



Business Visitation Program (BVP) 2019 Administrative Update

The Town of Sylvan Lake’s Economic Development Department has been conducting a Business Visitation Program (BVP) since 2015 through contracted services with the Sylvan Lake Chamber of Commerce. The BVP has been instrumental in identifying ‘red flag’ issues that the business community faces on daily and ongoing basis. Issues are then brought forward to administration and departmental managers to address each year. This may include proposed changes to the Land Use Bylaw (LUB), Business Licensing, and/or service delivery.

This administrative update highlights the issues and responses/changes made in response to the BVP:

2015 Home-based Business (HBB) Report	
Red Flag Issue	Administration Response
Lack of enforcement on unlicensed home-based businesses, no benefit to being licensed, no consequence for not being licensed. Link: http://directory.sylvanlake.ca	A lack of Town resources (changing staff) has resulted in limited enforcement, until this year. Unlicensed HBBs will be targeted and fined during the second half of 2019. The benefit of having a business license is a free listing in the Town’s online business directory so customers can find local businesses.
50% of trades, would prefer to not be lumped into the HBB category and without increasing the license fee, they would prefer a contractor license option.	Yes, this could be taken into consideration and would help establish requirements specific to the needs of HBB trades. The Town is investigating a Regional Business Licensing initiative that would provide substantial cost savings to contractors.
Most business owners could not recall having done a Real Property Report for their HBB. Those that had, felt that the process was contentious and not needed.	The Town requires a site plan as part of the permit application for a HBB. Some applicants may have chosen to get a Real Property Report, but the Town does not require this step.
There is a perceived inconsistency of enforcement of the Sign Bylaw. There is a need to educate HBB owners. Many of the HBB businesses were unaware that a Class B & C HBB were permitted to have signage. Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/business-development/land-use-and-zoning.aspx	Class B & C HBB are not required to submit a sign permit application. The Land Use Bylaw (LUB) section 7.24 outlines the dimensions and coverage of the signage permitted.
2015 Waterfront Commercial District (WCD) Report	
Red Flag Issue	Administration Response
Area Aesthetics: high number of vacant storefronts, run-down exteriors, out-dated signage, litter, vandalism, weeds, lack of pride with owners and operators.	In 2014, the Town introduced the Façade Improvement Program for Centennial Street, which was intended to help motivate property owners to undertake property

<p>Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/business-development/resources/Documents/Facade-Improvement-Program---2017-18.pdf</p>	<p>improvements. The Program, which provides property owners with a matching grant up to \$7,500 per storefront, was slow to start but has seen 5 property owners partake in the program. To date 3 facades have been completed, 2 are pending completion, and there is additional interest for 2019.</p>
<p>Lack of competition: need more retail shops, need more family/child friendly businesses, people don't think of Sylvan Lake as a place to shop. Link: https://sylvanlake.ecdev.org/ Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/business-development/investment-attraction.aspx</p>	<p>The Town of Sylvan Lake does not regulate competition. We are open for business and provide one-on-one business development support. The Town has a new microsite with detailed information to support new business start-up. A retail gap analysis and consumer demand survey have also been completed.</p>
<p>Signage: Better signage needed to direct visitors to shops and services, parking, washrooms. Too many restrictions on signage, types and locations. Link: https://sylvanlakechamber.com/</p>	<p>In 2016, the Town and Chamber (WCD Revitalization Committee) was formed and a provincial Visitor Friendly Assessment was conducted. This report identified the need for wayfinding signage both vehicular & pedestrian. This summer the new signage which matches our brand will be installed.</p>
<p>Tourism: Needs to be better managed, more promotion of Sylvan Lake needed outside of Sylvan Lake (print/radio), better promotion of town events, more winter events=less dependency on summer, lack of beach, no affordable boat launch in town, no day mooring, Beach Ambassador Program needs improvement. Link: http://visitsylvanlake.ca/ Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/business-development/town-projects.aspx</p>	<p>The WCD Revitalization Committee will eventually become a destination management & marketing organization (DMMO) as per the Town's work plan. New Culture & Tourism Marketing Coordinator has been hired. Tourism Marketing Strategy is under development. The Festival & Events Strategy is in its implementation stages. Following REIMAGINE SYLVAN process, the Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) short term strategies are being implemented. This includes creating a Consolidated Vision for the Lakefront that will address day mooring, boat launching, & commercial water activities. Beach Ambassador Program has been discontinued.</p>
2016 Retail Report	
Red Flag Issue	Administration Response
<p>Alberta's Economy</p>	<p>Although the Town is not responsible for the provincial economy's downturn, the Oil & Gas and Manufacturing sectors have been directly impacted. As a result of layoffs there is less disposable income to spend at retail operations.</p>

<p>Signage Restrictions and Process: hinders marketing ability, permits (sign & building) are not efficient and very frustrating, systems are difficult to navigate. Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/business-development/permits.aspx</p>	<p>Signage is always a contentious issue and is typically the number one complaint from businesses. The sign regulations are written in an attempt to balance the needs of business advertising while limiting sign clutter in the community. The Town has created new brochures and a more transparent process for obtaining permits. The website has been updated and should be easier to navigate.</p>
<p>Competition: Too many similar businesses are opening, mobile vending, proximity to Red Deer, online shopping are impacting local retailers. Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/business-development/investment-attraction.aspx Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/business-development/town-projects.aspx</p>	<p>The Town of Sylvan Lake is not responsible for regulating competition. Competition is seen as good for business, creates a healthy business environment, and contributes to a higher and expected level of customer service. Mobile vending has become very popular and provides an animation element to the town. Establishing an online component for products sold has increased in popularity. A retail gap analysis and consumer demand survey were conducted to help fill the voids in products and services needed in Sylvan Lake. A Commercial Land Use Strategy is currently underway.</p>
<p>High Rent and High Property Taxes Link: https://sylvanlake.ecdev.org/business-climate (scroll to the bottom of the page)</p>	<p>The Town of Sylvan Lake is not responsible for setting rental/lease rates. It has been identified in the BVP that property owners are not reinvesting in their buildings yet demand “A” Class rent. Non-residential property taxes have only increased once in the past six years and the Town has frozen the mil rate again in 2019. Tax rates between communities can be compared by accessing the link provided.</p>
<p>2017 Professional Scientific Technical Services (PSTS) Report</p>	
<p>Red Flag Issue</p>	<p>Administration Response</p>
<p>42% of the businesses surveyed said they have no immediate needs for the Town to address</p>	
<p>Maintenance and unsightly properties need to be addressed, more enforcement of bylaws required. A barrier should be put up along Hwy 20 where the scrap yard is located. Link: https://sylvanlake.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/9051?preview=44824</p>	<p>Unsightly properties are monitored by the Peace Officers as per the Community Standards Bylaw. All municipal bylaws are enforced when a complaint is launched. The Town has an online process for municipal bylaw complaints.</p>

Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/your-government/your-government-report-a-problem.aspx	
Decrease business taxes, or provide tax breaks. Link: https://sylvanlake.ecdev.org/business-climate	The Town of Sylvan Lake does not have a tax that is imposed on businesses. The provincial Municipal Government Act (MGA) mandates that municipalities in Alberta cannot offer tax breaks or incentives. Non-residential property taxes have only increased once in the past six years and the Town has frozen the mil rate again in 2019.
Out of town patients/clients having to pay for parking, business owners who live out of town who have to pay to park despite paying business taxes. Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/public-services/visitor-pay-parking.aspx	Four (4) parking passes per property are now available at no charge. Property owners are responsible for distributing to the businesses that rent or lease their property, if they choose. An annual pass can be purchased for those out of town residents that frequent Sylvan Lake's waterfront area. This cost is valued at the same \$ as a resident pays through their property taxes. There is no business tax in Sylvan Lake.
Signage and zoning bylaws too restrictive and impractical and would like less barriers in place so they can promote their business.	Signage is always a contentious issue and is typically the number one complaint from businesses. The sign regulations are written in an attempt to balance the needs of business advertising while limiting sign clutter in the community. Businesses are encouraged to populate their business listing which is free with their annual business license. Websites are the most popular means for consumers to find business.
2018 Manufacturing/ Oil & Gas Report	
Red Flag Issue	Administration Response
40% of businesses surveyed in these sector said they have no immediate needs for the Town to address.	
Business licensing process: lack of time sensitivity, lack of communication, difficult process Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/business-development/business-licenses.aspx? mid =14300	The Town has limited resources to process business licensing. Licensing is done on a first come first serve basis. The Town endeavors to issue licenses as quickly as possible, however applicants are always told that they should expect 7-10 days for processing. Often approvals from external bodies (AHS, AGLC, etc) and/or development and building permits are required before a license can be processed, which may add additional time
Timely snow removal	The Town has develop a snow removal policy and schedule that is available online. Snow

<p>Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/public-services/snow-removal.aspx</p>	<p>fall (depth) triggers removal services in the Industrial district.</p>
<p>Enforcement needs to do a better job of penalizing those who don't follow the rules (putting signs up all over town if others are not able to)</p> <p>Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/your-government/your-government-report-a-problem.aspx</p>	<p>The Town now has two (2) Development Officers responsible for sign bylaw complaints. Complaints should be made through the online system.</p>
<p>Business taxes (property taxes) are too high in Sylvan Lake compared to other municipalities, not enough services to justify the higher cost.</p> <p>Link: https://www.sylvanlake.ca/en/public-services/property-taxes.aspx?mid=14223</p> <p>Link: https://regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/#/explore-an-indicator?i=municipal-mill-rate&d=CalculatedValue</p>	<p>The Town of Sylvan Lake does an annual comparison of taxes with 10 similar communities in Alberta. Non-residential property taxes have only increased once in the past six years and the Town has frozen the mil rate again in 2019. The Alberta Regional Dashboard allows you to compare mil rates to neighbouring communities.</p>

In 2019, the Chamber will once more be recruited to conduct an online Business Satisfaction Survey for all industry sectors. The completed surveys will help the Town to establish a baseline of business satisfaction that can be utilized to attract further investment into the community.