



## WHAT WE HEARD:

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM INPUT TO INFORM THE 2026-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN



## Executive Summary

Lacombe is facing simultaneous shifts: affordability pressures, rising service expectations, changing demographics, infrastructure demands, and a more complex public-communication environment. None of these pressures are unique to Lacombe, but they are converging here in ways that will require steady, deliberate leadership. Resident expectations are growing, and decision-making will need to be increasingly disciplined to keep pace.

Three themes stand out that we wish to offer for Council's Strategic Planning:

**First**, Lacombe's future will depend on its focus on long-range planning and staying committed to decisions once they are made. The next term will bring major facility planning (City Hall, fire halls, the Lodge, a recreation site), infrastructure renewal, and demographic changes that require early, coordinated action. A clear, shared direction will help the organization deliver on these priorities.

**Second**, the City's financial capacity is tightening. Costs are rising, residents are approaching the limit of tax tolerance, and external pressures, policing standards, insurance, provincial downloading, and future capital needs, continue to grow. Council will be best positioned when it prioritizes intentionally, aligns service levels with available resources, and has open conversations about what services truly cost.

**Third**, communication will be a defining issue. Social media can rapidly distort complex issues, and the City must strengthen its approach to ensure Council and Administration speak with one voice. Refreshing policies, clarifying our messages, and using both digital and non-digital channels effectively will be essential to maintaining public trust.

Despite these challenges Lacombe is well-positioned for a strong future. The community is engaged, the organization is stable, and the groundwork for long-term planning, asset management, social needs assessment, recreation planning, and regional collaboration, is already in place. If Council approaches the next term with focus, consistency, and a willingness to prioritize, the City can confidently navigate this period of change. The decisions made in the coming term will have lasting impact, and the City is ready to support Council in doing this work thoughtfully and well.

## Participation Overview

- Three collaborative CLT workshops were held in 2025.
- Participants included all members of the Corporate Leadership Team.
- Sessions were structured around six core strategic questions.
- Input was synthesized into themes that reflect collective insight.

## Method & Data Notes

- Sessions used facilitated discussion rather than survey responses; therefore, ideas were exploratory, iterative, and conversational.
- Notes were consolidated and lightly edited for clarity, then organized by question.
- The intention is to present a narrative summary that captures the breadth of insights without attributing comments to individual participants.
- These insights are not recommendations but reflect organizational observations intended to inform the next Council's strategic planning process.

**Question 1: Community Insights: What emerging trends or community needs should the next Council be prepared to address?**

**Bottom Line:** *Lacombe is changing, and technological, affordability and social pressures are real.*

**Summary:** The CLT identified several emerging social pressures, including homelessness, affordability challenges, and possible rising food insecurity. They noted that these pressures are occurring alongside an aging population, crime complexity, and rapid digital and AI adoption that affect how residents interact with the City and each other.

Residents are also expressing higher expectations for recreation, City-run programming, entertainment, and unique community experiences, even as traditional media and brick-and-mortar retail continue to decline.

Taken together, these factors indicate that Lacombe’s historically “small town” identity is evolving, and community needs are coming from a more diverse and complex population.

**Question 2: Improving Communication: What lessons have we learned about public communication, and how should they shape future strategies?**

**Bottom Line:** *If Council and Administration don’t speak with one voice, social media will fill the gaps with noise. Strategic, proactive, disciplined communication isn’t optional anymore.*

**Summary:** Participants agreed that gossip, speculation, and social-media misinterpretation can easily outpace facts, underscoring the need for consistent, aligned messaging. However the CLT is uncertain about where residents actually expect to consume information from the City. The community’s reliance on multiple social platforms makes it difficult for the City to maintain message reach and clarity and to “meet our residents where they are” in the digital sense.

Updating the City’s communication and public engagement policies and practices will be important going forward. Greater use of physical signage, face-to-face engagement, and the City’s website as a “source of truth” are likely to remain central to any changes.

**Question 3: Building on Success: What strategies should the next Council prioritize to maintain momentum on key initiatives?**

**Bottom Line:** *Lacombe is positioned to achieve big things. But success will come from disciplined planning, steady leadership, and a willingness to prioritize what matters most.*

**Summary:** The CLT emphasized the importance of disciplined long-range planning, particularly for major civic assets such as future fire halls, City Hall, the Lodge, and a large recreation site. Long-term facility planning was cited as a central theme, with staff noting the need for early land assembly and clarity on future building locations to support timely and coordinated project delivery.

They encouraged Council to rely on the asset-management program, maintain consistent tax strategies tied to CPI, and avoid symbolic tax freezes.

The CLT stressed that trusting professional expertise, supporting empowered committees and volunteers, will help maintain project momentum. They also highlighted the value of focusing on a manageable number of priorities rather than dispersing effort across too many initiatives. Decisions should reflect the needs of the whole community, not only the most vocal groups.

Regional collaboration, effective growth management, and consistent implementation of existing plans—including the Social Needs Plan and the Recreation and Culture Plans—were identified as important contributors to maintaining momentum and ensuring sustained community benefit.

***Question 4: Reducing Barriers: What financial pressures should the next Council anticipate over the coming term?***

***Bottom Line :*** Council will need to navigate rising costs and limited tax tolerance, but with clear priorities and honest conversations about what services really cost, the City can stay financially stable.

**Summary:** The CLT identified several financial pressures that will constrain the City’s fiscal flexibility in the coming years. Rising insurance costs, increasing policing standards (such as body cameras and dispatch upgrades), staffing pressures, expanded emergency-management requirements, and ongoing infrastructure renewal were all cited as areas where costs are increasing faster than inflation. Participants noted that residents are nearing affordability limits at the same time that provincial downloading, youth unemployment, and broader economic uncertainty are affecting local conditions.

Upcoming capital needs were highlighted as key long-term financial risks requiring careful prioritization. These include renewal of community facilities such as the LMC, as well as new infrastructure like water reservoirs, wastewater lift stations, and major corridor improvements to the South Connector ring road and the Highway 12/2A intersection. The CLT also noted risks associated with provincial funding shortfalls, rising education property taxes, and the potential loss of taxation from large institutional properties (Burman University).

In addition, rapid changes in AI, shifting housing affordability, and workforce trends will shape the City’s financial environment. Staff emphasized that taking on too many new initiatives, or relying heavily on user fees to offset limited tax room, could create long-term sustainability challenges. As a result, clear prioritization, transparent discussions about service levels, and disciplined financial planning will be essential for maintaining fiscal stability.

***Question 5: Looking Ahead: The Next Ten Years: What big-picture direction do you believe Council should take to ensure a thriving future for the community?***

***Bottom Line:*** Change is coming whether we plan for it or not, and by getting ahead of big decisions, the City can shape a community that works better for seniors, families, and young adults alike.

**Summary:** The CLT encouraged Council to plan proactively for demographic change, noting that an aging population and the need to attract and retain young people will influence future service delivery and community needs. They emphasized the importance of walkability, recreation opportunities, mobility options, intergenerational programming, and cultural amenities as key factors in building a connected and resilient community.

Strategic land acquisition, environmental stewardship, and early planning for major civic assets—such as future recreation facilities, City Hall, fire halls, and the lodge—were identified as essential for supporting long-term growth.

Participants described a future where senior-friendly infrastructure and services, including mobility supports, diverse housing options, recreation access, and safe public spaces, will shape much of the built environment. At the same time, they highlighted the need to provide attractive opportunities for younger residents through arts, culture, recreation, and employment. Staff emphasized the value of walkable streets, scooter and e-bike routes, accessible parking, and potentially a neighbourhood shuttle or trolley system to improve local mobility.

Intergenerational programming, strengthened partnerships with Burman University, major tree-replacement initiatives, and attention to natural spaces and watershed considerations were also identified as priorities that will support a thriving community over the next decade.

***Question 6: Looking Ahead: The Next Four Years: If you had five minutes with the next Council, what key message would you want to share for the next four years?***

***Bottom Line:*** *Strong leadership in the next term means setting a clear direction, avoiding distractions, and keeping the needs of all residents — not just the most vocal — at the heart of every decision.*

**Summary:** The CLT encouraged the next Council to remain consistent in its decision-making, avoid reacting to vocal minorities, and represent the full diversity of Lacombe’s population. They emphasized the importance of establishing a clear vision for growth, land use, transit, and recreation, grounded in data and supported by existing plans. Staff noted that policing complexity, unemployment, and demographic aging reflect larger urban trends emerging within Lacombe, underscoring the need to understand the community’s broader social landscape when prioritizing actions.

The CLT also encouraged Council to be proactive in its planning approach, clarifying expectations around major issues such as transit and growth management, and using the Social Needs Plan and the Recreation and Culture Plans as foundational tools. They highlighted the importance of defining success deliberately, acknowledging both the opportunities and trade-offs associated with growth, and maintaining a focus on environmental and community assets such as the tree canopy and natural spaces.

Strengthening relationships with Lacombe County, leveraging partnerships with local institutions, and following through on significant commitments—particularly the Lodge—were identified as important components of stable and effective governance over the next term.

# PESTEL Scan

To complement the question by question insights above, a high-level PESTEL scan (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal/Regulatory factors) frames the external conditions for Lacombe’s strategic environment.

<b>P</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Political Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing provincial downloading</li> <li>• Regional collaboration pressures: alignment with municipal neighbours on growth, infrastructure, recreation, and transportation.</li> <li>• Political environment increasingly shaped by social media, misinformation, and vocal minorities putting pressure on Council responsiveness.</li> <li>• Concerns about consistency of political direction over time and the need for Council to “stay the course” once decisions are made.</li> <li>• Politics around large institutional landholders affecting the tax base.</li> </ul>
<b>E</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Economic Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents nearing affordability limits: tax tolerance low; increasing cost-of-living concerns.</li> <li>• Internal inflation pressures:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ insurance rising significantly</li> <li>○ costs for utilities, construction, materials, fleet, and contracts rising</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Pressure to maintain competitive service levels.</li> <li>• Tension between service expectations and what residents can sustainably afford.</li> <li>• Infrastructure renewal: aging facilities (LMC, roads, utilities).</li> <li>• Big-ticket capital needs (fire halls, City Hall, lodge redevelopment, recreation, water reservoirs, wastewater lift stations).</li> <li>• Trend of youth unemployment and out-migration weakening local labour market.</li> <li>• Slow growth in brick and mortar retail environment.</li> </ul>
<b>S</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homelessness and visible social disorder exists.</li> <li>• More requests for social supports from residents (mental health, food insecurity, affordability-related needs).</li> <li>• Demographic aging: more seniors requiring accessible facilities, mobility supports, and age-friendly infrastructure.</li> <li>• Difficulty attracting and retaining young adults; desire for amenities (culture, recreation, childcare).</li> <li>• Higher expectations for recreation programming, City-run events, arts, and unique community experiences.</li> <li>• Shifting expectations about what a small city should provide.</li> <li>• Rapid erosion of trust when communication is unclear; misinformation spreads quickly.</li> <li>• Polarization between “old” and “new” Lacombe identities.</li> <li>• Volunteer burnout affecting ABC capacity.</li> </ul>

### Technological Factors

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- Residents adopting AI tools and expecting faster, digital-first service responses.
- Public reliance on multiple social platforms makes communication inconsistent and difficult to control.
- Growing technology demands for protective services (policing instrumentation, emergency notification, digital reporting).
- Need for improved digital infrastructure internally (systems integration, data management, online service portals).
- Website must function as the authoritative “source of truth” to counter misinformation.
- Declining role of traditional media reduces available pathways to deliver clear messages.

### Environmental Factors

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- Tree canopy requires long term replacement to maintain environmental health and aesthetics.
- Strong community expectations around natural spaces, parks, and green corridors.
- Recreation planning increasingly tied to outdoor assets and environmental stewardship.
- Desire for more comprehensive recycling services.

### Legal / Regulatory Factors

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- Increased compliance requirements for policing and emergency management.
- Privacy and public-record expectations intensifying due to changing legislation and digital communication patterns.
- Accessibility standards and building code changes affecting new builds and retrofits.
- Ongoing tension between providing an investor friendly environment and contract compliance.