2026-2029 Regional Economic Development Strategy

Towards a resilient, diversified, and innovative regional economy to support the prosperity of all residents.

Executive Summary

Unified Regional Vision: This 2026-2029 strategy provides a coordinated framework for economic development in the Lower Columbia region (Trail, Rossland, Fruitvale, Montrose, Warfield, and RDKB Areas A/B), focusing on building a resilient, diversified, and innovative economy to support resident prosperity. This strategy is a collaborative effort led by the Lower Columbia Community Development Team Society (LCCDTS) and the participation of the Trail & District Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) and Community Futures South Kootenay (CFSK)

Leveraging Core Partner Strengths: The plan integrates the region's unique assets —Metal Tech Alley (industrial innovation), IncrEDIBLE (local food systems), the Trail & District Chamber of Commerce (SME/tourism support), and Community Futures South Kootenay (entrepreneur financing, CED)—to tackle shared challenges like housing, transportation, workforce development, poverty reduction and social wellness, childcare, and downtown improvement.

Five Strategic Pillars for Growth: The strategy is built on five core pillars: 1) Advancing the Metal Tech Alley innovation ecosystem, 2) Supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses, 3) Improving awareness and the image of the region, 4) Advancing market housing initiatives, and 5) Strengthening local food systems and agri-innovation.

Action-Oriented Implementation: The plan outlines a governance structure, a funding strategy focused on leveraging provincial/federal grants, and a phased implementation roadmap with measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track investments, jobs, and business growth.

A Collaborative Call to Action: Presented as a living document, the strategy commits to annual reviews and community engagement. It calls on all residents, businesses, organizations and governments to participate in converting shared challenges into opportunities and building a prosperous collective future.

Last Edit: Jun 4, 2026

II. Introduction & Regional Assessment

- Purpose of the Strategy
  - To provide a coordinated framework for economic development
  - To solidify cooperation between the LCCDTS and its members
- Scope
  - The primary service area is specifically Trail, Rossland, Fruitvale, Montrose, Warfield and RDKB Areas A and B (the Lower Columbia or South Kootenay), but we recognize that any investment in the region is a good investment
  - Economic development specifically (not community/health/social services)
  - Calendar years 2026 to 2029, with annual updates
- Current Economic Landscape (2026)
  - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT Analysis)

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Clean power availability Destination resort (RED) Metallurgical expertise and supply chain Industry friendly Natural environment (river, mountains) Lifestyle Educated workforce Relative affordability Healthcare, regional hospital Farmers markets Regional collaboration & networking STAC/SIRC & Selkirk College	Remoteness: distance to market, access Awareness & image of region Market rental housing Start-up entrepreneur supports Small population base Availability of labour Downtown vibrancy Childcare Last-mile broadband Communication
Opportunities	**Threats**
Regional Innovation Ecosystem collaboration Critical Metals Innovation Industrial Opportunity Zone Market housing Advancing Tourism (image, awareness) Downtown improvement Entrepreneur supports Aligned communications	Geopolitical instability Climate change Demographic shift (housing/healthcare) Rising energy costs Regulatory environment Fed/Prov fiscal restraint

- What do we already do:
    - **LCCDTS**
        - **Metal Tech Alley**: an award-winning cluster initiative for metallurgical, advanced manufacturing, cleantech & digital technology sector development.
            - Specialized technical and business scaling support
            - Industry, postsecondary stakeholder and governmental relations including regular industry roundtables
            - Circular economy partnership and innovation facilitation
            - Investment attraction initiatives (domestic venture capital, innovation funding, and foreign direct investment (FDI))
            - White-glove concierge investor supports
            - Regional promotion and advocacy (conference participation, marketing, newsletters, media and social media engagement), especially on transportation/logistics, zoning & regulatory reform
            - Vocational training partnership with Selkirk Innovates (Selkirk Technology Access Centre/Selkirk Ion Source Research Centre)
        - **IncrEDIBLE Farmers Markets**: An anchor for local producers, tourism and community vibrancy. 69 markets with 60,000+ visitors per year.
            - Administrator of the BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program (~$60,000 per year redeemed)
            - Partnered with Chamber on Teen Chef Club Canada
        - **Lower Columbia Industry Land Inventory** (online interactive map to identify developable lands)
        - Maintains the **Lower Columbia Land Development Strategy** and provides feedback to provincial, municipal and regional zoning and regulatory environment / Official Community Plans / transportation
        - **Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) Entrepreneur Regional Stream** Designated Referral Agent for Trail and Rossland - refers 2-3 new businesses who commit to invest more than $100k
        - Hosts the **Hills 2 Valley Garden and Art Tour** (once per year regional tour in July)
        - **Regional data platform** for investors and researchers (paid subscription through CityViz, hosted online at data.metaltechalley.com)
        - Coordinates market housing initiatives (with LCAHS & BC Housing)
        - Member of: EDPN, BCEDA, BMAC, AccelerateZEV, Recycle BC
        - Committee Participation:
            - RDKB solid waste advisory committee
            - Trail Downtown Improvement Committee
            - RCIP (Immigration) Steering Committee
            - LCCDTS community member /volunteer meetings

- **Trail and District Chamber of Commerce**
  - Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) supports, including:
    - **Regional Business Directory** (1,100 businesses)
    - **Networking activities** (8 Business After Business per year with 400 participants)
    - **Annual Business Excellence Awards** (community engagement with 10,000 participants)
    - **Think Local Campaigns** (up to 81,000 social media reach)
    - Business Surveys & Business Walk (strategic surveys for business **pulse check**)
    - Advocacy through the Chamber Network (annually 70 policy resolutions are submitted to the provincial and federal government)
    - **Chamber Employee Benefit Plan** is a non-profit insurance program currently serving 75 businesses, providing stable, low-cost premiums.
    - Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies (Designed to celebrate the growth and milestones of businesses. Pilot project anticipating **4** business participation in 2026)
    - Rural Community Immigration Pilot (RCIP) Steering committee
  - **Teen Chef Club Canada** (Partnership with LCCDTS): A food security and food sovereignty initiative focuses on economic development and resilience through local food systems. The program has demonstrated strong uptake and impact, and has been successfully scaled through partner organizations under a licensing model. (In 5 years over **200** youth participated, and shopped at over **70** Farmers Markets.)
  - **Kootenay Women Summit:** a platform supporting women-led businesses at pivotal stages—whether launching, scaling, or re-entering the workforce. (Over **100** participants with **100%** satisfactory rate)
  - **Community Tourism Strategy - South Kootenay:**: Tourism sector development in the Trail, Warfield, Montrose, Fruitvale, RDKB Area A, district with its own identity.
  - **Resort Community Chamber Coalition (RCCC):** Align advocacy efforts with existing Chambers of Commerce policy schedules to compliment and not duplicate advocacy efforts.
  - Committee participation:
    - RDKB solid waste advisory committee
    - Trail Downtown Improvement Committee
    - Home of Champions Committee
    - Trail-Rossland BC Winter Games 2026 Society
    - Community Safety Task Force
    - Trail and Area Health & Environment Committee
    - LCCDTS community member /volunteer meetings

    - **Community Futures South Kootenay (CFSK)**
        - Provider of debt-financing (business loans), business services, and support for entrepreneurs and startups.
        - **Hosting and administering the Downtown Trail Improvement Committee (DTIC)**
        - ImagineKootenay coordination (subcontract to KES)
        - **Operating the South Kootenay Business Centre** and data centre
        - Hosting wesportfish.com

Shared challenges

We are aligned in our active interest in (and will work together on) other areas of community economic development that include (but not limited to):

- Workforce development and advanced skills training
- Transportation infrastructure
- Recreational and other community infrastructure
- Downtown vitalization efforts (Trail focused, but available for any municipality)
- Climate change adaptation
- Emergency preparedness
- Business resiliency and succession planning
- Poverty reduction and social wellness
- Childcare and early childhood education options for working parents

III. Strategic Pillars

Pillar 1: Advance the Metal Tech Alley Regional Innovation Ecosystem (RIE)

(Lead Driver: Metal Tech Alley (LCCDTS) with CFSK & Chamber support)

- Objective 1.1: The region will be a centre for sustainable critical metals recovery, advanced manufacturing, and cleantech innovation.
    - *Initiative:* Advance the Metal Tech Alley Regional Innovation Economy through regional collaboration supported by regional, economic trust, provincial, federal and private investments
    - *Initiative:* Identify, assess, and align funding and partnership opportunities to advance investment-ready projects and to minimize missed opportunities

    - *Initiative*: Work towards the establishment of an Industry Opportunity Zone: A pre-zoned industrial park with available power infrastructure and streamlined approvals, marketed to global investors seeking immediate operationalization
    - *Initiative*: Review and advocate for improved zoning and regulatory environment for businesses
    - *Initiative*: Active advocacy for improved transportation corridors, industrial/commercial logistics coordination and border crossings
    - *Initiative:* Engage with the BC Chamber Network's policy development process to advocate for Metal Tech Alley.
    - *Initiative:* Advance training partnerships with Selkirk College (Selkirk Technology Access Centre and the Selkirk Ion-source Research Centre) and the UBC-Okanagan Battery Innovation Lab for metallurgy, advanced manufacturing, and clean tech.
- Objective 1.2: Align training with emerging sector needs (metallurgy, advanced manufacturing, advanced materials, entrepreneurship, digital skills).
    - *Initiative:* Partner with Selkirk College & School Districts and regional industry to create co-op placements, apprenticeships, and micro-credentials.

Pillar 2: Support Entrepreneurs, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) initiatives

BRE Lead Coordinator: Chamber, supported by CFSK and LCCDTS

- Objective 2.1: Create a thriving, connected and innovative business community in the region by supporting SMEs with targeted BRE supports:
    - *Initiative:* Improve networking opportunities through regular Business After Business Events.
    - *Initiative:* Create engaging social media posts and marketing campaigns for increased business visibility and public engagement.
    - *Initiative:* Followup on advertising partnership with the Trail Regional Airport and the City of Trail to enhance the visibility of local businesses.
    - *Initiative:* Advocate for the improvement of regional economic development through the BC Chamber policy development process
    - Initiative: Create opportunities for entrepreneur and executive professional development (summits, workshops, webinars)
    - *Initiative:* Assemble a Business Walk Team as a collaboration of elected officials, municipal staff, and other key partners to identify growth opportunities, address challenges, and understand the local economic climate.
    - *Initiative:* Engage with the BC Chamber Network's policy development process to advocate for emerging challenges in various business sectors.

Loan and Training Coordinator: CFSK, supported by the chamber and LCCDTS

- Objective 2.2: Small businesses may grow and thrive with capital investment
    - *Initiative*: Debt-financing
- Objective 2.3: Small business operators are well supported with opportunities for training for themselves and their staff
    - *Initiative*: Investment Readiness Training
- Objective 2.4: The downtown is positioned as an innovation network for businesses
    - *Initiative:* downtown business engagement and information campaign
    - *Initiative*: Show Us You're Open
- Objective 2.5: Advance public awareness of women in trades and assist with organizational capacity building to support women in trades
    - *Initiative*: Host a workforce development event to support workforce readiness for women in trades

Pillar 3: Improve the Awareness and Impression of the Region

Tourism Lead: Chamber

- Objective 3.1: 2026 Create a brand that connects with locals and visitors. This work will produce foundational branding tools to guide future marketing and investment attraction efforts.
    - Initiative: Regional identity creation, including Warfield, Tail, Montrose, Fruitvale,RDKB Area A, by connecting with local businesses and other stakeholders.
    - Initiative: Comprehensive brand discovery and awareness
    - Initiative: Tactics including brand awareness
- Objective 3.2: 2027 Produce foundational brand tools to guide future marketing.
    - *Initiative:* Content creation development.
    - *Initiative:* Website and social media development
    - *Initiative:* Visual Acquisitions
- Objective: 2028 3.3 The expected outcome is a clearly defined and widely supported regional tourism identity that enables coordinated marketing, strengthens partnership, and improves the region's ability to attract and retain visitors.
    - *Initiative:* Website and social media management
    - *Initiative:* Promotions and marketing
    - *Initiative:* Ongoing content creation
    - *Initiative:* Print/online collateral

Downtown Trail Improvement Lead: CFSK

- Objective: 3.4: Downtown Trail's business environment and shopping experience is improved by facilitated partnerships that share information and resources.
    - *Initiative:* Identify opportunities to improve Trail's downtown business environment by hosting and administering the Downtown Improvement Committee
- Objective: 3.5: Support Imagine Kootenay with community profiles and saleable businesses
    - *Initiative:* Administer and support Imagine Kootenay with community profiles and saleable businesses
- Select Committee: Airport Improvement

Film and TV Lead: LCCDTS

- Objective 3.3: List locations in the region on the provincial registry of pre-scouted locations for film and TV productions
    - *Initiative*: work with the Kootenay Film Commissioner to conduct scouting of locations for film and TV production for the region and be the first contact for inquiries relating to film and TV

Pillar 4: Advance Market Housing initiatives

(LCCDTS lead)

Objective 4.1: Identify and advance market rental housing opportunities (worker housing) in coordination with City planners, developers, BC Housing/CMHC, the **Chamber**, and the LCAHS

- *Initiative:* collaborate with the LCAHS to host a market housing development workshop with local planners, developers and BC Housing
- *Initiative*: identify 1-3 new market housing developments and support fundraising efforts to build market rental housing
- *Initiative*: contribute to housing needs assessment reviews conducted by Selkirk College and city planners
- *Initiative:* Engage with BC Chamber Network's policy development process to advocate for Market Housing Initiatives.

Pillar 5: Strengthen Agriculture Sector and Local Food Systems

(Lead Driver: LCCDTS IncrEDIBLE Farmers Markets in collaboration with the Chamber and with CFSK supporting)

- Objective 2.1: Achieve operational sustainability of the IncrEDIBLE Farmers Markets
    - *Initiative*: conduct a financial review of the IncrEDIBLE Farmers Market and optimize for sustainability
    - *Initiative*: identify growth opportunities (such as an all-weather shelter or permanent market site) and secure additional investment for continued growth of the IncrEDIBLE Farmers Market.
- Objective 2.2: Identify 1-2 food security and or circular economy (waste reduction or redirection initiatives in partnership with food banks, food producers, supermarkets and other stakeholders.
- Objective 2.3: Build a pipeline of skilled youth, foster entrepreneurship opportunities and maximize the use of community kitchen infrastructure in the region by supporting the **Kootenay Teen Chef Club** (KTCC) program expansion.
    - Initiative: conduct a financial review of the KTCC
    - Initiative: secure additional investment for KTCC program expansion
- *Initiative:* Engage with BC Chamber Network's policy development process to advocate for the Agriculture Sector and Local Food System.

IV. Collaborative Actions

- **Integrated Marketing & Branding:** Develop a unified economic identity for the region that incorporates technology, agriculture, and lifestyle.
- **Shared Data & Insights**: Partners collaborate on tracking key economic indicators, housing needs, and labour market gaps.
- **Advocacy & Infrastructure**: Partner on joint advocacy for high-speed internet, affordable housing, clean energy, transportation links, and for other emergent issues related to the economic development of the region.
- **Events & Networking:** Co-host major events that blend the interests of all pillar sectors.

V. Governance, Funding, Implementation & Monitoring

Governance

- The Chamber, CF South Kootenay and additional Community organizations, local government, and industry will use the LCCDTS as the preferred medium for discussion, collaboration and regular meetings
- Monthly Economic Development collaboration meetings, plus annual review of the regional strategy

Funding Strategy

Prioritizing applications for multi-year, project-based funding that supports collaborative initiatives across the strategy's pillars, reducing reliance on short-term grants.

Pillar 1 (Critical Metal Tech Alley)

- Leverage regional and economic trust funding to aggressively pursue available provincial and federal development grants; namely, ETSI-BC, REDIP-BC and the PacifiCan Regional Innovation Economy (RIE) grant.
- Investigate other funds such as Defence Innovation Secure Hubs (DISH), Tariff Response Fund and other grants as they are announced and come available.
- Attend Investor events related to critical mineral investment opportunities in the cluster

Pillar 2 (Business Supports) (**Sector Expansion Strategy)**

- Investigate opportunities in supporting digital technology sector businesses
- Apply for funding to support Startup Business Advising program
- Builds on the success of the Kootenay Women Summit 2025 to explore and identify high-potential business sectors—such as digital technology—for targeted support.

Pillar 3 (Improving Image)

Lead: Chamber

- **Tourism Funding Strategy** focuses on leveraging ETSI-BC funding to initiate the first phase of the Community Tourism Management Plan 2024 - in Trail and Fruitvale. This initial investment will support priority actions, build local capacity, and demonstrate early impact. By advancing implementation, the strategy positions the communities to access

additional funding opportunities through Destination BC, enabling long-term growth and sustainability within the regional tourism sector.

Lead: CFSK

- Downtown improvement funding strategy TBD

Pillar 4 (Market Housing)

- Investigate funding opportunities based on identified projects.
    - Identify and solicit donated land from municipal partners
    - BC Builds (BC Housing)
    - CMHC construction loans.
- Advocating for housing opportunities on both Provincial and Federal level by maximizing the Chamber Network

Pillar 5 (Food)

- Re-apply for funding via the RDKB sustainable agriculture fund to ensure sustainability of the IncrEDIBLE Farmers Markets in Trail, Rossland and Fruitvale.
- Working in collaboration with the **Kootenay Teen Chef Club** to explore funding support.
- Continue administration of the BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program and seek its expansion

Implementation Roadmap

Realistic milestones to build momentum, demonstrate early wins, and scale impact.

Pillar 1: Advance Critical Metal Tech Alley Regional Innovation Ecosystem (RIE)

- 2026 (Foundational):
    - Secure Provincial REDIP and PacifiCan RIE grant funding to hire a dedicated Regional Innovation Ecosystem Manager.
    - Advance a site selection analysis for the proposed Industrial Opportunity Zone.
    - Identify and refine a minimum of 5 major investment opportunities
    - Continue regular industry stakeholder Roundtables (2026-2029)
- 2027 (Activation):
    - Operationalize the RIE along grant parameters
    - Work towards a pre-zoning application process and servicing for the Industrial Opportunity Zone.
- 2028 (Expansion):

    - Attract the first foreign direct investment (FDI) lead to the Industrial Opportunity Zone.
    - Establish a micro-credential program in clean tech manufacturing (target: 20 graduates).
    - Report a 10% increase in Business Expenditures in R&D (BERD) among core metal tech cluster members.

Pillar 2: Support Entrepreneurs & SMEs (Business Retention & Expansion)

- 2026 (Listening & Engagement):
    - Conduct the annual Business Walk (target: 100 businesses surveyed) to identify immediate SME pain points.
    - Launch the Kootenay Women's Summit with a focus on childcare solutions for working parents (target: 75 attendees).
    - CFSK to continue Downtown Business Engagement and DTIC
    - CFSK to deliver Show Us Your Open, ImagineKootenay.
    - CFSK to deliver workforce development event
- 2027 (Targeted Support):
    - Based on Business Walk data, advocate to local governments for one regulatory improvement (e.g., streamlined patio licensing).
    - Expand the Teen Chef Club, engaging 15 new youth.
- 2028 (Scaling & Resilience):
    - Achieve a 15% increase in SME participation in digital adoption coaching programs.
    - Host a regional procurement fair connecting local SMEs to major purchasers (e.g., Teck, hospital, RED).
    - Formalize a "Business Retention & Expansion" rapid response protocol for at-risk local businesses.

Pillar 3: Tourism, Downtown Improvement (Image/Awareness)

- 2026 (Planning & Identity):
    - Complete a Downtown Trail Vibrancy Action Plan (DTIC).
    - Develop a distinct regional tourism brand identity for Trail/Fruitvale, separate from the Rossland/RED Mountain Resort brand.
    - Launch a coordinated social media campaign showcasing local lifestyle, agri-tourism, and outdoor recreation.
- 2027 (Pilot Projects):
    - Implement one downtown "placemaking" pilot (e.g., seasonal pop-up parklet, public art installation, or extended market hours).

    - Publish and distribute a regional "Experience Guide" map highlighting trails, fishing location, farmers markets, and local shops.
    - Establish a quarterly Hospitality Roundtable to coordinate event scheduling and joint marketing.
- 2028 (Momentum):
    - Secure funding for a downtown public realm improvement (e.g., lighting, wayfinding signage).
    - Launch a self-guided "Farm-to-Fork" culinary trail linking IncrEDIBLE markets, local farms, and restaurants.
    - Achieve a measurable increase in shoulder-season visitation through targeted digital campaigns.

Pillar 4: Advance Market Housing Initiatives

- 2026 (Data & Identification):
    - Participate in WK Workforce Housing Symposium
    - Work with city planners and LCAHS to advance project starts.
    - Work with LCAHS to deliver a market demand analysis for "missing middle" housing
    - BC Chamber policy development on housing
- 2027 (Facilitation):
    - Facilitate introductions between private landowners and at least two development groups.
    - Advocate for one municipal zoning amendment to permit higher-density infill (e.g., secondary suites, small-scale multi-family).
    - Launch a public "Welcome Home" campaign to shift perceptions on density and new housing projects.
- 2028 (Groundbreaking):
    - Support one new market housing development to break ground (target: 30+ units).
    - Develop a best practices resource for builders to expedite permitting processes and grants.

Pillar 5: Strengthen Local Food Systems & Agri-Innovation

- 2026 (Stabilization):
    - Complete a financial sustainability report for IncrEDIBLE Farmers Markets.
    - Advance business planning workshop for local food producers.
- 2027 (Growth):

    - Pilot a commercial kitchen incubation program for value-added food products.
    - Integrate the Hills 2 Valley Garden and Art Tour into the broader regional tourism marketing strategy.
- 2028 (Sustainability & Innovation):
    - Achieve operational cost recovery (non-grant revenue covering 75%+ of market operating costs).
    - Facilitate a local food procurement partnership between the farmers market and a major local institution (e.g., hospital or school district).

Shared Foundations & Collaborative Action

- Integrated Marketing & Branding:
    - 2026: Develop a shared brand kit for all partners to ensure visual consistency.
    - 2027: Promote Imagine Kootenay
- Shared Data & Insights:
    - 2026: Agree on a common data dashboard with quarterly tracked KPIs.
- Governance & Monitoring:
    - 2026: Formalize monthly Economic Development collaboration meetings.
    - 2027: Conduct first annual strategy review and adjust milestones based on community feedback.
    - 2028: Host a public "Progress & Possibilities" community update event.

Summary of Incremental Progress Logic

- Year 1 (2026): Focus on foundational data, staffing, and planning ("Plan the work"). Secure grants, hire coordinators, and build trust.
- Year 2 (2027): Focus on pilot projects and visible action ("Work the plan"). Launch tangible initiatives that residents can see and touch.
- Year 3 (2028): Focus on scaling successes and securing long-term sustainability ("Prove and Improve"). Demonstrate ROI, attract investment, and prepare for the next funding cycle.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- $ investments leveraged
- $ Business Expenditures in R&D (BERD)
- # jobs created/supported
- # businesses launched/supported
- # new businesses launched
- # HQPs trained

VI. Conclusion

- **Our collective future is brighter with a unified strategy.** This plan seeks to provide the framework necessary to leverage our unique assets–from critical metals innovation to vibrant local food systems–and convert shared challenges into opportunities for shared prosperity.
- **This is a living document.** We commit to annual review and adaptation, ensuring our actions remain responsive to community needs, economic shifts, and new partnerships, while holding ourselves accountable through clear performance measurement.
- **We call on all community members, investors, and institutions to join us**. Success requires broad engagement and investment. Together, we will build a resilient, diversified, and innovative economy for the region.