

Shaping Energy Future Competitiveness  
in Southern Alberta

# Engagement Report

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Pincher Creek, Alberta & Area

**DECEMBER 04, 2024**



# About This Work

## The Roadshow Program

Since 2018, The Energy Futures Lab has worked with 14 different communities across Alberta to explore the opportunities and challenges arising from the energy transition in their unique contexts.

In collaboration with host community partners, the program harnesses knowledge, skills and networks within the community combined with those of the Energy Futures Lab Fellows and Ambassadors.

## Acknowledgements

The Lab was invited to work with the Town of Pincher Creek and the M.D. of Pincher Creek, and supported by the Southwest Alberta Sustainable Community Initiative (SASCI). A dedicated local Convening Team stewarded the process.



## The Energy Futures Lab

The Energy Futures Lab is an award-winning, Alberta-based not-for-profit organization that brings together a network of leading thinkers and innovators from across the energy system. It was established to enable collaboration around the polarized subject of energy transition and tackle some of its most pressing issues.

Since 2015, the Lab has worked with over 20,000 stakeholders, Rights and Title Holders from across Canada to collaboratively accelerate progress towards our vision of an equitable and net-zero energy future, drawing on diverse perspectives to find innovative and enduring solutions to complex, system-level challenges.

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# A Team Effort

## Convening Team

**Tristan Walker** - Massif Energy, EFL Fellow

**Marie Everts** - GoA, Regional Economic Development Specialist

**David Desabrais** - MD Pincher Creek

**Bev Thornton** - Director of the REDA (Alberta Southwest, member of the Southern Alberta alternative energy partnership)

**James Van Leeuwen** - Member of the community, owner of Headwaters Utility, previous EFL Fellow

**Kim Kozak** - Town of Pincher Creek

**Diandra Bruised-Head** - Kainai Blood Tribe

**Wesley Crow Shoe** - Piikani Nation

## Energy Futures Lab Team

**Matt Mayer** - Advisor, Strategy & Design

**Karen Selby** - Specialist, Design & Delivery

**Keren Perla** - Innovation Architect / Project Director (Competitiveness)

**Signe Spence** - Manager, Portfolio & Engagement





# Who's Who

Organizations represented included:

MD of Pincher Creek

Town of Pincher Creek

Alberta Southwest

REDA

SASCI

Chief Mountain Gas

TransAlta

SouthGrow

Fortis

ATCO

Blood Tribe

Parks Canada

Rural Routes to Climate Solutions

Pincher Creek Chamber of  
Commerce

Village of Cowley

Town of Claresholm

GP Energy Analytics

Kainaiwa Resources Inc.


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# ‘Why’ Pincher Creek & Area

## Shaping Energy Competitiveness

Shifting global markets and decarbonization activity are creating significant economic opportunities that regions across Alberta are uniquely positioned to seize, given their access to resource endowments, a growing presence of innovators and the potential to grow exports in key areas.

On October 8th and 23rd, 2024, leaders and champions for Pincher Creek and area gathered to collaboratively explore emerging economic opportunities and identify top opportunities for economic sectors positioned to grow and scale as the world continues to decarbonize and that would build on the area’s rich history of industrial development, innovation and leadership in renewable energy and agriculture alongside a deep care for the environment.



***“We need to remember how our decisions today will affect our grandchildren. There is no more important reason for why we need to think longer term, bigger picture and why sustainability matters.”***

- Participant



# Our Journey Together

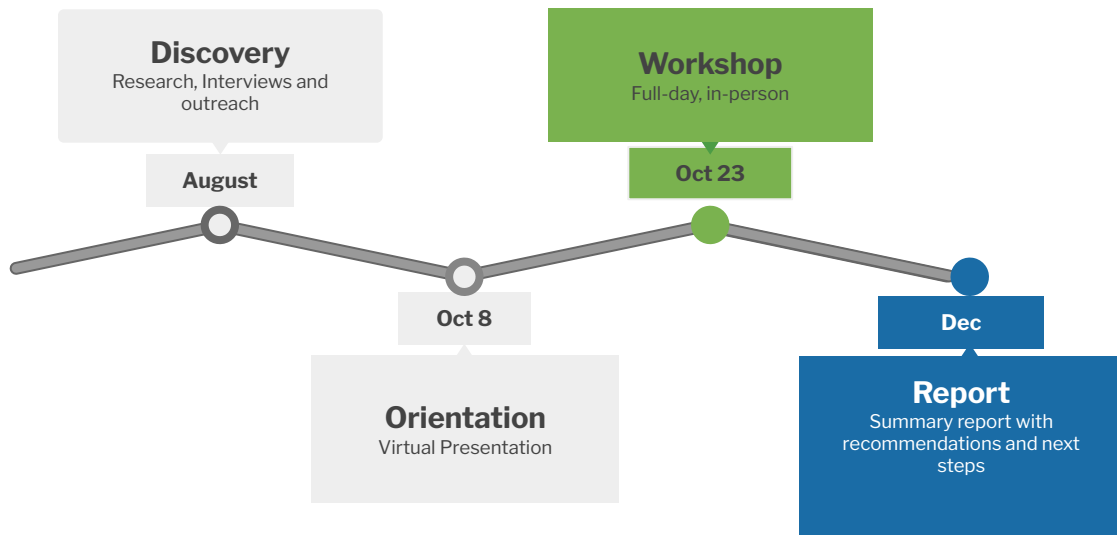
## Purpose and Process

In July 2024, a convening group of partners agreed to galvanize a 4-phase community engagement.

**Purpose:** Explore and get shared on economic opportunities to pursue in Pincher Creek and area

### Objectives

- Strengthen connectivity across actors
- Explore economic opportunities for the region's competitiveness as global markets shift to net-zero
- Explore how regional leaders might capitalize on these opportunities
- Brainstorm and discuss collaborative action opportunities



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# What We Heard

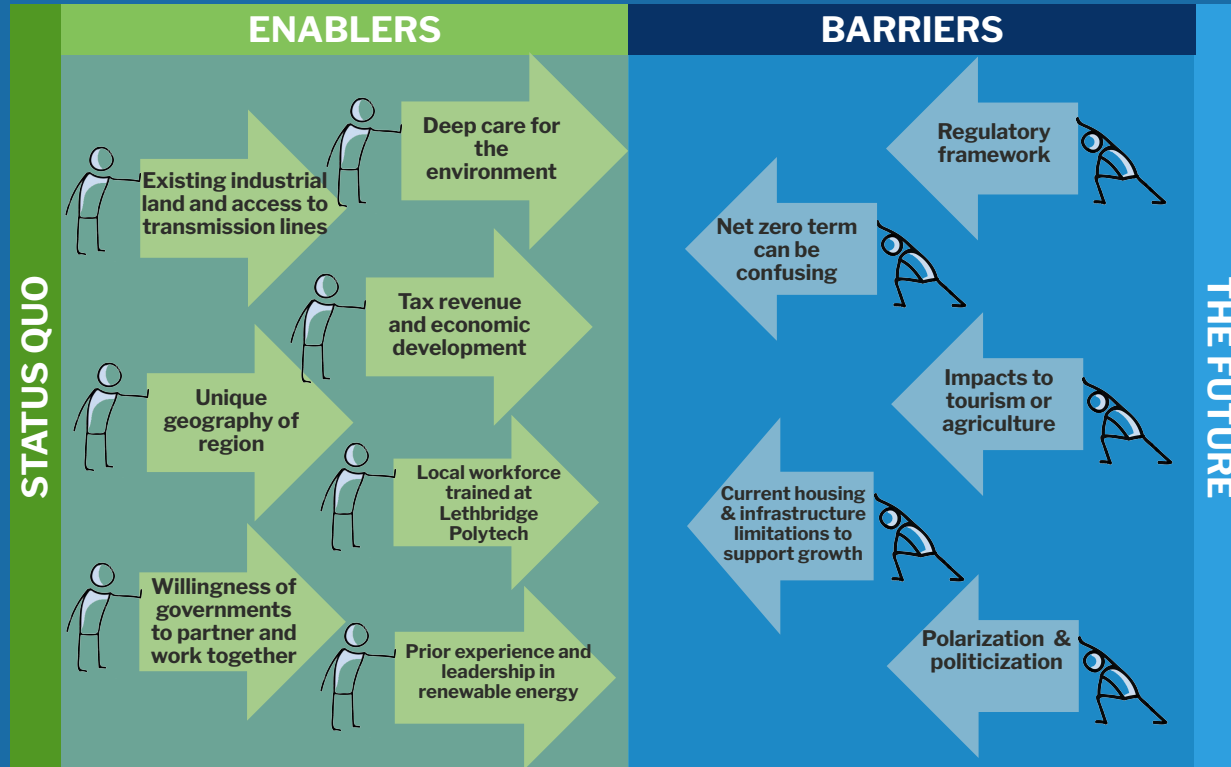
Before we gathered in person for the workshop, we met with local leaders representing municipal and Indigenous government, agriculture, industry, innovators & entrepreneurs, small business, academia and regional economic development groups.

Through a series of informal interviews we learned what's important to people in Pincher Creek and area:

- Local leadership: Pincher Creek has an outstanding legacy of renewable energy leadership.
- The 'how' is important: the way in which projects are developed matters; need to balance reconciliation, the region's agricultural significance, community values, and education .
- Indigenous leadership: The Piikani Nation and the Blood Tribe are actively exploring net-zero projects and partnerships.
- Barriers and enablers: the area has a number of unique strengths and is poised for opportunities in carbon sequestration and wind, but barriers to development continue to exist. A thoughtful approach is required to explore new industries or opportunities.
- Framing matters: the area needs a narrative that resonates with its community-minded population. Net-zero can feel polarizing and people need to see themselves in the solution.
- The economy: some concerns remain about reliance on intermittent energy sources like wind and solar and there are positive indicators for a more diverse approach to energy technologies.
- Connection to land and place: there is deep care for the environment connected to the region's agricultural roots.

# What We Heard

Interview participants identified key enabling factors and barriers to net-zero opportunities for Pincher Creek and area





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## Our Convening Question

**How might Pincher Creek and area seize economic opportunities for the region's competitiveness as global markets shift to net-zero in order to generate the best possible outcomes for current and future generations?**

**It's about the people:** the quality of life and lifestyle of current and future residents was placed as a top priority in the conversation, and a key theme identified by the convening team was the need for leadership at all levels.



# Orientation

We brought regional leaders and representatives together to explore these topics during an online orientation on October 8th.

## Rose, bud, thorn

After reviewing the barriers and enablers, participants discussed what success looks like and surfaced existing net-zero opportunities before engaging in small group discussions on what they liked, would change, or wouldn't move forward.

### Rose (liked)

**Alignment with Energy Transition and Agriculture:** The focus on agriculture and renewable energy resonated strongly as opportunities relevant to Pincher Creek.

**Leveraging Existing Strengths:** Participants valued the existing infrastructure, organizational support, and research capacity in the region

**Community-Driven Approach:** The diversity of participants a stewardship mindset felt optimistic for building on local successes while balancing competing values.

### Bud (would change)

**Clarity and Education:** need for clear definitions and accessible information to help citizens, councils, and administrations make informed decisions.

**Long-Term Vision & Planning:** a strategic vision that transcends political cycles and focuses on attracting investment and supporting innovation is essential.

**Community Engagement:** addressing trust gaps from past energy projects could improve communication and foster collaboration.

### Thorn (what's lacking and why)

**Critical Missing Elements:** Key technologies like battery storage and CCUS, along with baseline infrastructure like housing, were noted as not being addressed.

**System Constraints:** addressing barriers like limited intertie capacity, stalled projects, and regulatory inefficiencies.

**Economic and Political Risks:** Concerns over funding sustainability and the impact of political turnover on long-term plans highlight vulnerabilities in execution.

*The discussion emphasized the importance of building on regional strengths while addressing barriers, especially when it comes to community engagement as an enabler for regional energy competitiveness.*



# Leadership

*“Leadership is analogue - coming together in person and creating real space for respect and collaboration.”*

- participant

*“When realizing new things, leadership requires a willingness to be unpopular in the runway for your idea.”*

- participant



# Centering on Leadership

Leadership is crucial for creating the enabling conditions to scale emerging economic opportunities

Leadership encompasses a broad set of mindsets and behaviors. So while it can feel ambiguous, leadership, in particular community leadership, is critical for aligning people in a collective direction. It enables them to work together, accomplish shared goals, and adjust to changing environments.

Participants explored elements of leadership and identified the following characteristics and practices that future economic and energy opportunities would require of those in the community and surrounding area.



**Sustainability** – long-term thinking for the community, Nations and whole region



**Collaboration** – working together across divides



**Trust** – built through two-way relationships



**Adaptability** – continuously adapting to what matters to communities



**Risk Taking** – able to see, identify and take action in service of new ideas



**Inspirational** – value-driven with a deep sense of purpose and responsibility to create positive change

*“Based on my own experience... our work only goes at the speed of trust. So unless you build that trust the work will not go anywhere.” - workshop participant*

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# Local Leadership in Action

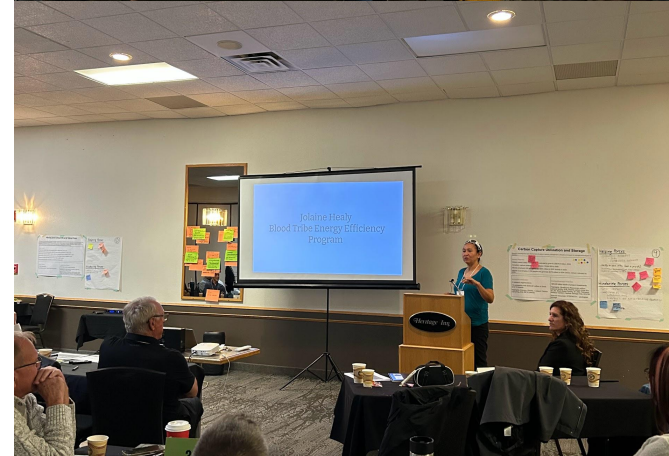
During lunch, two local leaders shared their experiences. Their stories provided a valuable backdrop to the conversations at hand.

## Art Bonertz, Former Mayor of Pincher Creek

A stalwart of the community, Art shared his experience bringing people together to create a vision for Pincher Creek in the late 1990s, emphasizing the importance of working together and holding new ideas up to your collective vision to see if they fit. He left the group with a motto that helped him stay motivated to make change over the years *“If it’s meant to be, it’s up to me!”*.

## Jolaine Healy, Energy Efficiency Coordinator, Blood Tribe

Jolaine shared her experience working on an innovative high school student employment program, provided by the Blood Tribe Employment and Skills Training department (BTEST) called the Blood Tribe Energy Efficiency Program. She shared how the program incorporates Blackfoot values, invests in the community’s youth, and shares knowledge gained back with the community to facilitate two-way learning.



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# Thinking Big

For innovation to thrive it can require a whole-systems approach. Often times, leadership comes in the form of supporting an emerging new technology or system.



## A History Lesson that Still Resonates Today

In discussing the future of Pincher Creek in a net-zero economy, participants kept coming back to the story of the light bulb.

One participant shared the example of how it took 40 years for the light bulb to take hold - Edison didn't just work on the light bulb itself, **he realized that for the light bulb to take off he needed to create an entire system for lighting.**

While Edison's light bulb was a great invention, *by itself* it wasn't a game changer. He also recognized that a suite of innovations were required to make it widely usable and so developed electricity generation, distribution systems, and even the first electric meter to track customer use.

This system of lighting was eventually widely adopted, due in large part to thinking about the system holistically.



# Net-Zero Opportunities

## **Defining Net-Zero**

A net-zero future is one that firstly eliminates or reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced — direct and indirect — and addresses the remaining emissions through use of offsets and removal technologies.

While there are number of economic and energy growth opportunities aligned with decarbonization towards a net-zero future, it is important to note these are a subset of economic opportunities for the region and province.

The Energy Futures Lab, along with The Transition Accelerator and the Smart Prosperity Institute, have undertaken a study of these opportunities for Alberta, and want to know where and how regions (like Pincher Creek and area) can act on them.

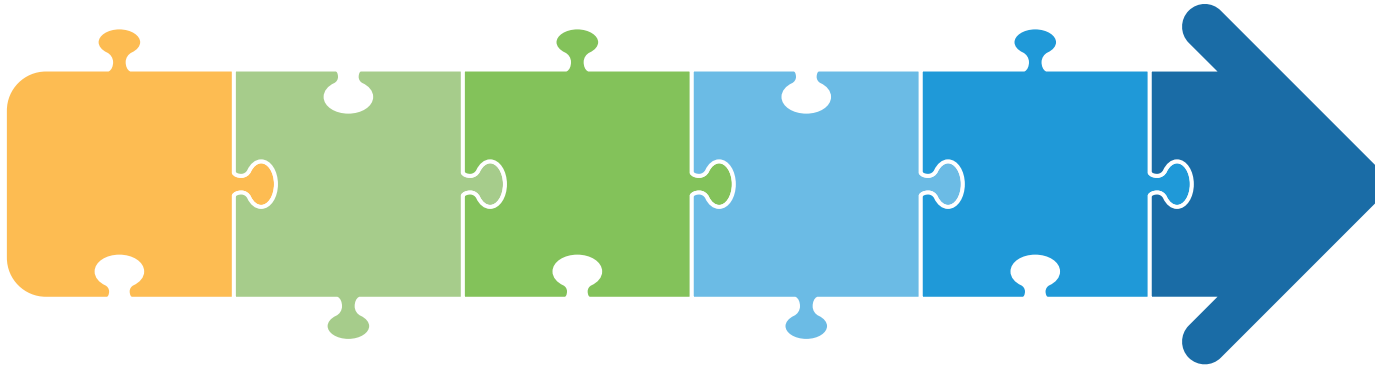
# Focus of the Alberta's Net-Zero Competitiveness Study

Regardless of whether we put net-zero in front of these, the emerging industries in the study have strong growth and export potential in both international and interprovincial markets.

1. Build the evidence base for net-zero as a place where wealth, prosperity, and jobs exist

3. Focus on markets where exports are expected to grow or emerging ones to scale

5. Better understand the investment case from a demand-side perspective

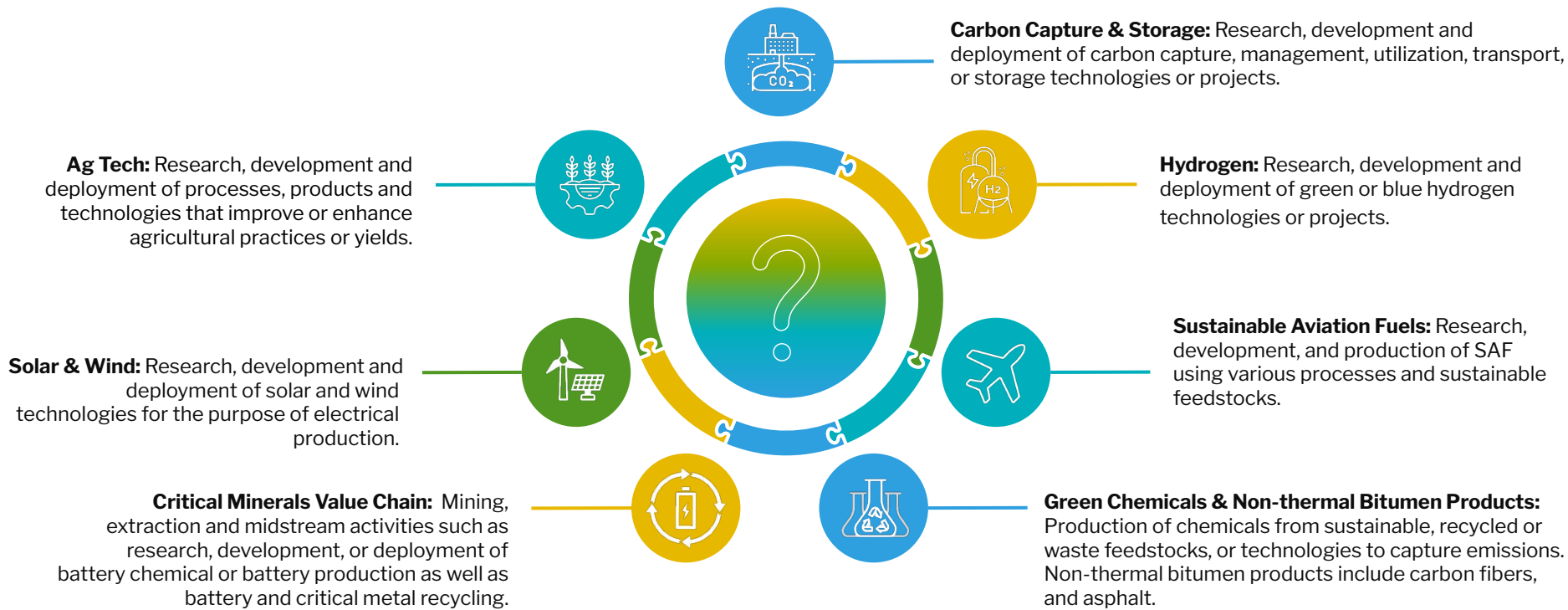


2. Hone-in on net-zero opportunities that offer export potential (international, inter-provincial)

4. Beyond Alberta resources towards opportunities to move down value chains into products, technologies, knowledge & services



# Participants Explored the following Opportunities





# Initiatives that will advance Pincher Creek and area's energy future

While the study explores export potential for Alberta in emerging industries, the purpose of convening is to tap into the area's potential and leverage its existing strengths.

Through a series of facilitated exercises, the group explored and crowd-sourced opportunities that align with not only regional strengths, but deeply held community interests and values.



# Helping and Hindering Forces

After engaging in a poster walk and reviewing seven opportunities, participants voted on their top three and chose which opportunity they'd like to lean further into, discussing the forces helping or hindering their activation.

The workforce here has the existing skill set and we have the trades and personnel needed.

Communities lack understanding of this technology and its overarching economic opportunities

**CCUS**

Blood Tribe agricultural project is a helpful example

We already have experience, knowledge & business support in the community

Big ag-tech corporations are benefiting more than local farmers, with profits not trickling down

Data understanding is low. There is plenty of data but unclear how to use it.

**Ag Tech**

We have the wind—if we can capture and use it to our advantage, why not?

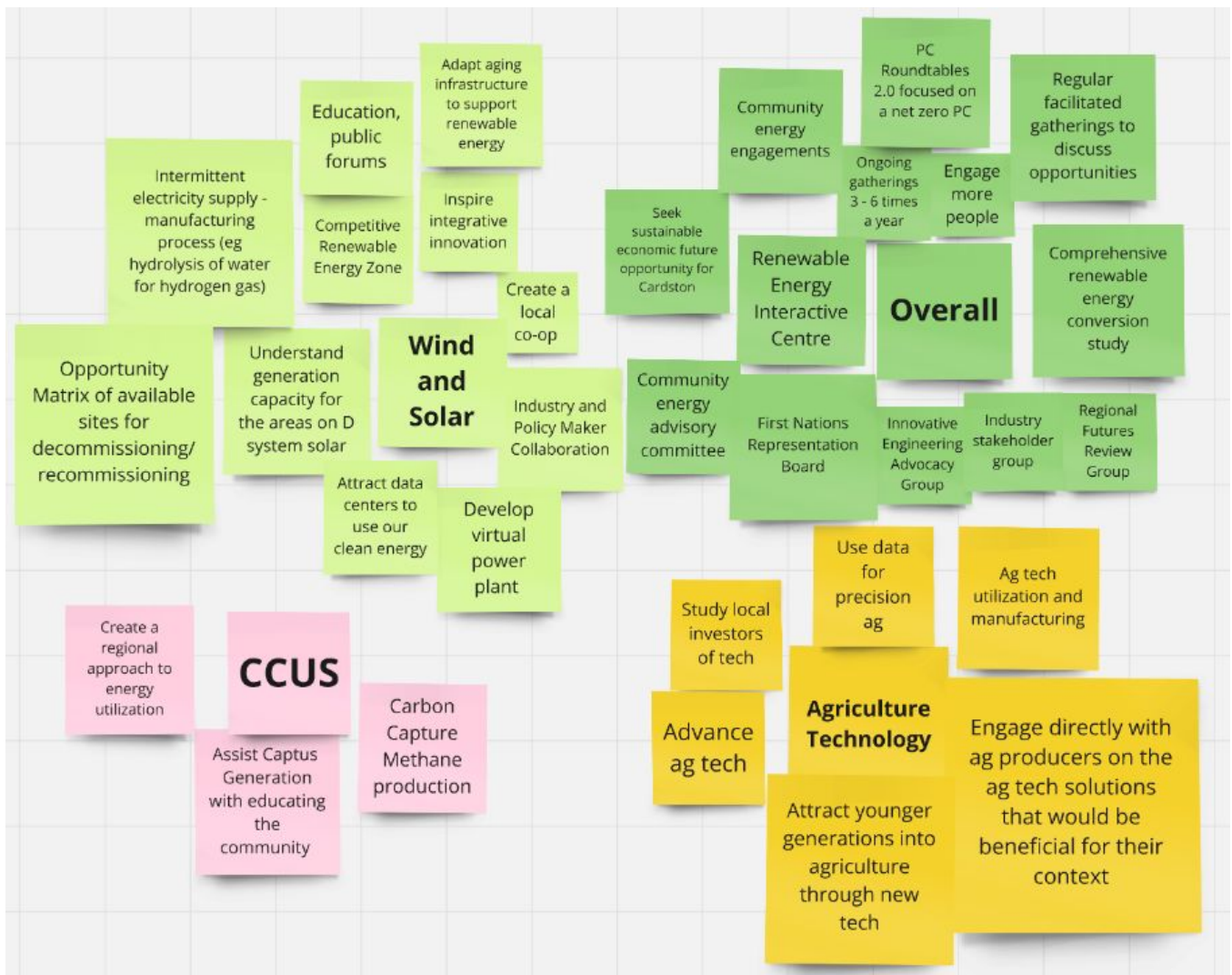
There's significant saturation in the landscape, and social capacity - residents voice concerns about proposed projects

**Solar & Wind**

# Snapshot: Initiative Ideas

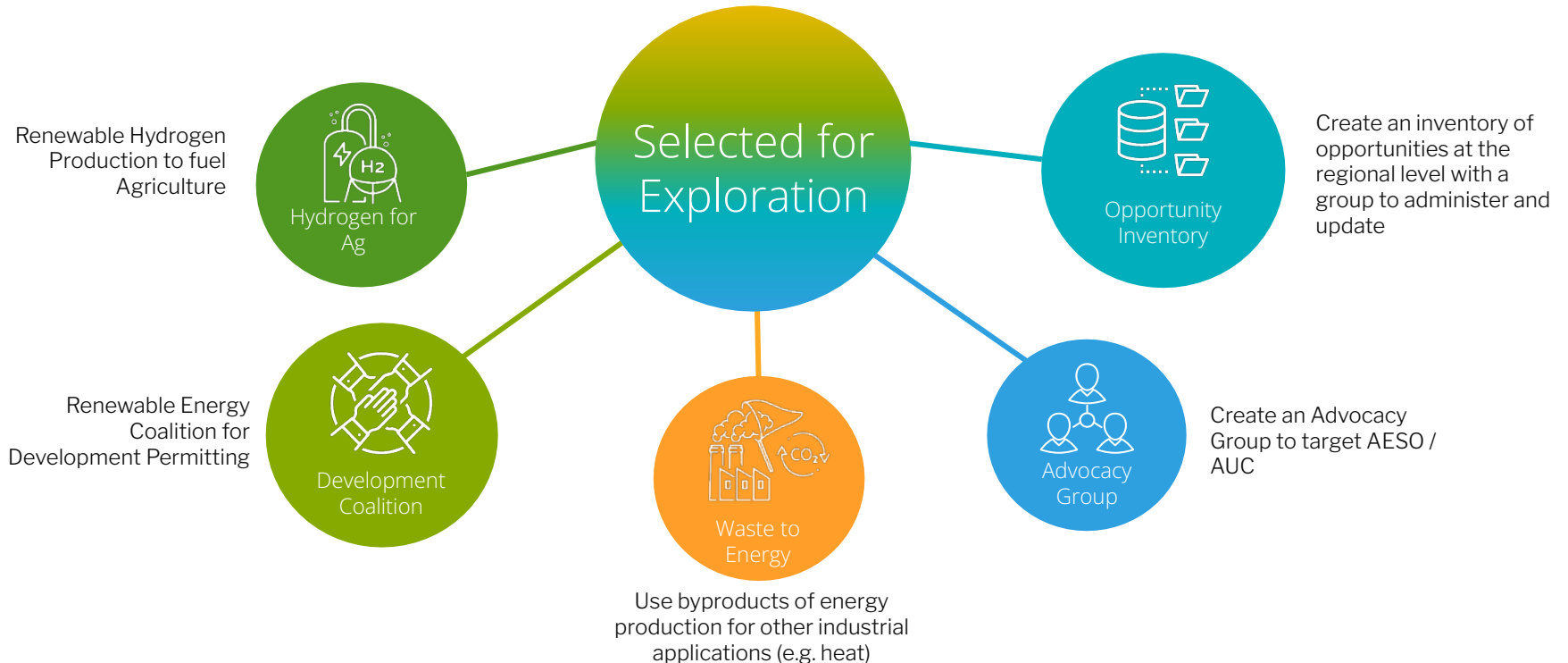
After reviewing the net zero opportunities and identifying helping and hindering forces, participants were invited to brainstorm and come up with creative initiatives to enable these opportunities.

Here is a snapshot of what was generated.



# Crowd-Sourced Initiatives to Advance the Region's Energy Future

The group applied guided criteria to evaluate and select the top ideas from the brainstorm session to take further action on. They chose to discuss the following 5 concepts further.





Crowd-Sourced Initiative #1

# Renewable Hydrogen Production to fuel Agriculture

Using surplus renewable energy and electrolysed water to produce a hydrogen blend to use in diesel engines.

## What does Success look like?

- A reliable and predictable fuel supply chain that can be produced on-farm.
- Seasonal viability when engines on farm are not in use (stored or diverted to other end users, eg. municipalities )
- Equipment manufacturers on side

## Participant-chosen strategic next step related to this goal:

- **Pilot it with a local farmer and conduct a cost/benefit analysis.** Create a summer project for students to pilot the technology and build a business case for the farm and energy producer. Quantify it and flesh out the potential for the region as a whole.

## Participant-brainstormed actions:

- Find a leader to hold and communicate the vision (helps if that leader is an end-user)
- Approach equipment manufacturers about participating
- Map out regulatory implications and engage regulators
- Determine current state of the storage systems
- Convene a regional concept development session

## Resources:

- EFL can connect you with UofC students who may be interested in using this opportunity as a course project.
- EFL can connect you with waste to energy specialists to build out this idea further.
- Government of Alberta: [Alberta's Hydrogen Roadmap](#)
- [Edmonton Region Hydrogen Hub](#)



## Crowd-Sourced Initiative #2

# Renewable Planning Commission / Coalition

**Get stakeholders together (municipalities, generators, etc.) to collaborate on renewable energy development (such as locations).**

### What does Success look like?

- Consistency and continuity
- Key players at the table
- Formalize, strengthen, and inform the process.
- Trust and confidence: When folks see a renewable project go forward, they have confidence that it's been regionally vetted in a way that represents their interests.

### Participant-chosen strategic next step related to this goal:

- **Find the right partnerships to source funding and stakeholders.** In addition to reaching out to local actors, identify larger or provincial level associations to get supportive funding for the Commission.

### Participant-brainstormed actions:

- GIS-based land suitability modelling to help inform locations
- Collective database of relevant information to assist with planning
- Have engagement with the Renewable Planning Commission as part of regulating process

### Resources and Recommendations:

- Include Piikani and Blood Tribe
- This initiative could be combined with Initiative # 4, Advocacy Group and #5, the Opportunity Inventory



Crowd-Sourced Initiative #3

## Use Byproducts of Energy Production

Use of waste energy (eg. heat or undersubscribed electricity) from a generation plant, such as Pieridae's Waterton Gas Plant or Captus Generation's CCUS plant, for other industry such as greenhouses or district energy.

### What does Success look like?

- Wasted electricity is used to support other industries
- Collaboration and partnerships
- Use of existing infrastructure
- Creation of new jobs

### Participant-chosen strategic next step related to this goal:

- **Conduct an initial waste energy analysis.** Quantify the amount of waste heat and how often it would have electricity overflow. With that, determine what energy requirements might be needed for a secondary industry on site then “match make” by finding suitable industries.

### Participant-brainstormed actions:

- Seek funding opportunities for a pilot project
- Work to understand how this fits in bylaws and other municipal requirements to make this streamlined for municipalities.
- Education and awareness campaign to the public on power generation and geological formations for carbon capture
- Make connection with Varme and Captus Generation

### Resources:

- EFL can connect you with waste to energy specialists and project proponents to build out this idea further.



Crowd-Sourced Initiative #4

## Advocacy Group to Target AESO / AUC

**Create an advocacy group with diverse and balanced representation to understand concerns and hindering forces on AESO/AUC regulatory processes and to navigate how we might reduce those forces.**

### What does Success look like?

- A funded group and framework that engages with a variety of stakeholders and sits at the table with AUC and federal government regulating bodies to discuss helping/hindering forces
- Local education around AESO/AUC process
- Wind and solar projects with local support
- Tax revenue and jobs.

### Participant-chosen strategic next step related to this goal:

- **Host an Event.** Create an event to discuss the problem, vision, and to gauge interest in starting up an advocacy group..

### Participant-brainstormed actions:

- Work with AUC and supportive First Nations to get clarity on existing processes.

### Recommendations:

- This initiative could be combined with Initiative #2, Renewable Planning Commission / Coalition



# Opportunity Inventory

An online searchable database tool for data to support new business and investment opportunities in the area, including grants and funding, opportunity projections, and preferred areas for development.

## What does Success look like?

- Be able to project where global trends are going and how assets can be leveraged to achieve it.
- Data on skills / demographics / population / education
- Companies can post RFPs, bids, etc.
- Resource opportunity projections
- Investors can pay for access

## Participant-chosen strategic next step related to this goal:

- **Stakeholder engagement.** What do they want, what can they offer? (Businesses, investors, municipalities, etc). Identify priority data for phased approach.
- **Business Case Development.** Determine the value, who benefits, and what the benefits are.

## Participant-brainstormed actions:

- Create a survey/questionnaire for businesses / investors to determine what data is helpful and how they would like to see it.
- Determine who hosts and owns the data
- Find funding to build out the tool.
- Determine how to get the data and how the data is uploaded and accessed.

## Resources:

- This initiative could be combined or hosted by Initiatives #2, the Renewable Planning Coalition.

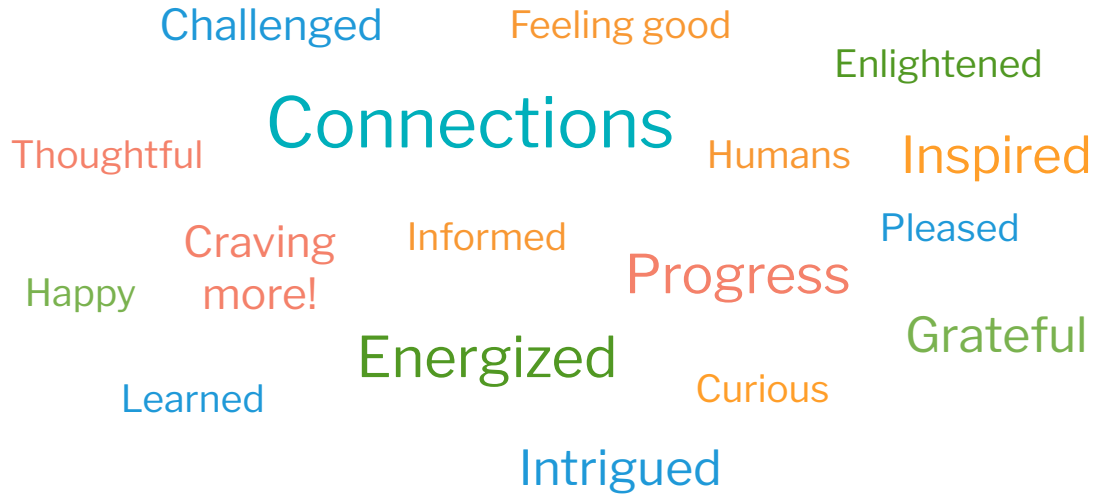


# The Roadshow process in full swing



# Mapping sentiment

As the workshop drew to a close, we asked people to share one word describing how they felt





# Turning Ideas into Action

“The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence – it is to act with yesterday’s logic.”

- Peter Drucker



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# Maintaining Momentum

**Renewable Energy Planning Coalition can be the hub for further action.** At the end of the session, participants noticed connections between the initiatives. It was pointed out that the suggested Renewable Energy Planning Coalition, if formed, could host the other initiatives, such as the opportunity database, and could advocate to AESO/AUC.

**Continue Community Engagements.** Many of the brainstormed ideas focused on continuing to engage the community to shape the region's energy future. Inspired by Art Bonertz, one participant suggested hosting "Pincher Creek Roundtables 2.0." Additionally, priority was given to engaging more diverse participants and continuing to expand representation from Piikani, Blood Tribe, and Metis.

**Collaborate and Listen.** A resounding theme from participants was a strong willingness to collaborate. To continue this collaboration, one participant suggested gathering 3-6 times a year to maintain inertia and invite more folks to the table.

**Seek out Funding.** Each of the initiatives identified a need to seek out funding to continue the work.



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# Next Steps

What happens next is now in your hands, as readers and viewers of this report.

Throughout this journey, the theme of leadership was prevalent.

From initial planning meetings with the Convening Team, through the interviews, and within both the orientation and in-person workshops we heard time and again that Pincher Creek, its residents, and the surrounding area has the capacity, skills, expertise and willingness to 'get it done'.

On the next slide, we'll share ways to keep the momentum we created together going. But for now, here are some planned next steps:

- Sharing this report with all participants of the process: this is your call to action to socialize this with the people you think need to see it, and share the value of leadership in exploring these opportunities.
- The Alberta's Net-Zero Competitiveness Study will integrate the group's feedback and now moves into an engagement phase with high potential relevance for some of the future initiatives that were surfaced and identified as being primed for community-led action.
- Further discussion and planning to move forward on immediate actions identified in the workshop.



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# So What, Now What?

Community members and leaders met and explored challenges and opportunities for Pincher Creek and beyond. How do you prevent these new ideas and initiatives from sitting on the shelf?

- **Keep talking** about these ideas, whether that's a small group getting together to further an idea, or at a community event, on a conference stage, or writing a letter in support. Your voice can be a driving force.
- As Art Bonnertz reminded participants: *"If I want it to be, it's up to me"*, **we all carry the power to shape our future.**
- Your people are your best asset - **stay connected** with one another and invite participation where it makes sense.
- Throughout this journey, there was a real shift towards recognizing **a regional approach is needed** to advance most of the opportunities - and that working with neighbouring regions and groups can amplify efforts.
- This report shares some of the helping forces to drive this forward, but there are many more so **lean into the vast array of strengths** that exist within the community and beyond.

## You are the ones you've been waiting for

If you have an idea for how to move the vision forward don't let it go unshared. Your willingness to take action is the community's most valuable asset and the most important steps will be the ones taken in your own backyard.

**We can't wait to hear about the incredible things we know you will make happen.**