



**WESTLOCK THINK-
TANK REPORT**

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INTRODUCTION

The Westlock Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Think-Tank was convened in October 2025 as a forward-looking engagement designed to surface local insight, test economic assumptions, and shape strategic direction. The initiative brought together community leaders, business stakeholders, planning and development officials, and regional partners to explore the forces likely to shape Westlock’s future economy. Rather than prescribe exact policy outcomes, the Think-Tank was framed as a scenario-based exploration – a space to investigate “*what if*” possibilities, deliberate trade-offs, and surface shared priorities that can guide economic strategy over the next five years and beyond.

This process was intentionally structured to go beyond traditional consultation. Participants were invited to assess long-term trends – including demographic shifts, climate change, and technological disruption – and then translate those into Westlock-specific drivers of economic change. Through a facilitated session, they worked through a series of exercises: identifying key drivers, rating their future impact, considering plausible economic development scenarios, and expressing their views on expected versus preferred futures. The Think-Tank also explored the tensions between preserving community character and enabling growth, and between rapid innovation and buffered, steady progress. In short, it asked: *what kind of economic future do we want for Westlock – and how do we get there without compromising who we are?*

The primary outcomes of the Think-Tank were fourfold: **(1) to identify and group the most influential drivers shaping Westlock’s economy, (2) to map a set of distinct yet plausible economic futures, (3) to surface consensus around a preferred future and articulate the risks of undesired paths, and (4) to define a set of strategic pillars to guide the Town’s five-year economic development strategy.** These outcomes now form the basis for further planning, policy development, and implementation efforts, as Westlock prepares to navigate growth and investment with purpose, agility, and community-led alignment.

KEY FINDINGS

The following section summarizes the most significant insights that emerged from the Think-Tank session and supporting survey data. These findings reflect the perspectives of local stakeholders on the future of economic development in Westlock – including what they value, what they expect, and what they hope to avoid. The results helped identify high-impact drivers, articulate potential future scenarios, and surface areas of alignment around strategic priorities and long-term aspirations.

SHARED VISION & PLANNING ARE CRITICAL

Participants overwhelmingly agreed on the importance of having a unified community vision and a concrete plan for Westlock’s economic development. On a scale of 1 to 10, most rated a shared vision and plan as very important (scoring 8–10), underscoring strong consensus that Westlock needs a coordinated direction for the future. This sentiment reinforces Council’s commitment to proactive planning in the CEDS process.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE & QUALITY OF LIFE

Westlock’s aging population and the out-migration of youth emerged as pressing concerns. Participants noted that without more career opportunities, young people leave or juggle multiple part-time jobs instead of finding one fulfilling full-time role locally. The community recognizes that making Westlock a more attractive place to live – with affordable housing, good services, healthcare, recreation and education options – is an economic strategy for retaining and attracting residents.

AGRICULTURE & RESOURCE OPPORTUNITIES

As a regional agricultural centre, Westlock sees value-added agriculture and food security as key opportunities for growth. Think-tank participants frequently mentioned expanding food processing and agri-business as ways to diversify the economy. Energy trends were also discussed – with some viewing Alberta’s traditional oil/gas-based economy as a vulnerability in a changing climate, while others saw potential in emerging energy solutions (such as small-scale nuclear or hydrogen technology) to drive future industry.

TECHNOLOGY & ADAPTATION

The rapid pace of technological change is a double-edged sword for Westlock. Many residents feel that embracing new technology is essential for the town to stay competitive. There was consensus that proactive adaptation – improving digital infrastructure, supporting tech education, and helping local businesses innovate – will be vital. However, participants also urged a thoughtful approach: technology should be a tool to support the community rather than a disruptor of it. The key will be to anticipate change, remain agile, and ensure the workforce can thrive alongside automation and digital transformation.



**EXPLORING
FUTURE TRENDS
AND IMPLICATIONS**

CHAPTER 1

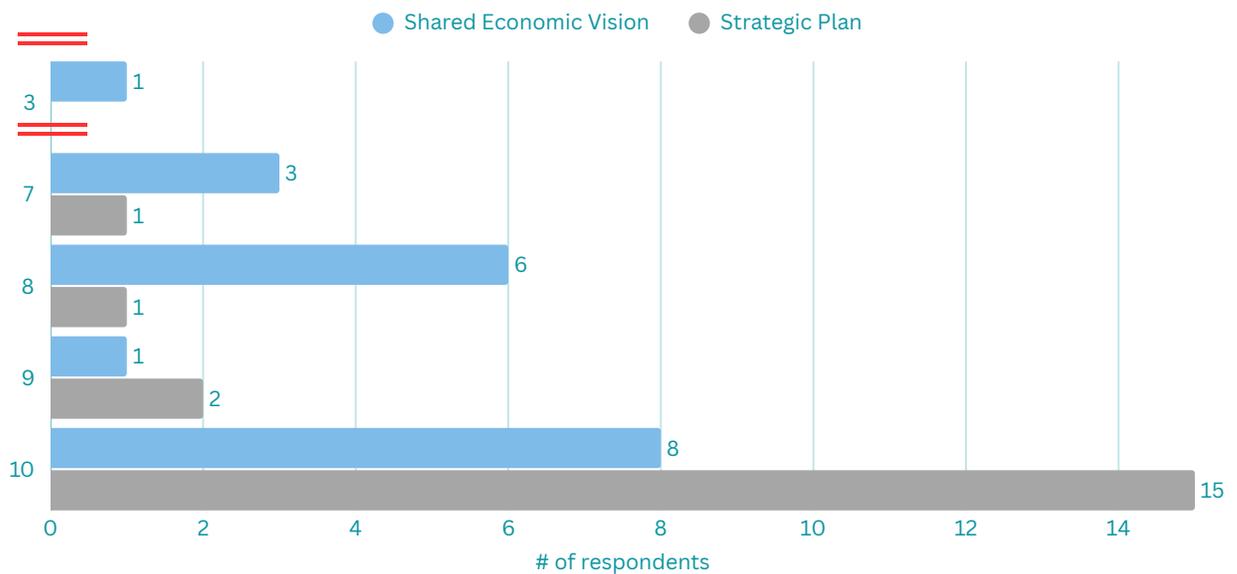
IMPORTANCE OF VISION AND PLANNING

Right at the outset, participants affirmed that having a clear vision and plan are fundamental. In fact, **having a shared community-wide vision** for economic development and **having a formal economic development plan** both received near-unanimous high importance ratings (averaging about 9–10 on a 10-point scale) among the group (Figure 1).

This strong agreement indicates that Westlock’s leaders and citizens are eager to coalesce around common goals and strategies.

The think-tank discussion noted that a shared vision helps align efforts across the community, while a concrete plan provides an actionable roadmap for growth. These elements will ensure that Westlock’s development over the next five years is purposeful and cohesive.

FIGURE 1: IMPORTANCE RATINGS FOR SHARED VISION AND STRATEGIC PLANNING



NOTE: This figure illustrates the distribution of Think-Tank participants’ responses to two key questions: the importance of having a shared economic vision and the importance of having a strategic plan to achieve that vision. Respondents rated each on a scale from 1 (Not Important) to 10 (Extremely Important).

CHAPTER 2

IMPLICATIONS OF GLOBAL TRENDS FOR WESTLOCK'S FUTURE

In facilitated discussions, the group explored three major macro trend areas –

(1) Demographics & Urbanization, (2) Energy/Resources & Climate Change, and (3) Technology & Pace of Change – considering how each might impact Westlock by 2040. Participants discussed these trends in global and regional contexts and then honed in on **what they mean for Westlock**, including how well the town is prepared for them. Several common themes emerged:

► **Demographic & Population Changes:**

Westlock faces a dual demographic challenge: an aging population on one hand, and the risk of youth and working-age adults leaving for bigger centres on the other. Participants worried that current local job opportunities are insufficient to keep younger people in town. *“Lack of full-time employment so they need multiple part-time jobs instead of one full time,”* one group noted of the current situation. If this trend continues, retaining talent will be difficult. At the same time, the possibility of population growth through immigration or spillover from urbanization was discussed. With Edmonton and other cities growing, Westlock could see new residents relocating for its small-town lifestyle. However, participants cautioned that any large influx would require Westlock to expand its housing, healthcare, and education capacity. As one participant predicted, growth will put *“pressure on the healthcare system, demand*

for affordable housing, [and] pressure on the education system.” This highlights the need to plan for infrastructure and services that support a larger and more diverse population. Overall, the group agreed that Westlock must find ways to attract and retain working families and youth – likely by creating good jobs and a high quality of life – or risk stagnation and an imbalanced population.

► **Energy, Climate, Food, and Water:** Being in an agriculturally rich region, Westlock is directly affected by resource and climate trends. Participants see opportunities in **strengthening the agriculture sector**, especially by moving up the value chain. Ideas like *food processing plants, agri-tech ventures, and year-round greenhouses* were mentioned as ways Westlock can leverage its farming base for economic gain. Ensuring local **food security** is both an economic and community priority – Westlock could become a hub for locally grown and processed food, which would create jobs and insulate the area from global supply disruptions. Climate change, however, poses uncertainties. The think-tank cited recent extreme weather events (e.g. drought) as warnings. Westlock will need to invest in water management, climate-resilient infrastructure, and renewable energy to sustain growth. One comment noted that *“we are an energy economy – not good for us”* in the context of climate change, reflecting concern that reliance on traditional oil and gas

CHAPTER 2: IMPLICATIONS OF GLOBAL TRENDS FOR WESTLOCK'S FUTURE

might be a liability as the world transitions to cleaner energy. At the same time, participants showed interest in **emerging energy solutions**: for example, small modular nuclear reactors or solar farms were floated as potential projects that could both supply cleaner power and create high-tech jobs locally. There was healthy debate on these ideas – not everyone agreed on nuclear energy's role (discussed later) – but the discussion underscored that **sustainable resource use and climate adaptation** will be central to Westlock's future. Protecting water resources, supporting local farmers through climate shifts, and taking advantage of new energy technology all featured as important considerations for the town's long-term strategy.

➤ **Technology and the Speed of Change:**

The rapid advancement of technology – from automation and artificial intelligence to digital connectivity – is a trend that will spare no community, including Westlock. Think-tank participants recognized that technology could be a great enabler for Westlock's economy if harnessed properly. For instance, better broadband and digital tools can allow local businesses to reach broader markets and even enable remote work opportunities that tie Westlock into the metropolitan economy. However, there was also a sense of caution and uncertainty: in a small town, adopting cutting-edge tech can be challenging due to limited resources and expertise. Several participants expressed that Westlock needs to be proactive and creative in positioning itself amidst technological change. They suggested **investing in tech education and training**, so that local workers can fill new types of jobs (or entrepreneurs can create them). There was

also discussion of **supporting innovation** in traditional sectors – e.g. precision agriculture technology, or leveraging automation to increase manufacturing productivity – so that Westlock's main industries remain competitive. Some responses conveyed anxiety about keeping up: *"Everyone will have a hard time keeping up, but we need to position ourselves"* was a common refrain. Indeed, the group agreed that a passive approach won't work: *"Have to be pro-active... before it is too late"* one wrote, and another warned that Westlock must *"plan for technological change that is imposed from outside"* so as not to be left behind. At the same time, a few voiced that technology should not overshadow community values – it should serve the people. For example, adopting new tech should go hand-in-hand with protecting jobs or creating new ones to replace those disrupted. In summary, the trend of accelerating change means **Westlock must anticipate and embrace innovation**, while also mitigating its downsides.

➤ **Synthesis of Trends – The Need for Adaptability:**

After examining each trend area separately, the group was prompted to consider *all* these future forces together. This yielded an overarching insight: Westlock's success will depend on **adaptability and integration** – the town must address *demographic, resource, and technological challenges* in tandem rather than in silos. Many participants emphasized the need to be *"wise and creative"* in balancing these factors. For example, **economic diversification** was a repeated theme tying the trends together: by developing new industries (like *value-added ag or green energy tech*), Westlock can create

jobs (helping with demographics), make the economy more resilient to climate/market shocks (addressing resource concerns), and encourage youth to stay (leveraging tech and training). Another cross-cutting point was **partnerships** – several recognized that Westlock likely cannot tackle issues like housing, healthcare, or major infrastructure alone. Collaborating with neighboring municipalities (Westlock County), provincial agencies, and even private investors will be necessary to bring big projects to fruition. Indeed, one respondent admitted *“I don't know that it is realistic to think Westlock can solve [these issues] on its own”*, underscoring the need for outside support and regional thinking.

Finally, virtually everyone agreed that all these efforts must come together under a **comprehensive strategic plan** – tying back to the importance of vision and planning. The community clearly wants to avoid a fragmented approach; instead, the preferred path is a well-coordinated strategy that anticipates future trends and guides Westlock to its desired future state.



**KEY DRIVERS
SHAPING
WESTLOCK'S FUTURE**

CHAPTER 3

KEY DRIVERS

With the future trends in mind, the think-tank next identified twenty **key drivers** likely to influence Westlock’s economic and community development prospects. In this context, *drivers* are major factors – events, developments or forces – that could propel change in Westlock. Through small-group brainstorming, participants listed many possible drivers, then consolidated them into a top 20 list of unique drivers (not ranked by priority). These range from economic factors like job opportunities to social factors like healthcare and housing. Each driver was then assessed on two dimensions: its potential impact on **Community Fabric** (*quality of life, social well-being*) and on **Economic Development** (*growth, jobs, investment*) (Figure 2). Participants scored each driver’s future impact on a 1 to 10 scale for both dimensions. The results provide a nuanced picture of what the Westlock community perceives as critical to its future.

Top Drivers – Areas of Broad Consensus:

Several drivers stood out as having **high impact in both community and economic terms**, indicating broad consensus on their importance:

➤ **Employment Opportunities and Youth Retention:** Not surprisingly, the availability of good jobs and career paths was seen as the pivotal driver for Westlock’s future. *“Employment opportunities/careers”* received among the highest impact scores across the board (with many rating it 10 out of 10 on economic growth).

Participants recognize that if Westlock can generate more employment – especially in industries that appeal to younger workers – it will revitalize the community (families will stay, population will grow) and boost the economy through increased spending and talent retention. Closely related is *“industries to keep youth”*, another top driver which emphasizes developing the kinds of businesses or sectors that attract younger generations (for instance, tech startups, skilled trades, or creative industries). This too scored very high for impact, reinforcing that **preventing youth out-migration** via local opportunities is a critical objective. In the same vein, *“post-secondary/education”* was identified as a key driver: establishing higher education or training facilities in town would greatly benefit the community socially (education access) and economically (skill development, innovation), with participants giving it strong scores on both dimensions. Overall, the message is clear – **jobs, education and youth-oriented industries** form a cornerstone of Westlock’s desired future.

➤ **Value-Added Agriculture and Food Security:** Building on Westlock’s agricultural strengths, participants heavily emphasized *“value-added agriculture”* as a driver of future prosperity. This refers to processing raw farm outputs into higher-value products (food processing, agri-food manufacturing, etc.), which can create jobs and increase local incomes. Participants rated this driver’s economic impact extremely high (averaging over 9/10 for Economic Development) – one of

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the highest of all drivers – and also significant for community fabric. Enhancing local food processing not only grows the economy but can support farm families and strengthen local food availability. Similarly, “*food security/local grown*” was identified as a key driver, reflecting interest in ensuring Westlock can produce and supply enough food for the region. This driver scored high on impact as well. Taken together, **agriculture-related drivers** are seen as a major opportunity area: by investing in agri-business infrastructure (such as a packing plant or food hub) and supporting farmers, Westlock can capitalize on global food trends while providing social benefits (food security, community pride in local products). One of the strategic ideas raised was to pursue a *meat processing or “butchering plant”* in the area to add value to local livestock production – an example of the kind of project behind these drivers.

➤ **Affordable Housing and Cost of Living:** Participants are acutely aware that **housing affordability** and **cost of living** will shape Westlock’s future viability. “*Affordable housing*” ranked very high, especially for community impact (many gave it 10/10 on that axis). Without adequate and affordable housing options, Westlock will struggle to attract new residents or even keep current ones – a challenge already noted under demographic trends. Likewise, “*cost of living*” (which includes housing costs, utilities, taxes, etc.) was rated as a significant factor, with strong community impact scores. If Westlock remains an affordable place to live relative to cities, it can draw people seeking a lower-cost lifestyle; conversely, if costs spike or housing is scarce, growth will be stunted. The think-

tank clearly signaled that strategies to **improve housing availability and affordability** – such as incentivizing new housing development, exploring multi-family or seniors’ housing projects, and ensuring essential goods and services remain reasonably priced – will be critical for a healthy future.

➤ **Healthcare and Community Services:** Quality of life drivers like “*healthcare*” and “*services*” (general community services and amenities) were also among the top-rated influences, particularly on the community fabric side. Healthcare was seen as extremely important socially (scoring ~9/10 on average for community impact) – reflecting the need for adequate local medical care for an aging population – though some felt its direct economic impact was moderate (healthcare does provide jobs, but its greater value is in resident well-being). **Protective services** (policing, fire, EMS) and **recreation** amenities were similarly noted as important primarily for community livability (with high social impact scores). The driver “*Services*” – encompassing the range of amenities from schools and shops to utilities – scored high on both axes, implying that a well-rounded set of community services is seen as a foundation for economic development too. In essence, the participants underscored that **investing in quality public services, safety, and recreational opportunities** will pay dividends by making Westlock a more desirable place for businesses and families alike. It improves community health and attractiveness, which in turn helps lure employers and residents in a virtuous cycle.

➤ **Infrastructure & Resources (Water, Energy, Land):** Several drivers relate to the physical and resource infrastructure that underpin development. *“Water”* was rated as having very high impact on both community and economic fronts – no surprise, as water is essential for residents and agriculture or industry, and recent drought conditions have put it top-of-mind. Ensuring a reliable water supply and investing in water infrastructure (e.g. storage, treatment) is clearly a strategic priority emerging from the workshop. *“Energy”* as a driver was considered more of an economic factor than a social one (scoring ~7.7 for Economic Development vs ~5.8 for Community Fabric), reflecting that energy projects or costs directly affect industry and growth. Given Westlock’s context, this could involve the availability and cost of power/fuel for businesses, as well as opportunities in new energy ventures (like the earlier-mentioned small nuclear reactor or solar project). There was also a driver about *“resources inventory”*, which can be interpreted as having readily developable land or natural resources available. This had a somewhat lower average impact on community fabric (just above 5) but a higher impact on economic development (~8.4). We interpret this to mean that participants feel having **shovel-ready land, industrial sites, or resource assets** is quite important for attracting investment (economic), even if it’s less directly felt by the general population day-to-day. Another related driver was *“Provincial & federal policy”* – the support (or hindrance) from higher levels of government. This was viewed as a significant economic driver (nearly 8/10) but less so a community one. Good policies or

funding from the province and federal governments (for example, economic development programs, infrastructure grants, or favorable regulations) could greatly boost Westlock’s growth prospects. Conversely, lack of external support could constrain local initiatives. This highlights the need for Westlock to align with and advocate for government policies that benefit the town’s development goals.



Business Climate and Investment:

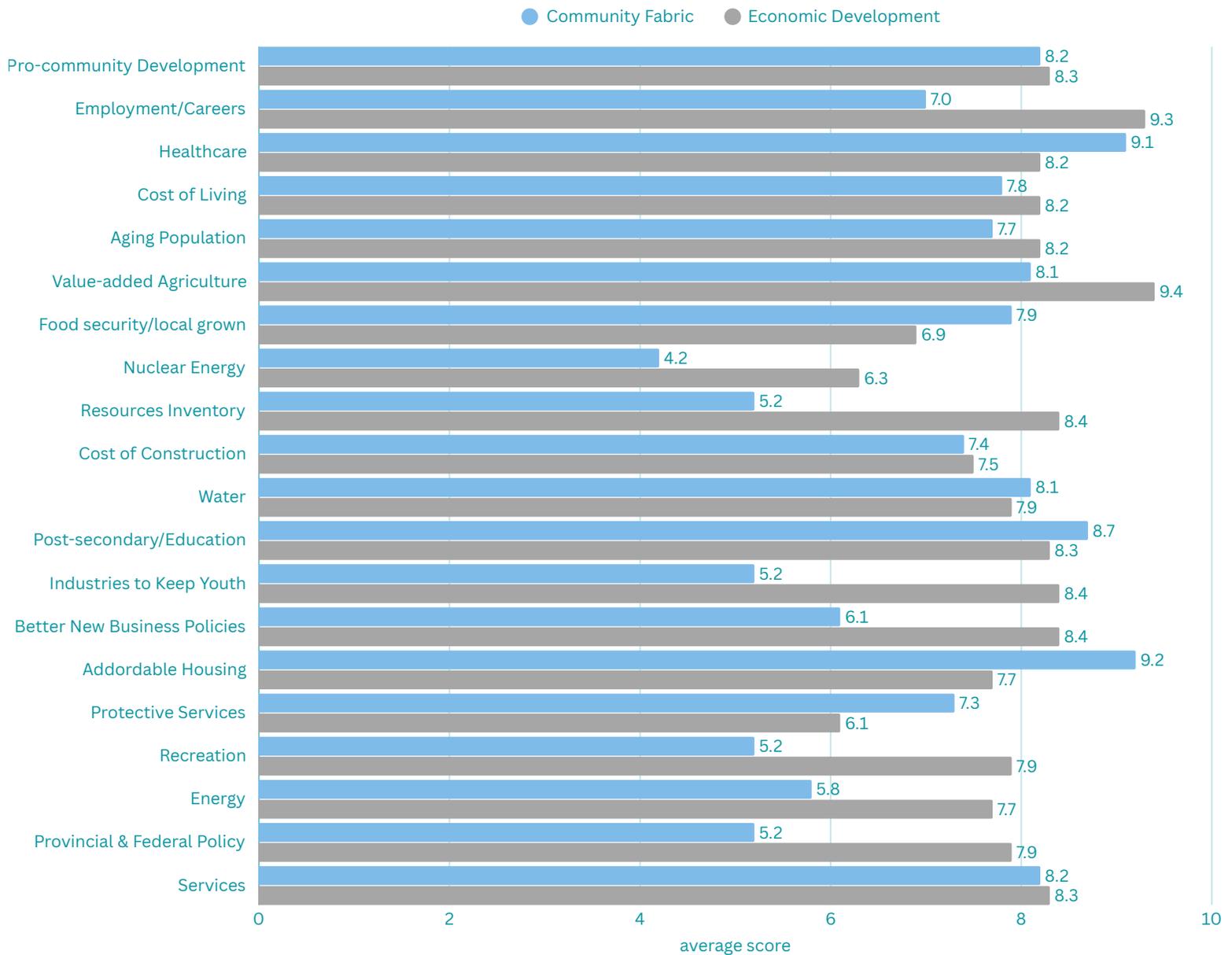
Participants also pointed to factors that influence the business environment. *“Better new business policies”* was one driver – essentially the idea that Westlock’s **local policies and regulations** should facilitate new business creation and expansion. This scored around 8.4/10 on economic impact on average, indicating a strong belief that improving things like tax rates, permitting processes, or incentives for business will yield economic benefits. Several strategic suggestions in the workshop echoed this, such as *moderating property and business taxes* to attract investment, and *aggressively pursuing industrial development* through incentives. Additionally, *“cost of construction”* was listed as a driver, which can affect how much development happens (high construction costs might deter new builds). This was seen as moderately high impact (around 7.4–7.5/10). While not the top driver, it reminds that the economics of development – influenced by interest rates, material costs, labor availability – will shape how Westlock grows. Keeping construction and development costs manageable could help the town realize more projects from housing to commercial buildings.

CHAPTER 3: KEY DRIVERS

➤ **Emerging or Polarizing Drivers:** A few drivers had mixed views among participants, notable among them *“nuclear energy.”* This driver received very low average scores (around 4.2 for community fabric, 6.3 for economic development), but that belies a split: some gave it a **“1” (no impact)** while others gave it high scores (some 10s) – indicating a polarized perspective. Those in favor see embracing nuclear technology (such as installing a small modular reactor for power generation) as a bold move that could bring jobs and energy security. Those against either felt it’s unrealistic or undesirable for Westlock’s community. The **divergence in scoring for nuclear** suggests any such proposal would need extensive public discussion. Other drivers like *“aging population”* and *“recreation”* received moderately high community scores but lower economic ones, reflecting that they are important issues to plan for (senior services, recreation facilities) but perhaps not direct economic drivers. *“Pro-community development”* was a driver that scored well on both axes (~8/10), though the term is a bit broad – it refers to fostering a **development-friendly, community-supported growth approach** in general. In summary, aside from the unanimously crucial drivers (jobs, housing, etc.), the think-tank results show there are some innovative ideas (like nuclear energy adoption) that intrigue participants but would require consensus-building. It also shows that **social factors and economic factors** are deeply intertwined in Westlock’s context – nearly every high-ranked driver has dual importance. The community fabric and the economic development are two sides of the same coin when planning for the future.

CHAPTER 3: KEY DRIVERS

FIGURE 2: IMPACT SCORES FOR 20 KEY DRIVERS SHAPING WESTLOCK'S FUTURE



NOTE: This figure presents the average impact ratings assigned by Think Tank participants to 20 key drivers identified as critical to Westlock's long-term prosperity. Each driver was evaluated based on two dimensions: its impact on Community Fabric (blue bars) and on Economic Development (grey bars), using a scale from 1 to 10.



SCENARIO PLANNING

CHAPTER 4

THE “LIKELY” VS “EXTREME” FUTURES

Armed with the drivers and trends analysis, the think-tank engaged in **scenario planning** to explore what Westlock might look like in 2040 under different circumstances. Scenario planning is a strategic foresight tool that allows communities to consider **multiple plausible futures** – it’s not about predicting exactly what will happen, but rather examining a range of outcomes (positive or negative) to better inform today’s decisions. This exercise helps answer the questions: *What might Westlock be like if current trajectories continue? What if extreme changes occur? And most importantly, what future do we prefer to create, and how do we get there?*

Participants first discussed a “**Likely Future**” **scenario** – essentially, an extrapolation of current trends and momentum into 2040. In general, the consensus was that without significant new interventions, Westlock’s likely 2040 outcome would be **challenging**. Common assumptions for the likely scenario included slow or stagnant economic growth, only modest population change, continued aging of the community, and ongoing struggles to retain youth. Some groups envisioned the likely future as a “**slow decline**” or status quo: the town remains a tight-knit community but sees little new industry, young people continue to drift to cities, and the tax base struggles to expand. In this future, quality of life might erode if critical thresholds (like too few working-age people to support services) are reached. In summary, the likely scenario served as a **cautionary future** – it showed that

if Westlock does not actively pursue new opportunities (the kind identified in the drivers), it could face socioeconomic decline by 2040. This scenario reinforced the urgency behind many of the strategic drivers (jobs, housing, etc.) identified earlier.

Next, the group explored an “**Extreme Future**” **scenario**. This was described as a radical or transformative outcome – participants had leeway to imagine either a best-case or worst-case extreme. Interestingly, different groups took different approaches to the extreme scenario. Some imagined an **extremely positive future**: for instance, Westlock in 2040 with booming industries, a surge of new residents, cutting-edge technology in use, and the town becoming a model community in the region. In such an optimistic extreme, Westlock might have successfully established major enterprises (like a large agri-food processing park or a clean energy research facility), leading to unprecedented job growth and population increase. The town could be nearly unrecognizable in its prosperity – perhaps even facing the “*problems of success*” like managing rapid growth or integration of many newcomers. On the other hand, a few groups envisioned a **negative extreme scenario** – essentially a crisis situation. In that version, global or national forces (like recessions, climate disasters, etc.) could hit Westlock hard: key industries collapse, people leave in droves, and the community fabric frays. While no one expects or wants this outcome, articulating it was

CHAPTER 4: THE “LIKELY” VS “EXTREME” FUTURES

useful to understand what vulnerabilities to guard against (for example, over-reliance on a single industry). The divergent interpretations of the extreme scenario highlight a community uncertainty: Westlock’s future could swing widely depending on external conditions and local actions. It underscored the importance of resilience. The scenario planning process thus created a **framework** to discuss what dramatic success or failure might look like, helping residents and leaders clarify which elements of those futures are desirable and which must be avoided.

CHAPTER 5

THE PREFERRED FUTURE VISION

After considering likely and extreme possibilities, the think-tank focused on defining a “Preferred Future” for Westlock in 2040. This is the future that participants **want to move toward** – an aspirational yet attainable scenario that informed the strategic planning. Based on the common themes from group discussions, we can paint a picture of this preferred future, which we’ll call “**Thriving Westlock 2040.**” In this envisioned scenario:

➤ **Economic Vitality:** By 2040, Westlock boasts a **diversified and innovative local economy**. Several new industries have taken root alongside traditional farming. Notably, the town is a recognized hub for **value-added agriculture** – home to food processing facilities, an agro-innovation centre, and other agri-businesses that add value to the region’s crops and livestock. These businesses create jobs ranging from entry-level plant work to skilled roles in quality control and product development. Manufacturing and light industry have also grown; for example, a small **processing plant** might be producing packaged foods or agri-commodities for export. Westlock has capitalized on its location and resources to also attract a few **technology-driven enterprises**. This mix of industries means the economy is no longer one-dimensional; it’s resilient to downturns in any single sector.

➤ **Education & Workforce:** A cornerstone of “Thriving Westlock” is a strong local workforce fueled by excellent **education and training**

opportunities. By 2040, the community succeeded in establishing a **post-secondary presence** in town. This could be a satellite campus of a college or a specialized training institute that offers programs aligned with Westlock’s industries (agriculture technology, trades, healthcare, etc.). The think-tank had suggested pursuing a “*community college*” or similar facility, and in the preferred future this has come to fruition. The result is that young people have options to get higher education **without leaving Westlock**, and older workers can retrain for new careers as needed. The community’s emphasis on education also permeates the school system, which works closely with local businesses (via apprenticeships and co-op programs) to prepare youth for local jobs. This has yielded a win-win: **youth retention is high** – many graduates choose to start their careers and families in Westlock – and local employers can find the skilled labor they need. In 2040, Westlock is known as a town that invests in its people, and this human capital development has paid off in sustained economic growth and innovation.

➤ **Community Life and Services:** In the preferred scenario, Westlock has maintained its **small-town charm and tight-knit community feel** while enhancing the amenities and services that make it livable for all ages. Years of effort toward improving housing have led to a healthy mix of options: new subdivisions with single-family homes, several **multi-family housing** developments for

CHAPTER 5: THE PREFERRED FUTURE VISION

affordability, and seniors' housing complexes that allow older residents to stay in the community. Affordable housing is no longer a critical bottleneck – young families, low-income residents, and seniors can all find suitable homes, partly thanks to joint initiatives by the Town and County (one idea during the think-tank was *“greater collaboration between town and county”* on housing projects. **Healthcare services** in 2040 are robust: the local hospital or clinic has expanded, possibly offering more specialty services so residents don't need to travel to Edmonton for common needs. There might be a wellness center that integrates healthcare with senior care, given the aging population driver was addressed. **Protective services** (fire, police, EMS) have kept pace with growth, ensuring Westlock remains a safe community. Additionally, the town invested in quality-of-life amenities – a new recreation center, upgraded parks and **green spaces**, and community events that keep the town vibrant. One group's idea *“more green spaces to attract people to stay”* has been realized; tree-lined trails, sports fields, and playgrounds are plentiful. The historic downtown is lively, with local shops and cafes benefiting from increased foot traffic of residents and tourists. Overall, **community well-being is high** in this scenario: Westlock is seen as a friendly, attractive place to live, with the conveniences of a larger center but the warmth of a small town.

► **Infrastructure & Sustainability:**

Westlock's preferred future includes smart, forward-looking infrastructure. Recognizing the importance of utilities and climate resilience, the town (with regional partners)

undertook major upgrades. By 2040, Westlock enjoys **secure water infrastructure** – perhaps a new reservoir or regional water line has been built, ensuring droughts can be managed and clean water is abundant for residents, farms, and industry. Power reliability is also improved; the community explored alternative energy and now a portion of Westlock's energy is locally generated. For instance, if the notion of a *“small nuclear reactor”* advanced by some participants proved viable, Westlock could host a small modular reactor providing steady, emissions-free power. Alternatively, solar arrays or wind projects might contribute to the grid. This not only gives Westlock energy independence to a degree, but also creates a few high-skilled jobs and positions the town as a **green energy leader**. Transportation and connectivity have seen upgrades as well: better highways or perhaps a shuttle service link Westlock to Edmonton, leveraging its proximity to a major city. High-speed internet connectivity is ubiquitous in 2040, enabling remote work and large-scale enterprises from Westlock – a boon that emerged from embracing the tech trend. All these improvements mean the physical foundation of Westlock is solid, sustainable, and capable of supporting further growth beyond 2040.

► **Governance & Partnerships:** A hallmark of the preferred future is **strong collaboration and leadership**. Regional collaboration is evident in things like joint economic initiatives (e.g., a regional industrial park) and shared services that improve efficiency. The think-tank stressed *“Get community leaders and government on the same page”* – this is reality, with a unified approach to development.

The Town also successfully lobbied for and secured support from the provincial and federal governments: infrastructure grants, rural development programs, and policy support flowed to Westlock, catalyzing many of the projects mentioned. Local policies were tuned to be **business-friendly and community-friendly** – for example, streamlined permitting helped new businesses open, and thoughtful planning/zoning ensured growth happened in the right places (an idea was to “*define appropriate areas for development*” to protect community character, which was implemented). Community engagement remained strong through the years, with residents continuing to have a voice in shaping development (preserving the small-town values even as the town grows). In essence, the preferred future’s governance is characterized by **intentional strategy and partnership**, which proved to be the “secret sauce” in turning ambitious ideas into reality.

In summary, “*Thriving Westlock 2040*” is a future where the town has grown and modernized in a balanced way: the economy is thriving with new industries and jobs; the population is a sustainable mix of ages (youth, families, and seniors all supported); and the community’s quality of life is excellent. Westlock has managed to keep its identity as a welcoming rural town while adapting to global changes. This vision, as developed by the think-tank participants, is aspirational but achievable – and it serves as the **north star for Westlock’s strategy**.

