



DISTRICT OF HOUSTON HOUSING STUDY: REVIEW OF PAST PLANS AND REPORTS

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Availability

Copies of this report have been provided to District of Houston and to all participants who provided input into this process. The final reports are further posted on the website of the Community Development Institute at UNBC: <https://www.unbc.ca/community-development-institute/research-projects>.

The information contained in this report is part of a series of reports completed for the District of Houston Housing Study. These include:

District of Houston Housing Study: Final Report.

District of Houston Housing Study: Review of Past Plans and Reports.

District of Houston Housing Study: Community Profile.

District of Houston Housing Study: Required Data.

Contact Information

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Introduction

The District of Houston is striving to ensure that the community has an adequate supply of high quality housing and that the housing stock includes options that meet the current and future needs of Houston residents. The District is particularly interested in ensuring that the housing stock includes suitable options that consider: the full range of incomes in the community, people at different ages and stages of life, worker and workforce mobility, and the long-term costs of maintaining the local government services and infrastructure required to support Houston's neighborhoods.

This study is undertaken by the Community Development Institute at UNBC to collect and analyze data and provide information and knowledge that can inform decisions necessary to develop a robust and diverse housing supply that:

- meets the current and future needs and provides options for the full range of Houston residents; and
- aligns with economic growth and diversification opportunities.

This housing needs assessment will not only support local government and community initiatives, but will also be important to meet provincial legislative requirements. In April 2019, the Province of British Columbia adopted new legislation that requires all local governments to complete housing needs assessments by April 2022 and re-assessed every five years.¹ Local governments are then required to reflect on housing needs to inform changes to the official community plan.

Proposed Approach and Methodology

The overall study is based around five iterative phases of work:

1. review of current and past plans and reports,
2. data collection from existing sources to develop the demographic and housing market profiles,
3. key informant interviews,
4. community workshop to present and discuss draft findings, and
5. final report.

To complete phase one, the purpose of this report is to obtain and review existing information and past reports pertaining to the housing situation, issues, and needs in Houston as well as relevant information related to proposed and potential developments in the community and surrounding area. This review will include plans, reports, and information such as the Official Community Plan (OCP), Zoning Bylaws, housing studies, economic development plans, location of community services, location of retail services, transportation routes, and other relevant documents.

¹ For more information on new provincial requirements concerning housing needs assessments, please visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/local-governments-and-housing/policy-and-planning-tools-for-housing/housing-needs-reports>.

Summary Review of Current and Past Plans and Reports

Municipal governments use plans, bylaws, and reports to inform strategic decisions and actions. In this report, we review current and past plans and reports to understand the strength of existing regulatory and planning tools and to assess potential gaps in community capacity that may need to be addressed. These included:

- Official Community Plan
- Unsightly Premises Bylaw
- Renovation Tax Exemption Policy
- Annual Reports (2011-2018)
- District of Houston 2018 Annual Water System Report
- Downtown Beautification Plan
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- District of Houston Transportation Master Plan
- Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- Official Community Plan and Land Use Update
- The Houston Way: Health and Wellness Charter
- Economic Development Strategy
- Labour Market Strategy
- Houston BC's Age Friendly Plan
- Investment Ready Community Profile
- The Houston Community Literacy Plan
- Pleasant Valley Communities Cooperative: Research on the Culture of Community, Learning, and Technology
- The Consequences of Forest Dependence for the Economic Growth and Socio-Economic Development of Houston

Based on our review of past and current plans and reports, several issues are clear. A diversity of housing options is critical to support the breadth of lifestyle choices and needs in Houston. Rural residential subdivisions are valued for the availability of acreage lots that support a rural lifestyle and outdoor recreational interests to attract and retain new families. The restructuring of resource-based operations has reshaped the fiscal position of the local government. With a decline in population and industrial tax base following industry closures, an aging population, and an influx of residents seeking affordable housing options, there is a need to strengthen the proximity of housing to services through mixed land use developments and infill, improve the use of underutilized infrastructure capacity, and pursue wise energy-efficient investments as housing and physical infrastructure assets are renewed. The availability of accessible housing and community infrastructure for an aging population and the renewal of market rental assets continue to be key priorities.

The District is interested in establishing family-friendly neighbourhoods that support a good quality of life. There is a strong desire to strengthen the quality of life by fostering a sense of community through more investments in gathering spaces, neighbourhood parks, and street furniture. There is also a strong interest to ensure the community is more connected through investments in an integrated trail network system that connects residential areas and recreational assets in order to foster health and wellness.

The availability of services also plays a significant role to attract and retain new residents and businesses. Previous reports also recognize emerging service needs for new residents moving to the community to access affordable housing. Ensuring appropriate health and wellness supports are in place to support a diversity of household needs is a key priority.

Many issues identified through stakeholder interviews have been raised before in past plans and reports. These documents suggest that there are important capacity issues that need to be addressed in order to move housing goals and initiatives forward. Progress on strategic goals and objectives has been postponed as a result of interrupted momentum from industry closures, the loss of provincial government offices, and the temporary loss of the grocery store. Responding to these types of crisis events is challenging for small local governments that can experience turnover amongst a small complement of staff. At the same time, local non-profit capacity is undermined by a lack of core funding and a declining skilled and networked volunteer base, prompting the need to support more collaborative forms of governance and partnerships. As the community works to attract investment and invest in downtown beautification, developing local entrepreneurial capacity is also needed to renew retail, hospitality, and other business related assets that will attract and retain residents.

Official Community Plan: Vision 2025

The Official Community Plan was reviewed for statements and policies intended to guide decisions with respect to planning and development. The Vision 2025's strategic directions were driven by six key areas, including a diversified and energy efficient economy; a highly educated and trained labour force; a compact and attractive urban core supported by geothermal, biomass, and solar energy investments; a healthy and caring community; an indoor and outdoor recreational and cultural hub; and an age friendly community.

The vision recognized several housing assets, including new seniors' housing and low cost housing, that could be highlighted in marketing strategies to support economic renewal. Housing was also an important component of goals to nurture the development of Houston as an energy efficient community by supporting small lot, common-wall housing developments, and higher density to reduce energy use. The report also explores opportunities to use existing park areas as geothermal sinks to provide an alternative heating source to adjacent neighbourhoods. Mixed use development was also encouraged to reduce walking distances from residential areas to needed services. The report recommends the development of a green energy infrastructure checklist for subdivisions that is now in place.

The report highlights factors that shape healthy living and housing environments. Notably, air quality has been shaped by the bowl effect created within the Pleasant Valley where certain wind conditions can funnel pollution from industry emissions, dust from spring road sweeping, and vehicle emissions. In response, the Vision 2025 identifies the need to review the open burning and air quality bylaw to determine opportunities to remove non-certified wood burning appliances through the participation in existing wood stove exchange programs. The plan also encourages the development of accessible forms of housing to support age-friendly and healthy living environments.

Fiscal constraints are a significant challenge for the local government, with limited funding resources for maintenance and upgrades to road and underground piping systems. Despite evolving housing needs, there is a reliance on a single water well for supply. Other wells (3 and 4) were deactivated due to contamination, with well #2 being examined for potential contamination. A key issue moving forward concerns unknown costs to extend water and sanitary sewage infrastructure to the east of the Highway 16 Houston overpass bridge and westward to Gerry's trailer park and residential lots in the area.

There is significant value placed on rural residential subdivisions and acreage lots to support an alternative lifestyle that attracts people to the area. This is complemented with objectives to accommodate growth within existing urban service area through infill and medium to high density development to maximizing capacity of existing and underutilized infrastructure. These objectives are in place to not only meet fiscal management objectives, but also to support other objectives to create a more energy-efficient and accessible urban core that provides greater proximity to key services and transportation networks. As such, affordable and accessible forms of housing, such as safe houses, group homes, extended care facilities, community care, and seniors / special needs housing should be located in medium-density and downtown areas.

Housing investments will only be successful if they are complemented and supported by strategic community and economic development investments. The report outlines several investments and

changes that are needed to support the recruitment and retention of residents. These focused on, for example, greater 24/7 health care coverage, the provision of community gardens, and neighbourhood watch programs. The plan also calls for collaborative governance structures, such as a Social Planning Council, Youth Council, and Downtown Revitalization Committee, to support strategic initiatives.

District of Houston. 2019. Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 1001, 2019 as amended by Bylaw No. 1111, 2019. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

District of Houston. 2013. Official Community Plan, Development Bylaw No. 1040, 2013. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

District of Houston. 2005. District of Houston Building Regulations, Bylaw No. 906, 2005. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

Unsightly Premises Policy

The unsightly premises policy established a process to maintain unsightly premises through District staff. Unsightly premises are defined by the District of Houston as the accumulation of discarded materials, littering (i.e. of bottles, glass), or graffiti on walls or fences. It is also defined by more subjective criteria such as the accumulation of offensive, unwholesome materials, or visual nuisance. As demonstrated in the final report, there are stakeholder concerns that this policy does not contain enough specific details and language to be effective.

A review of other property maintenance bylaws extends these types of details to include:

- Detailed definitions of rubbish or garbage (i.e. waste, discarded materials, discarded furniture and appliances, discarded fuel and gasoline products, tires, vehicle parts, etc.);
- Detailed definitions of unsightly premises and reasonable state of repair;
- Standards for hot water systems and heating equipment, ventilation, and electrical systems in rental accommodations;
- Derelict vehicles, boats, and equipment that are physically wrecked, not operational, and not accompanied with a valid license plate;
- Storage and parking of recreational vehicles;
- Graffiti through the display of symbols, writing, drawings, etc. on sidewalks, built structures, etc.;
- Property materials that are broken, rotten, cracked, rusted, or peeling paint;
- Uncontrolled growth of lawns, noxious weeds, and landscaping;
- Storage of building materials;
- Animal materials;
- Prevention and control of pest infestations;
- Maintenance of snow and ice from driveways and walkways;
- Other conditions of disrepair and deterioration (i.e. for accessory buildings, exterior walls, etc.);
- Noise, nuisance, and disorderly conduct; and
- Securing vacant properties.

There are, however, no standards of maintenance bylaw or regulatory tools that are directed towards ensuring standards are in place and enforced to guide rental accommodations.

A number of property maintenance bylaws contain statements about owner liability, authorities and powers related to municipal inspection of properties and rental accommodations, inspection notices for rental properties, notices of non-compliance stipulating time periods for property owners to conduct their own actions, appeal processes, entry on properties, executing property maintenance and clean-up by municipal staff on a cost recovery basis, limits for minimum and maximum fines and penalties, and enforcement of costs and penalties. Invoices, fines, or tickets are sent to the property owner. The costs of property maintenance and repairs conducted by municipal staff may also be added to property taxes.

City of Fort St. John. 2018. Property Standards Bylaw 2434. Available on-line at:
<https://www.fortstjohn.ca/assets/Documents/Bylaws/Bylaw~Enforcement/Property-Standards-Bylaw.pdf>.

City of Prince George. 2017. Property Maintenance Bylaw, Bylaw No. 8425, 2012. Available on-line at:
file:///C:/Users/ryser/Downloads/BL8425_BYLAW_CONSOLIDATED.pdf.

District of Houston. 2016. Division 24.0 – Unsightly Premise Regulations, as amended by development bylaw amendment bylaw no. 1086, 2016. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

District of Houston. 1999. District of Houston Structure Removal Bylaw No. 783, 1999. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

District of Kitimat. N.d. Rental Accommodations, Part 13, Division 3, Subdivision 4. Available on-line at:
<https://www.kitimat.ca/en/municipal-hall/bylaws.aspx>.

District of Vanderhoof. 2009. Unsightly Premises and Property Maintenance Bylaw. Available on-line at:
<http://www.vanderhoof.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Bylaw-1058-District-of-Vanderhoof-Unsightly-Premises-Bylaw.pdf>.

Municipal District of Pincher Creek No. 9. 2015. The Unsightly Premises Bylaw, Bylaw No. 1261-15. Available on-line at: <https://mdpinchercreek.ab.ca/docs/files/bylaws/Bylaw%201261-15%20Unsightly%20Premises%20Bylaw.pdf>.

Town of Cochrane. 2007. Nuisance and Unsightly Premises Bylaw, Bylaw No. 04. Available on-line at:
<https://www.cochrane.ca/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/50>.

Town of Smithers. Property Maintenance Bylaw No. 1778. Available on-line at:
<https://smithers.civicweb.net/document/87378>.

Town of Stony Plain. 2018. Community Standards Bylaw, Bylaw 2591. Available on-line at:
<https://www.stonyplain.com/en/town-hall/resources/Documents/Community-Standards-Bylaw.pdf>.

District of Houston Bylaw No. 1120, 2019

The vibrancy of commercial assets can shape the recruitment and retention of residents and, by extension, investments in housing. The District of Houston established a bylaw to offer tax exemptions related to commercial development renovations and downtown revitalization (Table 1). In this case, tax exemptions for up to three years are provided to businesses that are undertaking a capital renovation project. Eligible costs include improvements to the exterior of commercial structures, as well as improvements in accessibility.

Table 1: Renovation Tax Exemption Program

Capital investment for commercial renovation	% of tax exemption	Length of tax exemption
\$10,000 - \$50,000	30%	1 year
\$50,001 - \$100,000	30%	2 years
\$100,001 - \$200,000	30%	3 years
More than \$200,00	40%	3 years

Tax exemptions for up to ten years are also provided to new construction projects located within the downtown core or along the highway commercial area (Table 2). These developments may be related to the construction of a new building or the demolition and reconstruction of a commercial building.

Table 2: Construction Tax Exemption Program

Capital investment for commercial construction	% of tax exemption	Length of tax exemption
Construction of new building exceeding \$50,000	100%	In years 1 and 2
	50%	In years 3 to 5
	25%	In years 6 to 10
Demolition and reconstruction of building exceeding \$50,000	100%	In years 1 and 2
	50%	In years 3 to 5
	25%	In years 6 to 10

District of Houston Annual Reports

2018 Annual Report

In 2018, the District's priorities focused on renewing an economic development plan to diversify the economy and attract investment, improve the recruitment and engagement of employees, strengthen town beautification along the Highway 16 corridor and downtown core, encourage the use of health care services, and strengthen ongoing partnerships. Permissive property tax exemptions were provided to the Houston Retirement Housing Society.

In 2018, the District also prioritized several housing action items. The first was to improve bylaws to guide the enforcement and remediation of unsafe or deteriorated rentals. A second key priority identified by the District is to ensure that Houston has options in place to be ready to support the development of a new subdivision. The last priority entailed identifying non-profit partners to pursue subsidized housing in partnership with BC Housing. To complement these housing goals, the District has been focused on advocating for community social services and the use of local health care services.

Moving forward, the District completed the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan to focus on asset management, infrastructure, economic development and diversification, emergency preparedness, environmental responsibility, housing, labour, and community services. The District has also been pursuing longer-term goals through its vision for 2025 that focus on a diversified energy efficient economy; a highly skilled and trained workforce; a compact, energy-efficient and revitalized downtown core; a healthy community; a strong indoor and outdoor recreational and cultural hub; and an age friendly community that supports all ages and stages of life.

District of Houston. (2018a). 2018 annual report: Houston naturally amazing. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

2017 Annual Report

The District continued to pursue diversified economic development opportunities and review its 2014 economic development strategy. In 2017, Buy Low Foods opened in the Houston Shopping Centre to refill the space left empty with the previous year's closure of Super Valu Foods. Future priorities were established to pursue a downtown revitalization plan, improve the Highway 16 corridor, and encourage broader use of the façade improvement program. The annual report identified interest to prioritize strengthening partnerships with First Nations, business, the school board, and tourism. The District has also been continuing to engage with other municipalities through the Northwest Resource Benefits Alliance with the goal to obtain a Fair Share Agreement with the Province. The District moreover invested resources to complete a new Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Land Use Plan, and Community Wildfire Protection Plan; and completed renovations to the Houston Leisure Facility. Furthermore, the District continued to provide permissive property tax exemptions to the Houston Retirement Housing Society.

District of Houston. (2017). 2017 annual report: Houston naturally amazing. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

2016 Annual Report

Following the recent closure of Houston Forest Products, the community has also contented with the closures of Super Valu Foods and the Northwest Community College campus. In response, the District received \$471,554 from the provincial Strategic Community Investment Funds program to support general operating expenses. The District revised bylaws to reduce the floodplain setback requirements for properties outside of the Agricultural Land Reserve and reduced development restrictions on properties along the rivers. A new business bylaw was developed to attract mobile and sidewalk vendors. The development bylaw was also revised to exclude light industries, such as automotive repairs, towing, and machinery from home-based business classification. In terms of housing, permissive property tax exemptions were provided to the Houston Retirement Housing Society.

District of Houston. (2016a). 2016 annual report: Houston naturally amazing. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

2015 Annual Report

With the recent closure of Houston Forest Products, the District of Houston focused its investment of resources on the development of a labour market strategy program to identify workforce gaps and needs at the local and regional level. Three committees were formed to address workforce transition, economic development, and access to community services. Funding was secured through the Ministry of Social Development's Labour Market Partnership Program to deliver a job fair and relevant information sessions. The Community Health, Education, and Social Services (CHESS) Committee was tasked with developing a community health and wellness charter. A physician and nurse practitioners were successfully recruited; however, the community was not able to gain access to 24 / 7 healthcare services.

In terms of housing, the Houston Age Friendly Plan was formally adopted and incorporated into the Official Community Plan, with plans for future upgrades and investments. Permissive property tax exemptions were provided to the Houston Retirement Housing Society. Staffing issues were impeding the completion of longstanding goals to work with property owners to effectively market brownfield rental market properties.

District of Houston. (2015). 2015 annual report: Houston naturally amazing. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

2014 Annual Report

In 2014, the closure of Houston Forest Products resulted in a loss of \$445,000 in municipal property taxes to support operations during the following year. Despite these pressures, the District continued to make investments in planning and community groups to improve the availability and accessibility of housing assets. An Age-Friendly Access Plan was drafted in 2014, with the goal to adopt the plan in the following year. Permissive tax exemptions were provided to the Houston Retirement Housing Society. The report also reflects a sustained interest to work with property owners to market brownfield rental properties and establish a Beautification Society. A land development workshop was delivered with a focus on the readiness of municipal land to attract investment, working through the site selection process, identifying appropriate provincial government contacts and resources, and establishing an investment profile.

District of Houston. (2014a). Annual report 2014: Houston naturally amazing. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

2013 Annual Report

The District of Houston was informed that West Fraser intended to close Houston Forest Products sawmill in May 2014, prompting the need to pursue a transition plan in 2014 with anticipated reductions in staff and tax base. There was continued attention to address housing issues in the community through regulatory tools and the pursuits of additional funding resources. In December 2013, the District adopted **Development Bylaw No. 1040**, which included regulations to address unsightly premises and vacant lots in Section 24. The subdivision and development servicing bylaw was also adopted with a delegated committee and design criteria in place. Enforcement guidelines and policies were reviewed and updated. Goals were put in place to deliver a land development workshop in 2014 to focus on attracting investment, work through site selection processes, identify provincial supports, and establish an investment profile for Houston. This included goals to work with property owners to successfully market brownfield rental properties. Permissive tax exemptions were provided to the Houston Retirement Housing Society. Council met with the provincial Minister of Children and Family Development to request funding support for a safe house for victims of domestic violence. Building upon interest from 2012, efforts continued to explore options for establishing a Beautification Society.

District of Houston. (2013). 2013 annual report: Room to grow district of Houston. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

2012 Annual Report

In 2012, several housing issues were highlighted in the annual report. A review was conducted of bylaws concerning unsightly premises and vacant lots. Goals were identified to review the subdivision and development servicing bylaw to reflect goals associated with developing a sustainable community. These initiatives were complemented by work to explore establishing a Beautification Society. The Houston Health Centre was expanded to include respite and palliative care beds. Permissive tax exemptions were provided to the Houston Lions Senior Citizens Home Society and the Houston Retirement Housing Society. However, several market rental units were lost due to fire, including the loss of a five-unit townhouse complex on Hagman Crescent and an 18-unit apartment building on Copeland Avenue.

District of Houston. (2012). 2012 annual report: Room to grow district of Houston. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

2011 Annual Report

Under the former woodstove exchange rebate program to improve air quality, 84 woodstoves were replaced with EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) approved models.

Permissive tax exemptions were provided to the Houston Lions Senior Citizens Home Society and the Houston Retirement Housing Society.

District of Houston. (2011). 2011 annual report: Room to grow district of Houston. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

District of Houston 2018 Annual Water System Report

The annual water system report identified a number of aging water infrastructure assets, many of which were installed in the late 1960s. A new water reservoir was constructed in 2017; however, a number of infrastructure assets are reaching the end of their operating life and are resulting in increased maintenance costs. The report recommends that an emergency response plan for the water system be completed. Work is also needed to assess the condition of water infrastructure assets within the downtown core.

District of Houston. (2019). District of Houston 2018 annual water system report. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

Downtown Beautification Plan

The Downtown Beautification Plan was strategically pursued to support economic renewal through the attraction of business investment, recruitment and retention of new residents, and improved quality of life. The plan examined the design and use of public spaces in the downtown core, reflecting on issues related to vacant and aging commercial infrastructure, snow removal, the condition of pedestrian networks, lighting, public art programs, public spaces for gathering, street furniture, accessibility, and safety. The plan also advocated for re-orienting buildings towards the river to maximize the use of natural assets that could improve the appeal of commercial spaces, as well as multi-use developments where there is a mix of commercial and residential uses. Concerns were expressed about the boundaries of the downtown core that included institutional and residential areas considered to function differently.

District of Houston. (2018b). District of Houston: Downtown beautification plan. Vancouver: Urban Systems.

Parks and Recreation Master Plan

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan is intended to complement the updated OCP by focusing on the District's goals to improve the local quality of life through strategic investments in creating healthy spaces, indoor and outdoor recreational hubs, and opportunities for people of all ages and stages of life. To accomplish these goals, the plan recommended investments to link different areas of the community through a connected network of trails, including residential areas west and north along Highway 16 and residential areas northeast along Highway 16. The plan recommended ensuring Crime Prevention through Environmental Design principles are incorporated in order to strengthen the safety of residential and recreational spaces throughout the community. Building upon the Age-Friendly Plan, investments in parks and recreational spaces should adopt universal design principles to ensure these spaces are accessible for all residents. The plan also advocated relocating the outdoor fitness equipment from Jamie Baxter Park to within close proximity to the Seniors Activity Centre. Furthermore, recommendations focused on creating family-friendly recreational spaces that strengthen interaction and use of natural assets. These focused on incorporating more gathering spaces and seating within neighbourhood parks to support group activities, fostering more interactive and creative play through park equipment, and designing park and playground spaces to optimize natural materials and existing topography to allow families to experience nature within the community.

District of Houston. (2018c). Parks and recreation master plan. Houston BC: District of Houston.

District of Houston Transportation Master Plan: Final Report Volume 1- Summary Report

The Transportation Master Plan's review tied the importance of transportation planning and access to services with housing. An increased densification of residential housing in close proximity to services in the downtown core was recommended. In addition to projected modest growth that may prompt the need for an additional 400 new homes by 2033, the plan considers the potential impact of nearby temporary mobile work camps to support pipeline construction, with an estimated 400 workers at any one time. The plan also recommends improved north-south linkages to ease mobility between place of residence and employment while easing traffic pressures along Highway 16. The extension of Lund Road to Mountainview Drive was recommended to improve east-west connections. In addition to expanding pedestrian and bicycle networks throughout the community, transit, taxi, and senior shuttle services were recommended. A transit feasibility study would need to be completed. A new recommended bridge over Buck Creek would improve connections between Cottonwood Manor and nearby residential areas seeking easier access to the health centre and other nearby services.

Creative Transportation Solutions LTD. (2018). District of Houston transportation master plan: Final report volume 1- summary report. Prepared for the District of Houston. Port Moody, BC: Creative Transportation Solutions LTD.

Community Wildfire Protection Plan

The Community Wildfire Protection Plan examined the wildland urban interface for planning and mitigation of potential wild fire threats that pose risks for the community. Most private land within the wildland urban interface has been clearcut to support farming and housing development. Areas of potential concern were largely treed areas of private land located north and east of the community. Despite the presence of some stands that contain the Mountain Pine Beetle, most of the MPB infected areas were removed in the previous community wildfire protection plan. The plan recommended that wildfire prevention and suppression principles be incorporated into the design of any new subdivisions, with attention to road widths, turning radius for emergency vehicles, and access and egress points. There also needs to be a public education FireSmart program to ensure land owners are aware of ways to reduce wildfire hazard levels in their area.

Werner, R., & Layton, B. (2018). District of Houston community wildfire protection plan. Telkwa BC: Pro-Tech Forest Resources.

Official Community Plan and Land Use Update

The Official Community Plan was adopted in 2010 and updated in 2018. The official community plan and land use update determined that there was no need to develop new infrastructure at that time. At current population levels, the existing infrastructure designed to accommodate 6,000 residents is underused, prompting recommendations for infill and higher density residential developments. The update, however, suggested strengthening pedestrian infrastructure through investments in a link across Buck Creek and establishing a trail loop system that links to Steelhead Park. It also recognized interest to strengthen the protection of the Duck Pond area and better connect the park to nearby residential areas. A revised concept for the Duck Pond, however, proposes a connecting road between Gould and Gillespie Roads with residential infill development. Residential infill was proposed to financially support the development and maintenance of the connecting road and reflection pressures with servicing costs and the municipal tax base. Mixed developments containing commercial ventures on the ground level with residential units on upper level floors were also suggested to support goals of infill, densification, and contained municipal costs.

Selkirk Planning & Design, City Sense, & Applications Management Consulting LTD. (2018). Official community plan-land use plan update. Houston BC: District of Houston.

The Houston Way: Health and Wellness Charter

The Health and Wellness Charter was developed to support the goals of nurturing a healthy community. The health of the community is integrated and shaped by supportive policies, infrastructure, and services that facilitate healthy living. Housing conditions play an important role in health and well-being. In this respect, the charter recognized the local government's role as not only a liaison with developers and contractors, but also as regulators through related housing standard and zoning bylaws and the

provision of infrastructure support. Key housing indicators included housing distribution, housing affordability, median multiple affordability index², rental vacancy rate, and residential land supply.

District of Houston. (2016b). The Houston way: Health and wellness charter. Houston BC: District of Houston.

Salat, S. and Denis, J. 2019. Global Platform for Sustainable Cities, World Bank. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Economic Development Strategy

In 2014, an economic development strategy was completed in response to the closure announcement of Houston Forest Products. This strategy focused on five key directions, including business recruitment and retention, entrepreneurial development, expanded tourism opportunities, attracting investment, and support and facilitation. Actions to assess and address economic leakage through a consumer leakage study, business visitation programs, business walks, and the Small Town Love Campaign that encourages local shopping were discussed. Business retention and expansion directives focused on expanding the Houston Community Forest license, expanding and diversifying forestry opportunities, and supporting mining activity. Furthermore, building upon the programs offered through Community Futures, the strategy recommended investments in a Community Economic Development Investment Fund and programs to encourage the development of young entrepreneurs. Since this strategy was completed, young entrepreneurs in many small communities have been connecting with the Young Futurepreneur Program. Futurepreneur Canada is a federally and provincially funded organization established in the 1990s to provide support to potential young entrepreneurs (18-39 years of age) through business planning, financing, mentoring, marketing, and other support tools (<https://www.futurepreneur.ca/en/>).

To attract investment, the strategy recommended several initiatives ranging from the development of an immigrant investors outreach program to a self-assessment for investment readiness. The strategy also recognized council's interest to establish a Revitalization Tax Exemption program – an action item that was recently completed through the **District of Houston Bylaw No. 1120, 2019**. The strategy also recognized potential opportunities that were emerging with proposed LNG projects and encouraged the local government to develop relationships with LNG proponents and ensure local businesses were connected to government databases.

In the SWOT analysis, the affordability of housing in Houston was identified as an important strength to support these goals. At the time, only 6.5% of a survey expressed concerns about the availability of diverse housing options. The strategy, however, recommended establishing a health care working group consisting of healthcare, local government, business, and industry stakeholders as access to healthcare was identified as a key concern across community and business stakeholders. Other prominent challenges included the availability of jobs; the retention of young skilled workers; availability of retail, restaurants, and other entertainment amenities; and inadequate transportation.

² The median multiple affordability index generally refers to the affordability of housing for residents in a specific community in accordance to income and housing market conditions. It consists of the ratio of the median housing prices and the median gross annual household income (Salat and Denis 2019).

District of Houston. (2014b). Economic development strategy: District of Houston. Houston BC: District of Houston.

Labour Market Strategy

The labour market strategy was conducted following the closure announcement of Houston Forest Products. The purpose of the strategy was to develop a resilient local economy and labour force that can adapt to the rhythms and cycles associated with resource-based sectors. The report highlighted several actions that were undertaken during this transition period. West Fraser appointed a transition coordinator to support and monitor workers impacted by the closure of HFP. Impacted workers either accepted jobs at other West Fraser sites, pursued other employment locally, pursued opportunities to open their own business, retired, or sought other opportunities for retraining.

Despite the potential increase in unemployed residents looking for work, employers expressed concerns about a shortage of skilled labour to support a number of services and large-scale industrial projects planned in the region. At the time, there were 574 workers who commuted to Houston for work. This was largely driven by the close proximity of nearby communities within the region. Workers were reported to engage in mobile work in order to obtain greater choices for housing and employment opportunities for spouses. The report suggested that more work needs to be done to ensure local businesses and workers understand the economic opportunities planned for the region, both in terms of project work and to support a more mobile workforce.

Recruitment and retention was a key issue for employers, with the report indicating that employers estimated that 25% to 40% of their workforce were anticipated to retire in the next five-year period. Aging workforce pressures were anticipated to exacerbate recruitment and retention issues for key sectors such as health care that have longstanding labour force challenges.

The report highlighted a number of initiatives to attract the next generation workforce, including the promotion of outdoor / recreational assets, the promotion of affordable housing, and relocation subsidies. Employee retention programs may also include attendance and productivity bonuses, as well as transportation supports, subsidized lunch programs, benefit packages, and career development and internal training programs. Initiatives to develop a family-friendly community environment were encouraged. Moving forward, the report recommended several stakeholders and groups that needed to be engaged in governance structures to monitor labour market issues, such as training, recruitment and retention, and quality of life. These included the Houston Health, Safety, and Community Services Committee, the Economic Development Committee, industry, the Chamber of Commerce, Northwest Community College, Community Futures, Work BC, and Northern Development Initiatives Trust.

Newell, A. & Hufnagel-Smith, P. (2014). Labour market strategy for the District of Houston, BC. Houston BC: District of Houston.

Houston BC's Age Friendly Plan

The Age Friendly Plan provides a comprehensive assessment to improve the availability of housing, commercial, and public assets to support healthy living of older residents in Houston. The plan recognized the significance of affordable, accessible, and appropriately located housing for older residents. At the time of the study, Houston was home to Cottonwood Manor which provided five assisted living units and 11 subsidized independent living units, all within close proximity to the Houston Shopping Centre, the Houston Health Centre, and the Seniors Activity Centre. Pleasant Valley Village consisted of an independent living complex with more than 50 units located at the end of 11th Street roughly one kilometer from the Seniors Activity Centre, health centre, and shopping facilities. The complex was privately developed by the Houston Retirement Housing Society. To support more complex care needs, the Houston Health Centre was equipped with six residential care beds – four of which were complex care beds and two were allocated for palliative and respite care needs. To support the expansion of complex care, more research was needed to assess the number of residents who relocate to other communities for residential care. Moving forward, key recommendations focused on the provision of more independent living units, a safe house for older women, connecting older residents with funding programs to support home adaptations in order to retain residents as they age in the community. The plan also advocated to ensure more services were in place to help seniors age in their homes longer, and to ensure more smaller homes requiring less maintenance would be available to enable seniors to downsize.

Guidelines were recommended to support future investments in businesses, community services, amenities, and housing. These guidelines focused on the provision of handicapped parking; accessible or automatic entrances and washrooms; wider aisles, corridors, and walkways; priority seating for older residents; sidewalk curb cuts and benches; and the provision of a scooter charging station and parking area.

Western Canada Accessibility and Enablement Consulting. (2014a). Houston BC's age friendly plan. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

Investment Ready Community Profile

The Investment Ready Community Profile provided details about labour force characteristics, local and regional transportation routes and related infrastructure, industrial and commercial property assets, utility infrastructure, business services, housing values and characteristics, taxation rates, property tax rates, health care service, and recreational and cultural amenities. At the time, major employers included Canfor, Huckleberry Mines, and Houston Forest Products. Other major contractors and employers, notably DH Manufacturing, School District #54, Wilson Brothers Enterprises, the District of Houston, and Pleasant Valley Remanufacturing, have 50 or more employees.

District of Houston. (2014c). Investment-ready community profile. Houston, BC: District of Houston.

The Houston Community Literacy Plan

The literacy plan described the presence of a number of vulnerable groups in the community. These vulnerable groups included unemployed individuals, part-time workers, high-risk youth, Aboriginal residents, and those with lower levels of literacy and education. This vulnerability is connected to socio-economic conditions that may affect a household's ability to meet their daily needs or adapt to sudden changes that may intensify pressures in a household.

Key gaps were identified and focused on the capacity around ECE programs (i.e. recruitment / retention, training, advocacy); youth programs (i.e. for high-risk youth); apprenticeships and trades training; informal learning opportunities and life-long community learning; and access to high speed Internet. Other needs identified included upgrading, safety certification courses to support job readiness, driver's training, work preparation, ESL, technology training, cross-cultural and mentorship programs, sensitivity training, and tutoring. The plan also identified workplace gaps, such as a lack of skilled workers and trades workers, as well as a lack of people with communications skills and management training.

The plan revealed a number of groups engaged in many collaborative initiatives related to literacy, such as Northern Health, Houston Link to Learning, the Northwest Community College, the Houston Public Library, School District #54, Houston Community Services, and Northern Society for Domestic Peace. It pointed out a need to have a coordinator in place to support collaborative work related to the project. The plan identified pressures within the non-profit sector. As this initiative sought champions to move actions forward, there were a number of non-profits at the local and regional level that were 'in transition' and unable to take on new commitments. There were also concerns about the lack of core funding for non-profits, access to volunteers, availability of transportation, and access to housing.

Brienen, N. & Newell, A. (2008). The Houston community literacy plan by the Houston Literacy Committee. Houston BC: Houston Literacy Committee.

Pleasant Valley Communities Cooperative: Research on the Culture of Community, Learning, and Technology

This report explored notions of community relationships, learning, and technology. Specific sectors of the community were found to have strong relationships within their group. For example, the Sikh community had strong relationships amongst the Sikh population. Strong networks across different cohorts, however, were found to be weak, especially amongst older generations. Employment has also shaped community relationships. Men were found to be less engaged in community organizations and social events due to shift work schedules and rotations. Transient workers who commuted to Houston for short-term contracts also had limited community engagement and provided limited financial support to local groups.

Labour market conditions and productivity were shaped by a lack of highly skilled labour. Key gaps that needed to be addressed included management and supervisory skills. Despite efforts to build capacity locally, there had been a lack of instructors to deliver core safety programs.

Hennig, M. (2005). Pleasant valley communities cooperative: Research on the culture of community, learning and technology in the Pleasant Valley, April – July 2005.

Consequences of Forest-Dependence for Economic Growth and Socio-Economic Development: Houston

As a graduate student at the University of Northern British Columbia, Marc Steynen completed his Master's thesis work examining the consequences of forest-dependence for the economic growth and socio-economic development of Houston. Despite periods of growth, the volume of timber harvested in the Morice Timber Supply Area (TSA) had generally declined since 1984; nonetheless, lumber production increased as industries responded to the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic and as Canfor completed its supermill in the 1990s. These events, however, were insufficient to counter a decline in forestry-based commodities. He also identified several factors that were impacting the restructuring of the forest industry, including the global recession of the early 1980s, an increased value associated with the Canadian dollar, commodity price fluctuations, a decline in housing sales and demand for lumber in the US markets, the US subprime mortgage crisis, and the transfer of TSAs of Mountain Pine Beetle stands from the Lakes and Fort St. James TSAs to sawmills in the Morice TSA.

Steynen, M. D. (2010). The consequences of forest-dependence for the economic growth and socioeconomic development of Houston, British Columbia. Masters Thesis. Prince George, British Columbia: The University of Northern British Columbia.

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 to create a body of knowledge, information, and research that will enhance our understanding and our ability to deal with the impacts of ongoing transformation. The Community Development Institute is committed to working with all communities – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – to help them further their aspirations in community and regional development.



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