

# Abstract

Many rural regions and small towns within Canada are experiencing an extended period of economic and social restructuring due to a changing global economic climate. This process is evidenced by the automation of industries, changes in delivery of goods and services, as well as the transportation of people. Altogether, this economic and social evolution has led to a de-localization of local economies and has had a profound impact on traditional Canadian resource towns.

De-localization is often characterized by population out-migration, loss of youth residents and a shift away from primary resource industries. The reality of sustained population loss and dwindling natural resource availability has resulted in fewer economic development opportunities in resource towns. However, despite the economic and population-based instability experienced by these communities, they remain a common and a very relevant part of the Canadian landscape. Expressly, the contribution of Canada's rural economy towards the nation's overall GDP should not be overlooked.

One solution proposed by academics to mitigate the fluctuating population within resource towns is to diversify the population composition. Attracting and retaining families has the potential to be particularly effective in achieving sustainable town development.

In light of the current issues affecting resource town development, this report sought to determine whether existing resource communities have utilized the attraction and retention of families as a strategy for stabilizing and growing local economies. Three Northern British Columbian resource towns were chosen as case studies, Kitimat, Fort St. John and Tumbler Ridge. Research on these towns were used to explore two research questions:

- ❖ How can municipal planning facilitate the attraction and retention of families in northern British Columbian resource towns in order to stabilize and grow local economies?
- ❖ What policies have northern British Columbian resource communities incorporated into their Official Community Plans for attracting and retaining families and how can these policies be improved?

The foundation of this research was determined through a literature review which provided the theoretical base for this report and helped to determine how the research will fit into an existing body of knowledge. Furthermore, the literature review identified the development ideology for resource towns, and the historic economic and social issues that are prevalent in these communities. In addition to the literature review, there are three components to the research methodology: statistical analysis, interviews with planning professionals, and a policy review.

Upon completing a literature review and the analytical component of this report a list of recommendations were identified. These recommendations are intended for policy makers and planners in Kitimat, Fort St. John and Tumbler Ridge to further bolster the attraction and retention of families to these areas. The recommendations determined by this report are as follows:

## General Policy Recommendations

- Recommendation 1: Diversify the local economy
- Recommendation 2: Support a diverse demographic
- Recommendation 3: Ensure an appropriate housing stock for residents
- Recommendation 4: Devise OCP policies for managing transient/worker population
- Recommendation 5: Provide essential services and amenities for a growing population
- Recommendation 6: Develop a realistic growth management strategy for the future

## Recommendations for Kitimat, Fort St. John, and Tumbler Ridge

### Recommendations for Kitimat

- Recommendation 1: Plan for a Winter City
- Recommendation 2: Include OCP policies for regulating work camps

### Recommendations for Fort St. John

- Recommendation 1: Include OCP policies for regulating work camps and transient populations
- Recommendation 2: Address housing concerns

### **Recommendations for Tumbler Ridge**

- Recommendation 1: Work closely with incoming industries

The purpose of this research is to evaluate how the diversification of the population function as a strategy for achieving sustainable, long-term settlement development. From this research recommendations were determined to help address some of the municipal policy gaps that currently hinder the attraction and retention of families. As well, this report seeks to draw attention to some of the pressures resource towns face and provide feasible strategies for alleviating stresses in these vital communities.