

# Story of Valleyview

Known as the “Portal to the Peace”, Valleyview is a community of about 2,000 located at a highway junction leading from central Alberta to the famous Mackenzie and Alaska Highways. A small regional centre with a stable long-term population, it ably serves the needs of nearby farms, and forestry, oil, gas and mining operations. Valleyview’s strengths are its traditional layout and quiet character, its people, its location, and its stable, diversified economy. Its future potential lies in maintaining these and building on them.





## Past

For thousands of years, the Dunne-za First Nations inhabited the region around Valleyview. With the expansion of the fur trade, the Cree moved into the Peace region in the 1700s, driving the Dunne-za to the West, a conflict which was resolved through agreements about boundaries between the nations, signed at Peace Point in the late 1700s. In 1899, Treaty 8 was signed between the Government of Canada and the Cree Chief and the Headmen of Lesser Slave Lake and the adjacent territory, setting the stage for greater immigration and use of the area by newcomers. The Sturgeon Lake Nation were assigned three Indian Reserves in the area totalling about 15,000 ha, with the largest one at Sturgeon Lake itself; the Nation now numbers 3,000, of whom 1,400 are on-reserve.

Fur trading had begun by the late 1700's, with Hudson's Bay establishing a post at Sturgeon Lake. Recognizing agricultural potential, farmers were encouraged to settle in the area, and lands near Valleyview were surveyed by Fred Young in 1901, making homesteading easier. The town that grew up to serve the area was originally named Red Willow Creek, but the town's name was changed to Valleyview in 1929 to distinguish it from



*Scottie's Stopping Place*



*Mail Sleigh at Sturgeon Lake Hudson's Bay Company post*



another settlement and to reflect the beauty of the panorama visible from the town.

For much of its history, Valleyview has been a small regional centre, bypassed by major transportation routes. Early travel to the Peace region took the Long Trail from Edmonton through Athabasca or Swan Hills to Peace River and beyond. From 1911 to 1916, the Edson Trail connected Edson to Grande Prairie, and passed through nearby Sturgeon Lake but not Valleyview itself. By 1917, a railway from Edmonton to Grande Prairie made that trail obsolete, and it followed a route similar to the Long Trail, well to the east of Valleyview.

The construction of what is now Highway 43 in the late 1950's and the growth of auto and truck transportation meant Valleyview was now right on an important transportation corridor. At the same time, the oil and gas industry grew rapidly in Northern Alberta, leading to a population boom in Valleyview and surroundings. As a result, the community was incorporated as a village in 1954 and as a town in 1957.



## Present

Valleyview's population stabilized after the initial boom, with about 2,000 residents in the town itself and another 6,000 or so in the surrounding area. As the name suggests, it offers views over the Red Willow Creek valley to the Northwest. Built in the early post-war years, the town is laid out with a traditional grid of streets and the main streets have a traditional feel to them. Despite being on a highway junction, the town itself is quiet and friendly. Valleyview has a beautiful natural setting and offers easy access to fishing, camping, hunting, skiing, snowmobiling, and other outdoor recreation, as well as having ample community recreation facilities and schools in town. These characteristics make it a particularly attractive place to live.

Valleyview's people are friendly and hospitable, with a practical, hard-working nature that comes naturally from their pioneering history.



Photo courtesy of Diane Haskell Photography



Photo courtesy of Diane Haskell Photography



While Grande Prairie is the major centre in the region and has seen rapid growth paralleling regional investments in oil and gas, Valleyview has maintained a more consistent population. Its population has also been more consistent than that of other towns in the area that lost population from 2006 to 2011, such as Swan Hills, High Prairie, Swan Hills, Fox Creek, Little Smoky, and Donnelly. This stability is likely due to its diverse economy, having a role as a regional administrative and commercial centre as well as four major economic sectors: agriculture; forestry; sand and gravel extraction; and oil and gas. It may also be due to its relatively young community.

## Possible Future

Valleyview has a lot of potential, which is likely to be a gradual evolution of its past and present, based on the community's values. It can be described as having "big town opportunities, with a small town rural lifestyle". Valleyview's strengths include:

- Strong community (described by one person as "loving"! ) that values being:
  - Close knit
  - Compassionate, happy to help one another
  - Hard working, entrepreneurial, willing to go the extra mile
  - Friendly
  - Welcoming
  - Considerate and respectful
  - Deeply rooted locally, with a strong sense of ownership
  - A good neighbour to nearby communities

- Attractive traditional town and main streets, and a very walkable town centre
- Location on a major transportation and tourism corridor
- Diverse economy and role as a regional centre, with access to ample opportunities for employment
- Beautiful natural setting and great views from many viewpoints
- Immediate access to green spaces and recreation ("right out my door"), including hunting, fishing, and camping
- Community services, including schools and the hospital
- Recreation facilities and associated programs, valued for bringing the community together; these include the (multiplex, library, pool and arena)
- Parks and open spaces in town: playing fields, Legion Park, Trout pond, Splash park, walking trails, and the skate park
- Relatively young community
- Good sunshine and ample precipitation

The community's future will be affected by a number of factors:

- Politics – levels of leadership and local engagement locally, and political changes at all levels
- Oil and gas industry – a major employer and source of business. It may be affected by global economic forces and environmental concerns
- Agricultural industry – has been strong historically and is currently an important economic sector. It

may be affected by a changing climate, although the exact impacts are unclear and may be either positive or negative

- Highway expansion – brings more travellers, but easier access to larger communities increases potential competition for retail spending
- Relationships (competition, collaboration) with other nearby centres, e.g. Grande Prairie
- A relatively young population demanding more amenities, and the transient population working in the oil and gas sector but living permanently elsewhere
- The new recreation centre – a potential draw for newcomers

Valleyview has many opportunities:

- Energy resources – diversify towards renewables, drawing on closely related existing expertise
- Maintain agricultural and forestry strengths and look for ways to keep more revenue local
- Focus on long-term financial sustainability of the Town
- Make public spaces (streets) more beautiful for residents and visitors
- Draw visitors into the town from the highway – capitalize on the Town's great character and ease of access for northbound travellers
- Maintain and strengthen local health and education services for the region



Photo courtesy of Diane Haskell Photography



Photo courtesy of Diane Haskell Photography