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Quesnel as the “Next Whistler”?

There’s a strange criticism being lodged at our transition strategy and the resulting investments we’re making in the City and surrounding fringe areas: that Council somehow has aspirations to make Quesnel look or feel like Vancouver or that we want to become the “next Whistler.” The criticism has been around for a while, but it seems to have gotten more purchase with some in our community recently.

I’m not sure what’s so bad about providing visitors and residents with a fun and interesting community where they can enjoy modern amenities and infrastructure or about aspiring to become an outdoors-oriented community – if that’s what’s meant by the criticism. Why shouldn’t Quesnel residents get to enjoy a modern retail space in our downtown core, or new playgrounds, or enhanced amenities, or improved signage? Why can’t we, like Whistler and so many other communities, also offer great outdoor experiences through things like new and improved trail systems or our waterfront development strategy?

But, I can assure you that Council has never had a discussion about becoming a mini-Vancouver or the next Whistler. Our aspirations have never been based on what other communities have achieved, although we’re open to learning from both their successes and failures.

Council’s benchmark has always been how we can take advantage of Quesnel’s inherent strengths and address its weakness so it can become the best community possible in order to attract visitors, residents, and investment and make sure we remain resilient through this challenging transition period. We are a unique community with unique attributes and opportunities that Council wants to take full advantage of.

Quesnel is a river City surrounded by and dependent upon nature for both our industrial economy and our lifestyle. We’re not abandoning this historical foundation, we’re solidifying, modernizing, and enhancing it.

Our Forestry Innovation Centre and Future of Forestry Think Tank process is designed to work with all our partners to secure a brighter and better future for both our forest ecosystems and forest economy. Our Regional Food Innovation Hub is focused on growing and enhancing our agriculture sector. We’re in constant dialogue with our mining sector, particularly the major project proponents to the east and west of our community. And, most of our investments in amenities and infrastructure will greatly improve our tourism opportunities while also enhancing the

lived experience of our residents.

We're not abandoning our traditional resource sectors; we're working with all of them to ensure they are successful and we're maximizing the benefits our community can realize from them in the way of jobs and direct economic benefits, especially to our commercial and contracting sectors.

However, embedded in the criticism that Council aspires to create a Vancouver or Whistler experience here in 'good old industrial Quesnel,' shows a deep lack of understanding of one of our critical needs: the attraction of new workers and residents to our community.

Quesnel has one of BC's most dramatically shifting demographics as our population ages; the proportion of people above 60 is growing faster than the provincial average. The need to attract new workers to our community to fill key positions that are being vacated by retirements has to be a critical part of our transition strategy; and these new residents have very different expectations of what it means to have a livable community than some of our long term residents may have.

If we are to attract workers to fill current vacancies in all sectors and a new workforce to fill jobs being created through our economic transition strategy then we need to build the kind of housing, amenities, and lifestyle experiences these new families and workers are looking for.

Fortunately, Quesnel inherently has many of the attributes people want in an affordable and livable community; Council is simply making sure these are enhanced and promoted.

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