



City Council News November 28, 2018

Forestry remains our future

With the layoffs at Tolko Questwood and the recent announcement of the permanent loss of one shift at West Fraser's Quesnel sawmill, people are rightly concerned about the future of the forest sector here in Quesnel and in the Interior of the province in general. Those fears and concerns are warranted, especially for workers and their families who depend on this sector to keep a roof over their head and food on their table.

I've been calling on the Province to help companies, communities, contractors and workers to prepare for this eventuality since I was first elected to the Legislature in 2005. The reduction in the annual allowable cut throughout the Mountain Pine Beetle and wildfire impacted areas of the provincial forest should not be a surprise to anyone, nor should the inevitable, and necessary, downsizing in the forest sector, we've known this day was going to come since 2002.

Consequently, I applaud West Fraser's approach to right sizing their mills to the available timber supply. They are making planned step changes, with advance notice, assistance to impacted employees, and attempting to minimize the impact in the various communities they operate in. We need all the other major forest companies to take a similar approach if we are to manage this necessary rationalization, avoid a "cod fishery" like impact on our mid and long timber supply, and avoid catastrophic mill closures in single mill towns.

Over the past term, Quesnel City Council took steps to prepare for this inevitable rationalization in the forest sector. As a result, the City is in a much better place financially and strategically to manage our way through this transition period.

Council also made a deliberate choice to engage in a process to start reinventing our forest sector from the ground up: from forest management to manufacturing to markets.

Our "Future of Forestry Think Tank" process is a City-led initiative to gather all the players together to proactively work toward a new vision for forestry that will see us remain a forest dependent community for generations to come. In short, rather than simply trying to diversifying our economy away from forestry, we believe we can take steps to revitalize and reinvent our forest sector so it will remain the mainstay of our economy, generating long term employment and investments in our community despite a shrinking annual allowable cut.

We have had terrific support from the Provincial government for this initiative, at all levels. In fact, the level of engagement and support we're experiencing from the current provincial government is far superior to anything we

were able to generate under the previous administration. The recent announcement of substantial funding from the Province for our Think Tank process is simply the latest evidence of this support. This funding will allow us to accelerate our process and see concrete results sooner.

The City's Think Tank process also has tremendous buy-in and support from industry, First Nations, researchers, and post-secondary institutions – all critical partners for the success of this project.

In the meantime, the current downsizing in the forest sector is happening at a time when the whole economy is experiencing critical labour shortages, making it a good time for people to transition into new jobs and acquire new, much needed skills to fill critical vacancies in the labour market. We will continue to work with government, industry, and the post-secondary institutions to ensure the necessary transition training programs are made available to workers in a timely manner.

Without question, this will be a challenging transition, but steps are being taken to manage this transition as best as we can and to minimize, as much as possible, the negative impacts on communities and households.

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