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## Cold Lake is about to boom: Why that matters to millions of Canadians ahead of Alberta's voting day



Heather Yourex-West Global News  
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Cold Lake, Alta., is on the brink of an economic boom, and with thousands of people expected to move to the area in the coming years for jobs, leaving the housing market in a tight spot. Paired with inflation and critical infrastructure needs, affordability policies have become top-of-mind heading into Alberta's provincial election on Monday.

The winters may be long in **Cold Lake** but in the summertime the city, located 280 kilometres northeast of Edmonton, shines.

"We've got a beautiful beach and a lot of people come up here to camp and to fish," said Cold Lake mayor Craig Copeland.

Over the next several years, thousands of people could be coming to the area of Alberta to work as well.

The city has been home to a Royal Canadian Air Force based for decades — the military says 4 Wing Cold Lake is the busiest fighter base in Canada.



A Royal Australian Air Force F-18 Hornet taxis past Royal Canadian Air Force CF-188 Hornets on the ramp outside 3 Hangar upon its arrival for Exercise MAPLE FLAG 51 at 4 Wing, Cold Lake, Alberta on June 6, 2018. **Credit: Cpl Manuela Berger, 4 Wing Imaging, CAF**

People who live in Cold Lake either, for the most part, work at the military base or in oil and gas — but soon, Cold Lake could become major hub for clean energy as site of one of the largest **carbon capture and storage** facilities in the world.

“It has the right geology,” Pathways Alliance president Kendall Dilling said. “Carbon capture and storage (CCS) relies on the proximity to the right storage and (the area south of Cold Lake) is arguably close to, if not the best, in the world.”



The Pathways Alliance is made up of Canada’s six largest oilsands producers: Canadian Natural Resources Ltd., Cenovus Energy Inc., ConocoPhillips Canada, Imperial Oil Ltd., MEG Energy Corp., and Suncor Energy Inc.

The CCS project is the cornerstone of its plan to get to net zero by 2050.

The **Pathways Alliance** intends to bring carbon dioxide emissions from each oilsands operation down a 400-kilometer pipeline to be built from the Fort McMurray area to south of Cold Lake.

“This is a big project— \$16.5 billion,” said Dilling.

**“We anticipate 25,000 to 35,000 people required for the construction phase, which will occur over several years and then several thousand permanent operation jobs at the end.”**

With a target to begin capturing and storing carbon by 2030, Dilling says it has hundreds of people working on-site to keep the project on track, but it still needs regulatory approval and hopes to secure public funds in the form of tax credits and subsidies before the carbon can start flowing in the ground.

“Alberta is the owner and the regulator of the resource and clearly needs to be at the table.

**“Post-election, I think they’ll be able to engage and if we can get something figured out sooner or later, we can achieve 2030 – but if we’re not able to do that, it can slide on us.”**



The entrance of the City of Cold Lake in northeastern Alberta in May 2023. **Global News**

The mayor of Cold Lake is anxiously awaiting the results of the May 29th vote as well.

The community of around 16,000 people is expecting to see major growth in the coming years because CFB Cold Lake is undergoing a multi-billion-dollar upgrade as well.

“When you look at the province, where the growth areas are going to be, I think this area is going to be a significant growth area for sure,” said Copeland.

The construction at 4 Wing Cold Lake is in preparation for Canada’s new fighter jet fleet.

“In January of this year, the government announced the purchase of F-35’s,” said Colonel David Turenne, Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake Commander.

**“It’s quite a different airplane – in fact, they refer to it as an air vehicle more than an aircraft. It’s a flying computer.”**

The first aircraft are set to be delivered in 2026, officials said, and the full fleet is expected to reach operational capability between 2032 and 2034.

The Lockheed Martin F-35 fleet will replace Canada’s aging McDonnell Douglas CF-188 Hornet – commonly called the CF-18 – which have been in use since 1982.



Royal Canadian Air Force CF-188 Hornet fighter aircraft participating in Exercise MAPLE FLAG 2013 (JOINTEX) taxi on the Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake tarmac in Cold Lake, Alberta on May 30, 2013. **Credit: MCpl Marc-André Gaudreault, Canadian Forces Combat Camera**

Much of the air force base in Cold Lake is even older, dating back to 1954.

“The supporting structure of the base is fairly old and in need of an update, but the fighter project for the F-35 is going to deliver the hangar facilities and those direct infrastructure buildings that are going to support the aircraft itself,” Turenne said.

“Construction is expected to take four years,” said Chris Lane, senior vice president of Ellis Don Construction Services, the company overseeing the air force base upgrade.



**“We anticipate at the peak of construction, 600 people being involved. We’ll be taking labour from the Cold Lake area, Edmonton, Calgary and we’ve also had a lot of interest from outside Alberta as well.”**

The dueling construction projects are expected to heat up the local housing market in the coming years.

The city says it’s planning for the change as best it can, but it’s not such an easy task when inflation is already hitting family budgets hard.

“You obviously see it in the grocery bills and the energy bills,” Cold Lake resident Amanda Harvie said. It’s why, the mother-of-two says heading into the election, affordability issues are top of mind.

In late April, the United Conservative government promised five million dollars to plan improvements to the single lane highway.

Copeland says more investment will need to follow if his community will be ready for the people heading their way.



The city has critical infrastructure needs as well. The mayor hopes to the next government will invest in improving Highway 28.

**“We always call it the forgotten highway but really it’s the main artery that comes from Edmonton to Cold Lake.”**

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