



Fort Smith
Northwest Territories
UNEXPECTED. UNFORGETTABLE.

TOWN OF FORT SMITH

STRATEGIC PLAN - 2018



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Message from the Mayor



On behalf of the Town Council for the Town of Fort Smith, I am pleased to present the new Strategic Plan. This plan provides direction for how the Town will move forward in priorities, decisions, and opportunities for the next several years.

We have been able to meet with residents, businesses, and other Governments throughout the town to talk about what is vital to our community growth, wellness, sustainability, roles, economy, values, and identity. It is through the engagement process that we identified and consolidated the goals that you see as essential for the municipality. Many are under the mandate of the Town, while many others highlight the role that we need to take as a facilitator on social and wellness issues and as an advocate for our community.

Our decision-making process connects to the vision that our community has put forward. As we resolve issues that come before Council and how we will proceed, the Strategic Plan will be an integral part of those discussions. The Strategic Plan will be brought forward to the community for continued engagement through implementation.

We look forward to bringing to life the vision that we have created together.

Mayor Lynn Napier-Buckley

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Introduction

Building on the successful implementation of the 2010 Strategic Plan, Town Council initiated a Strategic Plan update. A community engagement process was undertaken to better understand the priorities that residents feel their local government should focus on.

This Strategic Plan is an important document for our town. It defines where we want to go as a community and provides us with the map to get there. It helps us to respond effectively and efficiently to issues facing our community and to take advantage of new opportunities that arise. It's about setting the direction that will help to maintain the kind of town we want.

We spoke with over 200 Fort Smith residents about your priorities for our town through an intensive engagement process. Whether you responded to the survey, attended a community event or participated through an advisory board, we thank you for being part of the process.

Strategic Planning is an on-going process. We will need additional input from our residents as we implement this plan. We hope that you will continue to partner with us, so we can continue to meet your needs now and in the future.

On behalf of the Town of Fort Smith Council and Staff, the Mayor and Council are pleased to present our 2018 Strategic Plan. This Plan establishes our goals and sets our direction over the next several years.

Background

The Town of Fort Smith is nestled on the banks of the Slave River¹. Once the capital of the Northwest Territories, Fort Smith has always been a hub of activity. For centuries, the Dene and Métis hunted and fished the land and tributaries flowing into the Slave River. The waterway was key to their movements, following the ancient rhythms of animals and seasons. Explorers and fur traders later used the Slave as a gateway from the Prairies when travelling north from Lake Athabasca.

Fort Smith was the site of a Hudson Bay settlement. For 200 years, all freight from the south travelled the Slave River. Due to the formidable rapids at Fort Smith, this freight would need to be portaged. This was the route to the Arctic until a highway to Hay River was built in 1949 and freight was transported to Great Slave Lake. Fort Smith was the capital of the Northwest Territories until 1967.

Today, its residents describe Fort Smith as a friendly, welcoming community. It has much to offer to residents and visitors alike. The Town has modern facilities, including a library, arena, snowboard park, track and field facility, pool, curling rink, and large gymnasium; excellent health and social services; and regular community programming for all age levels. Health and safety are ensured by the local RCMP detachment, volunteer fire and ambulance departments, the volunteer animal society, and the Fort Smith Health and Social Services Centre.

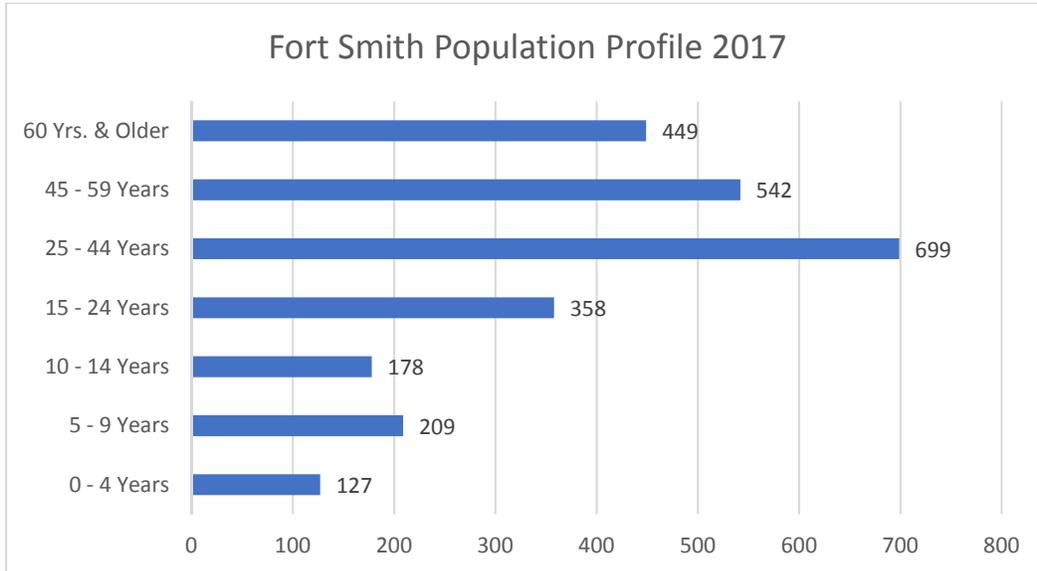
Fort Smith is the NWT education capital. All grades are available, from Nursery School, Head Start, Junior Kindergarten, Kindergarten to Grade 12, as well as French immersion and alternative education programs. The town is also home to Aurora College's headquarters and largest of three campuses.

World-class rapids, the world's largest Dark Sky Preserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and territorial and national parks are all nearby. The Northern Life Museum and Cultural Centre features impressive cultural and natural collections from the Thebacha region.

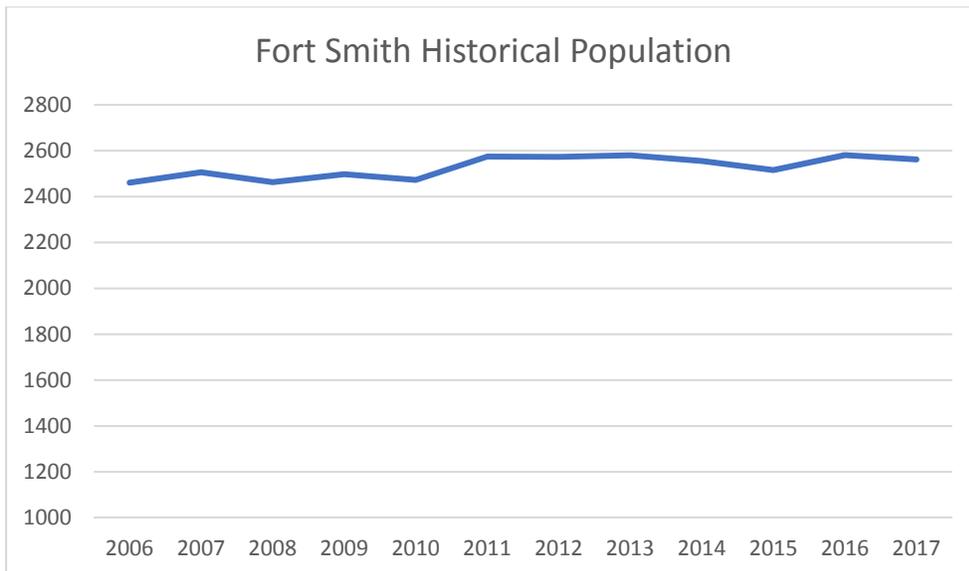
¹ From Town of Fort Smith Website

Demographics

The 2017 population profile below shows that the largest age group in Fort Smith is from ages 25-44. While this is significant, it is also worth noting that 34% of the population is under the age of 24 and 39% of the population is over the age of 45.

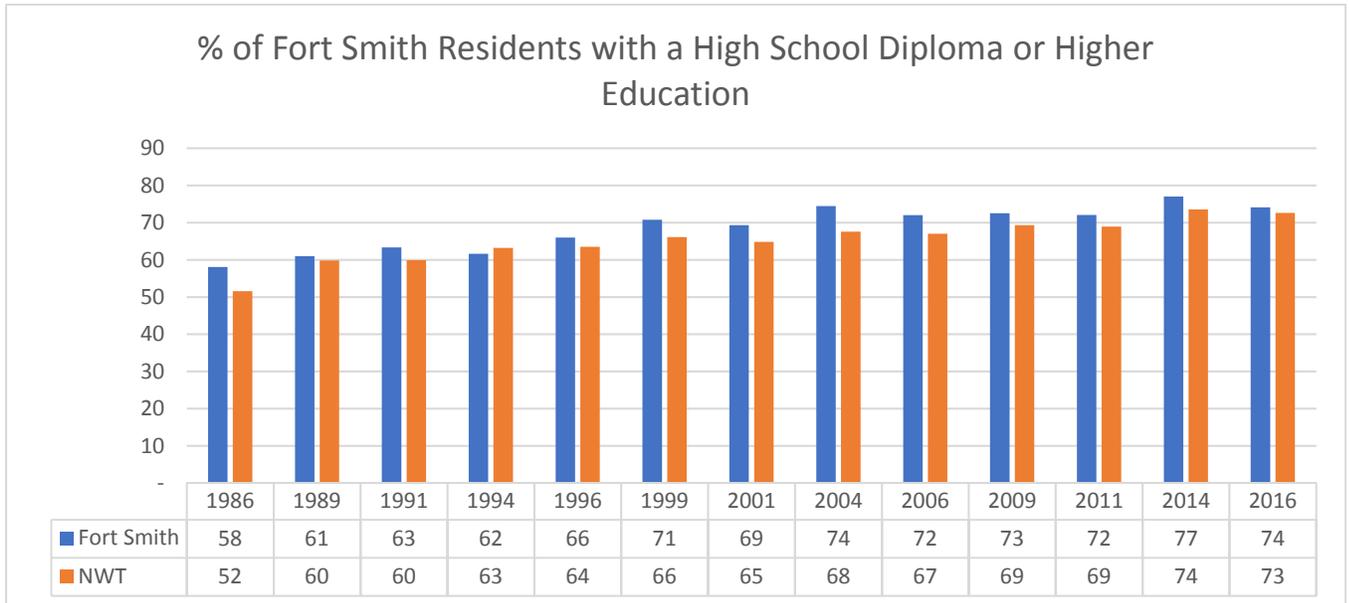


From 2007 to 2017 there was a slight increase in the population of Fort Smith. It grew by 0.2% in that time frame. However, the population of the age group 60 + rose by 4.2% over those 10 years.

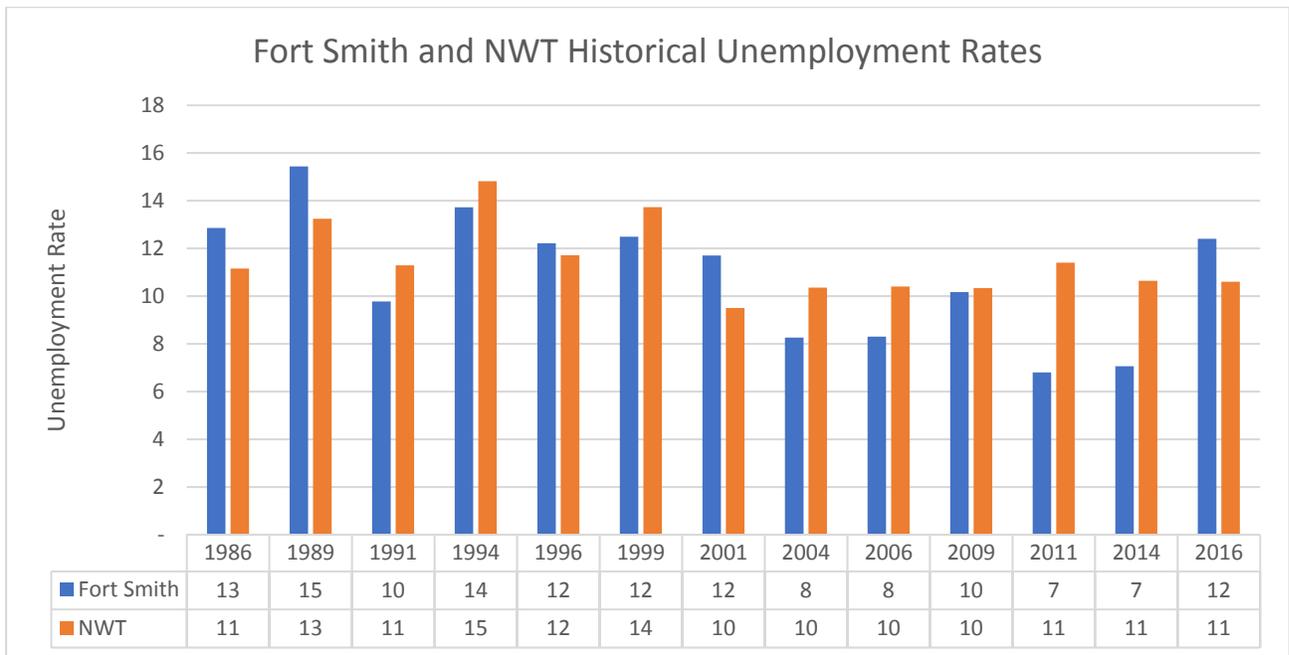


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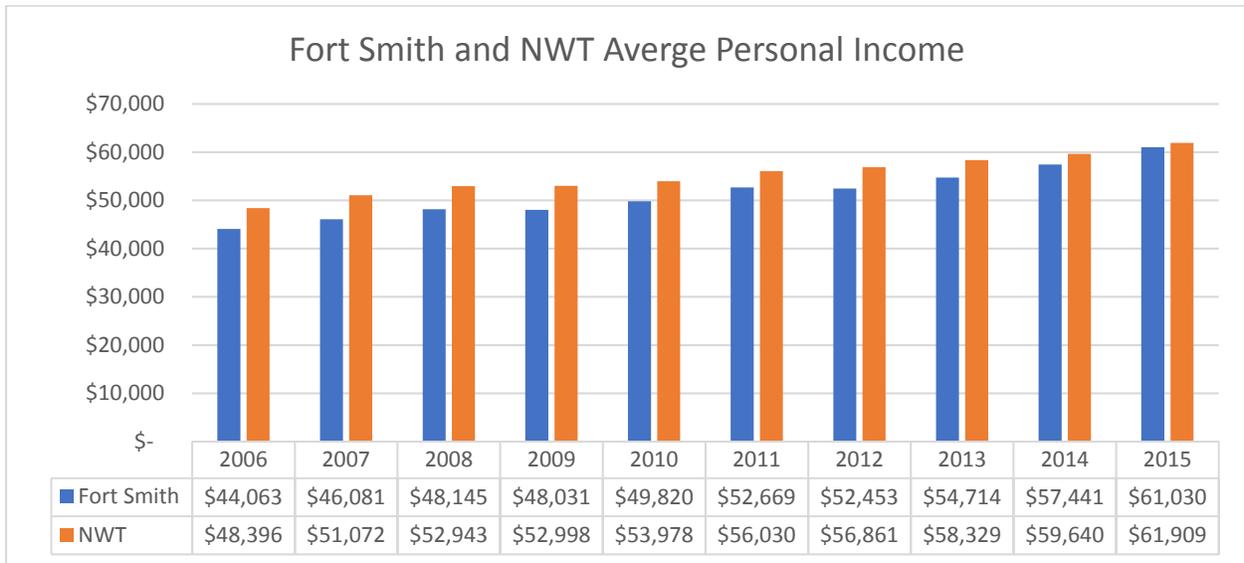
Fort Smith is a well-educated community. Those who hold a high school graduation diploma or have achieved higher education has increased in Fort Smith and throughout the NWT from 1986 to 2016. In general, the percentage of residents with a high school diploma or higher education is higher among those living in Fort Smith than the whole of the NWT.



The unemployment rate in Fort Smith is generally lower than the NWT.



Average incomes in Fort Smith continue to rise. From 2006 to 2015, the average personal income has been slightly lower in Fort Smith than in the Northwest Territories. However, the increase in income during this period has been higher in Fort Smith.



Process

The community engagement process took place over a 12-month period in 2017 and 2018. More than 200 residents participated and identified opportunities for Fort Smith's future. The perspectives gathered provide direction for the updated Strategic Plan. The process included the following opportunities for engagement:

- Community Survey
- Stakeholder workshops (7) – Northern Life Museum, Fort Smith Housing Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Fort Smith Métis Council, Fort Smith Seniors Society, Salt River First Nation, Smith's Landing First Nation, and Fort Smith Health and Social Services Society.
- Mayor and Council Workshops (3)
- Town of Fort Smith Advisory Board Workshops – Culture, Recreation, Tourism and Trade, and Sustainable Development.
- Information Booth at Aurora College
- Youth Visioning Workshop
- World Café

Vision

The vision statement outlines what our community wants to be. Our vision statement provides a basis for future decision-making and activities.

The Town of Fort Smith will work with our partners to enhance our excellent quality of life by respecting values, traditions, and healthy lifestyles. We will continue to advance as a unified, active and prosperous community.

Values

The mission defines how the Town will operate; it represents what is fundamentally important to us in how we work with each other and represent the citizens of Fort Smith.

- **Welcoming** – we are a friendly community which embraces our visitors, students and residents alike.
- **Innovative** – we take on new challenges in the pursuit of excellence.
- **Sustainable** – we are committed to sustainability in our Town’s operations and development.
- **Unified** – we work with Indigenous governments and our partners to implement our plans and achieve our goals.
- **Committed** – we operate professionally and to the highest ethical standards.

Priorities

Key themes and priorities emerged through the community engagement process. The residents of Fort Smith have a clear perspective on our Town's priorities. They are presented in two sections. The first includes priorities within the Town's mandate to address; the second include priorities that the Town can work with other governments and agencies to achieve.

Town Mandate

- responsive government
- youth
- attraction and retention of residents
- partnerships with Indigenous governments and others
- safety and legislation
- infrastructure
- community services
- communication

Town as Facilitator

- health and wellness
- child care
- sustainability, energy and climate change
- education
- economy
- affordable housing

Goals, Strategies and Actions

Based on the priorities our goals are:

- **To retain existing and attract new residents**
- **To be the healthiest community in the Northwest Territories**
- **To be a leader in sustainability**
- **To grow our role as the education capital in the NWT**
- **To create a diversified local economy**
- **To operate a responsive and transparent government**

Each goal is supported by strategies and actions to address the priorities. We are committed to working toward achieving these goals.

To retain existing and attract new residents.

Accomplishments

- ☑ Downtown Development Plan
- ☑ Special awards program that contributes to communication with elders
- ☑ Community engagement
- ☑ Development of Westgrove III

Strategies

- Support the development of affordable housing within the town
- Support the development of high quality and affordable child care in the town
- Work with Indigenous governments to support their development plans
- Promote Fort Smith as the Best Place to Live North of 60
- Develop a road connecting Fort Smith with the south

Support the development of affordable housing within the town

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6 Yrs +
Identify tools the Town has to reduce housing costs	A		
Work with local developers to promote diversity of housing types	A		
Work with the Fort Smith Housing Authority		A	
Work with the College to explore feasibility of renovating and renting vacant student housing			G
Work with the GNWT to explore the feasibility of renovating and renting the RCMP homes being replaced			G
Lobby GNWT, Minister, and Federal Government for support to develop housing			G

Support the development of high quality and affordable child care in the town

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6 Yrs +
Work with partners to develop child care (including infant, toddler, pre-school and after school care) in the town	A		
Identify tools available to the Town to support the development of additional child care spaces	A		

Work with Indigenous governments to support their development plans

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6 Yrs +
Provide and expand municipal services to accommodate growth and development			A
Prepare for future and support settled land claims			A

Promote Fort Smith as the Best Place to Live North of 60 “Unexpected; Unforgettable”

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6 Yrs +
Develop and implement a promotional campaign stressing location, quality of life, outdoor recreation, facilities and services	A		
Partner with businesses and government agencies on a strategy to attract new residents		A	
Develop a Fort Smith fact sheet for orientation to Town services, amenities, recreation opportunities, etc.		A	

Develop a road connecting Fort Smith with the south

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6 Yrs +
Work with the GNWT, Government of Alberta, the Federal Government and Indigenous Governments in and around Wood Buffalo National Park to create the connection			G

To be the healthiest community in the Northwest Territories.

Accomplishments

- ☑ Rebuilding the arena
- ☑ Increased and stronger bylaw enforcement
- ☑ Fire smart program
- ☑ Partnership with RCMP
- ☑ Pedestrian and vehicle safety improvements
- ☑ Improvement in community services
- ☑ Track and field facility
- ☑ Thebacha Trail
- ☑ Snowboard park
- ☑ Hosting the Arctic Winter Games

Strategies

- Increase community wellness and overall health
- Maintain and improve existing community facilities
- Ensure the safety of our residents

Increase community wellness and overall health

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Work with partners to update the Community Wellness Plan	G		
Work with partners to identify funding for a Community Wellness Coordinator	G		
Offer healthy food and beverage options at all Town facilities	A		
Develop a youth-led strategy for meeting their health and recreation needs	A		
Continue to develop both indoor and outdoor active recreation opportunities	A		
Provide additional STEAM and literacy-based recreational opportunities	A		
Member of Council to attend the Seniors' lunch program to develop awareness of elder needs	G		

Maintain and improve existing community facilities

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Implement recreation facility upgrade (midlife retrofit)	A		
Implement park space assessment recommendations		A	
Replace Town Hall		A	
Replace Library		A	

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Develop new Protective Services Building (firehall and ambulance)		A	
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Ensure the safety of our residents

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Update and implement emergency preparedness plan	A		
Roll out and use the Mass Notification System	A		
Organise and attend monthly meetings with RCMP and quarterly meetings with Ambulance and Fire Department	G		
Increased and stronger bylaw enforcement presence (speeding, dog control, contamination and littering)		G	
Work with inter-agency to address youth crime	G		
Identify barriers among homeowners regarding implementing the FireSmart Education Program	A		
Update and implement the FireSmart program for Town lands, private lands and Commissioner lands	A		
Citizens on Patrol in Town (work with RCMP and Indigenous Governments)	G		

To be a leader in sustainability.

Accomplishments

- Contributions of the Advisory Boards
- Waste Management Strategy
- Arena has electrified boiler (back up oil boiler only used if no power)

Strategies

- Be the first carbon neutral community in the NWT
- Reduce waste

Be the first carbon neutral community in the NWT

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Update and continue to implement and monitor the Energy Plan	A		
Develop a climate change adaptation plan		A	
Explore the feasibility of replacing Town vehicles with electric vehicles			A
Develop a plan to replace fuel oil with hydro electricity for residents			A
Educate residents on energy efficiency measures			A
Work with builders to develop sustainable housing			A
Explore partnerships with the GNWT to retrofit existing buildings with energy efficient alternatives	A		
Partner with the GNWT to identify funding to support this strategy	A		

Reduce waste

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Implement recommendations of solid waste management and recycling study	A		
Explore feasibility of collection and composting of organics (food and garden waste)	A		
Identify funding opportunities to move plan implementation ahead more quickly	A		

To grow our role as the education leader in the NWT.

Accomplishments

- Enhanced partnerships with Joseph Burr Tyrell Elementary School and Paul William Kaeser High School
- Town support for school events and activities

Strategies

- Lobby the GNWT to maintain and grow Fort Smith's educational status in the NWT
- Building strong relationships with the Aurora College Student Community
- Foster relationship with our schools – Joseph Burr Tyrell Elementary School and Paul William Kaeser High School
- Maintain the headquarters for NWT post-secondary education in Fort Smith

Lobby the GNWT to maintain and grow Fort Smith's educational campus status in the Northwest Territories

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Work with Aurora College to initiate discussions with the GNWT about current and future plans for post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories	G		
Continue to emphasise Fort Smith's role as a campus town with lots to offer students	A		

Build strong relationships with the Aurora College Student Community

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Ensure college students feel welcome (i.e. add student tab to Town website)	A		
Host Town-sponsored events for students	A		
Connect high school students within and outside the community with College offerings	G		
Lobby the GNWT to replace Breynat Hall and replace/upgrade student housing	G		

Maintain the headquarters for NWT post-secondary education in Fort Smith

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Communicate regularly with the Campus Director	G		
Become closer to the governance of the College; communicate with the Office of the President	G		
Appoint a Council liaison person	G		
Identify opportunities to participate in Aurora College activities such as orientation, student appreciation week and graduation	A		

Lobby the GNWT to ensure that Aurora College headquarters remain in Fort Smith, to reestablish appropriate governance of Aurora College, and to reinstate programs recently abolished (teacher education, social work)	G		
Work with other territorial governments (municipal, Indigenous) GNWT Ministers and MLAs to emphasise the benefits of having Aurora College headquarters in Fort Smith, and the dangers of GNWT centralisation	G		

Foster relationship with our schools – Joseph Burr Tyrrell Elementary School and Paul William Kaeser High School

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Transition to elected members to the District Education Authority (DEA) with regular reporting back to Council	G		
Offer student awards	G		
Support lunch and crosswalk programs	G		
Review and update joint use agreement	A		
Provide tournament support	A		
Identify other opportunities to partner with our schools	A		
Hold annual youth visioning workshop	G		
Coordinate training in municipal government for youth in grades 10,11, and 12	A		
Create a youth voice on advisory boards	G		

To create a vibrant local economy.

Accomplishments

- Economic Development Strategy
- Hired Economic Development Officer

Overall Strategies

- Support implementation of Economic Development Strategy
- Continue training of Economic Development Officer
- Build capacity of the Economic Development department
- Ensure continuing roles for the Tourism and Trade Advisory Board

Goals + Strategies (from 2017 Economic Development Strategy)

Goal #1: Foster and Encourage Business and Job Creation and Retention Strategies

- Opportunities assessment
- Develop land & business inventory
- Gather input from business community
- Identify investment objectives & strategies
- Implement investment strategy
- Strengthen government positions in Fort Smith

Goal #2: Increase Communication with and within the Business Community Strategies

- Assess local business climate
- Provide educational & networking opportunities
- Regular communication with business community
- Support Chamber of Commerce with “Shop Local” campaign

Goal #3: Diversify the Local Economy Strategies

- Create a cooperative planning strategy with community and regional partners
- Identify areas of economic “leakage” and areas to recapture spending
- Encourage youth and emerging entrepreneurs

Goal #4: Attract and Retain Residents to live in Fort Smith Strategies

- Identify the current situation
- Define key target markets, messaging & strategy
- Develop a marketing strategy
- Increase housing options
- Create a resident ambassador program

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Goal #5: Enhance Livability

Strategies

- Identify areas needing improvement
- Strengthen public engagement
- Create a community improvement plan/program
- Create municipal funding program
- Identify transportation concerns
- Grow culture and arts sector

Goal #6: Attract Shoppers and Visitors from the Region into our Community

Strategies

- Direct marketing campaign
- Improve visitor experience

Goal #7: Champion and Assist with Tourism Product Development and Packaging

Strategies

- Champion new development
- Identify the barriers to tourism development
- Encourage cultural aspects of tourism products

Goal #8: Increase number of Festivals, Sporting Events and Conferences held in Fort Smith

Strategies

- Create/maintain active Volunteer Base
- Collaborate with local and territorial organisations to host and market events

Goal #9: Work with Regional Partners to Market Fort Smith (Hay River, Fort McMurray, Yellowknife, Edmonton)

Strategies

- Market Fort Smith regionally, nationally and internationally

To operate a responsive and transparent government.

Accomplishments

- Paving of roads
- More streetlights
- Improved clearing of roads and sidewalks
- Waste Management Plan
- Updating bylaws
- 20 Year Capital Plan
- Council representative on the Museum Board
- Continuing implementation of Infrastructure Plan
- Stability in management
- Invigoration of Advisory Boards
- Website
- Opportunities for citizens to be involved in governance without being on Council

Strategies

- Continue to provide high quality programs and services to our citizens
- Implement the calls to action for municipal governments from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Be the employer of choice in the NWT
- Maintain and improve existing community infrastructure
- Review legislation to ensure it is up to date and relevant
- Ensure community members are well-informed
- Improve communication and dialogue with other levels of government including government agencies and boards
- Formalise orientation for new and returning Mayor and Council by Administration to ensure continuity after elections

Continue to provide high quality programs and services to our citizens

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Undertake annual community services satisfaction survey to identify improvements and solicit ideas for new programs and services	A		
Continue tax relief program for seniors and disabled persons		G	
Coordinate annual meeting of all Advisory Boards; facilitate sharing of information between Boards; quarterly Chair meetings	G		
Develop a Sponsorship Policy to increase revenue available for programs and services	A		

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Recognise and support the work of volunteers	G		
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Implement the calls to action for municipal government from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Fully adopt and implement the <i>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i> as the framework for reconciliation	G		
Reform policies and bylaws in support of decolonisation	G		
Provide education to staff on the history of Indigenous people, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the <i>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i> , Treaties and Indigenous rights, and Indigenous-Crown relations	A		

Be the employer of choice in the NWT

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Organise regular staff and Council meetings and social activities	A		
Highlight staff achievements	G		
Maintain a safe and respectful workplace	GA		
Maintain stability in management	GA		

Maintain and improve existing community infrastructure

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Repair and upgrade roads as required	A		
Repair and upgrade sidewalks as required	A		
Lobby GNWT and Federal Government to stabilise the slide zone		G	
Increase streetlighting as required	A		
Ensure that costs for water and solid waste are fully covered by users through user fees	A		
Continue to implement the 20 Year Capital Plan	A		

Review legislation to ensure it is up to date and relevant

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Continue the review of all bylaws, policies and procedures to ensure effectiveness and relevance	A		
Create new bylaws as required (i.e. legalization of marijuana)	A		

Ensure residents, college students and visitors are well-informed

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Develop community communications guidelines and policies	G		
Host an annual Open House to provide an update on Town activities and provide opportunities for public input	G		
Continue monthly calendar and community news sheet advertising local businesses and community events	A		
Make more effective use of media platforms to communicate Town events	A		
Work with the College to share information on Town activities	A		
Replace and relocate electronic sign	A		

Improve communication and dialogue with other levels of government including Indigenous governments

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Work with Indigenous governments to implement Municipal Service Agreements	G		
Foster partnerships with other agencies and organisations	G		
Regular meetings with Smith's Landing First Nation, Salt River First Nation and the Fort Smith Métis Council to discuss areas of common concern and provide support where applicable	G		

Formalise orientation for new and returning Mayor and Council by administration to ensure continuity after elections

Actions (A – Administrative; G – Governance)	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6+ Yrs
Develop a policy mandating orientation		A	
Develop procedures for when and how orientation will take place		A	

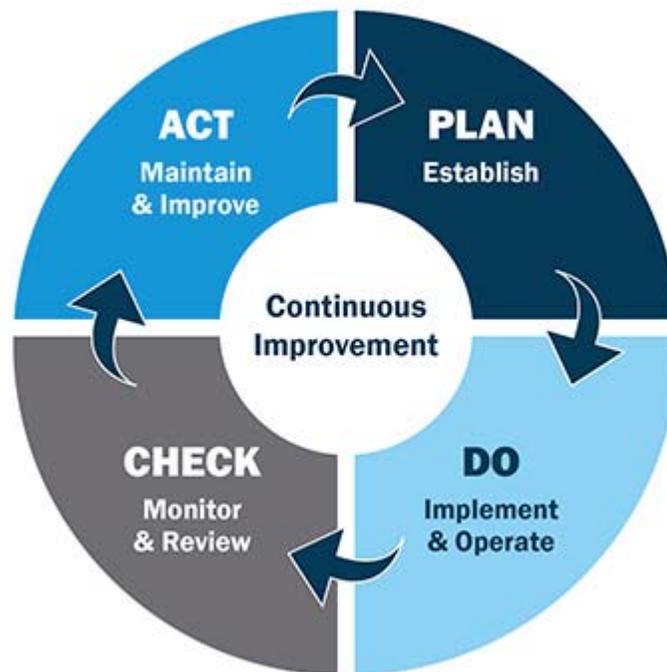
Next Steps

As a next step, we will work with staff to develop the financial plans to support the implementation of our Strategic Plan. Some of our strategies can be pursued, and action items can be accomplished, over the short-term while others might need to be pursued over the long-term.

Meeting our goals will require a coordinated effort from Mayor and Council, staff, Advisory Boards, other agencies and residents. Each Strategic Plan goal includes an implementation plan with suggested strategies and actions for addressing that goal. This is a critical starting point for the implementation of the Plan.

Evaluation and monitoring is the second key implementation tool. Evaluation and monitoring annually will enable us to:

- prioritize goals each year;
- set specific performance measures and performance targets;
- analyze progress towards meeting targets;
- reconsider goals and timing considering progress;
- involve residents in evaluating success; and
- communicate successes and challenges to residents as well as plans for the upcoming year.



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This approach provides a continual loop of planning, implementation and evaluation. It includes all stakeholders and involves residents in proactively planning community services as well as evaluating how community programs and services are meeting their needs.

Through this process we have identified our community values and priorities, and these will be our guide as we move forward. Our progress toward addressing these priorities and achieving our goals will be formally reported on through the Town's Annual Report.

Strategic Planning is an on-going process and your feedback is an important part of moving forward.

Appendix - Foundational Documents

Foundational documents

Below is a list of the documents reviewed as part of the process of developing the 2018 Town of Fort Smith Strategic Plan.

GNWT, **Cities, Towns and Villages Act** (2014)
GNWT, **Summary of Community Statistics** (2018)
Salt River First Nation, **Municipal Services Agreement** (2001)
Smith Landing First Nation, **Municipal Services Agreement** (nd)
Town of Fort Smith, **5 Year Capital Plan** (2010)
Town of Fort Smith, **20 Year Capital Plan** (2014)
Town of Fort Smith, **Capital Plan** (2016)
Town of Fort Smith, **Community Energy Plan** (2010)
Town of Fort Smith, **Community FireSmart Protection Plan** (2010)
Town of Fort Smith, **Community Services Master Plan** (2012)
Town of Fort Smith, **Drainage Assessment** (2010)
Town of Fort Smith, **Economic Development Strategy** (2017)
Town of Fort Smith, **Integrated Community Sustainability Plan** (2010)
Town of Fort Smith, **Parks and Open Space Plan** (2017)
Town of Fort Smith, **Tourism/Visitor Services Branding and Marketing Strategy** (2011)