

Regional business plan kicking into high gear

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A plan to expand local business opportunities and study labour market conditions for existing and potential investors has, well, expanded.

This week, a release from "Invest Southeast Alberta" outlines a "newly formed consortium of business, governments and services agencies" will take on the issue about six months after it was proposed.

"Invest Medicine Hat" the City of Medicine Hat's economic development contractor suggested the study in co-ordination with municipal administrators last fall, with details to follow.

This month, the new group plans to begin the first phase of the project by gathering input from business owners in a series of meetings. That will lead to a formal study later this year of job opportunities, the

skillset of local workforce, and could tailor business attraction efforts to specific industries.

Medicine Hat Mayor Ted Clugston said in a release that a broad approach is required.

"With many assets we have we must also recognize the important role each of us plays in providing a strong competitive environment," he stated. "Invest Southeast is bringing these leaders to the table."

The need for such a study was discussed last year after the arrival of major industrial projects of Aurora Cannabis, Hut 8 data processing and others, which could require a total of 700 or more workers by the end of 2019.

A "business retention and expansion" and "workforce development strategy" could also help existing businesses attract talent.

Similarly, it could help educational institutions, job seekers and placement agencies,

refine their efforts and offerings.

Kevin Shufflebotham, the incoming president of Invest partner Medicine Hat College, said "education and training helps people put their talents to work."

"We're looking forward to integration on our campuses and in the communities we serve."

Cypress County deputy Reeve Richard Oster called it "a dynamic group" that will "take advantage of the opportunities unique to our region."

A total of 16 private and public sector partners make up the group, including the City of Medicine Hat and Hat-based business groups such as the City Centre Development Agency, Tourism Medicine Hat and Community Futures Entrepreneurship Corp.

Regional governments are involved through the participation of Verge Economic

Development, an organization formed via partnership of counties of Cypress and Forty mile, and the towns of Redcliff and Bow Island.

Private sector participation comes from major firms Aurora Cannabis, Hut 8, as well as Dynamic Industrial Solutions, Red Hat Cooperative, accounting firm MNP, as well as renewable energy system contractor Terralta, Bow Island Apple Drugs and Moxies and Mr. Lube franchises.

Alberta Labour and Immigration is providing \$122,500 for the effort from funds from federal government employment support programs.

Meetings will take place on June 19 and 20 in Medicine Hat to hold discussions with local business owners, who can register by June 17 by calling the Community Futures Entrepreneurship office at 403-528-2824.