

# Executive Summary

The High River Regional Airport Board (the Board), the Municipal District of Foothills No. 31 (MD of Foothills) and the Town of High River (the Town) engaged Dillon Consulting Limited (Dillon) to prepare a Business Development Strategy (the Strategy) for the High River Regional Airport (the Airport). Working with the Board, tenants, the MD of Foothills and the Town, Dillon's planning team completed research and consultation, and prepared the Strategy.



Airports are critical to the social and economic well-being, and development of communities. Owned jointly by the MD of Foothills and the Town, and operated by the Board, the Airport faces challenges to its growth and survival which are common to many community and regional airports throughout Canada; challenges which make the financial sustainability of the airport very difficult.

Airports are capital intensive projects with limited revenue options. While they can often generate sufficient financial resources for operations, major upgrades or improvement require funding and support from outside the Airport. There are very limited federal or provincial funding sources for small regional airports. Funding is required to keep the airport at a safe operational level.

The Airport has been operating since 1976 when Bylaw 405 was passed by the MD of Foothills to create a joint airport commission between the MD of Foothills and the Town. Ownership of the Airport was transferred from the Province to the MD of Foothills and the Town. In 2003, the Airport entered into a new agreement and created a Part 9 Company under the Companies Act called the High River Regional Airport Limited (HRRAL). The HRRAL was designed to create governance structure which was outside of the Town and the MD of Foothills. At the same time, an Area Structure Plan (ASP) was developed to guide and protect the airport from encroaching uses.

The partnership between the MD of Foothills and the Town, with good long range planning, can provide a foundation for the Board to continue to operate and provide service to the community, while being a financially viable, economic engine, and attracting business to the area.

Building on feedback and information from stakeholders, the Board, the MD of Foothills, and the Town, this Strategy summarizes recommendations to improve operations for sustainable growth.

The Strategy resulted in 33 immediate, short, medium and long-term recommendations for the Board and the Airport.

**Table E-1: Airport Recommendations**

Recommendation Number	Recommendation	Timeline
<b>SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		
1)	It is recommended that an airport specific Land Use District be created and adopted by Council. This land use will identify permitted uses at the Airport and allow for future growth. This would rescind the Direct Control District #5 and create a land use district that would apply only to the Airport lands.	Immediate
2)	It is recommended that an airport Land Use District be divided into three “zones”: Airside; Groundside; and Operational Reserve.	Immediate
3)	It is recommended that an airport Overlay Land Use District be prepared to protect the area in the vicinity of the Airport by restricting uses that would impact the safe operation of the Airport. This would match the 4 km obstruction free zone as defined by Transport Canada Regulations.	Immediate
4)	<p>It is recommended that the “Groundside” Land Uses that may be considered include the following (noting that clear definitions for each must be created to the satisfaction of the MD of Foothills and added to the Bylaw):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) All Aviation Uses (to be defined in more detail);</li> <li>b) Extensive Agriculture (including Greenhouses);</li> <li>c) Camping (this might be only for overnight pilots);</li> <li>d) Caretaker Suite (one suite on the airport property) for the Purpose of Housing a Person to Act as the Caretaker for the Airport;</li> <li>e) Commercial Uses (this could be narrowed down);</li> <li>f) Contractors Yards (may include some outside storage or parking of vehicles);</li> <li>g) Eating and Drinking Establishments (these may be restricted in size until piped water and sewer is available);</li> <li>h) Emergency Services (fire and ambulance);</li> <li>i) Logistics and Distribution (trucking and transfer of goods and services from one mode of transportation to another for the ultimate delivery of the product);</li> <li>j) Light Manufacturing (it would be preferred if this was aviation related and it not open to factories or any operation that creates steam, smoke, or electronic interference and generally is a minor assembly of parts);</li> <li>k) Air Museum ;</li> <li>l) Outside Storage in Locations Determined by the ASP (this could include RV Storage or some other vehicle storage);</li> <li>m) Parking Lots;</li> <li>n) Aviation Related Repair Shops (all business is conducted inside the building);</li> <li>o) Solar Installations (industrial or commercial);</li> </ul>	Immediate

Recommendation Number	Recommendation	Timeline
	<p>p) Technical/Training Schools; and</p> <p>q) Warehousing (including mini storage).</p>	
5)	It is recommended that the HRRAL continue to lease lots on the Airport and that the Board extend the term of the leases from 25 to 49 years to allow hangar development and financing.	Short-Term
6)	It is recommended that the Town and MD of Foothills continue to support the Airport with a minimum financial donation of \$10,000 per annum.	Short-Term
7)	It is recommended that the Board prepare a recommendation for the MD of Foothills to return a portion of the Airport property taxes to the Board for operation of the Airport.	Short-Term
8)	It is recommended that the Board work with the MD of Foothills Engineering Department to develop a strategy for servicing the Airport with piped water and sewer services.	Short-Term
9)	It is recommended that the Board continue to promote the Airport. Consider a Twitter account that is updated daily and identifies any travel updates, weather conditions and business opportunities.	Short-Term
10)	It is recommended that the Board consider un-manned methods of capturing flights and landings to supplement the flight information, and potentially provide an opportunity to invoice for use of the Airport.	Short-Term
11)	It is recommended that the Airport Board send a letter to the flight schools who currently conduct touch and go's at the airport that they will be invoicing the flight school and follow-up.	Short-Term
12)	It is recommended that a surcharge be added to fuel sales as an additional revenue source.	Short-Term
13)	It is recommended that the HRRAL create a list of key infrastructure replacement and key capital investment requirements to plan over time.	Short-Term
14)	It is recommended that the Board, using the capital project recommendations in this Strategy, develop a capital budget for the next 10 years.	Short-Term
<b>MEDIUM-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		
15)	It is recommended that the Board, collaborating with the Town and MD of Foothills, negotiate with an internet service to provide better access and higher speed internet connections to existing and future tenants.	Medium-Term
16)	It is recommended that the Board investigate the pricing options to access water from the Cayley Water Line.	Medium-Term
17)	It is recommended that the Board explore a partnership with a flight school to develop a residential campus for flight training.	Medium-Term
18)	It is recommended that the Board explore short-term staffing assistance or summer student support through government programs such as the Serving Communities Internship Program or through high school volunteer hours to create a full tenant and business record, to track take-offs and landings, and to work to improve the website.	Medium-Term
19)	It is recommended that the Board work with other airports in Alberta to promote a chain of airports from the United States Border to the Northwest Territories Border for fuelling and aviation services for general aviation American pilots who fly to Alaska every summer.	Medium-Term
20)	Explore incentives such as an Airport Revitalization Tax Exemption Program, where new developments could receive tax relief for eligible construction	Medium-Term

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	projects.	
21)	It is recommended that the HRRAL put together a leasing package and promote the leases on the Airport website.	Medium-Term
22)	It is recommended that the HRRAL consider joint marketing with the MD of Foothills and the Town to promote the area.	Medium-Term
23)	It is recommended that the HRRAL seek partnerships with youth groups and schools to provide education sessions at the Airport.	Medium-Term
24)	It is recommended that the MD of Foothills investigate growth opportunities with the Regional Growth Board, once mandated.	Medium-Term
25)	It is recommended that the HRRAL complete a review of the rates and fees every five years to ensure they remain competitive and profitable.	Medium-Term
26)	It is recommended that the HRRAL consider a not-for-profit status which would allow more funding opportunities.	Medium-Term
<b>LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		
27)	It is recommended that this Strategy be reviewed by the Board annually to monitor and track the implementation progress.	Long-Term
28)	It is recommended that a full review and assessment of the Airport be completed every 10 years by an external consultant.	Long-Term
29)	It is recommended that the HRRAL, the MD of Foothills and the Town monitor and evaluate the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP).	Long-Term
30)	It is recommended that the HRRAL investigate funding options to expand into Phase 3 of future development.	Long-Term
31)	It is recommended that if there is approved piped water and sewer services, that the Airport investigates the potential of individual Caretaker Suites (one suite per hangar, not exceeding 700 sq. ft. of habitable space).	Long-Term
32)	It is recommended that the HRRAL maintain and improve runway maintenance for all runways.	Long-Term
33)	It is recommended that the MD of Foothills and the Town extend the headlease to 99 years upon expiry in 2043.	Long-Term