

NORTHERN BC HOUSING STUDY

INTRODUCTION

October 2016



The Northern BC Housing Study is comprised of a series of research reports detailing the community and housing profiles for ten communities from across Northern BC. The goal of the study was to bring to light some of the key trends, challenges, and opportunities that communities in the north are facing in relation to housing. For the past 12 years, the Community Development Institute at UNBC has been working with communities throughout Northern BC to build capacity and strategies for community and economic development, resilience, and readiness for industrial change and development – and housing has been a common denominator in much of this work.

Having a diverse and adequate supply of housing to suit the evolving needs of our population has shown to be central to a community's social health and economic potential. Yet, most all of our communities are struggling with issues related to the age, condition, and adequacy of their housing stock – and the challenge of accommodating a population that ebbs and flows in line with the boom-bust cycle of resource economies.



- In many communities, housing built predominantly in the 1960s-70s is no longer suited to the needs of the current population.
- Many communities lack the types of quality housing that appeal to the skilled professionals they are trying to recruit.
- Many communities lack an adequate supply of smaller, accessible, and supported dwelling options to enable their growing population of older residents to downsize and remain in the community as they age.
- Many communities lack adequate supplies of housing for lower and fixed income residents as well as people with disabilities – and importantly, provisions to protect housing for these vulnerable groups during economic boom times.

Finding solutions and taking action on these and various other issues related to housing in Northern BC is imperative to realizing the economic potential of the region. This study is intended as a starting point for strengthening our understanding of these issues – revealing common trends across communities, and devising strategies for addressing them.

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Each of the individual community reports contains a brief community profile, focusing on those indicators that are relevant from the perspective of driving housing demand and supply. Each profile reviews past trends related to the size and growth in the population as well as future projections for demographic change, particularly as they relate to the age cohorts (i.e. seniors, family formation years) that coincide with changes in housing needs and preferences.

The profiles also look at workforce issues such as skills and educational attainment, employment rates, and incomes. They detail trends in household sizes and community mobility. They also look at the housing stock: age, condition and types of dwellings, trends in residential development, as well as the market for both ownership and rental housing. Each profile concludes with a snapshot of current and future housing initiatives in the community and a commentary on challenges and opportunities moving forward.

It is acknowledged that there are several other relevant indicators related to housing that could have been included in these reports; however, it was not the intent of this study to develop comprehensive housing needs assessments for each community. The scope was determined in part by those datasets that were available for most, if not all of the ten communities being examined. The profiles also chose to focus on those indicators that impacted housing and which the community had some control over, as opposed to mortgage rates, for example.

Ten Northern BC Housing Study Communities:

- 100 Mile House
- Dawson Creek
- Fort St. John
- Kitimat
- Prince George
- Prince Rupert
- Quesnel
- Smithers
- Terrace
- Williams Lake

Taking action on housing will require a more robust understanding of the needs and opportunities around housing in Northern BC – as well as new approaches and products that will initiate change in the northern housing market.

In addition, it is acknowledged that the analysis has been hindered by the supply and quality of current data available for the communities. As results from the 2016 Census have yet to be released, the most recent standardized and systematically collected data available is from 2011,

since which time Northern BC has experienced both a low and high in its economic cycle. Furthermore, with the change in data collection methodology in 2011 from a mandatory census to a voluntary survey (National Household Survey), the global non-response rate rose from 6.5% in 2006 to 26.1% in 2011. The result was considerably lower levels of data quality and, in some cases, lack of comparability with past data. This study has endeavored to use other, more common sources of data, where available. We look forward to using 2016 Census data when it becomes available.

Given the scope and data limitations of the study, it is important to underscore the role of this study, to inform and catalyze innovation and action on housing in Northern BC. The hope is that the ten reports will open up discussion and debate within and between communities about priorities, opportunities, and synergies regarding housing – and further provide a starting point for collaboration and collective action on this issue, which is so central to the well-being and resilience of the communities and economies of Northern BC.

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