



Newsletter

August 2008

OBAC Community Social Services and Supports Strategy and OBAC Attraction and Retention Strategy

A working group developing these two strategies met on August 11 to review early drafts of the plans and provide feedback directly to the strategy consultants. More than two dozen people in the social services, education, employment training, government services, and economic development sectors met to provide the consultants with a community-level overview of the challenges and opportunities in these two areas. OBAC Directors Mayor Stephanie Killam (Mackenzie) and Mayor Bernice Magee (Burns Lake) also attended the session.

OBAC determined several months ago that it was best to combine efforts for the development of these two strategies. There are many commonalities when considering how to improve social services and community support, along with what it takes for a community to attract and retain skilled workers and entrepreneurs. When considering a move to a new community, people often want to know about health care, schools, recreation, housing, shopping, and other services. Employers often point to these community attributes when advertising for new employees.



Work on these strategies included a very successful summit session in July with more than 40 attendees. OBAC Director Mayor Stephanie Killam commented, "The summit was an excellent session that brought together a good cross-section of people with many good ideas to share. The working group took information from this summit and has developed some great recommendations for the two strategies. Overall it has been an excellent process." Both strategies are expected to be released in October.

OBAC Future Forest Products and Fibre Use Strategy

Work on this strategy began in late July. Dialogue sessions (held in Vanderhoof on August 11 and in Houston on August 12) provided an opportunity for area residents to discuss how best to diversify and further develop the forest industry in the OBAC region. The sessions included a presentation by strategy consultants, Timberline Natural Resource Group, that provided participants with background on the current challenges facing the forest sector. Eighteen people from industry, communities, First Nations, and government attended the session. OBAC Chair, Mayor Len Fox, attended the session and commented, "I'm confident the input given during the session will be very valuable in helping to develop this extremely important strategy. Everyone was very forthright in presenting their comments and ideas."

Fifteen people from Burns Lake, Granisle, Houston, and Smithers attended the session in Houston. OBAC Director Mayor Sharon Smith attended the session and stated, "The session was a great opportunity to exchange ideas, discuss the challenges facing the forest industry and explore some of the oppor-



tunities. Inviting people to attend the dialogue session from the surrounding communities will provide OBAC with a broad cross-section of suggestions that will help develop a more focused strategy with realistic recommendations.” A working group is currently being formed to guide development of the strategy, and it will use the input from the dialogue sessions as a starting point. It is expected this work will continue for another couple of months, with the strategy being released in late October or early November.

OBAC Integrated Regional Infrastructure Strategy



Additional work on the OBAC Integrated Regional Infrastructure strategy is being carried out this summer to ensure that the full range of infrastructure needs in OBAC communities are identified in the report. OBAC Directors are also working in their communities to gather additional input from community leaders on infrastructure needs for the medium and long term. This strategy is viewed by OBAC Directors as one of the most critical in terms of helping OBAC communities to diversify their economies and seize opportunities for further growth and development. Resource and business investors need adequate road, rail, and air transport services, and updated telecommunications services. Communities also need modern infrastructure and amenities to help attract and retain new employees and their families. Work will continue on this strategy through the summer with a release date sometime this fall.

Strategy Briefings in Victoria

OBAC General Manager, Elizabeth Andersen, and Strategy Coordinator, Herb Langin, spent two days in July providing strategy briefings to senior government representatives in various government ministries. The purpose of the briefings was to gather input from senior ministry staff on the development of the strategies before they are finalized. OBAC Strategy Coordinator, Herb Langin, states, “Their input is important to the process, as these are the people who will implement the recommendations, should government choose to accept them. OBAC will be more successful in presenting its recommendations if they have been tested by a wide audience of interested parties, including senior government staff, who provide a very useful perspective.”

Input from senior staff also helps when recommendations impact more than one government ministry. For example, OBAC recommendations that deal with access to training and education programs could easily involve both the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Advanced Education, and implementation will need to be coordinated across the two ministries.

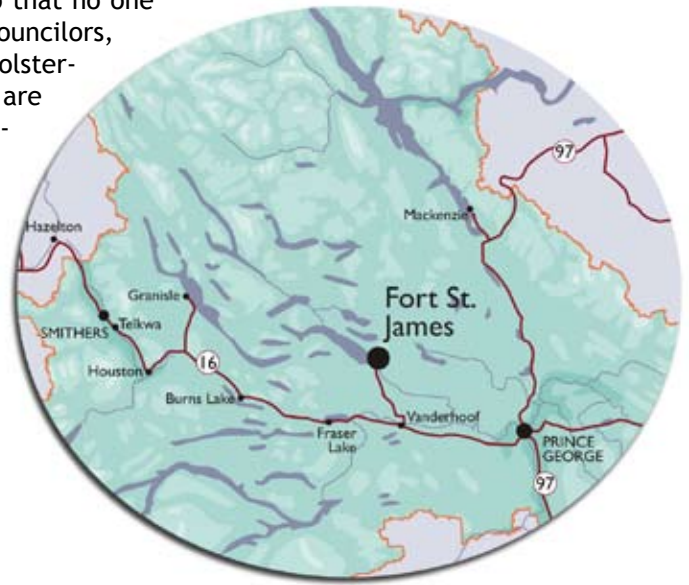
Community Focus - Fort St. James



It is common knowledge that Fort St. James is one of the many communities hard hit by the mountain pine beetle epidemic and the current downturn in the forest industry. This has had widespread negative impacts on almost every aspect of life in the small community nestled on the shores of Stuart Lake. What has come, as a result of these circumstances, is the opportunity for the community to once again show its extraordinary strength of character in meeting these life-changing events.

The “true grit” of the decision-makers in Fort St. James who forged and formed this community, recognize that this is the time to take stock of community assets. By strengthening the agricultural, tourism, and mining industries already pres-

ent within the economy, it solidifies the economic base so that no one economic factor can ever again cause such uncertainty. Councilors, administrators, and stakeholders are actively involved in bolstering the economy through diversification initiatives. They are also participating in discussions to lead to realistic strategies to mitigate the existing circumstances. Fort St James is fortunate to have a wealth of expertise to address all of the relevant issues, as the community rolls up its sleeves up and gets to work.



Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church on the shores of Stuart Lake in Fort St. James.

For information on the Coalition please contact

Elizabeth Andersen, Manager

Phone: (250) 563-7005 • Toll-free: 1-866-563-7005 • Fax: (250) 562-7880

www.ominecacoalition.ca

email: info@ominecacoalition.ca

