


REPORT TO COUNCIL
CONSULTANT PROPOSALS FOR NRED PROGRAM GRANT APPLICATION
October 16, 2024

COUNCIL DISCUSSION	
	TOPIC: Consultant proposals to prepare a Northern and Regional Economic Development (NRED) program grant application for Foothills County for the 2024-25 intake.
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INTRODUCTION:

The Northern and Regional Economic Development (NRED) program funds initiatives led by Alberta municipalities, Indigenous communities and non-profit organizations that promote regional economic development and diversification. Projects should either immediately promote regional economic prosperity or lay a foundation for continued economic prosperity into the future. Applicants are eligible to receive between \$10,000 to \$300,000 to support eligible project costs.

Foothills County submitted an application for the 2023-24 intake to support economic development capacity development in the organization through the creation of an economic development officer position and the drafting of an economic development strategy for the County. However, the County was not successful in securing funding.

It should be noted that there has been a shift in the program priorities since last year. The new program priorities are as follows:

- Increase investment readiness and regional attractiveness for private investment.
- Support planning and feasibility studies that lead to economic development enabling investments that boost regional growth.
- Support local and regional business and industry, including business retention and expansion.

The NRED Program will provide up to 50% of total eligible project costs. **Applicants must be able to match the funding requested at a minimum of 50% of the total project cost** and all Matching Funds must be fully secured or committed at the time of application (can also be grants but not Government of Alberta grants). The maximum timeframe for the completion of proposed projects is 3 years.

Administration is proposing that the County retain an economic development consultant to provide advice on what would be the most advantageous project that could be proposed under the NRED program and to prepare an application on behalf of the County. The deadline for submissions is December 6, 2024

PREVIOUS APPLICATION DEBRIEF:

Administration met with NRED program administrators for a debrief to gain an understanding of why the County's 2023/2024 application was not successful in obtaining funding. This is the feedback that was received:

- The program was highly subscribed last year with 174 applications, 72 of which were ultimately funded.
- The number of jobs that the proposed project would create was heavily scored in the 2023-2024 intake, and the evaluators did not feel the application provided a sufficient "story" as to how the project proposed by Foothills County would create jobs. The focus of the County's application had been capacity building (which was identified as one of the program priorities) but making a connection between the increased municipal capacity for economic development and the creation of jobs was a difficult leap to make.

PROPOSALS FOR CONSIDERATION:

Administration has solicited proposals from three local economic development consultants which were provided to Council. These reports contain proprietary information so should Council wish to discuss the details of the proposals, it is suggested that the discussion occur in closed session.

In terms of suggested projects, all three consultants have recommended focusing on the Highway 2A Industrial Corridor and looking for grant funding that would support development of an investment readiness / investment attraction plan, but part of the scope of work would be to provide details regarding a recommended project that would be proposed for the grant. Two of the consultants have proposed undertaking two grant applications simultaneously (a federal grant as well as the provincial NRED grant). This is particularly advantageous as the NRED grant is a matching grant, but the matching funds can come from another grant if it is not a provincial grant.

REQUEST OF COUNCIL:

Council is asked to discuss the merits of the submissions that were received and provide direction to administration.

SUGGESTED MOTION:

Council directs administration to retain _____ to prepare an NRED application on behalf of Foothills County as outlined in their project proposal.

Resources:

- Northern and Regional Economic Development Program (NRED) information: [NRED Program Information](#)
- NRED application guidelines: [NRED Program Guidelines 2024/2025](#)