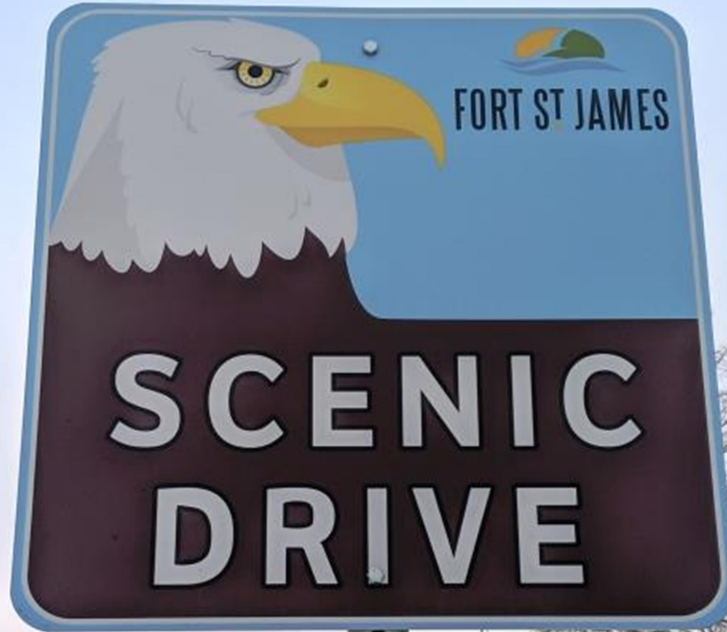


Fort St. James CED Assessment



Findings and recommendations for community growth and revitalization

A study completed by SFU Community Economic
Development's Mill Closure Response Team

March 2020



FACULTY OF
ENVIRONMENT

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT



SFU

**COMMUNITY
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**

Researched and Written By:

Rupert Downing
Independent Consultant

Janice Iverson
Community Futures Sunshine Coast

Shannon McPhail
Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition

Amy Robinson
LOCO BC

Jeremy Stone
SFU Community Economic Development

Contents:

Study Background 1

Summary of Recommendations 3

CED Assets in Fort St. James 6

Study Findings and Recommendations 9

Appendix A: Cast Studies and Resources 22



Study Background

In June 2019 Conifex sold its mill assets in Fort St. James to Hampton Lumber, which resulted in the closing of the mill and the loss of 226 direct jobs. This had followed temporary curtailments previously and a general anxiety in the sector more broadly. Although it was a shock for some that the mill had closed, it was not the first time Fort St. James had experienced this: in 2007 the Pope and Talbot mill closed for two years while Conifex purchased and modernized the operations, which also resulted in job loss and economic disruption. While Hampton Lumber has committed to reopening the site in three years, Fort St. James is facing another long stint without one of its major employers.

So Fort St. James has two pressing economic questions: what will pick up the slack in the intervening years to support the well-being of the community, and what can be done to smooth the curve of the boom-bust cycle of forestry? Forestry obviously has a place and a future in the Fort St. James economy, but it is only one of many economic possibilities that can be pursued and strengthened.

To answer these questions, the District of Fort St. James (in partnership with Community Futures Stuart Nechako and with generous funding through the BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction's Labour Market Partnership Program) invited Simon Fraser University's Community Economic Development (SFU CED) program, an initiative of SFU's Faculty of Environment, to develop an assessment of CED opportunities and barriers for ongoing economic resilience planning. SFU CED began in 1989 as a hub for sustainable economic development training and research, with an emphasis on social and individual well-being. The SFU CED approach focuses on grassroots, "bottom-up" community engagement. Community members usually understand their economy the best, and should be empowered to chart their own paths towards economic self-sufficiency. Moreover, many of the opportunities that community members identify are ones that are of a small or medium size. Rather than solely looking for new industrial operations or major employers, residents often describe entrepreneurial and employment opportunities that build on a diversity of skills and interests, and that contribute to a sense of place and local culture. There is nothing wrong with larger scale industrial operations, especially when they are the lifeblood of local economies. However,

resilient economies are ones that integrate many diverse opportunities that are less susceptible to individual business closures, so our CED approach seeks to identify the assets and opportunities that will fill economic gaps and develop the next wave of innovation and growth.

With that in mind, the District of Fort St. James, Community Futures Stuart Nechako, and the SFU CED team collaborated closely to co-design a process that would ask good questions and involve a broad range of stakeholders. From December 12th to 14th the SFU CED team visited Fort St. James and met with over 80 community members through marathon interview sessions geared towards gathering as much information as possible. These sessions involved a wide set of roles including elected officials, government staff, Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation leaders, business leaders, dislocated mill workers, social service leaders, and representatives of vulnerable populations. There was also wide sector representation including forestry, agriculture, tourism, financial services, social enterprises, education, health care, and commercial retail.

Following these interviews the SFU CED team collated and coded the interview data and drafted a series of findings and recommendations described in detail here. Although we feel confident in our process and findings, this study is not meant to be exhaustive or final. Rather, this is the starting point for a deeper discussion around the future of the Fort St. James economy, and how diversification can be supported in the long term. To that extent, SFU CED hopes to continue to be a partner in whatever way we can to support ongoing economic development planning and capacity building.



The SFU CED team, EDO David Schroeter, Santa, and an elf at the Fort St. James Christmas market.



Summary of Recommendations

The following is a summary of high-level recommendations from the study. Each recommendation is further fleshed out below, and contains quite a bit more detail. However, for summary purposes, major headings are provided as follows:

Labour Market

1. Perform a skills gap analysis with existing and projected employers and sectors in the local area.
2. A workforce strategy should be developed that better coordinates agencies to focus on resources and needs.
3. Place-market Fort St. James internally to the community.
4. Welcome new workers and residents to town.

Small Business Capacity and Culture

5. Coordinate and build capacity for economic development planning in the region.
 - a. Convene a working group of key sector champions – including the NDC and other atypical participants – and identify a few priorities for the next ten years of development.
 - b. Provide the EDO with a mandate and resources to pursue these priorities.
 - c. Utilize the working group to coordinate individual endeavors and opportunities so that various economic actions are complementary to each other across the region.
 - d. Reach out to other communities in the region to foster inter-community mentorship and support.
6. Get serious about “Buy Local”.

- a. Reinvigorate the Chamber of Commerce with a mandate to better support local businesses, and to raise the profile of buying locally within the community.
 - b. Perform some local business impact research to make the case for multiplier effects and local purchasing.
 - c. Put up some signage or fliers that promote local business.
7. **Better engage partners like Community Futures, and SFU CED to develop new business opportunities.**
 8. **Push for Community Benefits Agreement with Stuart Lake Hospital development to include local procurement and hiring provisions.**

Business Finance

9. **A roundtable of local finance organizations should be organized to develop short- and long-term financing strategies for new and existing businesses, as well as economic development projects.**
 - a. Seasonal products for tourism and agriculture.
 - b. Community impact investing cooperatives.
 - c. Loan loss reserve to spur private investment.
 - d. Syndication loans and participation agreements.

Forestry

10. **Collabourate with representative organizations (Community Futures, universities, etc.) and other mill closure towns to lobby for resources that will support economic development, rebranding, and other revitalization initiatives as a part of the mill closure response.**
11. **Incentivize innovations in local value-added production in conjunction with the community forest.**
12. **Consider alternatives to direct logging, including agroforestry and ecosystem restoration.**

Agriculture

13. **Develop a local farmer attraction and mentorship strategy.**
 - a. Collabourate with other communities to advertise local farming opportunities around BC and Alberta.
 - b. Work with the Young Agrarians' BC Land Matching Program.
 - c. Work with the schools to reimagine and revive 4-H programming.
 - d. Promote small-lot agriculture.
14. **Evolve farming sales through buy-local initiatives and programs like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).**

15. Further explore and promote the use of greenhouses, especially using heat from biomass energy.
16. Lobby the Provincial government to streamline regulations concerning additional buildings on farmland.
17. Lobby for changes to regulations and updating of practices to support local butchering.

Tourism and Culture

18. Develop a more cohesive identity or brand for Fort St. James.
19. Partner with Nak'azdli Whut'en to develop Indigenous tourism amenities.
20. Develop local businesses infrastructure to capture more tourism revenue.
 - a. Another hotel, B&Bs, or more AirBnB capacity to accommodate guests.
 - b. More restaurants, or at least restaurants that are open at appropriate hours of the day.
 - c. More retail that focuses on tourism needs, or that at least incorporates tourism products and messaging.
 - d. More coordination between local businesses and surrounding activities.
21. Explore more alternative tourism amenities. There were various tourism opportunities described which need more development or promotion. Some of these included:
 - a. Mountain biking
 - b. River guiding and trips
 - c. Promote trapline tours
 - d. Build agreements with the 5 guide outfitters in region to help crosspollinate and/or boost each other's businesses.
22. Strengthen a community hub to coordinate, administer, and market recreational opportunities and support volunteer groups that organize them.



CED Assets in Fort St. James

The starting point for any community economic development (CED) process is to garner a clear and common understanding of a community's assets. Assets take many forms: individual skill sets, public infrastructure, service infrastructure, natural amenities, geographic location in terms of proximity to markets, transportation options, cultural heritage, and so on. CED upends traditional approaches and patterns of economic development, which tend to focus upon and service challenges or vulnerabilities, by exploring how community assets can form the foundation of a revitalized economy and community identity.

Fort St. James has many assets that are relatively unknown outside of the region. These are all building blocks for economic diversification and growth.

Local Champions

Fort St. James has a rich mix of local personalities who are dedicated to the success of the town and region. The economic development officer, the ski hill manager, the Indigenous men's group leader, the recycling program manager, a very vocal rancher – the list goes on – Fort St. James has strong voices and strong talent to support and grow the local economy. One of the themes that came up numerous times is that with the mill, there was very little need for diversification and entrepreneurship since many people were taken care of. There was a sense by some respondents that Fort St. James hasn't had to "push itself" yet. The exciting flip-side of that is that there are people here locally who have capacity to dream, push, nudge, and think a little bigger than before. In small and rural areas those people can have as lasting of an impact as the usual institutional leadership.

Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation

The Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation, upon whose traditional territory Fort St James was built, is deeply engrained into the physical and community fabric of the area. The Nak'azdli

Development Corporation (NDC) owns some forest tenure and numerous businesses in the community, and shares many of the same tourism resources. Reserve land and District land sit side-by-side separated only by a road, however, it appeared from stakeholder discussions that the District and the Nation are not very coordinated regarding economic development. This did not seem to derive from historical animosity, but more from lack of coordination. The CEO of NDC stated is interest in collabourating and “doing business”, which is possibly a mutually beneficial asset for both communities.

Natural and Recreational Amenities

Fort St. James has a vast and relatively undiscovered beauty that few outside of the region truly appreciate. Stuart Lake itself, which connects to many more miles of streams, rivers, and other lakes, provides endless opportunities for fishing, sailing, swimming, guiding, etc. The Stuart Lake Golf Course is a 9-hole course on the banks of the lake. In addition there is cross-country skiing, the ski hill, dog sledding, ATV areas, and various other winter sports available. One of the few outdoors speed skating ovals exists here, with the Falcons Speed Skating Club churning out Olympic-level athletes. Fort St. James is in the unique position of having a year-round tourism product, which is absolutely underutilized.

Agriculture

According to the BC Agricultural Census in 2016, the Bulkley-Nechako region (of which Fort St. James is a part) has approximately 10% of the farmland of the province, but generates less than 2% of the total farm receipts of the province. There are various factors that play into that disparity (e.g. climate/growing seasons, value of products able to be grown locally, etc.) but it is clear that there are underutilized opportunities for farming and ranching that can be developed. Innovations in winter farming have been further developed through the Mount Pope Greenhouse owned by the Nak'azdli (focusing primarily on tomatoes), and the Northern Lights Organics greenhouses which has expanded to cannabis and hemp production. Northern Lights is ramping up production with the addition of two new 3200 square foot greenhouses and plans to further scale operations. Fort St. James has a strong and proud agricultural community with a keen interest in attracting more farmers and increasing production, which signals that agriculture could have a bright future if the appropriate emphasis was put on this sector.

History

The deep history of Fort St. James is unique in British Columbia. Being the first outpost of the Hudson's Bay Company in BC, and one of the first European settlements, Fort St. James predates New Westminster as the hub of settler governance by 50 years. It was here that Simon Fraser met Chief Kw'eh of the Nak'azdli, and the start of the fur trade in BC was born. Both the original fort (a National Historic Site) and Chief Kw'eh's grave are still located here, and the Our

Lady of Hope Church stands as one of the oldest wooden Catholic churches in British Columbia. The fort alone brings 40,000 visitors a year to the town. There are ample opportunities to promote these histories beyond Fort St. James itself.

Healthcare Infrastructure

Fort St. James already has medical services that rival that of other similarly sized communities across BC, but now the Stuart Lake Hospital has been approved for a \$116 million expansion which will triple the capacity it has now. Beyond the construction impacts on additional jobs for the area, this also provides exceptional opportunities for local procurement, new business development, and related employment possibilities.

Local Artisans and Entrepreneurs

In Fort St. James there are lots of little crafters, artisans, and entrepreneurs who don't have storefront space, but sell their wares locally. There's a bee keeper who makes honey and other products, a man who makes coasters from various types of hardwood, and ladies who make gift baskets for the holidays. These people don't all necessarily consider themselves entrepreneurs, but they are creating incomes and sustainability in their own ways.

Other Assets

- Veolia Fort Green Energy Plant – This 40MW biomass energy plant has relied on wood waste from the forestry sector and sells energy directly to BC Hydro under a 30-year purchasing agreement. Although participants described some lack of coordination between the plant and the community, there are many possibilities for employment, transfer of heat to greenhouses, and other economic initiatives.
- Imperative Recycling – Numerous participants listed the recycling operation as a serious community asset, especially because waste is such an issue locally. Although funding has been cut to the program, it is converting to a cooperative and integrating business support. This is an important CED model to champion in the community as it demonstrates alternative models of organization for achieving economic, social, and environmental goals.
- Fort St. James Community Forest – The forest tenure owned by the District of Fort St. James is approximately 22,000 hectares and yields about a million dollars in sales each year (before harvesting costs). The proceeds from the community forest are invested directly into the District budget (but they are starting to divert money into an infrastructure fund as well). This can be an excellent source of funding for innovation and change in the community.



Study Findings and Recommendations

Fort St. James is a special place – a diamond in the rough. There are many attributes that could support it as a thriving community for many generations, but these need to be further developed and enlarged. With the closure of the mill many middle-class salaries were lost. Camp jobs were the primary alternative and have come with all of the social impacts that those jobs carry. This in turn has had ripple effects through retail and other businesses as spending has dropped up to 40% in some establishments. Diversification is critical in the short- and long-term if the community is to be resilient to the various pressures of an ever-changing economy.

The following synthesizes what we heard from the community during our interviews, as well as our resulting recommendations. Although we had a large sample of participants, some may disagree with the findings or recommendations because they have additional information of different perspectives. We admit from the outset that the results may be skewed by who was in the room. Given that caveat however, there were numerous consistent themes that rose up from the discussions we heard.

Labour Market

The impact of the mill closure is affecting the health and well-being of many residents. Health and social service agencies and schools report increased difficulties for children and families. Anxiety over debt is also a concern even with the BC Bridging to Retirement program and “skip payment” options at local financial institutions. Some are not sure how to adapt to lower paying roles, or whether they can stay in their town. Some have moved to work in camps, which has strained families. There is a need to focus on the workforce and help them navigate towards new, local opportunities.

However, developing skills and opportunities is difficult. It was reported that social development in the community lags behind elsewhere in BC, with some parts of the population lacking life skills, literacy, and other essentials. Commercial driver's licenses are also lacking, especially amongst the Nak'azdli, which limits the kind of jobs that some local workers can take. At the same time, there were numerous suggestions that quality of life is not enough in Fort St. James to keep workers and their families there. There's no pool, theater, bowling alley, or good shopping, and there is only one place to get breakfast. This seems a bit difficult to accept from an outsider perspective since there are so many amenities locally. However, they may not be of the type that the workforce is looking for.

There is a lack of locally specific skills gap information (as opposed to aggregate regional data) and accessible information on current and projected trades and certification requirements for industries in the area. There is not a lot of confidence that people are getting the training, re-training, and certification that is going to lead to real jobs. Moreover, there is a gap between the services provided by Work BC and Nak'azdli Employment and Training Services. It was reported that there is lack of coordination between the two agencies. Communication is also difficult, with many people only hearing about workforce events after the events have happened.

The silver lining, however, is that there are considerable needs in the community for various skills, both for local and tourist populations. There were numerous skill needs listed like stone masons, small appliance repair, and RV technicians for the large number of RVs that come through town. Even if these were not full time jobs, community members with these skills could be utilized on a part time basis and contribute to the overall financial stability of the workers when combined with other income streams.

Recommendations

1. **Perform a skills gap analysis with existing and projected employers and sectors in the local area.** Although a skills gap analysis is being performed for the Bulkley-Nechako region, there needs to be a specific analysis done for Fort St. James. It is imperative to know what skills are needed and better match services to those needs. This could also be part of an overall workforce strategy (see below) that includes understanding the skills needs for future areas of growth (e.g. agriculture, tourism, etc.) and gets local labour ready for new opportunities. Labour Market Partnership Funding might be available to assist in this endeavor.
2. **A workforce strategy should be developed that better coordinates agencies to focus on resources and needs.** Based off the skills analysis, a workforce strategy should be developed to bring together the hard and soft skill supports necessary for the local workforce. This does not have to be an overly expensive and large process; rather, it could merely mean bringing together existing service providers and aligning what already exists. It is clear that a more coordinated strategy between health and social agencies to support vulnerable households may be needed with support by the Ministry

of Social Development and Northern Health. These can be linked to other area initiatives like the “Weaving our Way” pre-employment program with the Nak’azdli, driver’s licensing through All Nations Driving Academy, etc. Work BC and Nak’azdli Employment and Training Services could collabourate on training events and communications to amplify awareness of services and increase participation rates in programming. It might be worthwhile to connect with the Mount Milligan mining operations and see if there can be any connections to their own pre-employment programming. Some of the event communications could potentially be done on an informal basis beyond Facebook – in some areas garbage pick-up crews to deliver flyers door to door, and notices are posted at gas stations, health clinics, etc.

3. **Place-market Fort St. James internally to the community.** Although participants described their affection for Fort St. James, there was a deep narrative of decline and a bit of under-appreciation for what the town and region have to offer. The area has incredible amenities, a comparatively lower cost of living than other communities, and a lot of potential for growth. Obviously it would be good to consider what “urban” amenities could be added to the mix to sweeten the deal (maybe a diner?) but what seems most important is a real campaign to brighten the appeal of Fort St. James to its own residents. An effort that highlights the best of the region (The lake! The skiing! The people! The outdoors life!) could build a narrative that this is a great place to live, and in turn, a great place to work and develop new work opportunities. It has certainly been proven in other communities across BC that residents who love their town and see it as valuable will stick through the hard times and invest what they can to make the place stable again.
4. **Welcome new workers and residents to town.** Several participants mentioned the need to have a “welcome wagon” or similar initiative that greets new residents with information about, and connections to, the community in order to build the long-term social capital that can keep residents living locally long after any particular job may end.

Small Business Capacity and Culture

There are many small businesses in Fort St. James, and participants agreed that there are entrepreneurial opportunities in the community (especially in tourism, recreation, agriculture, food services, appliance repairs, etc.). However, there is a general decline in small business activity and survivability. Restaurants and retail have reported closures, and since the forestry downturn there is anxiety around the viability of opening new businesses in town. Participants reported that new businesses for the most part are locating in nearby Vanderhoof. However, this has not deterred all entrepreneurs, with a new yoga studio opening recently as well as a coffee cabin and soup place. One entrepreneur with a multi-level cosmetics company reported that more women have been joining as vending partners during the mill closure, and have been

increasing their own sales. Discussions with new business owners yielded enthusiasm about the support received from Fort St. James and others in the business community.

Despite the opportunities and community support, participants described some fundamental challenges in the local culture of small business support. One critical issue was the significant amount of leakage to other towns, including Vanderhoof and Prince George. Like other small towns in BC, residents are lured to larger towns with promises of cheaper prices and high variety in big-box stores. Although there is some “buy local” programming in town, like the moonlight madness shopping event around Christmas, it is limited and reportedly has not benefitted all businesses equally. Local currencies have also been adopted (Fort St. James Bucks and the “Chicken Bucks” from the chicken races at the Fort) but these have not had a deep impact on local purchasing.

A second challenge is the lack of strong formal small business support in the community. There are many leaders and innovators in the community in their own respective sector, but traditional structures like the Chamber of Commerce and the Municipality don't deal with their economic development interests. Several participants wanted to see a greater presence by the Chamber. There's also seems to be a very weak “transmission line” from ideas to collaborative action. The assets and potential of the community have individual champions but they are not projected outside or within the area, which adds to the sense of decline and uncertainty created by the mill closure. The Economic Development Officer for the Municipality acts as a connector and support for individual efforts, but lacks a structure with authority to support collaborative action on opportunities. Individual participants described a lack of support services for entrepreneurs in bookkeeping, business planning, ideas-to-launch and maintenance.

Recommendations

5. **Coordinate and build capacity for economic development planning in the region.** If one thing is clear, it is that Fort St. James 2020 does not have a strong idea of what Fort St. James 2030 should be like economically. Should it be a tourism town? A forestry town? A hybrid? This is not a criticism but is instead a caution that without some goals it will be difficult to organize efforts in complementary and emerging ways. In addition to these goals, capacities and support for growth should be developed in the community. In some ways this already exists – there are certainly champions in the community and active economic development organizations such as the Nak'azdli Development Corporation (NDC) – but the efforts and organizations are not aligned or fully fleshed out. Recommendations for possible actions in this regard include:
 - a. Convene a working group of key sector champions – including the NDC and other atypical participants – and identify a few priorities for the next ten years of development. These could be derived in part from the current study, but it would be good to have these ideas on narrowed down and made actionable.
 - b. Provide the EDO with a mandate and resources to pursue these priorities.

- c. Utilize the working group to coordinate individual endeavors and opportunities so that various economic actions are complementary to each other across the region.
 - d. Reach out to other communities in the region to foster inter-community mentorship and support. Learn from the successes of other communities and adapt those successes locally.
- 6. Get serious about “Buy Local”.** Too much money is leaving the community to Vanderhoof and Prince George. While it may be necessary and fun to go out to eat and shop away from home occasionally, it appears that there’s little to no loyalty to local businesses and purchasing. A few approaches to this might be:
- a. Reinvigorate the Chamber of Commerce with a mandate to better support local businesses, and to raise the profile of buying locally within the community. Although it has a bit of programming in this vein, it has not had to really “step up its game” before. The time is now to really push and promote local businesses.
 - b. Perform some local business impact research to make the case for multiplier effects and local purchasing. LOCO BC has a turnkey program for the market research, usually funded by a credit union in partnership with a chamber/BIA (\$5K for local programs, no travel costs included). This could potentially be delivered in a train-the-trainer, Skype meeting format to keep costs low, but face-to-face for the workshop is best.
 - c. Put up some signage or fliers that promote local business. One participant suggested a billboard at the edge of town that says “Costco does not support your community”, which is perhaps a bit too direct, but does suggest the idea that the box stores in Prince George are not investing back into the community of Fort St. James like local businesses do. It could also be helpful to educate the community on the additional costs in gas, time, etc., that shopping in adjacent towns incurs.
- 7. Better engage partners like Community Futures, and SFU CED to develop new business opportunities.** Community Futures already has an “Ideas to Market” program that can support small-scale manufacturing, as well as small business technical assistance services that can help grow business ideas. They are also partnering with SFU CED to roll out the LEAP! Social Economy Accelerator across BC to support early stage entrepreneurs in testing their ideas and focusing on customer development.
- 8. Push for Community Benefits Agreement with Stuart Lake Hospital development to include local procurement and hiring provisions.** The development of the new hospital will be an incredible opportunity to focus buying and hiring (both during construction and in the operating phase) on local businesses and workforce. Successful CBAs have been utilized in other jurisdictions (e.g. the Parc hotel development in

Vancouver) to ensure that benefits of major projects are shared locally. This should be a priority for ongoing negotiations.

Business Finance

Business finance and the financial health of businesses in Fort St. James has not been particularly strong. Financial representatives described how that during the pine beetle years, most of the profits from salvage logging were spent and not banked, so that now contractors are running into cash flow problems, they do not have savings to cover it. Due to the overall state of the economy, there is more difficulty in getting access to lines of credit and debt financing. RBC is the primary commercial lender in the region, and they base their underwriting on financial statements. Businesses that waited too long to apply for loans are showing losses on their financial statements and are getting declined by the bank more often. This is also partially driven by the technical capacity to develop financial statements – those who have business training are doing better at showing the financial health of their companies.

There are some additional options for commercial lending, especially through Community Futures Stuart Nechako, and Bulkley Valley Credit Union in Burns Lake. The benefit of these institutions includes their ability to use credit scores to support underwriting. There was some discussion that various institutions could collabourate to fund existing businesses or startups. RBC can fund up to 75-90% on equipment purchases, but would need Community Futures or another lender to cover the balance if the borrower could not. For agriculture businesses there are the Canadian Agricultural Loans Act (CALA) loans provided by RBC that make financing accessible, even for new farmers. Additionally, there are some grants through Northern Development Initiative Trust that can support business development in the region.

Recommendations

9. **A roundtable of local finance organizations should be organized to develop short- and long-term financing strategies for new and existing businesses, as well as economic development projects.** The trust, local foundations, local banks, and Community Futures should be brought together to explore how various investments can be applied towards economic development and small business growth. Bringing these entities together could enable more opportunities for partnership and financial product development. Examples of possible financial solutions that could be explored in Fort St. James include:
 - e. Seasonal products for tourism and agriculture. Access to capital with seasonal interest-only periods or “payment skips” for bad years could allow businesses to

repay over longer terms while also dealing with the periodic cycles of their business models. RBC already employs this approach for some of their clients.

- f. Community impact investing cooperatives. In order to engage more people in supporting the business community, forming or partnering with a community impact investing cooperative could enable local residents to invest in, and benefit from, local businesses while directing the course of economic development. This might include informational and training sessions on community-based philanthropy.
- g. Loan loss reserve to spur private investment. Banks and other lenders often require a loan loss reserve to cover default risks related to their lending. Depending on the risk profile, these reserves can range from 10-50% of the loan portfolio's value. Trusts and foundations can back loans by establishing reserves to hedge the risk the lenders take on. If there are no or few defaults, the funds can flow back to the providing institutions.
- h. Syndication loans and participation agreements. Sometimes multiple lenders will pool their funds and use a syndication or participation agreement to invest into businesses. These agreements break the capital into smaller chunks so that each lender has a portion of the overall loan, but takes on less exposure overall. Given the right enhancements (e.g. a loan loss reserve, interest buy-downs, deal fees, etc.) this can entice even commercial banks to the table to contribute capital to a loan fund.

Forestry

Obviously the forestry industry is in upheaval in British Columbia and Fort St. James is no different. A prominent local logging operator described how they have had a significant loss of revenues and have started selling equipment off. There are numerous problems, but one is that if there isn't a large company like Conifex consuming wood, there's a glut on the market which lowers prices and sales for everyone. That impacts smaller operators who might have a slightly higher cost of production. Stumpage fees are driving that in some part, because the smaller players have to pay as high a rate to the Crown as large companies do. Then there are the ongoing issues around tenure access for local communities. Major players can sit on the logs in their tenure while local loggers try to get access. And finally, the ongoing lack of value-added processing in the Interior creates a lack of opportunities for developing high-value, low-volume revenue streams.

These are primarily structural issues that will not be solved at the local level in Fort St. James. However, there are some general recommendations for addressing the real and ongoing challenges that communities across BC are facing:

Recommendations

- 10. Collabourate with representative organizations (Community Futures, universities, etc.) and other mill closure towns to lobby for resources that will support economic development, rebranding, and other revitalization initiatives as a part of the mill closure response.** Unsurprisingly, other communities experiencing 2019 mill closures are in the same situation as Fort St. James, and also need these same resources. There is a significant opportunity to speak as a more unified voice, demand more specific response resources, and utilize the media and other outlets to communicate joint messages. Besides the clear need for more economic development resources rather than only worker supports, there should be across the board lobbying for tenure reform and better access by small communities to fibre that they can use.
- 11. Incentivize innovations in local value-added production in conjunction with the community forest.** Although the revenues produced by the community forest are necessary for the District government, there can be a great deal more done with those assets. One logger suggested that the District should hold a competition for the best value-added idea for local timber, and reward the most innovative idea with the most job potential with tax incentives, investment capital, access to fibre, etc. In this way, the forest could be an incubator for new initiatives and create even better returns for the community.
- 12. Consider alternatives to direct logging, including agroforestry and ecosystem restoration.** The salvage of bug-killed wood is coming to an end and what remains are the decimated forests. This creates a landscape level opportunity for ecosystem restoration, which not only benefits the land and forests, but wild salmon and steelhead as well. With all the damage caused by mountain pine beetle in the area, as well as issues with drought, agro-forestry and regenerative agriculture projects would go far in long-term resiliency both economically and environmentally.

Agriculture

There is a strong agricultural community in Fort St. James with many farming operations in the region. It is clear that there is a real spirit of mentorship and mutual support in the farming community – whether it is the woman who helps teach fencing techniques to others, or the rancher who actively shares his tricks of the trade with younger families coming up in the business, there is a good pool of knowledge and camaraderie. Participants also described how there is ample land locally for agriculture and that it is much cheaper than land both in the region and across Western Canada. The general feeling was that farming has exceptional potential here, and could expand if they could attract more farmers and mitigate a number of barriers that farming communities across BC are facing as well. These include:

- Access to animal sales and butchering facilities is very limited. Although there is a large cattle auction in Vanderhoof, it must be booked months in advance, which is true of the beef buyer in Prince George. Buyers for poultry and rabbits are 140km round trip, which increases costs. There is no federal inspector in the region, so they cannot certify their meat for export.
- Rules preventing buildings on agricultural land are squeezing numerous opportunities. People can't build housing to keep their children on the land and working the farm, which impacts succession planning. Buildings can't be erected to promote agritourism operations and AirBnB rentals while still maintaining an active farm.
- Although farmer attraction is a high priority for local agricultural producers, they are concerned that the typical buyers of local farmland are foreign buyers who are more connected with foreign supply chains than local ones. For example, some ranchers described a shortage of hay locally, while the foreign-owned hay farms were shipping their hay for sale to Chinese markets. Similarly, the fertilizers and other inputs were reportedly being shipped in rather than purchased from local sources.

Some agricultural participants said they wanted to work harder to attract young BC farmers and Alberta's farmers. Saskatchewan has been successfully attracting farmers to their lands, but BC has not been doing the same even though there are significant farming assets here. Similarly, there has been a reduction in the 4-H and other farm programming in schools and the community. Some participants described the need to attract the youth into agricultural careers. The 2009 agricultural plan for Fort St. James made little mention of encouraging new farmer growth or attracting new farmers to the area, although the RDBN agricultural plan in 2012 had a few pages devoted to ideas around creating opportunities for new farmers such as smaller land plots, community supported agriculture programs, etc.

- There was a history of the region's farmers growing potatoes and other food for the mines, but in the present day there is very little local sourcing of food. Although the beef is quite good, and would fetch a premium for "locally sourced" in the Lower Mainland, there is little demand or higher prices being paid for that quality and provenance of meat.

Recommendations

- 13. Develop a local farmer attraction and mentorship strategy.** The agricultural sector could benefit from more locally-based farmers. Although there are plans in place for the agricultural sector, a concerted strategy for attracting outside farmers and training local youth and those interested in farming is important to better utilize the land assets that already exist. Recommendations for such a strategy might include:

- a. Collaborate with other communities to advertise local farming opportunities around BC and Alberta. A campaign like “It’s Better in BC” could better explain the benefits of farming in the region while also tying farming to a higher quality of life than the prairies. Funding could be sought from the Ministry of Agriculture.
- b. Work with the Young Agrarians’ BC Land Matching Program. Jolene Swain, the land matcher for north and central BC, resides in the Kispiox Valley and is keen to support local farmers to work with youth who want to get into farming but can’t afford to purchase farmland.
- c. Work with the schools to reimagine and revive 4-H programming. The decline in 4-H membership over the past two decades has broken a significant link from local youth to farming careers. Although there have been shifts in economic and locational preferences in recent generations (causing more of them to leave for urban jobs in city-centres) newer programs like the Senden Agriculture Resource Centre in Hazelton have been succeeding in reconnecting local youth to agricultural skills and production.
- d. Promote small-lot agriculture through leasing or subdividing of smaller plots of land so that new farmers can begin to learn their trade. These plots could be a stepping stone into larger operations over time.

14. Evolve farming sales through buy-local initiatives and programs like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). Promoting local agriculture to local residents and businesses could enhance buyers and revenues for farmers. A buy-local initiative focused on both consumers and restaurant/grocery store owners could dip into the history of agriculture in the area and attempt to revive connections that have since been lost.

Using CSA programs could be one way to do this on the consumer side. CSA programs are those that directly link consumers to producers by using subscriptions from local residents to source mixes of produce, meat, and other products from area farmers. Hosting workshops on CSA programs like a Good Food Box program, food subscription program, or a basic market garden training program could increase the viability of small farms, and potentially attract smaller farmers into production. Mark Fisher on the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District is a major knowledge holder of such programs and initiatives, and has supported the development of these types of programs in Smithers.

15. Further explore and promote the use of greenhouses, especially using heat from biomass energy. Participants were very supportive of the work that has been going on with local greenhouses, and it’s obvious that new opportunities for winter growing can be pursued this way. There was also a suggestion that not using the heat produced by the biomass energy plant was a lost opportunity that should be integrated into the greenhouse model. If greater collaboration with the plant could be achieved, there could be exciting possibilities for winter agriculture in the District.

- 16. Lobby the Provincial government to streamline regulations concerning additional buildings on farmland.** The concerns from Fort St. James about regulatory barriers concerning buildings on agricultural land can be found in communities across BC. There are sincere needs to monitor land use to ensure that agricultural uses are protected; however, unintended consequences that impact economic sustainability of farming families and communities should be mitigated. There should be new policy approaches that balance various needs but also allow small scale development of buildings which enable multi-generational farming, agritourism, and novel agricultural practices.
- 17. Lobby for changes to regulations and updating of practices to support local butchering.** A number of alternatives to the current regulatory environment are possible including home kills with submission of samples to regulators, certified mobile abattoirs that could ethically kill animals on farms, and certification of farmers to do their own butchering. This is unlikely to be accomplished by Fort St. James alone, but across the province this is a highly contested issue, so there are many likely allies to support it.

Tourism and Culture

There is a distinct feeling amongst everyone interviewed that tourism is underdeveloped in Fort St. James. There are so many amenities and so much history that the opportunities are really endless. On top of that, these amenities are relatively unknown outside of the region, so there are likely untapped markets across BC and Alberta. A caveat to this, however, is that people in Fort St. James are also very guarded about these treasures. They expressed the desire to have some people visit, but not too many, and some people be attracted to move there, but not too many.

There is already a great deal of activity going on locally, especially in winter. Hockey tournaments are popular here, as well as the dog mushing races, the winter festival, and other events. There is a popular “snowmobile poker” ride which hosts around 300 snowmobiles. However, there is a lack of infrastructure to support these events as well as poor scheduling. Many events happen in February which competes for impact. There are few hotel and restaurant facilities, which makes it difficult for visitors to stay and eat locally. This is so acute that the hockey tournaments are sometimes forced to cater their events from Prince George. Skiing is popular at the ski hill, but there isn’t a local ski shop, so getting supplies is difficult.

In the summer, the lake and waterways are full of opportunities. Jetboat and canoe tours are available along the over 350 miles of waterways. There has been a successful fishing derby over the years, but the fish sizes are diminishing as more and more are overfished. Locals say the lake needs to be stocked so that populations can rebound. There are mountain biking trails locally, but there needs to be more trail development for entry-level trails, as well as liability insurance for the mountain biking club. The Fort draws 40,000 people each year, but many of

them come in on buses and leave; they don't explore the town very much or shop locally. There has been a successful Music on the Mountain Festival that draws around 800 people when it is held. Destination BC gives a \$10K grant to operate the Visitor Centre, and they get the Chamber to do it year round on a fee for service basis. However the centre is only open 3 days/week in the summer and locals seem to feel like it is a missed opportunity. Moreover, although the "Love Fort St. James" exists under the <https://lovenorthernbc.com/> banner, locals report frustration with the site and a lack of connection to the community.

Recommendations

- 18. Develop a more cohesive identity or brand for Fort St. James.** Although there is some place-branding for Fort St. James ("Historic and Resourceful!" "A Great Place to Be!") there doesn't seem to be an exciting or attractive identity that encapsulates how and why Fort St. James is so different and special. The area is an "Undiscovered Country" of recreational opportunities and is a "Gateway to the True BC", replete with Indigenous, natural, and historical values. This place-branding can and likely should be integrated with workforce and local community placemaking such that Fort St. James becomes an ideal place to live, play, and work.
- 19. Partner with Nak'azdli Whut'en to develop Indigenous tourism amenities.** The Nak'azdli Development Corporation described interest in developing a site that would mirror the Fort but tell the story, and create access to the culture of, local First Nations. This could be an incredible opportunity to draw more interest to the area, as well as to advance reconciliation locally. This could also entice more visitors to make a trip to Fort St. James an overnight experience rather than just a day trip.
- 20. Develop local businesses infrastructure to capture more tourism revenue.** The critical gap in tourism capacity is just the infrastructure to accommodate people interested in visiting Fort St. James. There are any number of businesses necessary to fill in gaps, which include:
 - a. Another hotel, B&Bs, or more AirBnB capacity to accommodate guests. This should also include adequate advertising to help people figure out where to stay.
 - b. More restaurants, or at least restaurants that are open at appropriate hours of the day. Some participants reported that downtown is "dead" at night in the summer. This gap could also be filled by food trucks or food carts, which don't necessarily need to be locally owned (though that is always preferable).
 - c. More retail that focuses on tourism needs, or that at least incorporates tourism products and messaging. Examples given locally included stores with ski equipment or accessories, laundromats advertising to visitors for the fishing derby, more guide outfitting for fishing and ecotourism.

- d. More coordination between local businesses and surrounding activities. For example, 150 cars go to the ski hill during the ski season, but the local businesses don't particularly capitalize on that potential business. Same with local festivals.

21. Explore more alternative tourism amenities. There were various tourism opportunities described which need more development or promotion. Some of these included:

- a. Mountain biking: The T-bar on the ski-hill can be used to pull up bikes like is currently done in Scandinavia. An annual bike race could be held in the summer on the ski hill and increase the popularity of the sport in the area.
- b. River guiding and trips: More could be done to advance either ecotourism or jetboat tours up the rivers (though these may clash with each other if both pursued).
- c. Promote trapline tours: there are already existing traplines in the area, experienced trappers, and snow machines to get to them. This is a potentially lucrative line of business as evidenced by similar tours around Babine Lake (<http://www.babineguides.com/Kurttest.html>)
- d. Build agreements with the 5 guide outfitters in region to help crosspollinate and/or boost each other's businesses. Guide outfitters can help mentor youth as wranglers, guide assistants or camp help as part of their land-based businesses. Outfitters not only hunt, they guide fishing, backcountry expeditions and wildlife viewing. Perhaps working with local tourism operators to lease guiding days (thus dealing with the issue of insurance) so that locals can operate boat tours, hiking trips, etc. under the guide outfitter's license and insurance.

22. Strengthen a community hub to coordinate, administer, and market recreational opportunities and support volunteer groups that organize them. As mentioned above, the visitor's centre and the Chamber of Commerce already engages in these activities, but they are not enough to both attract tourists or avoid the overlap in activities that strains capacity. There needs to be a more central and higher-capacity entity to take on these activities and better coordinate and promote tourism.



CED Case Studies

All communities embarking on some form of economic change look to other communities who have dealt with these issues previously. As such, this section provides case studies from primarily Canadian jurisdictions that may have relevance to Fort St. James. It is important to note, however, that the only way innovation occurs is by communities taking risks on ideas or projects that they find important. We hope that these case studies are inspiring, but do not limit the creativity that is already apparent in Fort St. James.

Fogo Island, NL – Diversifying economies after the cod collapse

After decades of declining biomass, the Canadian federal government passed a moratorium on the northern cod fisheries in 1992 which cost 30,000 jobs in Newfoundland alone. Fogo Island, a rural fishing community, was especially devastated, given their reliance on commercial fisheries harvesting and processing. In the lead-up to the moratorium, as the industry was in decline, the Fogo Island Co-op was developed to purchase infrastructure and equipment from exiting companies. The co-op maintained the economy and spurned a culture of social enterprise until the moratorium.

In its wake there was general economic disarray, but eventually multi-generational Fogo Islanders developed a charitable society, the Shorefast Foundation, from a combination of \$6 million in private funding and \$10 million in provincial and federal funding. The foundation used an assets-based development model to explore the skills and assets of Fogo Islanders and then invest into new businesses and programs with local “fit”. This included tourism businesses like Fogo Island Inn, arts and artisan businesses like the online Fogo Island Shop, Fogo Island Fish which sells directly from the boat (cutting out middle-buyers), and micro-loan fund for local start-ups. These businesses all engage in local procurement as well, so that the furniture for the inn is bought from local artisans, etc. Federal and Provincial governments have continued to support these initiatives indirectly through tourism infrastructure investments and directly by sponsoring market development in new industries such as sea cucumber.

In order to highlight the economic impacts and encourage more local purchasing, the businesses carry “Economic Nutrition” labels which detail how monies are spent and how much recirculation of funds is going back into the local economy (shown below). The businesses also collabourate with local youth to pass on traditions of fishing, art, and furniture making to carry on Fogo

Economic Nutrition©			
A Stay at the Fogo Island Inn			
Where The Money Goes			
Actual 2016			
Ingredients		% Financial Value	
Compensation		50%	
Food & Room Supplies		14%	
Commissions & Fees		5%	
Operations & Admin		16%	
Sales & Marketing Expenses		5%	
Contribution to Shorefast Foundation		10%	
Reinvested in Community			
Geographic Distribution			
Fogo Island	63%	Canada	22%
Newfoundland	8%	World	7%



Island’s material culture. These ventures have not only diversified local economic opportunities, but have also changed what was once a predominately a commodity-oriented economy which lost the majority of its value to external firms to a services and local production economy that internalizes and recirculates and much greater amount of value.

Hazleton, BC – Senden Sustainable Agriculture Resource Centre

The Senden Sustainable Agriculture Resource Centre is a project of the Upper Skeena Development Centre (USDC) in the heart of Hazelton, BC. In response to the loss of the local mill and decline in the forestry sector, Senden was developed to become an incubator for agricultural skill development and production. With the support of Western Economic Diversification, Bulkley Valley Credit Union, Storytellers’ Foundation, and the Village of Hazelton, USDC purchased a farmhouse and surrounding lands. The redevelopment of the land itself was an investment in social capital, with the Gitksan First Nation and other community residents working together to renovate the building and establish the farming site. Upon completion, USDC ran Youth Employment Services (YES) Programs on the site, building job capacities with an experiential education curriculum. Subsequently, the programming at Senden has grown to include a Community Supported Agricultural (CSA) seasonal food box program, bee keeping courses, an apple press for cold press juicing, etc.



More than just a CED program, however, Senden serves as an important node for social and community services. Donations of produce are made to elders and community groups, free community lunches are provided once a month to support community building, wellness programs are operated to address mental health and substance use in the community, and land-based programming is offered to connect youth back to cultural values and placemaking. To this end, economic development is being interwoven with food security, social capital, public health, and community building outcomes, which provides the fundamentals of community resilience in multiple areas.

Okanagan Territory, BC – Collaboration between Okanagan Indian Band and City of Vernon

The Okanagan Indian Band and the City of Vernon Councils signed a historic Relationship Accord in 2018 in order to facilitate stronger relationships through joint economic development and land use planning initiatives on traditional Syilx/Okanagan territory.

Okanagan Indian Band and the City of Vernon are one of 9 partnerships that were selected in Canada to participate in the Community Economic Development Initiative (CEDI) (www.fcm.ca/cedi). The program provides the respective Councils with additional capacity to reach common goals and realize a joint vision. The resources provided by the CEDI program assist in facilitating priorities set out in bi-annual workshops in order to achieve joint community economic development success.

At the bi-annual workshops, elected officials and senior staff representing both communities have learned about each other's history, culture, governance structures and economic development priorities. These discussions have strengthened relationships as neighbours and provided a foundation for future partnerships through respectful communication.

The Band and City Councils have agreed on priorities for the communities, which include joint land use planning, infrastructure and tourism opportunities. These initiatives are part of a long-term plan intended to maximize the benefit of participating in the CEDI program. These steps are essential in creating a successful environment to enable joint economic development initiatives to be realized.

<https://www.vernon.ca/activities-events/news-events/news-archive/okanagan-indian-band-and-city-vernon-sign-historic>

<http://www.edo.ca/cedi/current-cedi-partnership-profiles/okib-and-vernon>

Rhineland, Missouri, USA – Moving a town out of a floodplain

In the aftermath of the 1993 Midwest floods in the United States, Missouri's Boonslick Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) focused on moving small and rural communities out of the Missouri River floodplain. The first town to be physically moved was Rhineland. All 52 structures in Rhineland were assessed, and of those 32 were accepted for removal. These were cleaned, repaired, and put on trailers to be moved approximately a mile and a half up a hill adjacent to town. The majority of the remaining 20 structures (mostly businesses) were beyond repair, and were bought out by the planning district. Those who received the buyouts built new houses on plots of land also provided up the hill within the new flood-safe community. The community then redeveloped the floodplain with recreational facilities and open space for communal use while also mitigating future flood risks.



Although unusual in its scope, this program was success for several reasons. First was that the BRPC was able to cobble together funding from multiple sources such as HUD's Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), FEMA's hazard mitigation grant program (HMGP), the Missouri Housing Development Commission, local city bonds, and other available sources. Secondly, the BPRC worked individually with each homeowner to provide the technical assistance necessary to apply for funds, deal with mortgages, etc. And finally, because of the sense of community people had, few of them took the buyouts and left; they predominately remained and supported each other through the transition. The relocation program was completely voluntary, and allowed the community to maintain their connections and shared histories while still moving them

Revelstoke BC – Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation (RCFC)

The RCFC is one of the earliest and largest community forests in BC In the 1980s and 1990s when confronted with increasing sawmill closures, members of the community began the project in partnership with three local sawmills. Since 1993, the organization has managed 120,000 hectares of forest. The RCFC also owns a tree farm license and operates a log-sorting yard, which allows the community to benefit from the profits of timber sales and to control forest practices for local economic and environmental benefit. The RCFC ensures that timber harvested in the area is processed locally and the tree farms are managed in a sustainable way, in addition to managing the area for tourism and recreational use. According to the mayor of Revelstoke, before the RCFC, they only exported raw logs to other communities for processing, but now, the majority of the logs are locally processed or traded for logs that can be processed locally. This was accomplished through the establishment of RCFC in conjunction with one of

their industry partners, the local family-owned Downie Sawmill. Moreover, the Revelstoke Community Energy Corporation (RCEC) uses wood residue from the Downie Sawmill that would otherwise be disposed of to heat municipal buildings in the downtown core using a biomass district energy system (revelstokecommunityenergy.ca). The RCEC system was expanded thanks to a loan provided by the RCFC, illustrating how collaborations between community-controlled projects can enhance CED initiatives.

Lillooet, BC – T'it'q'et Economic Development Authority and Food Security Program

In the early 1970s, a wildfire destroyed most of the community's infrastructure of the T'it'q'et First Nations located in the Central Interior-Fraser Canyon region. This event led to several food security initiatives: in the 1980s, a community garden was established and in the mid-2000s, the community supported a large fruit tree planting project under the Ucwalmicw Centre Society. In 2009, there was another large wildfire near Lillooet and the town had to be evacuated for five days. During that time, the stores did not have enough food to supply the communities and food security became a top priority for the T'it'q'et First Nations. In 2013, the Ucwalmicw Centre Society partnered with Thompson Rivers University to bring a Horticulture program to the Northern St'at'imc communities. The Ucwalmicw Centre Society also received funding from Community Futures of Central Interior First Nations to build an Intermediate Technology Food Processing Facility (ITFP). T'it'q'et First Nation provided 2.5 acres for farming, which was fitted with a drip irrigation system, drought tolerant crop, and traditional speckled beans, while incorporating indigenous food security planting techniques. They also developed natural farming seed pods, cold storage, green houses, tested aeroponics and small solar panels.

The project employs community members, encourages community youth to consider potential careers in agriculture related fields, and a percentage of the food harvested goes to Elders and community members. The enterprise also packages dehydrated foods that include fruit and vegetables, for local venues and food security. Some produce is sourced from other farmers surplus harvests, to add to the volume of produce for the T'it'q'et First Nation members. Their product "Amlec" is now available at local businesses. To date the dehydrator has produced more than 10,000 lbs of product for community consumption and retail sale. The community also works with Thompson Rivers University on hosting horticulture workshops, and volunteers from the community and surrounding communities offer their time exchange for knowledge and experience.

(<https://www.lillooetagricultureandfood.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/sustainable-farming-workshop-1.pdf>)

Central Okanagan, BC – The COEDC Business Walk

An innovative regional workforce development strategy is facilitated by the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission (COEDC). The Commission and 13 partner organizations from Lake Country, Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, West Kelowna and Peachland are now on their 6th annual Small Business Walk, where volunteers visit small businesses in the communities and ask business owners, management, and staff key questions about the current state of business, future trends and barriers to growth. This helps government and service providers understand the current state of business, future trends, and barriers to growth – including workforce related challenges. It also connects business support agencies to the business community and identifies opportunities for COEDC's Business Enhancement programming. In 2017, 41% of businesses surveyed experienced difficulties finding and recruiting staff in the past year: Of the 91 businesses reporting challenges, 34 were seeking entry level workers, 38 were seeking semi-skilled workers and 21 businesses were looking to fill key skilled or professional positions. Other questions related to the impact of wildfires and flooding, and succession planning. The COEDC implemented Canada's first Business Walk in 2012, and it has since spread to over 75 communities throughout BC and Alberta (https://www.investkelowna.com/application/files/7715/1009/7437/2017_Small_Business_Walk_Report.pdf).

Stratford ON – Developing broadband capacity locally

The town of Stratford used money from their data utility, Rhyzome Networks, to fund their own broadband project. The network serves 7 rural communities, and has created 700 ICT-Based jobs in the area. The connectivity project contributed to the town's reputation as a technological hub, inspiring Waterloo University's Stratford Campus and amplifying rural healthcare access. <https://community-broadband.ca/stratford>

Northeastern Ontario – Land clearing and tile drainage fund

In 2016, the Ontario provincial government provided \$3.7million in funding to several associations in Northeastern Ontario for land clearing and tile draining projects on potential farmland. The project recipients and funding amounts included:

- The Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance — \$1 million for nine farmers' tile drainage projects on about 1,900 acres of land in the Timiskaming and Cochrane area and another \$1 million for 12 farmers' tile drainage and land clearing projects on nearly 2,000 acres in the same region.
- The West Nipissing East Sudbury Agricultural Support Projects Inc. — \$950,000 for 26 farmers' projects on 1,600 acres in the Nipissing and Sudbury area.
- The Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre — \$800,000 for 29 farmers' projects on 1,400 acres in the Algoma and Sudbury West regions.

Through the program, farmers got half of their eligible project costs, or up to \$500 per acre for land clearing or tile drainage work.

<https://www.betterfarming.com/online-news/ontario%E2%80%99s-northern-farmers-enthuse-over-land-clearing-tile-drainage-funding-61517>

Prince George, BC – UNBC Wood Innovation Research Lab

The Wood Innovation Research Lab (WIRL) is a new state-of-the-art UNBC wood science and engineering research facility in downtown Prince George.

The WIRL provides students, faculty members and researchers from UNBC's Master of Engineering in Integrated Wood Design program with the ability to build and test large-scale integrated wood structures using engineered wood products such as Cross-Laminated Timber, Glued Laminated Timber and Laminated Veneer Lumber. The over-height, single-story structure features a high-head lab for tall projects and a portion of the building consists of a strong floor and wall to support testing equipment and a crane.



The \$4.5 million building is a joint federal-provincial investment, with the Government of Canada contributing \$1.88 million and the Government of British Columbia contributing \$2.62 million. The City of Prince George is providing land for the lab.

The WIRL complements the nearby Wood Innovation and Design Centre by providing dedicated research space, which enables researchers to discover new, sustainable ways to integrate wood into building design and construction.

<https://www.unbc.ca/engineering-graduate/wood-innovation-research-labouratory>

Forestburg, AB – Battle River Cooperative

In 2008, a coalition of local farmers formed a co-operative to purchase and operate a 50-mile strip of railway that was being put out of service by CN. The farmers, who relied on the railway to transport their crops, sold shares to local stakeholders such as agricultural societies, businesses, and municipalities, eventually raising \$3.5 million and borrowing \$1.5 million more. The farmers purchased the rail line and locomotives in 2010 and established the Battle River Railway co-operative. The co-operative now offers tourism, storage, and commodity

transportation services. It also has a clear social mission, prioritizing local hiring and contributing to community development projects (<https://www.battleriverrailway.ca/>).

Gibsons, BC – Gibsons Public Market

With changes in the local economy, the former yacht club space in Gibsons lay vacant. With funding support from the local community, the regional trust, and other supporters, the Gibsons Community Building Society raised funds to redevelop the space as a local farmer's market and community space.



Now a central gathering space, the Gibsons Public Market is a significant community amenity that supports a variety of activities in addition to its core function as a farmers' market. A community kitchen is host to cooking demonstrations and community classes, while the Marine Education Centre serves as an additional tourism amenity for visitors. Vendors are directly supported by a business incubator that supports small-scale food producers to refine their products and grow their business. The ongoing impacts from the Public Market and Marine Education Centre after five years are estimated to result in 40.9 local jobs.

Whistler, BC – Shoulder season tourism strategy

Whistler is a global tourism destination for skiing and snow sports, but its summer tourism market has been growing exponentially, and rivals the winter season for sales and revenue. This has been due to a strategy to grow the shoulder season and find ways to diversify uses of local amenities and infra-structure. Some approaches include emphasizing mountain bike tourism through the expansion of mountain bike trail networks. The town has also focused on attracting more conferences, as well as staggering the planning around events and festivals to better spread the economic impacts.

