

# 50-YEAR COMMUNITY VISION

CITY OF WETASKIWIN  
26 FEB 2021

STORMY  
LAKE  
CONSULTING



# Who we engaged

Anything presented in “quotes” are verbatim comments from the research and broadly representative of the entire discussion.

“

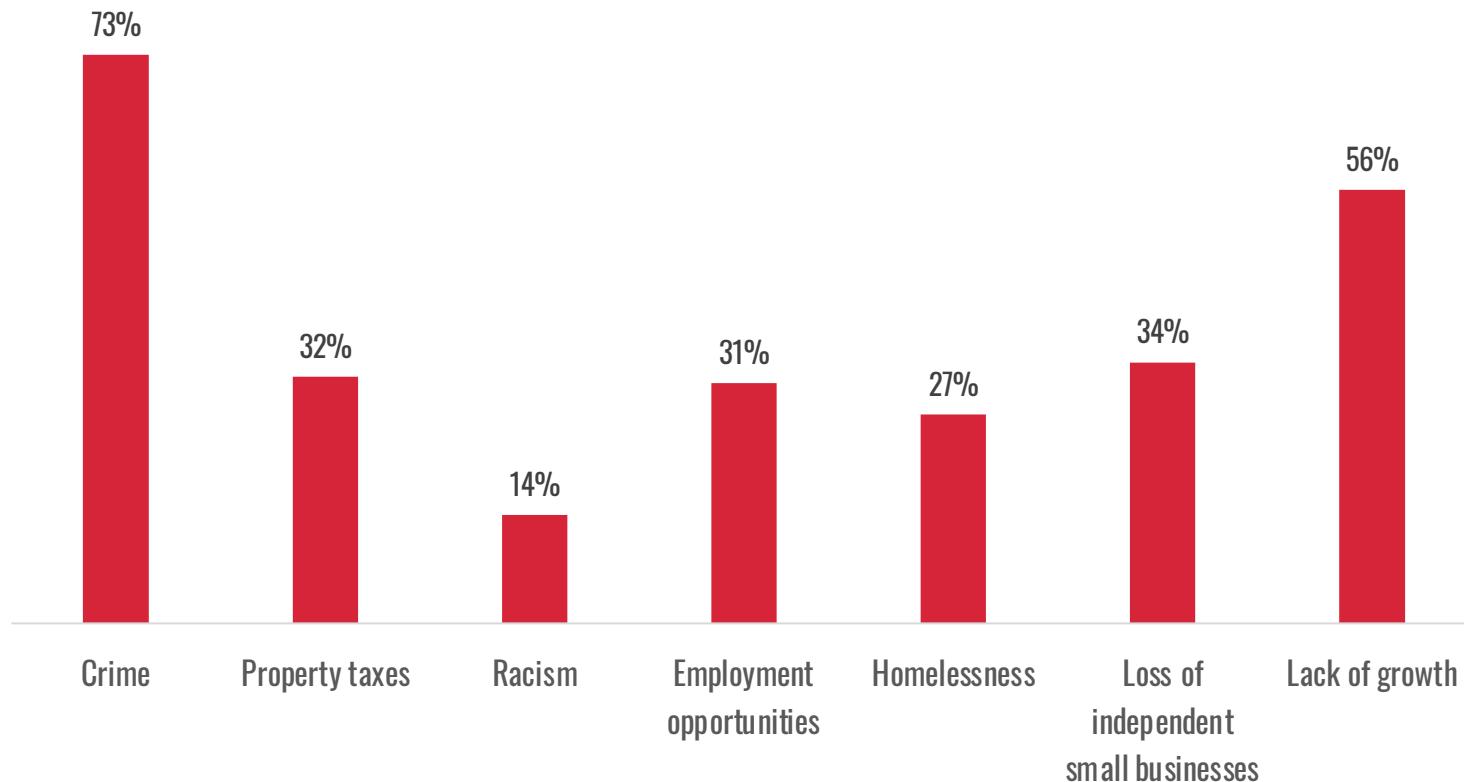
I was against the idea of spending money and resources on a 50-year vision, but after hearing the questions you've asked, it's opened my eyes.

”

WHERE  
WE ARE  
TODAY

# What issues are most important to you today?

(greater than 10% response)



# City of Wetaskiwin

Municipalities of all sizes are facing many challenges. With regulatory changes, government funding squeezes, the cost of running a municipality increasing while the tax base is decreasing, and population migration away from rural, many feel as if they are struggling. There is a call amongst municipalities for new ways of doing things. Wetaskiwin is no different.

Current snapshot of Wetaskiwin:

- No growth in the last decade.
- An aging population with 19.9% of residents over the age of 65.
- 37% of those that work in Wetaskiwin do not live here, and 25% of residents work elsewhere.
- Higher property tax and utility rates.
- Residents have an average income and level of education lower than provincial averages.



“

Economically we've been stuck for some time now. We've seen businesses come and go, close, over and over again. We've been stuck in how to draw people in and how to grow locally and this would be a great thing to get unstuck from.

”

“

*Do you want your kids to stay in Wetaskiwin?*

I want to say yes. I'm from generations that grew up in Wetaskiwin. But the way the city is today, they would be stifled. I want them to have more opportunities than I have living in Wetaskiwin.

”

# Community commitment

Residents spoke frequently about the strong community spirit and support for others in Wetaskiwin's community. From being ranked third in the province for giving and volunteerism, to support for community events and the strong leadership within community organizations, the community is committed to helping each other.

Residents are incredibly proud of the city's 128 years of settler and agricultural history, as well as the number of multigenerational families that are still around.

Often, community spirit and pride of place doesn't extend to include Indigenous neighbors and Wetaskiwin's pre-settlement history.



“

When we started having problems during COVID-19, Angelo's Pizza next door was doing take out. They have a donation box at their till. They donated all their tips to us. They were being a good neighbor. We needed help and \$100 or so each month was really helpful.

”

"We painted our whole fence rainbow. I invited kids from the LGBTQ+ community to help paint my fence. 40 squealing kids in my yard. Very happy memory."



“

We're one of the oldest cities in Alberta and still carry that heritage. We're still grounded in our pioneer roots.

”



“5th generation farms providing food for the community. There are so many amazing farms, history, agricultural opportunities. Making sure it stays alive as part of the heritage.”

# Reputation

The harshest critics of Wetaskiwin are its own residents. Whether it's the negative perception of the south side, the distrust in the City or intolerance; negativity and criticism run wild through the community—amplified, in part, by social media.

Outside of Wetaskiwin, the city has a weak reputation primarily due to its high crime rate and perceptions of being dangerous, as well as the 'cars cost less in Wetaskiwin' brand. This makes it difficult to attract visitors, businesses and new residents.



“

At a local level, we are facing the challenge of showing the community that the City staff and council are working in the best interest of the community. To my understanding, this has not always happened, and it has caused a lot of distrust with the residents/businesses and the city.

”

“

[Wetaskiwin], the city where everyone complains.

”

“

Social media for this town is either a good thing  
or a really bad thing.

”

# Maskwacis neighbors

It's deeply felt that the meaning of the word Wetaskiwin has been forgotten by residents. They don't feel safe or welcome in Wetaskiwin as targeted racism makes it difficult to visit, participate, do business and live there. Many spoke about rejected business proposals, rental inquiries, job applications and youth sport participation as well as discrimination within healthcare, policing and the judicial system.

There is a perceived lack of engagement from the City and unwillingness to create an equal partnership with the four bands. Maskwacis are rarely consulted. This has created distrust.

It's also felt that Wetaskiwin has lost its connection to, and respect for the land (this was also mirrored with some Wetaskiwin residents).





"The Peace Cairn would be iconic, but they keep moving it around like a bag of rocks."

“

More and more crown land is becoming privatized and where does that leave us in 50 years? What if there is no crown land left? That is a sad scenario because we can't practice our way of life.

”



"Because I am Indigenous, I have a spiritual connection to the land. I walk in Peace Hills and By-the-Lake Park and it holds our stories. This is a place where peace was made—it's in the name. Pipestone Creek is where stone for our peoples' pipes was taken. The deep history is all linked to the land. When I'm out in the community I think about the elders' stories and how those stories affect the community today. For a lot of people there is really deep history held in the land and in the stories."

“

It's important to the indigenous population to keep a healthy relationship with the land. We don't do them justice in that sense. We don't value their point of view.

”



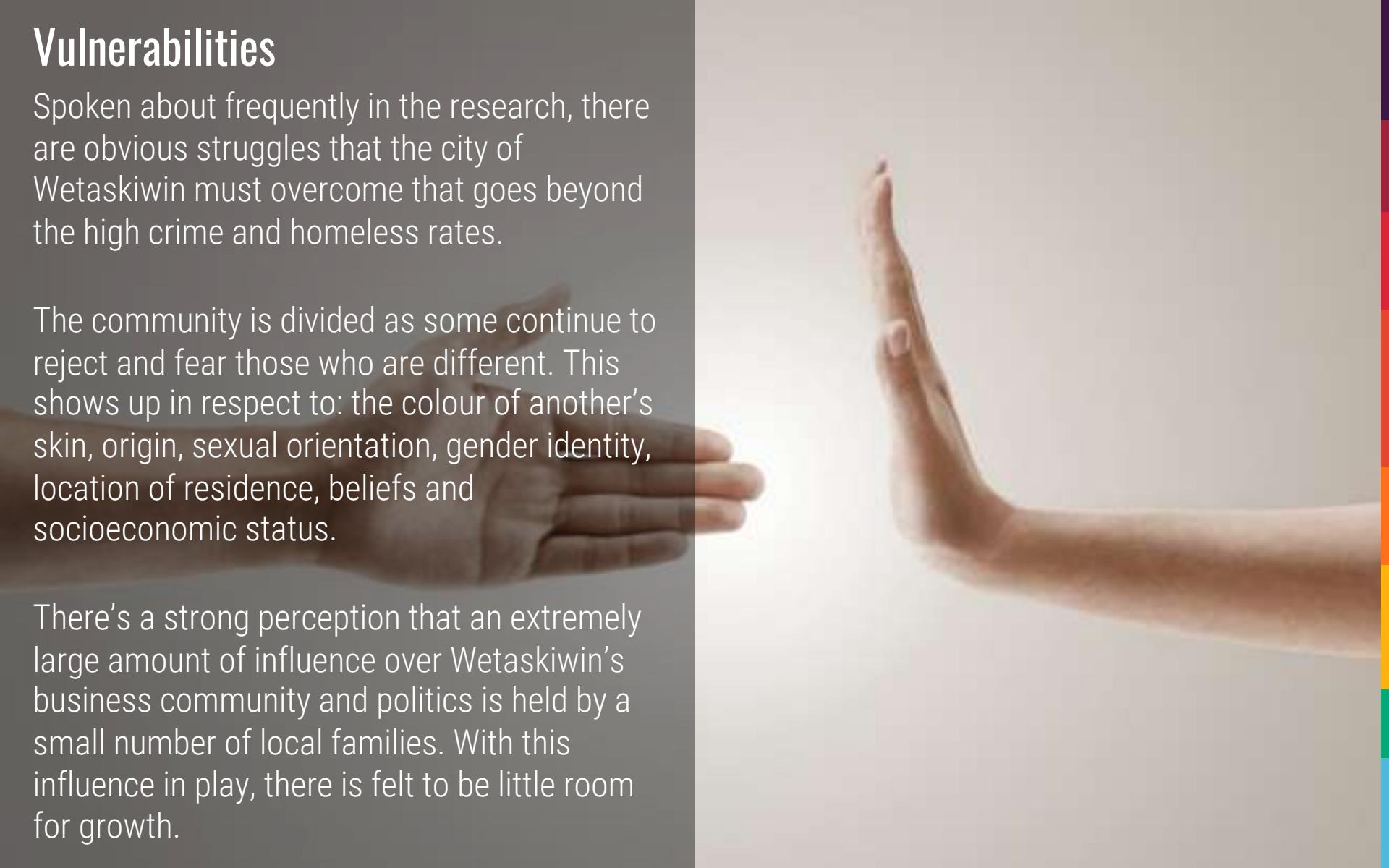
"The Treaty 6 flag raising at City Hall three years ago. It was significant because I have an Indigenous background and it was significant to see the City recognize our heritage in that way. I felt pride. There isn't always great relations between the Maskwacis and the people in Wetaskiwin, so this was really great for my kids who are visibly Indigenous."

# Vulnerabilities

Spoken about frequently in the research, there are obvious struggles that the city of Wetaskiwin must overcome that goes beyond the high crime and homeless rates.

The community is divided as some continue to reject and fear those who are different. This shows up in respect to: the colour of another's skin, origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, location of residence, beliefs and socioeconomic status.

There's a strong perception that an extremely large amount of influence over Wetaskiwin's business community and politics is held by a small number of local families. With this influence in play, there is felt to be little room for growth.



“

The community only rallies around the people who  
are like them... there's a large empathy gap.

”

“

What keeps me up at night is that racism towards many community members continues to exist including the Indigenous, Filipino and many other people who are arriving to live, raise families and work. People continue to be afraid of people unlike themselves.

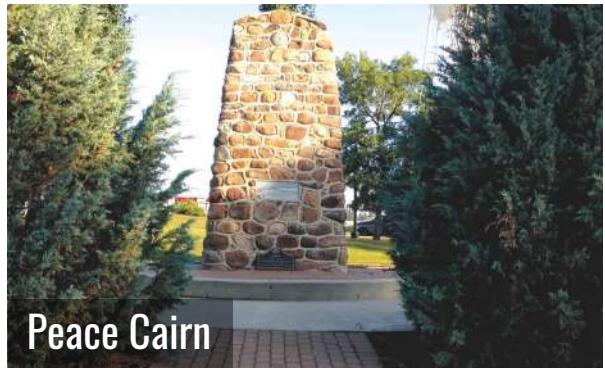
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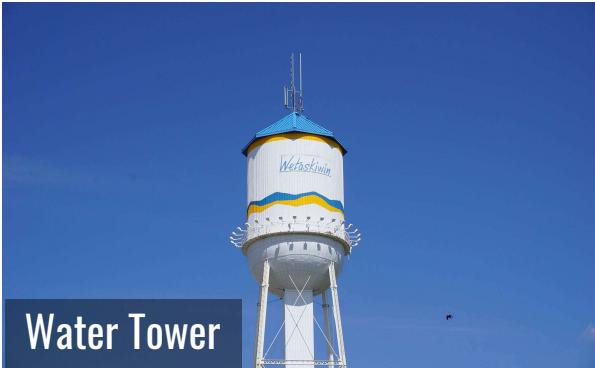
It swings both ways. It's not all white people doing wrong. I've been harassed and accosted in the grocery store for being white. So much trauma and hatred on both sides that it stagnates all of us.

”

# THE CITY'S ICONS



Peace Cairn



Water Tower



City Hall



By-The-Lake Park



Automile



Reynolds Museum



Airport



Santa Claus Parade



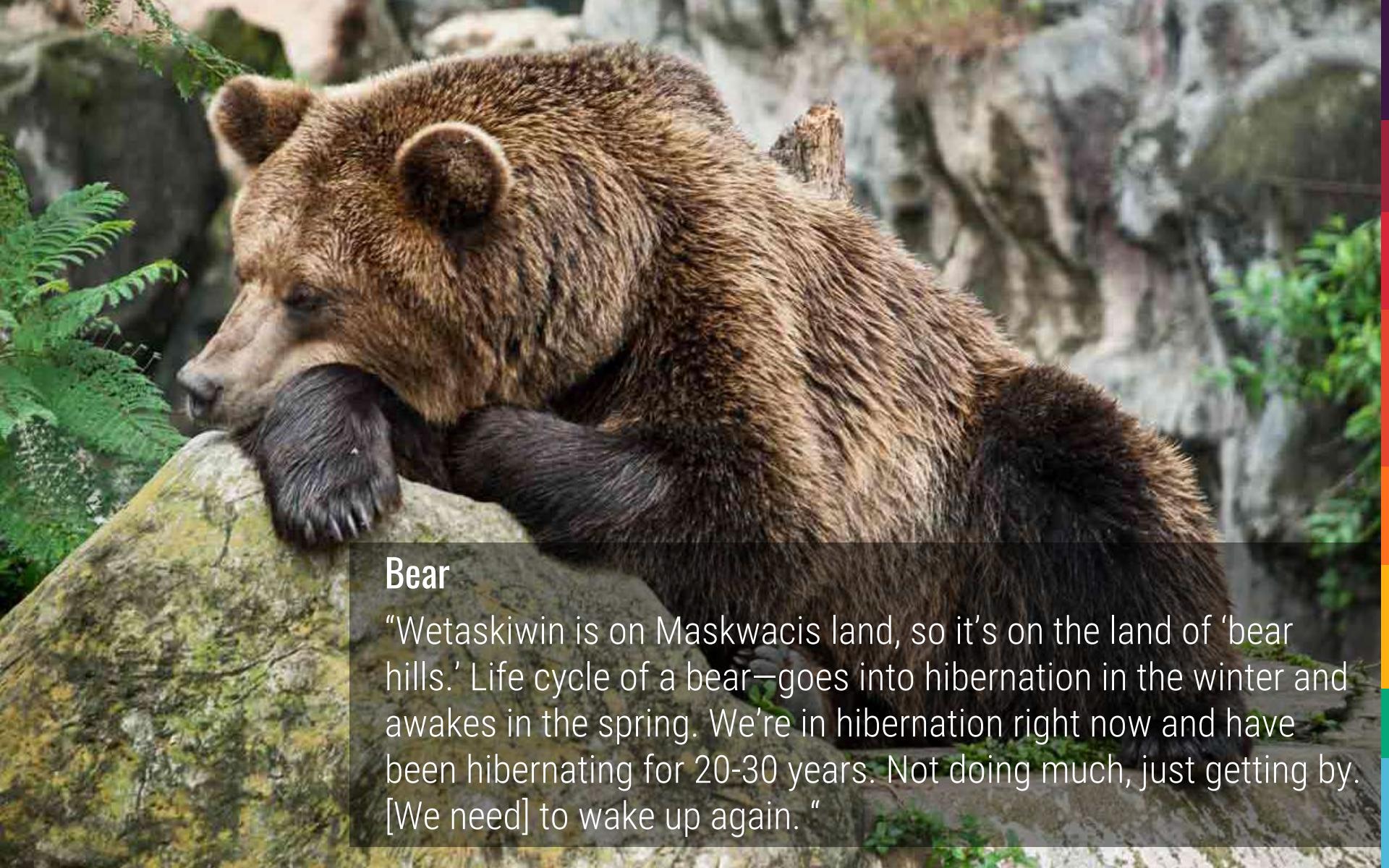
Mayor Gandom  
LIEF GANDAM  
Mayor

“

Why do we have to choose one icon? If we are a deeply historical place, can we honor the entire trajectory of the history from the peace cairn to downtown—preserving the entire historical path of the community.

”

WETASKIWIN  
AS AN  
ANIMAL.



## Bear

“Wetaskiwin is on Maskwacis land, so it’s on the land of ‘bear hills.’ Life cycle of a bear—goes into hibernation in the winter and awakes in the spring. We’re in hibernation right now and have been hibernating for 20-30 years. Not doing much, just getting by. [We need] to wake up again. ”

## Honeybee

“Bees represent the industrious spirit of Wetaskiwin. But they don’t do it alone. They basically exist to be a community and they are greater than the sum of their parts.”



## Elephant

"They're community-driven animals. If there is one in need of help, then they all thunder over to help that one. Do the best that they can to help each other."

"There's a community within a herd of elephants. They're thoughtful, protective and move with purpose."



With all the social issues and continual lack of growth, the community feels discouraged—with some having lost hope. There is a lot of work that needs to be done and it will take time to accomplish it. This is not going to be easy—to regain the trust of the community and implement vision-aligned initiatives—but an unwavering commitment to try and live up to the vision will be **essential**.

“

[To the future Wetaskiwin residents,] we want you to know how hard we're trying to give you a better place.

”

HOPES  
AND  
DREAMS

“

I hope that Wetaskiwin can rebrand itself as something new, maybe something that combines our rich history with a vision for the future. I hope it finds itself as a progressive and inclusive community that feels pride in itself. I envision that when people talk about Wetaskiwin, they talk about how we overcame many of our challenges and how it is now a lovely place to raise a family. I hope people talk about Wetaskiwin as the place where their dreams for their family, friends, and businesses came true.

”

“

My dream is for our neighbours from Wetaskiwin to be sitting in the same tipi smoking our pipe, and our chiefs doing the same over there—sitting in a formal gathering with their leadership. Sitting side by side and working together with no concerns whatsoever.

(Past Chief and Elder)

”

“

We want to see growth without losing ourselves.

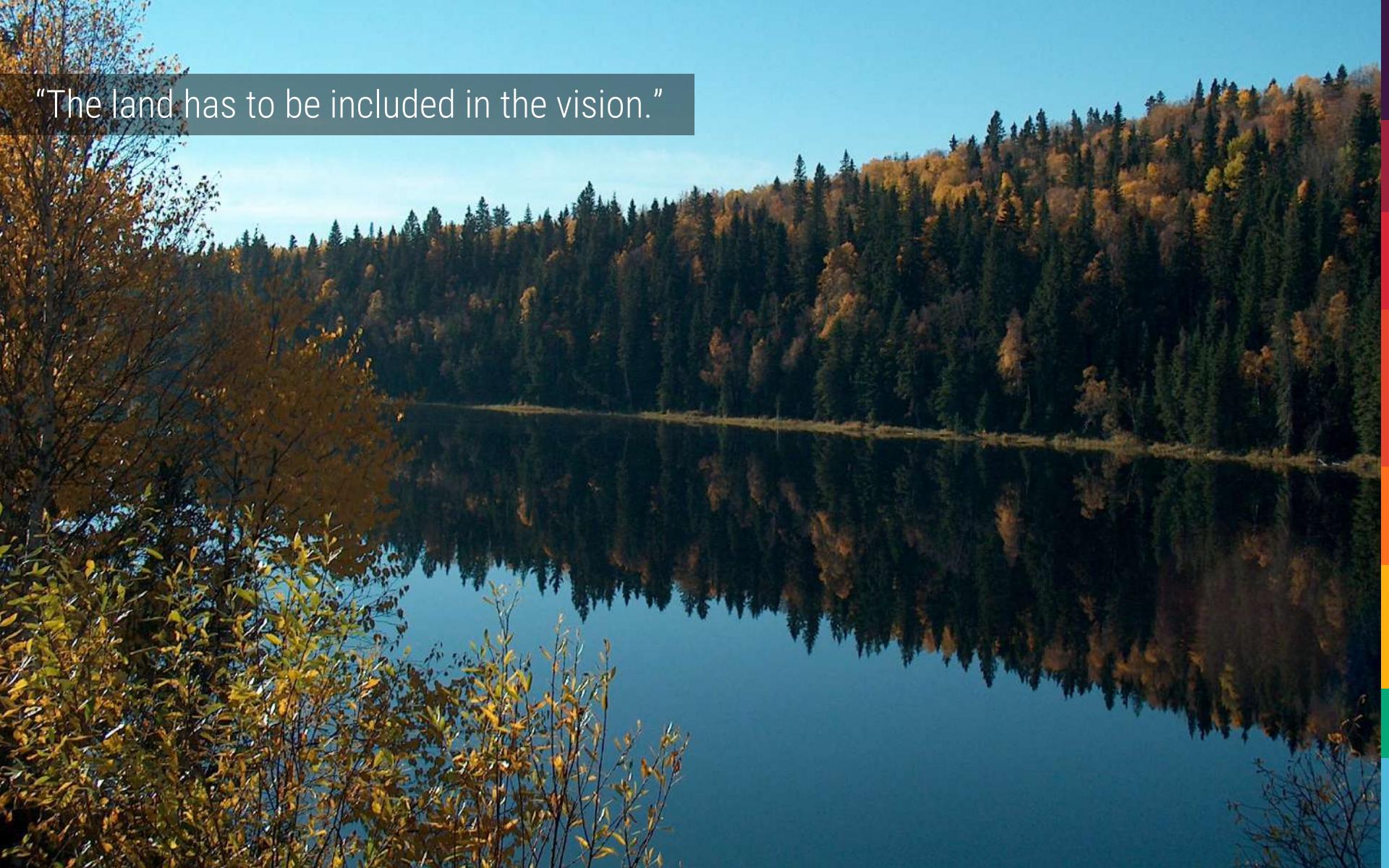
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“

I'm not keen on too much growth because you lose contact with Place. Lose sense of community if it gets too big. I don't want to see us grow—I want to see us thrive.

”

“The land has to be included in the vision.”



“

I hope that it will be a welcoming community for everyone and not just for ‘the right kind of Indians.’ I hope that my girls can have opportunities and have their name on a resume without it being a problem for them. I think we’re on a roll in the right direction.

”

“

To be leaders in truth and reconciliation. Forced closeness can force dialogue, which is a benefit.

”

“

I'd like for each side to feel safe when we visit each other.

”

“

For more inclusivity of our minority communities (racial, disabled, LGBTQIA+, etc.) to be a community that stands up for each other and with each other instead of pointing fingers and sweeping issues under carpets.

”

“

Mutual respect, commitment and dignified relationships.  
We are all human, all our blood is red. I feel as humans,  
we should all be treated with dignity regardless of our  
short comings, our social conditions, our addictions.  
We are all human, nonetheless.

”

“

I would want to see a vibrant town centre.  
But I also don't want to see agricultural land giving way  
to new subdivisions and no longer growing things.

”

“

Prosperity, without losing its small town feel and atmosphere. Being raised in a community surrounding Wetaskiwin, and then raising my children in Wetaskiwin has instilled core values of respect for others. I'd like to see growth in the economy and in the relationship with Maskwacis. We can be a powerhouse of prosperity financially but also for community and connectedness.

”

“

As a grandma, I want my grandson to be born and raised in this community. I want [Wetaskiwin to remain] multi-generational and I want our community to have jobs for him to work in and homes that he can afford to stay in.

”

“

Making the city a viable and attractive place for business to move into. We need to encourage business to move here to create more jobs. We need more choice in retailers and more manufacturers coming in to create sustaining jobs.

”

“

There also needs to be dedication to quality of life opportunities. A way to do this is developing more walking trail areas and beautifying the city to look more appealing to newcomers.

”

“

A walkable urban center that advocates for compact, transit-orientated, walkable, bicycle-friendly land use, including community gardens, neighbourhood schools, and mixed-use development with a range of housing choices.

”

“

Creating a resilient, regenerative community.  
Progressive outlook—water capture, community  
gardens, solar panels, electric car charging stations,  
city utilities (geothermal or solar), public food  
forests, recycling manufacturing.

”

“

To the future:

I'm sorry we didn't get it all right  
but we're fighting to make you proud.

”

“

I hope Wetaskiwin doesn't give up on itself.

”

# 3 words to describe Wetaskiwin in the future

The word cloud is composed of several large, bold words in the center, with smaller, related words surrounding them. The central words are 'community pride' (dark red), 'inclusive' (orange), 'prosperous' (orange), and 'thriving' (dark green). Surrounding these are numerous smaller words in various colors (black, orange, red, green, yellow, blue) that describe the qualities of these words. The colors of the words often correspond to the colors of the surrounding text blocks.

**community pride**

**inclusive**

**prosperous**

**thriving**

surrounding words include: learning, accommodating, genuine, connected, opportunity, generous, caring, sustainable, resilient, supported, progressive, rural, economically, creative, revolutionary, educated, young families, abundant, friendly, adaptable, confidence, super safe, well-planned, wellness, vibrant, self-aware, accessible, neighbourly, growth, training, unique, forward thinking, strategic, openness, beautiful, noisy, appreciative, understanding, visionary, welcoming, diverse, S.M.A.R.T, cozy.

# 3 words we DON'T want to describe Wetaskiwin



A word cloud composed of various negative words, each with a different color. The words are arranged in a cluster, with some words overlapping. The colors include green, brown, orange, red, and purple. The words include: apathetic, solutions, town without, forgotten, resigned, Edmonton, isolated, regressive, discriminatory, divisive, complacent, backwards, irrelevant, separated, divided, land, negative, capital, unwelcoming, teachings, stagnating, criticizing, huge, crime, unsafe, ghost, racism, moving, racially, sterile, poor, racist.

apathetic solutions  
town without forgotten resigned  
Edmonton isolated regressive  
complacent discriminatory divisive  
backwards irrelevant separated divided  
land negative capital unwelcoming  
stagnant criticizing teachings huge  
unsafe ghost racism moving  
racially sterile poor racist

# VISION AND VALUES



# Elements of a community vision

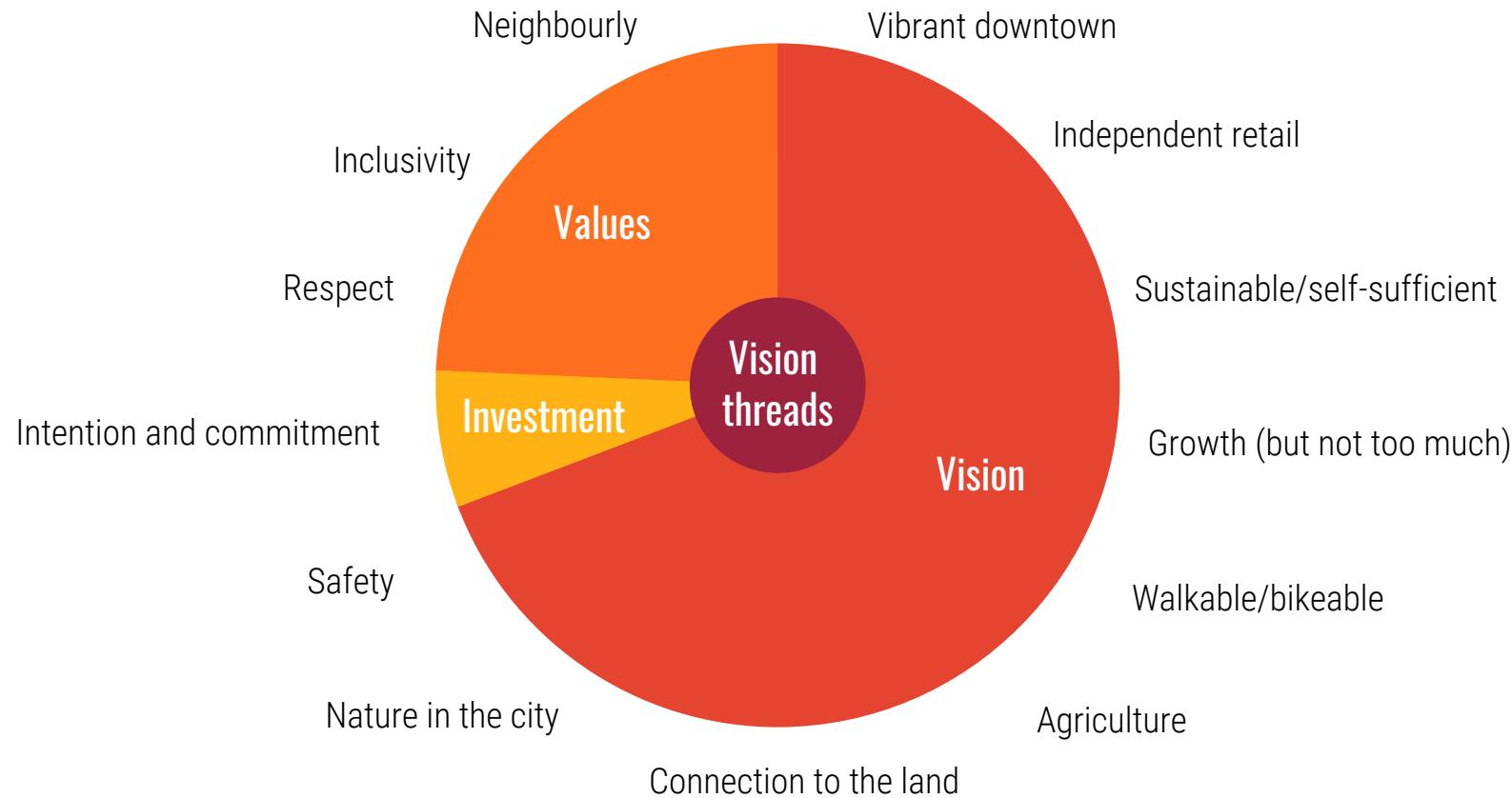
A community vision statement is:

- Future oriented
- Likely to lead to a better future for the community
- Reflects the community's values
- Sets standards of excellence
- Clarifies the community's purpose and direction
- Inspires enthusiasm and commitment
- Reflects the uniqueness of the community
- Ambitious

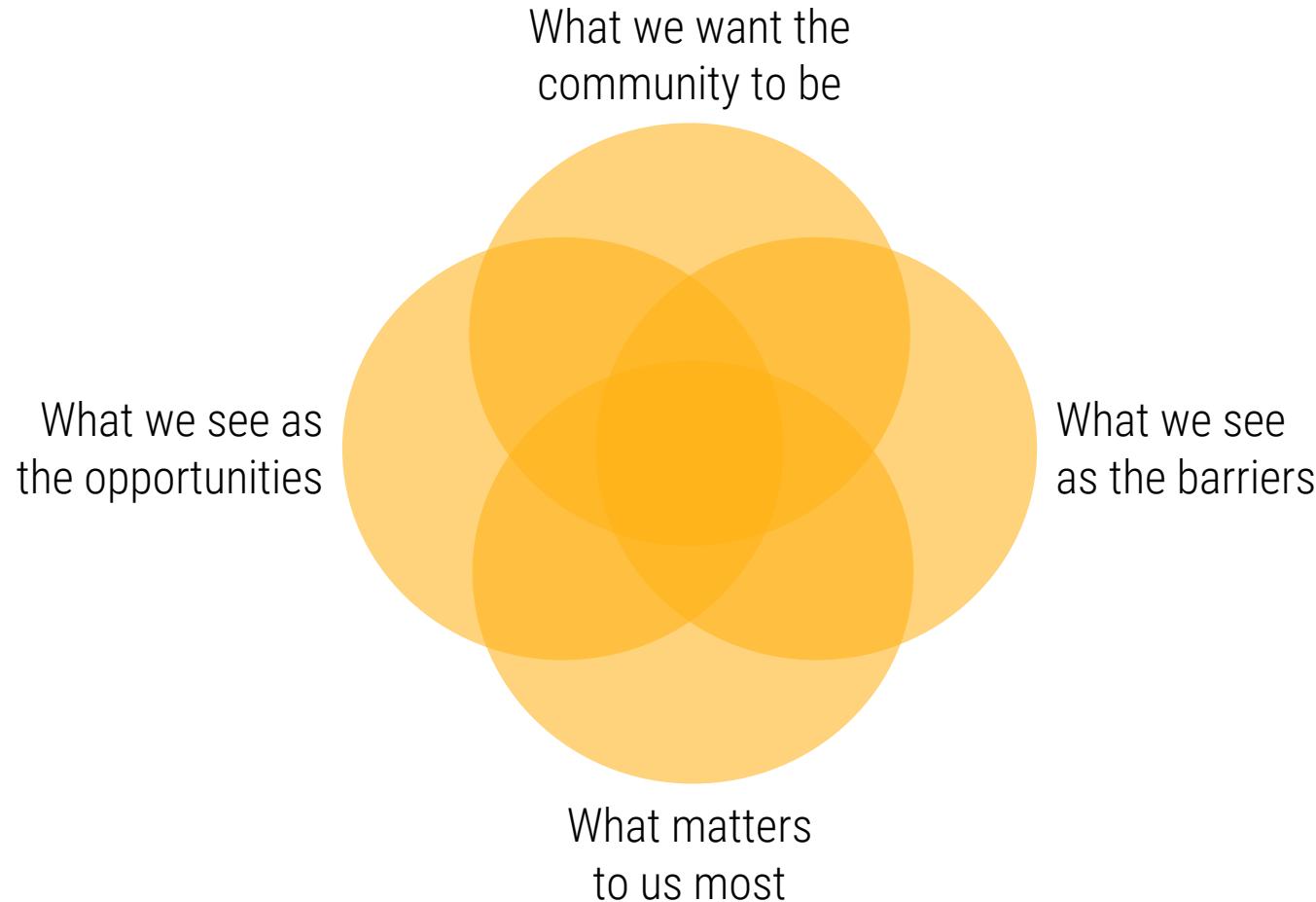
Four sectors

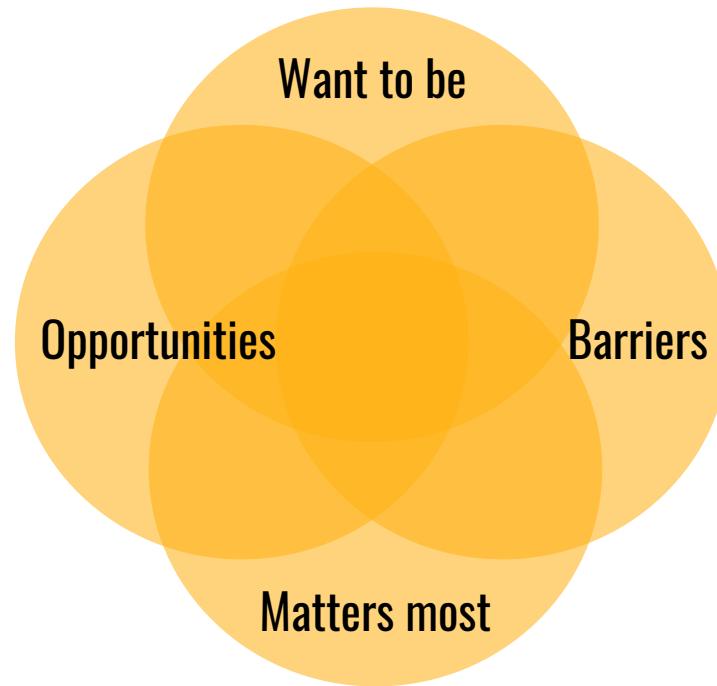
- Economic
- Environment
- Social, health and education
- Arts & Culture

*...as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow, and the grass grows...*



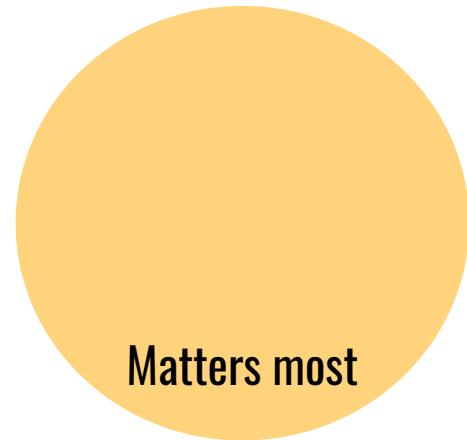
# Vision framework





Thriving small city  
Sense of our own history  
Walkable/bikeable

**Want to be**

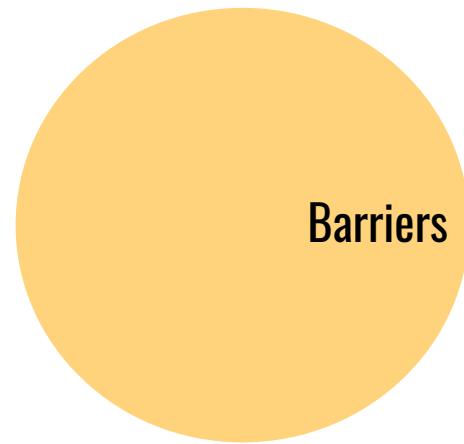


Safety  
Independence/self-sufficiency  
Manageable growth  
Warm, inclusive, neighbourly



## Opportunities

Local employment  
Self-sufficiency  
Reclaiming our retail



Crime  
Racism  
Surrounding, larger communities  
with more amenities & services  
Youth leaving  
Lack of relationship with  
Maskwacis  
Current reputation  
Negativity

Local employment  
Self-sufficiency  
Reclaiming our retail





Wetaskiwin's vision is to be a better version of who it used to be,  
more than a better version of who it is today.

We can do more than this.

# Our vision

Nestled by the hills where peace was made, Wetaskiwin is a vibrant, sustainable and self-sufficient small city distinguished by our

- Easy access for people of all abilities
- Abundant nature inside and outside the city
- Thriving downtown core that honours our past
- Resilient economy rich with opportunity
- Unquestioned safety of person and property for residents and visitors alike



# Our values

As a community we value

- Respect for all our neighbours
- Relationship with the land
- Diversity and inclusivity
- Connecting through arts and culture
- 500 generations of history



# Ideas implicitly included in the vision

These ideas were also raised in the community engagement. They are included in the recommended vision and values in a more indirect manner.

- Climate change
- Reconciliation
- Food sovereignty
- Multi-generational
- Welcoming and accepting
- Empowered and engaged community
- Regenerative
- Stability

# Wetaskiwin vision & values

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# Intention and commitment

On February 3, 2021, a Living the Vision workshop was held with 30 City staff and Councillors. Five intention and commitment statements were identified to be included with the vision and values. They were:

- Make safety a priority.
- Ensure financial stability.
- Support growth of business.
- Bring the community together.
- Be unwavering in our commitment to this vision.

# Wetaskiwin vision, values & commitment

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As a community we value

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- Connecting through arts and culture
- 500 generations of history

To do this we will

- Make safety a priority.
- Ensure financial stability.
- Support growth of business.
- Bring the community together.
- Be unwavering in our commitment to this vision.