



Community Values Assessment for the M.D. of Pincher Creek No. 9

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

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**For:
The Southwest Alberta Sustainable Community Initiative
and
The Municipal District of Pincher Creek No. 9**

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Southwest Alberta Sustainable Community Initiative (SASCI), in collaboration with the Municipal District of Pincher Creek No. 9 (the MD), spearheaded a Community Values Assessment (CVA) intended to help the MD consider community values more effectively in decision-making and develop better practices for land use and land management. The goals of the CVA were to identify and assess community values related to the natural, social, and economic environment, to establish the relative priority of those values, and to determine the factors contributing to convergence and divergence in values in the MD. To assist with the CVA, SASCI contracted The Praxis Group™ (Praxis), to conduct a consultation process to engage a broad spectrum of residents in the MD.

Praxis designed a three-phase consultation process to meet the objectives for the CVA.

- The first phase of the process involved a random sample telephone survey of residents within the MD to identify commonly held values, conflicting values, and the level of importance of those values. Administered in June 2011, 332 (37%) households in the MD were surveyed.
- For the second phase of the consultation, five facilitated small group sessions with a diverse range of stakeholders from the MD were held in late June and early July 2011. The objectives of the small group sessions were to generate a prioritized inventory of community values, to solicit in-depth feedback from participants regarding the priority values identified, and to identify participants' expectations for the MD with regard to preserving and enhancing community values. A total of 29 stakeholders participated in the small group sessions.
- The third phase of the consultation process, conducted in September 2011, saw 16 participants from the small group sessions reconvening to review the findings from the first two phases of the consultation and to provide feedback regarding the next steps in the CVA process.

The CVA was conducted in 2011, and to some degree is a reflection of conditions and circumstances facing the community at that time. Although it is impossible to know how such circumstances have affected participant responses, it may be useful for the future reader to understand the nature of some of these circumstances. At the time of the CVA, the Government of Alberta was implementing a new land use planning process pursuant to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, and the land use plan governing the MD, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, was being drafted. There were various developments proposed on the landscape, including mining north of Burmis and logging in the Castle, as well as many ongoing activities, such as oil and gas development, tourism, and many forms of recreation. Property rights were a key issue for many landowners, and there was increasing subdivision pressure in parts of the region. A major recession occurred in 2008-2009, and the economy was recovering in 2010-2011. Over time, as circumstances continue to change, it will be important to ensure the collective understanding of community values remains current. In this regard, it is recommended the CVA findings be reviewed periodically and updated as appropriate.

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

Two documents were produced for the CVA process: *Community Values Assessment for the M.D. of Pincher Creek No. 9 (November 2011)*, a comprehensive report with the results from the three phases of consultation; and *Community Values Assessment Technical Appendix (February 2012)*, a technical report detailing the findings from the random sample telephone survey. Following are the summary highlights from the comprehensive report.

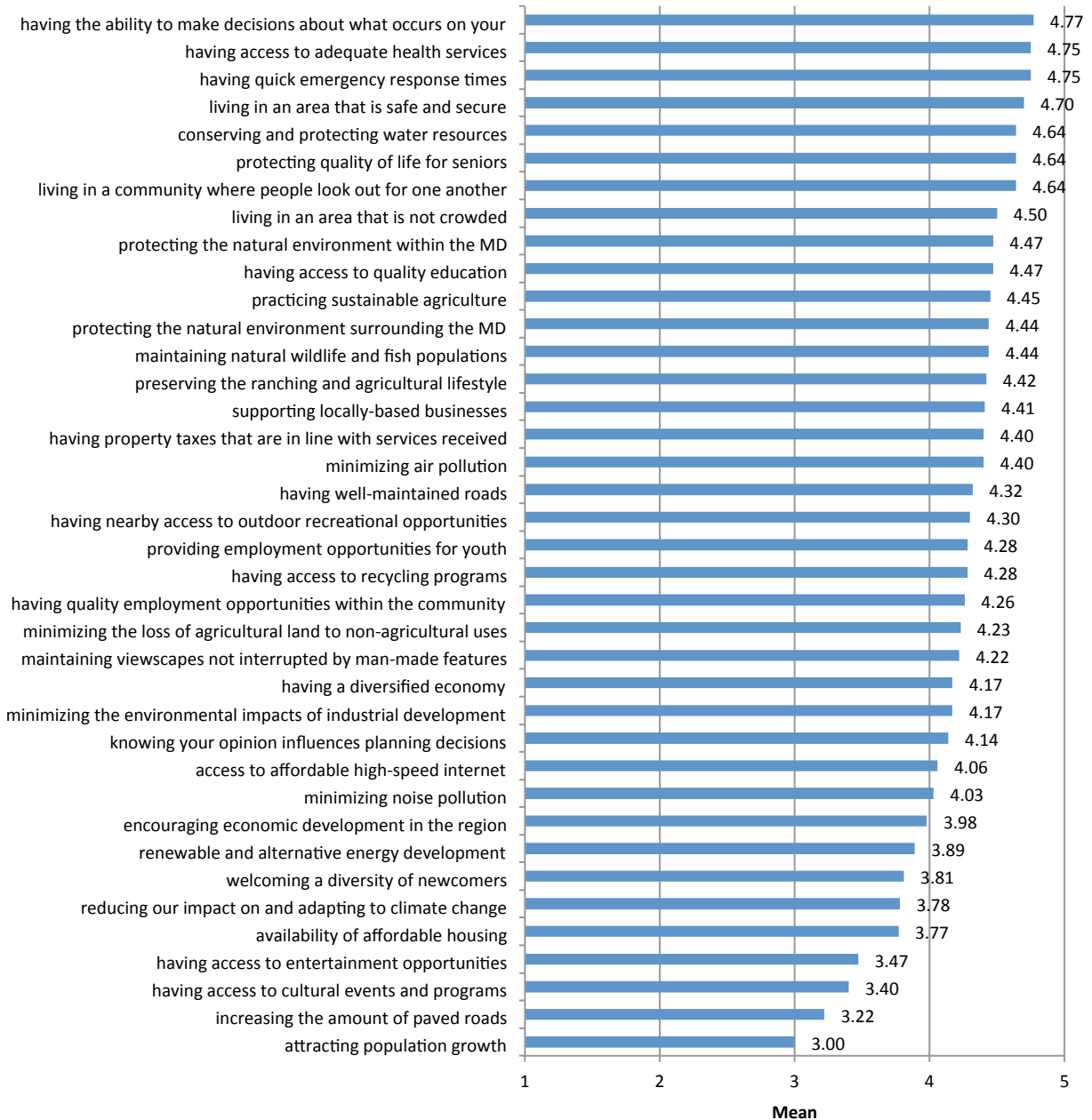
Random sample telephone survey results showed that residents in the MD of Pincher Creek place high value on the experience of community life in the MD, as well as the services and amenities available within the MD. The survey asked residents of the MD of Pincher Creek to rate the importance of 38 'value statements' and over half of the 15 most important 'value statements' were related to social aspects of the MD (*access to health services, quick emergency response times, safe and secure area, quality of life for seniors, people look out for one another, area is not crowded, access to quality education, ranching and agricultural lifestyle*). In addition, when survey participants were asked to indicate the best thing about living in the MD, *friendly and community-minded people, peace and quiet, and the rural lifestyle* placed second, third, and fourth respectively. Similarly, across all small group sessions, sense of community or the shared community experience, access to health care and education opportunities, the availability of community facilities and recreational infrastructure, and the qualities of the people living in the area emerged as vital and valued characteristics of the MD.

Both survey and group session participants recognized the natural environment as an important aspect of the MD and identified environmental conservation as a priority. Again, five of the 15 highest rated 'value statements' pertained to environmental conservation (*protecting the natural environment within the MD, conserving and protecting water resources, practicing sustainable agriculture, protecting the natural environment around the MD, and maintaining natural wildlife and fish populations*). Survey participants also strongly supported *setting aside land in an undisturbed state for habitat protection* as a land use option, and identified the *beautiful scenery* as the best thing about living in the MD. Consistent with the survey results, small group session participants spoke about the importance of: maintaining functioning ecosystems, conserving ecological diversity, sustaining wildlife habitat, saving native fescues and grasslands, maintaining land productivity, and protecting water resources.



The following figure presents telephone survey participants' ranking for 38 'value statements' from most important to least important. *Having the ability to make decisions about what occurs on your land* was rated as the most important of the 38 'value statements' followed closely by *having access to adequate health services and having quick emergency response times*.

FIGURE 1: WHAT RESIDENTS VALUE – RANKING IMPORTANCE FROM MOST TO LEAST IMPORTANT

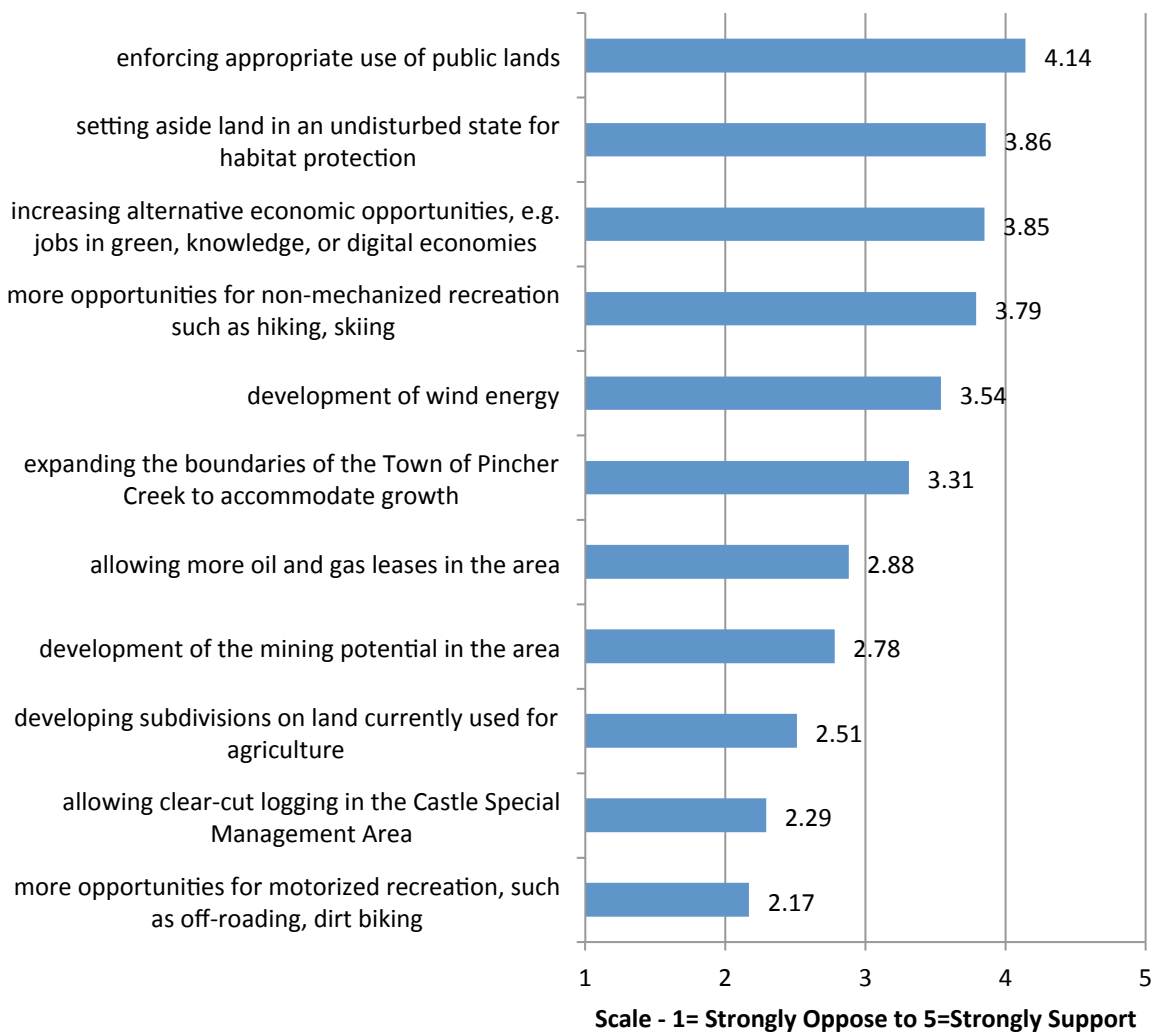


All of the above statements were also rated in terms of satisfaction on a 5-point scale. Comparing the mean scores for satisfaction and importance provides a measure of performance and can be used to identify priorities. The top five priorities for improvement are; *knowing your opinion influences planning decisions, providing employment opportunities for youth, having property taxes that are in line with services received, having the ability to make decisions about what occurs on your land and minimizing*

the loss of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. The items where performance expectations are currently being met (where there is minimal gap between satisfaction and importance) are; *having nearby access to outdoor recreational opportunities; minimizing noise pollution; having access to entertainment opportunities; having access to cultural events and programs; attracting population growth and increasing the amount of paved roads.*

Survey and small group participants generally agreed that *having ready access to a range of outdoor recreational opportunities* is a valued benefit of living in the MD, and survey respondents strongly supported *increasing non-motorized recreational opportunities*. That said, concern was raised in the small group sessions about the negative impacts of unrestricted recreational land use on public lands, and both sets of participants backed *enforcing appropriate use of public lands*. In this vein, when asked about land use options, telephone survey respondents were in greatest opposition to *increased opportunities for motorized recreation (OHVs, dirt bikes, etc.)*. Figure 2 shows telephone survey respondents' level of support for various land use options in the MD of Pincher Creek and its immediate environs.

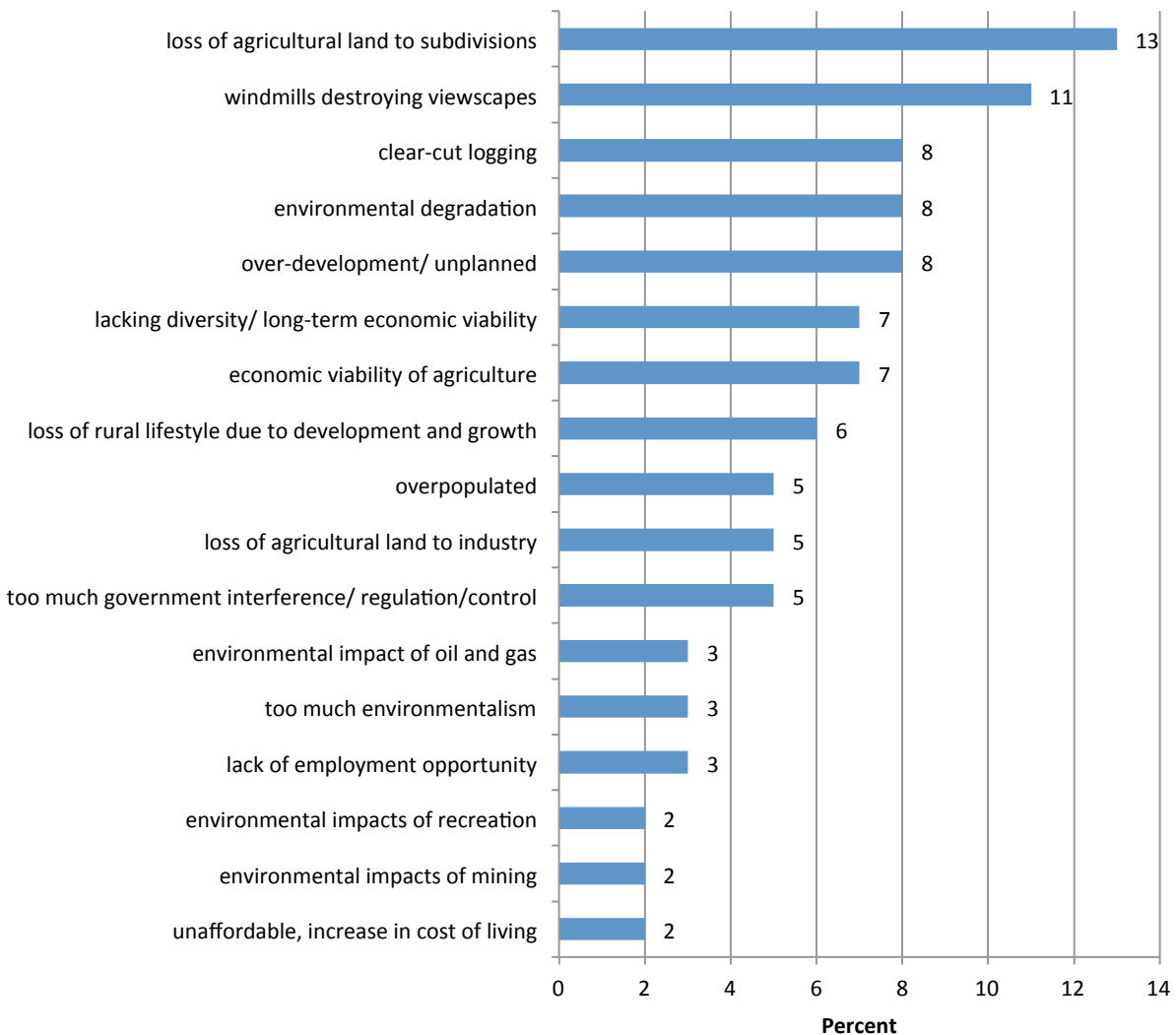
FIGURE 2: SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION FOR LAND USES



Survey respondents named *loss of agricultural land to subdivisions* as the foremost concern for their future in the MD, and *subdividing land currently used for agriculture* was opposed as a land use option. Likewise, individuals across all small group sessions largely agreed that minimizing future fragmentation of the land base and maintaining prime agricultural land should be priorities in the MD. Suggestions raised in the group sessions for minimizing landscape disruptions included designating areas suitable for subdivision, and restricting the number of acres eligible for subdivision. *Windmills destroying viewscapes* was identified as the second most significant concern for the future by survey participants. Although preserving the MD’s natural beauty and viewscapes was identified in the majority of small group sessions as a shared community value, participants acknowledged the conflicts and tradeoffs between unobstructed viewscapes, regional economic development, and support for green energy.

Figure 3 presents telephone survey participants’ most important concern for their future in the MD, from most important to least important. These categories are based on an unaided response to the statement “*the one concern I have about the future of the area is ...*”.

FIGURE 3: ONE CONCERN I HAVE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE AREA IS...



In the small group sessions, conversations regarding viewsapes and the subdivision of agricultural land gave rise to discussions related to landowner rights. In this context, participants noted that windmills have provided much needed income to ranchers and farmers, and although unobstructed viewsapes may be important to the broader community, some landowners want to maintain the ability to develop their property as they see fit. Further, some suggested that restrictions on the location and size of subdivisions may be unpopular among rural landowners.

Across all small group sessions, developing and maintaining a sustainable economy in the MD was seen as a priority and the need for economic diversification through entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation was acknowledged. In some sessions, participants talked about the importance of sustaining agricultural livelihoods and maintaining the agricultural way-of-life. When participants in the follow-up session were asked what type of development is appropriate in the MD, many said the focus should be on a knowledge-based economy and low-impact development that does not encroach on the MD's environment. Survey respondents strongly supported *farming/ranching*, *tourism/recreation* and *wind farms* as the most appropriate types of economic development in the MD. Figures 4 and 5 show the economic development telephone survey participants considered to be appropriate and inappropriate.

FIGURE 4: CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

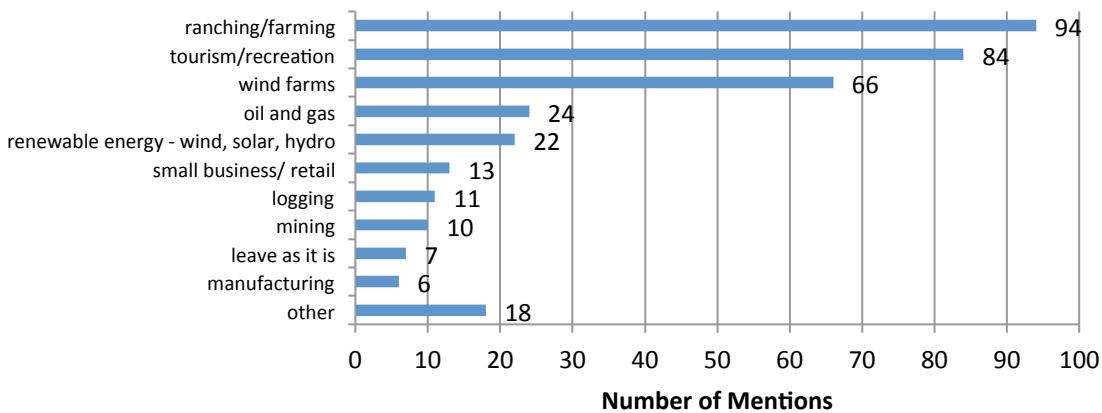
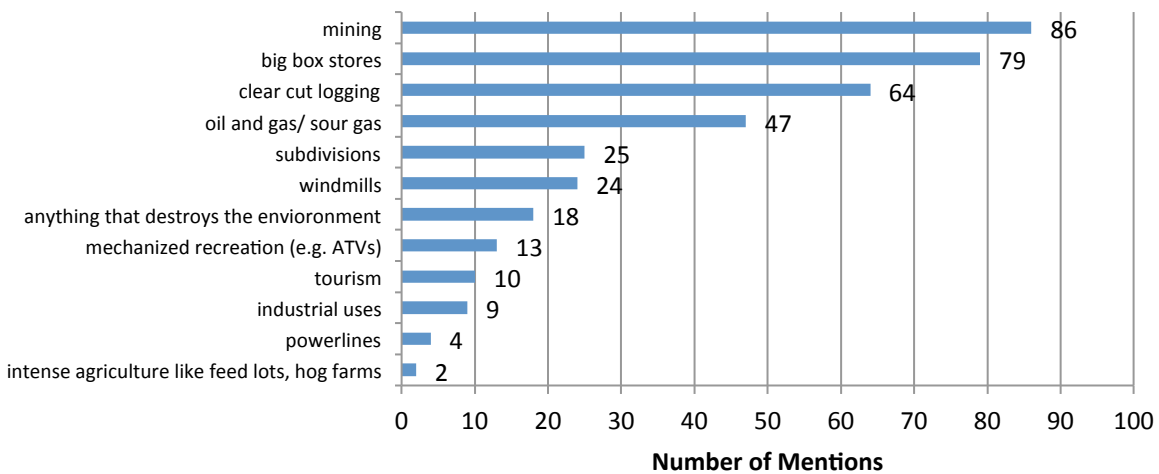


FIGURE 5: CONSIDERED INAPPROPRIATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



In each of the small group sessions, participants were asked what the expectations are for the MD in terms of preserving the priority values identified. Participants readily provided a range of directives for the MD, which have been included in the individual session summaries in the main report. That being said, it is worth noting that in all sessions, participants consistently called upon the MD to “act as the community’s voice” and proactively represent the interests of the community - particularly regarding land and environmental management - even if matters are outside of municipal jurisdiction.

