

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The District of Mackenzie is a single-resource town in Northern British Columbia. Dependent on timber harvesting and forest-product manufacturing, Mackenzie is subject to boom-bust cycles and suffered from a mega-bust in late 2008 which resulted in the loss of approximately 1500 jobs. This bust has created a new sense of urgency among the community to diversify their economy to create more resilience and stability. This report examines the present situation in Mackenzie and offers planning recommendations that could be used to assist in mitigating the effects of single-resource dependency.

The research method used consisted of several stages. First, a literature review was conducted to help provide a theoretical framework for resource-based communities in Canada and to highlight approaches used to address these challenges. Next, a description of the historical and geographic setting of Mackenzie along with an analysis of the community design and present conditions will be conducted using maps, planning documents relevant literature and some descriptive statistics. Planning documents for Mackenzie and relevant documents at the national, provincial, and regional level were reviewed to determine strategies presently in place. Three similar single-resource towns were used as case studies to highlight additional diversification strategies useful and appropriate to the context of Mackenzie. The communities chosen include: Tumbler Ridge, B.C., Elkford, B.C., and Hearst, Ontario. These three communities were chosen because of they share a similar size, all exhibit a staples-dominated economy (forestry or mining) and suffer from restructuring challenges inherent of a such an economy. Relevant planning documents and literature will be reviewed for each case study. Finally, planning recommendations were made based on the strategies observed in the literature, planning documents and case studies.

The literature review revealed that resource-dependent communities remain an important part of the Canadian economic landscape, yet remain very vulnerable to the staples cycle. This vulnerability has been recognized for a long time, and past strategies used consisted of creating permanent planned towns instead of company run 'work-camps'. These new towns incorporated modern planning techniques in an effort to create permanent and stable communities. In British Columbia many such communities (Mackenzie included) were created via the Instant Towns Act. While some argue that these towns succeeded as permanent settlements, they still remain sensitive to boom-bust cycles and remain largely dependent on one economy. Some research proposes that resource communities may choose to follow a more sustainable 'alternative' future instead of following the traditional winding down phase of the resource town model. Recent efforts toward an 'alternative' future have been pushing toward creating more diverse economies that draw on tourist, energy, mining, and oil/gas industries.

The site analysis of Mackenzie indicates that the community is suffering considerably from this latest bust. Massive population loss has resulted in school closures, low tax revenues, declining infrastructure quality and high housing vacancies. The town has a new economic development plan and tourism plan which are striving toward diversification into tourism and mining. However, the Official Community Plan is quite dated and it appears that planning approaches have been neglected over the past several years.

It was found that presently there is substantial support available for single-resource towns at the national, provincial and regional levels. National level programs are providing valuable research and support in the forms of forums and workshops enabling community leaders and decision-makers to access valuable information regarding bioenergy and other new initiatives. Funding is largely facilitated at the provincial level through a surprisingly large number of programs, ranging from assistance with community planning to worker education and tourism/marketing

support. The Regional District of Fraser-Fort George is presently facilitating greater regional cooperation among the District communities.

Studying the case study communities of Elkford, Tumbler Ridge and Hearst revealed numerous planning strategies that Mackenzie could adapt to their own situation.

Drawing from the literature, planning documents and case studies five planning recommendations were created for Mackenzie.

- 1. Mackenzie should develop a new Official Community Plan to provide clear guidance for present and future decision-makers and residents.**
- 2. Mackenzie should update their Zoning By-law to formalize the construction of secondary suites and allow professional home occupations within residential areas.**
- 3. Mackenzie should develop a set of urban design guidelines for both the commercial core and residential areas.**
- 4. Mackenzie should implement a CIP for the downtown core and the main boulevard.**
- 5. Mackenzie should develop a comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan to guide future recreational infrastructure initiatives in the community.**

Overall, this report found that while Mackenzie is receiving support from several levels of government and has developed several strategies to diversify their economy, there has been limited emphasis placed on planning approaches. It is felt that the above recommendations will be useful for Mackenzie in helping fill this void.