

Oak Lake Regional Community Development Board



Strategic Plan 2016-2020

May 30, 2016

Vision and mission

Vision: The Oak Lake region a great place to live, work and play together.

Mission: The Oak Lake Regional Community Development Board promotes the area's community, social and cultural values to enhance healthy living and economic development in an environmentally friendly way.

1. Introduction and Background

The Oak Lake Regional Community Development Board encompasses the Rural Municipality of Sifton, and includes the Town of Oak Lake, Oak Lake Beach, Deleau, and Griswold. The Board consists of community members and includes representatives from the RM Council. Originally known as the Economic Development Board, the name was officially changed in 2015 to reflect a wider focus on social development in addition to economic development. The CDB actively seeks to collaborate with neighbouring development boards to create a regional economic development approach in Southwestern Manitoba.

Regional Economic Analysis Process Report (REAP) 2014

In 2014, a Regional Economic Analysis Process Report was prepared for the Oak Lake region (including the Town of Oak Lake, RM of Sifton, Sioux Valley First Nation and RM of Woodworth) by staff from Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives. The report summarized the demographic factors and economic activities at play in the region, providing a jumping off point to develop a strategic plan.

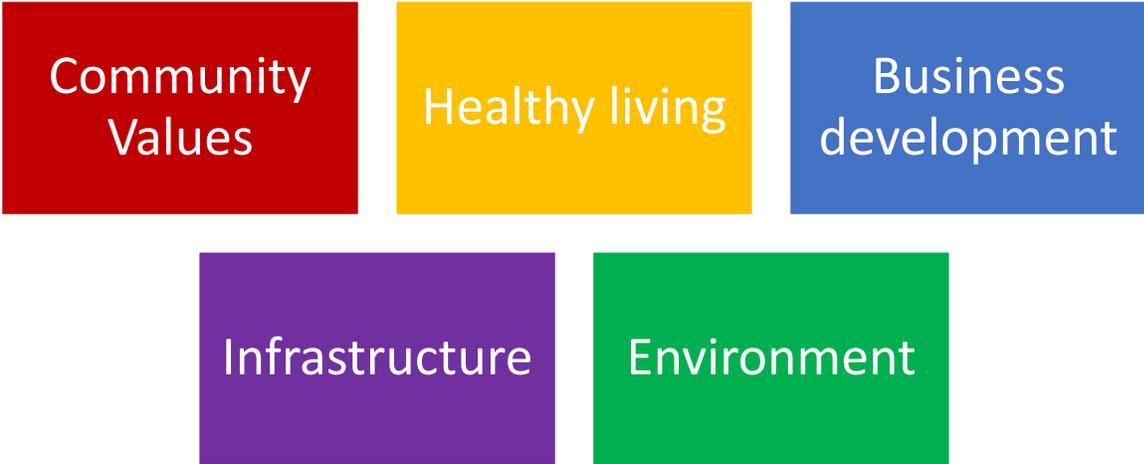
In summary, there has been a small increase in population over the last decade, which is encouraging considering that many rural areas further away from urban centres are experiencing a decline. Compared to the rest of Manitoba, there is a relatively high number of children under 19, and adults over 50. This will reflect on the need for children's facilities (schools, playgrounds, recreational activities) and perhaps seniors' housing. There is a small under-representation of young adults in the 20-29 age category, which could be a reflection of moving away to pursue schooling or to develop careers. It will be important to create employment opportunities for young adults to encourage them to stay in/return to the area.

Availability of trained labour is an important driver for economic development. The report indicates the percentage of high school and college trained individuals is comparable to the rest of the province. The area is under-represented in university educated individuals. The technology trades, health care fields, agriculture and business management are the most common fields of study in the region and are likely very important to the local economy. There tends to be a higher percentage of low income households, compared to the provincial average, but there was a significant increase in income between 2005 and 2010. In 2011, agriculture employed the most number of people in the area, followed by health, education and public services, oil and gas, transportation and construction, and retail services. Whereas

agriculture, oil and gas, and transportation are presently areas of relative strength in the present labour force, there are other areas of possible expansion. Compared to the provincial average, the region has a relatively high number of small businesses where people are self-employed. This indicates there is an entrepreneurial spirit to engage in small scale enterprise, such as home-based business.

Community Development Board – strategic brainstorming 2014

Building off the REAP Report, the Community Development Board undertook a strategic thinking exercise in 2014 to develop possible areas of focus for future development activities. In a workshop, participants were asked to describe the advantages of living in the Oak Lake region, and then were encouraged to develop ideas that they would like to see advanced within five years. Similar individual suggestions were then grouped, and five major themes emerged.



2. Five theme areas to guide future development

It was recognized that future development in the Oak Lake region needs to follow a strategic plan - a big picture outline of the principles that are important to the residents of the area. This strategic plan then needs to be taken into consideration in the planning process that guides land use and the issuance of building permits. This will help to mitigate haphazard development that could lead to conflict among neighbours.

The **five theme areas** to guide future development are:



Promoting a sense of community, respecting the diversity of social and cultural values.

It is recognized that one of the major strength of the Oak Lake region was the sense of community that was felt among the residents. This was felt to be a major strength even though there is a diversity of social and cultural backgrounds. On an individual basis, it was felt that people accept and celebrate each other's cultural backgrounds. People care for one another and in times of trouble take care of one another. Certain activities, such as those involving the school and the fair bring people together and are seen as important community-building events. **Encouraging the development of fairs, festivals, interest groups and sports clubs will play an important ongoing role in fostering a sense of belonging.**

For newcomers, a special effort needs to be extended to welcome them into the community. Organized events, such as newcomer's suppers, are good ways to formally make connections, but these lack the timeliness of a more individualized approach. **A "welcome wagon" or "meet and greet" approach offers a good way to make contact with new individuals who move into the community.**



Promoting healthy living – through good nutrition, recreation and exercise

Healthy living was seen as one of the most important qualities for guiding development activities. Promotion of good nutrition- through growing food in community or home gardens or through good nutrition programs in the school are important levers into reducing the epidemic of obesity in Canada. **It will be important to continue to facilitate small scale food production, and good food preparation within the community.**

Besides good nutrition, exercise and recreation are essential to a healthy lifestyle. **Children need safe areas to play and, if developed properly, these become community meeting spaces for adults.** Skating rinks, pools, splash pads, play areas, bike parks and sports facilities form a central component of

community life. Other recreational facilities such as golf courses, campgrounds, nature trails, and farm vacation parks attract local residents and visitors alike. Because of its location, the Oak Lake region is ideally suited to outdoor activities such as boating, bird watching, fishing and hunting. **Properly developed and promoted this area could be a significant tourist destination that is branded as the playground of southwest Manitoba.**

Business development

Promoting business development - in keeping with the social and environmental norms

The economic basis of the Oak Lake region was described in the REAP report. Agriculture, oil and gas, public services, and construction and transportation form the majority of economic activity at present. Developing products and services to supply these industries adds significant value to the local economy.

But there are other activities that could add diversity to the local economy while taking advantage of our existing strengths in agricultural and environmental heritage. **Development of a green economy is an untapped potential area for growth.** Building a destination that promotes our social, agricultural and environmental values can take many forms. Some ideas for consideration are:

- Development of small-scale farm clusters that specialize in food production and processing. (Many of these farms offer tours, workshops etc.)
- Catering using locally sourced foods.
- Development of a local wedding/ event service cluster – integrate food catering, hall rental, photography in a one-stop shop.
- Collective promotion of artisanal products – common marketing of local arts, crafts
- Development of alternative energy project clusters
- Development of environmentally friendly waste disposal methods
- Development of bus day tours to local attractions – Pumpkin patch, heritage sites, nature trails, specialty farms, cultural events, etc.
- Encouragement of small scale businesses and that provide goods and services to local residents.

Infrastructure

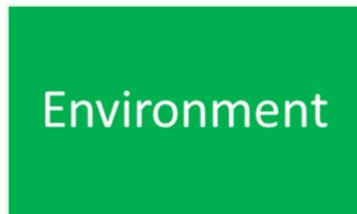
Promoting the development of essential infrastructure

The essential infrastructure needed for community development can be thought of as the skeleton upon which all community development is built. Infrastructure includes available land, transportation

corridors, electricity, water and sewer, natural gas, and communication services. **There are presently gaps in some of these elements that will limit the type of development that can take place.**

- Water and sewer services are not universally available
- Natural gas is not available in many communities
- Land use planning must take into account the Oak Lake aquifer with the risk of seasonal flooding.

Having shovel-ready land available for commercial and residential development will attract new businesses and residents. Restoration of existing, but unused buildings and lands is a first step in this process.



Protecting the environment – with special stewardship of the Oak Lake Aquifer, and wetlands

Much of the Oak Lake region lies over an aquifer that requires a mindful approach to development projects, and protection of the water quality should be a top consideration. The extensive marsh area provides an important ecosystem for water regulation, fish and wildlife preservation. Sand hills, bush lands and prairies round out the ecological topography of the area, providing a diverse environment for many species.

One of Oak Lake’s most famous citizens, Maurice Strong, developed a strong sense of respect of the environment roaming the sand hills in his youth, and he carried that commitment globally to the highest ranks of the United Nations with his international work on climate change. **This sense of environmental responsibility is carried by many local citizens who want to see development projects that are in harmony with the environment.** Projects of this type might include:

- eco-tourism – such as tours for watching birds, identifying rare fauna and flora
- ecologically sustainable harvesting of plants with medicinal or therapeutic uses
- preservation or propagation of rare species
- ecological research – in conjunction with universities or colleges
- researching and developing low impact practices for agriculture and the oil and gas industry
- creating low impact camping sites
- developing opportunities for educating school children and their families
- developing sustainable energy and water management projects
- developing a national centre to promote education and research into environmentally sustainable methodologies

3. Implementation of the strategic plan by 2020

A strategic plan is only as good as its implementation, so the Community Development Board has proposed a timeline of 2020 to realize a number of goals in each of the theme areas.

Community Values

Promoting a sense of community, respecting the diversity of social and cultural values

- **Seek RM Council approval for this strategic plan**
- Engage other community groups to coordinate efforts to work towards common goals of this plan
- Create or improve at least 2 community spaces – i.e. renovate the Community Hall kitchen to commercial kitchen standards
- Formalize and appoint a newcomers greeter
- With volunteers, formally conduct an annual community cleanup
- Support the Oak Lake regional fair through promotion of new activities
- Organize at least one new major festival/event in the area
- Expand the list of volunteers involved

Healthy living

Promoting healthy living – through good nutrition, recreation and exercise

- Create at least one new recreational facility – i.e. BMX bike park
- Organize an after-school mentorship program
- Promote growing healthy food through community gardens, small scale food production
- Promote healthy nutrition through teaching cooking classes
- Support existing recreational facilities by maintaining liaison with governing boards
- Promote outdoor recreational activities by creating a website directory of businesses and attractions

Business development

Promoting business development - in keeping with the social and environmental norms

- Act as a catalyst for investors – provide information about investment clubs; organize at least one investment group
- Provide liaison opportunities for promoting local services
- Establish a marketing co-op for home-based artisans and service providers
- Maintain an inventory of land and buildings that could be developed or rented by entrepreneurs
- Attract at least two new businesses or services
- Provide information to those seeking grants or start up assistance
- Create a website directory of local businesses and attractions; create awareness of local services
- Create a communications plan to promote awareness of the CDB activities

Infrastructure

Promoting the development of essential infrastructure

- Work with Council to explore the feasibility of a regional water and sewer system; access to natural gas
- Review land use plans and provide input
- Attract development of local services to support tourism –gas, food and lodging
- Attract at least 10 new family homes to be built

Environment

Protecting the environment – with special stewardship of the Oak Lake Aquifer, and wetlands

- Create a liaison committee to work with local Nature Conservancy properties – Jiggins' bluff, and others – to create nature trails, cross country ski trails, nature surveys, birdwatching

- Develop at least one project that supports environmental stewardship, including waste reduction or recycling.
- Propose development of a national centre to recognize and promote the values championed by Maurice Strong –respect for the environment and the promotion of culturally and ecologically sustainable development.

Vision for 2020

By 2020, the Oak Lake region will have solidified its existing employment base by promoting existing businesses and creating new business opportunities. Businesses will collaborate to create clusters that support each other. A vibrant community of artisans exists who sell their products locally and abroad through a marketing co-op. Local food production and processing is flourishing, and healthy eating is promoted through the schools. Cultural festivals and heritage events attract locals and visitors, and the Oak Lake region is noted for its outdoor recreational opportunities. Essential infrastructure is in place to support a tourist industry and further business development.

