SECTION 9: AGRICULTURE

The agricultural sector within the MD of Willow Creek includes both dryland and irrigated farming alongside extensive cattle ranching and confined feeding operations. Agricultural operations range from small family-owned farms to large-scale commercial enterprises and are characterized by a mix of crop production and intensive livestock operations. The presence of irrigation infrastructure in certain areas of the MD enhances productivity and supports higher-value crop production which contributes significantly to local employment, economic stability, and regional food production.

The MD of Willow Creek recognizes that rural residential development forms an important part of the municipality's settlement pattern and housing choice. Rural residential opportunities may include existing farmsteads, employee housing, acreage development and other forms of low-density residential living that contribute to the diversity and vitality of agricultural sector. At the same time, unmanaged or scattered residential development can create challenges related to agricultural land fragmentation, conflicts with farming operations, servicing costs, transportation demands, environmental impacts, and pressure on municipal infrastructure. For this reason, rural residential growth should occur in a planned and orderly manner that supports efficient service delivery, protects agricultural land, and respects the rural character of the municipality.

9.1 TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE

Agriculture within the Municipal District of Willow Creek remains a vital and enduring sector that continues to shape the municipality's economy, land use patterns, and rural character. The preservation of agricultural land remains a key priority for the Municipality and as such, careful management of growth and land use is essential to maintain the long-term viability of agricultural operations. The MD supports the ongoing viability of agriculture as a cornerstone of the community, recognizing its role in sustaining livelihoods, supporting local and regional food systems, and contributing to the long-term resilience and well-being of the municipality.

Objectives:

- To support agriculture as a key component of the MD of Willow Creek's economy, rural lifestyle, and long-term sustainability.
- To protect the agricultural land base for ongoing farm and ranch use through compatible planning, appropriate siting, and effective separation of uses.
- To encourage the responsible diversification, modernization, and intensification of agricultural activities where compatible with surrounding lands and municipal planning objectives.

DRAFT

- To support innovative agricultural enterprises, agri-business, and value-added agricultural development in a managed manner that reduces adverse impacts on adjoining lands and the broader community.
- To support agrivoltaics as an integrated land use that combines agricultural production and renewable energy generation while maintaining the long-term productivity of agricultural land.

Policies

9.1.1 The MD of Willow Creek supports traditional agricultural uses, including crop production, grazing, ranching, livestock operations, and farmstead uses, as the primary use of agricultural lands, and shall provide for appropriate land uses and relevant standards in the Municipal Land Use Bylaw.

9.1.2 The MD of Willow Creek should explore the preparation of an **Agriculture Master Plan** for the municipality intended to guide, support and strengthen agricultural policies within statutory documents.

9.1.3 Agricultural lands should be protected from unnecessary fragmentation and premature conversion in order to preserve the long-term viability of farming and ranching within the municipality. Subdivision and development proposals in agricultural areas should be carefully evaluated to ensure they do not adversely affect existing agricultural operations, reduce the productive capacity of agricultural land, or create land use conflicts.

9.1.4 New subdivision and development proposals in predominately agricultural areas should be carefully considered to minimize impacts on farming operations and preserve large agricultural parcels.

9.1.5 Development determined to be incompatible with agriculture should be directed to appropriate locations where it does not interfere with normal farm practices or reduce agricultural viability. Normal agricultural practices, including seeding, spraying, harvesting, livestock management, and movement of farm equipment, are recognized as part of rural life.

9.1.1 The MD of Willow Creek considers “first parcel out” subdivision, which separates the farmstead from the quarter-section, vital to the long-term viability of agricultural operations and the rural population base.

9.1.2 Existing farmstead sites may be considered for continued residential use, replacement dwellings, subdivision, or adaptive re-use in accordance with the Land Use Bylaw and applicable municipal policies.

9.1.6 The MD of Willow Creek supports diversification of traditional agriculture through secondary farm uses, home-based businesses, on-farm sales, and value-added agricultural activities where compatible with surrounding lands and in compliance with policies established in adopted Intermunicipal Development Plans.

9.1.7 Agricultural development should be carried out in a manner that protects soil capability, water resources, drainage systems, and environmentally sensitive areas.

DRAFT

9.1.8 Future municipal road, bridge, and infrastructure planning should consider the needs of the agricultural sector, including movement of equipment, livestock, and farm products.

9.1.9 The MD of Willow Creek will continue to support collaboration with agricultural producers, industry organizations, and provincial agencies to strengthen the long-term viability of agriculture.

9.1.10 The development of intensive livestock operations (ILO) which are below the animal numbers required for a registration or approval from the Natural Resource Conservation Board will continue to be supported through the standards found in the Land Use Bylaw.

9.1.11 The Municipality shall encourage the routing of new utility infrastructure in a manner that minimizes fragmentation of agricultural land and does not unnecessarily restrict ongoing agricultural operations or the long-term use of agricultural lands.

9.2 LARGE SCALE AGRICULTURE

Large-scale agriculture generally refers to agricultural operations that are developed and managed primarily for commercial production at a scale that exceeds typical farmstead or small-scale operations. These operations will often involve significant land holdings, specialized equipment or buildings and infrastructure designed to maximize efficiency, productivity, and market access.

Such operations typically include commercial greenhouse operations, cannabis production facilities, mushroom production, and large combined grain production and livestock operations. Within the municipal planning context, the development of Large-Scale agriculture is generally considered an important economic activity that should be accommodated in appropriate locations while managing impacts related to traffic, water usage, odour, noise, drainage, environmental stewardship, and compatibility with surrounding land uses.

Objectives:

- To support the development and expansion of commercial greenhouse operations, controlled-environment agriculture, and related food production facilities.
- To provide clear policy direction and appropriate land use opportunities for large-scale commercial agriculture through the Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw.
- To ensure adequate transportation access, road capacity, utility servicing, and sustainable water supply are considered in the development of large-scale agricultural operations.

Policies:

9.2.1 The Municipal District may support large-scale agriculture as it is recognized as a key component of the local economy, employment base, and long-term rural prosperity. All development proposals shall consider the availability of an adequate and sustainable water supply, wastewater

management, transportation infrastructure and utility servicing appropriate to the scale of the operation.

9.2.2 New development should be designed and operated to minimize potential impacts related to traffic, noise, odour, dust, lighting, visual impacts, and stormwater runoff on neighbouring lands and the broader community.

9.2.3 Commercial greenhouse and controlled-environment agriculture operations should incorporate appropriate site design, screening, servicing, lighting controls, and water management measures where necessary.

9.2.4 Value-added agricultural uses associated with large scale agricultural production, such as storage, grading, packing, feed production, processing, and distribution facilities, should be supported where they are directly related to agricultural production and compatible with surrounding land uses.

9.3 CONFINED FEEDING OPERATIONS REGULATED UNDER AOPA

In Alberta rural municipalities, Municipal Development Plans (MDPs) can address confined feeding operations (CFOs), but they do so within a legal framework where CFO permitting authority primarily rests with the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act (AOPA). The MD will continue to support the development and expansion of Confined Feeding Operations while minimizing land use conflict, protecting long-term municipal growth opportunities, safeguarding infrastructure, and providing clear municipal policy guidance to the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act (AOPA).

Objectives:

- To recognize livestock production as important contributor to the municipality's economic base, rural character, and long-term sustainability.
- To provide clear land use planning direction for the location, expansion, and review of Confined Feeding Operations within the municipality.
- To support the siting of Confined Feeding Operations in appropriate areas of the municipality where an adequate and sustainable water supply can be demonstrated and should consider water source availability, servicing capacity, cumulative demand, and potential impacts on neighbouring lands and the environment.
- To support the efficient and safe use of municipal roads, bridges, and transportation networks affected by Confined Feeding Operations.
- To protect environmentally sensitive areas, watersheds, riparian lands, wetlands, and other natural features through sound land use planning.
- To ensure municipal statutory plans, infrastructure planning, and intermunicipal planning objectives are considered in the review of Confined Feeding Operations.

- To guide municipal participation in Natural Resources Conservation Board referral and review processes under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act.

Policies:

9.3.1 MD of Willow Creek recognizes that approvals for Confined Feeding Operations are issued by the Natural Resources Conservation Board pursuant to the Agricultural Operation Practices Act (AOPA). The policies of this Plan are intended to guide municipal land use planning and municipal responses to provincial referrals. This policy is not intended to duplicate provincial technical regulation but to address planning compatibility.

9.3.2 The MD of Willow Creek supports agricultural operations, including livestock production, where such development is compatible with surrounding land uses and consistent with this Plan.

9.3.3 New Confined Feeding Operations shall not be supported within any CFO Policy or Exclusion Area as identified in adopted Intermunicipal Development Plans.

9.3.4 Existing legally established Confined Feeding Operations located within any CFO Policy or Exclusion Area may continue to operate in accordance with provincial approvals and applicable legislation. Policies contained within this plan as well as adopted Intermunicipal Development Plans are not intended to render existing operations non-conforming or prevent normal agricultural continuity.

9.3.5 Applications for expansion or major modification of an existing CFO within an existing or future Exclusion Area should demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the reviewing authority, that impacts are appropriately mitigated, including traffic and road impacts; odour, dust, and noise; stormwater and drainage considerations; impacts on nearby residences or settlements; and consistency with long-term municipal or intermunicipal planning objectives.

9.3.6 Outside of any CFO Exclusion Area, the MD of Willow Creek may support new CFO proposals where the proposal demonstrates:

(a) an adequate water supply is available at time of application;

(b) compatibility with surrounding agricultural and non-agricultural uses;

(c) adequate road access and transportation capacity;

(d) appropriate separation from residences and settlement areas;

(e) consistency with statutory plans and intermunicipal planning policies;

(f) mitigation of nuisance impacts; and

(g) no undue interference with future municipal growth.

DRAFT

9.3.7 When reviewing CFO proposals, the MD of Willow Creek in their response will consider land use planning impacts related to ground and surface water, including aquifers, wetlands, riparian areas and municipal watershed management objectives. As well, any impact to significant water bodies, including rivers, creeks and reservoirs, flood-prone lands and environmentally sensitive areas as depicted *Environmentally Significant Areas in the Oldman River Region: M.D. of Willow Creek* shall be reviewed and appropriate comments forwarded to the NRCB for consideration in their decision.

9.3.8 The MD of Willow Creek may provide comments respecting the suitability of municipal infrastructure serving a proposed CFO, including road classification and design capacity; bridge restrictions; haul routes; seasonal road limitations; traffic safety near residences, schools, or hamlets; and long-term maintenance impacts on municipal assets.

9.3.9 The MD of Willow Creek may provide comments respecting the following development setbacks the including:

(a) All buildings, structures and development other than cultivation or grazing shall be setback from lot or parcel boundaries at least:

(i) 22.9 m (75 ft.) from the right-of-way of any developed or undeveloped roadway not designated as a highway in the Memorandum of Agreement between Alberta Transportation and the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26;

(ii) 30 m (100 ft.) from the property line or 50 m (165 ft) from the centre of a designated Minor Highway and 40 m (131 ft) from the property line or 70 m (230 ft) from the centre of a designated Major Highway in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement between Alberta Transportation and the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26; and

(iii) at least 20 ft. (6.1 m) from adjacent property lines.

(b) All buildings, structures and development that is to be located in close proximity to an escarpment, coulee break, riverbank or other geographical feature may have special requirements for setback as determined by any geotechnical or slope stability analysis report requested by the municipality.

(c) Vehicle access points and buildings, fences, trees or similar obstructions more than 3 ft. above a rural road grade may be restricted by the municipality within 90 m (300 ft.) or such greater distance from an intersection with another rural road or a provincial highway as required by Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors.

9.3.10 The MD of Willow Creek may require that an CFO operator to enter into and comply with either a Heavy-Haul Agreement or Development Agreement respecting the use, upgrade or construction of suitable municipal infrastructure proposed to serve a new or expanding CFO.

DRAFT

9.3.11 New or expanded CFOs should not create unreasonable constraints on lands identified for future residential development, hamlet expansion or intermunicipal growth areas within adopted statutory plans.

9.3.12 Where a proposed CFO may affect lands near a municipal boundary, the municipality should coordinate with adjacent municipalities and consider applicable Intermunicipal Development Plan policies.

9.3.13 The municipality shall participate in referral opportunities provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Board and may submit comments regarding consistency with this Plan, land use compatibility, infrastructure impacts, future growth impacts, intermunicipal planning considerations; and local environmental planning matters.

9.3.14 Where appropriate, Council may request information of the applicant prior to submitting municipal comments on a proposal, including site context mapping, road access plans, traffic estimates, water supply and source, drainage information, adjacent land use analysis; and mitigation measures for potential nuisance impacts.

9.3.15 Council may amend any CFO Exclusion or Policy Area identified in an adopted Intermunicipal Development Plan where supported by updated planning studies, infrastructure strategies, growth forecasts, environmental studies, or intermunicipal planning objectives.

9.3.16 The MD of Willow Creek may in the future expand CFO Exclusion Areas to include lands associated with hamlets and settlement areas; future residential growth areas; reservoir shorelines or recreation areas; environmentally sensitive areas; identified tourism corridors; industrial or commercial growth nodes; and lands constrained by infrastructure limitations.

9.3.17 No policy in this Plan shall be interpreted as the municipality issuing approvals under AOPA or replacing the jurisdiction of the Natural Resources Conservation Board.

9.4 CROWN LAND

The MD of Willow Creek recognizes that significant areas of land within the municipality may be owned or administered by the Province of Alberta as public lands or provincial Crown lands. While such lands may be identified or referenced within municipal planning documents and land use maps, the Municipality does not have jurisdiction over the issuance of dispositions, licences of occupation, permits, or other provincial authorizations governing activities on Crown lands unless specifically provided for through legislation or agreement. For this reason, cooperative planning and ongoing communication between the Municipality and the provincial departments or agencies responsible for Crown lands is essential.

Objectives:

- Advocate for land use outcomes on Crown lands that align, where possible, with the long-term vision and objectives of the Municipality.
- Encourage provincial agencies to consult with the Municipality on proposed dispositions, licences, permits, management plans, or significant land use changes.
- Support coordinated planning that considers transportation access, servicing, emergency response, environmental stewardship, and compatibility with surrounding land uses.

Policies:

9.4.1 The Municipality recognizes that the Province of Alberta has primary jurisdiction over the administration, disposition, and authorization of activities on public lands and provincial Crown lands, except where authority is otherwise delegated by legislation or agreement.

9.4.2 The MD of Willow Creek shall encourage provincial departments and agencies to consult with the Municipality regarding proposed dispositions, licences of occupation, permits, management plans, and significant land use activities on Crown lands that may affect municipal interests.

9.4.3 Where proposals on Crown lands may impact municipal roads, bridges, drainage works, utilities, emergency services, or other municipal infrastructure, the MD of Willow Creek may request consultation, technical review, and appropriate mitigation measures.

9.4.4 The Municipality may provide comments or recommendations to the Province respecting proposed uses or developments on Crown lands where such proposals may affect municipal residents, neighbouring landowners, or future municipal growth and development.

9.4.5 Where appropriate, the Municipality may seek memoranda of understanding, servicing agreements, road use agreements, or other collaborative arrangements with the Province or proponents to address shared interests related to Crown lands.

DRAFT