

# 2020-2024 COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

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Watford City &  
McKenzie County

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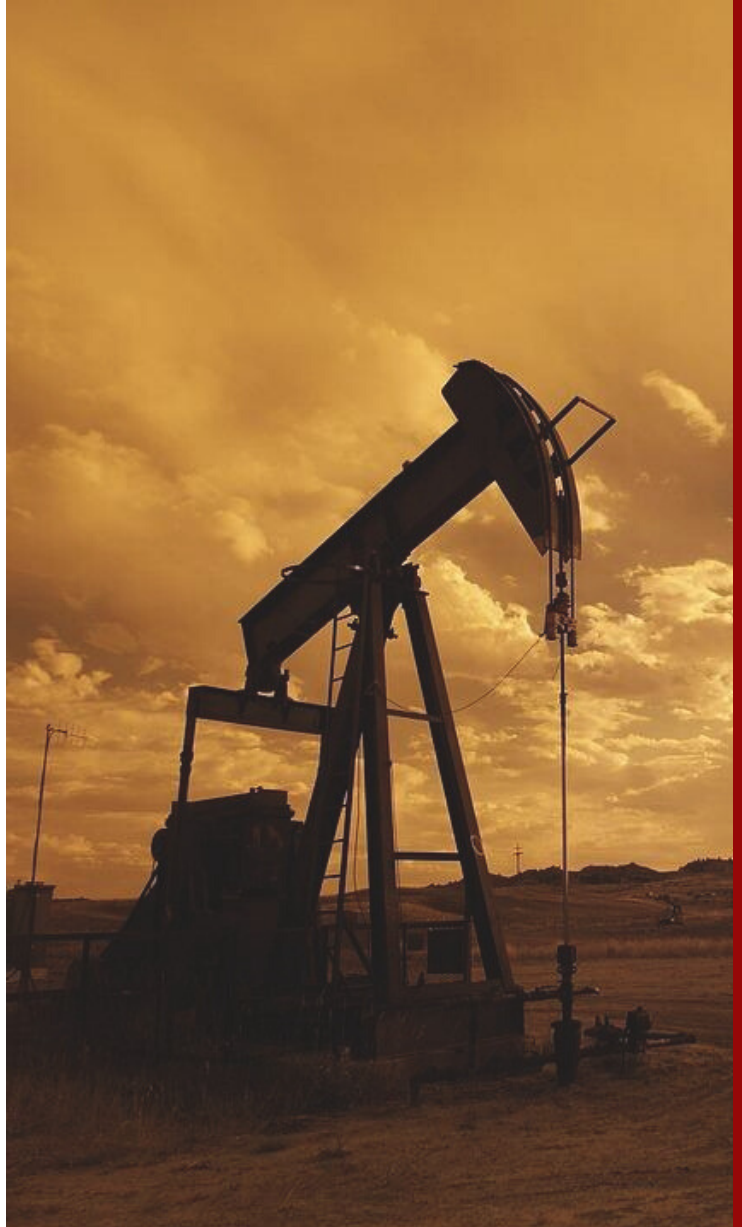
**StrengthenND<sup>®</sup>**



# BACKGROUND

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In the summer of 2019, the City of Watford City and the McKenzie County Job Development Authority engaged with Strengthen ND to develop a five-year **Community Sustainability Plan**. Through a community survey, community roundtable sessions, and a leadership-driven planning session, data was able to be collected on the current state of Watford City and McKenzie County as well as what could be future priorities. Laid out in the sustainability plan are the details of the community planning process, relevant outcomes, and the distilled goals and strategies to guide future growth and development of Watford City and the broader McKenzie County area.



***Strengthen ND** is a dynamic, multi-faceted, and well-connected organization that works across North Dakota to elevate nonprofits and rural communities to support a high quality of life and resources for vulnerable populations through community development.*

# COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS

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At Strengthen ND, our motto is:

***“If you can’t write it, you can’t do it.”***

We believe that creating and documenting a community’s goals and methodology is the most vital step toward actualizing the outcomes you hope to see. Of course a community can have a clear strategy without having a strategic plan. A strategic plan is merely a document that puts on paper the long-term chosen direction. While a clear direction may exist anyway, writing it down enables it to be better understood by residents, by partners, by developers, and even by community staff and elected officials.

Our belief at Strengthen ND is that an effective strategic plan makes choices based on: 1) knowing who you are; 2) knowing what brings change; 3) predicting how the environment is likely to change; and 4) rigorous and honest self-appraisal. To support this belief, Strengthen ND worked with the leadership of the City of Watford City and McKenzie County Job Development Authority to compile and deploy a county-wide survey, hold six community input roundtables, and facilitate and document the outcomes of a leadership-driven planning process, which resulted in the distillation of seven strategic goals.



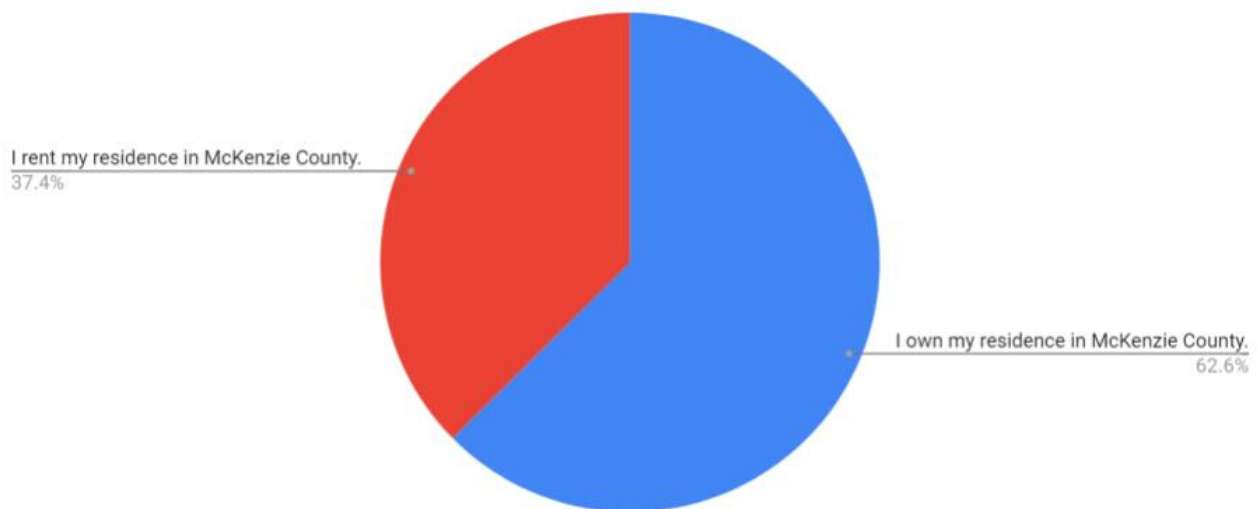
# ELECTRONIC SURVEY

Through a widely distributed electronic survey, the leadership of Watford City and McKenzie County sought to understand residents' current perception of the area, their thoughts about current opportunities and challenges, and their thoughts about what leadership should focus on into the future. Below is an abbreviated summary of the results obtained from 535 respondents; the complete listing of results can be found in the plan's attachments.



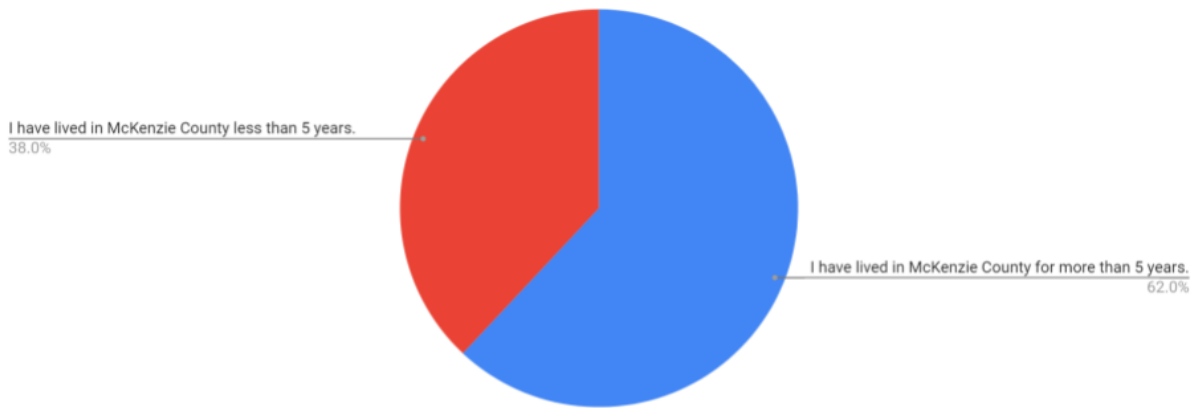
## **Of the respondents:**

**Which of the following applies to you?**

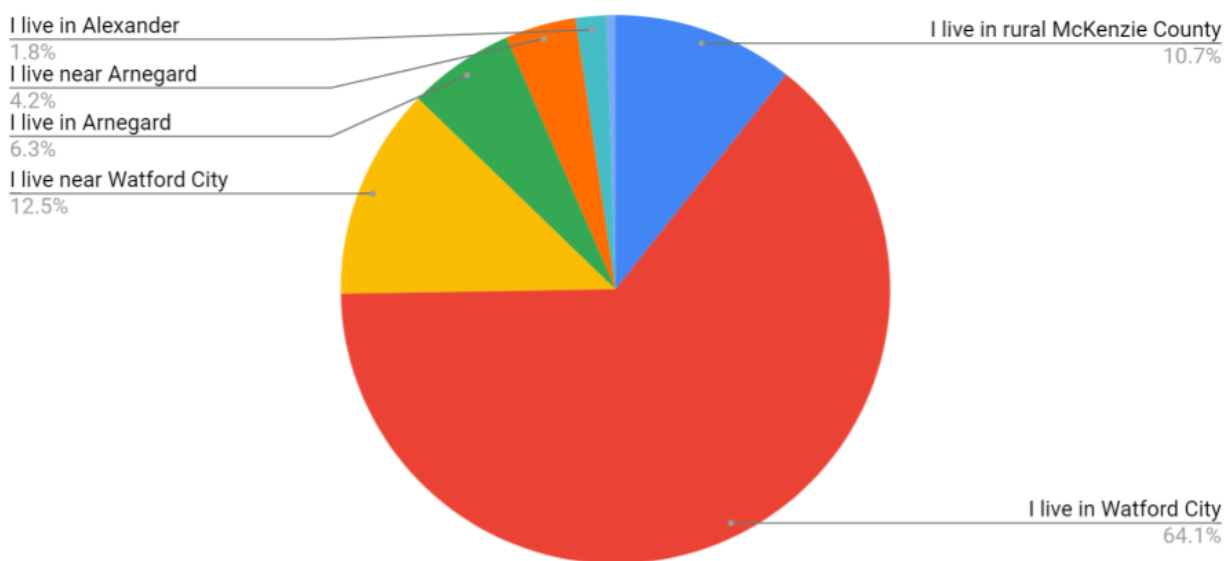


# ELECTRONIC SURVEY

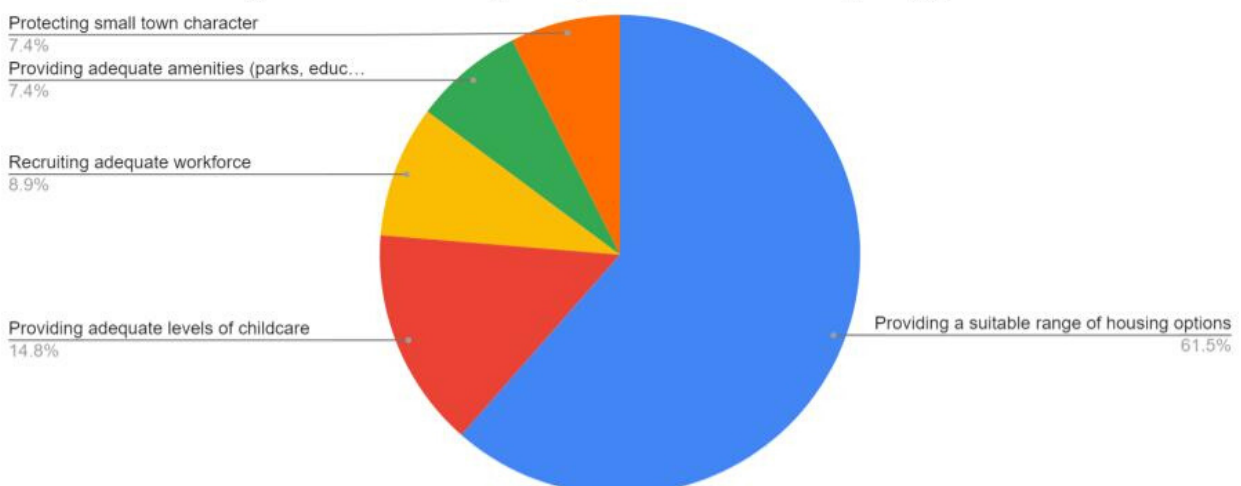
Which of the following applies to you?



Which of the following applies to you?



When it comes to growth and development, what is Watford City's biggest obstacle?

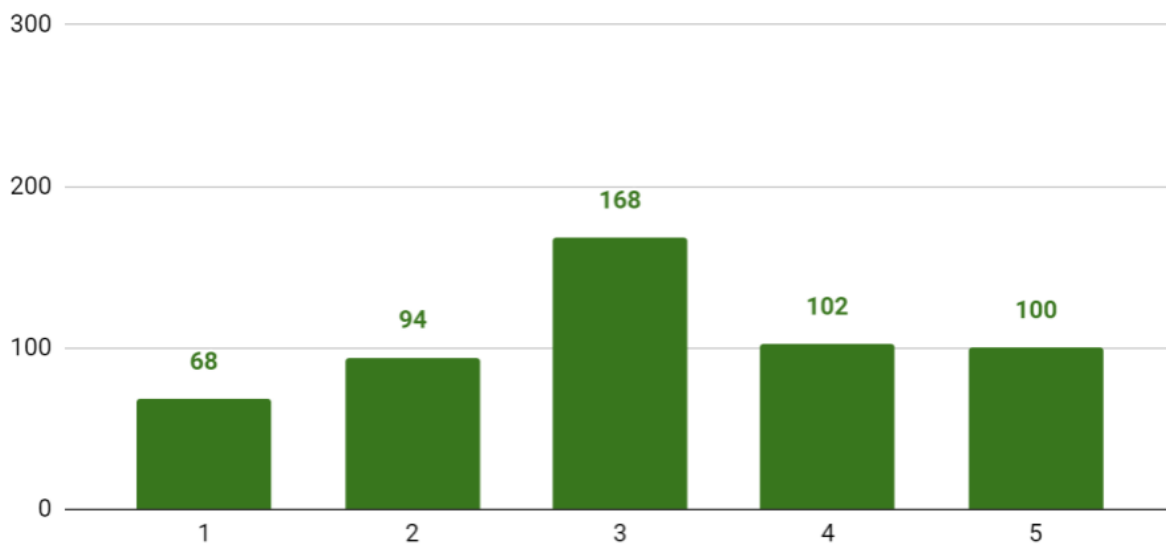


# ELECTRONIC SURVEY

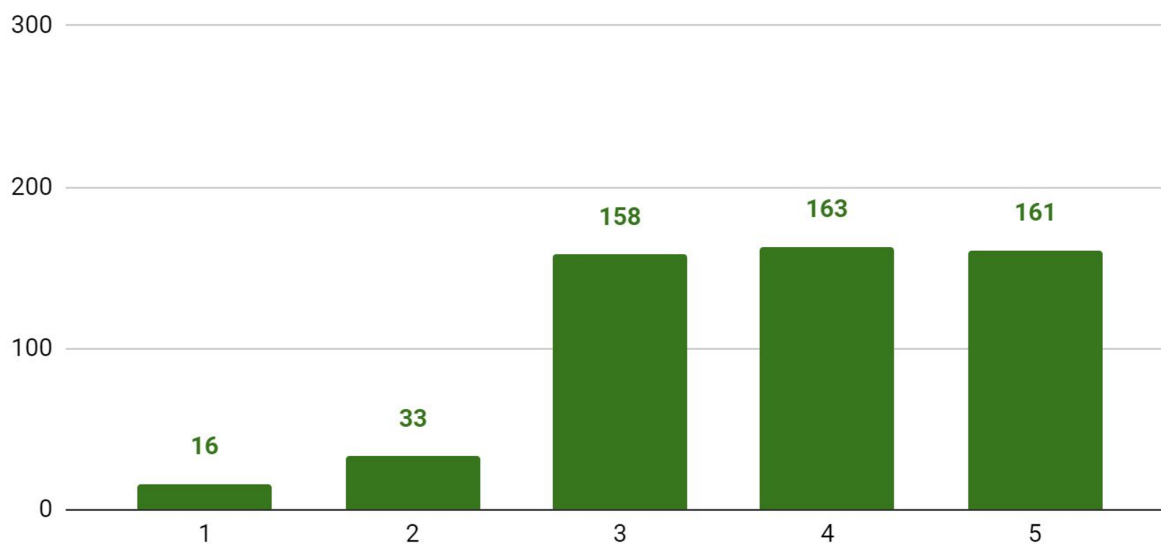
## Of the respondents:

*On a scale of 1 (NOT IMPORTANT) to 5 (EXTREMELY IMPORTANT), please indicate the level of importance of each of the following items listed below to the future resilience and growth of Watford City.*

### Transitional Shelter to Support Vulnerable People

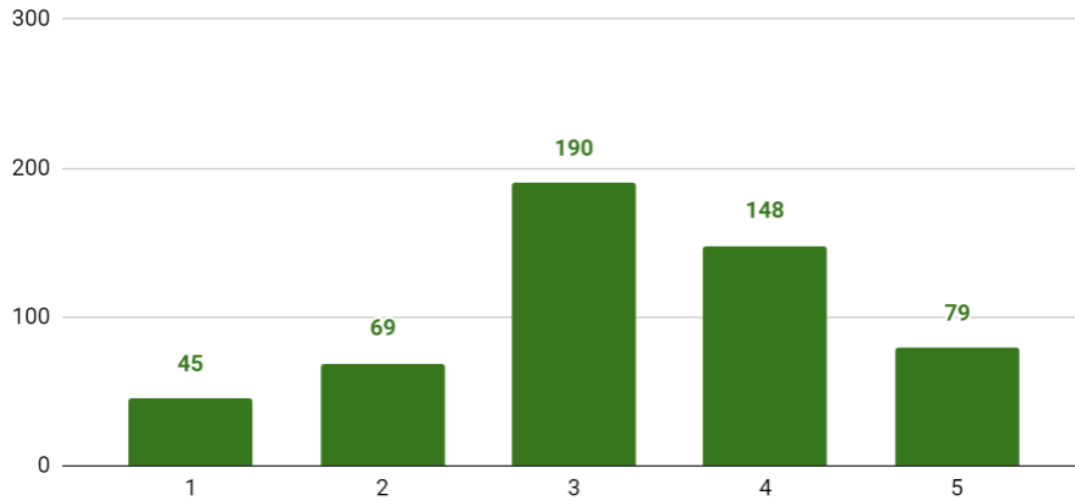


### Aging Services & Aging Housing Solutions

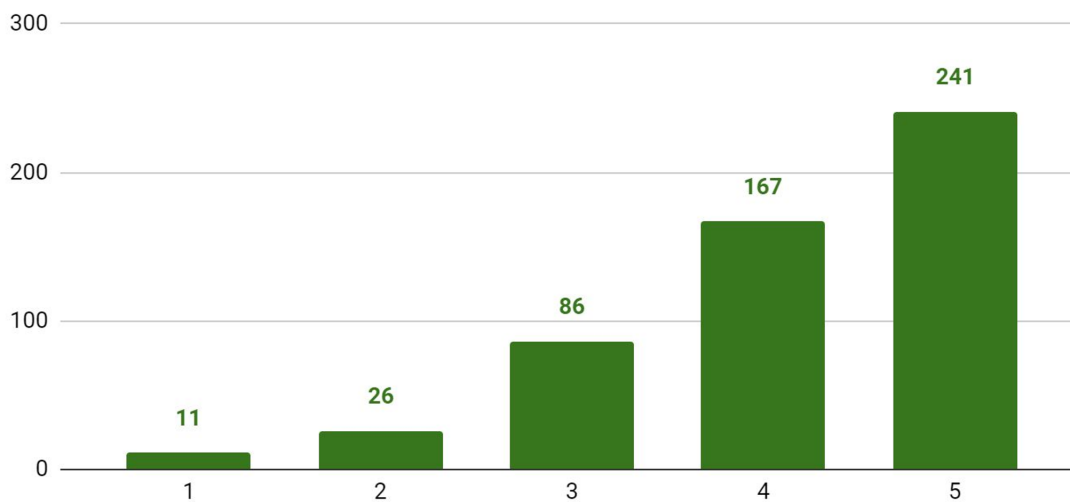


# ELECTRONIC SURVEY

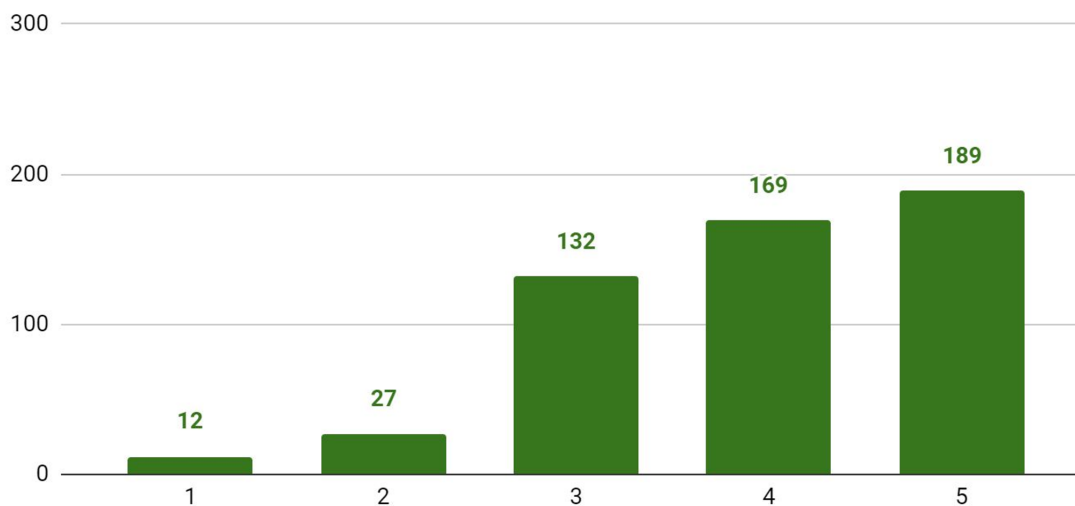
## Arts, Culture, & Heritage Infrastructure (Facilities & Programming)



## Family Recreation & Wellness Infrastructure (Facilities & Programming)

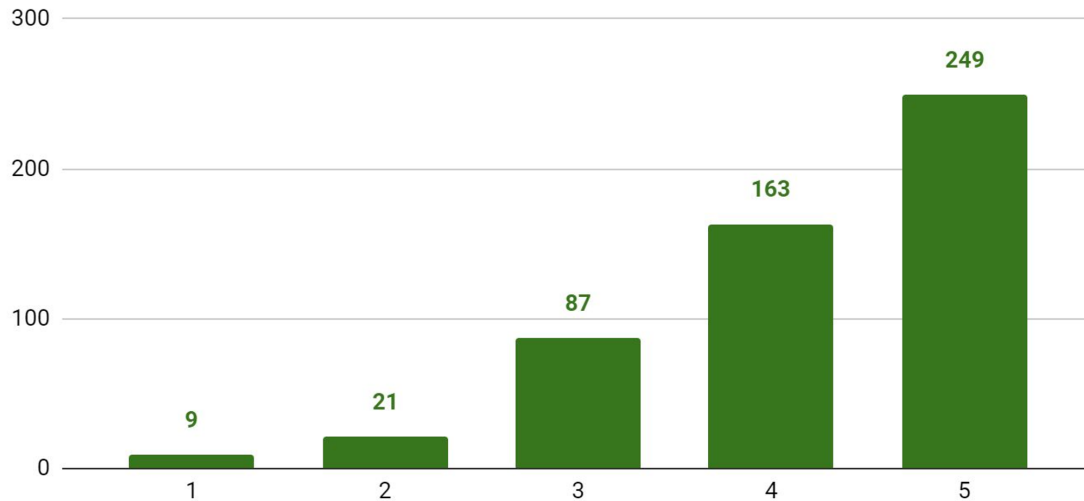


## Adult Recreation & Wellness Infrastructure (Facilities & Programming)

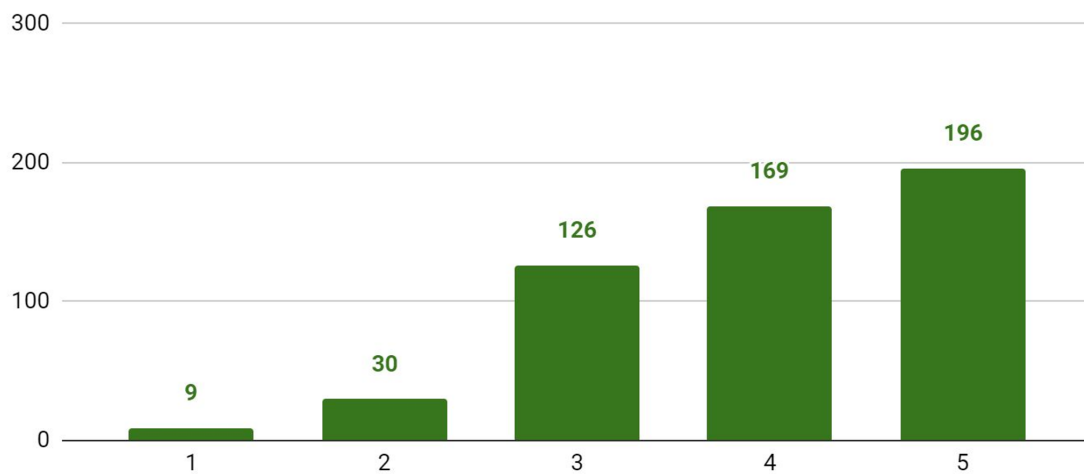


# ELECTRONIC SURVEY

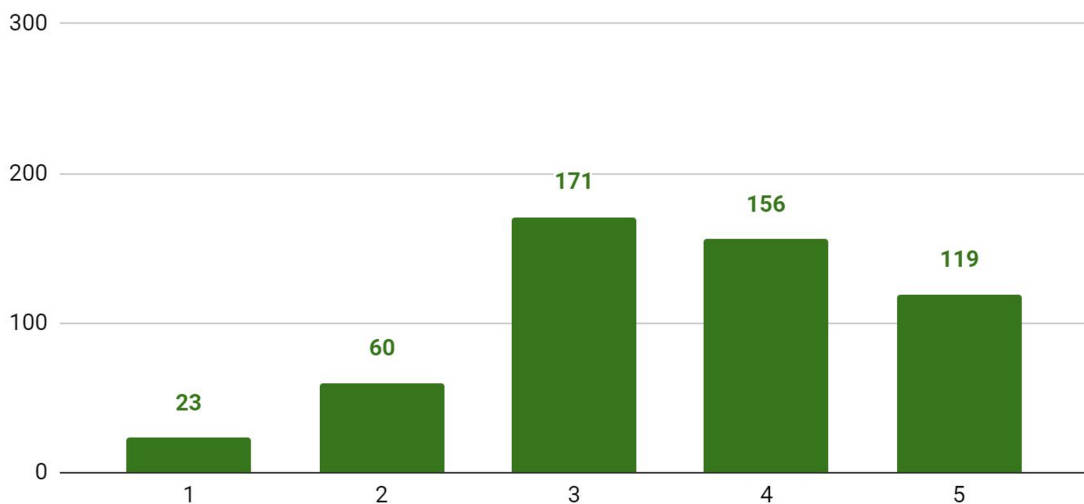
## Youth Recreation & Wellness Infrastructure (Facilities & Programming)



## Primary, Technical, & Post-Secondary Education Opportunities for Students, Employers, & Employees

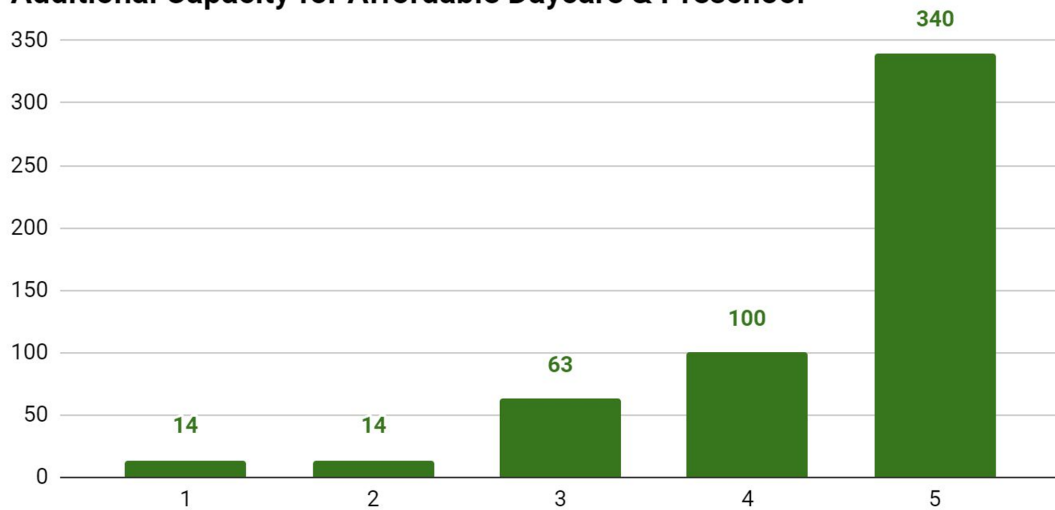


## Community Beautification Projects

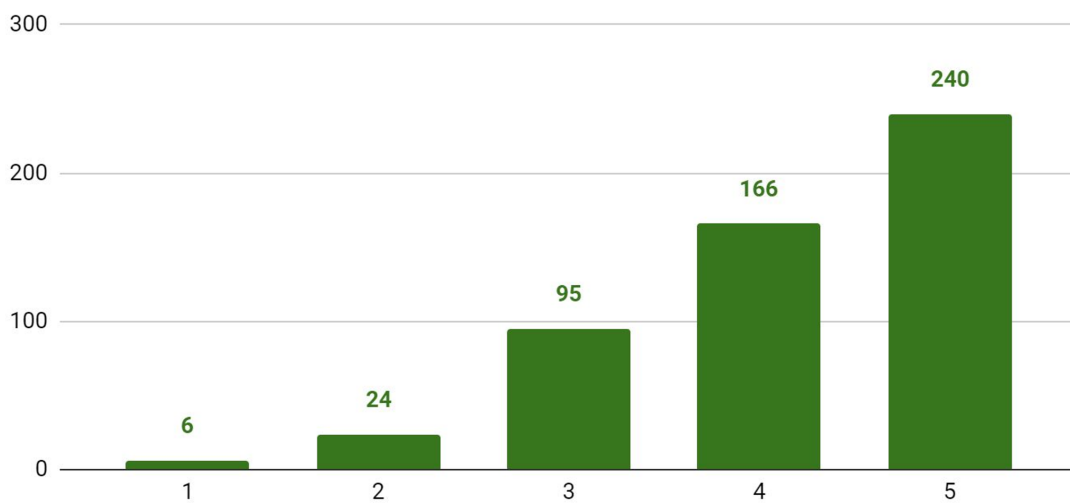


# ELECTRONIC SURVEY

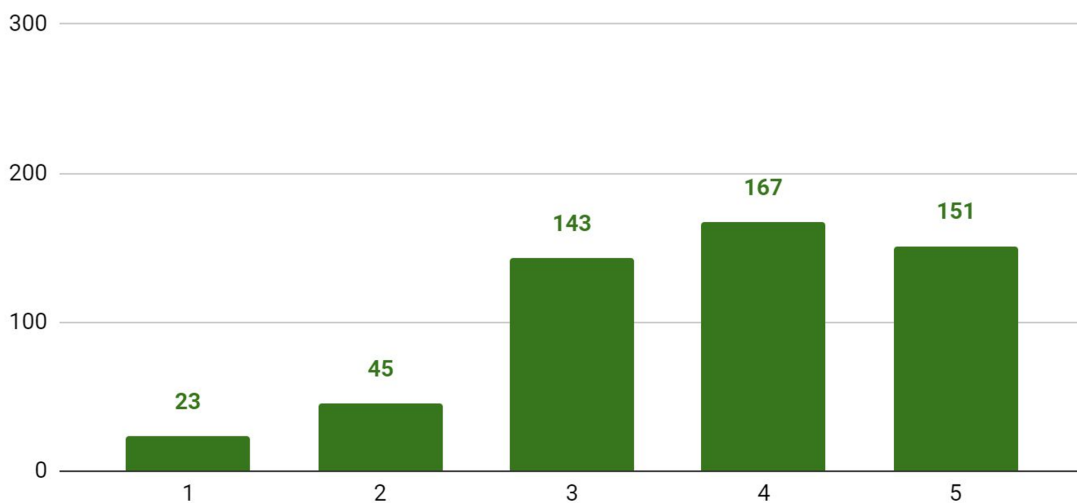
## Additional Capacity for Affordable Daycare & Preschool



## Recruitment Efforts & Incentives for Retail

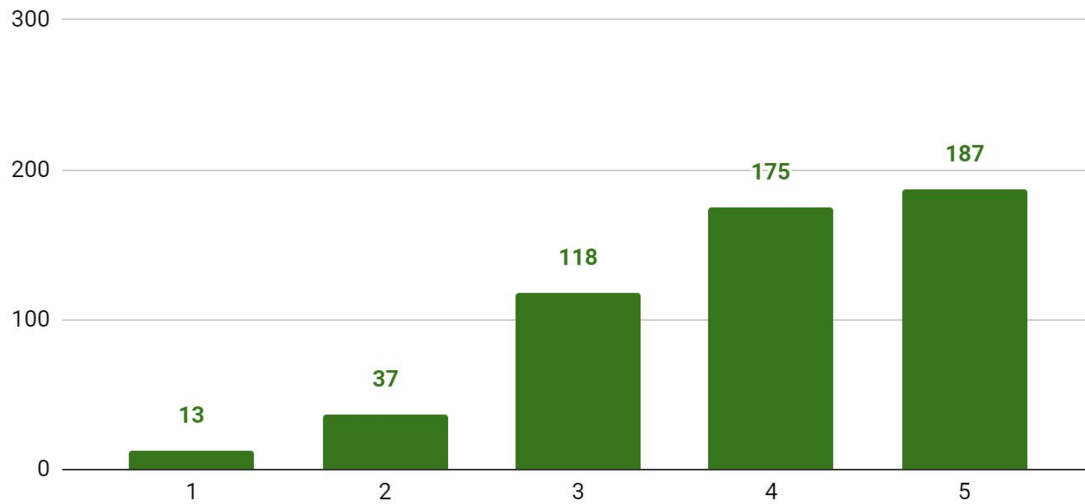


## Recruitment Efforts & Incentives for Industry



# ELECTRONIC SURVEY

## Expanding the Availability & Frequency of Entertainment & Social Events



# COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLES

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To further support understanding of the electronic survey, six community input roundtable sessions were held. Participants for the roundtable sessions were selected from specific targeted segments of the community, including:

- Watford City Youth
- Parents of Young Children
- Faith & Service Leaders
- Business & Industry Leaders
- Arts & Culture Advocates
- Members McKenzie County Job Development Authority Board of Directors

With each of the roundtable sessions, attendees were provided with seven prompts:

- What do you love most about living in Watford City? What keeps you in the community?
- What do you think the greatest needs of the community are?
- What keeps you up at night? What are the greatest opportunities available to Watford City?
- What is missing from Watford City that could make it a more vibrant community?
- What would you like to see Watford City's leadership focus on?
- What else would you like the leadership of Watford City to know?
- Any other final comments?

Complete notes of each roundtable session can be found in the attached materials.



# COMMUNITY VALUES & INPUT THEMES

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Based on the results of the electronic survey and individual roundtable sessions, Strengthen ND was able to identify what residents of Watford City and McKenzie County find important or value, along with nine potential themes to focus planning efforts around.

## **Residents Value:**

- **Community Connectivity & Inclusion:** Watford City and McKenzie County embrace all who come to the area to better themselves and their situations, regardless of their background, socioeconomic status, or any other external factor. Many in the community want all to feel welcome and to have the resources and services they need to thrive; like they can call Watford City "home", too.
- **Thoughtful Growth:** Many in the broader community are appreciative of the investments in infrastructure and facilities that have been made - whether it is building the Roughrider Center, more schools, or other needed facilities. They want to see smart investments, like those already made, initiated well into the future.
- **Developing the Next Generation of Leaders:** Residents in the community acknowledge the strong leadership that has guided the area's successful development, and they want to see the new generation of leaders cultivated. Further, young people in the community are seeking opportunities to have a voice or meaningful input in the future of the area.

# COMMUNITY VALUES & INPUT THEMES

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## **Nine Themes Identified for Planning Efforts & Discussion:**

- **Inclusive Community:** Through the electronic survey and roundtables, challenges emerged around the availability of resources or services for diverse individuals or individuals in need. Specific areas identified include a lack of special education services, addiction and mental health services, and services for vulnerable people. Further, additional efforts to support inclusion of individuals with different cultures or newcomers were cited.
- **Engaging & Supporting Youth:** A great deal of feedback received involved discussion around youth. It was identified that there is a lack of recreation or out-of-school time activities, along with available leadership opportunities for youth and children. Additionally, youth cited a lack of community support for the school - not through funding, but through a lack of attendance of school functions or sporting events. Finally, it was identified that efforts need to be focused on retaining area youth to live and work in McKenzie County.
- **Food:** Whether it is restaurants, retail stores, or markets, McKenzie County residents identified that more variety is desired with regard to food. Many cited a strong desire for more quick food restaurants and dining options. Others indicated that an organic or specialty food store is needed and would be very well-received. Additionally, food experiences are desired, whether it be food festivals, ethnic food markets and farmers markets, or cooking classes, residents want an opportunity to shop and try different offerings.
- **Affordable Housing:** The need for more affordable housing opportunities came through perhaps more strongly than any other issue area. Whether it be the cost to rent a home in Watford City or the cost for first time or new homebuyers, it is clear that a lack of affordable housing is impacting many facets of the community, including workforce and cost of living.

# COMMUNITY VALUES & INPUT THEMES

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## **Nine Themes Identified for Planning Efforts & Discussion:**

- **Expanding Main Street:** Many reported loving the small town charm of Watford City, but there is a strong desire from the community to expand the landscape of Main Street. Whether it is pocket parks, a community gathering space, trees and beautification, community art and streetscapes, or pet-friendly areas, residents are in favor of additions that will increase the walkability and aesthetics of downtown.
- **Recreation Opportunities:** The recreational assets of the McKenzie County area are a tremendous addition to community livability, including close proximity to biking and hiking trails and lake activities. Many in the community identified that they would like more recreation opportunities available inside city limits, including opportunities for biking and walking. Further, structured outdoor recreation programming, available for all seasons, was identified as a need.
- **Childcare & Preschool:** Watford City is a great place for children to grow up, but parents and caregivers identified a need not only for more childcare and preschool opportunities but also that those opportunities be affordable.
- **Workforce:** Watford City and McKenzie County are located in the epicenter of a thriving industry, but some of its growth is being inhibited because of a lack of available workforce. The lack of workforce isn't just impacting the growth of the oil and gas industry, but also of small businesses, other entrepreneurial efforts, and direct services and supports.
- **Senior Needs:** While all populations are being impacted in McKenzie County in a variety of ways, seniors are perhaps one of the more in-need populations as many cited a lack of availability and accessibility of senior services and senior housing options. This is impacting the area's ability to retain individuals ages 65+.

# GOALS & STRATEGIES

With the results of the electronic survey and roundtable sessions, the leadership of Watford City and McKenzie County came together to focus and strategize on drafting a vision, goals, and strategies for the future. Below are the outcomes of the planning session.

## Our Vision:

***In 2024, Watford City will be a vibrant and inclusive community***

- ***where a diverse economy is fostered;***
- ***where residents enjoy a high quality of life and a strong sense of belonging;***
- ***where collaboration and strategic growth are prioritized; and***
- ***where people are proud to call McKenzie County "home".***



## Goals & Strategies:

1

***To increase the availability and accessibility of affordable housing units in McKenzie County through 2024, leadership will:***

- Through cooperative partnerships and efforts, add 500 new single family housing units to the existing housing inventory (CURRENT GOAL of 125 in years 1 and 2; 125 in year 3; 125 in year 4; and 125 in year 5), while rigorously monitoring inventory and median sales to only apply incentives when the shortage of affordable housing is severe, persistent, and critically constraining economic growth.
- Educate developers and potential homebuyers to combat the economic volatility misnomer by re-framing Watford City's and McKenzie County's narratives to indicate the sustainable phase of the Bakken that is currently underway.
- Provide incentives to draw in developers and the construction industry workforce.

# GOALS & STRATEGIES

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2

***To expand the availability of childcare throughout McKenzie County through 2024, leadership will:***

- Leverage public funding opportunities to add 250 childcare slots by 2021 through new facilities.
- Research regulations and develop a legislative strategy to expand the childcare marketplace through opportunities for in-home licensed operations and licensed centers.

3

***To increase McKenzie County's workforce capabilities and availability through 2024, leadership will:***

- Invest in the development of local training pipelines and state level programs for scholarship and tuition reimbursement to train local individuals in healthcare careers and critical trade occupations, including welding, trucking, and construction.
- Undertake a feasibility study to assess the viability of a career academy for both youth and adults to support job training and re-tooling to keep pace with the evolution of the area's needed skills.
- Research all employee recruitment programs and options and utilize all that support in closing the gap on North Dakota Job Service unfilled positions in western North Dakota.
- Invest in retaining youth in the community (post high school and college) through intentional alumni tracking, marketing, and potential student loan incentives.
- Continue and grow connections with local McKenzie County schools and schools statewide to support student career goals with employer and community recruitment strategies.



# GOALS & STRATEGIES

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4

***To build the opportunity culture needed by 2024 to cultivate the next generation of community advocates, leadership will:***

- Re-establish the young professionals group.
- Grow the availability of youth advisory opportunities on established boards and commissions.
- Assess the need and feasibility for a community leadership development program.
- Encourage fellow leaders to engage in mentoring (both formal and informal).
- Incorporate youth voices into municipal and county leadership by encouraging students to provide a "State of the Student Body" report at council and commission meetings.

5

***To provide additional resources and support services to the area's vulnerable populations by 2024, leadership will:***

- Assess the need and sustainability of a regional transitional living or safe house.



# GOALS & STRATEGIES

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6

***To mitigate senior outmigration and assure that seniors are empowered and able to age in place, by 2024 leadership will:***

- Undertake a mill levy vote campaign to acquire additional funding to support senior services.
- Establish a senior activity center able to provide Meals on Wheels, transportation services, front line medical care (blood pressure checks, foot care, etc.), and socialization opportunities.
- Assess the need and sustainability of in-home senior medical care.
- Embrace technology to understand additional opportunities to support remote or rural seniors through in-home care.

7

***To maintain and expand McKenzie County's high quality of life through 2024, leadership will:***

- Encourage 2020 Census participation to achieve the needed population benchmarks for new retail and restaurant opportunities.
- Invest in community safety through law enforcement funding and support.
- Undertake development of the area's brand or identity through the generation of a community event marquee, communication tools, and front line customer service training.
- Expand community marketing and event frequency to better acquaint newcomers and visitors to the area.
- Focus efforts to recruit essential state services to Watford City to increase livability, including DMV services.



# **Attachments**

Roundtable Session Notes

Community Survey Summary