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DAWSON CREEK

# Supporting Rural Development: Creating a Voice for Rural British Columbia

SEPTEMBER 2014



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# Rural Development Mandate

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In September 2013, the Rural B.C. Steering Committee, comprised of Board members of all three Beetle Action Coalitions (BACs), met with the Premier and relevant Ministers at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) Convention to discuss the Rural B.C. Project and present a number of recommendations. One of the recommendations was for Government to assign a Cabinet Minister for Rural Development. A resolution supporting the Rural B.C. project was passed.

The Premier responded by assigning the Honourable Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations as Minister Responsible for Rural Development. Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development Donna Barnett was asked to support Minister Thomson in this role.

The Premier tasked Minister Thomson and Parliamentary Secretary Donna Barnett with consulting with both rural communities and the Community Economic Development Committee of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) on barriers they face to economic development, and on growing economic opportunities in rural

communities. The Premier asked that Minister Thomson and Parliamentary Secretary Barnett bring forward a report on rural development for Government's consideration.

To support this mandate and align the rural development work already underway within the Ministries of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training and Community, Sport and Cultural Development, a joint rural coalition/government staff working group was formed. The Rural B.C. Project Working Group was established with staff from the three BACs and the ministries of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations; Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training; Community Sport and Cultural Development; and Social Development and Social Innovation.

Minister Thomson's responsibility for rural development was reaffirmed by the Premier in the Minister's June 2014 mandate letter, which included mandating the Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary to work with the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development on the creation and implementation of the Rural Dividend as committed in Strong Economy, Secure Tomorrow.



# Completing the Rural Development Report

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Between January and June 2014, the Rural B.C. Working Group met on several occasions. Two workshops were organized on identified topics (i.e. venture capital, rural/regional economic development), with participation from a range of rural community stakeholders. Research and background reports on rural economic development were reviewed, and an inventory was prepared identifying provincial and federal government rural support.

The efforts of the Working Group culminated in a set of recommendations that were endorsed by the Rural B.C. Steering Committee and submitted to the Parliamentary Secretary in June 2014.

Concurrent to the efforts of the Rural B.C. Working Group, Parliamentary Secretary Barnett met with the Rural B.C. Steering Committee on several occasions, and attended a session organized by one of the BACs on investment readiness. The Parliamentary Secretary also met with the President of the B.C. Chamber of Commerce and representatives from the UBCM Community Economic Development Committee.

The Parliamentary Secretary also met with the Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development and the Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training. Minister Thomson and Parliamentary Secretary Barnett brought forward recommendations that have been supported by government.

## Supporting Rural Development -Creating a Voice for Rural British Columbia

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Rural communities in British Columbia have expressed their desire to see a greater understanding within the provincial government of the current challenges facing rural communities. The Government of B.C. recognizes the importance and contributions of rural B.C. and is committed to work together with rural stakeholders and leaders to foster thriving rural communities.

In response to rural B.C. needs, the Province commits to action that is responsive to rural needs, and offers government accountability to rural stakeholders. These commitments represent a proactive approach with shared leadership that will support rural British Columbians in building opportunities in their communities, and determining the course of their community's

future. The issues identified by rural communities will be addressed through concentrated engagement and effective partnerships among governments, businesses, organizations and community members. Through a process and structure that creates effective dialogue with rural stakeholders, the Province will ensure that rural B.C. communities are a place to prosper and grow.

- 1. The Province will establish a Rural Advisory Council that offers a strong new voice for rural citizens, ensuring that rural British Columbians have regular and meaningful input to government policy decisions on how to best support rural prosperity and thriving rural communities across B.C.***

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The Rural Advisory Council will advise on issues, strategies and policy changes that can further grow and strengthen rural communities. Through a regular dialogue between Government and the Council, there will be an opportunity for government to hear, first-hand, the rural perspective on the issues within those communities.

British Columbians with a deep understanding of rural B.C. issues will be appointed to the Council to support government in developing an understanding of the impact of government policy on rural communities. The Council will work with Government to develop an effective lens on rural B.C. challenges, priorities, and opportunities. The Council will stimulate discussion and understanding of the challenges facing rural B.C. and the actions required to help rural communities succeed.

Within its terms of reference, the Council will prioritize where its efforts should be focussed. Advice from the Council will help in developing new opportunities, actions, and policies that will further rural development, supporting business owners, leaders and workers across rural communities in driving new economic activity and job creation.

***2. The Province will structure the Rural Advisory Council to fully support the successful achievement of the Council's mandate, ensuring effective governance, membership and secretariat support.***

For the Council to be successful, it needs to be structured effectively. This includes building the Council with an effective governance structure. The province's existing advisory councils offer some effective governance models in moving forward with the Council's establishment.

Terms of reference will be developed to clarify the Council's mandate and provide a clear description of the areas of focus. The Council will be developed with cross-agency input and consultation.

A diverse and knowledgeable membership will be recruited for the Council that appropriately and fairly represents rural B.C. The Council will be appointed by the Premier in consultation with Minister Thomson and Parliamentary Secretary Barnett, and consist of 10 to 18 members from throughout B.C. Membership will aim to achieve demographic and geographic diversity that reflects regional balance, and a diversity of regional perspectives. Appointees will include one representative from each of the three BACs, ensuring that the knowledge and experience gained through the Rural B.C. project help drive the Council's success.

The Province will also ensure that the development of the Council considers the role of other regional entities with rural development mandates such as the Regional Economic Trusts, and that the Council works collaboratively with such entities to appropriately build on and complement existing efforts.

The Council will have the opportunity for dialogue with the provincial representatives who have the mandate for rural development. The Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations or Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development will attend Council meetings. Other Ministers will be invited if priorities under discussion also fall within their ministries. The Premier will be invited to attend at least one meeting annually.

The Council will have the resources it needs to be fully active and operating efficiently, including dedicated secretariat support.

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**3. The Rural Advisory Council will advise the Province on priority actions, policy and programs supporting rural economic development.**

**Government will request the Council consider an early focus on rural economic development priorities that have been previously identified by rural stakeholders:**

- **Avenues to support greater rural access to investment capital**
- **Stronger business development support for rural entrepreneurs and business owners.**

To help ensure the vitality of rural communities, a strong economic base is needed. The Province recognizes the need to support rural communities in developing strong economies, and transitioning from dependency on traditional sectors such as forestry to capitalizing on exciting new economic opportunities emerging in B.C., such as agri-foods, bio-energy, and natural gas.

The Council will advise Government on rural priorities supporting economic development. In discussions with some rural stakeholders, the need to encourage entrepreneurs and

support business growth and success have been identified as key to growing rural economies. These stakeholders have examined various means of supporting greater access to capital for rural communities and businesses, including new models such as the Community Economic Development Investment Fund model. Stakeholders have also considered how to support greater rural utilization of the Province's existing investment capital programs by identifying the most promising means to raise awareness and understanding in rural communities about community-based venture capital corporations.

The Province will request that the Council consider an early focus building upon the work that rural stakeholders have undertaken to date. In doing so, Government will also request that the Council work closely with existing rural entities supporting economic development, including the Regional Economic Trusts. In this manner, the Council will be well-positioned to bring forward advice to government that builds on and complements other initiatives and entities supporting rural economic development.



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**4. The Rural Advisory Council will provide advice to the Province to support rural community capacity building.**

**Government will request the Council consider an early focus on rural capacity building priorities that have been previously identified by rural stakeholders, including advising government in moving forward with the Rural Dividend.**

To keep their communities vibrant and attractive, rural communities need quality of life and infrastructure to grow. A combination of actions and strategies are needed to build local communities, develop strong community leadership, and support active community volunteers. Support for locally driven initiatives is needed to build the internal capacity of rural communities to respond to changing circumstances.

The need for a rural dividend to help build communities and plan for future growth is identified in Strong Economy, Secure Tomorrow. The Premier's June 2014 mandate letters to the Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource

Operations, and the Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development outline Government's commitment. Both Ministries are mandated to work together and work with Parliamentary Secretary Donna Barnett on this initiative.

Some rural B.C. stakeholders have expressed a desire to engage with the Province in moving forward with the rural dividend. The Province will ask the Council consider an early focus on advice to government on the rural dividend. The Council can offer Government insight into the most effective means of moving forward with the rural dividend from a rural perspective. Any advice from the Council on the rural dividend will need to be carefully reviewed and evaluated to fully understand the fiscal implications and will necessarily involve close collaboration between the Ministries of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development. Government will also ask that the Council work closely with existing rural entities that have mandates supporting rural development in bringing forward advice on the rural dividend.



# Implementing Rural Development Commitments

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Meeting the rural development mandate necessarily includes an effective plan for Government's implementation of commitments, a plan that is consistently and explicitly understood and supported across government. Implementation will focus on key essentials for success—building effective linkages and partnerships across government, identifying leadership, and structuring accountability into the implementation process.

## **5. Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations will lead the establishment of the Rural Advisory Council, and coordinate government wide consultation and collaboration in support of the Council.**

Relevant ministries will work closely with the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations to ensure cross-agency policy, legislative and fiscal considerations are efficiently managed in support of B.C. rural communities.

The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations will lead the development of the Council under the guidance of the Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development.

The Council will consider a wide range of policies and actions that will touch upon a number of provincial ministries, requiring a high level of cross agency coordination. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations will be responsible to coordinate government wide collaboration in establishing the Council and in supporting the Council's priorities. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations will work closely with relevant ministries to ensure priorities that

are determined by the Council are carefully considered for cross-agency policy, legislative and fiscal considerations.

In particular, any potential input to Government by the Council on the rural dividend will include working closely and collaboratively with Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development to support the mandated partnership between the two ministries.

If the Council determines that consideration of new investment fund models is a priority focus, this would necessarily entail close consultation and involvement of Ministry of International Trade, Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, and Ministry of Finance.

The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations will also assume the responsibility for secretariat support to the Council. Additionally, it will ensure effective communications and public reporting out on the Council's progress to rural stakeholders.

Fiscal implications to the advice brought forward by the Council will be clearly articulated and carefully reviewed by Government in considering Council's advice.

## **6. The Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development will have ongoing accountability to the Premier on the progress of the Rural Advisory Council, and in meeting the Rural Development mandate.**

Direct accountability to the Premier on meeting government's commitments will be fulfilled by the Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development.

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Accountability includes a commitment to move forward with the rural development mandate on a timely basis. Timely execution will be met through a commitment to get the Council established by the end of 2014.

Government's actions in addressing rural challenges and progress supporting rural

development will be identified and clearly communicated. Accountability for rural development will be met through regular progress reports to the Premier on the accomplishments of the Rural Advisory Committee, and in meeting the rural development mandate.



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Government is committed to rural development. Progress on meeting commitments will be communicated on a regular basis. Check [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca) for updates.

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