

VISIT
Sylvan Lake

STRATEGY OVERVIEW

**DESTINATION LEADERSHIP
& MANAGEMENT PLAN**

snapshot

Questions?
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Sylvan Lake
BRILLIANT ALL YEAR

**This Plan represents the community's
voice and experience**

in pursuit of a shared outcome:

A community where tourism enhances local pride in place and quality of life, and is an integral part of local development initiatives.

Where residents are at the heart of decision making in tourism and the place is left better off than it was found - socially, culturally, economically, and environmentally.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES



1. Collaboration and Participation

Develop and commit to implementing structures, processes and partnerships that allow for open and transparent dialogue and participation in tourism planning and initiatives on an ongoing basis, and that foster relationship building between the Municipality, residents, community organizations and local Indigenous Peoples.



2. Sustainability and Responsibility

Take actions that have positive, lasting impacts on residents, business owners and visitors, and which are supported by necessary resources to be as effective as possible. Prioritize the conservation and protection of local natural and cultural resources.



3. Leadership and innovation

Position Sylvan Lake as a provincial leader in tourism development, a hub for Central Alberta visitation and a top provincial tourism destination by building on the strengths of pride of place, community-based practice and care for the people who live and work in the town.



4. Diversity, Equity, inclusion and Accessibility

Champion diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in tourism planning and implementation so Sylvan Lake is fully enjoyed and appreciated by all residents and visitors regardless of race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, language spoken or age.



5. Truth and Reconciliation

Connect with local Indigenous leaders and Knowledge Keepers to support community-led tourism initiatives that promote cultural preservation and celebration of Indigenous culture, stories, traditions and ways of life.

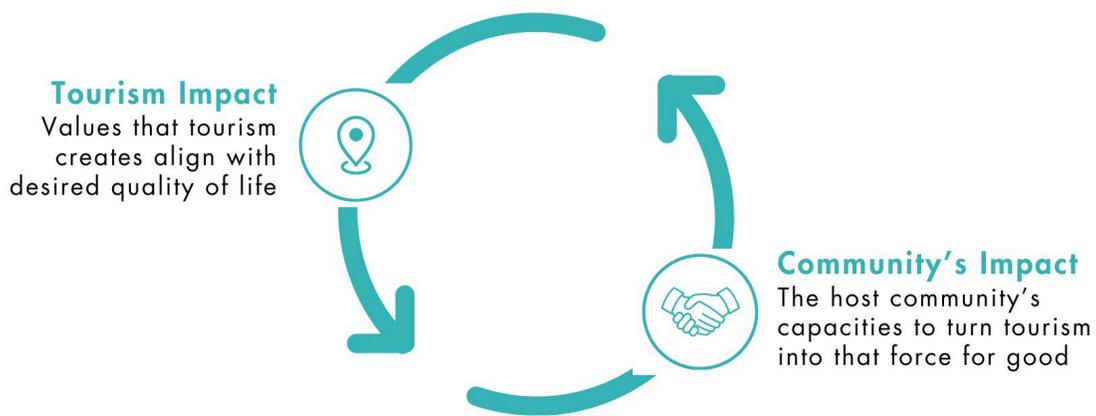


6. Flexibility and Forward-Focus

Take the necessary steps to develop a long-term path toward destination leadership focused on prioritizing the possibilities of community development while measuring and evaluating activity to allow for necessary and beneficial iterations of the 10-year strategy.

BACKGROUND & APPROACH

Sylvan Lake’s Destination Leadership and Management Plan (DLMP) redefines tourism as a tool for enhancing community well-being. Tourism in Sylvan Lake must be about more than visitor numbers and economic growth—it must be about how tourism can support the community, protect the environment, and tell the story of a place where people want to live, not just visit. Sylvan Lake’s approach to tourism is people-first, locally led, and rooted in long-term stewardship.

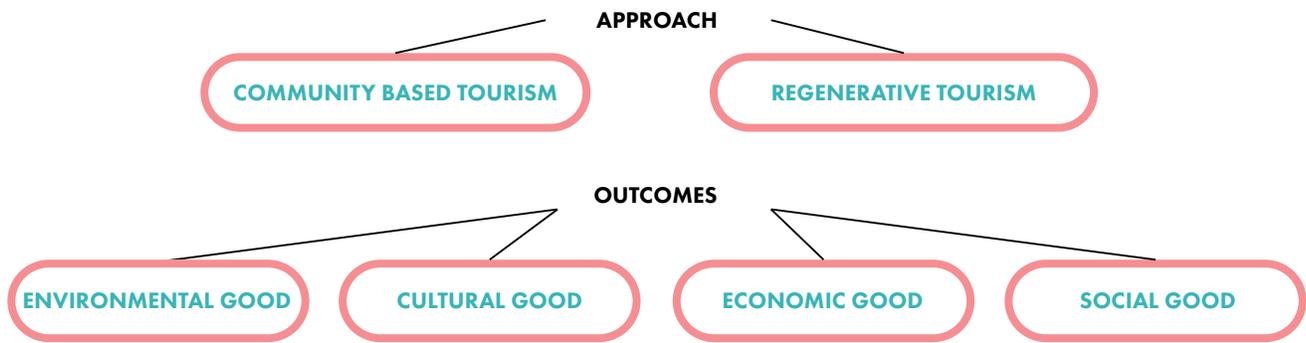


The DLMP responds to the impacts of global challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and systemic inequality by prioritizing people, place, and sustainability. The plan embraces a bold shift: tourism must benefit the community first, rather than simply serving visitors.

Tourism in Sylvan Lake is no longer just about attracting more people—it’s about ensuring that tourism contributes positively to the town’s social, cultural, environmental, and economic life. Community members aren’t viewed as passive “stakeholders” but as “community rights holders” who actively shape tourism development. This approach moves away from top-down decision-making and toward local leadership and inclusion.

Two guiding models shape Sylvan Lake’ tourism decision making approach: community-based tourism and regenerative tourism. Community-based tourism empowers residents to manage and share their stories, traditions, and assets with visitors. Regenerative tourism takes it further, aiming to leave the destination better off than before—environmentally, socially, and culturally. Together, these models make it possible for Sylvan Lake’s tourism economy to thrive, while avoiding the pitfalls of overcrowding, cultural erosion, or environmental harm.

SECTION 1



Tourism stands out as a uniquely people-focused industry compared to other economic sectors. It fosters cultural exchange, community pride, entrepreneurship, and environmental responsibility.

Sylvan Lake stands out in Central Alberta as the key magnet community for tourism in the region which is integral to both its economic spirit and community identity, shaping the landscape and experience of local residents. Sylvan Lake already has many ingredients of a great destination—its scenic lakefront, central location, and strong sense of local pride. Tourism can be used as a mechanism and platform to enhance the ability of the town tell its story while supporting small businesses, creating jobs, and building long-term resilience.

To manage this, the plan distinguishes between two key concepts:

- Destination management, which focuses on logistics, marketing, and infrastructure—ensuring smooth visitor experiences.
- Destination leadership, which is broader and values-driven. It places community well-being at the core, guiding tourism development in ways that align with local values, long-term sustainability, and emotional connection to place.

Sylvan Lake’s DLMP combines both, creating an integrated governance model that elevates tourism as a tool for building community—culturally, socially, and economically. Collaboration is emphasized between government, local businesses, residents, and even visitors. The plan encourages public and private investment in tourism leadership and coordination.

To guide growth, the DLMP outlines four levels of hosting capacity:

1. Local Host – Serves nearby visitors, with basic tourism infrastructure and strong community engagement
2. Regional Host – Welcomes a broader visitor base and actively leads tourism in the surrounding region.
3. National Host – Attracts visitors from across Canada, with signature experiences and larger-scale marketing.
4. Global Host – Draws international attention through unique, world-class attractions.

In 2025, Sylvan Lake currently sits at the Local Host level, with ambitions to grow responsibly. The DLMP provides the roadmap to guide this transition, ensuring that tourism development is inclusive, community-led, and sustainable. Ultimately, tourism is positioned not as an end in itself but as a powerful tool to strengthen the town and enhance quality of life for all who call it home.

SECTION 2

COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Tourism strategy must be shaped “with the community, for the community,” and must prioritize local voices, needs, and values.

To gather insights, the Town engaged over 800 people—around 5% of the population—through interviews, surveys, workshops, and informal discussions at community events. Residents, business owners, and other community rights holders were consulted about how they think and feel about tourism in their community. The approach was intentionally personal and accessible, using relaxed settings and creative methods to ensure honest feedback. The findings clearly show that while tourism has potential, it also creates tension and frustration, particularly among residents.

Residents often feel overwhelmed by summer crowds and believe that tourism disrupts their quality of life. Many expressed frustration with traffic, noise, litter, and public intoxication—especially near the beach. There’s a sense that visitors bring their own supplies and don’t spend money in local businesses, while taxpayers cover the costs of cleaning and security. Residents want to enjoy their town too, but often feel pushed out of their own public spaces during peak season.



SECTION 2

Businesses, meanwhile, want more support to draw visitors away from the beach and into the downtown core. They're eager for improvements in infrastructure, signage, parking, and aesthetics that better reflect the town's lakeside charm. Many believe Sylvan Lake is positioned to become a regional hub—but only if tourism is managed to benefit everyone, not just visitors.

The lake is universally seen as the town's most valuable asset—economically, culturally, and recreationally. However, its overuse and the lack of regulation around tents and grills on the beach reduce enjoyment for many. Locals want better enforcement and a more inclusive lakefront that balances visitor access with resident comfort and environmental protection.

Data gaps are another concern. Without clear, transparent evidence of tourism's economic benefits, many residents remain skeptical of tourism investments. Better measurement tools are needed to show how visitor spending supports the community.

Residents are also calling for a broader mix of experiences beyond summer beach days—such as events, arts, winter activities, and unique local businesses that serve both tourists and locals. Accessibility remains a key issue, with efforts already underway to improve beach access for people with disabilities.

Overall, Sylvan Lake has passionate, engaged residents who care deeply about their town's tourism future. Their feedback points to the need for a tourism approach that emphasizes equity, respect, and shared benefit—rooted in the local context and guided by local leadership.

WHO WAS HEARD AND HOW

- Full-time and seasonal residents
 - Community groups
 - Commercial land owners
 - Business owners and entrepreneurs
 - Experience providers in all consumer sectors
 - Tourism and hospitality workers
 - Sylvan Lake Mayor and Council
 - Town of Sylvan Lake Administration
 - Central Alberta Tourism Alliance (CATA)
 - Travel Alberta
 - Indigenous Tourism Alberta
 - Tourism Industry Association of Alberta
 - Past and prospective visitors
- 37 one-on-one or group interviews
 - Workshops Council, one with Economic Development and Tourism Committee members, and one with the Town Administration—which engaged over 40 people
 - Two public Visioning Session workshops for community members
 - One industry night for tourism and hospitality workers, which welcomed 14 attendees;
 - One public survey, with different survey branches designed to reach residents, business owners, commercial property owners, and past and prospective visitors, with a total of 705 responses (70% of responses came from full-time and seasonal residents!); and
 - 25-30 intercept Interviews with visitors and residents at two large events – the Ice Dragon Boat Race (Feb. 11, 2023) and Winterfest (Feb. 18, 2023).

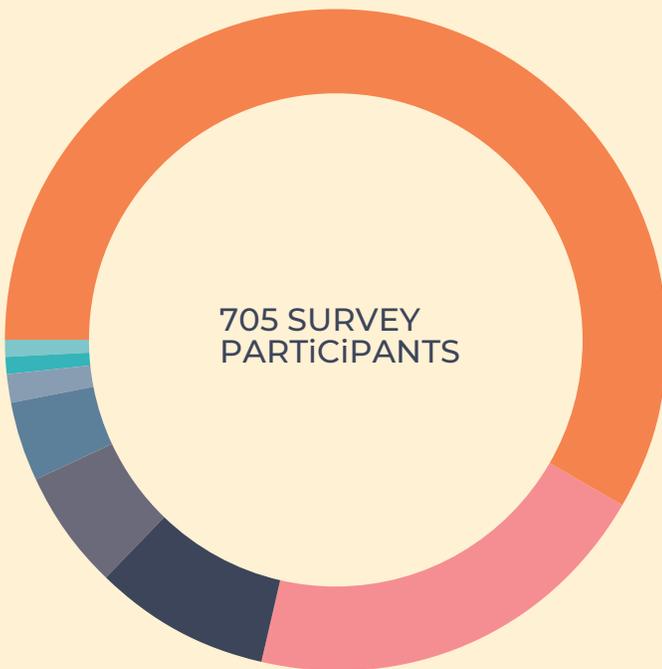
Overall, more than 827 people were engaged to inform the DLMP over an eight-week period, which is equivalent to roughly five per cent of the resident population. This high response rate within such a brief timeframe illustrates how much the community cares about tourism.

LOOKING AT THE DATA

OVERALL DEMOGRAPHICS

What does survey data collected in the DLMP development process say about the local tourism sector? Here's a snapshot of the insights gleaned!

THERE WERE A TOTAL OF 705 SURVEY PARTICIPANTS, WHO IDENTIFIED AS:

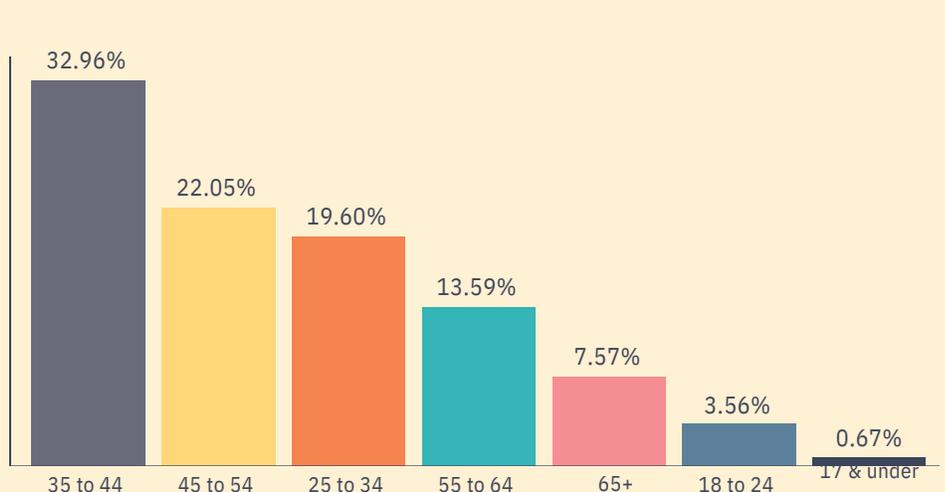


Full-time Sylvan Lake residents	58.44%
Past or prospective visitors	20.28%
Seasonal Sylvan Lake residents	8.65%
People who live near Sylvan, but not in Town	5.8%
Sylvan Lake business owner	3.97%
People who work in Sylvan Lake, but live elsewhere	1.28%
Owner of land or commercial space in Sylvan Lake	0.85%
Nearby business owners	0.71%

TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME BEFORE TAX

\$150,000 or more	22.49%
\$100,000 — \$149,999	19.38%
\$75,000 — \$99,999	12.03%
\$50,000 — \$74,999	9.13%
\$25,000 — \$49,999	5.79%
0 — \$24,999	3.12%

SURVEY RESPONDENTS AGES RANGE

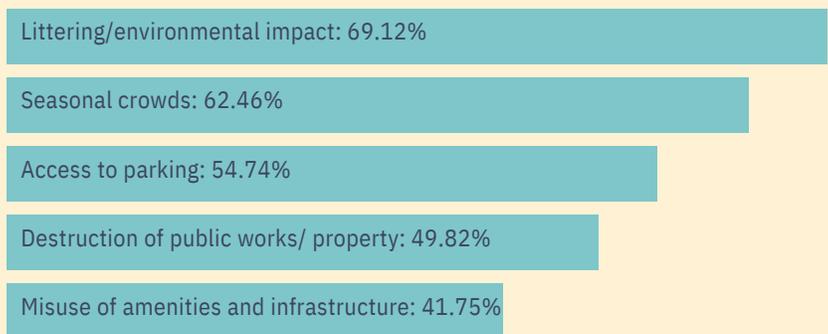


Sylvan Lake residents say...

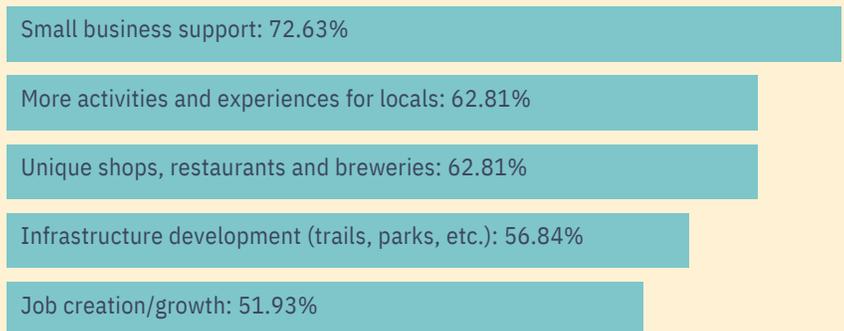
THE TOWN IS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE,

- 83.16% ACCESS TO THE LAKE
- 77.89% SMALL TOWN VIBE
- 57.19% LOCATION
- 49.12% COMMUNITY SERVICES
- 46.67% PUBLIC SPACES
- 42.11% FAMILY-FRIENDLINESS
- 28.07% STANDARD OF LIVING
- 17.89% COST OF LIVING
- 11.23% OTHER
- 9.12% WORK/CAREER OPPORTUNITIES
- 4.56% BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES



THE TOWN CAN BENEFIT FROM



THE TOP THREE PRIORITIES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED ON A MUNICIPAL LEVEL

1. TOURISM
 - MANAGEMENT AND IMPACT
2. COMMUNITY SAFETY AND POLICING
3. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS AND CLEANLINESS

WHERE RESIDENTS WHO ARE CURRENTLY WORKING IN TOURISM ARE EMPLOYED

- 40% Food and Beverage
 - restaurants, fast food, pubs, bars, snack shops
- 20% Accommodation
 - hotels, motels, B&Bs, camp areas
- 20% Recreation and Entertainment
 - performing art, museums, parks, spectator sports, festivals/events, attractions
- 13.33% Retail
 - stores selling merchandise, clothing, souvenirs
- 13.33% Travel Services
 - provisions of travel arrangements and/or reservations, group/guided tours, destination marketing

WOULD LIKE TO SEE DOWNTOWN SYLVAN LAKE ENHANCED WITH

- Pedestrian-friendly areas
- Improved traffic & parking measures
- Supports for local businesses
- Better waste management (garbage, recycling)
- Renewed building appearance
- More greenery

Sylvan Lake business owners say...

The untapped business opportunities for Sylvan Lake's downtown are:

- Hosting destination events, such as weddings and sports tournaments.
- Providing small buses for transportation to tourist attractions and other urban centres.
- Offering bike, scooter or e-scooter rentals.
- Developing a great shopping district and events space.
- Offering various tours around the town and Central Alberta.
- Encouraging healthy and active lifestyles and promoting fresh food options.
- Adding water slides and equipment rentals for activities near the beach.
- Providing incentives for property owners to develop innovative uses for empty and under-used spaces.
- Encouraging and supporting diverse locally-owned businesses, instead of chains.
- Emphasizing the use of local ingredients to reduce reliance on imports.
- Increasing accessible live music and organizing events for young people.
- Adding residential density in the downtown core.
- Extending operational hours for businesses during busy times.

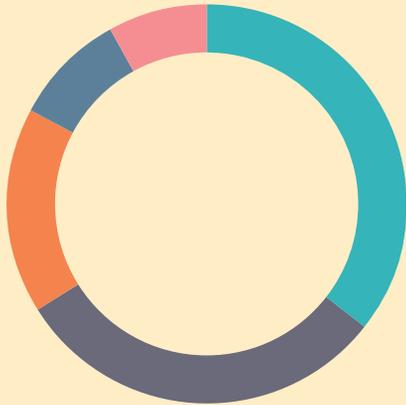
THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES THAT BUSINESSES WILL FACE (2023)

66.67%
 increasing operational costs
 wages, food costs, training,
 insurance
 37.50%
 Labour issues
 recruitment, retention, high pay :
 expectations, skills mismatch

29.17%
 Weak economic conditions in Canada
 25%
 Supply chain constraints
 16.67%
 Cost of travel
 airfares, gas prices, room rates

Past and prospective visitors to Sylvan Lake say....

WHEN VISITING A BEACH DESTINATION IN ALBERTA OR B.C., THE MAJORITY OF THEIR TRAVEL BUDGET IS PLANNED FOR:



- 70.39% Food and drink
- 59.87% Hotels or short-term rentals
- 32.89% Shops and boutiques
- 17.76% Rentals and equipment
- 15.79% Transportation

FOR A WEEKEND GETAWAY, THEY HAVE AN AVERAGE TRAVEL BUDGET OF:

\$0 TO \$499

44.08%

\$500 TO \$999

43.42%

\$1,000 TO \$2,499

11.18%

\$2,500 OR MORE

1.32%

THE EXISTING EXPERIENCES AND AMENITIES THAT INSPIRE VISITORS TO PLAN OVERNIGHT VISITS WITHIN ALBERTA ARE:

Beach: 79.61%

Lake activity (boating, fishing): 64.47%

Unique experiences (brewery tour, culinary activity): 51.97%

Trail system: 48.03%

One-of-a-kind shops and boutiques: 46.05%

DECIDING FACTORS FOR WEEKEND EXPERIENCES DURING THE SPRING, FALL AND WINTER INCLUDE:

Outdoor activities: 76.32%

Special events: 51.97%

Foodie experiences: 44.08%

Unique experiences (brewery tour, culinary activity): 41.45%

One-of-a-kind shops and boutiques: 36.18%

THE TRAITS AND ATTRACTIONS THAT VISITORS ENJOY THE MOST ABOUT THE TOWN ARE:

The beach

The lake

Lakeside walking trail

The vacation ambiance

The unique restaurants and shops

Their family ties

The local events and festivals

THE OPPORTUNITIES THEY SEE FOR IMPROVEMENT ARE:

ADDITIONAL ARTS AND MUSIC EVENTS AND FESTIVALS

EXPANDED AND MORE ACCESSIBLE BEACH

DAY RENTALS FOR ACTIVITIES

BETTER PARKING MANAGEMENT

MORE UNIQUE

HOSPITALITY OPTIONS

A BAN ON TENTS

AND BARBECUES ON THE BEACH

VOICES & PERSPECTIVES HEARD

There is limited publicly-owned infrastructure available for watercraft, and no public boat launch within town limits.

Visit Sylvan Lake (VSL) brand has not been physically operationalized throughout the town.

Downtown lacks a visible and palpable identity, which impedes its success as a tourism asset.

Parking spaces are not well distributed.

There is a gap in place-based activations (programming, placemaking) that echo the charm, heritage, stories and people.

There are limitations to the use and appeal of existing infrastructure (Pogadl Park, Pocket Park, Centennial Park, Sylvan Lake Park/Baby Beach, Lakefront Park, Lighthouse Park, Festival St., library parking lot).

There is a lack of designated parking for RVs, buses, boat trailers, etc.

There is a lack of place-based initiatives/installations that showcase local Indigenous culture and perspective.

Public art and installations in Sylvan Lake lack strategic thought and interactivity.

There is a lack of attractive, inclusive and interactive heritage designations and storytelling initiatives/installations around

There is a lack of comprehensive wayfinding and signage that connects major assets and attractions throughout the town.

There is no uniquely dedicated and active year-round visitors centre.

There is a lack of visitor information infrastructure.

There is a lack of harmonized aesthetics that embodies and demonstrates a unique sense of place.

Major attractions and visitor services do not adhere to comprehensive accessibility standards.

Town infrastructure lacks walkability and cyclability.

VOICES & PERSPECTIVES HEARD

There is an opportunity to enhance information-sharing channels, whereby the Town can provide the community with updates about tourism-related initiatives, opportunities and investments.

There is a gap in accessible and inclusive engagement channels for community rights holders and visitors to participate actively in the conversation in tourism-related decision-making.

Knowledge, funding and communications barriers prevent community participation and investment in tourism-related initiatives.

There are no Public-Private-Community Partnership (PPCP) strategies currently in place for capital pooling and investment in destination development.

The current organizational structure disconnects tourism-related initiatives from one another; there is a lack of intradepartmental collaboration at the Town level to maximize the impacts of community-centric tourism and destination development initiatives.

The Town's tourism team is not always consulted or involved in cross-departmental initiatives with tourism connections or implications, preventing VSL from being an active partner in positioning actions for tourism growth, or taking on a leadership capacity in the destination's evolution.

There is limited VSL staff capacity to effectively lead and carry out the DLMP implementation plan and actively leverage strategic partnership opportunities.

There are no systems in place for ongoing tourism-related data collection.

A lack of physical infrastructure, resources and tools—including funding—hinders the successful implementation of the DLMP.

Current policies and bylaws do not effectively facilitate community-centric practice in tourism development.

There is a gap in preparedness within the Town and among tourism experiences and services to address the needs of an ever-more culturally diverse visitor base.

VOICES & PERSPECTIVES HEARD

The purpose of VSL marketing and communication channels, and Town of Sylvan Lake marketing and communication channels should be further distinguished.

There is a fractured approach to marketing and promotion.

There is a lack of collaborative marketing and sales opportunities between the Town and local & regional partners.

There is a limited view of marketing as a promotional activity, which misses key components such as program- and place-based activations.

There is a lack of trip planning tools available via Sylvan Lake channels.

There is a lack of calls to action within marketing activities.

There is limited budget and capacity for effective destination marketing.

There is no dedicated events marketing strategy.

There is a lack of cohesion in the customer journey that connects all points of visitor interactions.

The Municipality views VSL as a “communications channel,” rather than recognizing and enabling Visit Sylvan Lake’s growth potential, ability to influence visitor consumer behaviour, ability to showcase local and authentic sense of place and culture, and future potential for revenue generation.

PRESENT STATE DESTINATION ASSESSMENT

This Section analyzes Sylvan Lake's current destination characteristics from 2023 to 2025 as a starting point to future destination growth. By looking backward, the path forward becomes clearer, learning from the past and building on the existing foundation of success.

Geographically, Sylvan Lake benefits from a central location between Calgary and Edmonton and is just 20 minutes from Red Deer. It is the only lakeside urban center in Alberta, making it a natural draw for regional visitors, particularly in the summer. With a population of over 16,000, the town is a key player in Central Alberta's tourism network and is part of the Olds to Lacombe Tourism Development Zone (TDZ) supported by Travel Alberta.

Economically, while exact tourism revenue data for Sylvan Lake is lacking, indicators suggest a significant impact. The town hosts an estimated 800,000 out-of-town visitors annually, contributing around \$27.2 million to the local economy. Parking fees alone generated over \$500,000 in 2023. This suggests tourism is already an economic driver, though more precise, consistent data is needed to inform planning.

In terms of tourism infrastructure, Sylvan Lake offers a mix of accommodations: five midscale hotels (214 rooms), over 200 active short-term rentals, and nearly 400 campground sites, including future expansions at Pogadl Park. Hotel and campground occupancy during summer is high—between 80–85%, and short-term rentals average 72% occupancy—indicating strong seasonal demand.

A Destination Readiness Framework has been developed to assess Sylvan Lake's capacity as a tourism destination. This framework categorizes destination readiness into four levels: Local Host, Regional Host, Provincial/National Host, and Global Host. Each level reflects increasing tourism maturity and capacity.

Currently, Sylvan Lake functions as a Local Host, able to attract day-trippers and weekend visitors from nearby communities. Its existing infrastructure—especially the downtown core and lakefront—creates a foundation for tourism, but there are gaps. These include limited year-round tourism products, a lack of weather-independent experiences, and inconsistent visitor services (e.g., business hours, customer service standards, and storefront aesthetics).

To progress toward becoming a Regional Host, Sylvan Lake must enhance its tourism offerings and extend the visitor experience beyond peak summer. This includes more diverse and high-quality accommodations, improved culinary and retail experiences, and better support for entrepreneurship. Key gaps include a lack of coordination among businesses, uneven product development, and insufficiencies within the town's tourism leadership.

Sylvan Lake has the location, infrastructure, and visitor base to support its tourism ambitions and will need to focus on investment in experience development, capacity building, and strategic annual planning to become a premier year-round destination.

VISION FOR DESTINATION GROWTH

Sylvan Lake's 10-year tourism vision positions Sylvan Lake as Central Alberta's premier, inclusive, and vibrant destination—welcoming visitors of all ages and abilities while safeguarding the town's cultural identity and natural environment. This vision is built around the idea that tourism should serve the community's long-term quality of life, sustainability, and sense of place.

The DLMP provides strategic direction for transforming Sylvan Lake into a leading year-round tourism destination over the next decade through a structured and flexible roadmap toward sustainable tourism leadership. This vision is grounded in community input, strategic alignment with provincial and national goals, and a detailed readiness assessment tailored specifically for Sylvan Lake.

Importantly, this journey is not seen as a straight line from a "Local Host" to a "National Host." Instead, it's described as cyclical—marked by ongoing adaptation, investment, and innovation. The DLMP recognizes that destinations evolve through continuous learning and incremental change rather than linear progression.

Outcome and Impact Statements (OIS) form the backbone of this strategy. They describe what tangible success will look like across key areas like the lakefront, downtown, environmental management, cultural vibrancy, and accessibility. For example, the plan envisions a lakefront that balances recreation with ecological preservation, and a downtown that reflects local charm while drawing diverse foot traffic. Several enhancements are envisioned: visual and physical connections to the lake will be strengthened, downtown aesthetics will be improved, and lake access will be redesigned to be both multifunctional and environmentally sustainable. Year-round use of public spaces will be encouraged, and festivals and public art will play a key role in creating a distinct sense of place.

The plan also embraces small but meaningful changes—coined "small big changes"—to build a resilient tourism foundation. These include upgrading park infrastructure, enhancing walkability, and using adaptable fixtures and furniture to make public spaces more inclusive and dynamic.

Strategically, the DLMP aligns with broader tourism priorities: environmental stewardship, inclusive economic growth, and equity. It supports initiatives like anti-racism, cultural preservation, and stronger partnerships with Indigenous communities. It also seeks to grow Sylvan Lake's tourism leadership role through partnerships, cross-regional collaboration, and thoughtful storytelling.

By integrating environmental care, community well-being, and strategic investment, Sylvan Lake aims to become a model destination that reflects its unique identity and values, while expanding its appeal across Alberta and beyond.



10-YEAR TOURISM VISION

Connect, Inspire and Be the Force of Good With and In the Community

In the heart of Central Alberta, Sylvan Lake emerges as a premier, **year-round** destination for **one-day and multi-day visits**, welcoming visitors of **all** ages, abilities, and origins from across the province and beyond. Visitors seek to experience the town's **unique blend of local lake town charm and vibrant culture**.

Harnessing its unique qualities and strategic location, Sylvan Lake continues to grow as the **magnet attraction for experiencing Central Alberta's** local charms and tastes in one cohesive experience. It stands as a leader and trendsetter for tourism initiatives in the region.

Sylvan Lake's tourism leadership—Visit Sylvan Lake—has leveraged tourism as a catalyst for **sustainable community economic development** and has set a data-driven tourism development model. The Town incubates open **innovations and collaborations**, placing **community quality of life and leadership, environmental stewardship, and equitable sharing** of tourism's benefits at the forefront of tourism decision-making.

Tourism operations have established **a strong local industry**, collaborating **closely with the Town administration** to boost visitation and **public, private and community partnership and investment**. Offering **authentic and iconic experiences**, they provide unique ways to connect visitors to the lake and the natural surroundings that sustain the community, to places that define its charm, and to people and stories that **differentiate** Sylvan Lake as a place to visit and as a community to belong to. Sylvan Lake flourishes as an inclusive community for living, visiting, working, investing, creating, and playing.

GOALS & OUTCOMES

The backbone of the DLMP's action plan are forty four Outcome & Impact Statements (IOS) that serve as the goals for the community's tourism development. Success and strategic decision making can be assessed through these guidelines for meeting the 10-year vision for destination growth in Sylvan Lake.

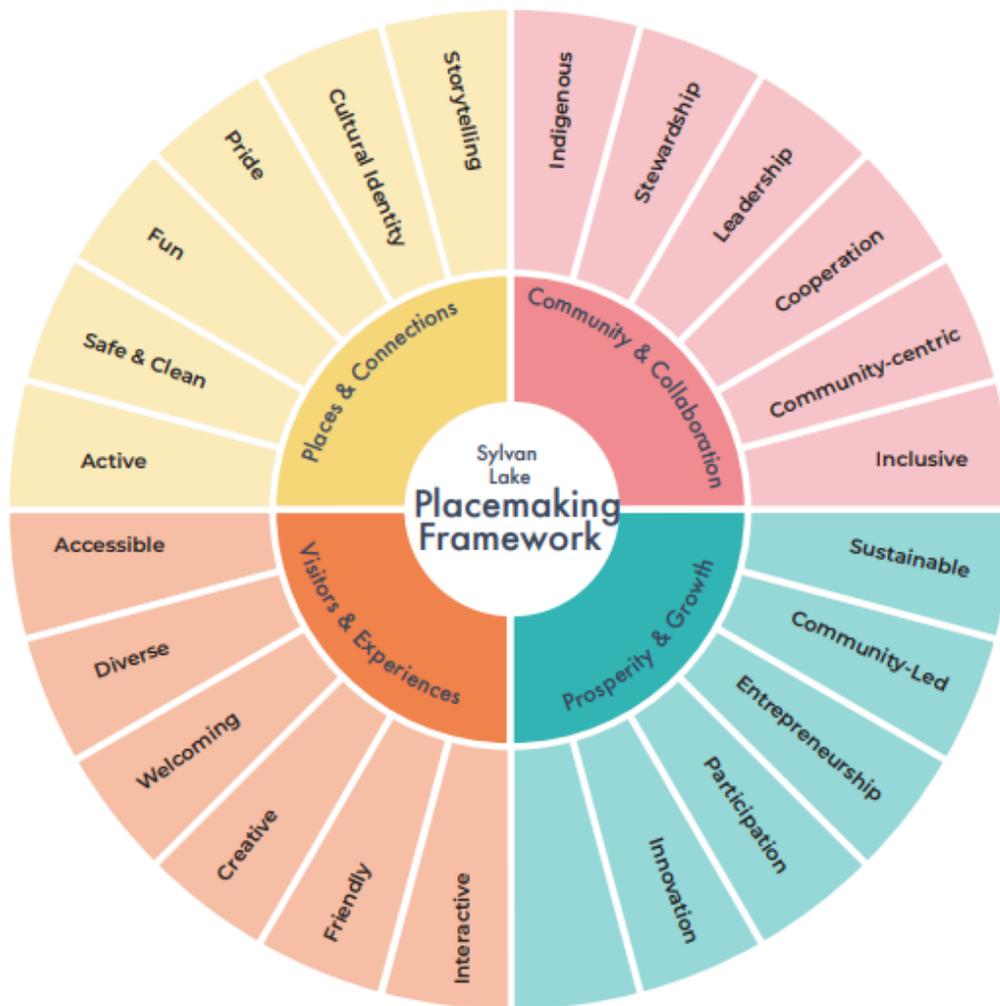
- OIS.1** **The natural appeal** of the water's edge is improved, maintaining the lake as the prime component of the town character: an iconic natural attraction, and a key reason for the uniqueness of the lake experience the town offers.
- OIS.2** **Key visual corridors** to and from the lake are improved, and the sense of connection to the lake is extended through the whole town.
- OIS.3** **Access to water** is reenvisioned and enables multifunctionality while adhering to environmental sustainability.
- OIS.4** Lakefront and beach hosts uses, **functions and experiences** that are **adaptable** and inherently **connected to/unique to** the lake experience, and are **appealing** during peak seasons **for all**.
- OIS.5** All Lakefront uses and experiences embrace **responsible practices** and a strict commitment to minimizing ecological impact.
- OIS.6** **Downtown and lakefront streetscapes and their overall ambiance** are uplifted, engaging a diversity of foot traffic and reflecting the unique sense of place for which Sylvan Lake is renown.
- OIS.7** There is a sense of **harmonized aesthetics** and a distinct sense of place throughout the whole town, reflecting the unique local vibe and the essence of a small, connected and vibrant lakeside community.
- OIS.8** Residents and visitors move effortlessly, enjoying easy **access to and from downtown**, services across town and **major attractions**.
- OIS.9** Major **attractions, visitor experiences, visitor-related facilities** and **supporting services** in downtown and lakefront area, as well as across the town, are **clearly defined and easily navigable** from main access points to the town, key intersections and visitor hot spots.

- OIS.10** There is a notable enhancement in Sylvan Lake’s **walkability and cyclability**
- OIS.11** Sylvan Lake and its offerings are **accessible to all**, and can be experienced **safely** and seamlessly by everyone.
- OIS.12** Sylvan Lake sees a significantly enhanced **accommodation quality**, with every stay elevated by excellent customer service, reaching new heights of comfort and charm.
- OIS.13** There is a year-round active **visitor information hub**.
- OIS.14** A variety of other **visitor management assets** are integrated throughout the town.
- OIS.15** A well-established **network of supporting services** elevates visitors’ experiences, safety, health and security **year-round**.
- OIS.16** Through authentic, **Indigenous-led, place-based initiatives and experiences**, people have fostered a deep understanding of Indigenous history and perspectives and a deep connection to the water and land.
- OIS.17** **Emerging and existing** entrepreneurs have a clear development pathway and comprehensive support from the Town tourism leadership to **start and/or grow** their **visitor-related businesses**.
- OIS.18** **Downtown** Sylvan Lake has attracted a **diverse mix of retailers and local makers**, creating a distinctive and vibrant vibe for foot traffic.
- OIS.19** A diverse array of **businesses beyond downtown** enhance Sylvan Lake’s unique local vibe and charm **through the whole town with its distinctive products and services**.
- OIS.20** A diverse range of local operations are **advanced market-ready**, with evidence of **collaboration and partnership** for market expansion and product diversification.
- OIS.21** **Downtown and throughout** Sylvan Lake has diversified into a **rich variety of experiences**, ensuring a consistent stream of things to do year round.
- OIS.22** Sylvan Lake hosts a number of **authentic Indigenous experiences** that are key to Sylvan Lake’s **brand differentiation**.

- OIS.23** Sylvan Lake’s tourism operators enjoy an **extended market reach of high value visitors** who are seeking an authentic **local vibe** and **community-centric & responsible recreational** experiences.
- OIS.24** The local tourism sector has attracted and continues to attract a **diverse workforce** from various demographic groups for **full-time, seasonal, and part-time positions**.
- OIS.25** Tourism operators and hospitality services have a **well-trained workforces** capable of providing **high-quality customer service** and personalized experiences to visitors, and are knowledgeable about cultural sensitivity and accessibility.
- OIS.26** **Town tourism leadership** actively facilitates a **diverse** range of one-day and multiple-day **paid visitor experiences and tourism products** for exploring Sylvan Lake.
- OIS.27** The local tourism sector has attracted and continues to attract a **diverse workforce** from various demographic groups for **full-time, seasonal, and part-time positions**.
- OIS.28** **Town-invested** and **co-invested** visitor experiences and attractions are strategically **distributed** and expanded **throughout the year and across Sylvan Lake** contributing to **reduced seasonal dependency** and more equitable sharing of tourism’s positive impacts.
- OIS.30** Diverse community rights holders actively **participate in tourism decision-making**, and local input has significantly influenced the development of new visitor experiences and capital investments aligned with community priorities.
- OIS.29** **Public and private recreational assets** (infrastructure and experiences) are strategically utilized to **diversify and enrich offerings** for high-value visitors, and year-round activation.
- OIS.31** There are numerous **accessible pathways** and opportunities for community rights holders to **engage, build partnerships**, and co-invest with the Town in tourism development initiatives, and the outcome of these initiatives is key to **Sylvan Lake’s brand differentiation**.
- OIS.32** There are a number of well-established **grassroots groups** that have **diversified their revenue sources** through active engagement in **visitor-related services and experiences** and are on the pathway to financial self-sustainability.

- OIS.33** The Town tourism leadership has **enhanced its capacity for facilitating** and enabling community-centric **pathways for capital pooling and co-investment** in destination development.
- OIS.34** The Town tourism leadership has an **established organizational, operational, and leadership capacity** to implement DLMP recommendations and acts as the **driving force** behind the **community economic development** of Sylvan Lake through tourism.
- OIS.35** The Town tourism leadership is recognized as Visit Sylvan Lake, the entity. Visit Sylvan Lake **key player** in **Central Alberta's destination brand** and a prominent regional leader in **community-centric sustainable tourism development**.
- OIS.36** Comprehensively-collected **local data** informs tourism development decisions and investments, with findings from studies used to **monitor tourism impacts** on community well-being and the **performance of implementing DLMP's** recommendations.
- OIS.37** **Potentially significant environmental impacts of tourism development projects** on the lake watershed ecosystem is being monitored through **cross-municipal collaboration**.
- OIS.38** Diverse **local rights holders understand** the direct and indirect **impacts** of tourism development in their community, and actively support and **participate** in collecting data to inform tourism impact assessment.
- OIS.39** There are **multiple year-round Town-managed channels** that play a critical role in both visitor behaviour management and enriching the experiences of diverse visitors throughout their **entire customer journey**, from initial trip planning to their actual visit and even after they've left.
- OIS.40** Diverse target groups consistently enjoy **exceptional customer experiences** when engaging **with Town tourism products and offerings**, whether as **visitors, vendors, partners**.
- OIS.41** The **Visit Sylvan Lake online platform** has evolved into an inclusive, user-friendly, and accessible **multifaceted interface** for visitor information, trip planning, marketing and entrepreneurship support.

- OIS.42** Visit **Sylvan Lake** is a **recognized brand** and **entity** among **Albertans**, positioned as a unique destination in **Central Alberta**.
- OIS.43** Local residents, operations and visitors are **aware of the environmental significance** of the **Lake and other natural assets**, and **responsible practices** are well-established, accepted and practiced among **locals and non-locals**.
- OIS.44** **Sentiment and community buy-in** towards tourism is significantly improved among residents and community groups.



ECONOMIC IMPACT PROJECTIONS

An estimated 966,000 visitors visited Sylvan Lake in 2024, expected to grow to 1.3 million by 2034. Initially, growth is largely attributable to day trippers. In the later years of the plan (2030-3034), the destination will be more attractive to overnight visitors, so while day trip visitors continue to increase steadily on an annual basis, the overnight visitor segment will begin to grow at a more rapid rate. Here's the dollars and cents of it all:

	2024	From 2025 - 2034 (Cumulative)
GDP generated by visitor spending	\$44.9 million	\$606 million
FTEs supported by tourism economic activity	608	8,435
Collective earnings - direct labour income (tourism)	\$26.4 million	\$368 million
Municipal taxes generated by tourism economic activity	\$1.3 million	\$18 million

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ACTION PLAN

Designed to ensure that Sylvan Lake can move from vision to reality in its goal of becoming a sustainable, year-round tourism destination, the action plan of the DLMP uses a phased approach, building on a solid foundation of deliberate, achievable steps to growth to chart Sylvan Lake's tourism future. It translates 8 key strategic directions and priorities into a detailed roadmap of steps, progression, and resource needs. A summarized shortlist is included here.

- S5-D1** **Embrace placemaking as a comprehensive framework for approaching public art, beautification, activation and wayfinding as interconnected solutions to Sylvan Lake's destination development, further supported by design, planning and policy interventions.**
- PC-DDP-1.** Maintain the visual, emotional and perceptual connections to the lake for the whole town.
- PC-DDP-2.** Invest in the enhancements of infrastructure, amenities and facilities connected to the lake experience.
- PC-DDP-3.** Use placemaking to enhance the infrastructure of underutilized or unused open public spaces, Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPs) and vacant lots for recreational experience development (in particular, iconic events).
- PC-DDP-4.** Enhance the visitor experience for pedestrians and cyclists throughout the town
- PC-DDP-5.** Invest in adding, redistributing and refining wayfinding infrastructure to enhance visibility and create connections between parking, walkable routes, town attractions and supporting services.
- PC-DDP-6.** Use placemaking to reflect and promote the local stories, history and legacy throughout the town, while creating visitor attractions.
- PC-DDP-7.** Customize a community-centric Placemaking Framework for Public Art.

S5-D2 Invest in downtown revitalization to improve attractiveness and create a harmonious and engaging experience throughout.

- PC-DR-1.** Invest in harmonising the visual and architectural aesthetics to reflect the essence of the Visit Sylvan Lake brand: a small, connected and vibrant lakeside community.
- PC-DR-2.** Invest in the improvements and enhancements of downtown infrastructure, amenities and facilities.
- PC-DR-3.** Enable activation strategies to encourage business piloting, and starting small and adaptive (incrementalism).
- PC-DR-4.** Implement measures that encourage the use of vacant spaces and the adaptive reuse and repurposing of retail & commercial spaces, downtown.
- PC-DR-5.** Define a regional/provincial campaign to attract prospective entrepreneurs.
- PC-DR-6.** Define internal strategies with relevant departments to assess tourism considerations and applications of infrastructure needs and projects.

S5-D3 Leverage placemaking, downtown revitalization and program-based activations for effective visitor management.

- PC-VM-1.** Implement creative solutions to peak-season parking challenges and future high-demand periods.
- PC-VM-2.** Implement shuttle connections to, from and within Sylvan Lake.
- PC-VM-3.** Improve interpretation of wayfinding, placemaking and visitor information assets.
- PC-VM-4.** Enhance Visitor Information hubs.
- PC-VM-5.** Enhance accessible experiences and connections.
- PC-VM-6.** Enhance accessibility in tourism businesses and service.

SECTION 8

PC-VM-7. Use festivals and events to encourage visitor traffic beyond the lakefront and downtown.

PC-VM-8. Use wayfinding and placemaking to influence visitor behaviour.

PC-VM-9. Use community programming to influence visitor behaviour.

S6-D1 **Invest in ongoing Town-led, co-led and Town-enabled tourism product diversification and expansion, increasing year-round visitor spending and enhancing the visitor experience.**

VE-PDE-1. Expand VSL's capacity for product development.

VE-PDE-2. Showcase the practice of cultural diversity, accessibility and environmental sustainability in VSL product development

VE-PDE-3. Expand capacity for non-weather-dependent products and experiences, to enhance local tourism sector resiliency and sustainability.

VE-PDE-4. Enhance VSL's capacity to evaluate emerging product development opportunities.

VE-PDE-5. Invest in supporting local recreational facilities and venues to attract small-scale business events, meetings and retreats.

VE-PDE-6. Enhance Town capacity for supporting, co-facilitating and co-investment in events with external organizers, utilizing Sylvan Lake private and public recreational facilities, amenities and services

VE-PDE-7. Invest in establishing Sylvan Lake as a host or co-host for sport, leisure and cultural events, focusing on shoulder season opportunities.

VE-PDE-8. Invest in facilitating Indigenous land-based experiences, using Sylvan Lake's natural assets and recreational infrastructure.

VE-PDE-9. Invest in VSL-led packaged experiences, in collaboration with local industry and grassroots community groups, activating underutilized town assets.

SECTION 8

- VE-PDE-10.** Activate the town's assets (public and private) via VSL-led events, festivals and tournaments in different seasons, targeting high-value markets.
- VE-PDE-11.** Invest and co-invest in creating an iconic festival (series) that positions Sylvan Lake as the gem of Central Alberta.
- VE-PDE-12.** Pilot a VSL leadership structure for community events.

S6-D2 **Establish a multi-faceted tourism entrepreneurship support system, using a community-centric approach, to enable high-quality, year-round visitor experiences within the local industry**

- VE-EBS-1.** Launch a pilot of the Tourism Partnership Accelerator (TPA), as the evolution of the existing Tourism Partnership Program (TPP) and an amalgamation of various Town-led business support initiatives—Tourism Experience Incubator (TEDI), Tourism Experience Development Program (TED), the Façade Improvement Grant and the Recreation Culture & Tourism Micro Grant.
- VE-EBS-2.** Establish the 'Capacity Building for Product Development' component of the TPA that accommodates availability and varying stages of market preparedness.
- VE-EBS-3.** Establish the 'Testing and Piloting' component of the TPA.
- VE-EBS-4.** Integrate VSL online channels (i.e., website, social media) as part of the TPA.
- VE-EBS-5.** Conduct regular evaluations of the TPA's performance to understand impacts on visitor experience development.
- VE-EBS-6.** Enhance, advance and refine the TPA program

S6-D3 Invest in expanding VSL organic and paid marketing efforts, to increase regional brand awareness, influence visitor behaviour, enhance community buy-in to tourism efforts, and attract high-value visitors year-round.

- VE-M-1.** Invest in enhancing the Visit Sylvan Lake web platform
- VE-M-2.** Invest in enhancing VSL's e-mail marketing and communications capabilities, to strengthen year-round engagement and personalize messaging to unique audience segments and prospective partners.
- VE-M-3.** Develop a robust VSL Content Calendar, mapping-out content needs (photos, videos, text) for organic marketing activities on each VSL marketing platform (website, social media, B2B email newsletter, B2C email newsletter, Visitors' Guide).
- VE-M-4.** Develop theme-based itineraries that facilitate collaboration and partnership among local tourism and hospitality businesses.
- VE-M-5.** Invest in ongoing capture of polished and refined photo and video assets, featuring the lake town vibe throughout the seasons, and the diversity of the community & visitors.
- VE-M-6.** Develop organic campaigns and initiatives to encourage locals and visitors to share user-generated content (UGC).
- VE-M-7.** Develop an annual Campaign Calendar to schedule, manage and develop VSL marketing campaigns.
- VE-M-8.** Invest in developing VSL-branded tourism marketing campaigns, including organic and paid elements, focused on engaging and attracting the following market segments: High-value travellers; Small scale business events, meetings and retreats organizers; Sport and recreation clubs and organizations; and others, as value becomes apparent.
- VE-M-9.** Invest in developing VSL-branded marketing assets, campaigns and initiatives dedicated to influencing and managing visitor behaviour, and promoting responsible travel & tourism.

SECTION 8

- VE-M-10.** VE-M-10. Invest in developing VSL-branded marketing assets, campaigns and initiatives targeting entrepreneurship and local business development.
- VE-M-11.** VE-M-11. Develop organic and paid in-destination campaigns and initiatives to enhance community stewardship and local understanding of & involvement in the tourism sector.
- VE-M-12.** VE-M-12. Develop funnels for co-operative marketing investments from local and regional partners.
- VE-M-13.** VE-M-13. Expand VSL's capacity for tourism marketing.

S7-D1 Enable mechanisms to utilize tourism for building capacities in participatory decision-making, co-investment, partnerships, protect building, community cultural exchange, and environmental stewardship.

- CCS-CII-1.** Create accessible, inclusive and interactive information-sharing channels for updates about tourism-related initiatives, opportunities and investments.
- CCS-CII-2.** Create accessible and inclusive engagement channels for community rights holders and visitors to participate in tourism-related decision-making.
- CCS-CII-3.** Implement strategies to reduce barriers to participation, encourage active engagement and lower the risk of partnership and investment in tourism-related initiatives.
- CCS-CII-4.** Identify and implement community-centric strategies to encourage PPCP for capital pooling and investment in destination development.
- CCS-CII-5.** Invest in community-centric visitor management, and environmental & cultural stewardship.

S7-D2 Establish regulations, structure, processes and resources for effective destination leadership and management, specifically regarding organizational capacity, revenue, funding and co-investment models, bylaws and policies, collaboration, sustainability, and metrics reporting.

- CCS-DLM-1.** Invest in reenvisioning organizational roles, responsibilities and collaboration, and expanding the tourism team to lead community-centric tourism and destination development.
- CCS-DLM-2.** Invest in securing infrastructure, resources and tools for the tourism administration entity to implement the DLMP.
- CCS-DLM-3.** Adopt and/or refine policies related to the physical development of the town, to support the implementation of the DLMP.
- CCS-DLM-4.** Implement policy and practice to support the development of a multifunctional lakefront recreational zone (including Centennial Park, Sylvan Lake Park, Lighthouse Park and Lakefront Park), that prioritizes community appeal.
- CCS-DLM-5.** Implement policy and practice to facilitate a community-centric approach in tourism development.
- CCS-DLM-6.** Pursue government funding to subsidize projects as suggested in DLMP.
- CCS-DLM-7.** Create diverse revenue streams for tourism development investments, as recommended in the DLMP.
- CCS-DLM-8.** Utilize strategic partnerships with key tourism players at local and regional levels to realize the DLMP's vision for Sylvan Lake, to be a destination leader in Central Alberta.
- CCS-DLM-9.** Enhance existing policies, regulations and practices to manage and monitor the environmental impact of tourism development at a local level.
- CCS-DLM-10.** Initiate regional collaboration for environmental impact management of projects with potentially significant impacts on the lake's watershed ecosystem, using the Sylvan Lake Cumulative Effects Management System (CEMS) framework as a basis for directing efforts.

SECTION 8

- CCS-DLM-11** Develop guidelines and initiatives for environmentally sensitive practice & messaging in tourism product development and marketing.
- CCS-DLM-12** Implement a context-specific Tourism Impact Measurement Framework (TIM) aligned with DLMP priorities to understand, measure and monitor tourism economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts and to inform respective tourism decision-making.
- CCS-DLM-13.** Measure and monitor the outcomes of implementing DLMP recommendations, actions, and project deliverables to identify areas for improvement and inform subsequent actions.



VISIT Sylvan Lake

Destination Leadership & Management Plan Snapshot

**For questions about the Destination
Leadership & Management Plan:**

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