











District of Vanderhoof
Housing Study and Needs Analysis
June 2015

District of Vanderhoof
Incorporated 1926
Geographical Centre of BC

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE
UNBC

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 5

Introduction 7

Housing Issues & Challenges 10

Current Housing Needs 16

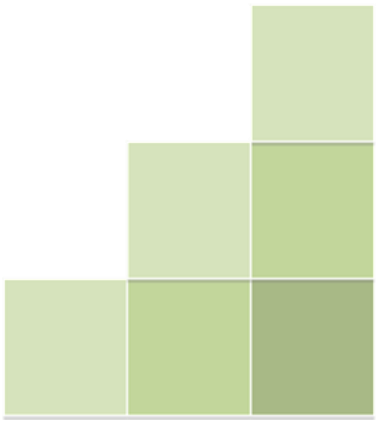
Looking Forward 24

Key Change Drivers 24

Priorities & Potential Strategies 38

Conclusion 46

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE UNBC



Acknowledgements

The Community Development Institute at the University of Northern British Columbia would like to thank and acknowledge all of the people who participated in this project. Thank you to those who took part in one-to-one interviews, and to those who contributed to the workshop. Special thanks to the District of Vanderhoof Housing Committee: Councillor John Murphy, Daniel Scoular, Dave Flegal, Fiona Lamprecht, Sylvia Byron, and Tom Clement. Thanks also to Mayor Gerry Thiessen and District Staff representative Gavin Ireland.

On our research team, we wish to thank Erin MacQuarrie for her assistance in tabulating extensive demographic data.

Funding for this project came from the District of Vanderhoof.

Clare Mochrie, Marleen Morris, and Greg Halseth

June 2015

Accessing This Report

The reports from this project may be accessed through the Community Development Institute's website at: http://www.unbc.ca/community-development-institute/research-projects.

For further information about this topic and the project contact Marleen Morris or Greg Halseth, Co-Directors of UNBC's Community Development Institute:

Community Development Institute at UNBC
3333 University Way
Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9
Website: http://www.unbc.ca/cdi

Marleen Morris
Tel: 250-960-5952 / Cell: 250-960-9806
Fax: 250-960-5606
Email: Marleen.Morris@unbc.ca

Greg Halseth
Tel: 250-960-5826
Fax: 250-960-6533
Email: Greg.Halseth@unbc.ca

Introduction

Vanderhoof prides itself on being a friendly, family-oriented community: a great place to live, raise a family and do business. Nestled within the Nechako Valley in the geographic centre of the province, Vanderhoof is surrounded by rolling hills of fertile farmland and thick coniferous forests.

It has a stable economy that is rooted in agriculture and the resource industries of forestry and mining. Diversity is afforded through the presence of several government agencies, a regional hospital, and various health care services. The Nechako Campus of the College of New Caledonia is based in Vanderhoof. The town also has a strong retail and service sector.

Vanderhoof has a rich history. The surrounding terrain also offers a wide array of recreational opportunities, attracting a growing number of tourists.

The town has all the key markers of a community at the “heart of it all” as per the District’s tagline. However, over the past five to ten years, Vanderhoof has experienced a growing host of issues and challenges related to housing. As with many northern communities, the housing stock established in the 1960-70s has not kept pace with the size and needs of the population. As a result, housing has become a critical impediment to Vanderhoof’s capacity to attract and retain residents, families, professionals, and workers.

This Project: the Research Process and Methodology

Recognizing the existing challenges related to housing and the implications of these issues to the social and economic health of the community, the District of Vanderhoof initiated a study to examine the local housing market as well as current and future housing needs in the community. This process, facilitated by the Community Development Institute at UNBC, involved four main components:

- Review of Literature – including an in depth review of past reports and relevant documents pertaining to the current and future economic and housing situation in the District and surrounding region;
- Data collection – to develop a longitudinal community and housing profile for the District;
- Key informant interviews – with 22 community and industry stakeholders, including housing and social service providers, major employers, industry representatives, and those involved in the development sector;
    - These interviews delved into stakeholders' perceptions and knowledge of existing issues and challenges related to housing in Vanderhoof as well the populations they were seeing in greatest need for housing, both presently and in the future. Employers were questioned on the relationships between housing and their ability to attract and retain professionals and labour. The interviews explored current trends and projected changes in the District workforces and the implications of these changes to local housing demand and supply. They also inquired into the current and future outlook for housing development;

- Workshop – with key stakeholders to review research findings and discuss housing strategies and priorities in relation to different future scenarios.

Given the research focus on the housing needs, consultations were intentionally directed to housing service providers and those indirectly impacted by issues and challenges of the housing situation. Going forward and prior to proceeding with any housing developments, it will be important to reach out to the specific populations in need of housing regarding the different features of that accommodation. At this stage, however, these more detailed consultations would have been inappropriate and result merely in the premature raising of expectations.

This Report

This report summarizes the results of this research process and what was revealed through both the data and community discussions about existing and emerging issues and needs related to housing in Vanderhoof. It profiles four specific populations that are experiencing the greatest challenges in finding and retaining suitable homes. It also highlights a number of key drivers that stand to shape housing demand in the future.

The report also provides a synopsis of outcomes from a community workshop, which explored housing needs in relation to three different possible scenarios. These discussions revealed a number of needs and strategies that will be pertinent and effective regardless of what population and economic shifts should transpire. These priorities and strategies are outlined in the final chapter, as a starting point for next steps and future action.

Housing Issues & Challenges

Housing is a growing issue in communities throughout central and northern British Columbia. Vanderhoof has been buffered from the radical swings in housing costs and demand that many other smaller resource-based communities have experienced. However, as in many towns, it is grappling with a housing stock that no longer meets the needs of its evolving population.

Housing has become a critical impediment to those looking to move, or recruit people to Vanderhoof. It is also an issue for those who wish to stay and grow old in town. There are a number of interrelated factors that are contributing to the current challenges. These are discussed below.

Aging Housing Stock

The lion's share of housing in BC's central and northern communities was established during the housing/resource town boom of the 1960s and 70s. This was the case in Vanderhoof and there has been limited housing development since this time. As a result, 57% of the town's housing stock is more than 25 years old and aging.

Limited Housing Structure Options

Sixty-nine percent of the housing stock is single-family dwellings. The second most common housing structure is trailers, making up 11% of total dwellings. Apartments and duplexes represent a mere 7% of the mix, and row houses another 7%.

The limited number of apartments is in part attributable to a District limitation on building heights. Buildings higher than three storeys have always been prohibited by fire regulations – and specifically the lack of a ladder fire truck.

While recent years have seen the development of a number of duplexes, as these took some time to sell, there is minimal appetite among the development community to expand this stock.

Diversity of housing options has also been impeded by the design of homes. Most homes, and particularly those located on or near the floodplain in Vanderhoof, have been constructed without a sub-terrain level, which removes the option of basement suites. While basements represent just one option for secondary suites, this housing feature has meant that very few households have taken advantage of this revenue generating opportunity.

Minimal Rental Stock

Notwithstanding the resounding feedback from stakeholders regarding the demand and shortage of rental accommodation, the proportion of renters in Vanderhoof decreased between 2006 and 2011. While the percentage of homeowners rose from 71% to 74% during this period, the proportion of households renting their homes dropped from 29% to 25%. This decrease is likely reflective of a lack of rental supply, as opposed to demand. Interviewees confirmed that there have been no new rental properties built in Vanderhoof in the past 30 years.

Due to the fact that the current demand for rentals far exceeds the supply, the costs of rental accommodation are elevated. Two bedroom basement suites in Vanderhoof are reportedly approximately $1,300/month – a price which rivals that of much larger urban centres.

Physical Shortage of Housing

There is a shortage of the types of homes that people want in the places where they want to live and at costs they can afford.

The most widespread observation made by community members in relation to housing was that physical supply of homes in Vanderhoof falls critically short of demand. More specifically, the District lacks the types of homes that people want, in the places where they want to live, and at prices that they can afford. Due to the limited housing development over the past thirty years, the housing stock has not kept pace with changes to the nature and demographics of the population.

The shortages in Vanderhoof are exacerbated by extreme housing shortages on the Saik'uz First Nations Reserve. Situated 9km southeast of Vanderhoof, the population on reserve is growing quickly and there are an estimated 81 units of housing required.

Elevated Housing Costs

The limited supply of particular housing types drives up the costs of these homes in Vanderhoof. In addition, the design of the aging housing stock, which typically rely on electrical heating systems and lack insulation, make them extremely expensive to maintain during the winter months. Trailers, which comprise 11% of the housing stock, are also typically very costly to heat.

The combination of high utility expenses and elevated rental or mortgage costs renders the overall costs of living in Vanderhoof on par with those of much larger urban centres, and exceeds what many people are willing to pay.

High Costs of Development

Local developers report that it is expensive to develop land in Vanderhoof. On land to the south and around the river, developers face an additional substantial cost to build up the lot.

Renovations and housing development is further impeded by a lack of tradespeople. Skilled tradespeople working in the District are at capacity. As a result, the costs of building are high and developers are deterred from building rental accommodation and essentially any houses below $300,000. However, the greatest demand for homes are those that fall between $200,000 and $250,000.

Developers are finding that they cannot recover the costs of building and developing housing in the District, and as a result there is inertia to build.

A considerable proportion of available land within the town proper is reportedly concentrated in the hands of a small number of owners. However, due to the economics of building, these lands are sitting vacant. The majority of homes built in recent years have been built outside/on outskirts of town.

A Lack of Public Transportation Infrastructure

The absence of a public transit system or taxi service exacerbates the housing issue in Vanderhoof. While the District is fortunate to have a vibrant and centralized core of retail and services, it means that individuals and families living outside of this downtown area are required to own a vehicle. Seniors, persons with disabilities, and low/fixed income individuals and families are impacted most by this reality. It also heightens the importance of housing within walking distance of the downtown core that is suitable and affordable to these populations.

Perceptions of Housing

As in many smaller communities, people are unfamiliar with, and in many cases, opposed to multi-unit housing options. Notwithstanding the economic and energy efficiency gains that can be achieved through multi-unit/attached housing, a widespread preference for the single-family home prevails. As a result, while the District has seen the construction of a number of duplex units in recent years, the developers of these properties report relatively slow uptake on these sales, which they attribute in large part to public perceptions. A number of stakeholders interviewed talked about there being a general expectation among people about being able to afford a single detached home – in many cases with a garage - as a feature of smaller town living. This is an expectation, however, which developers feel is now out of step with the costs of building.

Current Housing Needs

Housing shortages impact a community's ability to attract and retain talent and labour – and therefore business. Shortages impede the ability for residents to stay in the community as they grow older and their needs evolve. They also undermine the more vulnerable members of a community's capacity to transition to greater stability and contribute more fully to society.

Housing shortages thereby affect everyone in a community. However, there are generally certain segments of the population who feel the brunt of the issue. In the case of Vanderhoof, the research highlighted four groups who are particularly impacted by the current situation.

Seniors

Who are they?

As described in the Community Profile, 12% of the Vanderhoof population was over the age of 65 in 2011 – and 22% were considered low income. The majority of seniors are longer-term residents of the community. They are based in single-family homes on large plots of land situated outside of the downtown core. As people age, they tend to want to downsize and move closer to family and services. They may require different housing designs or layouts, situated on a single level for example. While they may want to continue to maintain a small garden, the responsibilities and/or costs of maintaining a larger piece of property become too taxing. In-law/secondary suites within the home of a family member often offer an attractive option.

In some cases, health issues require that people obtain different levels of assistance and this need tends to become more acute as people age. However, in Vanderhoof, the suitable options available for seniors to downsize into and receive the services they require are critically limited.

A number of the seniors housing options are situated out of the downtown core and across the bridge to the north of river, making it unsafe or impossible for those without vehicles to travel on their own to access shopping and services. Assisted and complex care housing options in town are fully subscribed. Seniors housing facilities throughout the District also have lengthy waitlists. As a result, many seniors remain in their single-family homes until their health deteriorates to the point that they are forced to leave.

The situation is detrimental from both an individual and community perspective. It is clearly preferable to both the physical and social health of seniors to transition to housing that is designed and supported at a level appropriate to their abilities while they retain a choice. When these individuals lack appealing and affordable alternatives, however, they remain in their homes beyond the point that they need and are able to care for them. The community subsequently lacks the supply of single-family homes for the families that require them. If and when these homes do come on the market, they also tend to be run down.

As highlighted by the Community Profile, Vanderhoof's population is aging and can expect to see exponential growth of its senior population. Over the next ten years, the proportion of those aged 85 and over is expected to increase by 148%. The second highest rate of growth will be seen among "young" seniors, aged 65-69, which is projected to grow by 87% in the coming decade. This two-pronged growth pattern translates to increased demand for a range of seniors' housing options.

What types of housing do they need?

Based on the feedback from stakeholders, early retirees/young seniors are seeking to downsize to smaller, independent but single level homes within close proximity of services. While some may be looking to buy, the option to rent is attractive to many. This demographic is looking for options that will remain suitable as they age, thus designed with the necessary supports and accessible to those with mobility challenges, using walkers and wheelchairs. "Care housing" arrangements whereby seniors move in with a household that can provide some basic level of assistance, rides, and meals holds appeal for many.

Meanwhile, research revealed that more elderly seniors need homes with at least the option of differing levels of care. Residences designed not merely to enable but actually facilitate social interaction are key for this population, taking into consideration the conditions and mobility barriers created by the climate in winter. Again, the ability to remain in place while their health and physical needs change and progress will also be critical.

One/Two Person Households

Who are they?

Sixty percent of Vanderhoof's population in 2011 was comprised of small, one and two person households. While some of these are seniors, this group also consists of young individuals and couples: working professionals and those starting out their careers, recent graduates who have been recruited to town by employers, industry workers, as well as those working in lower paid service industry jobs. While the median after-tax income of two-person households was $68,775, that for single person households was $23,116 in 2011.

A lack of appealing smaller scale and rental options in Vanderhoof is presently impeding employers' ability to attract this population and several reported losing talent directly as a consequence of the town's limited housing options. Smaller rural and remote communities all over the north and central regions of the province face challenges in recruiting skilled professionals and trades to town as well as in retaining their young talent. A shortage of the types of housing structures and tenure that appeals to this population therefore places an extra burden on local employers.

What types of housing do they need?

Stakeholders interviewed as part of this project indicated that this group needs smaller-scale homes – either independent or multi-unit dwellings. While some may be looking to buy, in many cases this younger population is typically at a transitional stage in their lives and careers. They may have moved to Vanderhoof for a first job out of college or university. This group also includes working

professional singles and couples. As such, smaller homes appropriate to higher and lower income levels are in need. As in the case of RCMP officers or medical professionals, they are in town on a temporary contract. In these cases, rental options are generally preferred. Many are looking for somewhat modern accommodations and designs.

Low Income Individuals

Who are they?

As of 2011, the proportion of low income individuals in Vanderhoof was 18% and one fifth of the population was paying more than 30% of their income on shelter. In the case of renters, 48% fell into this category of "core housing need".

The unemployment rate was 9.9% and the proportion on government assistance was 10.6%. All of these numbers are above the provincial average. They point to a sizable number of more vulnerable individuals in the community. Persons with disabilities – either mental or physical – often fall into this population, along with single parents. In Vanderhoof, social service agencies report an extremely limited number of accommodations that are accessible to individuals in wheelchairs.

For those receiving government assistance, the $375 allowance for housing (one unit) often falls critically short of what is required to cover both rent and utilities, particularly during the winter. Due to the limited number of small, lower rent accommodations in town, landlords are able to be selective. As a result, agencies in town indicate that those individuals that may be "harder to house" are often discriminated against.

While there is a transitional housing program for women in Vanderhoof, there is nothing available for single men. The RCMP has a “sojourners program”, but this is intended to assist only workers who find themselves, due to weather or other situations, stranded in town without a place to stay. Notwithstanding this intent, officers have made exceptions for homeless residents in town in recent years. More often, social service agencies are forced to look outside of Vanderhoof in assisting these individuals to find housing. It was reported that in many cases they are sent to Prince George.

Social service agencies reported there being an unequivocal population of homeless individuals in Vanderhoof. At times, particularly during the winter, the issue is hidden as people “couch surf” and bunk in with family and friends. In the warmer months, people are living outside.

What types of housing do they need?

Based on the input of stakeholders interviewed, this population requires small, low cost rental housing that is connected to support services. They require housing providers or landlords who understand and operate with a level of tolerance for the challenges that many of these individuals face. Housing specifically for single men is required as well as accommodations that are accessible to those living with disabilities. Service providers indicate having proof of interest from a number of households in providing room and board, supervision and personal/social support to persons with disabilities.

Many of the service providers expressed the need for low/no barrier housing, i.e. housing where a minimum number of expectations are placed on people who wish to live there, the aim being to have as few barriers as possible to allow more people access to services. Several also highlighted the need for emergency housing to provide short-term shelter for individuals in crisis.

Families

Who are they?

Eighty percent of Vanderhoof's population in 2011 was families, including 36% couple-only families and 44% couples with children. The median income of couple-only families was $66,000; that of those with children was $96,000. These are therefore middle-income families with adults employed with the local industry and services.

This segment of the population has always been the crux of Vanderhoof's vision as a family-friendly community. The continued ability to attract and retain this core population is also key to Vanderhoof's vision as a family-oriented community going forward.

Longer-term resident families are, for the most part, accommodated by the existing stock of single detached homes. However, families new to town or looking to relocate consistently report struggling to find housing that suits their needs and lifestyles. Lower priced homes rarely come on the market for sale and rental homes are extremely limited. Families also often find the options and quality of housing available unsuited to their needs and tastes.

Vanderhoof's local industry and employers have well-paying work opportunities by which to attract professionals and skilled trades. However, when it comes to enticing families to town employers report having difficulty. Families are often seeking a broader array of recreational/family-oriented amenities, i.e. a swimming pool or community centre. But the limited availability of high quality low to mid-range family homes in town is also a key factor.

What types of housing do they need?

The Vanderhoof housing stock includes an abundance of the types of single-family dwellings that families are looking for. Stakeholders reported a fair supply of higher-end family homes appealing to executives or as "move-up" options. However, decent quality homes of this nature very rarely come onto the market at a lower and mid-range price point that these families would consider affordable. Consequently, stakeholders indicated that addressing this need is therefore not a matter of building more single-family homes, but stimulating turnover of these dwellings and creating options for some of the current owners, such as seniors that might be better suited to other types of housing, so as to free up these homes for families.

Looking Forward

Key Change Drivers

In addition to exploring issues and challenges related to housing currently, this research sought to uncover key forces that stand to shape Vanderhoof's housing demand and supply in the future. This involved looking at projected shifts in Vanderhoof's population. It also involved an examination of broader shifts in key regional industries as well as talking to key employers about future changes in the size and nature of their business and labour needs.

What was revealed through this inquiry were three key drivers: an aging population; a downturn in the forest industry; and potential growth in mineral exploration and mining. Each of these key drivers is discussed in more detail below along with three potential future scenarios that these drivers could bring about.



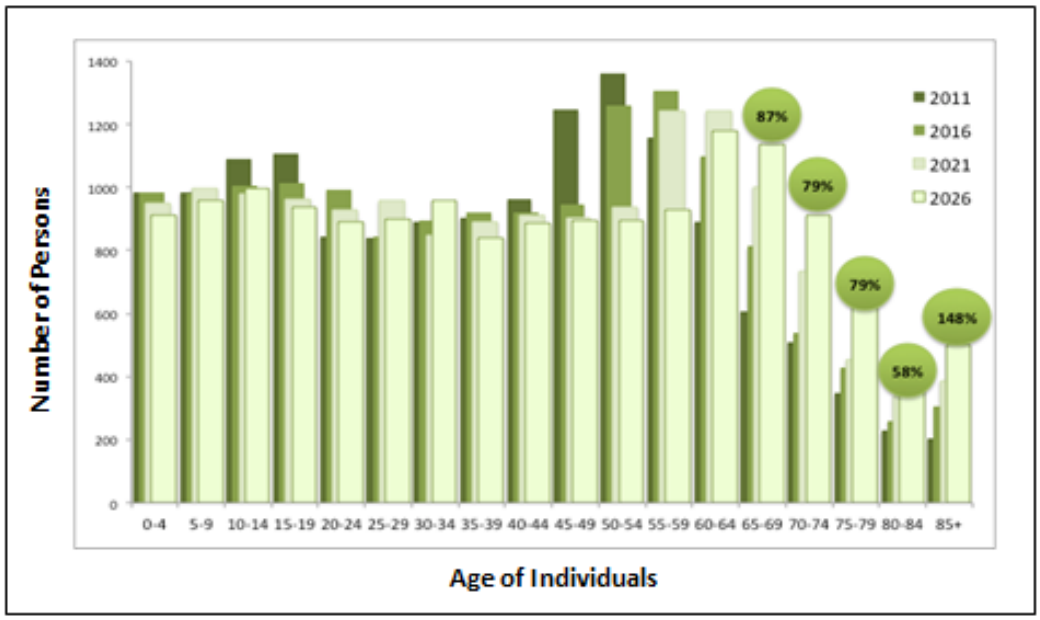
Aging Population

Following the trend being seen province-wide, the population of Vanderhoof has experienced a significant increase in its proportion of seniors. Thirty years ago, the greatest proportion of the population fell between the ages of 25-34 – and individuals aged 65 years and older represented a mere 7% of the District population. Since 1986, the bulge of the population shifted and while all of the age cohorts decreased in size, all those over 45 years expanded.

Between 2001 and 2011, the population aged 55-64 increased by 43%; and more notably, the proportion of individuals over the age of 85 grew by 75%.

The aging of Vanderhoof's population has therefore been underway for some time now. However, the rate of seniors growth projected over the next decade is far more significant. As depicted in Figure 1, by 2026, the elderly population (those aged 65 and older) is expected to increase by 86% to represent close to a quarter of the entire population. Over this period, the proportion in the 85 plus cohort is expected to grow by 148%.

Figure 1: Regional Population Projection 2011 to 2026



Source: BC Stats: P.E.O.P.L.E. 2013.

These staggering rates of growth in the number and proportion of seniors will transform various aspects of the community in Vanderhoof. They are particularly important from the perspective of housing given the reality that as people approach, begin, and live through retirement; their housing needs and preferences tend to change. The projected growth of the 75+ age groups is particularly significant given the housing trends in these years.

A report on Housing for Older Canadians (2012) showed that the proportion of senior women living in special care facilities increases from 0.4% for those aged

55 to 64 years to 15% for those aged 75 years and older.[1] For men, it increases from 0.4% to 8%.

The proportion living alone also rises significantly. Whereas 17% of women aged 55-64 live alone, close to half (48%) of those 75 years and older live by themselves. For men, 21% of those 75 years and older live alone as compared to only 13% aged 55-64.[2]

Given these and other housing shifts that occur as people become older – and the projected burgeoning of the senior population in the District, the aging demographics of the community will constitute a key driver of the future housing needs and demands in Vanderhoof.

[1] Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. 2012. Housing for Older Canadians: The Definitive Guide to the Over 55 Market. Volume 1, Understanding the Market. http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/67514.pdf

[2] Ibid.



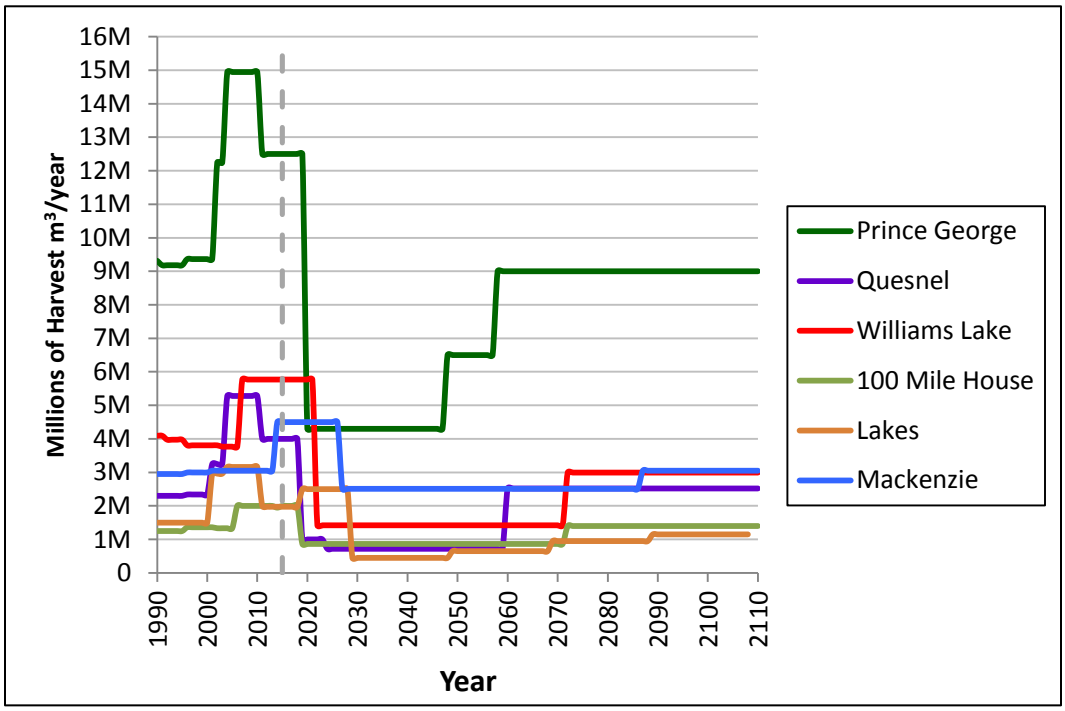
Forestry Downturn

Forestry has traditionally been one of the mainstays of Vanderhoof's economy. Forest activity in Vanderhoof is linked primarily to timber harvested from the Crown land base in the Prince George Timber Supply Area (TSA), which covers approximately 7.5 million hectares and stretches from near the Alberta border in the southeast to Tweedsmuir Park in the southwest and Spatsizi Plateau in the northwest. The region is home to three large wood processing facilities as well as several smaller wood processors.

As of 2006, 45% of the total labour force was employed by the forestry sector, up 21% from 2001. The increased activity was due mainly to the uplift in the allowable harvest rates associated with the Mountain Pine Beetle Epidemic. However, as the salvage of beetle-killed wood is completed and allowable annual cuts (AACs) are recalibrated, this activity in the Prince George TSA and throughout the province will taper off.

The current AAC (in effect since January 2011) for the Prince George TSA is 12.5 million cubic metres (m^3). This represents a 16% decrease from the previous AAC of 14,944,000 m^3 which applied from 2004 until 2010. More significantly, in 2020 the AAC is projected to drop an additional 66% to a mere 4.3 million m^3 and remain at that level until at least 2050 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Forecast Allowable Annual Cut Data for Select Timber Supply Areas



Source: Snetsinger, J. 2011. Prince George Timber Supply Area: Rationale for allowable annual cut (AAC) determination. British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Mines and Lands. Accessed January 20, 2015. https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hts/tsa/tsa24/tsr4/24ts11ra.pdf

Being within relatively close proximity of the Mackenzie TSA, which is projected to remain relatively stable, Vanderhoof may be at least partly buffered from the impacts of this drop off in timber supply. The District of Vanderhoof has also taken a number of steps to mitigate the effects including, for example, looking to build a road to Mackenzie. A bioenergy plant is presently under development and the District has made progress in securing the supply of fibre for wood pellets, electrical production, thermal energy, and other uses. An application for a Community Forest has also been made.

As a result of these proactive measures, the forest industry remains a relatively stable economic driver in Vanderhoof. Even so, there is strong probability that the District will experience a hit associated with the impending precipitous drop in timber supply felt in the form of layoffs, a decrease in ancillary services, and an-outmigration of families and professionals. As such, these changes in the regional forest industry will constitute a key driver of Vanderhoof's population and housing market going forward.



Mining

The mining industry has long had a presence in the Bulkey-Nechako region; however, the past decade has seen a significant increase in mineral exploration in and around Vanderhoof. In 2008, a GeoScience initiative to investigate mineral potential in central B.C. found the 40,000 km^2 zone around Vanderhoof to have "excellent potential for copper, gold, silver, and molybdenum." Accordingly, there are presently a number of projects underway or in development. A number of molybdenum developments are on hold due to global economic conditions more broadly in the mining industry. However, a proposed gold and silver mine located 110 kilometres southwest of Vanderhoof holds considerable promise.

With a predicted annual production of more than 500,000 ounces of gold and almost 240,000 ounces of silver, New Gold's Blackwater Project is slated to be the biggest gold mine west of Ontario. Currently undergoing environmental assessments, construction on the project is planned to begin in 2017, with production to start in 2019. The construction phase of the project is expected to create 1,500 jobs. Once completed, the mine will generate 500 permanent jobs. It is also likely to spark employment associated with any number of ancillary businesses and services.

During the exploration phase, 65% of the workforce was hired locally. New Gold has expressed both a desire and a commitment to hire as many people as possible from the region for both the construction and operation phases of the project. (The region includes Vanderhoof, Williams Lake, Burns Lake, Prince George, and Fraser Lake.)

An onsite camp is planned for work on the project during both the construction phase and for operations. However, there are clear advantages to both the company and the community to having workers based in Vanderhoof and within the region as opposed to merely flying in and out for their shifts. The company is in discussion with a community advisory committee to structure shifts so as to maximize the positive benefits of the workforce within Vanderhoof. Should the 600 permanent positions result in even just 100 families moving to Vanderhoof, the implications to both the population and housing market would be substantial.

As such, the Blackwater Project represents another key driver for the future population and housing needs of the community.

Possible Future Scenarios

Scenario 1: "Blue Skies"

- North timber supply remains strong, forest industry continues
- Blackwater Project proceeds on schedule



Implications for Local Population and Housing

- Influx of well-paid mining industry workers
- Influx of service sector workers – associated with industry and in health/seniors care
- Influx of families
- Increased number of seniors associated with aging population
- New seniors moving to Vanderhoof to be close to families
- Increased demand for small rental accommodation

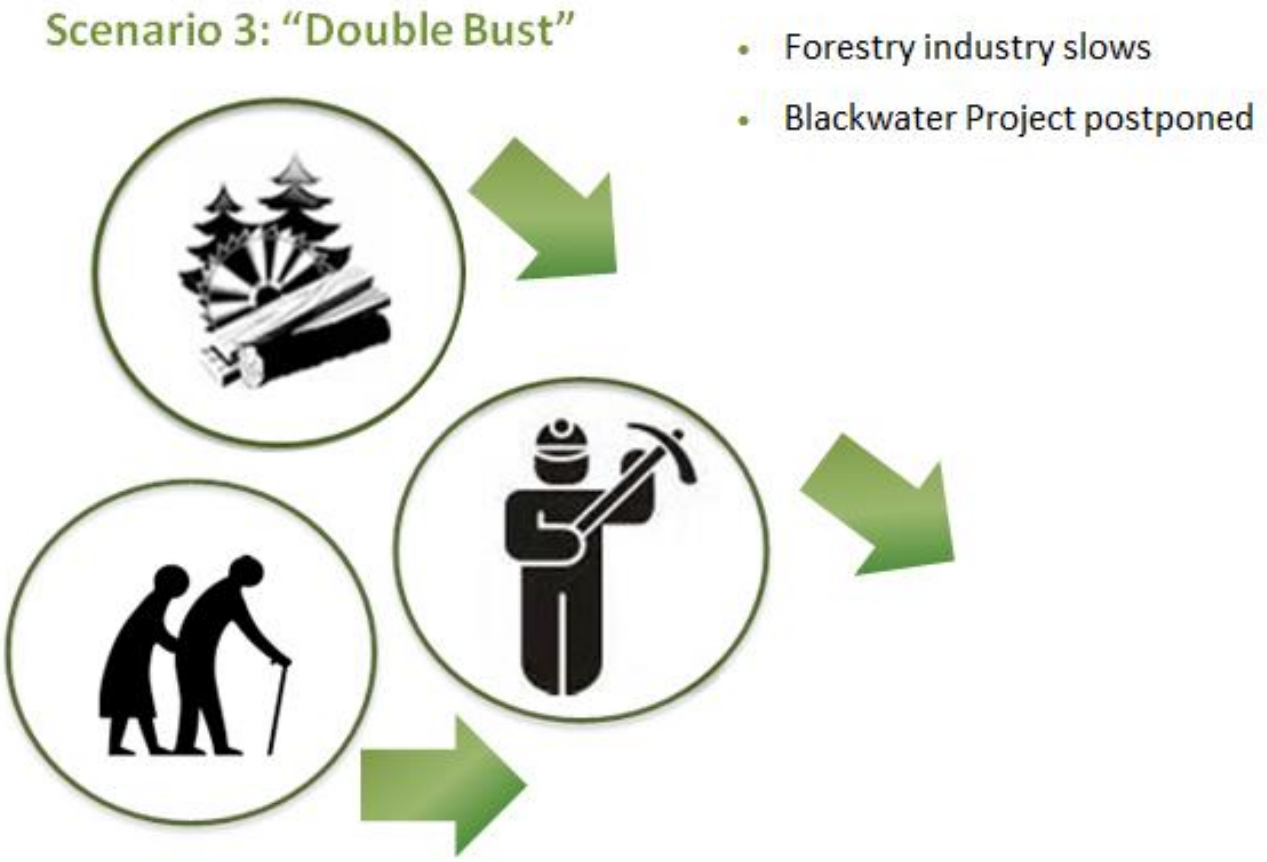
- Increased demand for family homes
- Increased demand for seniors housing – independent and with supports
- Rise in demand will drive up rents and housing costs
- Vulnerable populations displaced in favour of industry workers
- Increased need for low income housing with supports



Implications for Local Population and Housing

- Out-migration of longer term resident forestry worker families – and seniors
- In-migration of well-paid mining industry workers
- Casualties of forestry downturn shift to work on the Blackwater Project
- Increased number of seniors associated with aging population
- In migration of new seniors moving to Vanderhoof to be close to family
- Influx of service workers – associated with industry and in health/seniors care
- Increased demand for small rental accommodation

- Increased demand for family homes
- Increased demand for seniors housing – independent and with supports
- Vulnerable populations displaced in favour of industry workers
- Continued demand for low income housing with supports



Implications for Local Housing Demand

- Out-migration of longer term resident forestry worker families
- Increased number of seniors associated with aging population
- In-migration of service workers – associated with health/seniors care
- Increased demand for seniors housing – independent and with supports
- Increased demand for lower cost housing options
- Continued demand for low income housing with supports
- Dropping of housing and rental costs
- More housing on the market – for sale and rent

Priorities & Potential Strategies

The community workshop explored each of the potential scenarios outlined above and discussed the implications for the population as well as the supply and demand for housing. These discussions revealed a number of common themes: certain populations that will require housing regardless of what should transpire with the local economy; and specific approaches that will be key to ensuring that the housing stock remains well suited to the needs of the population as it evolves, grows, and/or contracts over time.

Housing for Seniors

Due to the aging nature of the population in Vanderhoof and throughout Canada, it can be assured that seniors will comprise a growing demographic in the future and this demographic will require housing. The housing needs of this population are by no means uniform but rather exist along a continuum of varied size, tenure, independence, and level of support (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Spectrum of Care



Source: Comfort Life. 2014. Spectrum of Care. http://www.comfortlife.ca/images/spectrum-care-colour.jpg

In the case of Vanderhoof, housing along the full continuum will be required.

Particularly given the lack of public transportation in Vanderhoof, the location of this housing will be key. While presently the bulk of seniors housing has been built north of the river, situating seniors housing close and ideally within walking distance from the downtown core will enable this population to access services independently while adding vibrancy to this area of town.

For every 100 seniors, $3.3 million per year[3] is added to the local economy and the situation of housing close to retail and services will enable Vanderhoof to maximize the economic benefit of this growing demographic.

[3] Statistics Canada. 2011. Consumption Patterns Among Aging Canadians: A Synthetic Cohort Approach. Catalogue no. 11F0027M – No. 067.

The growth of the senior population will also indirectly impact the number of health care and support workers in the community. The housing needs of these workers and potentially their families therefore represent a secondary dimension of this housing priority.

Rental Accommodation

In each of the scenarios, there will likely be a continued and in many cases growing demand for rental housing. Corroborating these growth projections, a report by the BC Non-Profit Housing Association published in 2012 looking at projections of Rental Housing Demand and Core Housing Need forecast rental housing demand in Bulkley-Nechako to increase by 4% to 14% over the next 25 years through two different scenarios, compared to an overall population increase of 6% over the same period.

This need for rental accommodation encompasses a mix of housing types and income levels. While rental housing is a priority for lower income individuals, it will also be key to attracting skilled trades and professionals to Vanderhoof.



As a way of increasing portfolio of rental dwellings, some municipalities such as Victoria have established reserve funds which provide capital funding grants to support the development of rental accommodation.

The Victoria Housing Reserve Fund, for example, dispenses grants of up to $10,000 per unit of rental housing as a way of spurring the development of rental housing for no, low, or moderate income households.

Having accommodations to suit the needs of middle-income industry workers will be central to the District's capacity to benefit from development in the region. A lack of housing for these workers will see this population merely passing through the community. Should this occur, Vanderhoof will receive a mere fraction of the potential economic spin-offs that these workers represent.



Kitimat is among the municipalities in northern BC that have proposed by-laws to require that industry work camps make either cash or in-kind contributions per operating bed to the District's Affordable Housing Fund. This District has also negotiated with one of its key industry stakeholders to convert their worker housing into a multi-family zoned property once their project is finished, including underground utility services.

A decent stock of rental homes will be an important prerequisite to facilitating an influx of families as well as individual workers to town, and maintaining Vanderhoof's vision as a family-oriented community. While some of these families may end up staying in town for the longer term, most will be seeking more temporary, rental accommodations in the short term while they try out and adjust to life in Vanderhoof.



A number of municipalities in BC waive development cost charges or application fees as a way of incenting rental housing, seniors housing, care facilities, and supportive housing. In 2013, the City of Vernon waived over $81,000 in development cost charges in support of 20 new affordable rental housing apartments.

"Smart" and Universal Design

The current housing stock in the north has underscored the reality that housing needs change as populations evolve. Communities originally built for populations of young families are now having to retrofit themselves in order accommodate the burgeoning population of seniors. Similarly, as seniors increasingly remain healthy and mobile for longer, homes originally built for the elderly are having to change to accommodate a broader diversity of seniors needs.



Examples of how the principles of Universal Design can be applied include:

- *Power doors with sensors at the doorway that are convenient for all users;*
- *Lever or loop handles on doors and faucets as opposed to twisting knobs;*
- *Hallways and doorways that are wide enough for those in wheelchairs and scooters;*
- *More extensive use of colour and texture to assist with wayfinding and orientation; and*
- *Smooth, ground level entrances without stairs.*

Rather than building for the current population, it is clearly more strategic to design homes that are suitable to the widest range of people possible. Universal Design is an approach to building and design that recognizes that there is a wide spectrum of human abilities. Everyone, even the most able-bodied person, passes through childhood, periods of temporary illness, injury, and old age. Universal Design takes into account the full range of human diversity, including physical, perceptual, and cognitive abilities, as

well as different body sizes and shapes. The result is homes, structures, and systems that are more functional and more user-friendly for everyone.

The principles of Universal Design have increasingly been incorporated into the Building Code and other applicable design regulations. However, ensuring the application of universal principles in the design of any housing development in Vanderhoof will be key to addressing some critical needs that exist currently, such as the absence of housing suitable for persons with disabilities. It will also help to ensure the long-term sustainability of these homes in the future.



As part of its 2012 Housing Strategy as a means of encouraging apartment units that meet the needs of changing demographics, the City of Banff is investigating the feasibility of adding flex-style apartment characteristics into its design guidelines. It is also amending applicable by-laws to incentivize these types of developments.

Dynamic Mixed Housing

In addition to building for a diversity of abilities, sizes, and shapes, Vanderhoof stands to benefit from housing that appeals to and suits the needs of a mix of demographics, household types, and income levels.

Housing developments are often built and designed for specific populations, i.e. seniors or industry workers. This limits their appeal and suitability when the population shifts. In contrast, housing that is built to be dynamic and targeted to a mix of individuals, families, different ages, and income levels can help ensure that structures remain relevant and in use as the population evolves. Maximizing the number of “grow-home” or “flex-style” units can therefore build resiliency

into the housing stock and increase the community's ability to respond to the boom-bust cycles of the economy and associated changes in resident demographics.

What might be built originally as worker housing, if designed correctly, can be easily converted into seniors housing once no longer needed. Temporary workforce accommodations can also be designed so as to be retrofit for other uses.

The mixing of housing and other uses is also a strategy that stands to benefit Vanderhoof. Unlike many smaller towns, Vanderhoof has been successful in retaining an enviably vibrant and concentrated downtown core. This feature contributes significantly to the character, charm, and cohesion of a community. This concentration of development within the existing service envelope is also highly strategic from an economic and infrastructure perspective.

Integrating housing into the retail downtown core will add to the vibrancy of this area. It offers an avenue to develop lower cost housing and concentrates use of the municipal infrastructure rather than dispersing these expensive services throughout the District. In addition, given the lack of public transportation in Vanderhoof, developing mixed use housing into the downtown retail space is key to enabling residents without vehicles to access necessary services.

Secondary suites present another highly effective and dynamic opportunity for increasing the supply of rental accommodation in a community. As demand rises, these suites can serve as a mortgage help/source of revenue generator for owners, while at the same time integrating this lower income/renting population within the existing housing stock. While many homes in Vanderhoof without a lower sub-terrain level may be limited from developing basement suites, there are a variety of other side-by-side/back-front options that could be explored.

Subsidized Supportive Housing

There is a current need for housing in Vanderhoof that is appropriate and affordable to individuals and families on low/assisted incomes and in need of supports. This includes individuals with mental and physical disabilities. Regardless of what transpires economically, this need will persist. If/when the Blackwater Project proceeds or the community sees an influx of workers associated with another development, this population will likely be particularly vulnerable due to rent increases. They will therefore likely be displaced and be forced to either leave the community or be homeless. As a result, low cost housing provided with program supports emerged as another priority going forward.

Conclusion

This research provides clear insight into a range of housing issues that are at play in Vanderhoof, now and into the future. The scenarios highlighted in the findings offer three different lenses by which to consider potential changes and needs in the community. The scenarios also provide useful tools for anticipating and planning for housing needs and demand going forward.

Housing priorities

- *Housing for seniors*
- *Rental accommodation*
- *'Smart' and Universal Design*
- *Dynamic mixed housing*
- *Subsidized supportive housing*

As has been shown, there are a number of housing needs and issues that are consistent across a range of futures and will therefore require attention regardless of which scenario transpires. These should constitute the District's priorities and focus. However, it will also be key for the community to consider other future possibilities – and put in place mechanisms and supports in order to foster general resiliency in the housing stock and a capacity to respond to other unforeseen changes in the either the population or economic situation.

It will also be important to continue the dialogue on housing in the community that has been started through this project. Many of the stakeholders interviewed through this project commended the District on undertaking such a comprehensive consultation and conveyed a strong interest in being involved in future discussions on the topic of housing. Continued engagement of these

stakeholders and the broader business and resident community will be pivotal to the success of any measures taken to address housing issues.

While this project has outlined some of existing housing needs, going forward it will be essential to engage more deeply with the populations directly experiencing those needs about exactly what those needs are and how they might best be met. Community-wide discussions about changes and improvements to housing: the types of housing, the location, timing of construction, and costs – will be equally critical.

Finally, this research revealed a high level of integration and the presence of strong relationships between government, industry, and service providers in Vanderhoof. Continued and strengthened collaboration between these different stakeholders will also be key in moving forward with the successful implementation of an effective housing strategy for the community.

Collaboration will help to ensure that changes are made and priorities are addressed strategically. The alignment of key institutional stakeholders will also help to ensure the effective use of resources. All players in a community stand to gain from a strong and resilient housing situation and therefore should be integrated as active participants and contributors in the process.

The Community Development Institute at the University of Northern British Columbia

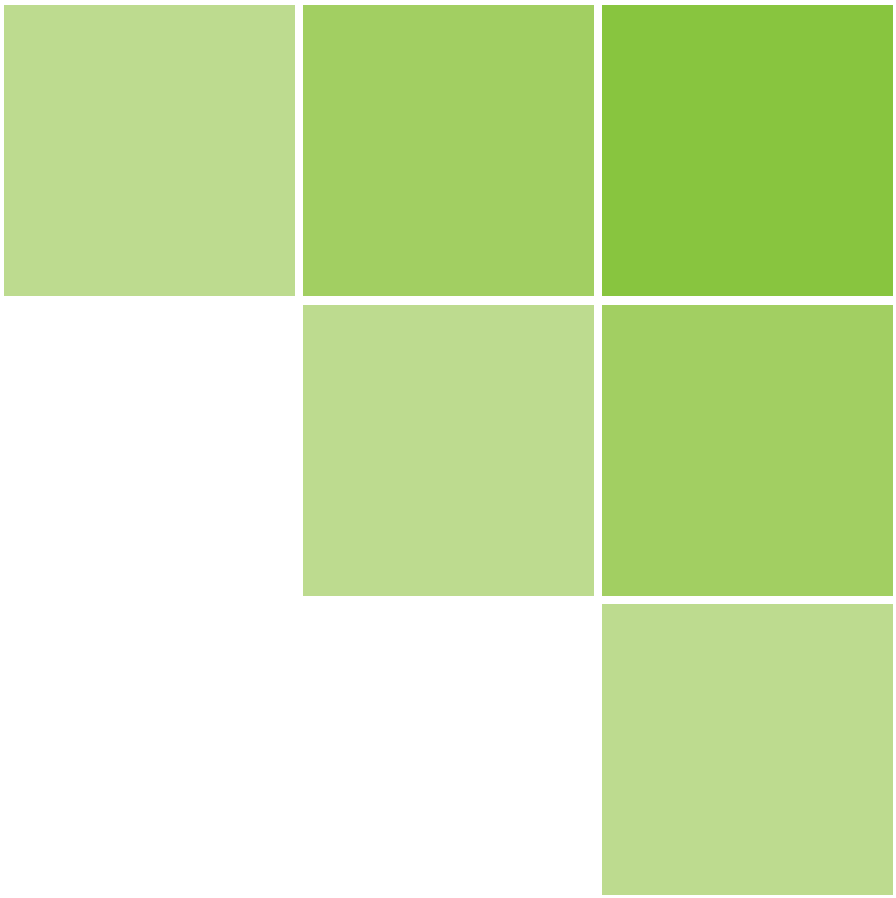
The Community Development Institute (CDI) at UNBC was established in 2004 with a broad mandate in the areas of community, regional, and economic development. Since its inception, the CDI has worked with communities across the northern and central regions of British Columbia to develop and implement strategies for economic diversification and community resilience.

Dedicated to understanding and realizing the potential of BC's non-metropolitan communities in a changing global economy, the CDI works to prepare students and practitioners for leadership roles in community and economic development, and create a body of knowledge, information, and research that will enhance our understanding and our ability to anticipate, and develop strategies for, ongoing transformation. The CDI is committed to working with all communities – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – to help them further their community and regional development aspirations.

www.unbc.ca/cdi

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE UNBC

The Community Development Institute at UNBC
3333 University Way, Prince George BC, CANADA V2N 4Z9
www.unbc.ca/cdi



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE UNBC

3333 University Way,Prince George, BC CANADA V2N 4Z9
Telephone: 1 (250) 960-5826 E-mail: marleen.morris@unbc.ca
www.unbc.ca/community-development-institute