Fort McMurray

Community Profile
2006/07

Submitted to

and

By
Gabinet & Associates Inc.
August, 2006
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population and Anticipated Growth Patterns</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Force and Employment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Social Services</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Services</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary and Secondary Education</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort McMurray Public School District</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort McMurray Catholic School District</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary Education</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Services Department</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Services</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCMP</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire and EMS – Regional Emergency Services</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure and Municipal Services</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMWB &amp; Community Initiatives</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festivals of Fort McMurray</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interPlay Festival</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Community Initiatives</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services:</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Centre of Hope:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Fort McMurray is located 435 km northeast of Edmonton on Highway 63 surrounded by boreal forest and sitting at the confluence of the Athabasca and Clearwater rivers. Some Fort McMurray establishments still carry the name of Peter Pond, one of the early European explorers to map the area. While the early settlement grew around fur trading, by the 1960’s oil exploration was a major force in the growth of Fort McMurray. Today, a variety of industries support the rapidly growing economy of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) and the city of Fort McMurray.

This profile was developed as part of a major community visioning process. Initiated by Mayor Blake in 2005 and launched in 2006, Future Forward is a multi-staged approach to developing an understanding – as a community – of our vision for our region. In this profile, information is provided about Fort McMurray: its status as the hub of the oil sands region of Alberta; demographics; labor force; social services; and infrastructure. This profile will serve as part of the background information that the Future Forward Visioning process will address as residents explore the issues and build on the community’s assets.

*Future Forward will take Fort McMurray beyond today and into the future it wants to be – the most promising place in Alberta, Canada and maybe even the world.* (Rod McDonald, Chair, Future Forward Committee)

Information in this document is based on numerous studies that have been completed for the RMWB over the past five years. This includes the 2005
Wood Buffalo Business Case and socio-economic impact assessments completed for oil sands projects (see appendix for full list).
Population and Anticipated Growth Patterns

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, including the City of Fort McMurray, has experienced rapid population growth over the past few years. The population currently is approximately 63,000 and is predicted to increase to over 100,000 in 20 years. This growth is predominantly linked to the oil sands activities in the region. With this growth comes both opportunities and challenges, and Future Forward visioning process is striving to build on the opportunities while addressing the challenges.

Private capital investment from oil sands developers is expected to be approximately $45 billion over the next five years. This increase in oil sands development activity will cause the population of Fort McMurray to increase from approximately 56,000 residents in 2004 to between 80,000 and 97,000 by 2010, if growth continues to follow the eight percent per year pattern of the past six years.  

This growth will help invigorate the community, but will require special attention be paid to issues related to housing, and infrastructure; educational, social, cultural, health and recreational services.

---

1 Population forecast based on oil sands developments. Base case includes all projects already built; full development case includes proposed projects publicly announced.
The RMWB will also need to be cognizant of the fact that with the
anticipated oil sands investment will come an additional population of 7,000 to 10,000 people living in construction camps in the region.

The 2005 Business Case study suggests that approximately $1.2 billion would be needed for new or improved capital infrastructure projects from 2005 to 2009 in order to keep up with the growth rate of oil sands development and the related population increase.²

Several new infrastructure developments and upgrades in a range of sectors have already been approved for Fort McMurray. These include:

- the twinning of Highway 63 between Fort McMurray and Nisku south of Edmonton (transportation)
- the MacDonald Island Park Redevelopment Project (recreation),
- Safety Improvements at the Fort McMurray Airport (transportation), and
- the release of Provincial Lands for housing developments in the Fort McMurray area (housing).

**Labor Force and Employment**

The growth in the economy in the region has created a large demand for all types of workers. The demand cannot be met by the current local labor market, hence the large projected population growth.

Attracting workers who want to benefit from the economic opportunities as well as contribute to the local community and make Fort McMurray a great place to live is one of the biggest challenges facing the region. Some individuals moving to Fort McMurray are looking to make the City their long-term home and move their families to the city, while others are moving to the region on short-term or

temporary basis. Both types of workers are needed, but finding the balance between the two is the challenge.

A recent trend that has been noted by many residents is that many families moved out of Fort McMurray in 2005, so that they could capture the increased value of their homes and increase their income by receiving the “living out allowance (LOA)”, the oil companies’ offers to workers who live outside of the RMWB. Another trend which might emerge in the region is the development of new oil sands projects with “fly-in / fly-out” camps, where new workers do not relocate to Fort McMurray with their families.

The job growth goes beyond the direct employment created by the oil and gas industry. For every one job that is created by an oil sands project, three jobs are generated in the oilfield service, business, and service industry.

Challenges exist with acquiring and retaining public sector employees and health services professionals, mostly due to the high housing costs and limited availability.

These new capital expenditures, jobs, contracts, and related work create an immediate and continuing need for public infrastructure, accommodation and services.

Other examples of challenges that the RMWB will need to address include staffing shortages and high wage costs for private and public sector employers in retail, restaurant, and government agencies. Public agencies and companies cannot offer the same incentives as the oil sands companies and are limited by provincial funding programs. Consequently, there are concerns related to the
high cost of living and the high demand but low availability for candidates to fill positions such as teachers, health professionals, and administrative staff.

The RMWB recognizes that housing is one of the key issues it must address as it plans for its future. High housing prices and availability are frequently listed as a challenge to developing a community in which people want to live; there is a great demand for workers in the service sectors but people working in these jobs have difficulty living here as affordable housing is scarce.

Fort McMurray has some of the highest housing costs in Canada. This reality along with the need for the Provincial Government to release lands for new housing construction is a significant challenge to the growth of the community. As well, other than workcamps, Fort McMurray is the only area community capable of providing for industry worker accommodations.

The current housing situation also impacts the ability of the health, education, and other public sector fields to attract and retain staff to provide necessary services. Industry workers are paid a higher-than-average wage, which helps mitigate issues associated with high living costs. However, this does not apply to people on fixed income and provincially-determined pay grids: workers in the service, hospitality, and retail sectors; the government and health sectors; or those on social assistance.

It is anticipated that 6,000 new housing units will be needed by 2010.\(^3\) To meet this need the RMWB is working with government and builders to make more housing available. These plans include 370 acres in the community of

---

\(^3\) Yvonne Fritz, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports responsible for the Alberta Social Housing Corporation, as reported at http://www.centrongroup.com/whats-new.htm

Draft: Fort McMurray Community Profile December, 2006 Gabinet & Associates Inc.
Future Forward – Sharing the Dream and Making it Real

Timberlea that is being developed by Centron Residential Corp., and a second block of land called “Parcel F” which has 285 acres. Combined, it is estimated that these two developments will have between 4,000 and 4,500 units by 2010 (including both single and multi-family units). Other parcels of land are also being planned for development, which will add further to the supply.

Affordability is another key challenge for the RMWB. As new houses are added to the market, some of them must be allocated to affordable housing programs. In the Centron Development, 300 units will be sold as part of an affordable housing program. This alone, however, will not meet the demand for affordable housing, and other initiatives will need to be developed by the RMWB. The Wood Buffalo Housing and Development Corporation is an important part of future strategies, as they focus on affordable housing options. This non-profit developer organizes projects for those who cannot afford housing available in the private sector marketplace. The supply of affordable housing has increased in recent years, but more options are still needed.

Health & Social Services

Health Services

Fort McMurray is part of the Northern Lights Health Region (NLHR), which includes over 20 communities and covers the entire northern land area of Alberta.

The RMWB recognizes the importance of having adequate health care services, and is working in collaboration with the NLHR to improve the current situation, one of increasing pressure on all aspects of health care due to population growth.
The Northern Lights Regional Health Centre (NLRHC) is the hub of health services in Fort McMurray. The Centre is equipped with 24-hour emergency care, intensive care, and full surgical, radiology, and medical labs services. There are several indicators that illustrate how growth in the region has impacted the deliverability of health sector services.

The physician to population rate is one example of how the region’s population growth has put pressure on health services. The RMWB currently has the fewest number of physicians per capita of any health region in Alberta.

Usage levels for emergency room services have also shown a significant increase in recent years. Emergency room data shows that the mean number of visits per treatment space in an emergency room in Alberta is 1,718. In comparison, during 2004-2005, the NLHR had 3,600 visits per treatment space. Even with this volume of patients, however, the emergency room is able to keep the length of stay in the emergency room to levels below other health regions.

Funding for health services and infrastructure is proving to be a challenge in Fort McMurray as well. On a per capita basis, the NLHR is currently the lowest funded Health Region in Alberta, with funding of $728/capita as compared to the provincial average which is $1191/capita. In addition to this low level of funding, the formula for allocation of funding does not include the impact on the NLHR of the higher-than-average growth due to oil sands development and the population of workers in camps outside of Fort McMurray who use NLHR facilities.
The number of patient days has also increased in recent years. Projections for the 2005-2006 fiscal year show a 20 percent increase from 2004-2005. This number will continue to increase as Northern Lights introduces more medical and health services, such as a second orthopedic surgeon.

There is also a shortage of continuing care beds in the Health Centre. As the population ages, there will be additional strains on this service that need to be addressed. An off-site continuing care facility needs to be developed to meet the needs of senior citizens and free up additional space for acute care in the Health Centre.

The high housing prices also affect the Health Authority’s ability to recruit and retain medical and support staff. Recruitment and retention is extremely difficult given the northern location and competition with local industries for human resources, and is made worse by housing prices that make it difficult, if not impossible, to recruit health care professionals who work on standardized Provincial salary grids.
Social Services

Fort McMurray community support services include the following:

**Association for Community Living**: Established in 1968, the Fort McMurray Association for Community Living has been committed to providing services and programs that support individuals in our community who have a wide range of barriers and/or limitations to employment such as physical/mental challenges, learning disabilities, brain injury and any other issue/condition which makes securing and maintaining a job difficult or impossible.

**The Fort McMurray Boys and Girls Club**: “To provide a safe, supportive place where children and youth can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, and build positive relationships and develop confidence and skills for life.” This is the Mission Statement of the Fort McMurray Boys and Girls Club, on which programming is based. Resources, support and opportunity are provided for children and youth from all economic, cultural and social backgrounds to help them to grow and become responsible members of society. The Fort McMurray Boys and Girls Club provides three main categories of service – pre-school, pre-teen and teen.

**The Centre of Hope**: The Centre of Hope, located in the downtown core of Fort McMurray, opened in September 2005.
The Centre of Hope is a drop-in centre providing programming for the homeless and underemployed individuals within Fort McMurray. A safe environment for community connection, rest and relaxation is provided for these individuals. The Centre of Hope is also a focal point for accessing a variety of programs and services, in partnership with other community organizations, geared toward helping people achieve a sustainable lifestyle.

**The HUB Family Resource Centre:** The HUB Family Resource Centre opened in September 2003. The purpose of the Family Resource Centre is to provide a “One Stop Shopping” facility to enhance access to and the delivery of available community resources, which focus on the promotion of healthy childhood development through the support of positive parenting skills.

**Salvation Army Community Service Centre:** The Salvation Army Community Service Centre has been operating in Fort McMurray since 1982, offering a variety of programs. These programs include a shelter for men in need, a mat program for the chronically homeless who cannot be housed in the shelter. Food services are provided for these programs, as well as for families in emergency situations. The Thrift Shop has low cost clothing, furniture, household items and also provides volunteer and employment opportunities. The Working Family support fund provides financial support to working families who need assistance with rent, utility costs, and damage deposits to secure and maintain housing.

**Some Other Solutions Society for Crisis Prevention:** In 1986, a provincially established program called the Suicide Prevention Program needed a home. At the same time the City of Fort McMurray was establishing an Aid Program for the community. The two came together and became known as the Some Other Solutions Society for Crisis Prevention. In 1994
the Grief and Loss programs were added. Since that time SOS has grown to include such programs as crisis lines, critical intervention stress intervention program, students assisting students program, the mentor program, and a weekly radio show called “Let’s Talk Wellness”.

**The Children’s Centre:** The Children’s Centre began as a preschool in 1992. Soon after, a parent toddler drop in program was added. It became clear that there were challenges within the homes of the children, so home visits were established with a family liaison worker. The Children’s Center continues to meet the needs of less fortunate children in the community by filling the gaps in existing services. Some of the services provided by the Children’s Centre include Food for Two, a prenatal and postnatal nutrition program, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome program, Angel Manor, which is a shelter for pre- and postnatal women and their infants, and a Food Program which offers breakfast and a hot meal for children who attend the Centre. In the summer the Summer Community Action Program, a drop in preschool program, is offered to children and their parents.

**Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society:** The Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society supports Unity House, a shelter for women. Unity House has been in operation since 1982 providing a safe place for women and children when they have nowhere to live and are experiencing problems with domestic violence. Services provided include early intervention, follow-up, outreach, sexual assault, public education, second stage housing and Men’s program.

**Pastew Place Detox Centre:** The Pastew Place Detox Centre opened in 1979. A non-medical, residential, facility with hospital and paramedic backup, the centre provides support to those wishing to detoxify from the effects of substance abuse and problem gambling. Pastew Place also
provides an education day program for all clients and families, as well as the general public who are interested in learning more about addictions.

**Fort McMurray community support services include the following:**

- Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) – several programs are operated by the FCSS including the Seniors’ Outreach Program that assists older persons to identify and act on their needs, allowing them to make informed choices
- Homelessness Initiative Steering Committee – a recent visioning session undertaken by the steering committee produced the following: "Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is an inclusive community with opportunities for everyone to have a healthy, safe place to live” and is currently seeking public input on homelessness issues.  
- The HUB Family Resource Centre - offers a large variety of interactive play programs for parents and young children in Fort McMurray and surrounding areas.
- United Way – “Our mission is to bring together people and resources for the purpose of fundraising to support social, health and welfare needs in our region.”  
- Fort McMurray Association for Community Living – Supportive Housing – Horizon House: a transitional supportive residence for adult females with mental health challenges.
- Family Crisis Society - Unity House – provides a warm, caring and secure environment for battered women and their children.
- Salvation Army – emergency men’s shelter, MAT program, soup kitchen/drop-in center
- Fellowship Baptist Church – soup kitchen

---

4 [www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca](http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca)
5 [www.fortmcmurray.unitedway.ca](http://www.fortmcmurray.unitedway.ca)
Education

Primary and Secondary Education

Fort McMurray schools serve the community well, as reflected in the Accountability Pillar Survey completed by Alberta Learning. This survey shows that students, parents, and administration have an increasing level of satisfaction with the system’s performance.\(^6\) Achievement results show Fort McMurray schools perform very well, with almost all tested grades achieving Acceptable Standard and/or Standard of Excellence in core subject test areas.

The school system is seeking to maintain these levels of achievement, and is therefore analyzing options to address some of the areas that might limit the success of the schools, one of which is to increase the involvement of parents in student learning. The prevalence of shift work and the type of industry has historically had a negative impact on parental participation in student learning.

Within Fort McMurray, schools are operated by two school divisions, the Fort McMurray Public School District No. 2833 (FMPSD), and the Fort McMurray Catholic School Board (FMCS). In total, there are 19 schools in these two divisions, providing ECS to Grade 12 instruction.

\(^6\) www.education.gov.ab.ca/accountability
Fort McMurray Public School District

Fort McMurray Public School District serves a student population of approximately 5000 in eleven schools, in the City of Fort McMurray. Seven of the schools serve Kindergarten through grade 8; two schools serve Grade 9 through 12, and also offer an outreach school. One K-8 school is a dual track English-French Immersion School. The configuration of the schools is under review as the school district struggles to accommodate growth. The newest school in the district is the Fort McMurray Islamic Alternate Program.

Because of the relative isolation of the community, the school district has become quite independent and has put in place programs to serve the needs of most resident students. Some of the programs offered include those for special needs including the mild, moderate and severely handicapped as well as a very successful Outreach program, which serves students who, for a variety of reasons, flourish with alternatives in learning opportunities. The Knowledge and Employability Program is highly effective in serving student needs and a number of students have graduated with a high school diploma. A transitional behaviour program is offered to assist selected students to find success in regular programs.

In addition to an excellent academic program, students have a variety of fine arts and practical programs available to them. There is a broad range of extra curricular activities offered at all schools. Fort McMurray Public School District is active in the “Community Careers Cooperative”. Students and staff in the district have received local, provincial and national recognition for their achievements.
Both the Public and Catholic School Districts participate in the RAP (Registered Apprenticeship Program) as part of the Community Careers Cooperative. This program provides the opportunity for students in Grade eleven to begin working towards a trade; with the support of local employers they are able to finish their apprenticeship.

All schools will have to address issues related to the high cost of maintaining and servicing technical and physical infrastructure, as well as the high cost of labor for both certified and support staff in the region.

There is also a recent trend of concern, which has high school students taking an extra year to complete their studies as they are drawn into the economy for part-time work.

The growth forecast suggests that the 2004 student population of 9,700 may increase by 5,300 by 2010 (an 8% annual growth rate) and as high as 9,500 (or an annual growth rate of 13%) if the development of announced oil sands projects get underway. However, it should be noted that school enrolment declined in 2005-2006 school year, with anecdotal information suggesting that many families moved out of Fort McMurray in 2005 so that they could realize the increased value of their homes and increase their income by receiving the “living out allowance (LOA)” the oil companies offer to workers who live outside of the RMWB.

Projected school enrolment numbers may also be overstated if insufficient housing is available, or if new oil sands projects operate “fly-in / fly-out” camps, where new workers do not relocate to Fort McMurray with their families.
Preparing for the expected enrollment increase is important to the capital development plans of the Fort McMurray Public and Catholic School Districts. Maintaining good local schools and programs is necessary to meeting the needs of existing and incoming families and to developing future employees in the region.

Infrastructure needs for primary and secondary education in Fort McMurray include new junior high and high schools, and the upgrading of several schools including replacing portables with classrooms.

Some new developments are already underway, with a new Catholic primary school being constructed in Fort McMurray. This is the first major school development in the region since the 1970s as enrollment did not increase between 1980 and 1995.

**Fort McMurray Catholic School District**

The Fort McMurray Catholic Board of Education serves over 4,200 students in nine schools. The schools offer a wide range of programming geared towards meeting the academic, cultural and spiritual needs of the students and their families.

Instruction is primarily in English. French Immersion programs are offered at Ecole St. Paul French Immersion Centre (Kindergarten to Grade 8) and at Father Mercredi Community High School (Grades 9 – 12). Saint Martha School (Kindergarten – Grade 8) opened in September 2006. Sister Mary Phillips School (Kindergarten - Grade 8) opened in 1993. Funding has been announced for a new Catholic High School, which is anticipated to open in
September 2009. A wide range of sports, culture, fine arts, spiritual and leadership programs are available at all schools.

As part of the Public Education System of Alberta, Fort McMurray Catholic schools offer a faith-based learning environment to students of any background and a level of instruction geared towards the highest academic standards. The Early Entry Preschool program began at Fr. Turcotte School in 1996. This program was designed to integrate “community” children as role models with children experiencing speech as well as other delays in a preschool setting. This program is now offered at all K-8 schools in the Catholic District, with educators from all over the province coming to Fort McMurray to learn about the Early Entry program. Other programs offered include those for special needs including the mild, moderate and severely handicapped.

The newest program in the Catholic School District is the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit initiative. Four district schools have full time liaisons helping to remove barriers and bridging the gap between school and home for Aboriginal students and their parents. Three of the four liaisons are in elementary schools, focusing on early literacy intervention. Fr. Turcotte, Good Shepherd, Fr. Beauregard and Fr. Mercredi schools offer Native Studies as a course which can provide credits for students. Fr. Mercredi High School’s graduation rate for Aboriginal students is over 60% which is the highest in the province and has been recognized by Alberta Education.

Service to the community is an expectation of students attending Fr. Mercredi Community High School. Students will participate in programs such as SADD (students against drinking and driving), and Santas Anonymous as part of their service project in the community.
Post-Secondary Education

Many of the jobs in the region are technical and require highly trained and skilled workers. The area is therefore attracting skilled labor from all parts of Canada and around the world. In addition to this influx of skilled labor, residents can gain post-secondary education through Keyano College.

To meet the needs of the community in the future, post secondary education is focusing on the following areas:

- Increasing the supply of skilled workers, especially in technology and trades, like heavy equipment operators, process operators, electrical and instrumentation, technologists, etc.;
- Promoting lifelong learning as production and refining technology evolves;
- Enhance the Keyano campus to create a vibrant college campus, anchored by the Syncrude Sport and Wellness Centre;  
- Focus on replacing the aging equipment for trades training.

Keyano College is a board-governed, comprehensive, community college that offers educational and training programs, courses and services to the residents of northeastern Alberta. The College does so in accordance with the Alberta Colleges Act.

The College is dedicated to providing program excellence through utilizing a highly qualified, dynamic faculty and staff. The College is committed to offering or facilitating programs and services in the following areas:

- Apprenticeship training in a variety of trade designations and technology programs designed to prepare graduates for jobs in technical fields

7 [www.keyano.ca/alumni_donors/sport_wellness/index.htm](http://www.keyano.ca/alumni_donors/sport_wellness/index.htm)
• Academic upgrading and human development programs designed to provide skills and knowledge that will prepare individuals for further study or entry into the workforce
• Pre-employment and occupational training directed toward preparing graduates for immediate entry into the workforce
• Certificate and diploma programs designed to prepare individuals for careers in management, business, arts and culture, and human service occupations
• Transfer programs; such as first and second year university transfer programs, in a variety of disciplines
• Community education and services in the areas of personal and professional development, culture, and recreation
• Courses and services, usually through continuing education, designed to meet the specific needs of business and industry
• Collaborative programs with other colleges, technical institutes and universities

Keyano College responds to industry and student demand by working with existing partners; and developing new partnerships to deliver existing programs in new ways, or developing new programs as the need arises. For example, Keyano College’s On-site Apprenticeship Technical Training is an innovative way to deliver apprenticeship training on-site with active involvement by employers, Alberta Apprenticeship & Industry training, students and Keyano College.

Keyano College’s Workforce Development works with stakeholders to meet the demands for work-related, non-credit training. Through partnerships with industry, other post-secondary training providers and government agencies, Workforce Development is serving a larger number of clients and thereby generating revenues that will support future developments. Keyano College, through this business planning process, has identified concrete actions that respond to the growing demands of industry, students and government.
Community Services Department

The Community Services Department plays an important role in the RMWB and is working to meet the future needs of local citizens. The Community Services Department consists of:

- Family and Community Support Services (FCSS);
- Community Development Division;
- Parks and Recreation Division.

FCSS is a partnership between the province, municipalities, and Métis settlements to develop social initiatives to benefit the people living in the region. The Community Development Division works with communities to build programs and services focused on recreation, sport, and maintenance of the Centennial Pool.

The Parks and Recreation Division maintains and manages parks, green spaces, and trails.

In Fort McMurray, recreational opportunities are available at community parks with softball and soccer fields, beach volleyball and basketball courts, water parks and a skateboard park. There are several indoor and outdoor ice rinks for hockey or skating, such as the rink in Borealis Park. There are three 18-hole golf courses and Vista Ridge All Seasons Park has beginner to intermediate-level ski and snowboard runs.

Major renovations are currently in progress for the MacDonald Island Park facilities. The redevelopment will include “an aquatics facility, arena, public library, field houses, running track and other value added amenities, such as child play, child minding, leased space, and a climbing wall.”

Transportation

To encourage sustainable growth for Fort McMurray’s future, there is a need to create a long-term plan focused on the transportation system in the region. Currently, Fort McMurray is accessible by a variety of forms of transportation.

Road transportation is via highway 63, the primary route into the area. Additional access is available along highway 881, which passes through many of the communities in the southern part of the RMWB. There are very high traffic volumes during the morning and evening peak times with industry workers traveling between Fort McMurray and the job sites. Highway 63 has higher-than-normal traffic volumes due to shift changes going south to Edmonton on Thursday evenings and going north to Fort McMurray on Sunday afternoons. These additional pressures on the highway have led to concerns about safety on the regional roadways. The airport has scheduled service from five regional air carriers to Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Fort Chipewyan and connections to the rest of Canada and the United States.

Long-term infrastructure plans include twinning the entire highway from Nisku, south of Edmonton, to Fort McMurray. Engineering and planning work is currently underway on this project. Highway 63 is currently being twinned from the Suncor turn-off to the Syncrude plant. As well, paving of Highway 881 between Fort McMurray and Lac La Biche will be completed by fall of 2006.
Within Fort McMurray, intersection upgrades are needed, as well as bridge improvement and increased capacity for greater traffic volumes.

The East Side Transportation Corridor, connecting current and new oil sands facilities located east of the Athabasca River with Highway 63 is currently under consideration as well.
Protective Services

RCMP

The RCMP detachments that service the majority of the RMWB are located in Fort McMurray with a community office in the neighborhood of Thickwood. There is a satellite office in Janvier/Chard and a detachment in Fort Chipewyan. There are several bylaw officers that work closely with the RCMP officers.

Fort McMurray's RCMP detachment is one of the busiest in Alberta, with more than 25,000 calls per year. At the end of 2006 there were a total of 98 RCMP officers for the municipal detachment and approximately 26 officers for the rural areas.

Even though it is one of the busiest detachments in the province, the Fort McMurray detachment is meeting resource requirements and working to identify sufficient funding for future growth.

Fire and EMS – Regional Emergency Services

The Fort McMurray Fire Department (part of Regional Emergency Services along with EMS) provides fire prevention services from the fire marshal, three safety codes officers, and one fire department assistant; comparative statistics for all protective services for the years 2000 – 2004 are available on the RMWB website.9

---

9 www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca
In 2006, the department responded to 279 more calls in Fort McMurray (10.36 percent increase) compared to the number of calls in the previous year. In general there were increases in all types of emergency responses including fire, medical, vehicle collisions, and rescues.

In the city, Fire and EMS aim for an eight minute response time for medical emergencies and ten minute response time for all other emergencies in 90 percent of all situations. Emergency services and response capabilities are undergoing improvements. Projects such as the new Fort McMurray South Station, upgrades to rural stations and equipment, and a broadband emergency communication system, along with improvements to recruitment and retention programs for Volunteer Fire Fighters will ensure better service to the Region.

Infrastructure and Municipal Services

Solid waste management is an issue in the RMWB and the municipality has initiated an awareness and education campaign about recycling to help reduce waste accumulating in the landfill sites. As a result, Fort McMurray’s diversion rate doubled between 2002 and 2004 and is lower than several other comparable Alberta communities. 10 The RMWB has a total of seven landfills, the largest of which is the Fort McMurray Landfill.

RMWB has a water treatment plant located in Fort McMurray with plans for expansions to its distribution systems to meet the needs as the population grows.

---

10 Sustainable Community Indicators, Summary Report, 2006)
Sewage treatment is also being expanded, with the announcement in late 2005 of a project for a new facility in Fort McMurray.

Many of the infrastructure service providers have noted that Fort McMurray is working to catch up with the recent population growth, but that in this area there is still an infrastructure deficit.

To meet the projected increase in demand the following projects are being proposed: Should be the same as earlier list or don’t repeat – probably not necessary.

- Tertiary wastewater treatment plant;
- Regional landfill site;
- MacDonald Island redevelopment;
- Timberlea Athletic Park;
- Thickwood Park;
- Multi-use recreation facility in Thickwood /Timberlea;
- New Catholic primary school being constructed in Fort McMurray.
- South East Water Line to Anzac.
RMWB & Community Initiatives

The spirit of volunteerism is strong in Fort McMurray, and the enthusiasm of those who have lived here for years has motivated newcomers to get involved as well. The following are just a few of the initiatives into which locals have invested many hours of their time and energy in an effort to improve the quality of life for local residents and those in rural areas as well:

Festivals of Fort McMurray

interPlay Festival

The Fort McMurray interplay Society was formed in 1990 by a group of dedicated volunteers. It was established to organize and operate a Festival of Youth. In the first years, the interplay Festival was a huge success attracting huge crowds and terrific community support. However, during the mid 1990’s the Festival was forced to take a year off in order to regroup after running into serious financial trouble. Since that time, interPlay has been steadily growing.

The interPlay festival is a celebration of the visual and performing arts that attracts over 20,000 visitors each year. If someone tried to describe the interplay Festival, they would need to combine the elements from a fringe, folk, street performer and visual arts festival. There are plays, street performers, music, food, visual art, stand-up comedy, improve and much more. It is the largest summer event in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.
Blueberry Festival

The Blueberry Festival traditionally held on Labour Day weekend is an end of summer celebration. The Festival dates back many years, once organized by the Kinsmen Club of Fort McMurray, as well as the Exhibition Association. The Blueberry Festival is truly a community event which transforms itself each year. Now called the Wood Buffalo Blueberry Society, the committee is made up of community members who have set out to ensure the long standing community event continues. It is a festival that has several community groups and organizations working together. From the parade to the River Raft Race the pie eating contest, a golf tournament, fish fry by the Snye River and Country Market, this festival marks the end of summer and the return to school for the children of the community.

Oilsands Rotary Music Festival

This music extravaganza is sponsored by the Rotary Club as well as local oil companies. It is well attended by classical music and arts lovers from around Alberta and Western Canada. The events include live choral and orchestral performances, student expositions and showcases, as well as band and musical theatre performances. The Festival runs from March until May culminating with the Grand Concert.

Other Community Initiatives

• Communities in Bloom – “a Canadian beautification program that provides information and education, and awards Bloom Ratings for achievement in floral displays, landscapes, turf, urban forestry, community involvement, heritage conservation, environmental awareness and tidiness.”

11 www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca/
• Trade Shows – Fort McMurray Tourism operates two annual general consumer trade shows, one in April and one in September. These shows draw anywhere from 12,000 to 17,000 people.12

• Mayor’s Picnic

• Mayor’s Advisory Council on Youth (MACOY): Mission – “Youth working to improve the quality of life in our community.” Purpose – “Advise council on services and programs for youth in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo . . . recognizes that youth have a voice in our region, and that young people are positive contributors to the region.”

12 www.fortmcmurraytourism.com
Summary

In the early years of Fort McMurray’s growth, most people who answered the call of the oil sands developments believed that this was to be a short (2 – 3 year) commitment. While this may have been the case for some, others decided to stay and raise their children here, believing that this was becoming a strong, vibrant community.

Over time, through the financial and volunteer commitments of industrial, business, and social sectors, Fort McMurray has become a thriving community boasting political, economic and social vitality.

The unprecedented growth that the community and the region have experienced has raised new challenges for the Regional Municipality, challenges that are being met with a commitment to the development of a vision for the future. The creation of this vision will involve people from all walks of life; all will be invited to participate in the process that will help to determine the future of Fort McMurray and how it will ensure a balance between sustained economic growth and quality of life for those who live there.

"Future Forward will take Fort McMurray beyond today and into the future it wants to be – the most promising place in Alberta, Canada and maybe even the world." Rod McDonald

(www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca/futureforward/)