

Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce

Strategic Planning Workshop Summary



It's about knowing your **VISION**,
your **BUSINESS** and **YOU**.

Prepared for: Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce

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Workshop Overview

The Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) is a non-profit action organization designed to meet the business needs of the Lac La Biche Region (the Region). Operational for nearly 91 years, the Chamber is a voluntary organization for progressive individuals and businesses that work together to advance the commercial, financial, industrial, and civic interests of the community.

The Chamber continues to experience challenges and opportunities in relation to the changing economic environment in the region; the Chamber's Board (the Board) has therefore agreed that a more formal strategy is needed to provide direction for the Chamber's growth and continued value for its stakeholders. To begin their progress towards that strategy, the Board met on September 6th, 2013 for a strategic planning workshop. The workshop was hosted by Remax at its Lac La Biche offices. While the scope of the discussions included the next three years, much of the activity focused on the next few months as this will largely determine the viability of the Chamber and its efforts.

The workshop attendees included:

- Maurice Brousseau, Alberta Human Services;
- Reuel Thomas, Community Futures;
- Rick Skyran , Crude Energy;
- Gene Wesley , Limousine1.ca;
- Charlyn Moore, Remax Reality; and
- Nalina Naidoo, Western Financial Group.

The following report outlines the key discussion points and outcomes from the workshop.

Values, Vision & Mission

Values

Values are not about ***what*** is done, but rather ***how*** its done. These core beliefs and values shape decisions and relationships as the Chamber carries out its mission.

Workshop participants were asked to brainstorm the top five values that they felt were integral to the Chamber, with each participant writing their top values onto individual notes.

The bubble diagram on the follow page reflects the consolidation of the various notes posted by workshop participants. The size of the bubbles represents the popularity of the respective values based on the number of participants who listed the value as one of their top five.



- **Integrity** – We fulfill the promise of our mission through behavior that reflects honesty, responsibility and fairness. We are forthright and truthful in our interactions with others.

- **Trust** – We believe that we will only be successful when we earn the trust of our members. To earn that trust, we strive to focus on their best interests.

- **Forward-Thinking** – We endeavour to be flexible thinkers, able to question existing thinking, adapt and creatively meet the demands of the future.

- **Respect** – We genuinely care for our members and respect their internal ability to achieve success with our support.

- **Community & Identifiable** – We make the effort to understand the needs of our members and their communities, so that we can deliver relevant and meaningful support.

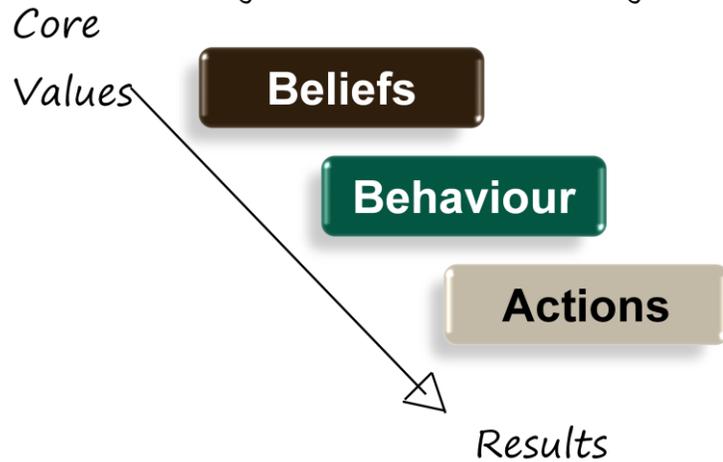
- **Transparency** – We conduct ourselves with openness and candor in all aspects of our work, seeking input from stakeholders to encourage open communication and foster collaboration.

- **Engagement** – We seek to capture the emotional commitment of Chamber members because we recognize that people that believe in the Chamber will take an interest in the organization and want it to do well.

- **Simplicity** – Our mission is to “support and lead the business community”. We will not be all things to all people.

What's at your core?

Are your members there with you?



Mission Statement

A Mission Statement is intended to define what the Chamber exists to do each day, specifically as it moves towards the vision i.e. the purpose for the Chamber to exist. The Chamber's stated mission statement below was discussed during the workshop, and the perception of participants is that it still accurately reflects the mission of the Chamber.

"The Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce will support and lead the business community by:

- *Advocacy: being the voice of our members and lobbying for positive change.*
- *Being ambassadors for members, community and the region.*
- *Providing a resource service center*
 - *Information & Networking*
 - *Creative Business Solutions*
 - *Dynamic Thinking*
- *Promotion of tourism and visitors services for the region."*

Vision Statement

A Vision Statement is intended to provide a picture of what the Chamber will look like in the future such as its direction, business position, capabilities, and other characteristics. Similarly to the Mission Statement, participants felt that the stated Vision Statement represents where the Chamber wants to go.

"The Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce will be a unified business organization promoting a healthy economy and prosperous community."



Reflecting this vision, comments from workshop participants included:

- An aspiration to have the Chamber recognized at the forefront of the business community.
- A desire to have the Region viewed to be a "business-development friendly" community.
- A goal to have the Board represent a cross-section of the business community (not only Main Street).

Market Trends

The following items were brainstormed by workshop participants to outline the macro-level market trends that may directly or indirectly affect the Chamber. The market trends are not listed in any particular order.

Industry

- The economy is picking up, but Lac La Biche & District could be bypassed if the business environment isn't more welcoming.
- There is some concern regarding the impact of the HWY 63 twinning and the potential impact it could have on the Region.

Government

- General lack of vision
- Not-business friendly
- Lack of understanding regarding costs vs. return
- A vocal minority is repressing growth

Workforce

- There is demand in the Region to train and attract skilled workers
- The “Demographic Bubble” representing baby boomers and other pockets of the labour market looking to exit the workforce will compound the existing shortage of resources.
- There is a significant exodus of residents in the 19-20 year demographic i.e. there are approximately 2,500 18-19 year olds but only 200 19-20 year olds.

Community Stakeholders (non-government)

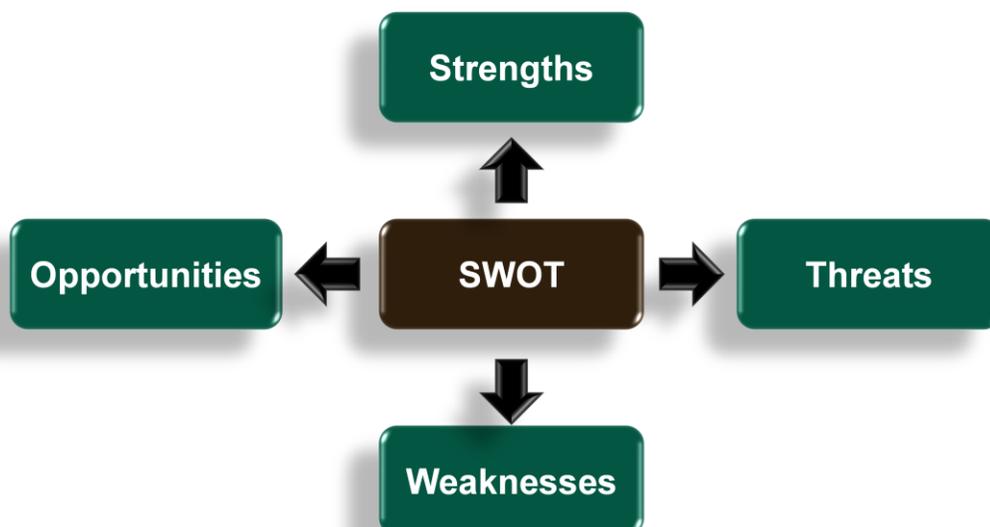
- There is a plethora of groups, but all struggle with participation / engagement.
- Some of these groups tend to compete for the same members and resources.

Situational Assessment

The situational assessment portion of the workshop focused the participants on the consideration of current positives and negatives presently associated with the Chamber. The situational assessment is intended as a baseline reading to determine what gaps may exist between the current situation and the aspiration within the Chamber’s Vision and Mission. The primary function of the assessment was a SWOT analysis.

SWOT Analysis

The workshop participants spent a considerable amount of time brainstorming the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing the Chamber. Their results are listed below.



Strengths

- A strong, cohesive, forward-thinking and likeminded Board.
- The Region is well positioned to experience strong growth in the coming years.
- The Chamber has been established for 91 years.
- Strong brand recognition and affiliation with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (i.e. there are more than 450 chambers of commerce and boards of trade, representing 200,000 businesses across Canada).
- The VIC (Visitor Information Center) is a real success story that represents the values of the community.
- The Chamber has hosted / sponsored a variety of high-quality events within the community (unfortunately these have not always been well attended).
- The Chamber provides a voice for the business community
- Though historically this has been a weakness, the Board has done some great work in creating more structured policies and procedures. This includes the formation of the following sub-committees (Governance / Finance, Communications, Membership, and Special Events).
- The Chamber has a strong membership base (~125).

Weaknesses

- Member engagement has been lacking (i.e. general apathy).
- The current relationship with the Municipality is strained.
- The Chamber is short-staffed (i.e. need Executive Director, Industry Liaison). This has led to the volunteer Board being over-tasked as they strive to fulfill the requisite responsibilities.
- The Chamber currently lacks relevance and a clear value proposition for its members. This reflects a historical lack of consistent vision and execution.
- The Chamber isn't very effective at self-promotion i.e. identifying the positive things they've accomplished within the community.
- The Chamber has become more of a service group rather than business development.
- The Chamber doesn't provide effective education to businesses / industry.
- There is redundancy with other organizations trying to do the same thing.
- The Chamber lacks effective member communication (e.g. membership contact list, website, etc).
- Historically there have not been effective financial controls / governance in place. *Note: the recently formed Governance & Finance sub-committee has largely addressed this weakness.*

Opportunities

- Ongoing economic growth in the Region will continue to create opportunities for entrepreneurship and business development. This will represent continuing opportunities for the Chamber to serve and potentially expand its service offerings.
- Look beyond Lac La Biche. Traditionally the Chamber has been disproportionately focused on "Main Street"; however, there is real opportunity in a more balanced focus on the "District" part of Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce.
- Focus on additional membership from small businesses, home-based businesses and industry.

- Opportunity to provide innovative training / programs to meet the needs of Chamber members.
- Support local understanding / responses to Municipal RFPs.
- Interested in the potential to tie Chamber membership to the application for a business license.
- Generally improving the information on the Chamber's website.
- Investigate a rating system for members on the website.
- Expanding client / membership base e.g. 500+, maybe even 1000+.

Threats

- Growth in energy development within the US and Europe may draw industry funding away from the Region.
- Potential that regional growth could bypass the Region in search of more “business friendly” communities. This is the responsibility of the Community overall.
- “Traditionalists” within stakeholder communities continue to struggle against more progressive elements to resist economic and resource development initiatives.
- Some segments of the stakeholder communities do not support industrial development/expansion, regardless of economic benefit.
- The relationship with the Municipality has been strained, impacting the Chamber's potential effectiveness within the Community.
- Community perception of the Chamber has not been very positive. There is a perceived lack of relevance that could challenge the sustainability of the Chamber.
- There are other organizations providing services similar to the Chamber, leading some members to those organizations rather than the Chamber.
- Funding for the Chamber is primarily provided by membership fees. Declining membership would challenge the Chamber's sustainability.
- Government takeover of the role that the Chamber currently provides. This would present a significant threat to the business community.

Critical Issues

Of the issues discussed, the following were thought to be most critical:

In the next six months:

- Develop value proposition
- Hire an effective Executive Director
- Focus on engaging new and existing Board / Chamber members
- Engage with new County Council members
- Complete updates to bylaws, policies, communications plan, financial controls

In the next year:

- Build on foundation laid out over the next six months
- Develop relevance for members and the community at large
- Implement better member communications

In the next three to five years:

- Increase market share (e.g. minimum of 300 members of close to 2,000 business entities)
- Increase political partnership

Action Planning

Based on the assessment of the Chamber's current situation, the participants were asked to develop some SMART goals to address their SWOT analysis, within the context of the Chamber's Vision and Mission.

SMART goals must be:

- *Specific* – easy to define and understand.
- *Measurable* – quantifiable “by the numbers”.
- *Achievable* – done with current resources.
- *Realistic* – meets needs of stakeholders and board.
- *Timely* – has a start and finish date with specified milestones.

The workshop participants developed the following SMART goals:

- **Develop Value Proposition** – over the last number of years one of the significant challenges for the Chamber has been the lack of involvement on the part of its members. To reverse this trend and incent increased engagement of its members, the Board must be able to clearly articulate its value proposition to its members and the community in general.
 - Timeframe: Two Months
 - Assigned to: Reuel Thomas, Charlyn Moore
- **Develop a job description for the Executive Director position** – one of the critical issues identified during the workshop was the lack of an Executive Director to drive the Chamber's mandate. The perception of the out-going Board is that based on the experience gained over their term, they are best positioned to develop the requirements of this position.
 - Timeframe: One Month
 - Assigned to: Gene Wesley to contact Alberta Chamber of Commerce, follow up with Board
- **Develop a membership strategy** – workshop participants identified the need to be proactive in reaching out to Chamber members / different member groups and the need to identify a strategy to articulate this activity.
 - Timeframe: Two Months
 - Assigned to: Board
- **Develop job descriptions for the Board** – the current Board has worked very effectively together and has also initiated a variety of sub-groups (as described previously). To assist with continuity, the workshop participants felt that it would be valuable to provide incoming Board member with an overview of what Board members are responsible for i.e. job descriptions.
 - Timeframe: Two Months
 - Assigned to: Board
- **Develop marketing plan** – participants identified the need to diversify the Chamber's revenue stream beyond the traditional approaches.

- Timeframe: Six Months
- Assigned to: Board

Performance Indicators / Targets

Indicators of Success

Key Success Indicators are quantifiable measurements, agreed to beforehand by the Board, that reflect the critical success factors of the Chamber.

- Increased membership engagement (e.g. number of people attending Chamber events).
- Filled Executive Director position
- Demonstrated positive cash flows

Measureable Targets

Goal objectives should include numeric or descriptive measures that define quantity, quality, cost, etc. How will the Board know when the goal has been successfully met? Be clear in the goal about what will be changed and by how much. Setting this clearly at the start makes it easier to evaluate:

- Articulate the Value Proposition of the Chamber
- 10% growth in membership (year over year)
- Retain current membership (99% retention)
- Identify touch points with member (e.g. minimum 1-2 times / year)
- Conduct “exit” interviews for members choosing to not maintain their membership.
- Track the number of calls coming into the Chamber.
- Continue tracking the number of visitors to the Visitor Information Centre.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Based on the observations during the workshop, it is clear that within the Board there is a strong foundation of shared values and joint success upon which to work together for the future.

Specific Recommendations:

- The Chamber must be able to clearly **articulate its Value Proposition** to stakeholders. The benefit of this process is that it will focus Chamber efforts and provide members and prospective members a concise understanding of the value that the Chamber provides.
- **Capitalize on the Municipal elections.** This is a unique opportunity to hit the “reset” button on the relationship with the Municipality. Ultimately success (or lack thereof) will be determined by how well the Chamber and the Municipality are able to work together towards a common goal. With new incoming council members, there is an opportunity for the Chamber to frame the discussion and convey the value that the Chamber offers.
- **Monitor** the Chamber’s **progress** towards the stated goals and objectives. Specifically:
 - Establish a tracking and recording mechanism to monitor progress on an ongoing basis.
 - Where relevant, communicate these results out to Chamber members.
 - Identify gaps between expected results and actual results.
 - Propose actions to address gaps.