



## **SOCIAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY**

### **Issue**

The Okotoks Social Needs Assessment and Strategy is presented to Council for information.

### **Motion Proposed by Administration**

That the Okotoks Social Needs Assessment and Strategy be approved as a planning document and the recommendations of the Strategy be implemented to enhance social well-being in Okotoks.

### **Report, Analysis and Financial Implications**

In 2024, the Town launched an extensive community engagement process to amplify community voices and identify key social priorities and emerging trends, resulting in the Social Needs Assessment and Strategy. Replacing the 2010 Social Wellness Framework, this strategy emphasizes the Town's ongoing commitment to social well-being as a foundation of responsible growth and community development.

The five (5) community priorities outlined in the Strategy are a direct reflection of residents' lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations. Rooted in meaningful conversations and collaboration, this strategy is driven by community voices and informed by robust demographic and socioeconomic analysis.

1. Community Affordability - Addressing rising costs of living, housing affordability, and economic barriers to ensure long-term sustainability for residents and businesses.
2. Accessibility and Inclusive Services - Improving transportation, recreational programs, and support services to improve accessibility for all residents, especially seniors, youth, and individuals with disabilities.
3. Strengthening Community Connections - Enhancing opportunities for social interaction and reducing isolation, particularly among marginalized and underserved groups.
4. Community Awareness and Engagement - Increasing transparency, communication, and public participation in decision-making processes to strengthen civic engagement.
5. Growing in a Way that Supports Everyone - Creating infrastructure, public services, and development strategies that align with social well-being goals as the Town continues to grow.

There are several municipal strategies and plans that play a role in enhancing social well-being. The Social Needs Assessment and Strategy builds on and complements these existing initiatives, ensuring alignment without overlap. This Strategy's recommendations are responsive to identified community priorities and align the collective efforts of the Town and community to enhance social well-being as Okotoks continues to grow.

All aspects of this project were designed to build trust and deepen understanding. Many residents engaged repeatedly throughout the process, forming strong relationships with Administration and contributing to a shared sense of ownership. The energy and dedication of participants has built momentum for action and this Strategy is the result of that collective journey.

### Next Steps

One of the first recommendations in this Strategy is to adopt a Social Policy Framework to establish clear municipal roles and responsibilities for addressing emerging social needs. As a first step in implementing the Strategy, a draft Social Policy Framework will be presented to the May 20, 2025 Governance and Priorities Committee for discussion and feedback, including recommendations on potential budget implications to implement actions in the Strategy. An excerpt of this framework is included in Attachment 2 which outlines the potential roles and responsibilities the Town can take in addressing social well-being.

The Social Policy Framework will help the Town understand its role and responsibility in addressing factors that influence the social well-being of residents, while also considering the role of others. Rather than providing a specific action plan, the framework will provide a consistent decision-making lens to help determine how, when, or if the Town should respond to emerging social needs.

### **Strategic Plan Goals**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Responsibly Managed Growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrated Environmental Leadership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong Local Economy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced Culture & Community Health
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organizational Excellence		

### **Equity/Diversity/Inclusivity Impacts and Strategy**

The Social Needs Assessment and Strategy was informed by a deliberate, equitable and inclusive engagement process designed to reflect the diverse voices of Okotoks. The corresponding actions and strategies are rooted in ensuring that no one is left behind.

### **Environmental Impacts**

n/a

### **Governing Policies/Bylaws/Legislation or Agreements**

n/a

### **Community Engagement Strategy**

This Social Needs Assessment and Strategy was shaped and built by an extensive nine-month process that involved hearing the voices and input of over 1300 residents, dozens of community organizations, Administration, and many others. Community voices shaped every stage, from initial community conversations and focus groups to validation surveys and design labs.

The project team focused on meeting people where they are at to foster participation that was accessible, welcoming, and representative of Okotoks' diverse population. This included visiting schools, social agencies, and community gathering spots. To generate a deeper understanding of Okotoks, a large cross section of the community was engaged through interviews and focus groups, asset mapping, interactive community workshops, a validation survey, and design labs.

### **Alternatives for Consideration**

n/a

### **CAO Comments**

This has been a key priority for Council and I am pleased that the social needs assessment is now complete and Administration can begin the development of an implementation plan to address the needs of the community. This social needs assessment will form the social pillar under the pillars of sustainability and will allow for this to guide all of the work of the municipality, and ultimately community partners for the benefit of the community. The level of public participation highlights that a community conversation was required and that changes are needed to improve social inclusion in the community.

### **Attachment(s)**

1. Social Needs Assessment and Strategy
2. Social Policy Framework (Excerpt)

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