



# **Economic Development & Recovery Plan**

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# Introduction

COVID-19 has had an immense impact on Canadian and Saskatchewan businesses. National GDP has dropped by 7.2%, provincial employment has fallen by 20,000, and 33.8% of Saskatchewan businesses have had to lay off employees. Brought on by unforeseen challenges, the country, province, and municipality are subject to intense economic pressure.

The RM of Edenwold No. 158 was quick to respond to pandemic-induced economic concerns. It lowered municipal mill rates on residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural properties by 15%. It updated the Municipal Action Plan (MAP) to outline key objectives and put forward short-, medium-, and long-term strategies for success, and it invested over four million dollars into local infrastructure projects to keep people working in the area, most of these contracts going to local businesses and supporting the regional economy. The RM has thus worked to promote economic resilience within the community. These tactics have brought success and have established a strong foundation for greater economic development. It is on this foundation that the municipality chose to adopt an **Economic Development & Recovery Plan (EDRP)**.

This document outlines initiatives adopted as part of the Economic Development & Recovery Plan, and further opportunities the municipality has to develop connections with the local business community, foster entrepreneurship, and ultimately promote economic and business resilience. This plan is divided into eight broad categories, each presenting strategies and programs that can further support local business.

These categories are:

- I) Phase I – **What has the municipality done to promote economic development and recovery?**
- II) Phase II – **What steps can the municipality take to promote economic development and recovery?**
- III) Business Community Proud – **How can the municipality build and develop stronger and more resilient businesses?**
- IV) Municipal Intervention – **How can the municipality use its financial resources to support business?**
- V) Structural Change – **How can the municipality develop a more robust economic environment?**
- VI) Provincial and Federal Support – **How can the municipality act as a spokesperson for local businesses to provincial and federal governments?**
- VII) Internal Development – **How can the municipality be a leader in creating internal economic opportunities?**
- VIII) Emergency Preparedness – **How can the municipality prevent an economic downturn in the future?**

These strategies are drawn from economic and disaster-planning best practices. They are structured such that each can be adopted piecemeal, or can be integrated into a larger economic development program. Further, each proposal leaves room for iteration and modification. They can be changed to match economic circumstances, though overall, will only be as successful as the municipality allows.

**“He who hesitates is lost”**

“Cato” by Joseph Addison, 18th Cent. English Writer

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# I) Phase I

## *What has the municipality done to promote economic development and recovery?*

On July 14th, 2020, the Planning & Development department presented 22 economic development strategies to RM Council for consideration. They chose three to be included in Phase I of the Economic Development & Recovery Plan. The selected initiatives were picked because they promote emergency preparedness, support business improvements, and reinforce important work being done within the community. Phase I was adopted on July 28th, 2020, and was promoted to businesses through social media, a business newsletter, and in partnership with the White City/Emerald Park Business Association. Phase I initiatives include:

**a) First Aid Training,**

**b) Green Fund,**

**c) Internet Accessibility Statement.**

### **a) First Aid Training**

The RM of Edenwold has partnered with St. John's Ambulance to provide subsidised first aid training to RM staff and business entrepreneurs. The municipality sees safety as a top priority, first aid training allowing local business people and municipal staff the ability to assist in times of crisis. Further, as many local employees live within the community, improved first aid training benefits the region as a whole, in addition to businesses during working hours.

The RM has provided \$2600 to subsidise first aid training. These funds will be used to provide first aid certification in OHS Standard First Aid, CPR-C, and AED Training to 8 RM staff and 22 local business people. Each business can register up to two employees, and sign-up is first-come-first-serve. Training will be offered during two sessions, one scheduled for October 19th, 20th, and 21st, and another planned for early 2021.

St. John's Ambulance offers first aid training for \$160, but the RM is providing it for \$100, the municipality subsidising the remaining 60\$.

## **b) Green Fund**

The RM has created a “Green Fund” to improve the overall business atmosphere and increase regional economic desirability. This fund holds \$20,000 and is given out using an application-system. It is managed by the Planning & Development department, with the assistance of the Department of Public Works – Rural, and Department of Public Works – Emerald Park & Utilities. Planning & Development administers the fund and provides approval, while the Departments of Public Works monitor projects and ensure landscaping is of high quality.

The municipality will provide funding for up to 50% of a project’s cost, to a maximum of \$2000. The fund is open to any business, commercial or industrial, and can be applied to many types of projects, including:

- Purchasing/Installing drought-tolerant trees, shrubs, and native flowers;
- Purchasing/Installing artificial turf, aggregate, and mulch;
- Purchasing/Installing hardscaping and exterior tiles, including water features;
- Purchasing/Installing fencing and decking;
- Purchasing/Installing drainage;
- Hiring a landscape architect.

Landscape improvements improve customer satisfaction, but also enhance economic viability. Well-maintained landscapes can draw in new business and can increase the land value of certain commercial properties. As such, the Green Fund provides financial support to companies looking to improve their appearance, in addition to businesses looking to attract customers and landlords looking to attract new tenants. Green Fund projects benefit the aesthetics of the municipality and increase the region’s economic competitiveness.

## **c) Internet Accessibility Statement**

The RM has begun drafting a formal statement requesting increased funding for internet projects within the municipality. This letter is being written in collaboration with the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) and highlights community challenges to accessing high-speed internet. The formal statement will be sent to government, and internet service providers. This includes members of the provincial and federal government, and local internet companies like Access and SaskTel.

SARM and the RM both believe rural internet deserves greater attention. SARM, in particular, has become an advocate for rural Saskatchewan residents in pushing for greater internet access. The RM’s letter will thus support and highlight SARM’s work in advocating for rural residents and show how imbalances in internet accessibility affect rural quality-of-life. It will provide examples of immediate steps the government and internet providers can take to support internet infrastructure, and will further highlight how COVID-19 has radically increased demand for improved internet availability across the region.



# II) Phase II

## *What steps can the municipality take to promote economic development and recovery?*

Following the success of Phase I, the Planning & Development department presented Phase II of the EDRP to Council on December 8th, 2020. Council also adopted Phase II on December 8th, 2020. Like Phase I, Phase II of the plan includes three initiatives that will promote local business resiliency, support business improvements, and improve relationships between the municipality and local enterprise. Phase II initiatives include:

- a) Audacity YQR,**
- b) Community Proud RFP Policy,**
- c) Business Counts Survey.**

### **a) Audacity YQR**

Audacity YQR is an entrepreneurial mentorship organisation created and run by Economic Development Regina (EDR). Similar to the Business Mentorship Program outlined in the EDRP, Audacity YQR aims to connect entrepreneurs with regional mentors that can support their growth and business development.

As part of Phase II of the EDRP, the RM will promote Audacity YQR to residents through social media and to businesses through the municipality's business newsletter. P&D has also met with Economic Development Regina both in-person and online to discuss this program and other potential partnerships. By making Audacity YQR an official part of the RM's Economic Plan, EDR and the municipality can begin working together to create a mutually beneficial long-term relationship.

This initiative has no expected costs as it relies on existing RM communication channels. Further, as EDR has done much of the foundational work, this initiative also requires limited staff hours.

## **b) Community Proud RFP Policy**

Phase II of the EDRP includes the Community-Proud RFP Policy. This policy, drafted by P&D in communication with other RM departments, will be included in all future-RFPs and outline RM business objectives. It will state that the RM prioritises working with local companies and supporting regional business. While a similar process is informally used within the municipality, this policy will make this practice official.

This initiative will be developed internally and has no expected costs.

## **c) Business Counts Survey**

In 2017, the RM conducted a Business Survey as part of public engagement for the new OCP and Zoning Bylaw. This survey collected information about business employment, travel and residency patterns, income, and general attitudes towards the RM. The survey was distributed to 120 businesses and was very well received. The survey also recommended the municipality conduct a follow-up survey in 2019 or 2020.

Due to its high response rate, Phase II of the EDRP includes a business survey, named the “Business Counts 2021 Survey.” This survey will measure demographic changes between 2017 and 2021 and present a better understanding of how COVID has affected the local business community. Some questions that may appear on the survey include:

Does your business allow you to work from home? – How many people are employed full-time, part-time, seasonal, volunteer in your business? – How do your projected profits compare to previous years? – Do you think the RM is a good place to work or own a business? – How do you receive information from the RM with respect to opportunities and information?

The RM will also promote the survey in association with the Strategic Plan. The survey will be published during the 1st quarter of 2021 and collect feedback from the business community regarding strategic goals outlined in the Strategic Plan. The Business Counts Survey will also provide an opportunity to explore future EDRP initiatives.

This survey will be developed internally and has minimal additional costs (i.e. printing and promotion).



# III) Business Community Proud

## *How can the municipality build and develop stronger and more resilient businesses?*

The RM has the opportunity to support the local business community through targeted programs. By helping regional firms weather the economic recession, the municipality can play a role in creating opportunities for economic development. "Business Community Proud" programs will focus on retaining capital and business knowledge. Targeted economic strategies will thus show that the municipality is proud of its business community, with recovery through development allowing for a smooth and efficient return to normalcy.

### **a) Business Mentorship Program --- Timeline: Medium to Long, Cost: Minimal**

The municipality will partner with the White City Emerald Park Business Association (WEBA) to create a mentorship program for entrepreneurs and small business owners. This partnership will provide small and new businesses access to a network of experienced business people and industry leaders.

### **b) Shop Local --- Timeline: Immediate, Cost: Minimal to Moderate**

The municipality will invest in advertising to support regional business. Social media, municipal newsletters, and regional publications will bring attention to consumer options and ensure residents are aware of their role in supporting regional business success.

### **c) Emerald Park and Area Business Conference --- Timeline: Long, Cost: Moderate to High**

The municipality will work with WEBA to host and organise an economic conference for local and regional businesses. This conference will be web-based, take place over one or two days, and bring attention to municipal, provincial, and federal economic programs.

### **d) Business Counts Survey --- Timeline: Medium to Long, Cost: Minimal to Moderate**

The municipality will survey RM businesses to learn what resources are needed for success and how the municipality can ensure economic resilience. It will identify economic challenges facing businesses and highlight opportunities for development.

# IV) Municipal Intervention

## *How can the municipality use its financial resources to support business?*

The depression brought on by COVID-19 is unique in terms of its economic impact. Unlike natural disasters that affect supply, or traditional economic depressions that affect consumer's ability to participate in the economy, this economic slump is instead the result of an "output gap." There is a gap, or difference, between what can be produced under current health orders, and what can be purchased or consumed. The presence of an output gap provides opportunities for the municipality to support business through direct investment. A short-term influx of municipal funds will provide local businesses with capital until consumer spending returns to normal. This money will thus help local businesses maintain production and employment. The longer businesses suffer, the greater the economic impact, capital loss and municipal inaction debilitating economic development. The municipality should thus provide funding opportunities to buoy local businesses and provide capital until consumer spending returns.

### **a) Green Fund --- Timeline: Immediate to Medium, Cost: Minimal to Moderate**

The municipality will invest in the beautification of business areas through the creation of a landscape fund. A Green Fund will improve the overall atmosphere of business in the area, increasing customer satisfaction and showing how the RM directly supports business development.

### **b) Safety Fund --- Timeline: Medium to Long, Cost: Minimal to Moderate**

The municipality will purchase PPE equipment and cleaning supplies in bulk and sell it to local businesses at-cost.

### **c) Utility Fund --- Timeline: Immediate, Cost: Moderate**

The municipality will subsidise business water fees for a set amount of time.

**d) Commercial Rent Fund --- Timeline: Immediate, Cost: High**

The municipality will create a rent subsidy for start-ups, small businesses, and medium-sized businesses. The RM will work with commercial landlords to ensure local businesses have the space to operate.

**e) Resilience Incentive Fund --- Timeline: Medium to Long, Cost: Moderate to High**

The municipality will create a fund that will provide bridge loans, forgivable loans, revolving loans, and grants to local businesses and start-ups. By providing emergency funding for local businesses, the municipality will be able to backstop the economic decline caused by COVID.

**f) RFPs for Local Business --- Timeline: Immediate, Cost: Minimal**

The municipality will invest in local economies by giving more contracts to RM businesses.



# V) Structural Change

*How can the municipality work to develop a more robust economic environment?*

Alongside financial strategies that buoy regional business, the RM should work to implement supportive far-reaching municipal programs. COVID-19 has significantly impacted the way business is done within the municipality and has further highlighted structural changes that should be made. These changes should not be implemented “just-in-time,” but should instead be forward-thinking and proactive. They should be people-focused, new processes allowing for far-reaching and holistic responses. By implementing targeted structural policy, new ways of doing business within the municipality can be encouraged, strengthening resilience and future economic success.

## **a) Mental Health Strategic Plan --- Timeline: Long, Cost: Moderate to High**

The RM will partner with a mental health organisation that offers immediate and personalised mental health support.

## **b) Infrastructure Investment --- Timeline: Long, Cost: High**

The municipality will work to increase funding for shovel-ready infrastructure projects.

## **c) Working from Home --- Timeline: Long, Cost: Moderate to High**

The municipality will investigate strategies to support work-from-home employment. These initiatives will include lobbying for greater rural internet access, updating and investigating municipal home-based business requirements, and exploring methods to increase opportunities for distance education.

## **d) Municipal Modernisation --- Timeline: Immediate to Long, Cost: Low to High**

The municipality will continue modernising as a regional government by investing in technology and putting emphasis on transparency, public engagement, and municipal trust.

# VI) Provincial and Federal Support



## *How can the municipality act as a spokesperson for local businesses to provincial and federal governments?*

As a governmental organisation, the municipality can use its political weight to lobby provincial and federal governments. The RM can represent local businesses and serve as the regional voice for residents. It can speak on behalf of small businesses worried about “falling through the cracks,” speak on behalf of residents concerned about their economic future, and can advocate for clarity from provincial and federal governments. By showing support for business and working to improve the business environment, the RM can become a regional business champion by working to bring local economic concerns to Saskatchewan and Canada.

### **a) Provincial Lobbying --- Timeline: Immediate to Medium, Cost: Minimal**

The municipality will reach out to the provincial representative of the area, MLA Christine Tell, and the provincial minister of trade and export development, MLA Jeremy Harrison, and convey to them the challenges facing the region’s business community.

### **b) Federal Lobbying --- Timeline: Medium to Long, Cost: Minimal to Moderate**

The municipality will reach out to the federal representative of the area, MP Andrew Sheer, federal minister of small business and export promotion, MP Mary Ng, and the minister of economic development, MP Melanie Joly. Federal lobbying will allow the RM to push for the creation of region-specific programs that benefit rural Saskatchewan businesses.

### **c) Business Representation --- Timeline: Immediate to Medium, Cost: Minimal Moderate**

The municipality will work to collect and promote all relevant provincial and federal financial programs.

# VII) Internal Development

*How can the municipality be a leader in creating internal economic opportunities?*

As pandemic-restrictions lift and regional business rebuilds, the RM should be a leader in creating economic opportunities from within. By investing in municipal staff, both through employment and through business grants, the municipality can become a more valuable employer. These initiatives allow the RM to do more to support regional business and residents, internal investment improving community services, and resident satisfaction.

**a) New Employment --- Timeline: Medium to Long, Cost: Moderate to High**

The municipality will work to create new employment opportunities. This includes hiring a communications and business development officer, a chief financial officer, and a project manager.

**b) Employee Investment Fund --- Timeline: Immediate to Medium, Cost: Minimal to Moderate**

The municipality will create an internal grant to support employee business and provide funding for employee entrepreneurship.



# VIII) Emergency Preparedness

## *How can the municipality prevent an economic downturn in the future?*

Bolstering economic stability and preventing capital loss will be most successful in the long-term when paired with a robust emergency preparedness strategy. Though the pandemic is not a traditional disaster, planning with emergency preparedness in mind can prevent future economic collapse and support rebuilding in the future. Not only will preparedness allow for a safer municipality, but it will also benefit the economy. For every \$1 spent on business continuity preparedness, \$7 are saved in post-disaster recovery. As the costs of natural disasters rise, 14x since 1950, emergency preparedness can be structured such that the municipality is well prepared and protected. Emergency preparedness should work to meet all stages of the emergency management continuum, from prevention and mitigation, to preparedness, response, and recovery. By implementing policies that target these stages, economic development can be supported.

### **a) Municipal Preparedness --- Timeline: Immediate, Cost: Minimal to Moderate**

The municipality will build an emergency preparedness kit for office use. A similar kit will also be added to the rural shop. This kit will ensure that employees are prepared for a disaster and able to wait out any incidents in a secure location safely.

### **b) Municipal Recovery Action Plan --- Timeline: Medium to Long, Cost: Moderate**

The municipality will work with regional businesses and resident's organisations to create a municipal recovery action plan. This plan will outline steps to take during an emergency and responsibilities for staff during a disaster.

### **c) Economic Preparedness Plan --- Timeline: Medium to Long, Cost: Minimal to Moderate**

The municipality will create an economic preparedness plan. This plan will outline how the RM will support businesses during rebuilding and will be modelled using the Saskatchewan Economic Disaster Recovery toolkit.

# Conclusion

Phase I and Phase II of the Economic Development & Recovery Plan puts forward several strategies that will directly contribute to improving economic resilience and safety in the area. They have been further developed in close association with local business people and community representatives. As such, phase I and II create municipal opportunity for economic development. They will allow the RM to become a more active supporter of business success and can act as first steps towards economic development and recovery.

Beyond those strategies presented in Phase I and II, the programs and initiatives in this report provide opportunities for the municipality to improve local business relations and reinforce economic resilience. They involve vastly different scales and levels of engagement. Some highlight methods the municipality can act as a leader, while others rely wholeheartedly on the support and buy-in of local business groups. If adopted, they will benefit the economy tremendously. Each strategy is designed to improve business conditions, develop a flexible business environment, and create opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Though the pandemic has weakened the economy, through careful and quick municipal action, the RM of Edenwold can become a leader in this new business environment, attracting new companies and entrepreneurs through programs that put residents first.

