



# Newsletter

December 2008

## Four New Strategies Released

Fall 2008 saw the release of four new OBAC Strategies which present a vision and actions to build a prosperous future for the region. The strategies were released at two public events, November 28 and December 12. Both events were well attended by community leaders, provincial MLAs and Ministers, partner agencies, media representatives and interested members of the public.

OBAC strategies clearly articulate our region's vision and objectives for diversification on priority topics, describe the current opportunities and challenges and, recommend what needs to be done to achieve the vision. The strategies identify actions for local and senior governments, First Nations and industry leaders to take to achieve sustainable development.

The **Future Forest Products and Fibre Use Strategy** is aimed at achieving a diverse forest sector that builds upon our strengths in sustainable use and regeneration of forests and produces a wider range of both timber and non-timber products, including bio-energy as one opportunity. The strategy also calls for managing the forest resource for additional forest values including ecological services and cultural values.

The **Integrated Regional Infrastructure Strategy** includes recommendations and actions to ensure the region's new and existing transportation infrastructure provide for the safe, cost effective and expeditious movement of people, goods and services. The strategy also seeks to ensure the region's energy and communications infrastructure elements are in place to attract new businesses and allow existing ones to expand.

The goal of the **Attraction and Retention Strategy** is to ensure the region is successful in retaining and attracting the skilled workers and professionals needed by business, government and service providers. Marketing the region's considerable assets which make it a desirable place to live, work, play, invest and retire is a cornerstone of this strategy.

The **Community and Social Services and Supports Strategy** is focused on supporting healthy and resilient communities in the OBAC region where residents have access to quality and professional social services and supports. The strategy recommends more community involvement in determining priority needs and appropriate delivery mechanisms. This strategy also aims to enable young people and adults to obtain the education and employment services that will allow them to fully participate in the region's economy.

The strategy recommendations and actions are all aimed at supporting community level efforts to build more resilient and diversified economies. OBAC Chair Don Bassermann sums it up: "We are stronger when we work together and these strategies show the advantages of pooling our resources and knowledge to address our shared needs and improve economic and service synergies across businesses, communities and the region." Following strategy release, OBAC moves into action planning - identifying the subset of proposed actions from each strategy that are an immediate priority and finding implementing partners to begin to take action.



Hon. Pat Bell, BC Minister of Forests and Range



Don Basserman, OBAC Chair and Prince George City Councillor



Len Fox, Past OBAC Chair and Vanderhoof Mayor



Mackenzie Mayor, Stephanie Killam

## OBAC Board Appoints New Chair



Councillor Don Bassermann from the City of Prince George was appointed Chair of the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition at the OBAC Annual General Meeting in October 2008. Bassermann replaces retiring OBAC Chair Mayor Len Fox from the District of Vanderhoof.

"I'm delighted to take over from Len who has done an outstanding job in keeping the Board focused on our goal of enabling communities to build sustainable economies across the OBAC region," says Bassermann. "On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank Len for his dedication to communities in the region and wish him all the best as he takes a well deserved step away from public service."

## Community Transition Toolkit - A first implementation project on the two Social Development Strategies

The need for a "Transition Toolkit" was first identified by OBAC Directors in the wake of the economic upheaval caused by the sharp increase in mill closures and curtailments in several communities in 2007. OBAC Directors wanted to learn as much as possible from past experiences - sharing best practices and cautions so that local governments and community organizations are better able to prepare for ongoing economic transition generally and also economic crisis events should they arise.

**The Transition Toolkit: Working framework for a more resilient community** was first designed in the late spring of 2007 as the Community Development Institute (CDI) at UNBC worked with the District of Mackenzie on a plan to respond effectively to threatened industrial closures. The framework was then revised and expanded as part of a Community Transition Project undertaken by the CDI at UNBC, OBAC and Ministry of Community Development. The toolkit draws upon the wealth of experience and knowledge across OBAC communities, UNBC's research group in rural and small town studies, staff at the Ministry of Community Development's Community Partnerships Group and, the conclusions in a Canada-wide project done by the provincial and territorial departments in 2005 called "Facing the Challenge of Industry Closure: Managing Transition in Rural Communities".

The toolkit is a decision-support tool, enabling systematic preparation at the local level in three key areas: communications; knowledge, information and service status; and networks.

Preparing in these three areas will give local government decision makers tools to develop more resilient communities. The first area of the framework is a *Communications Strategy* to assist with organizing and communicating a clear direction for community change and community response. The second area of the framework enables *Knowing What We Have and Where We Stand*, focusing attention on the availability of critical services, as well as the status of community plans and strategies that provide a foundation for economic renewal and guide on-going community development. The third area of the framework guides the development and maintenance of *Support and Information Networks* to connect local and external decision-makers and to obtain timely and relevant information to support informed decisions.



The toolkit is currently being "test-driven" by OBAC communities and will be released early in 2009. Community leaders, senior staff and service organizations that have reviewed the draft have said that this will be a valuable tool but that it needs to be updated and maintained to keep it current and useful. This is a proposed action in the *OBAC Community Social Services and Supports Strategy* released in December '08. Putting in place a mechanism for periodically updating the toolkit will be one of the items built into the Action Plan for the implementation of this strategy.

For more information about the toolkit, please contact Greg Halseth, Canada Research Chair of Rural and Small Town Studies, UNBC.  
Phone: 250-960-5826 E-mail: halseth@unbc.ca

## Community Focus - McBride

McBride has traditionally relied on the lumber industry which has been experiencing a steady decline for the past few years. The Village is located in the Robson Valley Forest District where 37% of its income is dependent upon forestry. Mill closures have led to significant job losses, similar to Mackenzie, Fort St. James and Burns Lake. This presents great challenges for the small community of 700 residents. McBride leaders have responded to these circumstances by pursuing new, environmentally sensitive solutions to industry diversification and job creation.

One of the community's obstacles to economic diversification is the lack of stable power. An opportunity came with the announcement by BC Hydro Bioenergy Call for Power. Community leaders decided to invite a possible partner to establish a facility in the Robson Valley. This initiative fit well with McBride's effort to develop and showcase the community as the first true sustainable village in Canada.

As a result of the collaboration with its power partner, the McBride Community Forest Corporation, the Village of McBride and the community economic development office, a plan was formulated to develop first "green" industrial park around the proposed cogeneration facility and bring the power lines to the village. The partners' strong desire to succeed solidified the business relationship with the proponent to such an extent that even though the application for the Bioenergy Call was declined, the company decided to invest anyway.

Plans are now being developed to build a power station that will generate electricity and heat. The plant will become a catalyst for other industries including horticulture, aquaculture, organic fertilizer, wood drying and milling. The power plant will create 24 direct jobs, bring more than five million dollars in an economic benefit to the community, initiate environmental remediation of the a non-operating mill site and create spin-off jobs. Other "clean" technology industries are considering locating their operations in McBride.



For more information on the Village of McBride, visit the community's website at [www.mcbride.ca](http://www.mcbride.ca)

## Coming Events

**"Getting in the Game" First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative Natural Resource Forum** will be held January 15-16, 2009 in Prince George. This forum will help provide First Nations communities with the tools to fully engage in natural resource economic development initiatives in forestry, agro-forestry, mining and bio-energy. Optional pre-forum learning sessions will be held on January 14, 2009. OBAC will host the banquet and speaker. For information and registration: Zandra Ross, First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative: Phone: 250-963-9291; Email: [fnmpbi@telus.net](mailto:fnmpbi@telus.net); Web: [www.fnmpbi.com](http://www.fnmpbi.com)

**Opportunities North: The Northern Economic Summit** will be held January 22-23, 2009 at the Prince George Civic Centre and will provide a unique forum that will bring business, government and community leaders together to highlight the choices, challenges and potential of our economy. Prominent speakers will join Premier Gordon Campbell and BC's cabinet ministers, and provide thoughtful interactive input on the economic future of our province. For information and registration, visit [www.thebceconomicsummit.ca](http://www.thebceconomicsummit.ca)

**Minerals North 2009:** Fort St. James is hosting the 21st Minerals North Conference from April 21-23, 2009. This conference brings together the minerals industry with municipal and aboriginal representatives, business people, contractors, students, and environmentalists. The conference will help participants build working relationships and become informed about mining and exploration projects and issues. The warm hospitality that derives from community involvement ensures that Minerals North is distinct from any other BC mining conference. For information contact [mineralsnorth@fortstjames.ca](mailto:mineralsnorth@fortstjames.ca) or visit [www.mineralsnorth.ca](http://www.mineralsnorth.ca)

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