

**Transition Toolkit:  
Working framework for a more resilient community**

**Updated Version – October 2008**

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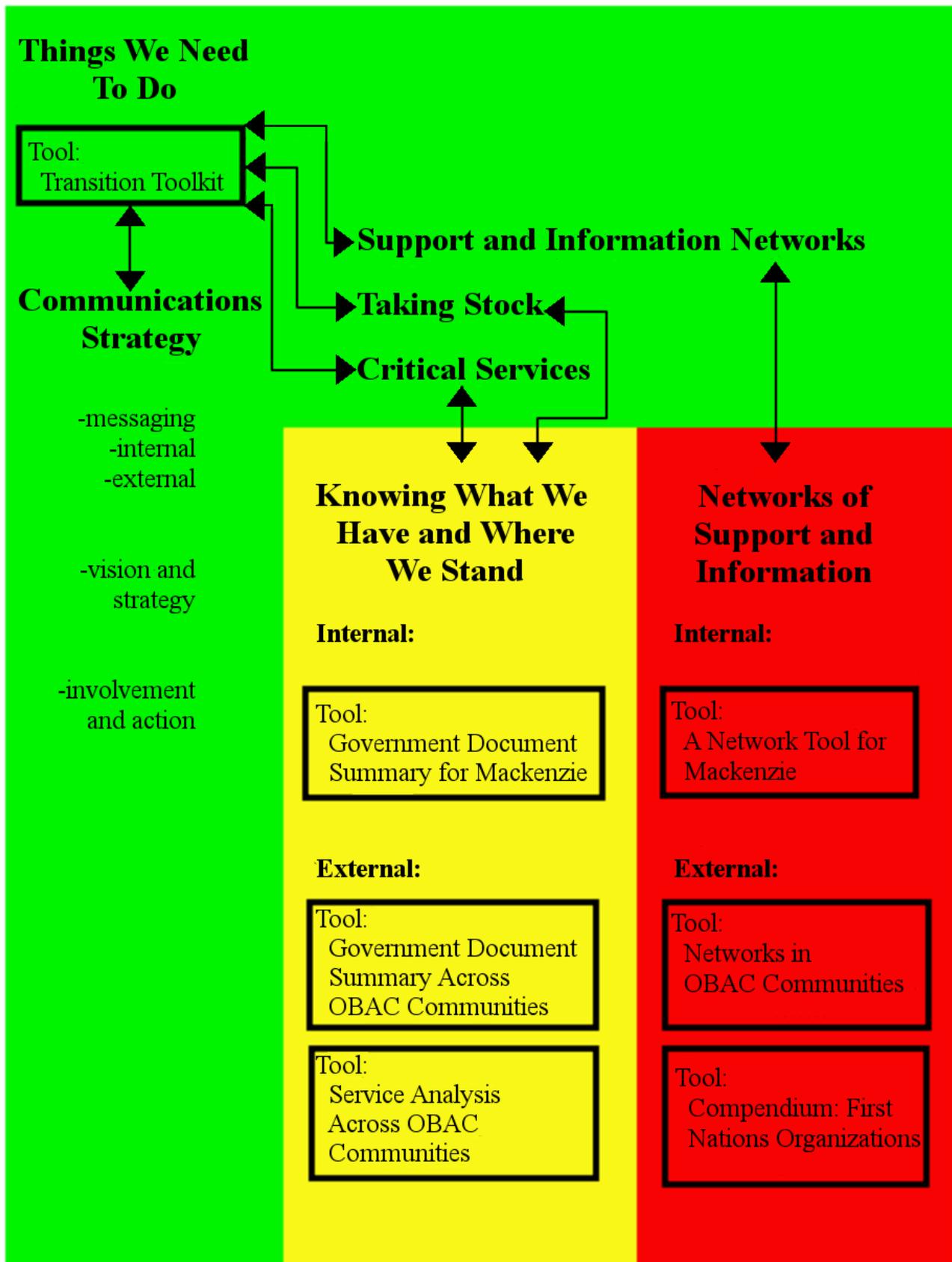
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# More Resilient Communities



**"Three threads that work together to support local economic transition."**

## **More Resilient Communities**

Rural and small town places have been experiencing a range of social and economic changes. Local government staff and leaders are at the forefront of responding to these changes. Part of developing more resilient communities includes mobilizing strategies, assets, resources, and networks to help places overcome challenges while being able to pursue opportunities.

The *Transition Toolkit: Working framework for a more resilient community* outlines three key areas of “things we need to do” in order to make our communities more resilient. It outlines a clear **Communications Strategy** to dispel rumours and communicate a clear direction for community change.

The next area consists of checking the availability of critical services, as well as taking stock of up-to-date plans and strategies that provide a foundation for economic renewal and guide on-going community development. Part of “taking stock” and obtaining “critical services” is **Knowing What We Have and Where We Stand**. As a part of **Knowing What We Have and Where We Stand**, a *Service Analysis Across OBAC Communities* and a *Government Documents Summary Across OBAC Communities* was completed to help local leaders assess their relative preparedness, as well as to determine needed services, supports, and strategies that can build capacity and position a community to be ‘ready’ to pursue new opportunities.

A final area includes developing and maintaining **Support and Information Networks** to connect with other decision-makers and to obtain timely and relevant information to make informed decisions. The *Networks in OBAC Communities* and the *Compendium: First Nations Organizations* identify local and regional networks of information, expertise, and resources that can enhance local resilience.

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## **Preface to Updated Version – October 2008**

The **Transition Toolkit: Working framework for a more resilient community** is an updated and revised version of our earlier “economic emergency toolkit for smaller local governments”. The Toolkit was first designed in the late spring of 2007 as the Community Development Institute (CDI) at UNBC worked with the District of Mackenzie on a plan to respond effectively to threatened industrial closures. The Toolkit served Mackenzie’s purposes very well, with the result that the CDI held two follow up sessions with administrative and economic development officers from a number of local governments around northern BC.

In partnership with the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition and the Community Transition Branch of the Ministry of Community Services, the CDI undertook to update and revise the Toolkit. Key in the revision is that the steps towards making your community a more resilient place need to occur as a matter of normal business and not simply the result of an economic threat or emergency. As a result, the original ‘emergency framework’ has been re-cast as this ‘Transitions Toolkit’. The steps involved in this revision include:

- A comparison against best practices identified in the New Rural Economy project (<http://nre.concordia.ca/>) as well as a number of other rural research networks and projects.
- A comparison with provincial and national reports dealing with rural community transition, including the report by the provincial and territorial departments responsible for local government entitled “Facing the Challenge of Industry Closure: Managing Transition in Rural Communities”, published in February 2005.
- Inclusion of lessons learned from regional and community development projects carried out in Newfoundland and Labrador by Dr. Keith Storey from the Department of Geography at Memorial University of Newfoundland and work by Dr. Derek Wilkinson of the Institute for Northern Ontario Research and Development at Laurentian University on community adjustments to resource industry downsizing and closure.
- A review of the Toolkit with those local governments across northern BC using it in daily activities.

In general, the Toolkit was found to be sound and effective. Elements have already been used by a number of local governments across northern BC. The District of Mackenzie has been the most extensive user of the Toolkit. When asked about updates, the Chief Administrative Officer for Mackenzie replied:

This has held up amazingly well. We discussed it, but there isn't anything to add as some of the critical pre-planning is developing the relationships in advance and we touched on that in the report. Our copies are dog-eared from use (unfortunately), but we haven't refined it at all.

In this Updated Version, minor changes have been made to the existing points so as to add new material and insights. The most important change comes at the end of the Toolkit where a section talking about routine practices in the periods not affected by an economic emergency has been added. It is this final section that really moves the Toolkit from being specially focused upon

economic emergencies to one more generally useful to local governments as they re-organize activities to build successively towards a more resilient community and local economy.

## **Transition Toolkit: Working framework for a more resilient community**

### **Introduction**

If there is a flood, local governments have disaster plans to follow. When it is time for an election, local governments have a well practiced framework of actions to be carried out in sequence. From crises to more mundane responsibilities, local governments make effective use of framework plans to help with managing orderly and efficient responses. This is especially important in smaller local governments with more limited staff time and resources. But what happens when such small local governments encounter the sudden crisis that arises from an (often unexpected) announcement that a large local employer will close? What happens when economic and social concerns build up over time and must be addressed through long-term actions and solutions? These questions are vital in smaller places with a more narrow economic base and smaller local government staff compliment. Too often, small local governments will meet such questions without a ready and certain framework or action plan for responding.

Since the early 1980s, rural and small town places across Canada have been challenged by a range of social, political, and economic restructuring impacts. Added to this is that over the past decade, economic closures (sometimes short-term and sometimes permanent) by firms or industries have occurred right across Canada's non-metropolitan landscape. Each time, local government offices are on the front line in terms of providing the community's response. In the case of a sudden crisis, these are tumultuous and stress filled moments in a local government office for both staff and elected officials. A number of times over the past five years, the Community Development Institute (CDI) at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) has received calls from local governments across Canada for advice and guidance. This Toolkit draws upon these experiences to create a template for a community adjustment or transition framework. Useful to sustain long-term efforts towards local resiliency, it is vital during times of sudden economic crisis. In addition to the CDI's work, the Toolkit also draws upon the experiences of the BC government's Community Transition Branch with whom we worked during the coal mining closures, and subsequence community revitalization, in Tumbler Ridge, BC. As such, it collects a number of lessons from BC and elsewhere about successful strategies for meeting economic and community change challenges.

## **Role of a framework**

This Toolkit is built around the notion of creating a ‘generic framework’. This was done in explicit recognition that community transition and adjustment within each place must be suited to the unique circumstances and issues of that place. It is hoped, however, that it will assist small local governments in their development of long-term adjustment planning, and in their initial reactions to sudden, often unannounced, challenges. Besides identifying common areas that need attention, the principal reason for publicizing this framework is so that local government offices do work in advance of any crisis – we recognize that attention to community transition is now the ‘steady state’ of local government operations.

With this generic framework in hand, we would urge small local governments (or any municipality for that matter that feels its economic viability rests upon a small suite of industries/employers) to use an upcoming strategic planning session to build their own local version. Strategic scenario planning is commonly used in the business world and it would be useful in this case as well. Bring senior staff together at a retreat, pose the fictitious scenario that the area’s major employer has just announced that it will close, and then work through the framework. Preparation is key to a successful response.

Experience has shown that even where no such crisis develops, attention to the host of issues collected together under this framework can assist small local governments in working towards a more resilient community and local economy. The latter part of the Toolkit (in particular Part 4) outlines a new set of activities that need to be better built into the normal activities of any rural and small town local government in Canada.

Small local governments, especially those whose economic base remains dependent upon a single business or resource industry are susceptible to economic crisis. As noted above, this circumstance has been accelerating across Canada since the early 1980s. Part 1 of this report provides background information on the importance of having a framework for dealing with crises, recognizing that it is crucial to prepare as much as possible in advance of any crisis. It also describes the role of ‘messaging’ and the short-term ‘triage’ responses that need to be initiated on very short timelines. Parts 2 and 3 describe the next two stages of a possible community adjustment or transition framework for small local governments. The important message in these next two parts is about the need to follow through on initial triage actions to create positive momentum. Part 4 brings together recommendations on a series of actions and activities that small local governments should build into their routine operating plans so that the foundations for a more resilient community and local government are being built and reinforced even when there is no economic emergency.

## **Mackenzie BC – a model case**

To highlight the speed at which the events and processes can unfold during an economic emergency, we illustrate with the recent case of a major sawmill closure announcement in Mackenzie, BC. Mackenzie is a forestry dependent community of 4,500 people two hours north of Prince George in the north central part of the province.

May 22, 2007: Canfor (Mackenzie's second largest employer) announces the indefinite closure of its local mill (loss of 450 direct jobs and an additional 390 jobs within the community).

May 23, 2007: Mayor enters discussions with MLA (continues throughout the process). Meeting between the Mayor, District of Mackenzie Administration, the Mackenzie Forest District Office, and Ministry of Community Services. Meeting between the CDI at UNBC, District of Mackenzie Administration, and the Mackenzie Forest District Office to strategize a framework for moving forward.

May 24, 2007: Special Council meeting to discuss impacts on the District tax base and to reprioritize projects.

May 30, 2007: Meeting at UNBC with 'Support Network' of local/regional agencies to develop short-term, medium-term, and long-term response strategies. Participants were able to identify themselves as contact points for the different organizations and agreed to look into specific projects and initiatives. The meeting was facilitated by the CDI. Participants included:

- Local Government (District of Mackenzie, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George)
- First Nations (McLeod Lake Indian Band, Prince George Aboriginal Business Development Corporation)
- Provincial Government (Mackenzie Forest District, Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Community Services)
- Federal Government (Industry Canada - Western Economic Diversification)
- Service Providers (Northern Health Authority, Service Canada)
- Education (School District, College of New Caledonia, UNBC)
- Regional Development Organizations (Omineca Beetle Action Coalition, Highways 16-97 Economic Alliance, The Northern Trust)
- Community/Economic Development Organizations (Community Futures offices).

May 31, 2007: First of an on-going series of individual meetings is held with local community and business leaders in Mackenzie by the Mayor, Administrator, and Economic Development Officer.

June 12, 2007: A Community Stakeholder Focus Group was held in Mackenzie to get feedback on proposed strategies.

June 18, 2007: A Town Hall Meeting was held in Mackenzie featuring many presentations (including by Canfor). The Town Hall Meeting was attended by approximately 450 people and broadcast live on the local radio station. Mackenzie's strategic response to the economic emergency, and the assistance of the local/regional Support Network, was outlined for the community.

## **Part 1 – Background and Triage**

### **Framework**

The framework described in this Toolkit consists of 4 parts. The first part involves the development of a range of ‘messages’. This has been shown as important in clarifying local government action and in helping to maintain focus throughout the transition process. The second part involves elements of a strategic framework for action. In this case, at least 3 time horizons are described to help guide actions as events unfold. The suggested timelines are based on a sudden announcement and a quick economic/industrial closure; these will need to be adjusted depending upon how much notice is given. The third part involves developing the linkages and relationships that can assist in mobilizing the framework when needed. The fourth part identifies actions and activities that should become routine in small local government offices in order to support a more resilient community and local government even when there is no economic emergency.

### ***Messaging – must be prepared to act quickly and clearly***

Any announcement precipitating a sudden economic crisis will immediately be met by community and media interest in the ‘local response’ – which in Canada means the local government voice. These messages need to be targeted, consistent, linked to civic realities, and coordinated with other local messaging/planning processes (such as community plans, visions and goal statements, economic development strategies, etc.). The consequences of inconsistent or unclear messaging can be significant. For example, residents and business leaders may lose confidence in the local government when they hear contradictory messages; as well, decisions by both of these community groups which may be based on misinformation may lead to unintended/additional negative consequences that harm renewal efforts.

There are at least four components to a messaging framework:

#### *The Mayor’s message:*

- the Mayor will be on the message ‘front lines’
- the message should mirror the ideas contained within other local government plans/documents
- need to dispel rumours and misinformation

#### *The overall message:*

- should be linked to the need to show leadership, and focus upon an approach and direction for dealing with the crisis
- may include concepts like ‘take ownership’, ‘move forward’, and ‘working together’

#### *The economic message:*

- must reflect and catalogue community assets
- needs to be rooted in realities to have credibility; must reflect the community's aspirations
- provides a foundation of economic renewal tasks
- should link to local 'vision' statements and economic strategy plans for consistency

*The community message:*

- must deal directly with feelings of panic and uncertainty within households and the wider community
- must clearly articulate goals of local government action (ie: community stability in short-term and renewal in long-term)
- if the community has coped with difficulty before (disaster, lengthy strike/closures) this is a good time to remind people that they have experience working together to overcome obstacles
- should list assets/advantages of the community; remind people of the depth of resilience already present in the community
- should include concepts like 'participation', 'keeping everyone informed', and 'building on our strengths'

***Strategy framework***

***Part 1: Triage and Initial Actions***

A three 'time horizon' strategy framework (short-term, medium-term, and long-term) is outlined below to help guide actions as they develop and mature following a crisis point. It is important to remember that the timing and length of these three periods can vary and will be determined by the pace at which events are unfolding. As noted above, they are posed here as part of a generic framework which needs to be adapted to individual circumstances and capacities.

*Short-term (couple of months at most)*

*\* please note that the elementary school calendar is especially critical in affecting household decision making about whether they will stay in the community or move somewhere else – a matter of timing that can significantly affect local planning and responses.*

*Goal - stability*

Item I Support and dialogue circles: These include people/groups that can supply information, support, and networks to connect with other decision makers; they need to be included from the start in a routine communications plan.

These support and dialogue circles should include:

- community formal and informal sector leaders

- local business, industry, and labour representatives
- neighbouring local governments and First Nations' communities as they often share the impacts with you
- regional services/organizations, including the school district and health authority
- senior government political and staff representatives
- provincial ministries responsible for local government, economic/regional development, and social services.

Item II Critical services availability: By making sure support services are available – and especially that there is certainty around health and education services – feelings of panic and uncertainty in the community can be minimized. These messages need to be in place very quickly and should include:

- worker adjustment supports and services
- education services certainty
- health care services certainty
- community crisis support services enhancement
- offer in-kind donations of space to support emergency service delivery.

Item III Communications strategy: An effective communications strategy helps cool passions, dispel rumours, and allow communities to set the tone and directions of the transition dialogue both inside and outside of the community. The strategy needs to be made manageable and part of local government office routines. It may include community town hall meeting(s), it should involve the local media, and needs to use e-mail to develop and stay in routine contact with a list of key supports and contacts. A communications strategy should include:

- within the local government office (ie: daily executive updates; weekly staff update sessions)
- within the community (ie: Town Hall meeting, meetings with Chamber of Commerce and other business/ industry/labour/community groups)
- within the regional support circle
- with regional/provincial local government organizations and with senior government appropriate ministries
  - especially important to quickly sort out eligibility and parameters for programs that may assist with the early stages of community reaction and adjustment
- external messaging (media and industry)
  - use media to 'advertise' local assets and strengths
- make sure that your local government website is up-to-date. It will receive a lot of e-traffic immediately following an economic emergency announcement and the website will convey critical first impressions.

Item IV Taking stock: A local government needs to have its own 'house in order' before approaching other partners for transition funding and assistance. By doing this, the local government is able to exercise more control/input in negotiations about the type of funding and assistance it may receive from other governments, etc.. Taking stock should include work to:

- assess the local government organizational and staffing structure to see if it is set up with the positions and skills to respond to economic crisis (including an assessment of available leadership skills and networks)
- assess the state of local community/development/economic strategy plans (including SWOT, skill, and local business analyses); are they up to date?; do they reflect your new reality?
- assess the local government budget status (especially with the possible loss of major industrial/commercial tax base)
- assess the local government debt load and services/infrastructure as a foundation for economic renewal
- assess/update local government economic profile data and documents
- assess the potential impact on local businesses and service providers through both formal and informal discussions
- establish what role the industry/company wishes to take in the downsizing/closure and how it will 'roll out'.

An essential part of the short-term action period is to identify who will be responsible for what actions. This helps clarify procedures and reporting lines for future tracking and follow-up, and it helps ensure that things do not fall through the cracks during this very hectic period. Finally, it also helps with properly allocating recognition for assistance (ie: if the school board is asked to issue a statement about keeping schools open; then when such a statement is issued it can be rightly acknowledged and can be shown as yet another step in the successful transition strategy roll-out).

In summary, Part 1 has highlighted:

- That it is crucial to prepare as much as possible in advance of any crisis, because once they are initiated, crises unfold with great speed
- That any framework must be 'generic' so that it can be responsive to the unique circumstances and issues of each place and crisis
- That such frameworks must include 3 parts: consistent 'messaging' to clarify local government action and help to maintain focus; a strategic plan for action covering the short, medium, and long-terms as events unfold; and developing/maintaining the linkages and relationships that can mobilize the framework when needed.

## **Parts 2 and 3 – Following Through**

Parts 2 and 3 describe the next two stages of a possible community adjustment or transition framework for small local governments responding to a sudden economic crisis. The important message is that local governments must follow through after their initial triage actions. The first response to an economic crisis is just the beginning of a longer term engagement towards creating a more resilient community.

### *Strategy framework*

#### *Parts 2 and 3: Following Through*

After the ‘short-term’ initial and triage actions, two additional ‘time horizons’ are needed within the strategy framework to guide on-going actions as they develop and mature following a crisis point: the medium-term and the long-term.

*Medium-term (transition into this within 2 months – extends for about 6 months)*

#### *Goal – actions*

Transition support: Most local governments will require external supports (financial, technical) to support a successful transition. The identification of potential external supports can involve actions to:

- explore with provincial ministries the provision of base funding support to provide stable health and education services over a period of potentially fluctuating population levels
- explore provincial funding (over a set time period) to compensate for lost industrial property taxes
- explore provincial (or where they exist a ‘municipal finance authority’) assistance in paying off/managing local government debt
- secure provincial funding for economic development and planning, as well as creating a community development marketing plan (including small business adjustment funding).

Economic renewal:

- use this medium-term period to construct the long-term economic development strategy (develop RFP for new plan(s) if needed)
- requires the involvement of community members/leaders early in all strategy topics (even while searching for funding/partners)
- local prioritizing of economic strategy topics so as to avoid staff overload

- arrange with regional partners and funders to move on priority action items around the economic strategy topics
- work with senior government as well as the industry/company to identify what will happen with regard to a disposal or re-allocation of assets/resource rights
  - become involved to preserve industry assets / key facilities
- in preparing for long-term strategies, consider a greater role and application of new information technologies
- re-visit infrastructure status (power, communications technology, roads, rail, and airports) and potential to attract new industry.

Re-check from Part 1:

Item I Support and dialogue circles:

- stay in contact with community representatives, regional services/organizations, senior government staff and political levels
- need to ensure that these groups are apprised/included in developing action plans
- if an economic vision is not in place or up-to-date, promote a community dialogue around current changes and the kind of ‘future’ residents and businesses might desire.

Item II Critical services availability:

- continue the work/dialogue with agencies responsible to ensure effective delivery of critical service support in areas of worker adjustment, education services, health care services, and community crisis support services
- work will be needed to transition these services as community moves away from the immediate crisis
- stability of health and education services over the mid-term is critical to population retention and will help set the foundations for economic renewal.

Item III Communications strategy:

- keep it up; should become an office routine
- include the tools used in the short-term time horizon for consistency
- communicate widely and often; don’t assume that people are being informed; especially important with respect to new residents or business interests in the community.

Item IV Taking stock:

- need for a local government ‘regrouping’ retreat to assess next steps, strategies, and pressure points
- reassess tax base implications and undertake adjustments
- reassess debt, staffing, and service/infrastructure foundations to support economic renewal

- analyze transition funding and assistance for gaps that need plugging as long-term community/economic adjustments get underway
- initiate 'gap filling' of critical information (such as economic profile, SWOT, skill profile, and local business analyses) to support moves into new economic/development planning.

*Long-term (moving forward after about 6 months)*

*Goal – long-term viable future*

Transition support: Over this period, the local government will need to start actions to 'transition' its own operations away from emergency supports. This will involve:

- adjusting operations and plans to fit new property tax realities
- adjusting staff workloads and priorities to include the now 'routine' duties that economic emergency transition planning work entails
- exploring with provincial ministries the funding support for key local services needed to retain and attract residents and economic activity
- retiring local government debt
- moving forward with new economic development, community development, infrastructure, and marketing plans.

Economic renewal:

- plans for economic renewal must build on community assets and reflect community aspirations
- energize an economic development strategy
  - include sub-strategies (involve multiple partners)
  - remember to ground economic diversification strategies within a realistic assessment of local capacity and infrastructure (don't just buy a generic 'shopping' list)
  - ground economic diversification/renewal strategies within the vision that the community has for its future
- focus upon existing strengths as a starting place
  - push additional opportunities within and across existing sectors to take advantage of local assets, skills, infrastructure, support industry, etc.
- add additional interests that build from local assets and aspirations
- identify business development assistance and training for the business/retail sector to diversify, grow, and take advantage of innovative new opportunities.

Maintain attention to:

Item I Support and dialogue circles:

- these will become more focused over time
- acknowledge assistance received.

Item II Critical services availability:

- these will continue to transition; the need for some will decrease
- depending upon changing population demographics, the need for some services may increase
- depending upon the changing local economy, the need for specific worker/skills training may increase
- continued stability of basic health and education services is a must.

Item III Communications strategy:

- keep up the routine; can be scaled back in volume and timing
- some elements of the communications strategy will become more focused as the community moves into economic diversification/renewal planning
- continue to assess that communications efforts are reaching the community; adjust as needed over time.

Item IV Taking stock:

- manage oversight on local government viability/vulnerability
- update local government economic profile data (to stay current; include new residents who move in bringing new skills).

### ***Relationship building***

Much has been made over the last few years about the concepts of social cohesion and social capital. At their simplest, these concepts are about developing relationships and trust. They are about getting to know people, groups, and organizations; developing networks for advice, information, and support; finding out how to work effectively with such groups, learning about what they do and can deliver, and finding out how they function; and working with groups to gain experience with who can be counted upon to respond when needed. Any local government staff member knows how crucial effective working relationships and trust are to getting things done.

A crisis is not the time to start building relationships; it is the time to mobilize relationships. Some may insist that they don't have time for this under their present workloads. We insist that doing this will not only pay dividends in routine local government operations, but that it is vital to preparing for more dramatic challenges. Some of these relationships may even yield insight into economic issues or challenges before they become a crisis. Relationship building supports the creation of trust so that industry and the community can work more as partners to move forward.

At a minimum, relationship building should include:

- the local business community (these links normally tend to be well developed for smaller local governments), including individual opinion/business leaders and organizations such as chambers of commerce
- the local industrial base (local ties to plant/mill management is important, but many times decisions will be made in distant head offices; there is a need to link with these external offices), including labour groups, unions, and suppliers
- agencies, groups (including service clubs, volunteer groups, church organizations, etc.) and government ministries responsible for mental health/counseling services as they are crucial 'first responders' to economic crisis
- agencies, groups, and government ministries (especially regional offices of Service Canada) responsible for worker adjustment programs
  - know who can support local access/information about employment insurance programs
  - know who can initiate/support programs for retaining, retraining, and supporting older workers (including retirement bridge funding)
  - know who can create or make local available space for needed retraining and older worker adjustment programs
- agencies, groups, boards, authorities, and government ministries responsible for health care and for education services
  - know who to talk to about continuing staffing
  - know who to contact for issuing press releases and community notices containing statements of support for the community and clarifying service levels
  - know who to talk with about staying informed of agency planning and decision making
- regional development agencies (at a variety of governmental levels; including the non-profit sector; and agencies like 'Community Futures/Community Business Development Centres') that can provide emergency support/funding for initiating community and economic renewal plans (may even include creation of such a support)
  - know who to talk with about staying informed of new programs and opportunities that may arise over time
- groups that can provide support for creating a 'community foundation'
  - including local people to play a leadership role in getting a community foundation going, and local businesses that can start fund raising
- business development agencies (including organizations such as 'Community Futures/Community Business Development Centres' or credit unions/caisse populaires) that can provide access to business advice and capital
  - know who to talk with about staying informed of new programs and opportunities that may arise over time

- know who to talk with about adjusting general advice and capital program parameters to better meet local needs and circumstances
- industry organizations that can provide access to information and advice about emerging opportunities or alternative business plans/models to fit unique circumstances
  - know who to talk with about getting the message out about local/regional investment and development opportunities
- colleges, universities, federal government research stations
  - know who can help with worker training/retraining programs
  - know who can help with advice/research/expertise on a host of issues that will arise during community transition work.

## **Remember**

It is important to remember that crisis from external (industry or corporate) decision making does not mean you have 'done anything wrong'. But it does highlight that you will need to 'get right' your responses within a matter of hours (for the message) and days (for the action plan). In this, preparation and forward planning will better equip the local government response.

As part of the on-going preparation, local governments should look at economic renewal as an on-going process, not simply one that responds to crisis management. By taking the long-term view, a local government can increase its resiliency and ability to cope with change (sudden or longer term). Preparation also means keeping contact information, as well as relationships, current so they can be quickly mobilized when needed. In addition, the local government information base and strategic plans also need to be as up-to-date as possible. While the examples above are premised on the notion of a sudden local economic emergency, it is important to remember that the lessons of preparation, networking, and of getting 'ones own house in order' are important long term and on-going tasks associated with transitioning the community towards a more resilient future.

## **Contributors to Mackenzie's Success**

In the case of Mackenzie, two threads run across the transition strategy. They include having a focused plan with assigned roles, and connecting with people on a personal level during a time of crisis and stress.

### **A uniform plan:**

In responding to the Canfor closure announcement, many players came to the table. A crucial part was that people were able to put their egos aside to come up with solutions and to see how they fit within, or could contribute to, the transition strategy. It was not about one person being right, but rather what was right for the community. It was important that the politicians did their job in being the voice for the community and that administration was allowed to do their job to execute the plan without interference.

### **Focus:**

Once Mackenzie had a plan, they stuck to it. A critical lesson from Mackenzie's experience is that a sound transition plan can help to maintain focus and actions long after the initial emergency has past. The net result has been a stronger and better equipped local government and community able to react to future challenges.

### **The social aspect:**

A key piece for Mackenzie was connecting with people in the community through both formal and informal visits with businesses, local groups, service providers, and community members. This was important for delivering messages, providing people with accurate information, and dispelling rumours. In some instances, these visits acted almost like a grief counseling session. It is such a shock to the whole community when something like this occurs; it made a big difference to people that municipal staff were out talking to them and were interested in how they were doing. Mackenzie has cultivated a good working relationship with local businesses, and situations like these reinforce the importance of such relationships and social networks in helping to unify the community around action.

## **Part 4 – The new ‘normal’ operating procedures**

The preceding sections have all dealt with actions taken following an economic emergency. These included initial ‘triage’ actions, medium-term transition actions, and efforts needed over the long-term to affectively mobilize an economic development or community diversification strategy. This section deals with core issues felt to be important to on-going operations for local governments during periods when there are no economic emergencies. Attention to these issues can help construct a foundation for responding to both opportunities and challenges – a way to become a more resilient and pro-active local government, economy, and community.

### *On-going routines*

#### *Goal – community development*

Staying up-to-date with information, plans, and policies is an important part of helping local governments to be more resilient and responsive to change. Attention needs to be directed to several areas.

#### Local Government Structure:

- in a world of change (economic, regulatory, demographic, etc.), it is important that local governments periodically adjust/update/renovate their operations, staffing, structures, and plans to fit with evolving realities
- succession planning needs to be part of all local government operations.

#### Local Government Policies and Plans:

- it is important that local government re-visit on a routine schedule critical regulatory and policy documents such as financial plans, economic development strategies, community planning documents, infrastructure investment/replacement plans, marketing plans, etc.
- when planning for economic booms, it is important to focus on minimizing future community costs by limiting urban sprawl, debt, and by taking the opportunity to renew aged infrastructure and enhance service efficiency.

#### Economic Renewal:

- plans for economic renewal must build on community assets and reflect community aspirations
- rather than simple ‘shopping’ lists of possibilities, economic strategies must be grounded in a realistic assessment of local capacity, assets, and infrastructure. They must also have dedicated and funded implementation processes so that action flows from planning investments
- there is a need to re-visit on a routine schedule the community’s sense of aspirations and vision for the future
- pursue diversification so as to reduce tax implications of single-industry reliance

- examine pros and cons of industry and resident relocation incentives
- examine pros and cons of agglomeration/cluster develop potential using local assets and facilities
- employ community economic development approaches to ‘plug local leakages’ and grow local entrepreneurial capacity
- look to the resource sector as an ‘incubator’ for other activities that could become more prominent parts of the community’s economy
- if resources are allocated to the community (such as through a community forest), attention to long-term stewardship of those resources is needed
- include environmental and aesthetic impacts of industry in planning considerations.

In addition to taking stock of local government structures and planning/policy preparedness, local governments need to invest in communications.

#### Support and Dialogue Circles:

- there is a need to maintain contact with a host of support services and agencies that may be operating within the community and the region. At a minimum, local government needs to know the mandates of such groups and know who the key contacts are.

#### Communications Strategy:

- direct time and attention to community wide communications efforts that go beyond press releases and notices in annual property tax mailouts
- attention should be given to hosting annual town hall meetings
- it is important that any communications strategy is ‘routine’ so as to manage the workload on staff
- it is also important that any communications strategy be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances and to changing technologies.

The availability of services is a critical part of community sustainability. Research on economic transition highlights the role of services in retaining and attracting both residents and economic investment. The maintenance of local services in rural and small town places has been difficult over the past 25 years as successive federal and provincial governments have reduced or regionalized services as parts of budget balancing exercises. Local governments need to focus on local service availability and undertake several types of actions to support such availability.

#### Role of Services:

- advocate for the maintenance of local services as part of an agenda to support communities and support a robust rural and small town Canada
- recognition of critical health care and educational services needs to be built into local government plans and policy documents.

#### Support of Services:

- provide various types of support for volunteer or community-based groups that may assume local responsibility for the delivery of some services that may not otherwise exist
- identify and support innovative solutions for accessing non-local services
  - especially critical for 'high-order' or specialized services that cannot be offered in smaller places
  - also important for services that are still available within the local region, but where travel reduces the ease of access for certain groups within the community.

#### Service Innovation:

- advocate for innovation in service delivery as a senior government policy response rather than simple service closures
- investigate region-wide opportunities for service restructuring/service delivery (more efficient service delivery)
- establish evaluation mechanisms for innovative services that are suited to the scale (local, regional and otherwise) at which the benefits are felt
- explore municipal service sharing opportunities.

As noted above, a crisis is not the time to start building relationships; it is the time to mobilize relationships. The position of this report is that investments in relationship building will not only pay dividends in routine local government operations, but are vital to preparing for more dramatic challenges. Relationship building needs to focus on at least five levels.

#### Local Relationships:

- business, community, industry, labour, service clubs, service providers, opinion leaders, volunteer groups, church organizations, etc..

#### First Nations / Regional Relationships:

- working partnerships with neighbouring First Nations communities and jurisdictions
- working regional partnerships with other local governments and local government organizations as a regional approach gives more voice and resources to individual places.

#### Service Agencies:

- government and non-government
- business, economic, and community development agencies
- industry and civil society organizations
- local and regional offices
- health and school boards.

#### Provincial Government Agencies and Ministries:

- especially those responsible for local government, finance, economic/regional development, and social, educational, and health services.

#### Federal Government Agencies and Ministries:

- especially those responsible for regional development, natural resources, social programs and supports, pension and employment insurance, and worker training adjustment programs.

## Closing

Small local governments, especially those whose economic base remains dependent upon a single business or resource industry are susceptible to economic crisis. Such crisis can arise quite suddenly. This is not news to any of these local governments. Even where no sudden crisis develops, we know that rural and small town Canada has been under a range of pressures over the past 25 years and that there is a need for concerted and long term attention to matters of building a more resilient local economy, local government, and community.

This Toolkit has outlined a generic framework for coping with a sudden economic crisis (Parts 1-3) and for re-organizing local government routines to address the need for more long-term building of community resilience (Part 4). Through scenario planning, small local governments may be able to tailor this generic framework to local circumstances. In the case of an economic emergency: once it has been announced it is very important for local government leadership to respond quickly and clearly (remember the messages). Being able to clearly articulate immediate needs gives the local government a greater degree of control over its destiny. Just as response time is important in reducing damages and losses from a natural disaster, so too is it important to get ahead of the ‘rumour mill’ in an economic crisis.

In the case of actions for building long-term community resilience: the Toolkit outlines a number of topic areas to which attention should be directed *now* – as it will not only save time when time is short, but it will also supplement day-to-day local government activities. We feel that by working through the framework, local governments may find ‘preventative’ actions which they can take now that may even help mitigate future economic crises.

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