CURRENT CIT PROJECT OVERVIEWS:

Columbia Basin Climate Change Visioning Case Study and Smart Planning for Communities

by hans peter meyer

The CIT program at the Real Estate Foundation is a response on the part of the Foundation's Governors to land use related issues that are specifically non-metropolitan in nature. Established as a signature program of the Foundation, CIT works with a wide range of project and funding partners in communities across BC to help them plan for and make transitions. One major focus of last year's CIT activities was the Reversing the Tide Conference held in Prince George, which grappled with how to plan for and sustain vibrant rural communities and small towns across the province.

Two current projects, the Columbia Basin Climate Change Visioning Case Study and the Fraser Basin Council's Smart Planning for Communities program, relate to community sustainability and climate change. Sustainable land use planning and practices have been ongoing themes at the Real Estate Foundation through most of it's 20+ years.

Columbia Basin Climate Change Visioning Case Study (CCVCS)

Project Proponent: The Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning (CALP) at the University of British Columbia

Project Partners: City of Kimberley, Columbia Basin Trust, Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning, Real Estate Foundation of BC, Selkirk College

The Collaborative for Advanced Landscape Planning (CALP) is an informal group of researchers at the University of British Columbia specializing in landscape visualization, environmental perception, public land management processes, and sustainable landscapes. CALP will use its landscape visualization tool in a series of public engagement sessions as part of a new Columbia Basin Trust initiative, Communities Adapting to Climate Change. The CALP project is a pilot study focused on collaborative community process and scenario-building as a way to respond to the effects of climate change. It is part of the larger Columbia Basin Climate Adaptation Project

in Kimberly, BC. Learnings from the Kimberley pilot will be applied to similar processes throughout the Columbia Basin.

Ellen Pond is a researcher with CALP. CIT interviewed Ms. Pond about the Kimberley project and learnings so far.

CIT: Tell me about the project in Kimberley and why it's important?

EP: Kimberley is struggling to find its feet as a result of changes to its major industry. For 100 years the City had the largest zinc and lead mine in the world...and the mine has provided a very strong economic base through it's history. But it closed in 2001. So this is a community in transition economically, but they are also a very forward-thinking community. The Mayor signed on to the Climate Action Charter, and there is a lot of interest in the community in responding to environmental issues and particularly climate change.

If you look at climate change impacts in the Kootenays, the worst case scenarios — which, unfortunately, are the scenarios we're tracking now based on existing emission levels — the impact is going to be more intense than on the coast. Temperature increases in the summer will be greater. There will be significant changes in precipitation, including more rain and less snow. This could be economically significant as Kimberley has an economically important ski hill.

CIT: What other kinds of effects is the project identifying?

EP: The Kimberley Climate Action Project has working groups set up to look at forests, tourism, water, infrastructure, and alternate scenarios — to assess the risks and vulnerabilities and come up with adaptations that the community can develop. In some ways, what we're seeing isn't rocket science. Adaptation measures aren't necessarily going to be a complete change of direction. The community in some ways is already taking steps based on current risks. For example, there is already a program to do controlled burns within in-town forested areas, to limit risk impacts of forest fires. Forest fires aren't a new risk. But the risk will increase as we get ever-drier summers.

CIT: Your project is about community process with regard to adapting to climate change. What are you learning so far?

EP: That's a good question. This is a collaborative, community-based process. It involves

bringing together municipal staff, community experts, and community members generally. We're presenting the work publicly to the community, and we're surveying the community about climate change. At the same time, because this project is taking longer than originally anticipated, I think we're going to see a better process in the long term. A longer process allows people to find more information, and it allows for more exchanges between meetings. We're not far off the schedule we'd hoped for, but the bit of extra time that it is taking has allowed us to develop better scenarios.

CIT: You've suggested that there are other benefits from taking more time. What are they?

EP: This is supposed to be a "climate adaptation" project, but the community has asked that it look at some mitigation as well. So CALP and the Kimberley scenarios group are trying to lay out a spread range of pathways that the town can take with regards to climate change actions, from impacts and adaptation to mitigation. We don't want to be prescriptive, but instead show suggestions of the different things that can be done.

Ultimately, the more spatial and visually-based information that the community brings to us the better we can make it visual with our scenarios. As well, the better the climate science gets, the more the information is "downscaled" from global/regional models to local conditions. This helps communities get better at assessing risks. On-going scientific research, community adaptation projects, and integrating climate scenarios into planning processes are all needed for local communities to adapt to climate change impacts, and reduce emissions.

CIT: What kinds of connections are being made between climate change adaption/mitigation and land use practices?

EP: Funding from the Real Estate Foundation and the Ministry of Community Development has enabled us to do some linking between land use planning and climate change scenarios. We're developing a couple of scenarios for how Kimberley could build out into the future, and asking questions about how these different development pathways help — or possibly hinder — adaptation as well as greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs).

One of the interesting things that has come up as we develop scenarios is the impact of Kimberley's significant turn to tourism as a core economic driver. Really, this is an amenity driven real estate development component, and it could have a big impact on GHGs. Right now the town is a very compact community. Very compact and very walkable, compared to many

other BC communities. It's a "smart growth" town without meaning to be, because much of it was built before cars. As they've moved into the current model of real estate development there's a tendency towards sprawl. Barring high-tech solutions, the sprawl model has high GHGs associated with it. One of the scenarios we've been working on involves infill development, and alternative transportation connections to Cranbrook.

CIT: Last comments?

EP: Yes. It's quite remarkable what CIT and the Real Estate Foundation is enabling us to do with this project. Communities like Kimberley just don't have the resources to do this kind of a visualization project. With CIT's help, we are bringing material and a communication and scenario-exploration tool, and a process, into the community that will aid in planning and decision-making for the future. Not just for Kimberley, but for communities throughout the Columbia Basin.

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Columbia Basin Climate Change Visioning Case Study project information is available on the CIT site.

Smart Planning for Communities (SPC)

Project Proponent: Fraser Basin Council

Project Partners: BC Hydro, BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, BC Ministry of Community Development, BC Ministry of Environment, First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle

Initiative, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Real Estate Foundation of BC

SPC is a collaborative BC-wide initiative sponsored in part by the Real Estate Foundation through the Communities in Transition program. SPC helps local governments (municipalities, regional districts, and Firsts Nations) navigate the many resources, approaches, and tools related to creating socially, environmentally, economically, and culturally sustainable communities. Five sustainability facilitators are now in place around the province. They provide a free service offering strategic support, education and training, assistance in accessing funding, and provision of in-house and third party technical expertise to BC communities.

Maureen LeBourdais is Program Manager of Smart Planning for Communities at the Fraser Basin Council. CIT interviewed Ms. LeBourdais in March of this year about SPC.

CIT: Tell me a little about the background to the Smart Planning for Communities (SPC) project. Why another “sustainability” planning initiative?

MLeB: That is one of the challenges facing smaller communities right now: there is so much going on right now under the heading of "sustainability planning." An example is that at a local government level, Councils sign on to the Climate Action Charter. But then staff wonder, 'Where do we start? There is so much information; there are so many "toolkits" and resources and players and consultants and approaches... We need an easier way to navigate through all of this.'

Many local governments in BC are already under-staffed, whether they're municipalities, regional districts, or First Nations. In parts of rural BC, there often is not a planner on staff at all. What planning gets done takes place off the corner of someone's desk. These people want to do the right thing, but available funding tends to drive what they can do. They aren't always able to take a holistic approach even though they may want to.

SPC is a response to this. Local governments have been telling us at FBC that they need help with sustainability planning. They also said, 'Please don't send us to a website. I want a warm body on the ground, who can come in, can talk to my staff. Someone who understands local government, and someone who knows my region. to help us navigate through this. At the bottom line, that's what SPC is: facilitators who come into the community when invited. They work with local politicians, with staff, wherever the need is identified, to determine: Where do we start? What are the resources available to us? How do we decide which ones are the best fit for what our community needs?

CIT: What kinds of responses are you getting from the local governments you work with?

MLeB: We're hearing that local governments are very, very pleased to have this support. I've received comments like, 'Thank goodness you're here,' or, 'This is exactly what I was looking for,' and 'This is what we need.'

CIT: Can you give an example of how SPC interacts with communities?

MLeB: We use the term 'light touch' to describe how we work. We're not going in as consultants, and we're not going deep into community, trying to take the place of planning staff they don't have. Our focus is on providing a bit of process advice, some referrals to technical expertise, helping the community decide what the priorities are and where to start. We support them to reach decisions about how they want to proceed, and then help them identify the resources they need to do this.

Sometimes what we do is a very small thing. It might just be answering a question about some funding. Or, reviewing a proposal the community has prepared, giving them feedback, asking them, 'Have you thought about this, or that?'

Sometimes it can be a presentation to Council. Often we see a situation where there is a champion on the local government body. It could be the Mayor or a Councilor, or someone on staff, an individual who really wants to see their community forward on reduction of GHGs. They just want a presentation, for us to come in and answer: What is sustainability planning? What is Smart Growth? What is Natural Step? What's the difference? How do we know which one we should be doing? What are the next steps? A presentation like this makes the language and ideas behind "sustainability" clearer or more accessible to people who aren't trained. It supports the local champion.

We've also learned that communities learn best from stories: they want to know what other communities, similar to their own, are doing. Rather than go in and recommend a framework, we'll go in and say, 'Here's what this framework is about, and here's a community like yours (maybe the same size or the same sector - agriculture or tourism), and here's a name you can call in that local government to find out how that framework or approach worked for them.

CIT: You've referred to "navigation" as your role.

MLeB: Yes. We're branded as "sustainability facilitators," but the facilitators refer to themselves as "navigators." That's how they see their role: not just helping communities connect to each other and the expertise they need, but navigating the many options and approaches that are available, without being directive.

It's hard for smaller communities. There is a perception of a number of organizations and consultants providing the same or similar services around sustainability planning. It's confusing. Our question to ourselves at SPC is: How can we play a role in doing this better? Maybe we can facilitate partnerships [between organizations] on certain activities? How do we make our resources [in the sustainability planning field] go further, to better help communities? And we're asking ourselves: How can SPC play a role in bringing this together?

We assist local governments and First Nations to understand who is providing the funding, services, and expertise - who they are and what they are doing. Then, by referring communities to them, SPC helps facilitate that connection between community sustainability planning needs and the resources and expertise available. This role is increasingly important given the likelihood of diminished financial resources as a result of the economic downturn.

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Smart Planning for Communities project information is available on the CIT site.