RESORT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (RDS)

City of Fernie

2025/26-2027/28



DRAFT

Acknowledgements

The City acknowledges and thanks the Resort Development Strategy Advisory Working Group and Tourism Fernie for their participation in the development of this Resort Development Strategy.

The City of Fernie is located within Qukinʔamakʔis, the unceded territory of Yaq̓it ʔa·knuqƛi'it First Nation.

We recognize that we live and work within their vast lands.

ʔakanuxuniḵ are from Yaq̓it ʔa·knuqƛi'it and are members of the Ktunaxa speaking peoples of British Columbia, Idaho and Montana.

1.0 BACKGROUND

As of the 2021 Census, the City of Fernie had a population of 6,320 residents, reflecting a 17.1% increase from its 2016 population of 5,396. More recent estimates suggest that the population has continued to grow, reaching approximately 6,972 by 2024.

Fernie is situated in the Elk Valley of southeastern British Columbia, near the Alberta border, and is part of Area A within the Regional District of East Kootenay. The city lies along Highway 3 (the Crowsnest Pass Highway), and is renowned for its world-class outdoor recreation opportunities and stunning mountain environment.

Fernie is located within the unceded, traditional territory of the Ktunaxa Nation. Specifically, it resides in Qukinʔamakʔis, the ancestral lands of Yaq̓it ʔa·knuqƚi'it First Nation (Tobacco Plains Indian Band). The Ktunaxa people have inhabited this region since time immemorial, with a territory encompassing parts of what are now southeastern British Columbia, Alberta, and portions of the United States, including Washington, Idaho, and western Montana.

Ktunaxa Creation

In ancestral times, referred to by the Ktunaxa as the animal world, there were references made many times by the Creator to when there will be ʔaqƚmakniḵ (people).

At that time, there was some disturbance caused by a huge water monster known as Yawuʔniḵ, who killed many of the animals. A council was called by the Chief animal, Naƚmuqɛ̓in. Naƚmuqɛ̓in was huge. He was so tall that he had to crawl on his hands and knees, for if he stood up, his head would hit the ceiling of the sky.

It was decided that Yawuʔniḵ had to be destroyed. A war party was formed. Yawuʔniḵ plied the Kootenay and Columbia River System, including Columbia Lake and Arrow Lakes.

Yawuʔniḵ was sighted in the Columbia Lake near Yaqa·n Nuʔkiy, and the chase was on. At that time, the Kootenay River and Columbia Lake were joined. As the chase proceeded, Naƚmuqɛ̓in gave names to many locations along the Kootenay River, Kootenay Lake, Arrow Lakes, and the Columbia River.

Yawuʔniḵ was pursued down the Kootenay River past the Wasa sloughs, now called Wasa, BC. Skinkuɛ̓ got into trouble when he fell into the river and had to be rescued by Wasa (horsetail).

The chase followed where the St. Mary's River empties into the Kootenay River. ʔaq̓am, where the St. Mary's Reserve is now located, then on downriver to Kanḵak (spring), where Mayuk (weasel) joined the war party. There were animals on both sides of the river as the chase continued, and among the party was a parasite, ʔa·kukƚakuwum, who had to be carried on the backs of other animals. His name was Ḵ̓umtus, and he was mean and bossy. The other animals grew tired of his nagging and dumped him into the river at a place now known as Yaqakiƚ waƚmitquƚiƚki Ḵ̓umtus.

Leaving the land of the Eagle, ʔa·knuqƚuƚam̓ʔamaḵis and into the land of the woodtick, Ḵam̓na ʔAmakis, past Wasaʔki (Waldo), then on past the now 49th Parallel and then past Kaxax (Turtle), now underwater, near Rexford, Montana. The chase went on by ʔa·kiʔyi (Jennings) and on by ʔaqswaq (Libby) then into Skinkuɛ̓ ʔAmakis (the land of Coyote), past ʔaq̓anqmi (Bonners Ferry, Idaho) then northerly past the now international boundary into ʔaɛ̓pu ʔamakis, the land of the Wolverine, past Yaqa·n Nuʔkiy (Creston, BC) then up the Kootenay Lake past ʔaq̓asqnuk, (Kuskannok, BC). The chase continued by ʔAkuqƚi (Akokli Creek), past Ksanka Creek. The Yawuʔniḵ chose to follow the Kootenay

River past ʔaqyamɬup (Nelson, BC). The chase was now in Miɬqaqas ʔamakis (the land of Chickadee).

At Kiḵsiɬuk (Castlegar, BC), Yawuʔniḵ went north into the Arrow Lakes, past ʔakinḵaʔnuk (Arrow Rock), where arrows were shot into a crevice in the rock. If the arrow was true, the journey continued; if the mark was missed, beware, danger ahead. The arrow was true, and the journey continued past Ɫaɬnuʔniḵ (Nakusp), then up past Ktunwakanmituk Miɬqaqas (Revelstoke, BC) where the Columbia River flows into the Arrow Lakes, then up and around The Big Bend, then down past ʔaknuqɬuk (Golden, BC) past Yaknusuʔki (Briscoe, BC) then on past Yakyuɛki. The chase carries on through Kwataq̓nuk (Athalmere), then past Kananuk (Windermere, BC), past ʔakiskq̓nuk (Windermere Lakes), then back into the Columbia Lake, Yaqa·n Nukiy (Canal Flats, BC). This completed the cycle of the chase.

Yawuʔniḵ would once again escape into the Kootenay River and the chase would go on. The chase would go on and on. Every time the war party thought they had Yawuʔniḵ cornered, Yawuʔniḵ would escape again.

One day, sitting on the riverbank observing the chase was a wise old one named Kiḵum. Kiḵum told Naɬmuqɛin, you are wasting your time and energy chasing the monster. Why not use your size and strength, and with one sweep of your arm, block the river from flowing into the lake, and the next time the monster enters the lake, you will have him trapped. Naɬmuqɛin took the advice of Kiḵum and did as he was told. The next time YawuniḴ entered the lake, he was trapped.

Having successfully corralled Yawuʔniḵ, a decision had to be made as to whom the honor of killing Yawuʔniḵ would be bestowed upon. The honor was awarded to Yamakpaɬ (Red-headed Woodpecker).

When Yawuʔniḵ was killed, he was taken ashore and butchered and distributed among the animals. There remained only the innards and bones. The ribs were scattered throughout the region and now form the Hoo Doos seen throughout the area.

Naɬlmuqɛin then took the white balloon-like organ, known as the swim bladder, and crumbled it into small pieces and scattered it in all directions, saying,ʾThese will be the white race of peopleʾ. He then took the black ingredient from the inner side of the backbone, the kidney, and broke it into small pieces and scattered them in all directions, declaring,ʾThese will be the black raceʾ. He then took the orange roe and threw the pieces in all directions, saying,ʾThese will be the yellow race of peopleʾ.

Naɬmuqɛin looked at his bloody hands and reached down for some grass to wipe his hands. He then let the blood fall to the ground saying,ʾThis will be the red people, they will remain here foreverʾ.

Naɬmuqɛin, in all the excitement, rose to his feet and stood upright hitting his head on the ceiling of the sky. He knocked himself dead. His feet went northward and is today know as Ya·ɬiki, in the Yellowhead Pass vicinity. His head is near Yellowstone Park in the State of Montana. His body forms the Rocky Mountains.

The people were now keepers of the land. The spirit animals ascended above and are the guiding spirits of the people.

Post-colonization / Contact

Fernie's history began with coal mining, founded in 1898 and incorporated in 1904.

The community has faced tragedies, including fires and several major mining disasters, but has grown into a thriving mountain destination focused on active pursuits, creativity, and cultural exploration. Located three hours southwest of Calgary International Airport and one hour east of Cranbrook's Canadian Rockies International Airport, Fernie has attracted significant interest from domestic and international investors, including those from Australia, Europe, and Great Britain. Economic growth and a focus on summer tourism have created high visitor interest, sometimes straining Fernie's natural and infrastructure assets. While traditionally based in mining, railways, and forestry, Fernie is diversifying into a broader socio-economic region. Tourism and services are becoming more prominent, alongside pressure on housing and accommodations, highlighting conflicting issues. Rapid growth in tourism and real estate is challenging the community and municipality, especially regarding infrastructure demands, necessitating enhancing the visitor experience rather than merely increasing numbers until funding for critical infrastructure and adequate housing is secured. Fernie Alpine Resort, Fernie Wilderness **Adventures**, and Island Lake Lodge are renowned for their powder skiing, attracting many visitors. Mountain biking and dry fly fishing are gaining popularity, with adventure tourism drawing in visitors. Recruiting and retaining employees, along with providing accessible housing, are interlinked challenges critical for developing new tourism products and supporting community viability.

An Authentic Mountain Community with Global Appeal

Fernie is an authentic Rocky Mountain destination rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage, and year-round adventure. With a population nearing 7,000, this community combines a welcoming, small-town feel with the amenities and experiences of a world-class resort area. Its proximity to major urban centres in Alberta and Montana and access to three regional airports make it highly accessible for both Canadian and international visitors.

A picturesque mountain town nestled in the Elk Valley of southeastern British Columbia, Canada, Fernie is completely surrounded by the majestic peaks of the Canadian Rockies, and is the only city-class municipality in Canada with this distinction. These exceptional landscapes, along with Fernie's historic downtown and vibrant arts scene, help to differentiate Fernie as a destination for those seeking meaningful, authentic, and eco-conscious travel experiences.

Key Attractions and Signature Experiences in Fernie Include:

- World-class dry-fly trout fishing on the Elk River and tributaries, despite mining-related environmental monitoring concerns such as selenium levels.
- Legendary skiing, snowboarding at Fernie Alpine Resort, and growing summer usage opportunities.
- Cat-skiing adventures at Island Lake Lodge and Fernie Wilderness Adventures.
- Expansive mountain biking networks, supported by community trail champions.
- More than 18 km of scenic recreational trails within city limits.
- Historic and walkable downtown offering curated shopping, local art, spa services, and culinary diversity.
- Recreational assets like the Aquatic Centre, Memorial Arena, and City parks.
- Engaging cultural institutions, including The Arts Station, Heritage Library, and the Fernie

Museum.
- Wildlife viewing in one of North America's most ecologically intact carnivore habitats.
- Golfing at the picturesque 18-hole Fernie Golf & Country Club.
- Additional and divers winter sports include snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, fat biking, and snowshoeing.
- Watersports and summer lake activities on nearby Lake Koocanusa and other alpine lakes.
- A thriving wedding and event scene attracts regional and international clientele.
- Tourism Development with Purpose

Fernie's Resort Development Strategy (RDS) focuses on:
- Extending the visitor season, particularly during spring and fall.
- Managing infrastructure and capacity to avoid overuse during peak periods.
- Enhancing visitor services, transportation, and accessibility.

Future-focused tourism planning recognizes the importance of working with the Ktunaxa Nation and honoring the unceded territory of Yaq̓it ʔa·knuqƛ̓i'it. This collaboration strengthens the city's commitment to cultural inclusion, community reconciliation, and authentic representation of local Indigenous heritage.

The RDS and aligned initiatives—including the Tourism Master Plan and the Heritage Strategy—will fund and support projects that deepen relationships with Indigenous partners, inspire visitor return rates, and maintain Fernie's identity as a unique, community-driven mountain destination.

By addressing challenges such as infrastructure strain, staff resource shortages, and land use complexity, Fernie is not just managing growth—it's shaping it sustainably and inclusively.

2.0 Tourism Industry Context

Tourism continues to be a foundational economic driver in Fernie, supporting businesses, jobs, and the quality of life in the community. Fernie's tourism industry has proven resilient and adaptive, rebounding strongly from the disruptions of COVID-19 and demonstrating record-breaking performance in recent years.

In 2023, Fernie experienced its highest lodging revenue year, driven by continued pandemic recovery, strong market awareness, higher average daily rates (ADR), and increased contributions from traditional and short-term rental (STR) accommodations. Notably, the TC Energy pipeline project also significantly boosted corporate travel demand during the spring and summer months, albeit with a more limited impact on retail and activity sectors than leisure tourists.

Fernie is poised for continued growth through strategic destination management, infrastructure development, and sustainable tourism initiatives. Over 1,100 lodging units (hotels, condos, chalets, townhomes, etc.) now exist, with a healthy mix of commercial and STR-zoned accommodations. New developments, such as the Basecamp condo-hotel (opening in 2026) and the Best Western expansion, are expected to generate an estimated $8 million in new annual lodging revenues and approximately $200,000 in additional MRDT (Municipal and Regional District Tax).

Key observations from recent lodging data show:

High-revenue months don't always correlate with high occupancy, pointing to pricing opportunities during peak-value periods.

Low-occupancy but high-demand months present growth potential for visitor volume and yield optimization.

Post-Pandemic Traveler Behavior & Trends

In 2025, travelers will place greater emphasis on authenticity, sustainability, nature, and wellness, all of which align with Fernie's brand and offerings. The desire for safe, uncrowded, outdoor-centric destinations continues to drive demand in Fernie's core markets.

Primary geographic markets remain:

58% Alberta

14–20% British Columbia

13–15% Other Canada (SK, MB, ON)

5–15% U.S. and international

Key visitor motivations include:

- Escaping urban routines for rest, rejuvenation, and meaningful connection with family and friends
- Interest in small towns and scenic mountain culture
- Demand for high-quality, wellness-centered, and eco-conscious experiences
- Opportunities & Challenges

Opportunities:

- Growth in spring and fall "shoulder seasons" shows improved performance and still holds significant potential.
- Continued collaboration with Destination BC, Kootenay Rockies Tourism, and the City of Fernie on strategic marketing and infrastructure development.
- Expansion of destination weddings, wellness tourism, and experiential travel segments.
- Increasing international demand recovery, especially for long-haul markets such as the UK, Germany, and Australia.

Challenges:

- Both tourism growth and industrial projects exacerbate ongoing housing and rental shortages.
- Staffing constraints and capacity issues during peak seasons.
- Limited indoor and weather-resilient attractions and infrastructure, including the need for upgraded venues, event spaces, and transit options.
- Climate-related challenges (e.g., wildfire smoke, heat waves) impact seasonal stability and the outdoor experience.
- Ongoing strain on local infrastructure includes trailheads, parking, signage, and public amenities.

Tourism Fernie remains committed to growing the sector responsibly, continuing to focus on destination management, authentic storytelling, environmental stewardship, and collaborative leadership with industry and community partners.

Truth and Reconciliation

In alignment with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the City of Fernie has taken meaningful steps to build respectful and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous partners, including direct collaboration with Yaq̓it ʔa·knuqƛi'it (Tobacco Plains). This ongoing dialogue has emphasized understanding the Nation's capacity limitations and ensuring that engagement is not extractive but rooted in mutual respect, listening, and long-term partnership. The City is committed to weaving Indigenous culture, knowledge systems, and priorities into this RDS project. These goals reflect our dedication to reconciliation, truth-telling, and working in solidarity to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a guiding framework for municipal action. The City of Fernie has, by Council resolution, adopted and endorsed acting on the TRC calls to action for local government, including:

#43: We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.

#47: We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, and to reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts.

#57: We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

#75: We call upon the federal government to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students, and current landowners to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried. This is to include the provision of appropriate memorial ceremonies and commemorative markers to honour the deceased children.

#77: We call upon provincial, territorial, municipal, and community archives to work collaboratively with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system, and to provide these to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

3.0 TOURISM MASTER PLAN

Throughout the fall of 2018 and into early 2019, the community of Fernie was invited to participate in numerous engagement activities as part of the development of the Fernie Tourism Master Plan (TMP). Activities included open houses, surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus group

conversations. Questions inquired about the following topics: benefits/challenges of tourism, what's working/not working as far as the tourism experience, growth and capacity issues, future visions, and roles for tourism organizations.

Details on the consultation process to create the master plan are published as part of that plan through Tourism Fernie.

4.0 SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS

The following SWOT analysis is the result of a comprehensive and collaborative process led by the Resort Development Strategy (RDS) Advisory Working Group, building on previous SWOT work from the original RDS, the Five-Year Strategic Business Plan (2025–2029) for Tourism Fernie, and the Draft Fernie Tourism, Events, and Animation Strategy. This effort reflects a deep and evolving understanding of Fernie's tourism landscape—grounded in community insight and sector-specific data. The SWOT outlines internal strengths (assets, programs, and policies that support tourism) and weaknesses (gaps and challenges that must be addressed), alongside external opportunities (emerging trends and circumstances that can be leveraged) and threats (risks and pressures that require careful management). Drawing from recent stakeholder engagement—including surveys, focus groups, interviews, and previous planning documents such as the Highway 3 Destination Development Plan—this analysis offers a strategic lens through which Fernie's tourism potential and vulnerabilities can be understood and navigated. The goal is to align our greatest strengths with external opportunities while actively addressing weaknesses and mitigating threats to support a resilient, year-round tourism economy.

Strengths

- Scenic Rocky Mountain location
- Wide range of outdoor recreation & arts activities
- Authentic, welcoming, passionate community
- Vibrant, historic downtown core
- Year-round tourism revenue supports the local economy
- Rich local and Indigenous history with storytelling opportunities
- Strong financial support (MRDT, RMI, large partners)
- Award-winning Tourism Fernie team (e.g., Ambassador WILD program)
- Access to Crown land for events and activities
- New accommodation projects underway (Basecamp, Best Western)
- Proximity to Calgary, Kalispell, and Cranbrook airports
- Unique, off-the-beaten-path mountain destination

Weaknesses

- Limited accommodation stock, especially high-end and event-specific
- Staffing shortages and affordable housing issues
- Remote location; limited mass transit and transportation
- Short business hours are not aligned with visitor expectations
- Parking, trail access, and washroom infrastructure limits
- Few indoor, weather-resilient attractions
- Aging event venues and outdated city infrastructure
- Trail overuse, maintenance gaps, and private land reliance
- Underutilized Fernie Alpine Resort in summer
- Inconsistent customer service levels
- Slow municipal approvals and processing delays
- Limited organizational capacity for event and festival growth

Opportunities

- Leverage strategic location to attract regional/international markets
- Rising demand for sustainable, authentic, and wellness tourism
- Growth in eco-tourism, boutique wellness sectors
- Expand mid-week and shoulder season visitation
- Enhanced collaboration between DMO and City for destination management
- Advocate MRDT application to campgrounds/RVs for broader funding
- Technology and AI tools enhancing visitor experience and marketing
- Creative public-private partnerships to develop infrastructure
- Build upon sustainable tourism brand and initiatives
- Position Fernie as a future post-coal economic driver

Threats

- Sewer and water infrastructure nearing capacity; costly upgrades needed
- Climate impacts: snow shortages, wildfires, wildfire smoke, extreme weather
- Strong competition from other resort destinations
- Labor shortages, volunteer burnout, and housing affordability issues
- Heavy reliance on the coal sector (Elk Valley resources [a Glencore company]) threatens future stability
- Poor Provincial crisis communication affects traveler perceptions
- Inflation, rising cost of living, affecting discretionary travel
- Risks to land access, invasive species, and mining-related selenium contamination.
- Disruptions to air travel and increasing sustainability regulations
- Local price competition between hotels and STRs (Airbnb/VRBO)

5.0 VISIONS & FOCUS AREAS & GOALS

Tourism Master Plan Vision

Throughout the TMP process, we engaged on what tourism should be for Fernie and adopted the following vision:

Our Tourism Vision

A vibrant and sustainable tourism destination built on respect, collaboration, and authenticity

We Have A Mission To

Work together to manage and grow tourism sustainably for the betterment of our community and our visitors.

Guiding Principles

- Together we are stronger
- A respected natural environment
- Benefitting the whole
- Businesses thrive sustainably
- Authenticity grounds us
- Balance sustains us

TMP Focus Areas and Goals

The TMP Focus Areas are the big categories or buckets that need to be filled to achieve the Vision. They capture the assets Fernie has and those Fernie needs to develop to move toward the Vision. Goals articulate the outcomes desired for each Focus Area.

Focus: Diversity of Visitors Year Round Goal: Sustain and grow visitation into multi-day, year-round economic and community contributors.	**Focus: Remarkable Visitor Experiences** Goal: Develop and enhance Fernie's visitor infrastructure, amenities, brand, tourism products, experiences & people.
Focus: Stronger Tourism Foundations Goal: Ensure collaboration, community support, people, and financing for tourism recovery and success.	**Focus: Sustainable Management** Goal: Manage locations where visitation is impacting the sense of community or natural environment and support the resiliency of the industry.

Resort Development Strategy Goals

Strategic Directions within the TMP represent broad priorities that guide specific actions and RDS projects over the coming years. The TMP Strategic Directions that most support the desired outcomes for the RMI program are as follows and represent the RDS Goals.

Goal #	Goal	Indicators
1	Ensure meaningful engagement with and representation of Indigenous Peoples, fostering opportunities for cultural exchange and knowledge sharing within applicable projects.	-Integrate historical research to enrich cultural storytelling and interpretation. -Build upon existing initiatives that promote environmental stewardship and wildlife awareness. -Embed Indigenous language elements to honor and preserve cultural heritage
2	Sustain and grow overnight visitation and maintain consistency, emphasizing year-round visitation.	-Room revenue (MRDT) – annual and by season -Visitor Centre stats – # of visitors annually and monthly -Business licenses – total number and number of tourism businesses
3	Enhance the visitor experience through arts and cultural tourism opportunities	-Visitation and participation at heritage and cultural sites and events -Survey feedback (NPS – Net Promoter Score)
4	Enhance active transportation (non-motorized) options for visitors through sustainably designed capital improvements	-Number of new active transportation supports created. -Number of linear meters of paved/accessible routes -Usage metrics for those supports
5	Support sustainable tourism growth by managing visitor capacity within the limits of our existing infrastructure and assets, while increasing our ability to accommodate future demand.	-Community attitude toward tourism benefits vs. challenges via surveys -Room revenue by season -Monitoring visitor and citizen usage of Civic facilities (Arena and Aquatic Centre) during peak times
6	Maintain and responsibly enhance access to natural attractions and recreational amenities while protecting natural assets and ensuring their sustainability.	-Kilometers of trails repaired, restored, or renewed (hours, features restored, etc.) (excludes regular maintenance) -Trail-use counters -Increase rafting or fishing numbers. -Visitor feedback from trail associations
7	Continue to focus on and improve getting into and around Fernie, a walkable and rideable community.	- Shuttle ridership and transit advocacy outcomes -Highway traffic counts -Visitor survey -Number of Wayfinding signage incorporated -Improvements addressed within the accessibility plan -Assisted with projects in Active Transportation Master Plan (ATMP)
8	Create enhanced focal points for visitor staging and gathering	- Number of enhanced and accessible elements at focal points -Number of basic amenities added (garbage, water, seating, etc.)

Linkages to other Plans

In addition to the focus on the Tourism Master Plan vision, goals, and actions noted above, the following related planning documents were reviewed for inputs into this Resort Development Strategy:

- ✓ Tourism Master Plan (TMP), 2020
- ✓ City of Fernie OCP Update, 2014 - supports the vision, economic development, and tourism goals
- ✓ City of Fernie Resort Development Strategy 2022-2025 – updated the vision, goals, background, and projects.
- ✓ Highway 3 Destination Development Strategy – ensured alignment of the TMP associated goals and directions
- ✓ Fernie Heritage Strategy
- ✓ Ktunaxa Nation Economic and Investment Sector's Ktunaxa Nation Regional Branding Initiative
- ✓ Tourism Fernie Five-Year Strategic Business Plan
- ✓ Fernie Tourism Events and Animation Strategy (Draft)
- ✓ Kootenay Rockies Tourism Report
- ✓ Tourism Fernie Strategic Plan and Annual Reports
- ✓ Integrated Transportation Master Plan
- ✓ Accessibility plan

FERNIE OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN VISION

An Official Community Plan (OCP) is a blueprint and map for the community's future. It is created to guide planning and land use management decisions by establishing a long-term vision, supporting goals, and policies to achieve them.

Local governments also use OCPs to help guide and support decision-making on a number of other important community matters, including economic development, transportation, recreation, environmental protection, climate change, arts and culture, and more.

After significant engagement, Fernie's OCP was updated in 2013, and with it, adopted the following vision for the community:

> *Fernie is an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable community where everyone has the opportunity to pursue an excellent quality of life. Fernie's compact neighbourhoods provide a diversity of housing options and are accessible and friendly. A robust, diverse resilient economy, including natural resource and tourism industries, supports a skilled workforce, the beauty of the community, its healthy ecosystems and bountiful recreation and leisure opportunities attract residents and visitors alike.*

A new Official Community Plan project is underway with an expected completion in 2027 and will inform the next RDS.

KTUNAXA REGIONAL BRANDING INITIATIVE

The Ktunaxa Nation Economic and Investment Sector is engaged in Ktunaxa Nation Regional Branding. The success of this initiative largely relies on the engagement with the Ktunaxa Communities. The end result will be a Ktunaxa brand that supports the development of marketable products and experiences and the emergence of the Ktunaxa owned businesses that will fit within the BC and Canadian tourism market.

The Ktunaxa Nation Council identified the development of the regional brand as a strategic priority following the review of the Economic Sector Situation Analysis: Ktunaxa Nation Economy, Economic Sector Governance, and Collective Business document. Communities identified tourism development that is supported by Ktunaxa values as a priority for the future sustainability and growth of the Ktunaxa Nation Economy.
This document and the Ktunaxa Nation Economic and Investment Sector has committed to supporting the development of Ktunaxa tourism enterprises and business ventures by creating a marketable Ktunaxa Regional Brand, which includes the ongoing management and administration of the brand.

Ktunaxa Nation Economic and Investment Sector developed the Ktunaxa Regional Branding Initiative (KRBI) to help with the promotion of the Kootenay Region, through partnerships with organizations which promote the various regions of BC to the world. The Ktunaxa have been largely invisible in their own homelands, not only to the visitors of the region, but to their very own neighbors as well. The time for this to change is now!

The mandate is to identify and assist market-ready Ktunaxa businesses, develop an authentic marketable Ktunaxa product that is a true representation of the Ktunaxa that will ensure the Ktunaxa are no longer invisible in their own homeland.

Strategic Framework for Tourism in BC 2022-2024

The pillars of the Strategic Framework have been employed as a lens to inform the development, prioritization, and selection of the projects within this plan.



People

Tourism Supports Healthy, Inclusive Societies

Key Priorities

- Support communities in rebuilding and enhancing their visitor economies
- Support true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through tourism
- Continue to support the tourism sector in becoming more inclusive and accessible

All capital projects have been, or will be designed with universal accessibility as a core priority. This also aligns with City Council's strategic priority of supporting inclusivity and accessibility. Additionally, the implementation of projects will include direct consultation with the Ktunaxa Nation Council and member Nations to ensure appropriate indigenous knowledge and Ktunaxa language is presented.

Planet

Harness Opportunities for Tourism to Contribute to Clean Growth

Key Priorities

- Build a cleaner tourism industry that is prepared to adapt to climate change
- Support responsible travel and preservation of B.C.'s natural spaces

The projects advanced in this RDS intend to advance, wherever possible, active visitation and use as a viable option when compared to vehicle-access amenities, and to provide transit between the resort and the City during both the winter and summer seasons. Consistent funding for the renewal of trails also responds to climate change as increasingly intense weather systems, both dry and wet, impact the sustainability of outdoor recreation amenities.

Prosperity

Sustainable Growth of the Visitor Economy

Key Priorities

- Build back a strong and diverse tourism workforce
- Invest in B.C.'s competitive advantages in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era through destination management
- Attract visitors during all four seasons and to more regions of the province

Projects targeted at these priorities include:

Pillar	Project	Alignment Description
People	Gathering and Staging Hub Enhancements	Designed for inclusivity with universal accessibility and consultation with Ktunaxa Nation.
People	Station Square Enhancements	Barrier-free space for diverse public use and cultural animation.
People	Signage, Interpretive and	Culturally inclusive signage,

	Wayfinding	QR/audio/tactile features for all abilities.
Planet	Integrated Trail Development, Remediation, and Impact Management	Sustainable trail building and erosion control in response to climate impacts.
Planet	Winter Visitor Shuttle	Reduces emissions with consolidated transit and supports active transport.
Planet	Signage, Interpretive, and Wayfinding	Promotes walking, low-carbon access, and emergency signage aligned with climate resilience.
Prosperity	Animation Infrastructure	Enhances downtown streetscape to support year-round economic vibrancy.
Prosperity	Station Square Enhancements	Flexible event space boosts off-season tourism and supports the downtown economy.
Prosperity	Winter Visitor Shuttle	Visitor mobility supports overnight stays and reduces vehicle use, enhancing tourism access year-round.

7.0 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The City of Fernie has formally endorsed the development of a comprehensive Resort Development Strategy (RDS) through a collaborative and transparent methodology, rooted in strong inter-agency coordination and strategic alignment with provincial guidelines. Informed by the Resort Municipalities Initiative (RMI) and developed in partnership with Tourism Fernie, the methodology integrates lessons from past RDS cycles, the MRDT Five-Year Strategic Business Plan, and current community engagement efforts.

Council's endorsement supports a process emphasizing capacity-based planning, lifecycle asset management, and a focus on high-impact infrastructure and tourism programs. The endorsed methodology includes creating a multi-stakeholder RDS Advisory Working Group, project charters outlining roles and deliverables, streamlined communication strategies, and commitment to public and Indigenous engagement. The approach also aligns with Fernie’s broader objectives for sustainable tourism, economic resilience, and community livability, ensuring the RDS delivers measurable, community-supported outcomes.

This structured approach ensures the City was well-positioned to present a high-quality RDS to the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture, and Sport, while supporting meaningful collaboration and accountability in delivering RMI-funded tourism enhancements.

The Resort Development Strategy (RDS) Advisory Working Group provided strategic advice and sector-specific insights to support the City of Fernie's Resort Development Strategy (2025–2027) development. This group contributed expertise, community perspectives, and feedback to ensure the RDS aligns with local needs, the Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) guidelines, and provincial expectations.

Members were invited based on their organizational roles or sector expertise and include representatives from:

- City of Fernie
- Tourism Fernie
- Fernie & District Arts Council
- Yaq̓it ʔa·knuqƛ̓it First Nation
- Fernie Chamber of Commerce
- Fernie Heritage Society
- Fernie Trails Alliance
- Elk River Alliance
- Community Member at Large

Continuity to the future RDS

To maintain the momentum established during the development of the 2025-26–2027-28 Resort Development Strategy (RDS) and ensure continuity into future planning cycles, the RDS Advisory Working Group must reconvene annually. These check-ins will provide opportunities for status updates, facilitate transparent tracking of project progress, and allow for early identification of challenges or emerging opportunities. By adopting a proactive approach, the City and its partners can begin preparing for the next RDS term well in advance, ensuring a smooth transition, consistent alignment with provincial RMI guidelines, and the successful delivery of high-impact, community-driven tourism projects. Annual engagement with the Advisory Group also reinforces collaborative governance, strengthens inter-organizational trust, and supports adaptive management practices critical to sustainable tourism development. This approach allows city staff to manage our internal resources effectively by considering the impacts and incorporating them into existing and future work plans, while evaluating against existing budget and project priorities.

Other Stakeholders

Beyond the TMP engagement, the draft RDS and all proposed projects are also being made available to the following organizations for comment.

- Yaq̓it ʔa·knuqƛ̓it First Nation
- Tourism Fernie
- General Public
- Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture, & Sport

9.0 RMI PROJECTS (Packaged Separately)