have been made to attract new commercial activity but for a variety of reasons, they have been largely ineffectual. The Town, other municipalities north-east of Edmonton and the city's north-east quadrant itself have all been significantly challenged in their efforts to attract light industry. The changing pattern of light industrial development in the Edmonton region however, will soon present significant new opportunities. To understand the significance of these changes, a brief summary of the challenges faced in the area is necessary.

North-East Edmonton has the largest concentration of land-intensive heavy industry in the region surrounding the Capital. Businesses serving light industry such as oil and gas support services are concentrated in south Edmonton and the Leduc-Nisku Industrial Park while trucking and warehousing are concentrated in West Edmonton. Light industrial development requires ready access to urban road designs, piped water, sewers and more importantly, good transportation infrastructure. Major routes such as the Yellowhead and the Edmonton-Calgary corridor on the Queen Elizabeth II highway provided that infrastructure for both South and West Edmonton. Leduc-Nisku also benefited from its proximity to the International Airport. North-East Edmonton has not had the benefit of a similar industry-highway configuration even though it serves as a key along the main corridor to Fort McMurray.

Gibbons must start now to position itself for major developments that will change the face of North-East Edmonton.

They include the completion of Anthony Henday Drive and new development in the Horse Hills Industrial Area.

The extension of Anthony Henday Drive from the Yellowhead to Highway 15 will enable North-East Edmonton and its nearby communities to compete directly with Edmonton's south and west quadrants, particularly if it connects directly to Highway 28A.

Just as the Alberta Heartland was a partnership of affected communities, the municipalities north and west of the North Saskatchewan River should collaborate on the development of a strategy for the growth of light industry in the Horse Hills area. The approach would be comparable to one taken by communities in south Edmonton where the Alberta International Region (AIR) is being marketed as a preferred industrial zone.

Economic Sustainability: Well-balanced Municipal Revenues (E1)

Ideally, Gibbons will be a community that provides a high level of support for family-related activities yet maintains an affordable tax rate.

The Town has been well-managed and prudent in its expenditures. Its infrastructure base (“hard services”) can accommodate significant growth without major investments.¹⁷ Its future infrastructure needs are shifting from “hard services” to “soft services.” People are attracted to communities that appeal to their recreation, social, cultural and educational interests (“soft services”). The Town should focus upcoming capital expenditures on facilities that address these needs and ones that are of the highest quality (e.g., the arena, curling rink, baseball diamonds, parks). The catalyst will be the Town’s proposed community centre. It must be positioned as an anchor for further development in the Town’s concentrated core area.

Gibbons’ market niche in the Edmonton region is its capacity to offer affordable single-family dwellings. This niche is characterized by the capital cost, taxes, and transportation costs of living in Gibbons vs. living in other communities. Historically the lower cost of living in Gibbons has been a significant advantage in the maintenance of its strong residential base. Councillors and staff must remain cognizant of this critical factor as the future unfolds.

Gibbons’ 7% proportion of non-residential assessment to total assessment is one of the lowest in the Capital region. Table I demonstrates that amongst 25 communities, Beaumont is lowest at 5% while Wabamun tops the list at 70% with the average ratio being approximately 21%. The growth of the Town’s commercial sector is needed to improve quality of life by establishing a tax base that can finance the enhancement of public services. Gibbons is a logical centre for secondary support industry that could serve future upgraders and industrial development in Alberta’s Industrial Heartland. With the recent recession however, there is still a great deal of uncertainty around how many of the upgraders will actually move ahead and when. The future of the upgraders has also been affected by oil sands producers developing new strategies to process bitumen at their existing facilities in other places.

¹⁷ Its capacity for both water distribution and sewage treatment is for a community of 10,000.

While Gibbons' economic development plan should include a strategy that supports upgrader activity in the Industrial Heartland, the Town must not rely on it for any significant portion of it to increase its non-residential tax base.

One strategy for example, is to identify the community's position in relation to the opening of the north-east segment of Anthony Henday Drive.

A long-term goal for the economic development plan should be to bring the Town closer to the regional non-residential assessment average mentioned above (21% of total assessment value).

Table I
2008 Proportion of
Non-Residential Assessment to Total Assessment

Municipality	Non Residential Assessment	Total Assessment	Ratio
Beaumont	50,729,149	974,155,919	5%
Bon Accord	4,471,324	82,145,499	5%
Bruderheim	4,534,676	74,039,903	6%
Gibbons	11,179,244	163,920,403	7%
Legal	5,216,668	70,093,787	7%
Calmar	13,881,400	149,236,302	9%
Saint Albert	671,843,038	6,439,534,387	10%
New Serepta	2,575,814	21,985,348	12%
Morinville	63,704,429	500,854,113	13%
Stony Plain	149,933,095	1,179,585,078	13%
Strathcona County	2,256,769,968	17,049,129,978	13%
Devon	78,006,935	543,149,104	14%
Lamont	12,329,866	90,479,150	14%
Spruce Grove	308,505,830	1,968,765,188	16%
Ft Saskatchewan	553,243,680	3,018,854,082	18%
Redwater	35,127,738	194,489,993	18%
Edmonton	18,705,580,889	82,068,069,069	23%
Thorsby	13,528,560	55,390,393	24%
Leduc	490,184,994	1,982,824,348	25%
Sturgeon County	810,451,386	3,086,836,399	26%
Warburg	5,750,421	22,306,117	26%
Parkland County	1,328,190,268	4,619,440,642	29%
Lamont County	278,605,789	595,713,871	47%
Leduc County	2,541,359,189	3,953,349,048	64%
Wabamun	70,092,858	98,467,546	71%
Average			21%

Source: Alberta Municipal Profiles/Assessment Profiles
http://www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/mc_municipal_profiles.cfm

The Goals and Strategies for Municipal Revenue and Expenses

E1.1	<i>The total value of Gibbons' assessed non-residential properties will be well-balanced with the total value of its assessed residential properties at a rate of 20% non-residential to 80 % residential properties</i>
E1.1.1	Maintain a tax rate that is competitive with other Edmonton region communities while providing sufficient revenues to be able to invest in the strategies proposed for building sustainability in this plan
E1.1.2	Develop an alternative strategy to complement but not rely on the upgraders
E1.1.3	Explore how the Town might be able to position itself in relation to the opening of Anthony Henday Drive that will complete the construction of Edmonton's ring road

Economic Sustainability: Community Promotion (E2)

As mentioned earlier, Gibbons requires a sustained rate of modest or moderate growth in order to achieve the critical level of population that will assure viability for the services and businesses that residents would like to see. This is not an insignificant objective when one considers that Gibbons is one of twenty-four communities in the Edmonton region that are competing with one another to increase their population.

To promote community growth in a competitive environment, it is essential to be able to convey the nature of the community's unique qualities as articulately as possible.

**Gibbons has yet to develop
its unique identity within
the Edmonton region**

Location and history gave other communities self-evident identities but Gibbons became an instant town in the 1970's with very little upon which to build an identity. Community residents however, consistently perceive the community as one that places a high value on family life. Most other communities also advertise their family orientation. To compete, Gibbons must convey what is authentic, unique and special about its family orientation.

On the basis of its unique identity, Gibbons can build a marketing plan that authentically represents the community's vision. The Town's best marketing resource is its residents: people encouraging good friends to come and live there. They are the ones that can communicate what makes the community such an attractive place to live. The friends of the 45-50 year old age group are not as likely to be in the market to move to a new community as the friends of those in the 25-35 year old group would be. They are often first-time home buyers and are beginning to think about raising families.

Another strategy to promote the community is to initiate and support a "Buy Local" initiative. To grow its commercial sector, the Town must start small by establishing a market place and proving its viability to other potential businesses. The first place to start is at home with people in Gibbons and the surrounding area that are producing products that appeal to the local population (e.g., fresh produce, retail incubation network for local artists, and other services that might meet resident's daily needs).

“Change the perception of distance” in the minds of residents and potential newcomers

Finally, the Town has an opportunity to “change the perception of distance” in the minds of residents and potential newcomers. This means considering the Town's geographic position from a new perspective. Gibbons enjoys a location that is close to many significant amenities that are important for high quality community living. City residents assume that because they live in an urban setting, the resources they need are more readily available than they

would be in a community such as Gibbons. In many cases, actual travel times from Gibbons to a given amenity in a nearby community may be competitive with those of city residents.

The Town could build its image around a “fifteen-minute rule.” This positions Gibbons at the centre of a defined area rather than as a satellite or bedroom community of a much larger area. By developing a plan to promote Gibbons’ accessibility to basic services located within a fifteen-minute drive, Gibbons can offset its perceived lack of local services. The development and up-to-date maintenance of an inventory of recreation facilities, commercial services, potential employment sites, social and health services within a fifteen minute drive could be used in the Town’s promotional literature.

Of considerable significance would be an inventory of current and projected employment areas including the Alberta Heartland, the Edmonton Horse Hills Industrial area, Fort Saskatchewan, etc. Transportation linkages to these areas could be identified and documented. The inventory would show that Gibbons is central to a significant portion of the employment base in the Edmonton region. While many may view Edmonton’s primary employment centre as being in Downtown Edmonton or the University area, the north-east is Edmonton’s most significant industrial employment centre. Gibbons is well-located to be the primary residential resource for this industrial concentration. It would be essential however, that Gibbons understand the needs of the different work forces and create an environment to attract them on the basis of their varying needs.

Once an inventory is complete, the next step would be to develop a communication tool that describes the scope of what is available within the 25 km radius that can be used in community promotion efforts. This provides a means to build potential newcomers’ confidence that they can obtain what they need easily without having to go into the city. Being described as a satellite does not build such confidence. Show how much can be accomplished within a fifteen-minute drive.

The Goals and Strategies for Community Promotion

E2.1	<i>Gibbons is a popular destination for relocation</i>
E2.1.1	Involve community members in selling the community to others
E2.1.2	Encourage and support “Buy Local” initiatives
E2.1.3	Position Gibbons as the residential centre for industrial development in the North-East Edmonton region
E2.1.4	Build the community’s image around a 15-minute rule that describes the scope of services that are available within a 25 km radius

Economic Sustainability: Commercial Development (E3)

Over the past few decades, sustainable communities are increasingly positioning commercial services closer to where people live so as to reduce the need for motorized transport. In many communities however, commercial services have become larger, more concentrated and accessible only by car. Shopping malls once built this synergy by locating anchor stores at each end linked by secondary commercial outlets that draw from the movement of people between the anchors. Gibbons’ commercial area has not managed to develop anchors that would draw people along the street or to build sufficient traffic to attract other commercial units. The newest retail model is the format of big box stores assembled in power centres. This configuration offers both selection and price. Unfortunately, smaller stores find it difficult to compete with them. The alternative shopping experience proposed in this plan makes for one that approximates a traditional main street experience that offers personal service and locally-made products.

The current pattern of commercial development on 50th Avenue in Gibbons is not conducive to pedestrian circulation. The buildings are set well back of the property line with parking in front, a very wide street to cross and a similarly configured layout on its other side. This separation of spaces makes it difficult to generate the synergy that ensues from pedestrian traffic between multiple, co-located services. In addition, Gibbons’ residents have access to a wide diversity of shopping experiences within a relatively short drive. With the exception of convenience goods, local services find it difficult to compete.

The Town must develop a small, concentrated hub that acts as an anchor for complementary activity

The ensuing synergy fuels new activity that in turn, fosters economic viability for all of the participants in the hub. A catalyst such as a public activity is needed to trigger initial development. Public spaces such as recreation, post offices, libraries, and meeting places are catalysts because people need to come to them frequently. The challenge is to design such developments to leverage investment in commercial uses.

The Goals and Strategies for Economic Sustainability: Commercial Development

E3.1	<p>Gibbons offers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>a shopping experience that: provides local products and personal service is sufficiently central provides multiple types of services is readily accessible on foot</i> • <i>a concentration of commercial activities that serves an area within a 25-km radius of Gibbons and includes North-East Edmonton's new Horse Hills industrial area</i>
E3.1.1	Create spaces within the Town Concourse for entrepreneurs to move from “home-based” businesses to conventional commercial outlets
E3.1.2	Work with the regional economic development board to develop strategies to attract small- and medium-sized enterprises that support or complement existing Gibbons-based businesses and that support industries within a 25-km radius

Sustainability of Local Governance (G)

Sustainability of Local Governance: Leadership and Democracy (G1)

Gibbons has had the good fortune of very stable governance at both elected and administrative levels. At the same time, a number of Councillors turn over after two to three terms in office. The Town benefits from the balance of new ideas with experience and historical perspective. Council relations over the years have been relatively harmonious, a rare phenomenon in municipal circles. With the passing of Gibbons' CAO in 2008, it is likely that the traditional stability enjoyed by the Town will change with turnover in both the political and the administrative arenas.

Clearly, a governance goal for the municipal corporation is to continue to benefit from a stable Town Council that incorporates new members on a regular basis. What strategies can Council use to cultivate sound leadership? There are two related approaches:

- Help community organizations to groom/recruit/elect strong leaders
- Use existing leaders to reach out to recruit “new blood” and work with them to identify those who might eventually gravitate toward the municipal political system.

Grassroots leadership is most often built by volunteer service to community programs. Members of Town Council and the Town can play important roles in building volunteerism and leadership because they have the opportunity to network with many citizens. In many cases, people may well be willing to play a role if they are asked.

One obstacle to involvement is the lack of information. Most organizations lack the resources to sustain an adequate level of communication within the community. Gibbons can ascertain the means it has available to assist organizations to get specific messages out to their constituents.

The most difficult challenge in cultivating leadership amongst residents is conveying the notion of civic responsibility as part of one's contribution to the community

With the fine example set by the Mayor and Councillors, some potential leaders may need to be reminded that positions on Council and other leadership positions are a civic responsibility for building community and need not be long-time commitments. In fact, one perspective that can be conveyed is that people in long-term leadership positions actually allow others to opt out of their civic responsibility.

The Goals and Strategies for Leadership and Democracy

G1.1	<i>Gibbons' residents benefit from a stable Town Council that incorporates new members on a regular basis</i>
G1.1.1	<p>Set aside time for Council to reflect on strategies that Councillors and Town staff could adopt to cultivate and promote leadership in the community. Potential examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting volunteer service to community programs • building volunteerism and leadership through networking opportunities with citizens • ascertaining the means the Town has available to assist organizations to get specific messages out to their constituents • conveying to residents the notion of civic responsibility as part of one's contribution to the community and the forms that it could take

G1.2	<i>Gibbons' local organizations benefit from stable governance and that incorporates new board members on a regular basis</i>
G2.1.1	Encourage members of community to step forward to support community organizations

Sustainability of Local Governance: Partnerships (G2)

Because of the town's size, there are certain types of services that will not be available within Town boundaries until a critical mass is achieved to ensure their viability (i.e., until it is much, much larger). Providing community services is complex and expensive. Higher costs for facilities require a larger customer base than in years past. Partnerships of all kinds are now a preferred solution for the delivery of adequate levels of service.

By building partnerships and relationships with neighbouring municipalities, the Town maximizes opportunities for enhanced levels of service for local residents. The Town has already established many partnerships that have enhanced its services. It is most evident in hard services such as sewer and water, waste disposal, fire protection, and recycling. Recreation, social services, health services, transportation are now moving to regionally-based delivery models. Gibbons requires a strategy to advance its community interests by:

- demonstrating the merit of Gibbons as a service point for regional services
- advocating for accessible transportation systems that would allow residents to access services without the use of a personal car

**Demonstrate the merit of
Gibbons as a central service
point for regional services**

The Goals and Strategies for Partnerships

G2.1	<i>Gibbons' residents and stakeholders benefit from regional services offered locally</i>
G2.1.1	Continue to build partnerships and relationships with neighbouring municipalities and explore opportunities to forge new ones to maximize opportunities for enhanced levels of service for local residents (e.g, public services such as health and transportation, commercial services such as regional bulk grocery delivery)

Sustainability of Local Governance: Broad-Based Planning and Decision-Making (G3)

Gibbons faces an unusual number of uncertainties. The first is the future of the Alberta Industrial Heartland and more specifically, the Fort Hills Sturgeon Upgrader to be built by Suncor (formerly Petro-Canada). The second is the alignment and timing for Highway 28A. Gibbons requires some certainty with respect to whether or not the upgrader will be built in order to tailor its plan to anticipate subsequent development. That decision would support the province's commitment to an alignment for Highway 28A and would permit the Town to prepare a development plan to accommodate both activities.

The current reality is uncertainty. This may inhibit bold steps but requires that the Town address the current need to stimulate growth. While Highway 28A construction in a new alignment may be long in the future, the alignment poses critical questions for development in the short term. Many implications for development need to be addressed. The key question is whether the current proposed alignment creates opportunity or has a neutral impact.

The Goals and Strategies for Broad-Based Planning and Decision-Making

G3.1	<i>Gibbons is a central place for commercial development that is triggered by new industrial development in North-East Edmonton and the neighbouring area to its north-east</i>
G3.1.1	Monitor potential development in the Industrial Heartland and the Horse Hills Industrial area to anticipate their potential impact on Gibbons and develop strategies to address them
G3.1.2	Encourage local landowners to recognize and prepare for opportunities

CONCLUSION

To implement this plan, Council will have to make decisions that involve risk and that affect existing interests:

- Whether, where and how to proceed with the establishment of a concentrated core area, possibly unsettling the existing business community
- Designating the location for a new community centre
- Whether and how to proceed with linking neighbourhood parks and the logistics involved in doing so

It is very possible that these are decisions that have been on Council's agenda for quite some time but there has not been the opportunity or catalyst to deal with them. To assure a healthy, long-term future for the community, Council must educate the community on the steps necessary for Council, community residents and stakeholders to transform the community. Mistakes may be made, but taking risks are part of any successful community's evolution.

The Municipal Sustainability Plan presented in this report is a long-term plan for the community. This statement contains two critical components: a time frame and a guide. Firstly, the plan proposed in this report will not be easy to implement and will take a very long time to complete. Council and community residents alike must remind themselves periodically that many of the strategies assume the laying of a sound foundation. Laying foundations can be the most time-consuming element of implementing a plan whether it be in constructing buildings or in building communities. To implement the plan, Council must first establish its short-term (2011-2013), medium-term (2014-2020) and long term objectives (2021-2050).

Short-term objectives for example would include obtaining the commitment from the province for early phase I construction of the new highway (Strategy

2.1.1) and Council approval of a strategy to position the Town in relation to the opening of Anthony Henday Drive and the Horse Hills Industrial Area (Strategies E1.1.3 and E2.1.3). The publication of a fully-upgraded municipal development plan would address a medium-term objective (Strategies N2.1.2). The transfer of the existing Highway 28A roadway from the province to the Town would be a long-term objective (possibly 2020), while the thriving, new concentrated core area of Gibbons could be a long term-objective targeted for 2030 or 2040. The key is to flesh out the detail in the plan with strategies, to set target dates, and then to update the plan annually, as objectives get met, reframed or must be delayed.

The second concept that Council and residents must understand is that by its very nature, a plan cannot be rigidly adhered to. It must take into account changing conditions in the community as well as new opportunities or threats. As conditions change, the plan must be updated to accommodate these changes. For this reason, the plan should be considered as a guide to meet the vision rather than a legislated document that must be implemented in every detail. The building of the Community Centre might have to be delayed a decade if something happened to the Recreation Centre for example. The key is to keep the vision and the long-term objectives as the targets, and to review the strategies needed to achieve them and adjust them if necessary, on a regular basis.

The most critical decision involves the refinement of a strategy to establish a concentrated area of community activity. Two things are important here. Firstly, the ideal alternative is to find the means to establish it at the intersection of Highway 28A and 50th Avenue. Even if some may consider the idea overly optimistic, all of Council's efforts should be directed towards the achievement of that ideal. Efforts to flesh out the details of an alternative solution, while trying to achieve the ideal can only serve to undermine the chances of a successful resolution of the ideal solution.

Secondly, there may be some disagreement about whether to locate the Community Centre in this concentrated area or near the recreation facilities. It is too early to make that decision right now. The immediate priority is the highway negotiation with the province. If the province can commit to moving the highway within the next five years, it would be worth waiting:

- for the movement of the highway
- for narrowing the newly created service road that approaches the intersection to make the proposed new area walkable, and
- for the construction of the Community Centre at the proposed intersection

If the province commits to moving the highway in 25 years, the community cannot wait that long and must consider other alternatives. Only once the province has made its decision, should the Town begin exploring the ideal location of the Community Centre.

Even if the province commits to an early Phase I construction of the highway realignment, it could be years before the Town would see recognizable signs of a concentration of activity growing in its new core area. Enhancing commercial development must be addressed in the meantime. Several strategies are discussed below to create the conditions to achieve success over time. These “meanwhile strategies” are low-cost, easily implemented, and temporary measures that keep the community moving forward while tasks for greater plans are being conceived and implemented.

Driving activity to the Town’s current core area on 50th Avenue will strengthen what will come later. Improvement of pedestrian paths to connect the core to the neighbourhoods can only enhance commercial success. Pedestrian traffic creates opportunity for second- and third-level activities to build a customer base.

Make it easy and attractive to walk between businesses in the core. Most connections between businesses are on private land because commercial spaces are set back with parking in front. Since both community and commercial businesses will benefit from better circulation, the Town should partner with owners on plans to cost share on building frontage enhancement and façade enhancement.

Keep store fronts active in the current core. With the cooperation of landlords, vacant store-fronts and hard-to-lease commercial spaces can be used for short-term community use. These spaces create negative perceptions of commercial viability. While turnover of tenants is normal, some spaces languish for a variety of reasons. An interim use is often needed to generate interest.

Improve maintenance for the main pedestrian routes. The commercial activity area needs to be accessible year-round including the winter months when

maintenance requirements are important to encouraging use. An enhanced maintenance plan is needed to keep such routes as easy to traverse as possible.

In summary,

- Be prepared to take risks
- Always keep the vision and the objectives in the foreground and be cautious about getting caught prematurely in detail
- Educate the community on the steps necessary for Council, residents and stakeholders to transform the community
- Expand on the plan with time frames
- Use the plan as a guide, not as a law
- All of Council's efforts should be directed towards the achievement of Council's objective at hand, whatever it may be, rather than spending too much time fleshing out details of Plan B before they are needed
- Make a decision about the location of the Community Centre only after a decision has been made about the Highway 28A realignment
- Drive more activity to the Town's current core area on 50th Avenue
- Make it easy and attractive to walk between business areas in the current core area
- Improve maintenance for the main pedestrian routes
- Keep store fronts active in the current core area

Using this Plan

To keep this Municipal Sustainability Plan off the shelf and in the minds of current and future Councillors, several steps can be taken to integrate it into Council's ongoing decision-making processes.

To ensure its implementation,
a Municipal Plan must have life
and must connect to Council's
decision-making process

The assumption is that if the Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP) is sufficiently comprehensive, it will serve as a guide for all Council decisions. The Town can require that requests to Council for funding or for decisions can state explicitly the goal or strategy in the MSP that it addresses. When Council makes other types of decisions, the related goal or strategy in the MSP can be reflected in the relevant Council meeting minutes. MDPs, Area Structure Plans, Business Plans, Strategic Plans, Emergency Management Plans and other planning tools can all tie their goals and strategies explicitly to the Town's MSP.

To facilitate this explicit linking process, a Decision-Making Template can be developed. When requests for decisions are submitted to Council, the template would pose a series of questions about:

- which sustainability pillar(s) will be addressed by the proposed action
- which specific goals and strategies will be addressed (referred to by its unique number identifier)
- measures to use to demonstrate the effectiveness of proposed actions

Clearly the plan included in this report does not cover all of the potential decisions that will be made by Council. It is up to the Town then to take this plan and to modify it to meet needs not currently addressed in the plan. Only then can Council embrace it as its own plan.