TOWN OF COALDALE

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

2025

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KEY FINDINGS

1. Total Revenues & Expenditures

At approximately $1,900 per resident, Coaldale's per capita operating costs remain the lowest among its peer and neighbouring municipalities, and approximately 28% below the group average.

2. Salaries, Wages, & Benefits

In 2024, the Town spent $807 per resident on salaries, wages, and benefits – $217 per resident less than neighbouring Taber and $759 less per resident than neighbouring Lethbridge.

3. Executive Compensation

At 2.8% below the group average, Coaldale's CAO compensation remains competitive within its cohort while still ranking below four of its seven peer municipalities.

4. Taxation

Over the past four years, Coaldale achieved a 14.4% reduction in its residential mill rate — the second-largest decrease among its peer and neighbouring municipalities and more than 6 times the group average of 2.3%.

5. Assessment Growth

From 2020–2026, Coaldale ranked first in both per capita residential and per capita non-residential assessment growth, coming in 64% and 158% above the group average, respectively.

6. Population Growth

From 2020–2024, Coaldale's population grew by 4.0% — 4.96 percentage points lower than neighbouring Lethbridge and 6.19 percentage points lower than neighbouring Taber.

7. Crime Severity

With an average CSI score of 57.2, Coaldale ranks as the safest municipality its size in Alberta, the 3rd safest municipality its size in western Canada and the 10th safest municipality its size in the country.

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

On behalf of Coaldale Town Council, I'm pleased to present the Town of Coaldale's 2025 Comparative Analysis. This year's Analysis highlights one of Council's most important priorities: maintaining a competitive and affordable tax environment for residents, businesses, and investors.

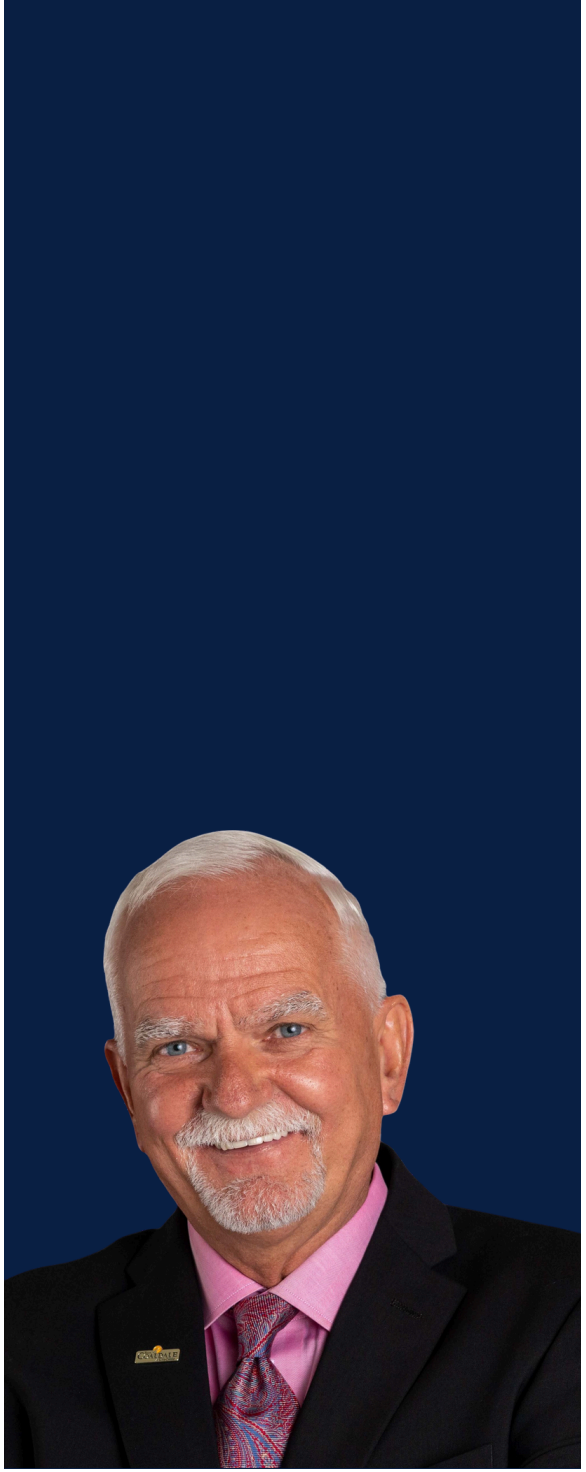
Over the past four years, Coaldale reduced its residential mill rate by 14.4%, the second-largest reduction among its peer and neighbouring municipalities and more than six times the group average. This achievement reflects Council's continued commitment to affordability, particularly at a time when many households are facing increasing costs in other areas of their lives.

Council has also remained focused on maintaining Coaldale's competitiveness as a place to do business. From 2022–2025, Coaldale reduced its non-residential mill rate by 2.7%, while the group average increased by 1.4%. In other words, while many municipalities moved toward higher non-residential tax rates, Coaldale moved in the opposite direction.

These results reflect a deliberate approach to taxation: one that balances the need to fund core municipal services with the importance of keeping Coaldale affordable, competitive, and well-positioned for long-term growth. As Council looks ahead, we remain committed to protecting this balance and ensuring that Coaldale continues to be a community where residents, families, and businesses can thrive.

Sincerely,

Jack Van Rijn, Mayor



MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

On behalf of Town Administration, I'm pleased to present the Town of Coaldale's 2025 Comparative Analysis. One of the clearest findings in this year's report is that Coaldale continues to operate with discipline and restraint when it comes to salaries, wages, and benefits.

Compensation is one of the most significant cost drivers in any municipal organization. It is also one of the areas residents rightly expect to be managed carefully, since staffing costs must be balanced against the need to provide reliable, high-quality services. In 2024, Coaldale spent $807 per resident on salaries, wages, and benefits — the lowest amount among its peer and neighbouring municipalities.

When compared regionally, this result is especially important. Coaldale spent $217 less per resident than neighbouring Taber and $759 less per resident than neighbouring Lethbridge. Coaldale also spent $280 less per resident than the group average, meaning the Town would have to increase its per capita spending on salaries, wages, and benefits by approximately 35% just to become average.

These figures do not suggest that staffing costs are unimportant. Rather, they show that Coaldale continues to take a measured approach to administration and service delivery. The Town remains focused on attracting and retaining qualified staff while ensuring that compensation costs remain sustainable, responsible, and aligned with the expectations of Coaldale taxpayers.

Sincerely,

Kalen Hastings, CAO

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF GROWTH & INVESTMENT

As the Director of Growth and Investment, I'm pleased to introduce the Town of Coaldale's 2025 Comparative Analysis. This year's report provides strong evidence that Coaldale's approach to growth is working — not only because the community continues to attract new residents and investment, but because it is doing so in a way that remains measured and sustainable.

From 2020–2026, Coaldale ranked first among its peer and neighbouring municipalities in both per capita residential and per capita non-residential assessment growth. Coaldale's per capita residential assessment growth reached $41,693, which was 64% above the group average, while its per capita non-residential assessment growth reached $19,639, which was 158% above the group average.

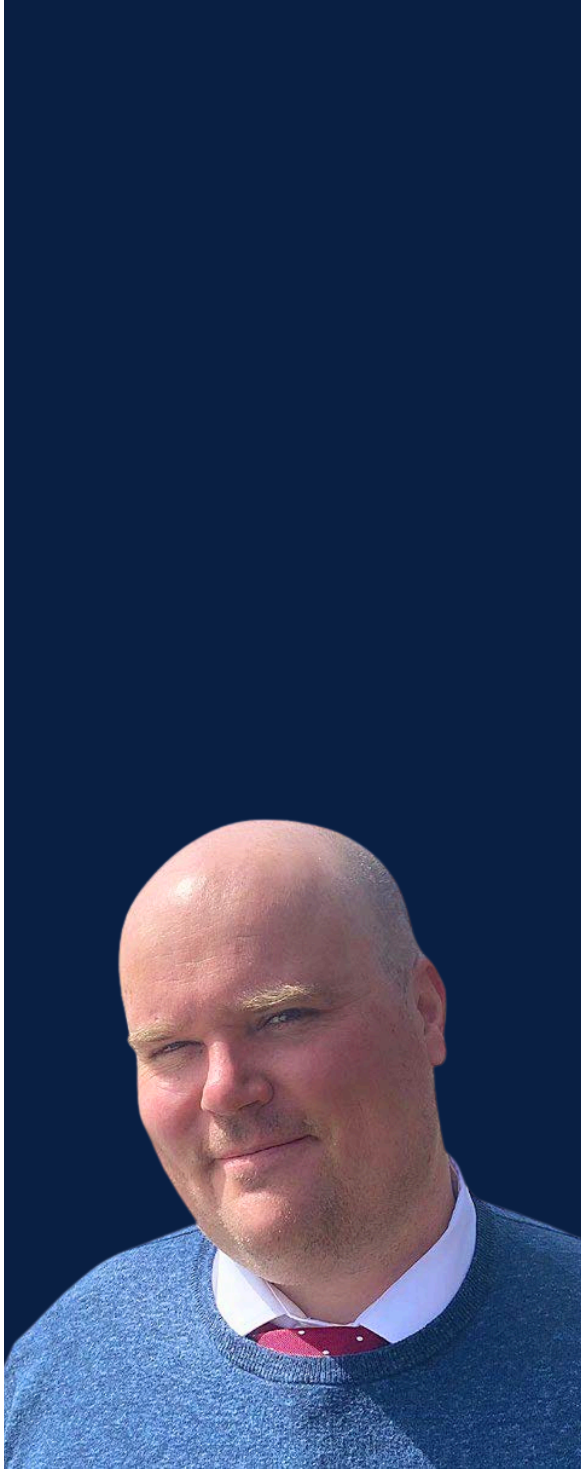
These results are significant because assessment growth helps strengthen the Town's tax base. Strong residential assessment growth reflects continued demand for housing in Coaldale, while strong non-residential assessment growth reflects Coaldale's ability to attract business and investment. Together, they show that Coaldale is continuing to grow in ways that support both community development and long-term financial sustainability.

At the same time, Coaldale's population growth was more modest. From 2020–2024, Coaldale's population grew by 4.0%, which was lower than neighbouring Lethbridge and Taber. When considered alongside the Town's strong assessment growth, however, this suggests that Coaldale's population growth was constrained less by weak demand than by limited housing availability, particularly among middle-market and multifamily housing types.

Sincerely,

Cameron Mills

Cameron Mills, Director of Growth and Investment



WHAT IS THE TOWN OF COALDALE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS?

Like private sector corporations, municipalities have a vested interest in assessing their financial and operational performance. After all, like the shareholders of a company, the residents and elected officials of a municipality - all of whom pay and the latter of whom set municipal taxes - have a vested interest in knowing just how efficient or inefficient their municipality's operations really are, and just how healthy or unhealthy their municipality's fiscal situation really is.

Assessing this performance, however, requires both introspection and extrospection. It requires evaluating the fiscal and operational performance of one's own municipality and then comparing that performance to the fiscal and operational performances of peer or competitor municipalities.

For this reason, in 2019 the Town of Coaldale decided to take its financial and operational reporting to the next level and applied the well-known business concept of "benchmarking" to municipal government. Rather than simply assess its own financial and operational performance (an exercise that, in accordance with Sections 276 and 648.4 of the Municipal Government Act, municipalities must perform on an annual basis), the Town went one step further and began comparing its financial and operational performance to the financial and operational performances of a number of peer/competitor municipalities across Alberta.

Now dubbed the Town of Coaldale "Comparative Analysis", this document stands alongside the Town's Operating and Capital Budgets, Audited Financial Statements, and Annual Reports as one more tool for analyzing the efficacy of Coaldale's operations and service delivery. In so doing, it not only provides Town residents and business owners - both current and prospective - with a better sense of how Coaldale is being run, but also, elected officials with a better understanding of how to make Coaldale a more competitive and attractive place to live and raise a family, moving forward.

WHAT INFORMATION IS INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS?

Peer/Competitor Municipalities

In keeping with the Town's 2024 Comparative Analysis, the Town's 2025 Comparative Analysis compares Coaldale's financial and operational performance to the financial and operational performances of Blackfalds, Drumheller, Edson, Hinton, Innisfail, Lethbridge, Lethbridge County, Olds, and Taber.

The reasons for comparing Coaldale's financial and operational performance to the financial and operational performances of these municipalities, in particular, are twofold. First, because Blackfalds, Drumheller, Edson, Hinton, Innisfail, and Olds are similar in size to Coaldale, many of them face – or are at the very least more likely to face – similar demographic, operational, and financial challenges. They therefore qualify as Coaldale's "peer" municipalities. Second, because Lethbridge, Lethbridge County, and Taber are Coaldale's immediate neighbours, they provide important context for understanding benchmarks such as taxation, assessment growth, population growth, and crime severity, all of which are heavily influenced – if not determined – by regional trends. Taken together, then, this sample of municipalities is intended to provide a balanced and meaningful basis for comparison—one that helps situate Coaldale among both peer *and* neighbouring municipalities.

Benchmarks

In keeping with the Town's 2024 Analysis, the Town's 2025 Analysis compares Coaldale to its peer and neighbouring municipalities across seven benchmarks:

- total revenues & operating expenditures;
- salaries, wages, and benefits;
- executive compensation;
- taxation;
- assessment growth;
- population growth; and
- crime severity.

The reasons for comparing Coaldale to its peer and neighbouring municipalities across these benchmarks, in particular, are also twofold. First, while the sheer volume of data available in Statistics Canada reports, provincial equalized assessment publications, and audited financial statements make it possible to develop any number of performance metrics for evaluating municipal finances and operations, the Town opted to confine its approach by measuring benchmarks that, taken together, are meant to provide a bird's-eye-view of the relative financial, operational, and social health of each municipality. Second, to avoid the accusation that it is "cherry-picking" stats, the Town opted to compare municipalities across benchmarks that can be measured consistently, year after year.

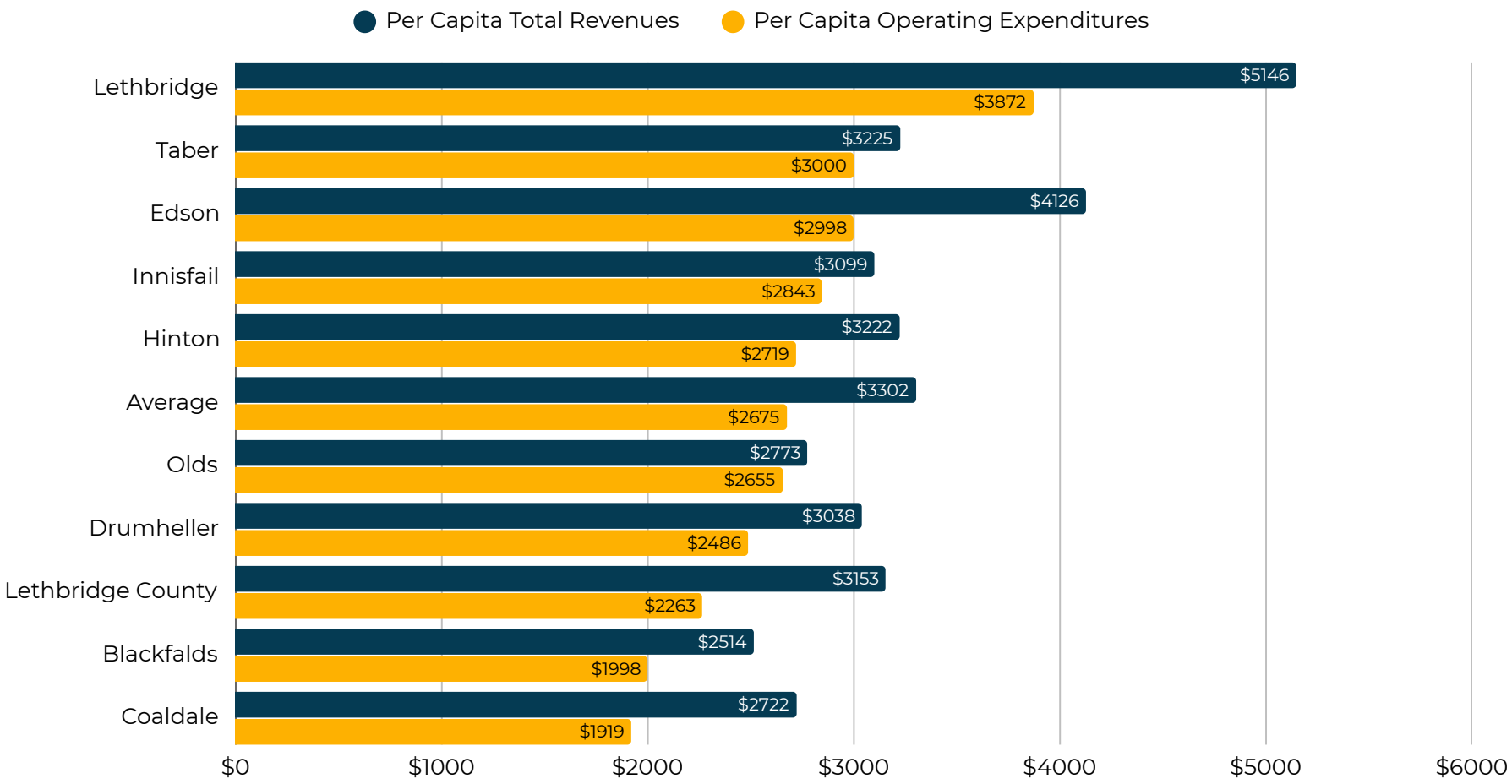
BENCHMARK 1: TOTAL REVENUES & OPERATING EXPENDITURES

Much like private sector corporations, municipalities have shareholders that go by the name of residents. Like shareholders, residents play a crucial role in sustaining the municipality by making a regular financial "investment" in the form of property taxes, utility payments, and other fees. In return, they rightly expect a "return on investment" in the form of high-quality public services, such as well-maintained roads, efficient waste management, accessible recreational facilities, and effective emergency services. Just as private sector corporations therefore have an interest in keeping their operating expenses under control, so too do municipalities. The only difference is that whereas private sector corporations are keenly focused on managing their operating expenses to maximize profits, municipalities face a somewhat different imperative: they must control their operating expenses to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of public services. Given this unique focus, it becomes essential for municipalities to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of their approach to financial management. Benchmark 1 therefore tracks the total amount of revenue each municipality collects versus the total amount of operating expenses each incurs - the ratio between which tells us where each of them stand in terms of having a fiscally responsible run operation.

KEY FINDING:

At approximately $1,900 per resident, Coaldale's per capita operating costs remain the lowest among its peer and neighbouring municipalities, and about 28% below the group average.

CHART 1: PER CAPITA TOTAL REVENUES VS. PER CAPITA OPERATING EXPENDITURES (2024)



As Chart 1 shows, Coaldale has the second-lowest per capita total revenues and the lowest per capita operating expenditures among its peer and neighbouring municipalities. At approximately $2,700 per resident, Coaldale's per capita total revenues remain about 18% below the group average of roughly $3,300 per person. At approximately $1,900 per resident, Coaldale's per capita operating expenditures remain about 28% below the group average of roughly $2,700 per person. Taken together, these figures indicate that, relative to comparable and neighbouring municipalities, Coaldale both takes in less revenue *and* spends less on day-to-day operations, making it a low revenue, low spend municipality.

CHART 2: PER CAPITA TOTAL REVENUES VS. PER CAPITA OPERATING EXPENDITURES (2024)

Also important to consider, however, is the ratio between Coaldale's total revenues and operating expenditures. As Chart 2 shows, Coaldale has one of the healthiest revenue-expenditure ratios among its peers and neighbouring municipalities.

For every dollar that Coaldale takes in from taxes, fees, fines, utilities, and other revenue sources, it spends approximately 71 cents on day-to-day operations. Unlike municipalities that spend nearly all of the revenue they generate on operating costs (Olds or Taber), Coaldale retains a larger share of its revenues after covering routine expenses. This provides the Town with greater financial flexibility and suggests a comparatively strong capacity to absorb unanticipated financial pressures like high inflation, build reserves, or support future capital investment. Overall, the data indicates that Coaldale is not just a low revenue, low spend municipality, but a fiscally responsible one as well.

BENCHMARK 2: SALARIES, WAGES & BENEFITS

A major source of public concern — and often frustration — is the salaries, wages, and benefits of municipal employees. This concern exists in Coaldale as much as it does in any other municipality - and for good reason: expenditures on salaries, wages, and benefits make up a significant portion of municipal operating budgets. The concern is further amplified by a perceived disconnect between compensation levels and service levels. While residents appreciate the necessity of fairly compensating municipal staff, they also expect that such expenditures translate into high service levels. As a result, when service levels fall short of expectations—whether in road maintenance, waste management, or recreational facilities—it is natural for residents to question whether resources are being spent wisely. Are the salaries, wages, and benefits of municipal employees too high? Could those funds be better spent on tangible and visible improvements, such as upgrading municipal vehicles, maintaining public buildings, or enhancing parks and other community spaces? This tension between investing in human resources and maintaining service levels is a delicate balance for municipalities to manage, and addressing these concerns in a transparent manner is essential for fostering public trust. Benchmark 2 therefore tracks each municipality's expenditures on salaries, wages, and benefits.

KEY FINDING:

In 2024, Coaldale spent $807 per resident on salaries, wages, and benefits – $217 less than neighbouring Taber and $759 less than neighbouring Lethbridge.

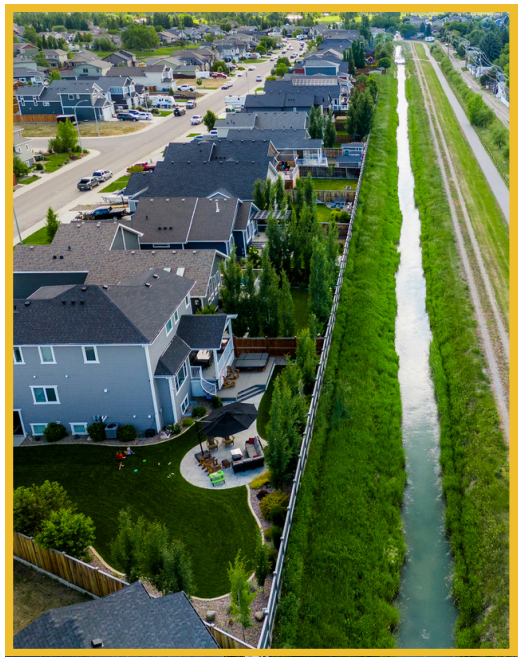
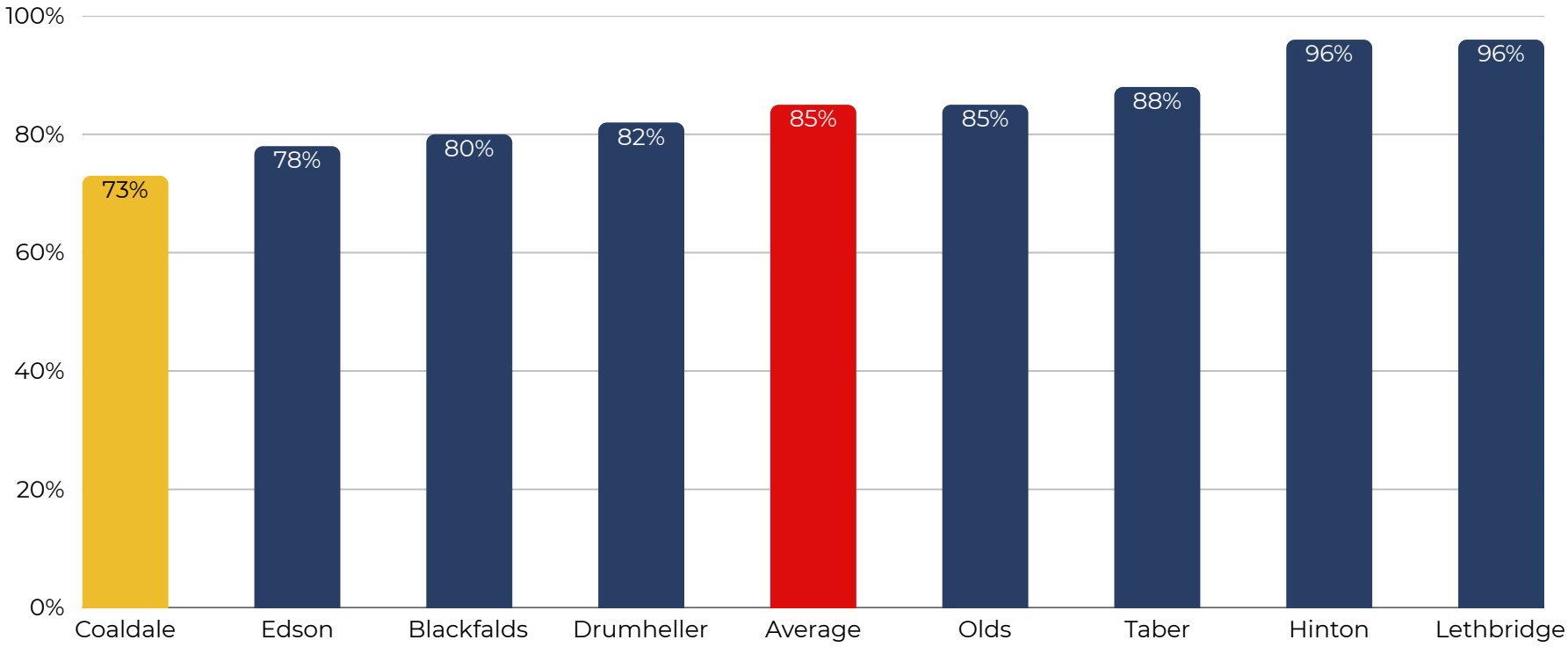


CHART 3: EXPENDITURES ON SALARIES, WAGES, & BENEFITS AS A PERCENTAGE OF TAX REVENUES (2024)

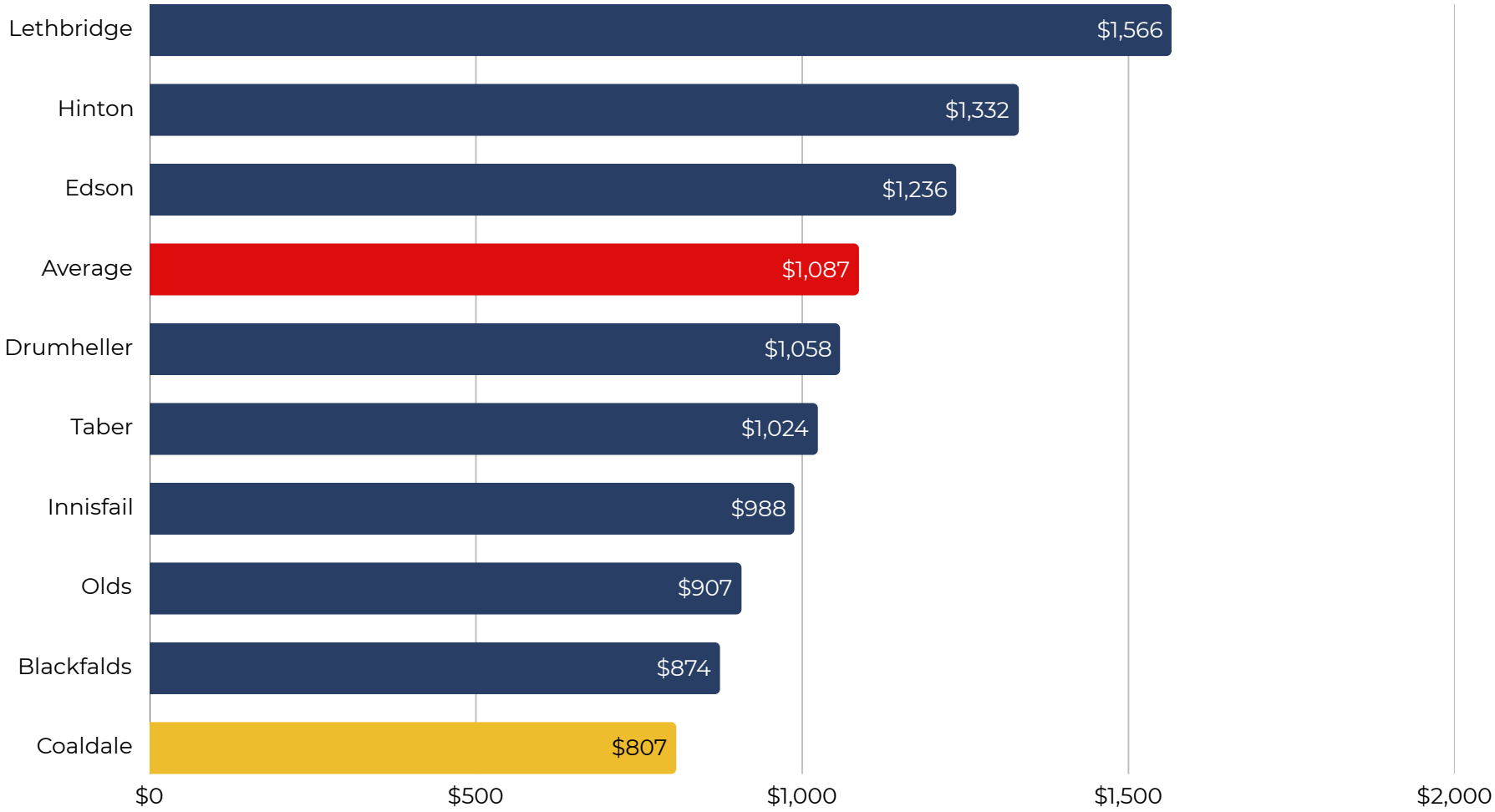
Unlike a municipality's total revenues, a municipality's tax revenues are subject to much less volatility as they remain insulated from one-time cash infusions from things like land and/or building sales (which can drastically alter the amount of total revenues a municipality takes in each year). For this reason, Chart 3 shows expenditures on salaries, wages, and benefits as a percentage of tax revenues. These are revenues that, rather like expenditures on salaries, wages, & benefits, change only incrementally over a long or, at the very least, *longer* period of time.



As Chart 3 shows, Coaldale spends approximately 73% of its tax revenues on salaries, wages, and benefits. At first, this may seem like a lot. However, when compared to Coaldale's peer and neighbouring municipalities, the amount of tax revenues that Coaldale spends on salaries, wages, and benefitsi is actually quite low (23% lower than neighbouring Lethbridge; 15% lower than neighbouring Taber; and 12% lower than the group average).

Note: Compensation figures for Lethbridge and Taber have been adjusted to exclude salaries, wages, and benefits for policing.

CHART 4: PER CAPITA EXPENDITURES ON SALARIES, WAGES, & BENEFITS (2024)



When adjusted for population, the picture becomes even clearer. In 2024, Coaldale spent $7,614,534 on wages, salaries, and benefits, which as Chart 4 shows, amounts to $807 per person. That's $67 per person less than the next lowest municipality in the group (Blackfalds), $280 per person less than the group average, and $217 (roughly 21%) less per person than neighbouring Taber. This means that Coaldale would have to spend an additional $2.05 million a year on salaries, wages, and benefits just to match Taber. It also means that Coaldale would have to increase per capita spending on salaries, wages, and benefits by 35%, just to become average.

BENCHMARK 3: EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

While expenditures on salaries, wages, and benefits are often a focal point of public concern, expenditures on executive compensation tend to draw even greater scrutiny - and again for good reason: residents understand that executive compensation represents a critical intersection between leadership accountability and financial stewardship. Overcompensation or opaque pay structures can erode public trust, leading to perceptions of mismanagement, favoritism, or even corruption within an organization. When residents believe that executive compensation is excessively high or lacks transparency, they begin to question the priorities and integrity of those in leadership roles. This erosion of trust can tarnish the municipality's reputation, making it harder to build or maintain constructive relationships with the broader community. Conversely, well-communicated, reasonable compensation decisions signal that leaders are acting in the community's best interest. Not surprisingly, then, residents want to know how much their elected officials are paid to represent the community, and how much those officials have approved in compensation for their single employee, the chief administrative officer (CAO) or city manager, who is responsible for overseeing the municipality's day-to-day operations. Benchmark 3 therefore tracks how much each municipality spends on its elected officials and CAO/city manager.

KEY FINDING:

At 2.8% below the group average, Coaldale's CAO compensation remains competitive within its cohort while still ranking below four of its seven peer municipalities.

*Note: As elected officials and city managers in Alberta's major cities receive significantly higher compensation packages than elected officials and Chief Administrative Officers in Alberta's towns and counties, Benchmark 3 does not include data for Lethbridge.

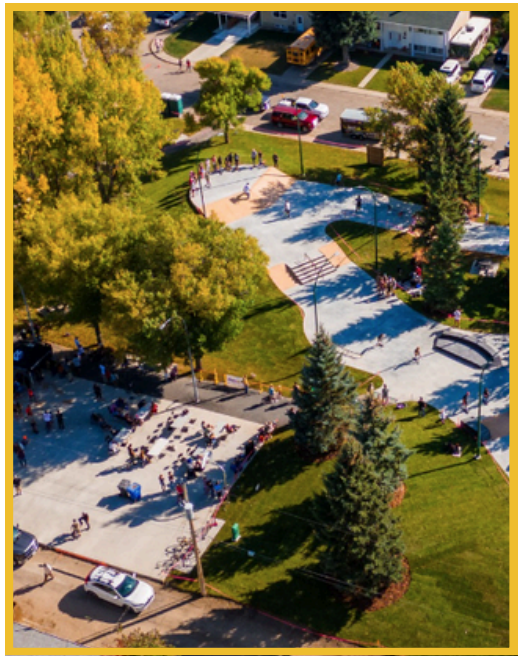
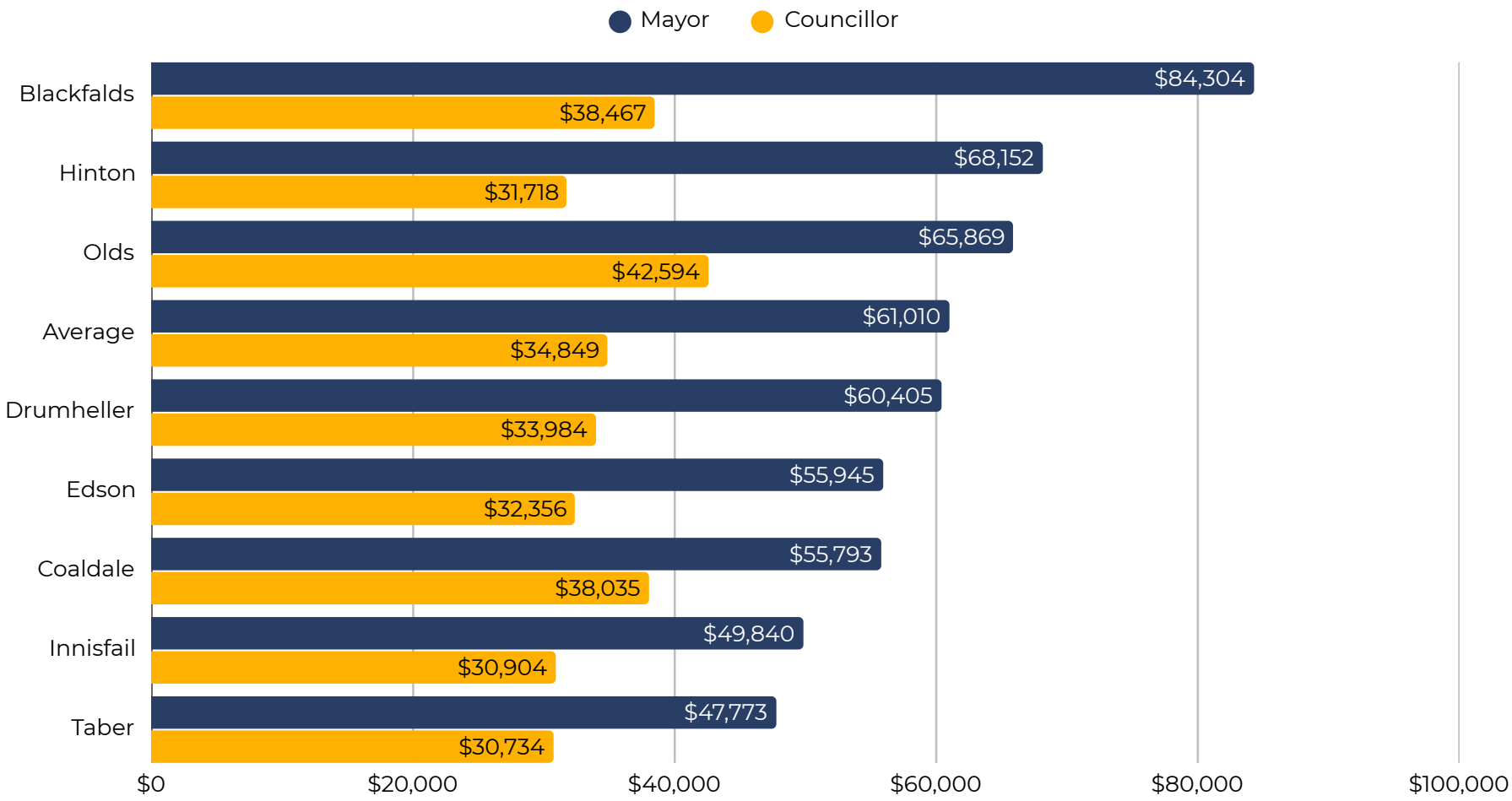
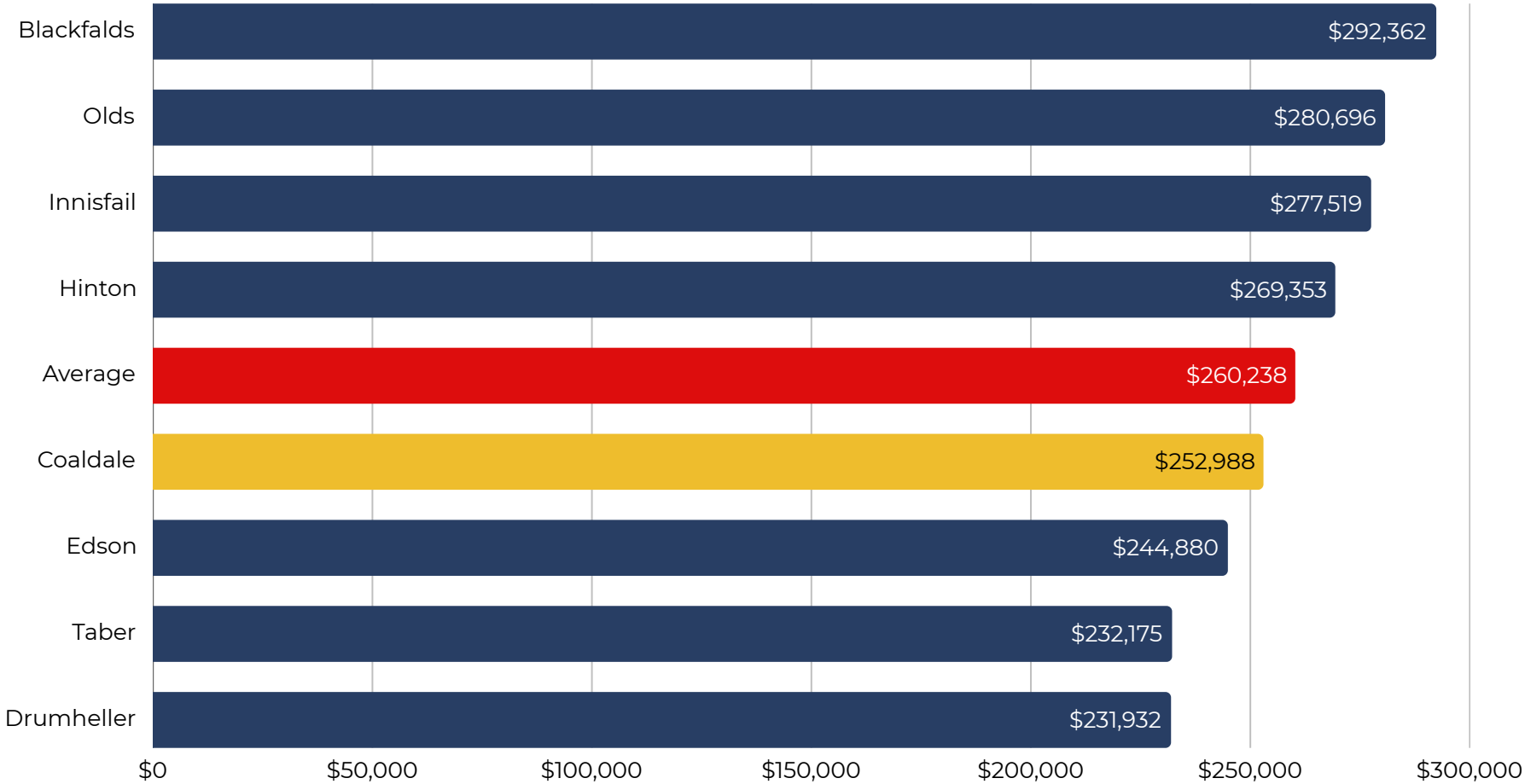


CHART 5: MAYOR AND COUNCILLOR COMPENSATION (2024)



As Chart 5 shows, Coaldale continues to take a balanced approach to elected official compensation. At $55,793, Coaldale's mayoral compensation is 8.6% below the group average of $61,010, while remaining higher than Innisfail and neighbouring Taber. Councillor compensation, meanwhile, is somewhat higher than average: at $38,035, Coaldale's councillor compensation is 9.1% above the group average of $34,849, but still remains below Blackfalds and Olds. Taken together, these figures suggest that Coaldale neither overpays nor underpays its elected officials. Rather, by avoiding the higher mayoral compensation seen in communities like Blackfalds, Hinton, and Olds, while also avoiding the more restrained spending seen in Taber and Innisfail, Coaldale strikes a pragmatic balance between providing elected officials with fair compensation and maintaining fiscal responsibility.

CHART 6: CAO COMPENSATION (2024)



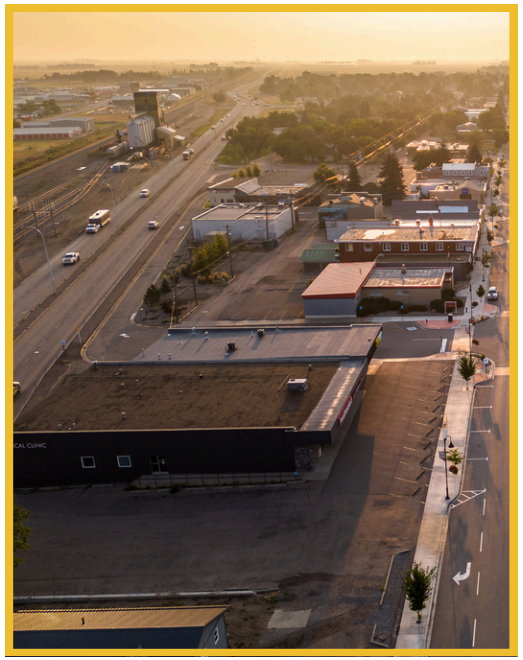
When it comes to CAO compensation, the story is much the same. As Chart 6 illustrates, while Coaldale spends significantly less on CAO compensation than Blackfalds, Olds, Innisfail, and Hinton (where CAO compensation ranges from just under $270,000 per year to just over $290,000 per year and are therefore approximately 4% to 11% higher than the group average), Coaldale also spends significantly more on CAO compensation than neighbouring Taber (which compensates its CAO at $232,175 per year or 10.8% below the group average). Like its expenditures on compensation for elected officials, then, Coaldale's expenditures on CAO compensation demonstrate a commendable balance between attracting and retaining top-tier talent and maintaining fiscal responsibility. Positioned at just 2.8% below the group average, Coaldale compensates its CAO at $252,988 per year — a figure that is competitive within its cohort while remaining lower than four of the seven peer municipalities included in the comparison.

BENCHMARK 4: TAXATION

Taxes are the proverbial lifeblood of municipal governments, providing the critical funding necessary to cover day-to-day operational expenses and support new capital projects. Without tax revenue, municipalities would struggle to function effectively, even with supplementary income from government transfers or utility fees. Despite their necessity, however, taxes remain a perennial source of frustration for residents and business owners, who neither enjoy paying them nor seeing them increase. How a municipality approaches taxation therefore reveals much about its priorities and fiscal philosophy. To balance public sentiment with financial needs, elected officials often avoid drastic changes to property taxes, opting instead for gradual adjustments to residential and non-residential mill rates. This approach at once reflects a desire to maintain fiscal stability while keeping the municipality competitive and appealing to taxpayers, ensuring a sustainable foundation for long-term growth and community development. To evaluate how each municipality is managing its approach to taxation (and, by extension, how competitive it is trying to be relative to its peers and neighbours), Benchmark 4 therefore tracks the percentage change in residential and non-residential mill rates over a four-year period (the length of a Council term).

KEY FINDING:

Over the past four years, Coaldale achieved a 14.4% reduction in its residential mill rate — the second-largest reduction among its peer and neighbouring municipalities and more than 6 times the group average of 2.3%.



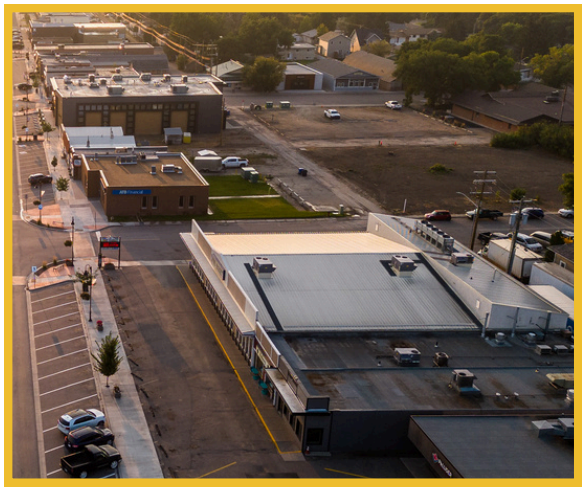
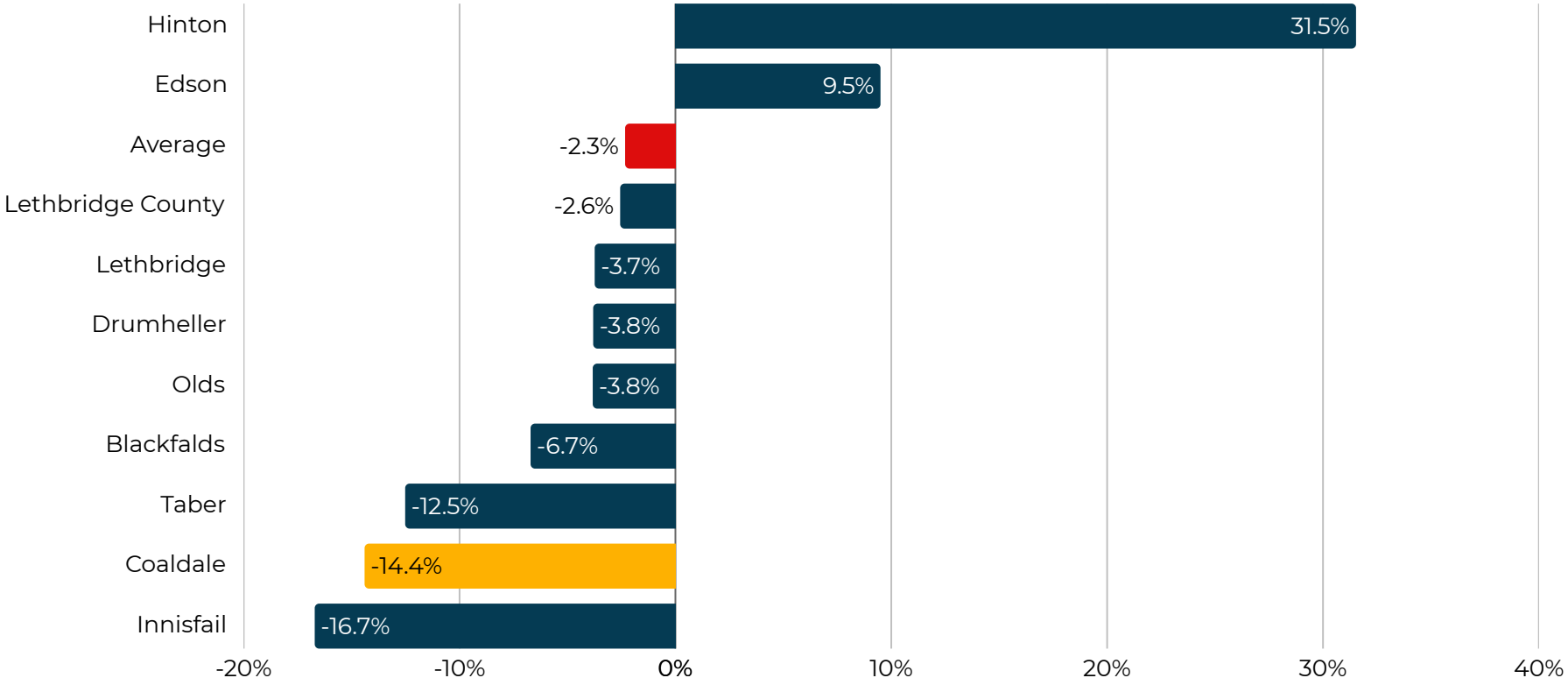


CHART 7: PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN RESIDENTIAL MILL RATES (2022-2025)

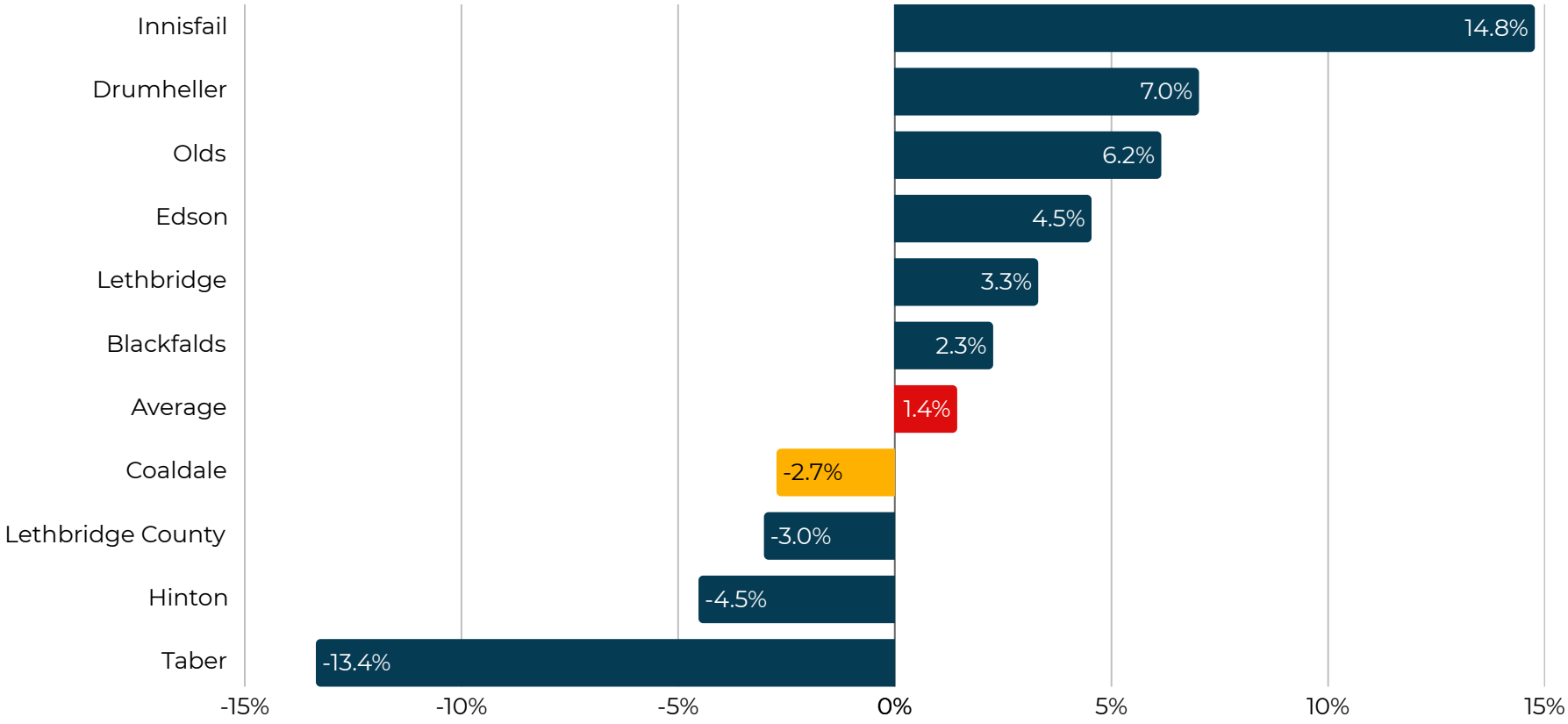
Residential mill rates are one of the clearest measures of how affordable a municipality is for homeowners. While property taxes are only one part of the overall cost of homeownership, changes in residential mill rates help show whether a municipality is working to maintain a competitive and affordable tax environment for current and prospective residents.



As Chart 7 illustrates, from 2022–2025, residential mill rates generally declined across Coaldale's peer and neighbouring municipalities, though not uniformly. Hinton and Edson were the only municipalities to move against this trend, increasing their residential mill rates by 31.5% and 9.5%, respectively. Among those municipalities that reduced their rates, the size of the reductions varied considerably, with only three recording decreases greater than 10%. Among this group of three, Coaldale recorded the second-largest reduction, with its residential mill rate falling by 14.4% — a decrease more than six times greater than the group average of 2.3%.

CHART 8: PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN NON-RESIDENTIAL MILL RATES (2022-2025)

Residential mill rates provide one measure of tax competitiveness, but they are only part of the picture. Non-residential mill rates are also important, particularly because they influence how attractive a municipality is to businesses and investors.



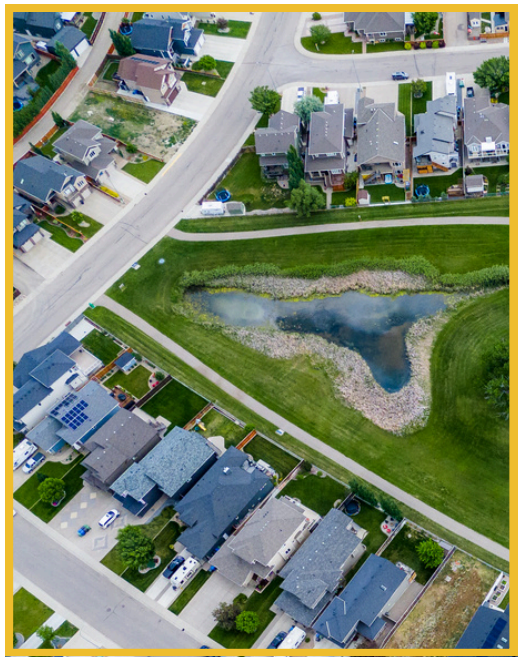
As Chart 8 illustrates, from 2022–2025, non-residential mill rates increased across most of Coaldale's peer and neighbouring municipalities. Innisfail recorded the largest increase at 14.8%, followed by Drumheller at 7.0%, Olds at 6.2%, Edson at 4.5%, Lethbridge at 3.3%, and Blackfalds at 2.3%. As a result, the group average increased by 1.4%. Conversely, while Taber recorded the largest reduction over the same period at 13.4%, Coaldale also moved in the opposite direction, reducing its non-residential mill rate by 2.7% and becoming one of only four municipalities in the group to do so.

BENCHMARK 5: ASSESSMENT GROWTH

Assessment growth is driven by two main factors: 1) increases in property values due to rising residential and non-residential real estate prices, and 2) the construction of new residential and non-residential properties. As a result, measuring assessment growth makes it possible to determine not only whether a municipality's property tax base is appreciating or depreciating in value, but also—and more importantly—whether its approach to taxation is in fact working. When a municipality's approach to taxation is working, we should be able to identify a correlation between its competitive mill rates, on the one hand, and robust assessment growth on the other. Conversely, if a municipality's approach to taxation is not working, we should be able to identify a correlation between uncompetitive mill rates, on the one hand, and little to no assessment growth on the other. For this reason, Benchmark 5 tracks per capita assessment growth in each municipality, offering a clearer picture of which ones are successfully fostering a climate conducive to growth and investment.

KEY FINDING:

From 2020–2026, Coaldale ranked first in both per capita residential and per capita non-residential assessment growth, coming in 64% and 158% above the group average, respectively.



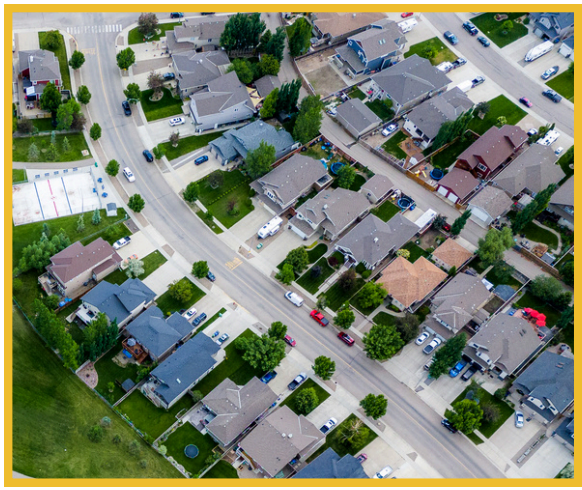
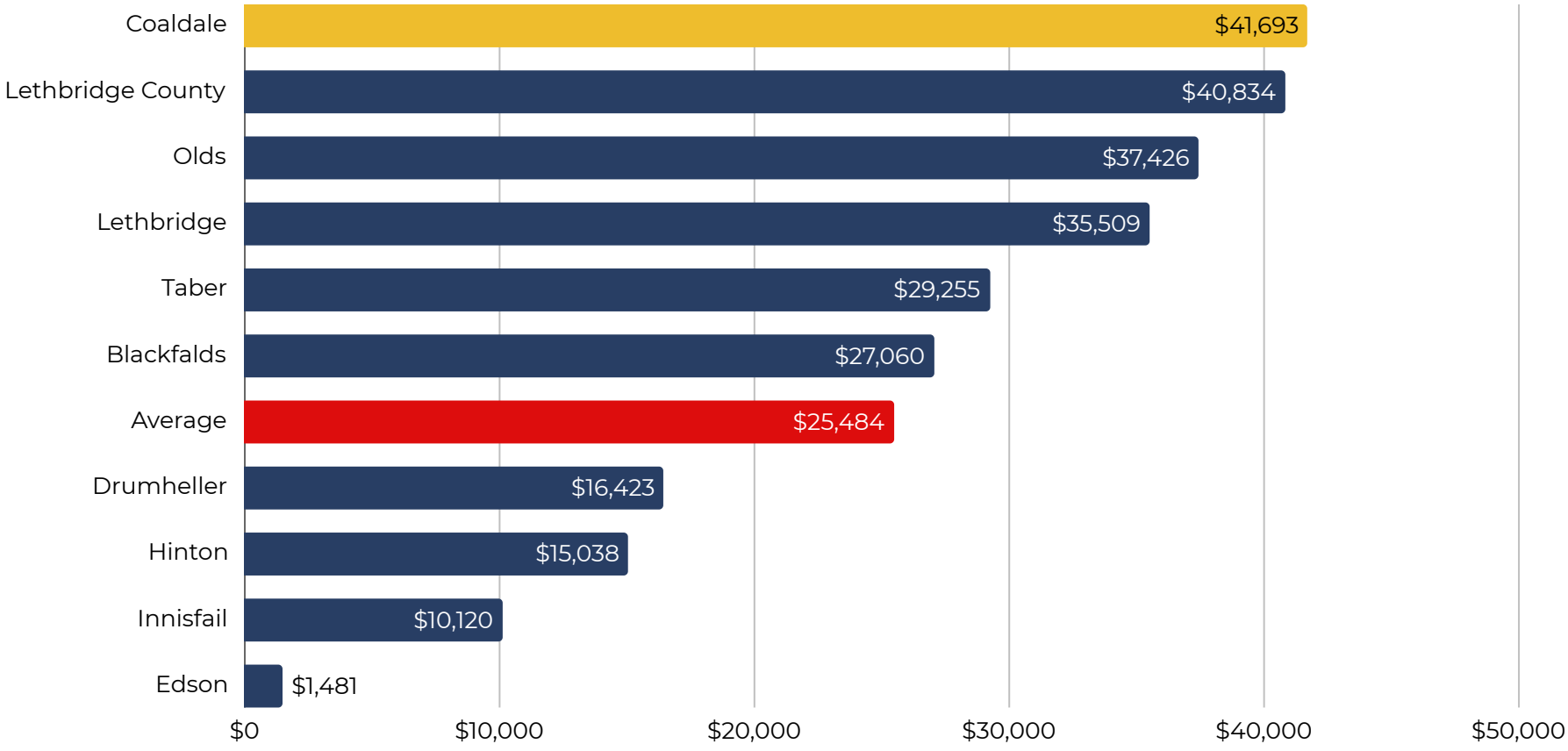
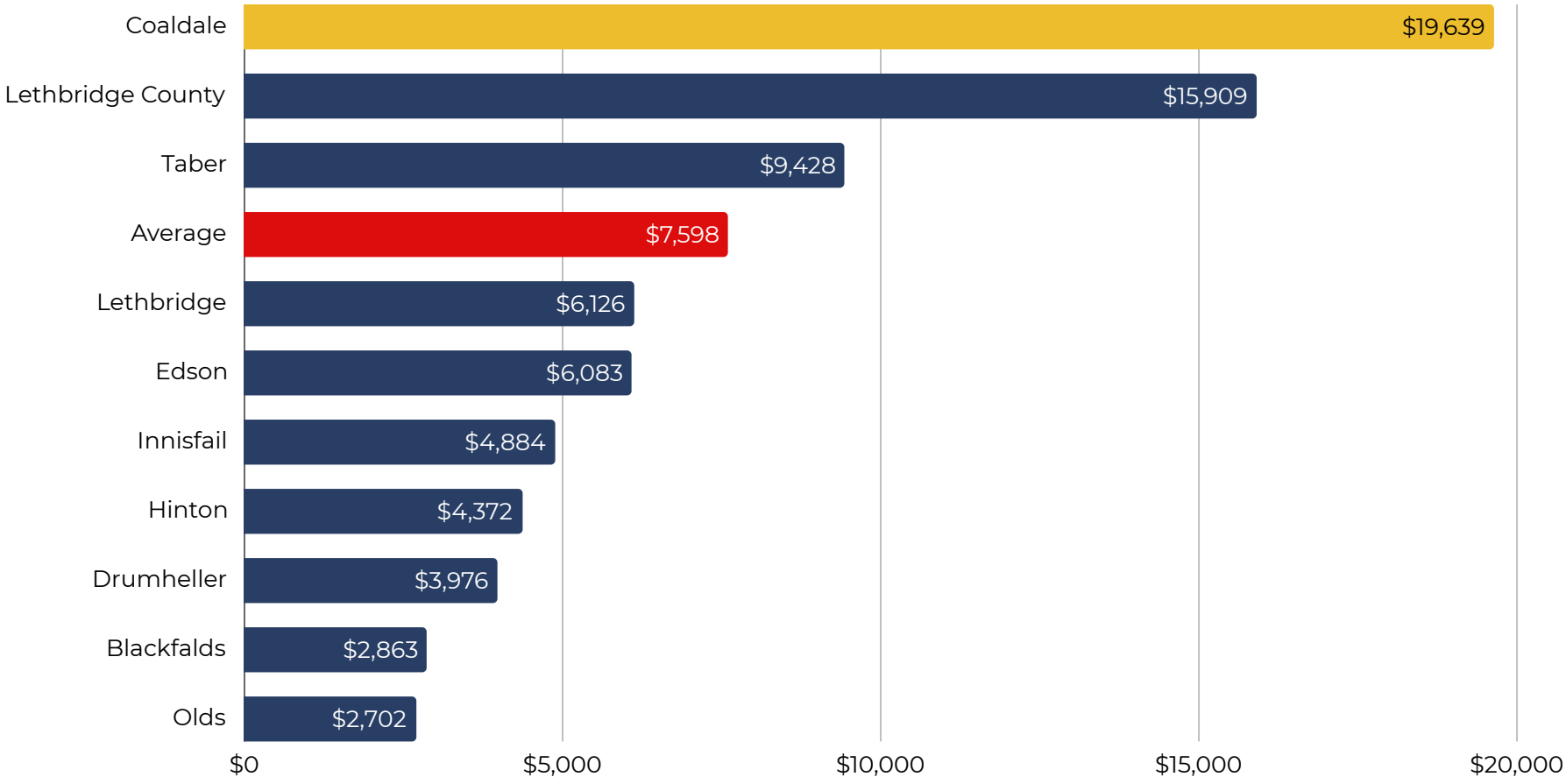


CHART 9: PER CAPITA RESIDENTIAL ASSESSMENT GROWTH (2020-2026)



Recall that over the last four years, residential mill rates in several of Coaldale's peer and neighbouring municipalities saw significant increases, while Coaldale's saw a 14.4% decrease. As Chart 9 shows, Coaldale's approach to residential taxation appears to be paying off. From 2020–2026, Coaldale recorded the highest per capita residential assessment growth among its peer and neighbouring municipalities, including Lethbridge County, Olds, Lethbridge, and Taber. At $41,693, Coaldale's per capita residential assessment growth was 17% higher than neighbouring Lethbridge's ($35,509), 43% higher than neighbouring Taber's ($29,255), and 64% higher than the group average ($25,484). What this strong per capita growth suggests is that by maintaining competitive residential mill rates, Coaldale continues to reap the benefits of a competitive housing market where demand for residential real estate remains relatively high.

CHART 10: PER CAPITA NON-RESIDENTIAL ASSESSMENT GROWTH (2020-2026)



Recall again that over the last four years, non-residential mill rates in several of Coaldale's peer and neighbouring municipalities saw significant increases, while Coaldale's saw a 2.7% decrease. As Chart 10 shows, Coaldale's approach to non-residential taxation also appears to be paying off. From 2020–2026, Coaldale recorded the highest per capita non-residential assessment growth among its peer and neighbouring municipalities. At $19,639 per resident, Coaldale's non-residential assessment growth was 221% higher than neighbouring Lethbridge's ($6,126), 108% higher than neighbouring Taber's ($9,428), and 158% higher than the group average ($7,598). What this strong growth suggests, then, is that by maintaining competitive non-residential mill rates, Coaldale continues to attract outside investment at a level that far surpasses its peer and neighbouring municipalities.

BENCHMARK 6: POPULATION GROWTH

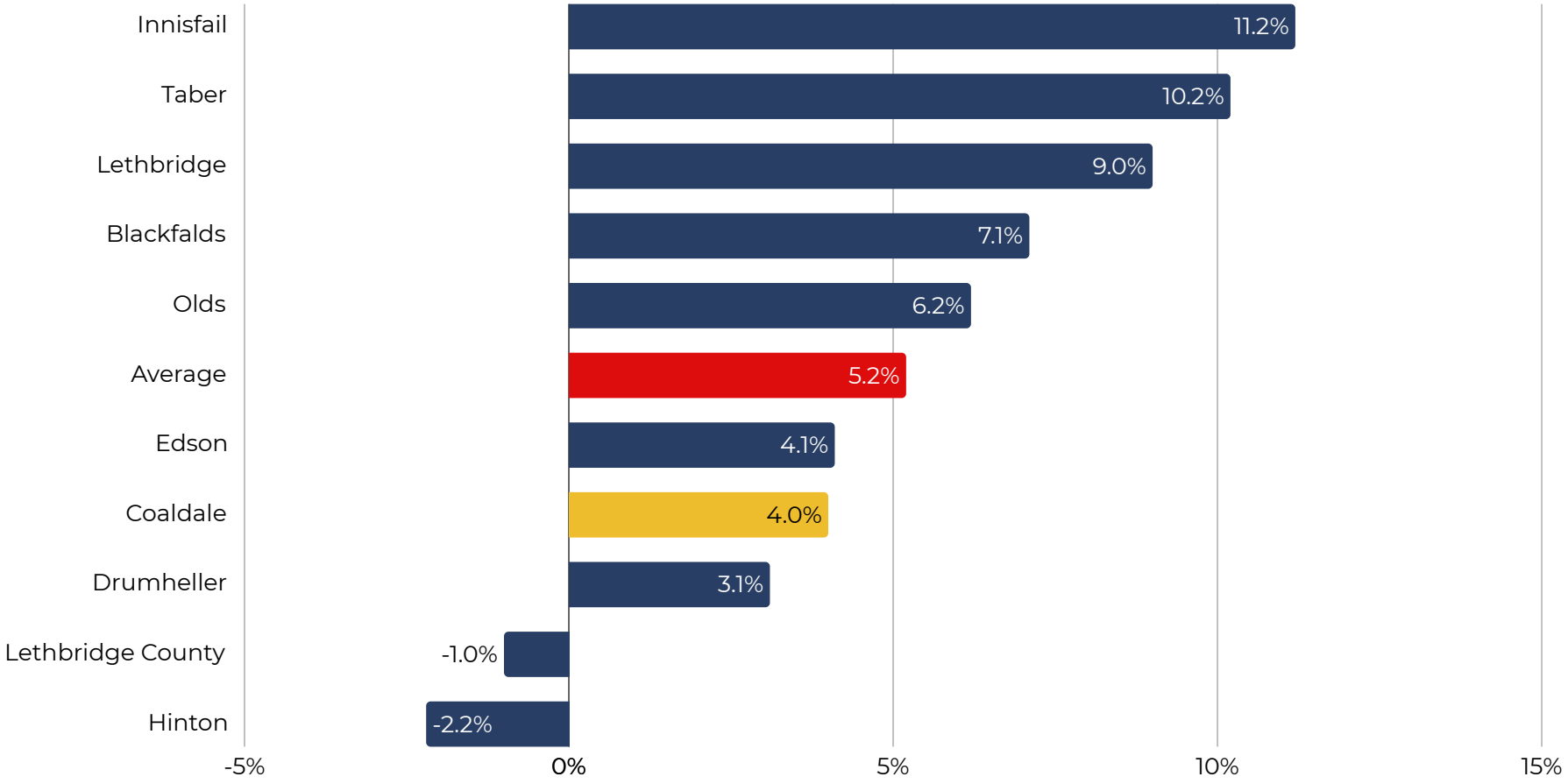
Population growth is one of the clearest indicators of a municipality's relative health and economic vitality. First, sustained population growth often signals a strong local economy, as people tend to relocate to communities where employment opportunities are available and investment conditions are favourable. If a municipality is growing while its peer and neighbouring municipalities are not, this may suggest that its economic policies are helping to create a more attractive environment for residents, businesses, and investment. Second, population growth can indicate that a municipality is managing its infrastructure and public services effectively. Well-maintained roads, reliable utilities, quality schools, and access to healthcare all contribute to a community's ability to attract and retain residents. Finally, population growth often reflects broader perceptions of a municipality's quality of life, including whether it is seen as safe, inclusive, and attractive to families, young professionals, and retirees. Conversely, if a municipality is losing population while neighbouring municipalities are growing, it may be an indication that it is struggling to remain competitive as a place to live, work, and invest. Benchmark 6 therefore tracks population growth in each municipality.

KEY FINDING:

From 2020–2024, Coaldale's population grew by 4.0% — 4.96 percentage points lower than neighbouring Lethbridge and 6.19 percentage points lower than neighbouring Taber.

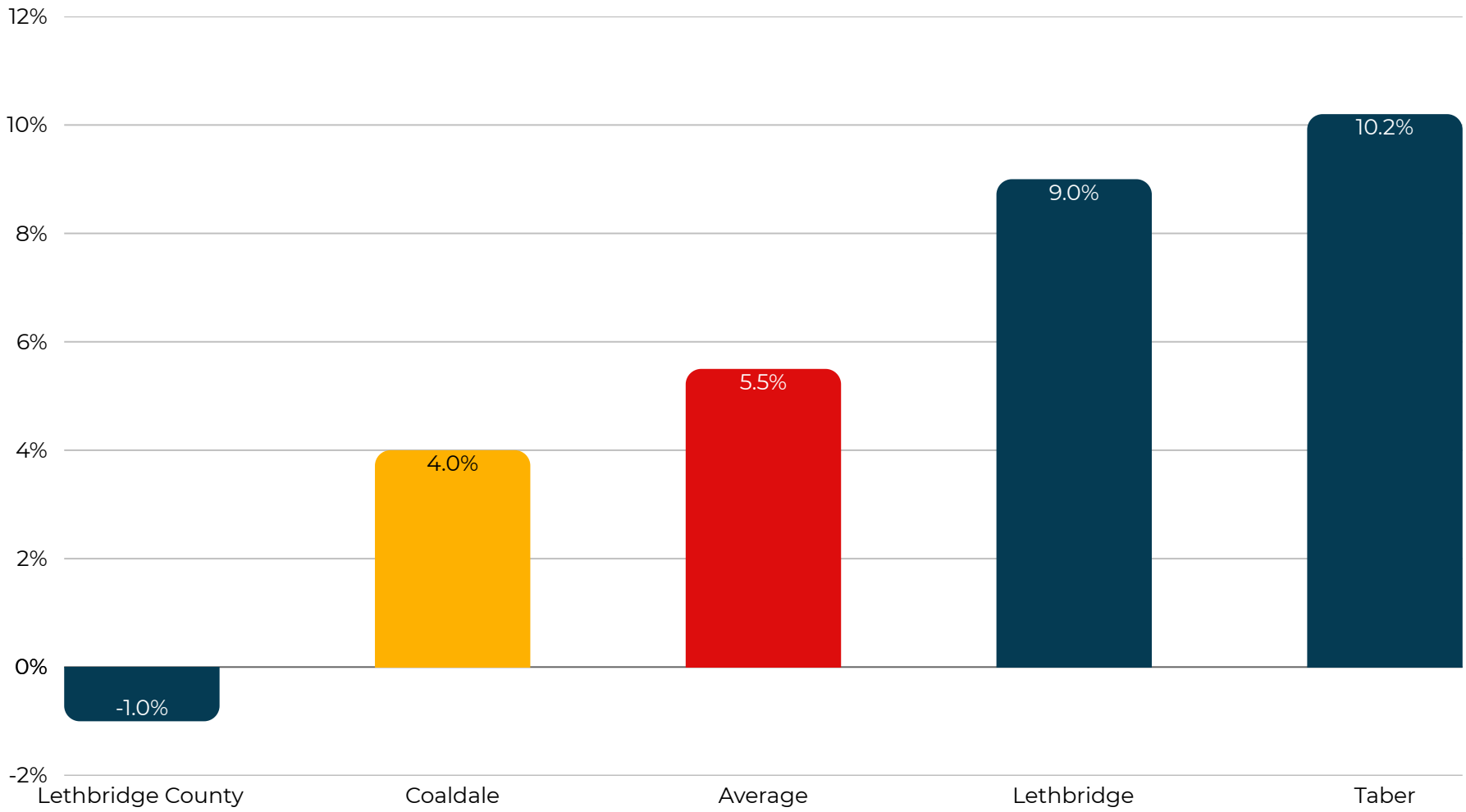
CHART 11: POPULATION GROWTH (2020-2024)

Population statistics used in this analysis are taken from the Government of Alberta and can be found online on its "Regional Dashboard." These numbers reflect annual estimates rather than the defined results of a federal census, which are only updated once every five years.



As Chart 11 shows, from 2020–2024 Coaldale's population grew by 4.0%. This places Coaldale slightly below the group average of 5.2% and near the lower-middle of the comparison group: below Innisfail, Taber, Lethbridge, Blackfalds, Olds, and Edson, but above Drumheller, Lethbridge County, and Hinton. When considered alongside Coaldale's leading per capita residential and non-residential assessment growth, the data suggests that Coaldale's comparatively modest population growth has less to do with community appeal (or a lack thereof) than it does with housing availability, particularly in the middle and multifamily markets.

CHART 12: POPULATION GROWTH (2020-2024)



From a regional perspective, Coaldale's population growth follows the same pattern. As Chart 12 shows, from 2020–2024, Coaldale's population grew by 4.0%, placing it ahead of Lethbridge County, which declined by 1.0%, but behind Lethbridge and Taber, which grew by 9.0% and 10.2%, respectively. But again, when considered alongside Coaldale's strong assessment growth, this comparison suggests that Coaldale's lower rate of population growth was driven less by weak demand than by limited housing availability. As additional residential developments come online, Coaldale's population is expected to significantly increase in future years.

BENCHMARK 7: CRIME SEVERITY

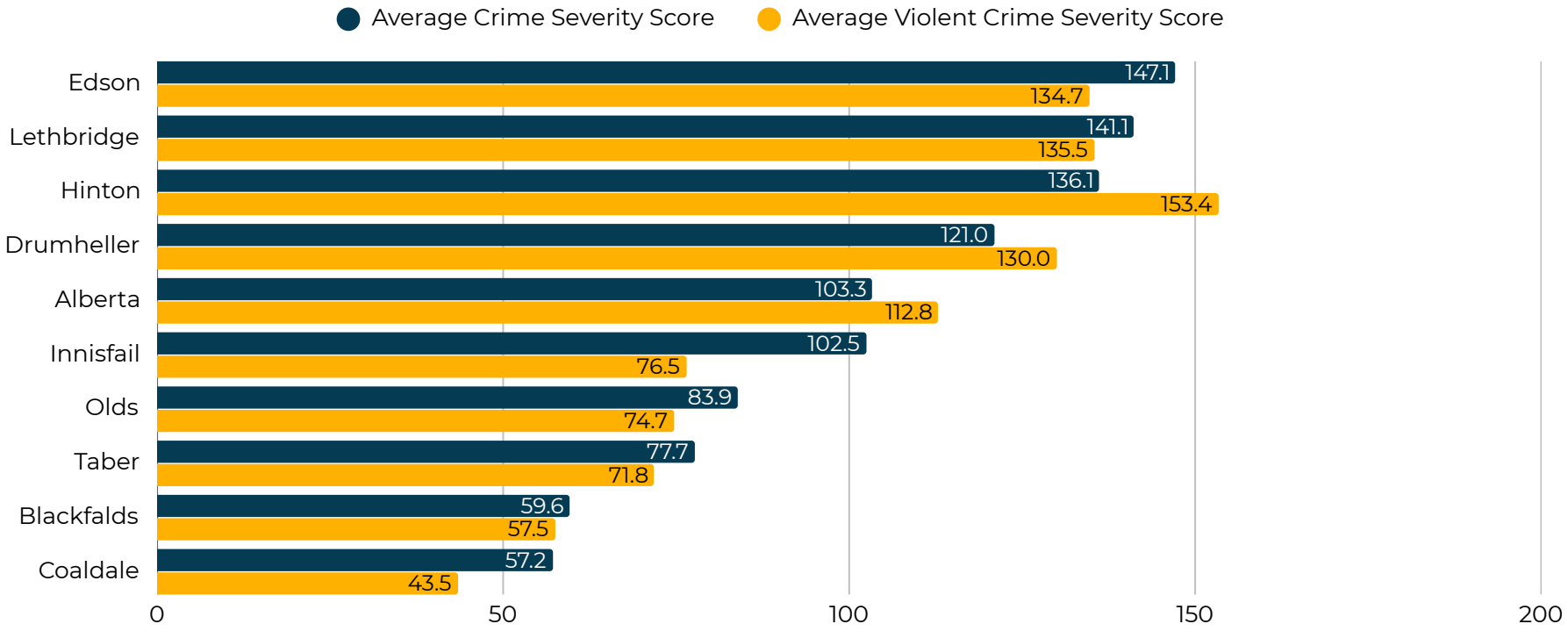
When comparing Coaldale to its peer and competitor municipalities, a seventh and final performance metric worth considering is its Crime Severity Index (CSI) score - and for several reasons. First, there is a well-documented relationship between population growth and crime, which is often described as "superlinear" in nature. This means that as a municipality's population doubles, the number of crimes committed tends to increase by more than double. This pattern emphasizes the importance of proactive crime prevention and management strategies in rapidly growing communities. Second, the impact of crime—violent crime in particular—on property values is also widely recognized. Studies consistently show that rising crime rates, especially violent incidents, lead to declining property values. This relationship occurs because crime creates an environment of insecurity, making areas less attractive to both prospective homeowners and investors. Achieving sustainable assessment and population growth, then, requires municipalities to focus not only on keeping overall crime rates low but on addressing specific types of crime that pose the greatest threat to community well-being, in particular. Factors such as violent crime, theft, and drug-related incidents have particularly strong effects on public perception and economic vitality. Benchmark 7, therefore, measures each municipality's Crime Severity Index score.

KEY FINDING:

With an average CSI score of 57.2, Coaldale ranks as the safest municipality its size in Alberta, the 3rd safest municipality its size in western Canada, and the 10th safest municipality its size in the country.

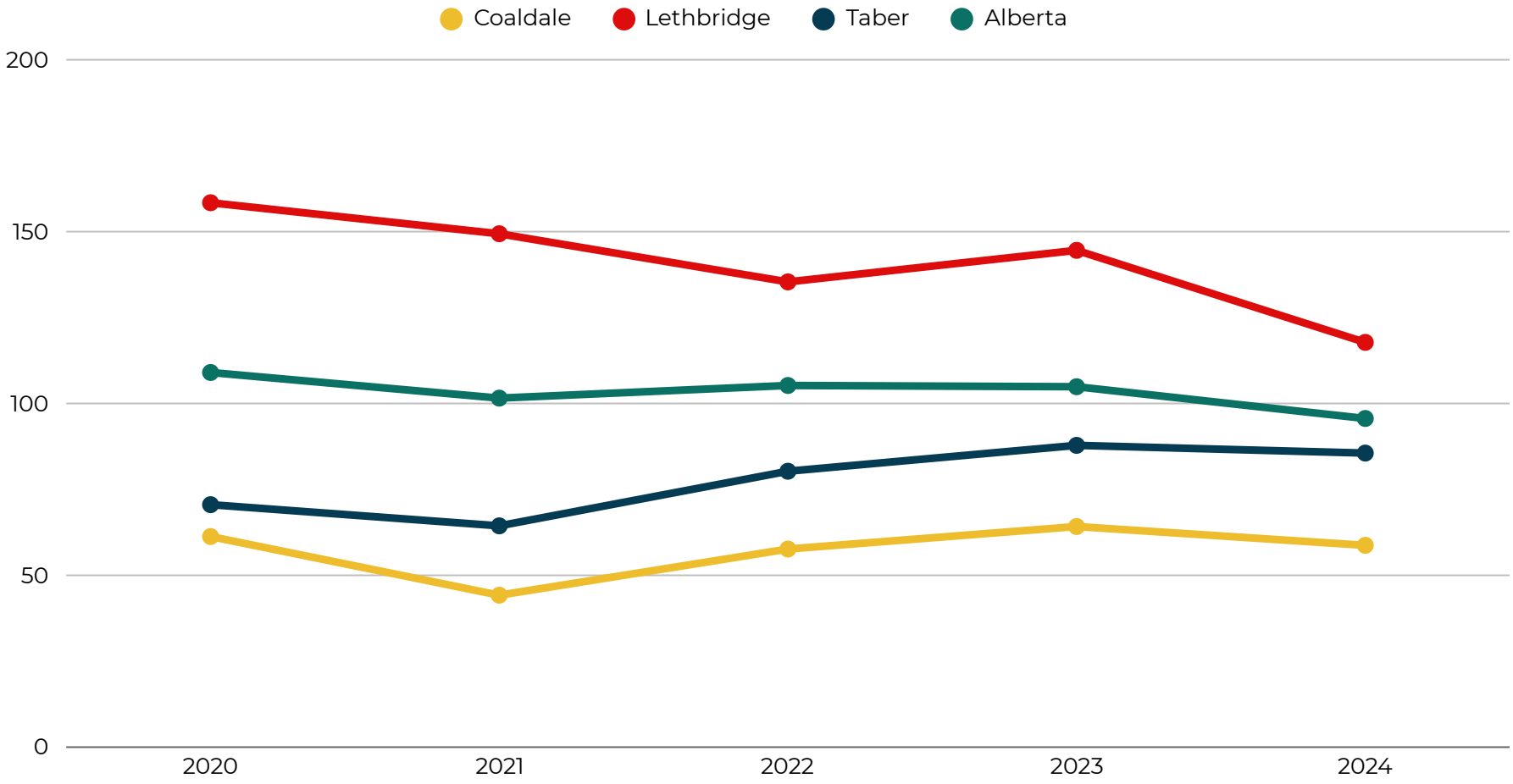
CHART 13: AVERAGE CRIME SEVERITY INDEX SCORE (2020-2024)

According to Statistics Canada, CSI scores are calculated using two factors: the number of crimes reported by police in a given jurisdiction and the relative seriousness of those crimes. More serious offences are weighted more heavily, while less serious offences are weighted less heavily. As a result, a municipality's CSI score can fluctuate significantly from one year to the next, especially if there is an increase in the number or severity of reported crimes, particularly violent crimes. For this reason, relying on a single year of CSI data can provide an incomplete picture of community safety. A five-year average offers a more reliable measure by smoothing out year-to-year fluctuations and providing a clearer sense of how safe or unsafe a municipality actually is.



That Canada's CSI score is always 100 means that municipalities with an average CSI score of above 100 are less safe while municipalities with an average CSI score of below 100 are more safe. As Chart 13 shows, Coaldale has the lowest average CSI score among its peer and neighbouring municipalities. Coming in at just 57.2, Coaldale's average CSI score is 50.5 points lower than the provincial average (107.7), and 89.9 points lower than high-crime Edson. This low CSI score is primarily due to the fact that violent crime in Coaldale has remained, on average, relatively low. For the years between 2020-2024, Coaldale saw an average violent crime score of just 43.5, which is 69.3 points lower than the provincial average (112.8).

CHART 14: CRIME SEVERITY INDEX SCORES (2020-2024)



When compared to its regional neighbours, Coaldale again stands out for having a relatively low CSI score. As Chart 14 shows, from 2020-2024 Lethbridge's annual CSI scores were at least twice those of Coaldale, thereby giving Lethbridge an average CSI score of 141.1. During the same period, Taber's annual CSI scores were also consistently higher than those of Coaldale, thereby giving Taber an average CSI score of 77.7. When compared to Lethbridge and Taber, then, Coaldale sees less violent and non-violent crime, making it the safest urban municipality its size in the region. In fact, with an average CSI score of 57.2, Coaldale ranks as the safest municipality its size in Alberta, the 3rd safest municipality its size in western Canada (behind only Kimberley B.C. and Qualicum Beach B.C.), and the 10th safest municipality its size in the country.

CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES THIS INFORMATION TELL US?

The Town of Coaldale's 2025 Comparative Analysis provides a clear picture of Coaldale's standing among its peer and neighbouring municipalities. Across the seven benchmarks examined in this report, Coaldale continues to demonstrate strong performance in financial management, compensation control, taxation, assessment growth, population growth, and public safety.

From a financial management perspective, Coaldale continues to operate as a low revenue, low spend municipality. With per capita operating costs of approximately $1,900, Coaldale has the lowest operating expenditures in the group and remains about 28% below the group average. At the same time, Coaldale maintains one of the healthiest revenue-expenditure ratios, spending approximately 71 cents for every dollar it takes in. This indicates that the Town is managing its resources in a disciplined and sustainable way.

This same discipline is evident in the Town's approach to salaries, wages, and benefits. In 2024, Coaldale spent $807 per resident on salaries, wages, and benefits — the lowest amount among its peer and neighbouring municipalities. This is $217 less per resident than neighbouring Taber, $759 less than neighbouring Lethbridge, and $280 less than the group average.

On taxation, the Analysis shows that Coaldale remains focused on affordability and competitiveness. From 2022–2025, Coaldale reduced its residential mill rate by 14.4% and its non-residential mill rate by 2.7%. While many municipalities increased or only modestly reduced their rates, Coaldale continued to maintain a competitive tax environment for residents, businesses, and investors.

This approach appears to be producing results. From 2020–2026, Coaldale ranked first in both per capita residential and non-residential assessment growth, coming in 64% and 158% above the group average, respectively. At the same time, Coaldale's population grew by 4.0% from 2020–2024. While this was below the group average and lower than neighbouring Lethbridge and Taber, the data suggests that population growth was constrained more by limited housing availability than by weak demand.

Finally, Coaldale continues to stand out as a safe community. With an average Crime Severity Index score of 57.2, Coaldale ranks as the safest municipality its size in Alberta, the third safest in western Canada, and the tenth safest in the country. This strong public safety profile reinforces Coaldale's appeal as a place to live, raise a family, and invest.