

OCP and Zoning Bylaw Update

Engagement Summary July 2025

Introduction

The District of Fort St. James is undertaking an update of the Official Community Plan (OCP) and Zoning Bylaw. These projects will play an important role in how the community grows and changes over time.

As part of the Province of British Columbia's initiative to create more housing, all OCPs in BC need to be updated by the end of 2025 to reflect the results of their Interim Housing Needs Assessment.

In early 2025, the District hired Stantec to support this work; District Staff and Stantec are working closely together as the Project Team. Meaningful engagement is important to the District of Fort St. James leadership and staff and will help to make these important community planning documents more relevant and effective.

Community Engagement: Round 1

There are two rounds of community engagement planned for the 2025 OCP and Zoning Bylaw update. The first round of engagement occurred through June and July 2025 and focused on raising awareness and collecting feedback on the community's vision, goals, and priorities. The second round of engagement is scheduled for September 2025 and will focus on reviewing the draft documents.

The first round of engagement included:

- 3 community pop-ups (at the grocery store, Spirit Square and liquor store)
- 1 community open house at the ~~Recreation Centre~~
- Community survey (between June 16 and July 15)

Through the pop-up events and the community open house, a total of 38 participants provided feedback, while an additional 19 participants completed the survey. The events included display boards and presentation (see Appendices A and B). These documents provided an overview of the purpose of the OCP and Zoning Bylaw, and outlined key themes and a draft vision based on input from previous OCP engagement.

The following is a summary of the emerging themes and community comments received during the first round of engagement.

Key Themes

- When asked what they **love** about their community, residents noted:
 - o The town is peaceful and quiet, with a small town character
 - o The people and sense of community
 - o The community's heritage, arts, and culture
 - o Access to nature, Stuart Lake, and wilderness
 - o Plentiful outdoor areas and recreation opportunities
- Participants noted several opportunities to help **improve** Fort St. James:
 - o Enhancing tourism opportunities (year-round activities)
 - o Supporting economic development and diversification (industry, small businesses, increasing retail and restaurant options)
 - o Expanding recreation opportunities and increasing trail and path connectivity
 - o Increasing housing options and choice (including seniors' housing)
 - o Focusing on attracting and retaining residents of all ages
 - o Improving the aesthetics of downtown and enhancing Spirit Square as the hub of the community
- The following areas were generally identified as **high priorities** for participants:
 - o Climate and emergency preparedness
 - o Community health and well-being
 - o Environmental protection
 - o Housing and more housing options
 - o Outdoor areas and wilderness
 - o Public spaces and recreation

Key Themes (continued)

- When thinking about **challenges** that Fort St. James will face in the future, participants noted:
 - o Economic uncertainty due to the decline in the forestry sector
 - o Challenges with attracting businesses and limited employment opportunities
 - o Declining population
 - o Increasing cost of living, especially when it comes to housing affordability
 - o Limited housing options
 - o Aging municipal infrastructure
 - o Social issues, including homelessness, and challenges related to mental health and addictions
- Respondents did not raise any **specific concerns** with the existing OCP or Zoning Bylaw when asked if they had experienced any challenges or issues.

Draft Vision

- The **draft vision** for the OCP *“Fort St. James is resilient community where the District and the Nak’azdli Whut’en work as partners in community planning and growth. Residents enjoy a high quality of life based on access to nature, affordable living, a vibrant downtown, a diverse economy, strong community spirit and a small community lifestyle.”* generally resonated with participants.

Nak’azdli Whut’en First Nation

- Overall, there is a strong connection to the **Nak’azdli Whut’en First Nation** and neighbouring four First Nations and participants expressed an interest in increased collaboration, partnering, and engagement including:
 - o Relationships and reconciliation
 - o Enhancing cultural diversity
 - o Increased dialogue, communication and collaboration
 - o Improving health and safety in the community
 - o Find ways to work together on projects
 - o Developing cultural gathering spaces
 - o Working together as one community

Infrastructure and Mobility

- The following comments were related to **infrastructure and mobility**:
 - o Focus on ensuring that basic infrastructure, like water and sewer, are working well before undertaking new projects
 - o Address ongoing issues with water quality
 - o Work to make the town centre denser, with a broader mixed of uses
 - o Work to ensure that the community is barrier free and accessible
 - o Focus on walkability and active transportation
 - o Collaborate with other levels of government on projects whenever possible
 - o Connect trails to create a usable, multi-modal network to connect key destinations
 - o Build new Fire Hall
 - o Plan for the long term as many facilities will need to be replaced over time
 - o Revitalize old rail trails

Local Economy

- The following comments were related to the **local economy**:
 - o Improve services and activities for tourists
 - o Promote the community as a place to visit year round
 - o Ensure that the community is open for business and share this message potential investors and visitors
 - o Find ways to encourage development and redevelopment of existing lots
 - o Develop mechanisms for the community to adapt to changing economic conditions
 - o Minimize red tape and streamline development processes where possible
 - o Focus on attracting stable year-round jobs
 - o Consider impact of population decline for the local economy
 - o Redevelop the airport
 - o Recognize that the local tax base is small, especially with decrease in local forest industry

Housing

- The following comments were related to **housing**:
 - o Work to add more affordable and diverse housing options
 - o Encourage a mix of housing types, including mixed-use development
 - o Encourage higher density housing, especially in the downtown core
 - o Increase housing, specifically for seniors
 - o Provide housing for hospital staff
 - o ~~Make it easier for new staff community to find housing~~

Recreation

- The following comments were related to **recreation**:
 - o Develop the area around the community hall into a recreational hub
 - o Increase indoor recreation opportunities to community members, especially for youth and seniors
 - o Consider developing a pool in the community
 - o Create recreation opportunities for all
 - o Focus on maintaining and improving existing parks and recreation opportunities
 - o Improve access to Stuart Lake and local swimming beaches
 - o Continue to improve Spirit Square as a community hub
 - o Continue to expand outdoor recreation opportunities
 - o Support work of local volunteer groups
 - o Repair local marina
 - o Work to increase the use, and usability, of the recreation centre

Community and Culture

- The following comments were related to **community and culture**:
 - o Work with Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation, other levels of government and other partners to deal with homelessness and related social issues
 - o Encourage volunteers to get involved and find ways for the District to support volunteers and local groups
 - o Maintain heritage resources
 - o Showcase local artists
 - o Address the lack of childcare
 - o Address the need for drop-in space for homeless people year round
 - o Facilitate community members working together
 - o Provide more social supports for youth, people dealing with mental health and addictions issues, homeless people and seniors
 - o Ensure infrastructure and services are in place so that people can age in place

Next Steps

- All information gathered during Round 1 Engagement will be reviewed by the Project Team. The themes and information collected will be considered in the development of the OCP and Zoning Bylaw in August-September 2025.
- The second round of community engagement will present the draft OCP and Zoning Bylaw for feedback from the community prior to finalizing the plans. The second round of engagement is planned for September 2025.
- Following the engagement, the Project Team will support the District to prepare a Council Report to approve the Final OCP and Zoning Bylaw between October-December 2025.

Appendix A

Display Boards



WELCOME

Thank you for your interest in the For St James Official Community Plan (OCP) and Zoning Bylaw (ZBL) update project!

Project Overview

The District of Fort St. James is undertaking a renewal of the Official Community Plan (OCP) and Zoning Bylaw (ZBL). These projects will play an important role in how the community grows and changes over time.

Why is the District updating the OCP and ZBL?

- Best practice suggests an update approximately every 10 years to make sure the vision and policies reflect the current conditions and desires of the community.
- As part of the Province's initiative to deliver more homes, all OCP's in BC need to be updated by the end of 2025 to reflect the results of their Housing Needs Assessments.
- A draft OCP was developed in 2023, but was never adopted.

How can you be involved?

Share your thoughts! Hearing from you, we will be able to use the community's vision to determine what the priorities are for how policies and regulations can be updated.

What is your vision for Fort St. James?

What do you love about this community?

What do you think could be better?

Where would you like to see growth?

What worries you for the future living here?

PROJECT TIMELINE

1. Project Kick-Off and Background Review
2. **Engagement Round 1**
Visioning and Priority Setting (June)
3. Draft OCP with Ideas for ZBL Amendments
4. **Engagement Round 2**
Review of the Draft OCP and ZBL Amendment Ideas (September)
5. Finalization of the OCP and Drafting of the ZBL
6. Council Adoption Process with **Public Hearing** (November)

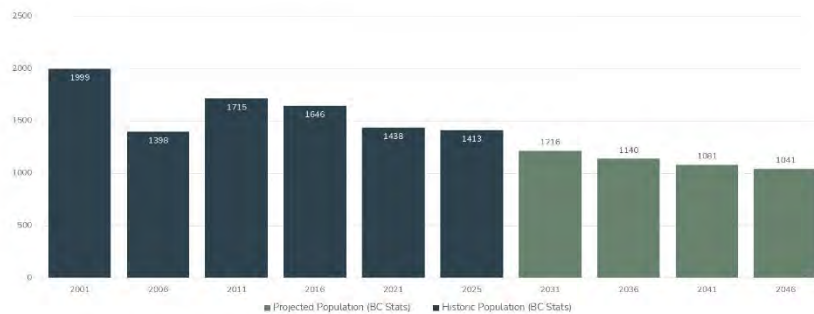


OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN AND ZONING BYLAW UPDATE



POPULATION AND HOUSING

Historic and projected population



Results of the Housing Needs Report

	Additional Housing Units Needed	
	5-year	20-year
A. Extreme Core Housing Need (Living in unsuitable housing due to size, age, or condition)	3.8 units	15 units
B. Persons Experiencing Homelessness	2.2 units	4.4 units
C. Suppressed Household Formation (Living with others because they cannot find alternative housing)	12.7 units	51 units
D. Anticipated Growth	5.2 units	-20.4 units
E. Rental Vacancy Rate Adjustment (Housing needed to achieve a 3% vacancy rate)	0.8 units	3.2 units
F. Additional Local Demand (Demand buffer)	16.2 units	64.8 units
Total	41 units	118 units

Results of the Housing Needs Assessment were calculated using the guidelines and standards set by the BC Government, using the Housing Assessment Resource Tool.

KEY AREAS OF LOCAL NEED

- Expand non-market and supportive options
- Expand rental housing supply
- Plan for the aging population
- Encourage secondary suites and additional dwelling units (backyard suites)
- Promote universal accessibility

How would you like to see housing options expanded to meet your and the community's needs?



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OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN AND ZONING BYLAW UPDATE

WHAT IS AN OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN?

Role

Intended to guide decisions on planning and land use management, by describing the long-term vision of a community.

Content

As outlined in the *Local Government Act*, an OCP **must include**:

- Statements and map designations addressing:
 - the approximate location, amount, type, and density of **residential development** required to meet anticipated housing needs over a period of at least 20 years;
 - the approximate location, amount and type of present and proposed **commercial, industrial, institutional, agricultural, recreational and public utility land uses**;
 - the approximate location and area of **sand and gravel deposits** that are suitable for future sand and gravel extraction;
 - restrictions on the use of **land** that is **subject to hazardous conditions or that is environmentally sensitive to development**;
 - the approximate location and phasing of any **major road, sewer and water systems**;
 - the approximate location and type of present and proposed **public facilities**, including schools, parks and waste treatment and disposal sites;
 - other matters that may, in respect of any plan, be required or authorized by the minister.
- **Housing policies** respecting affordable housing, rental housing and special needs housing.
- **Targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions** in the area covered by the plan, and policies and actions of the local government proposed with respect to achieving those targets.

...and **may include**:

- Policies relating to:
 - **social needs, social well-being and social development**;
 - the **maintenance and enhancement of farming on land in a farming area or in an area designated for agricultural use in the plan**;
 - **preservation, protection, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment, its ecosystems and biological diversity**;
 - **alternative forms of transportation**;
 - **transportation demand management**
- A **regional context statement, consistent with the rest of the plan, of how [required content] and other matters dealt with in the plan, apply in a regional context**.



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OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN AND ZONING BYLAW UPDATE

WHAT IS A ZONING BYLAW?

Role

A Zoning Bylaw is the key implementation tool of the OCP. It is intended to reflect the vision of the community and regulate how land, buildings, and other structures are used.

Content

As outlined in the *Local Government Act*, a Zoning Bylaw divides the community into zones, with established boundaries, and then can regulate:

- Use and density of land, buildings, and other structures
- The form of residential tenure (e.g., rental, ownership)
- Siting, size and dimensions of buildings and other structures and permitted uses
- Shape, dimensions and area of all parcels of land created by subdivision (this can include establishing minimum and maximum parcel sizes)
- Location of uses on the land and within buildings and other structures

Key points

- Should be **specific**, defined boundaries of each zone
- Should identify only what is currently approved for development on that parcel
- Used to **regulate existing development**
- Must be updated to remain in alignment with the OCP
- Each zone has detailed regulations that are applied per legal parcel



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OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN AND ZONING BYLAW UPDATE

DRAFT OCP VISION AND VALUES

Vision

Fort St. James is resilient community where the District and the Nak'azdli Whut'en work as partners in community planning and growth. Residents enjoy a high quality of life based on access to nature, affordable living, a vibrant downtown, a diverse economy, strong community spirit and a small community lifestyle.

Planning Values

1. Strong relationships with First Nations
2. Access to a healthy environment
3. Housing for all
4. Economic diversity and stability
5. Accessible and responsible services

Does this reflect the vision and values of Fort St. James residents today and in the future?

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OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN AND ZONING BYLAW UPDATE

DRAFT POLICY TOPIC AREAS

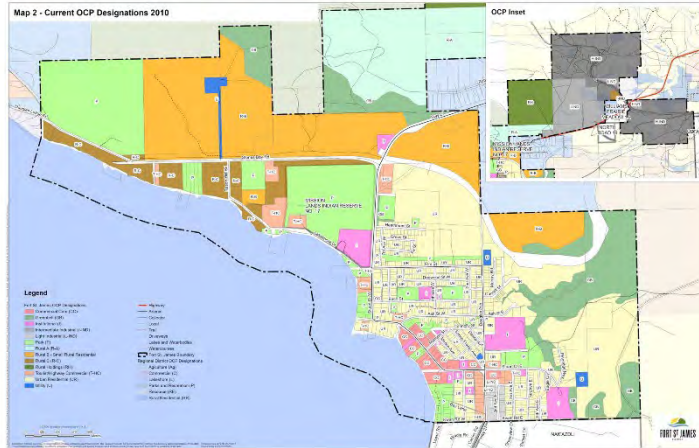
Do these policy areas and goals reflect your priorities?

Topics	Sample Goals	Topics	Sample Goals
Creating community with Nak'azdli Whut'en	- Operate in a way that is respectful of the history, culture and diversity of Indigenous people of the area. - Provide municipal services in a way that fosters the inclusion of Indigenous people... - Collaborate with the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation to foster a close working relationship based on trust and respect. - Use the principles of Truth and Reconciliation to advance relationships, and community healing.	Transportation	- Implement the District of Fort St. James Major Street Network Plan. - Leverage the airport to support regional economic development. - Collaborate with other jurisdictions on transportation initiatives. - Develop a multi-modal transportation network that accommodates vehicular and active modes. - Ensure the District's transportation network is accessible, safe, equitable, and sustainable.
Natural environment	- Conserve open spaces, natural beauty and environmentally sensitive areas. - Protect land, air and water quality for current and future generations. - Protect wetlands and shoreline riparian areas. - Ensure residents have easy access to Stuart Lake and other local natural areas.	Future Growth	- Direct future residential development in an orderly manner to leverage existing municipal services. - Encourage infill and intensification of vacant or underutilized lots. - Encourage comprehensive neighbourhood plans to ensure the development of complete communities. - Consider an integrated approach to transportation and land use planning.
Climate Change	- Reduce community greenhouse gas emissions by promoting compact land use patterns that create complete communities, and minimize unnecessary sprawl. - Promote energy efficiency, energy security and reduced energy costs. - Monitor and report accurate emissions data. - Minimize the negative impacts from floods, wildfires and other geohazards.	Local Economy	- Promote diverse and sustainable local economic development. - Attract people to live, work, and visit in the District. - Strengthen the downtown as the central hub for economic, entertainment, and tourism activities. - Maintain an adequate supply of lands for economic and employment opportunities.
Parks, Recreation and Culture	- Recognize the value of cultural assets through enhancing areas of unique historical, archaeological, and paleontological significance within the District of Fort St. James. - Develop a comprehensive parks and open space network to meet the recreation needs of all residents of the community, as well as the needs of tourists. - Develop (or implement) the Trails Master Plan to link the parks and open space network. - Improve public access to Stuart Lake.	Community Services	- Ensure the community's need for education, public safety, health, cultural, and spiritual services, and facilities are met. - Improve access to a range of community services and facilities to meet the needs of all members of the community. - Ensure community services are equitably distributed throughout the District.
Housing	- Ensure that the community's housing supply meets existing and future need as outlined in the Interim Housing Needs Report. - Ensure that the District of Fort St. James has options across the housing continuum that meet the diverse needs of residents. - Accommodate a wide range of housing forms, tenures, and densities, including market and non-market housing.	Community Infrastructure	- Provide safe, reliable, and efficient water, sanitary sewer, and solid waste services that meet residents' needs. - Plan and develop new infrastructure to support future growth in a logical and cost-effective manner. - Explore grant opportunities to support infrastructure upgrades.

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OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN AND ZONING BYLAW UPDATE

EXISTING OCP LAND USE MAP

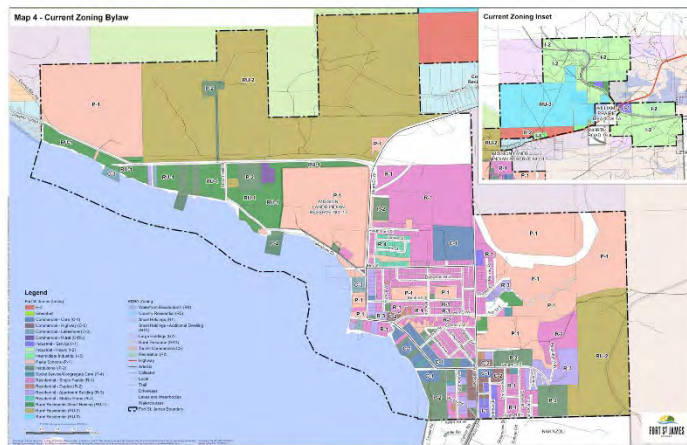


Does the existing development pattern reflect your vision for Fort St. James?

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OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN AND ZONING BYLAW UPDATE

EXISTING ZONING BYLAW MAP



Would you like to see increased densities or different housing/ building types throughout or in certain areas of the community?

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OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN AND ZONING BYLAW UPDATE



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS IN 3 WORDS

What do you love about Fort St. James?

What do you dislike about Fort St. James?

How would you like to see Fort St. James change?

What, if anything, worries you about your future living in Fort St. James?

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OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN AND ZONING BYLAW UPDATE



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

What opportunities would you like to see Fort St. James explore in the future? What has changed since the 2010 OCP was completed?

What do you think are the biggest challenges Fort St. James is facing?

Examples may include: aging population, housing options, affordability, economic challenges, climate change, community health and well-being

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Appendix B

Presentation



District of Fort St. James: OCP & ZBL

June 16 and 17, 2025

DISTRICT OF FORT ST JAMES | OCP & ZBL

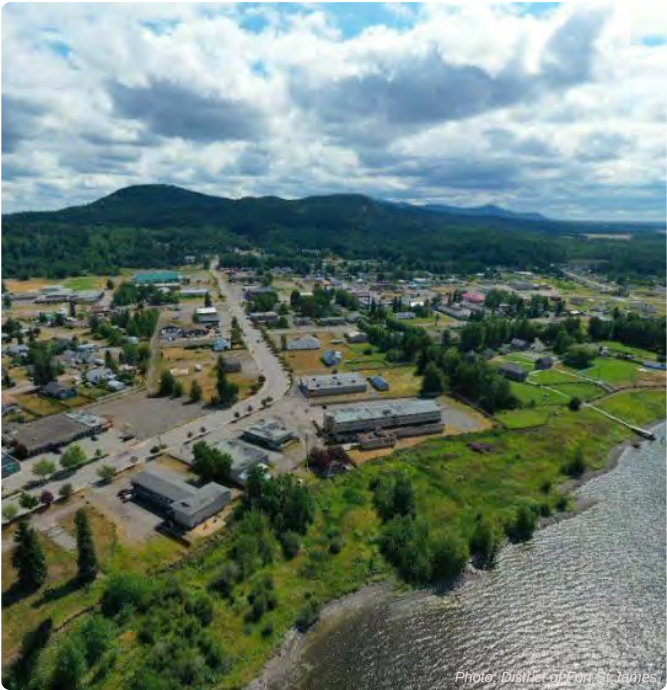


Photo: District of Fort St James

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  Photo: District of Fort St James	Agenda	
	Project overview • General project plan and key deliverables Official Community Plans and Zoning Bylaws • Planning hierarchy • Role of an OCP and ZBL Engagement • Engagement Plan • Questions for you	

2



Project plan

Key Tasks

Est. Timeline

Phase 1: Start-up and Background Review

March – May 2025

Confirm project scope, timelines, and deliverables
Review the Existing and Draft OCP to highlight gaps for revision and changes

Phase 2: Engagement Round 1

June 2025

Project introduction; discussion about vision and priorities

Phase 3: Draft OCP and Zoning Bylaw

June – September 2025

Prepare draft documents for review

Phase 4: Engagement Round 2

September 2025

Review draft OCP and Zoning Bylaw

Phase 5: Final Documents

October 2025

Finalize documents and final engagement

Phase 6: Final Documents

November 2025

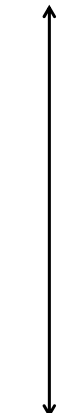
Council adoption process

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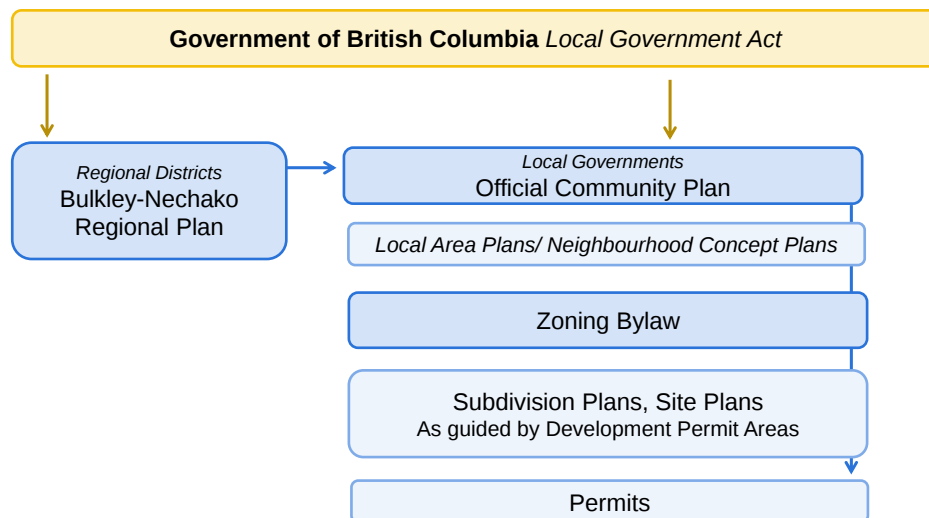


Planning hierarchy

High Level
Concepts



More
Detailed



4



Official Community Plans

Role

Intended to guide decisions on planning and land use management, by describing the long-term vision of a community.

Content

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 - other matters that may, in respect of any plan, be required or authorized by the minister.
- **Housing policies** respecting affordable housing, rental housing and special needs housing.
- **Targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions** in the area covered by the plan, and policies and actions of the local government proposed with respect to achieving those targets.

...and may include:

- **policies relating to:**
 - *social needs, social well-being and social development*;
 - *preservation, protection, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment, its ecosystems and biological diversity*;
 - *alternative forms of transportation*;
 - *transportation demand management*
- *a regional context statement, consistent with the rest of the plan, of how [required content] and other matters dealt with in the plan, apply in a regional context*;
- *respecting the maintenance and enhancement of farming on land in a farming area or in an area designated for agricultural use in the plan*;

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Key features of an OCP

- ✓ Articulate the community's future long-term vision.
- ✓ Reflect the views and perspectives of the broader community and create opportunities for participation.
- ✓ Provide a framework to assess community goals, set policy priorities and direct future growth.
- ✓ Guide decision-making for planning and land use management.
- ✓ Offer a foundation for other planning initiatives (e.g., Economic Development Strategy).
- ✓ Provides information to the public and developers.
- ✓ Resonates with Council, staff, residents, and local First Nations.

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Difference between an OCP and Zoning Bylaw

OCP

- Should be **general**, identifies areas to accommodate the community's land use needs
- Used as a **guide for future development**
- Land uses are identified at a high-level
- Not intended to be totally reflective of existing development

Zoning Bylaw

- Should be **specific**, defined boundaries of each zone
- Used to **regulate existing development**
- Each zone has detailed regulations that are applied per legal parcel
- Should identify only what is currently approved for development on that parcel
- Must be updated to remain in alignment with the OCP

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Proposed engagement

Engagement Round 1 (in-person)

Introduce the project and identify priorities

- Council workshop
- In-person public information session
- Meetings with other governments

Engagement Round 2 (in-person)

Share Draft OCP, highlighting how input from round 1 was used

- Council workshop
- In-person public information session
- Meetings with impacted and interested parties and governments

Engagement Round 3 (virtual)

Share Final OCP and Draft ZBL v2, highlighting how input was used

- Virtual public information session
- Virtual meeting with impacted and interested parties and governments

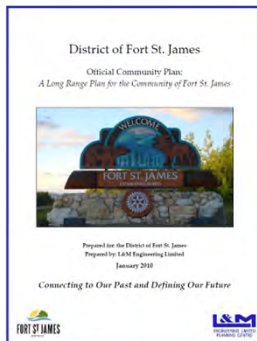
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Existing and Draft 2023 OCP – Discussion

Existing OCP

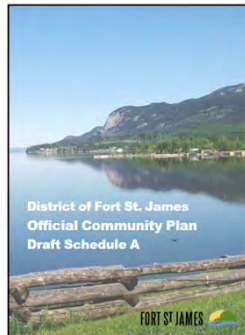
Adopted in 2010



Draft (2023)

Not adopted

Prepared by Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako



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N1

District comments on OCP

- Mix of residential housing options
- Mix of land uses
- Economic development
- Reflect required provincial legislation
- Meaningful engagement
- Well-organized



Photo: Stantec

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		 Photo: Fort St James Chamber of Commerce
	Visioning	
	Strengths • What do you love about Fort St James? • What are Fort St James' biggest strengths? Weaknesses • What do you dislike about Fort St James? Opportunities • How would you like to see Fort St James change? • Are there new opportunities that should be explored? Challenges • What do you think are the biggest challenges Fort St James is facing? Threats • What, if anything, worries you about your future living in Fort St James?	

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 DISTRICT OF FORT ST JAMES OCP & ZBL COUNCIL WORKSHOP			
	Setting goals and priorities		
	Many topics to include in OCP – which are most important <table border="0"> <tr> <td> • Accommodating future growth • Residential lands * • Commercial lands * • Industrial lands * • Agricultural lands * • Recreational and public lands * • Environmentally sensitive and hazardous areas * • Gravel and sand deposits * • Municipal assets and utilities * (roads, sewer lines, parks, rinks) </td> <td> • Housing policies * • Greenhouse gas emissions * • Regional issues * • Preservation, protection, and restoration of the natural environment * • Social and well-being issues * • Transportation * • Agricultural development * </td> <td> • Economic development • Community services • Parks, recreation, and culture • Naz'azdli Whut'en relationship </td> </tr> </table>		• Accommodating future growth • Residential lands * • Commercial lands * • Industrial lands * • Agricultural lands * • Recreational and public lands * • Environmentally sensitive and hazardous areas * • Gravel and sand deposits * • Municipal assets and utilities * (roads, sewer lines, parks, rinks)
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<i>* Identify topics required by the Local Government Act</i> <i>* Identify optional topics identified by the Local Government Act</i>			

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