



CITY OF  
*Lethbridge*

# *Towards a Brighter Future*

A Framework for Social Policy  
and  
the Priorities for 2009-11

Prepared by the Community & Social Development Committee of Council

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## INTRODUCTION

Much attention has historically been focused on the *physical* infrastructure of communities, including roads, sewers and communications systems. It is becoming increasingly evident, however, that strong *social* infrastructure is also critical to ensuring citizen well-being, sound economic development and healthy, sustainable cities.

The purpose of social policy is to clearly define a community's social vision, clarify core beliefs, articulate guiding principles, and describe desired outcomes. In addition, it details the roles and responsibilities of the various players, identifies local service priorities and makes appropriate recommendations. By providing an agreed-upon contextual framework, social policy enables a community to strategically invest in its social infrastructure and address complex issues in a methodical, tactical manner. Subsequent decisions and strategies related to social issues should demonstrate alignment with the policy vision and contribute to policy outcomes.

The need to develop current, relevant social policy for the City of Lethbridge was first recognized in 2002 and identified as a priority issue in City Council's 2001-2004 Strategic Plan, "A Shared Direction for the Future." Subsequently, *The Community and Social Development Committee*, an advisory board to City Council on matters relating to social well-being, was charged with both defining a social policy and identifying social service priorities. Three years have passed since the endorsement of the Social Policy (see *Road Map for a Brighter Future*, Approved by Council on July 25, 2005). What follows is an updated social policy, including the achievements over the past three years, the new and persistent challenges in the community, priorities for action, and recommendations for the City for the next three years (2008 to 2011).

***As with many communities in Alberta, rapid growth in Lethbridge is not without its challenges. Many people are still unable to find sustainable employment at a living wage. For those who are employed, incomes are not keeping pace with rising consumer costs. There is unequal access to programs and services that is increasing the gap between those who have and those who do not.***

CAT Research and Professional Services, 2008

## SECTION I – FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

### Vision

We envision a city in which all individuals, families and communities have opportunities for healthy development leading to social well-being.

### Core Beliefs

We believe that healthy development and social well-being occur when...

- a) All citizens are treated with dignity and respect.
- b) Diversity is recognized and viewed as an asset that enriches every aspect of people's lives.
- c) Disparities between groups are reduced such that all citizens have access to the basic necessities of life.
- d) All people have opportunity to participate in community life, contribute to society and develop their potential, irrespective of their age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or socio-economic position.
- e) Citizens experience a sense of belonging, acceptance and recognition.
- f) All citizens share in the responsibility of ensuring the quality of life within a community.

### Guiding Principles

- People are a community's most valuable resource. Investments made in the development and support of people enhances the quality of community life in all its aspects.
- The City of Lethbridge and its citizens are best able to recognize and build upon community strengths. Similarly, service priorities can best be identified at the local level.
- Partnerships and collaboration between people, associations, institutions and government are fundamental to creating the momentum required for social change.
- Investment in prevention and early intervention enhances the well-being of individuals, strengthens families and benefits the community as a whole.
- Volunteerism is linked to positive outcomes for individuals and the community.

## Long-term Community Outcome

Strong, healthy families and a safe, viable community.

This long-term community outcome will be achieved by:

- Participation and Social Inclusion – adequate opportunity for all citizens to participate in community life and experience a sense of belonging and identity
- Respect for Diversity – all people are treated equally, respected and supported in the community without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age or mental or physical disability
- Shared Responsibility – there is a sense of shared responsibility within the community for the social well-being of all citizens
- Strategic Resource Allocation - resources are strategically allocated based on social need and identified service priorities
- Collaboration and Coordination of Services – there is a high level of collaboration between the various services and sectors that exist within the community (public, private and volunteer)

***“Lethbridge is a community shaped by people who are proud of their past and confident of their future. People here are hard working, highly educated, and accepting of cultural and ethnic differences. They frequently demonstrate inventiveness in the way they confront challenges and are skilled in building collaborative partnerships.”***

***Mayor Bob Tarleck***

## SECTION II – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The quality of life in a community depends on both its physical and social infrastructure. Whereas physical infrastructure keeps municipalities operational and healthy, investment in social infrastructure ensures that all citizens have genuine opportunities to participate in society, develop their potential and enjoy fair access to income, education, services and resources. In Canada, federal and provincial governments have primary responsibility to fund and support social infrastructure, whereas the main role of municipal government is to facilitate collaboration between local stakeholder groups, identify issues and respond to needs. Sustainable social infrastructure depends on effective consultation and cooperation between all three orders of governments. It also depends on the successful engagement of the private and volunteer sectors that exist within the community.

### **Role of the Federal Government**

The Federal government is responsible for:

- a) Setting national standards in order to ensure that all Canadians are provided with reasonably comparable levels of public services; and
- b) Providing financial and income support.

### **Role of the Provincial Government**

As stated in the AUMA Policy Statement of Social Infrastructure (2004), the Provincial government is responsible for:

- a) Developing programs/services in keeping with the province's own distinct realities;
- b) Cooperating with municipalities in identifying needs; and
- c) Ensuring equity between groups and municipalities

### **Role of the Municipal Government**

The Alberta Municipal Government Act clearly states that local governments can include in their mandates social infrastructure considerations, given that a safe and viable community cannot be created through physical infrastructure alone.

Part 1, Section 3 (Municipal Government Act)

“The purposes of a municipality are:

- a) To provide good government;
- b) To provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the municipality, and
- c) To develop and maintain safe and viable communities.”

## **Leadership from the City of Lethbridge**

Given the before-mentioned guidelines, it is our belief that the role of City of Lethbridge, in the area of social infrastructure, is to:

1. Work with the community to identify and build upon community strengths and priority needs.
2. Bring the key players together to build a plan to address these community needs.
3. Build capacity in the community to address these needs
4. Advocate and lobby for action to address the needs that are the responsibility of other jurisdictions
5. Provide strategic investment of resources to support agencies and the community to address community needs. This may include one or more of the following:
  - Public education and information sharing
  - Community engagement processes
  - Funding
6. Measure the impact of this work and communicate it to the larger community

***The City of Lethbridge is actively working to ensure that the social fabric of the community is strengthened and that citizens have the capacity to care for each other and be engaged in their communities.***

## SECTION III - NEW & PERSISTENT COMMUNITY ISSUES

In 2004, the City of Lethbridge Community & Social Development Committee of Council determined that there was a need to develop a social profile of the community and conducted a Social Assets and Needs Assessment using a strength-based approach. This study identified the priorities and formed the basis for the Social Policy, approved by City Council on July 25, 2005.

Due to the dynamic nature of the community's social systems, City Council requested the Social Assets and Needs Assessment be conducted in 2008 in preparation for the planning and budget cycle. Again, the assets that were identified and will continue to support the social infrastructure to strengthen the assets and respond to the priorities include the

- Willingness of community groups, organizations and systems to work together
- Leadership demonstrated by the Mayor and City Council and the Community & Social Development Committee of Council
- Lethbridge's openness to innovation; and
- Community's emphasis on effective practice.

Although Lethbridge was again found to be a strong and caring community, the study reinforced that six demographic groups were experiencing new and persistent challenges; Families with Children, Youth, Aboriginal People, Older Adults, New Canadians and Persons with Disabilities. Project findings are as follows:

### FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

The primary issues affecting families with children in our community include:

- Increasing poverty amongst some families
- Lack of child care in the community
- Lack of education, counselling and supports for special needs children
- Lack of affordable, safe and child-friendly housing
- Risks associated with family violence
- Limited health care services

#### Community Priorities:

Based on the research, consultations and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for families with children in Lethbridge over the next three years:

- Increased access to affordable, flexible and high quality childcare – there is a considerable need for different forms of childcare for very young children,

children in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and before and after care for 6-12 year olds.

- More affordable and child-friendly housing – the housing situation in Lethbridge has deteriorated since 2005 and there is increasing need for community subsidized housing that is safe for families with young children.
- Education and Counselling – there is a growing need for supports for children with special learning needs and for no-fee counselling services to families and children.
- Continue the progress made towards increased access and expanded transportation services –cost, duration of service and transit routes need to be reviewed to continue to more effectively meet the needs of low income and working parents.
- Increased access to health services – there is a need for an urgent care unit as well as increased access to family physicians.
- Coordination and expansion of services – there is a need to offer multiple services at a single location in 2-3 accessible centres across the city. Participants would like to see an increase in programs that bring families together for support, education, recreation and community building.

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## YOUTH

The primary issues facing the youth in our community include:

- Lack of social and recreational opportunities
- Racism, discrimination and violence toward some youth
- Need to increase the protection of the environment
- Growing substance abuse and addiction issues

### **Community Priorities:**

Based on the research, consultations and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for youth in Lethbridge over the next three years:

- Continue the implementation of the Youth Action Plan under the direction of the Community & Social Development and the Youth Advisory Council.

- Youth Centre – The main priority for youth is the creation of a youth centre where kids can come together regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation or religion to explore interests, pursue activities and just hang out in a safe environment.
- Expansion of the Youth Emergency Shelter – there is need for the expansion and relocation of the Woods Homes youth shelter. The shelter currently has the capacity to serve 8 youth and is often over subscribed. Those who do not get a bed may sleep on the street and are at significant risk of violence, prostitution and drug use.
- Increased Funding & Resources – funding for services to youth needs to be reviewed in the next budget cycle. Funding needs to be sustained for existing youth services that are effective, strength-based, focused on resiliency and intergenerational and as well as directed towards new services such as multi-dimensional counselling (e.g., addictions, mental health issues; employment support and career planning, mentoring, ‘stop and prevent’ services).
- Increased Protection of the Environment – participants explained that it is youth who will pay the price if the City does not take a leadership role in coordinating community efforts to protect the environment now.

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## ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

The primary issues faced by Aboriginal people living in Lethbridge include:

- Discrimination and racism
- Challenges in accessing affordable housing
- Challenges in accessing employment
- Lack of child care
- The special challenges of Aboriginal youth around education, social inclusion, discrimination and violence

### Community Priorities:

Based on the research, consultations and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for Aboriginal people in and around Lethbridge over the next three years:

- Continue the support and participation in the Aboriginal Council of Lethbridge.
- Increase efforts to promote inclusion and prevent discrimination – this would include recognition and acceptance of the Aboriginal community as well as

efforts to combat systemic and covert forms of racism and discrimination in housing, employment and childcare opportunities.

- Increased access to safe and affordable housing – including more and better Treaty 7 Housing and a reserved allocation of Lethbridge Housing community subsidized housing for urban Aboriginal families.
- Increased access to and awareness of services for Aboriginal people – this would include strengthening the cultural competency of existing services as well as expanding services specific to Aboriginal people (education, health care, counselling, shelters and transitional housing).
- Childcare – creation of additional childcare services, particularly services that welcome and value Aboriginal children.
- Additional support for Native Women’s Transition Home – increased number of spaces, expansion of services and possible provision of childcare to meet the needs of the growing urban Aboriginal population.
- Establishment of Youth Centre and/or expansion of the Medicine Tree Program for Aboriginal Youth.

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## OLDER ADULTS

The primary issues faced by older adults living in Lethbridge include:

- Increases in the cost of living
- Lack of accessible and appropriate transportation
- Lack of affordable housing and supports for aging in place
- Need to create an “age-friendly agenda” for Lethbridge
- Funding for services and supports

### **Community Priorities:**

Based on the research, consultations and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for older adults in Lethbridge over the next three years:

- Continue the implementation of the Community Plan for Seniors and support of the Seniors Community Forum.
- Continuum of care to support ‘aging in place’ – there is a growing need to provide an expanded range and number of services that will support older

adults as their needs change over time. In particular support for care givers, both formal and informal, will be essential to enabling people to remain in their homes as they grow older.

- Transportation – accessing affordable modes of transportation continues to be a major concern among older adults in Lethbridge. Although there have been significant improvements over the past few years, many older people still feel that limited capacity to move around the city contributes to isolation and an overall inability to participate in the community and access services.
- Information resources – there is a need for program and service information to be provided through a variety of media to reach the diverse individuals that make up the older adult population. A 211 service, print, web-based, radio and television all need to be utilized to communicate information to seniors and their caregivers.
- Support to the 50+ age group – increased support to this cohort will be important to promote healthy aging and to support effective planning for retirement.
- Sustainable funding and support for possible expansion/adaptation of the seniors' centres to include more intergenerational programming

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## NEW CANADIANS

The primary issues faced by New Canadians in Lethbridge include:

- Isolation and support for inclusion of new community members
- Obtaining and keeping meaningful employment
- Lack of access to English as a second language training
- Lack of affordable housing and transportation

### **Community Priorities:**

Based on the research, consultations and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for New Canadians in Lethbridge over the next three years:

- Settlement services – a more pro-active, coordinated approach to settlement services and the exploration of an Immigrant Centre where new Canadians can access service and socialize.
- Employment, recognition of foreign skills and credentials – increased support for employment opportunities for new immigrants, including recognition of

foreign skills and credentials. There needs to be increased efforts to work with the business community and other employers to improve understanding of cultural differences and to clarify expectations.

- Transportation – build previous work to strengthen the transit system to increase and improve public transportation to under serviced communities, in particular to the industrial area and remote neighbourhoods. Extend the hours of service in early morning, later evening and on weekends.
- Housing – build more affordable (low-income and family) housing in the city.
- ESL classes – more classes need to be offered, particularly on evenings and weekends.

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## **PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, MENTAL AND/OR PHYSICAL CHALLENGES**

The primary issues faced by persons with disabilities, mental and/or physical challenges include:

- Access to appropriate and affordable transportation
- Affordable, accessible, safe housing
- Accessible services and community infrastructure
- Limited income, employment and educational opportunities

### **Community Priorities:**

Based on the research, consultations and focus group discussions the following were identified as priority areas for people living with disabilities in Lethbridge over the next three years:

- Invest in affordable, accessible housing for people living with disabilities. The City needs to consult Southern Alberta Disability Action Team to involve and engage the disability sector in this planning
- Establish a Community Inclusion function within the City of Lethbridge.. This co-ordination function could provide information about services and programs to older adults, immigrants and people living with disabilities
- Establish a resource centre or have an existing resource centre made accessible to co-locate services and information for people living with disabilities

- Develop a feedback mechanism for issues related to accessibility in the city. This system would enable people living with disabilities to contribute to policy, planning and programming at the City to address accessibility issues
- Consider the provision of subsidies for taxis when accessible transit is unavailable. Provide expanded transit service hours and additional training to flat floor and kneeling bus drivers.

## SECTION IV – THE WAY FORWARD

### The Role of the City of Lethbridge in Four Key Areas

The City of Lethbridge, through its leadership and facilitative role (p.7), will continue to address these priority areas and strategically invest available resources to align with the community priorities outlined in the Social Policy.

### Key Areas of Focus

The recommendations provided below are based on the information collected through the research and during the agency and citizen consultations. They are suggestions for action by the City over the next three years in four key areas: Housing, Transportation, Child Care and Supports for Inclusion.

#### I. Housing

Affordable housing continues to be one of the most significant issues in the community of Lethbridge. Excellent work has been completed by the Social Housing in Action Committee. The endorsement of the strategic plan “Bringing Lethbridge Home” and the adoption of a housing first approach to homelessness and affordable housing reflect the City’s commitment to address housing needs. Despite this, participants feel the housing situation has deteriorated since 2005 and there is an increasing need for affordable and community subsidized housing for many groups (families with small children, lone parents, people living with disabilities, aboriginal people).

**It is recommended that the City of Lethbridge continue its leadership role in ensuring there is increased access to safe and affordable housing through:**

- 1. Continuing to provide leadership in partnership with the Social Housing in Action Community Advisory Board to implement “Bringing Lethbridge Home” Strategic Plan.*
- 2. Supporting the Native Women’s Transition Home to access an appropriate permanent location.*
- 3. Continuing the implementation of the Housing First Model*
- 4. Evaluating the impact of the Outreach Support Services Innovative project.*
- 5. Determining the feasibility of a joint collaborative program in the community to support older adults to age in place.*
- 6. Supporting Social Housing in Action to ensure emergency shelter space is adequate for the needs of the community.*

## **II. Transportation**

Although there have been significant improvements to the accessibility of public transit over the past few years, transportation challenges persist for many older adults and people with mobility issues. The cost, duration of service, limited transit routes and inefficiencies of access-a-ride combine to inhibit people's capacity to get around the city and thus participate fully as citizens and community members.

### **It is recommended that the City of Lethbridge should**

- 1. Continue to work with the community, in particular with older adults, and persons with disabilities, to ensure the transit system is accessible and meeting people's needs. This should include a formal system for citizen feedback, and engagement.*
- 2. Promote the work being done by City Transit in the area of community planning and accessibility to ensure citizens are aware of the City's efforts to build an accessible transit system and the ways in which they can be involved.*

## **III. Child Care**

Access to affordable, flexible and high quality child care was an issue that cuts across demographic groups in the community. There is enormous need for a variety of child care services for very young children; children in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and before and after school care for 6 – 12 year olds. Access to affordable child care is a major barrier to many families' (single parent, low income and Aboriginal families) ability to make ends meet.

**It is recommended that the City of Lethbridge:**

- 1. Lobby the federal and provincial government to provide increased support for a publicly funded child care program.*
- 2. Work with the provincial government to develop new initiatives through the provincial “Creating Child Care Choice” program.*
- 3. Work with the stakeholders to provide incentives for the establishment of additional private, community day homes.*
- 4. Promote and support child care services that welcome and value Aboriginal children.*

**IV. Supports for Inclusion**

Although Lethbridge is considered a warm and inviting community, continued growth increasing migration among the aboriginal community and increasing immigration among new Canadians combine to challenge the City’s homogeneity and its openness to newcomers. The establishment of the Welcoming & Inclusive Community Leader’s Team and the preparation of a strategic plan to guide the team’s work are seen as excellent first steps in the process to strengthen community inclusion and mitigate discrimination in many forms.

**It is recommended that the City of Lethbridge:**

- 1. Explore the creation of one or various liaison position(s) at City Hall to work Aboriginal Peoples, older adults, people living with disabilities and new Canadians.*
- 2. Advocate at the provincial level to increase recognition of foreign skills and credentials. Work with the business community to establish internships or opportunities for immigrants to gain Canadian work experience in their field.*
- 3. Review the City’s own hiring policies to promote diversity in its workforce and to hire/retain more Aboriginal, immigrant and disabled staff.*
- 4. Take the lead in creating an age-friendly city by working with the Health Region, services providers and older adults to develop a plan to address the aging population.*

## SECTION V – IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION

The Community & Social Development Committee of Council will:

- Monitor the implementation of the policy.
- Annually review the status, effectiveness, responsiveness and appropriateness of the work plan for the implementation of the social policy
- Complete an outcome evaluation as identified in this Social Policy and present to City Council by the end of 2011 with the results of the current social assets and needs assessment and revised Social Policy.

## SECTION VI – REFERENCES

*A Shared Direction for the Future*, Lethbridge City Council, 2002.

*AUMA Policy Statement on Social Infrastructure, 2004*, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, 2004.

*Lethbridge Profile 2003-2004*, Economic Development Lethbridge.

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