CHARTING BC’S ECONOMIC FUTURE
100 COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS
PARTNERED WITH NORTH PEACE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
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HOPES AND CONCERNS FOR BC’S ECONOMY

Hopes

• That we’ll move away from the constant discourse that the economy, and oil and gas, is evil
• That people who come to the region for a season to make money are attracted to stay
• To see an increase in local amenities
• That people realize BC and Fort St. John are a great place to be
• That quality programming won’t only take place where there are a lot of people
• To get everybody together in their fields to discuss the economy
• To be in front of urban sprawl, and to enable people to afford living in the North
• That locals will realize the value that newcomers and immigrants bring to the area
• To see more localized control over the economy
• For the province to recognize that the provincial economy is driven by rural areas of the province, and to have services located in rural areas
• Want what my parents had: to grow up in a community where extended family can stay—opportunities for local youth to get local jobs locally
• That the training for job skills will be located where the jobs are located
• That all the hard work, research, on workforce needs will be used
• That we move forward with the knowledge that we have on the region and the local economy
• That the contribution, per person, to the provincial GDP can be recognized
• That we take advantage of the tremendous resources that we have (oil and gas)
Concerns

- That people in this province misunderstand the connection between a strong economy, and the other legs of the stool (social and environment). Two legs are not enough
- How to attract manpower to the northeast, and how to keep it
- A lack of willingness to converse with, and understand, each other throughout the province (i.e. on a provincial scale)
- Housing, cost of living, and quality of life in the north is a concern
- That we won’t find a balance between urban sprawl and growth
- Concerned about the local discourse and mentality that newcomers are coming to ‘take our jobs away’
- The lack of control over our own destiny, because we’re waiting on decisions that are being made elsewhere (Victoria, Vancouver, Beijing)
- The growing division between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’—growing inequality in BC
- That the province won’t recognize the importance of rural areas
- That local youth, and family units, will be separated
- Over the past year and a half, many workforce strategies have been done on a regional basis
- That training at the large universities and colleges in the lower mainland does not address labor needs throughout the province and where labor is needed
- That politics will trump good decision-making and policy-making
SWOT ANALYSIS FOR BC’S ECONOMY

STRENGTHS

• Natural resources (mining, oil and gas, forestry)
• People
• Positive attitude
• World demand for resources
• Innovation
• Industry
• Transportation
• Land base
• Cost of living in many places
• Strong financial system
• Good investment opportunities
• Natural environment with diverse landscapes
• Agriculture
• Renewable energy (Wind and Hydro)
• Tourism
• Job availability
• Pleasant weather conditions
• Educated workforce
• Social safety-net
• Labor standards
• Stable society
• Cheap power
• Positive global perception of the Province
• Local expertise on resource extraction
• Great communities (at least in the North)
• Accessibility to international markets
WEAKNESSES

- World instability of markets, financial instability and susceptibility to currency fluctuation
- The “no” attitude (with regards to natural resource development)
- Toxic political atmosphere
- Need for infrastructure—in terms of health and social services
- Lack of skilled workers
- Lack of affordable housing
- Poor logistics for transportation
- Debt
- Lack of services
- Uneven income distribution—inequality
- High tax rate for some (unfair system)
- Failure to recognize fundamental long-term issues such as cumulative impacts (failure to apply stewardship principles so that economic prosperity can continue on long-term)
- Short-term thinking in general
- High labor costs
- PST
- Red tape
- Lack of urban understanding of rural concerns and obstacles
- Lack of investment in rural areas
- Difficulty exporting raw resources
- Lack of exporting expertise
- Diverse society demands
- Too much primary industry—little value added
OPPORTUNITIES

- Dialogue between regions
- Increase access to foreign markets
- Innovation
- Employment
- Investment
- Partnerships
- Transportation
- Many opportunities to invest in energy sector
- Knowledge economy
- LNG opportunity
- Ability to live where you grew up and never leave home—strong careers
- We still could nurture an economy that would support an equitable society
- We still could steward our resources to create long-term, stable well-being for all
- Potential for enlightened policy on resource extraction
- Potential for value added resource development
- Opportunity remains for thoughtful and meaningful community development—avoid being a Fort Mac
- Training “Centers of Excellence”—tap into our local expertise to train the world
THREATS

- World competition from unstable competitors (ie. Russian pressure on Potash)
- Ignorance of how economy works
- Environmental
- Up/down global economy i.e. Economic slowdown if oil/gas prices drop on market
- Lack of acknowledgment for the people and economy outside major urban centers
- Lack of knowledge of diverse segments of province
- Site C
- Short-term thinking
- Loss of control over our diversity
- Climate change
- Decision making process out of our hands in regards to resource development
- Environmental and social concerns outweighing political decision-making
- Aging population
- Loss of expertise
- Increased environmental regulation due to perceived fears
- Lack of desire or inability to bring segments together
TOP ACTIONS FOR BC’S ECONOMIC FUTURE

GROUP #1

Top Actions to Create Wealth:

1. Eliminate the sales tax.

2. Education
   - Try to balance skills training and training people to be good civic ‘citizens’
   - Effective system to match education with the skill needs
   - Exchange programs such as Katimavik
   - Efforts to facilitate exchanges between the lower mainland and rural areas

3. Have an ongoing forum to discuss the economy, but turn the question upside down
   - Have the question: what actions are needed to protect the environment while maintaining a healthy economy?
GROUP #2

Top Actions to Create Wealth:

1. Educational Investment
   - Promotion of variety of opportunities that exist
   - Early exposure to students of work opportunities
   - Integration of high-school with industry needs
   - Development of education sector outside major urban centers—increasing the profile and appeal of living and teaching here (there are dollars in the classrooms here to hire teachers and instructors)
   - Industry willingness to develop programs to expose students to ‘real’ experiences
   - Create a ‘Centre of Excellence’ for oil and gas

   This action will create jobs through training. It will give BC a skilled workforce that matches industry need. This action will provide BC with stable and diverse social capital. This action could increase environmental awareness as more educated and affluent individuals tend to be more aware of the environment.

2. Increased investment in renewable energy sector
   - Hydro, solar, and wind
   - R&D opportunities—energy storage and reduction of environmental impacts
   - Development of a ‘Center of Excellence’ for renewable energy (participant commented that this already exists in Dawson Creek, but that they need support to do more)

   This action will create jobs through increased production, R&D, and training. It will give BC a global competitive advantage through low local energy costs. This action will increase societies’ awareness of environmental issues and their environmental knowledge. This action will lower our carbon footprint and reduce GHGs.

3. Increase the mobility of the continental workforce

   This action will enable BC to attract and retain more competitive workforce. It will lead to diverse community development and should be coupled with increasing cultural awareness. This action will lower our carbon footprint and reduce GHGs through the need to commute less. It will also increase appreciation for where people live—their local communities.
GROUP #3

Top Actions to Create Wealth:

1. Increase the quality and substance of political officials
   - Look for solutions and quit bickering

2. Improve educational opportunities and training in our region
   - Train people to stay at home in local communities
   - Flexible hours of training
   - Student loans for adult or adult training opportunities with pay [if you’re not on EI, you’re ineligible for funding]

3. Improve transportation infrastructure (air, roads, rail, pipeline, power, waterways)

4. Ensure that BC is benefiting fairly/equitably from our resources
   - Do a market and cost-benefit analysis to see what other provinces are charging for resources [royalties and taxes]. Are producers paying enough to get resources out of the ground?

5. Census
   - Obtain more accurate figures i.e. There is currently no capture of transient workers
   - Adjust provincial funding, which is based on population, to reflect actual population including transient workers [to whom services must be provided].

Additional Actions to Address Social Equity:

- Improve availability for counseling and rehabilitation [alcohol, drugs, gambling]
- Affordable housing
- Youth Programs—both indoor and outdoor

Additional Actions to Protect the Environment

- Regulation
- Proper inspection/enforcement