

**MOVING FORWARD**  
***“Future of the North Peace Region”***  
**Scenarios Report**

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**Felicity Edwards**  
**The CSE Group**

## Introduction

A 2010 Research Study on the social and economic impacts of the energy industry in the North Peace region has led to a decision to Move Forward with an implementation plan. Two workshops with leaders from the region have been held to begin that process. The second workshop focused on the process to develop a vision for the region. This began with the creation of a list of 12 forces will drive, shape and influence the region's future. They are:

<b><i>Forces Shaping North Peace Region's Future</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>
<b>Economics of the Energy Business</b>	Management of the boom and bust cycle and the ability to manage the impacts of fluctuating commodity prices.
<b>Demographic Shifts</b>	The make-up and characteristics of the region's population and its implications for creating community
<b>Environmental Factors</b>	The sustainability of the natural ecosystems, global climate change and other factors affecting the region.
<b>Education and Employment</b>	The need for upgrading skills of locals, the ability of local colleges to respond to the expanding requirements of the regional energy projects as well as the expanding communities
<b>Safety</b>	Workplace and in the community. Also safety as an issue in the ability to access employment opportunities
<b>Social Fabric</b>	Sense of community- emergence of the arts as a contributor to healthy lifestyle, including access to services
<b>Perception of the Region</b>	The region's image from the outside that would encourage people to come to live there
<b>Aspirations and values</b>	To become a fully integrated and healthy region to live in that will attract families as well as others.
<b>Governance</b>	Federal and Provincial decisions, their effect on the region and the rising role of citizen engagement in regional decisions
<b>Global Trends</b>	Events outside the community that have impacts on the region such as the change in emphasis to the BRIC countries
<b>Affordability</b>	Distance and expanding population make the region an expensive place to live and work.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Airports, roads, distance and the feeling of remoteness.

In order to build scenarios, the most important forces that also have the widest possible range of outcomes were identified. These are called the **Critical Uncertainties**. Two critical uncertainties were identified:

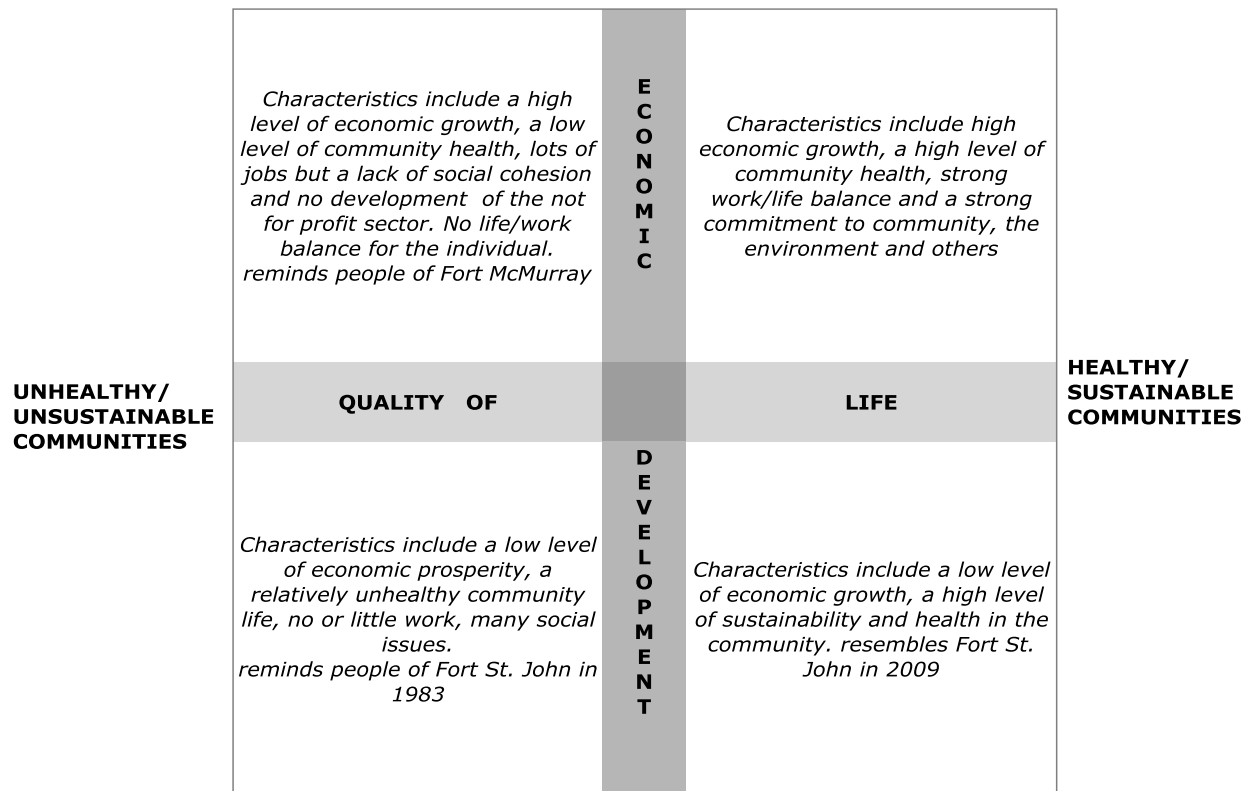
- **Economics of the Energy Business** (expansion and stagnation at the ends of the axes)– seen as the driving engine of the region and most scenarios.
- **Quality of Life** (poor and good quality at the ends of the axes)- the heart and soul of the community, the sustainability of a healthy community.

It is important to note that the other forces are not forgotten. All TWELVE forces become part of the narrative in the scenarios.

## Framework for the Four Scenarios

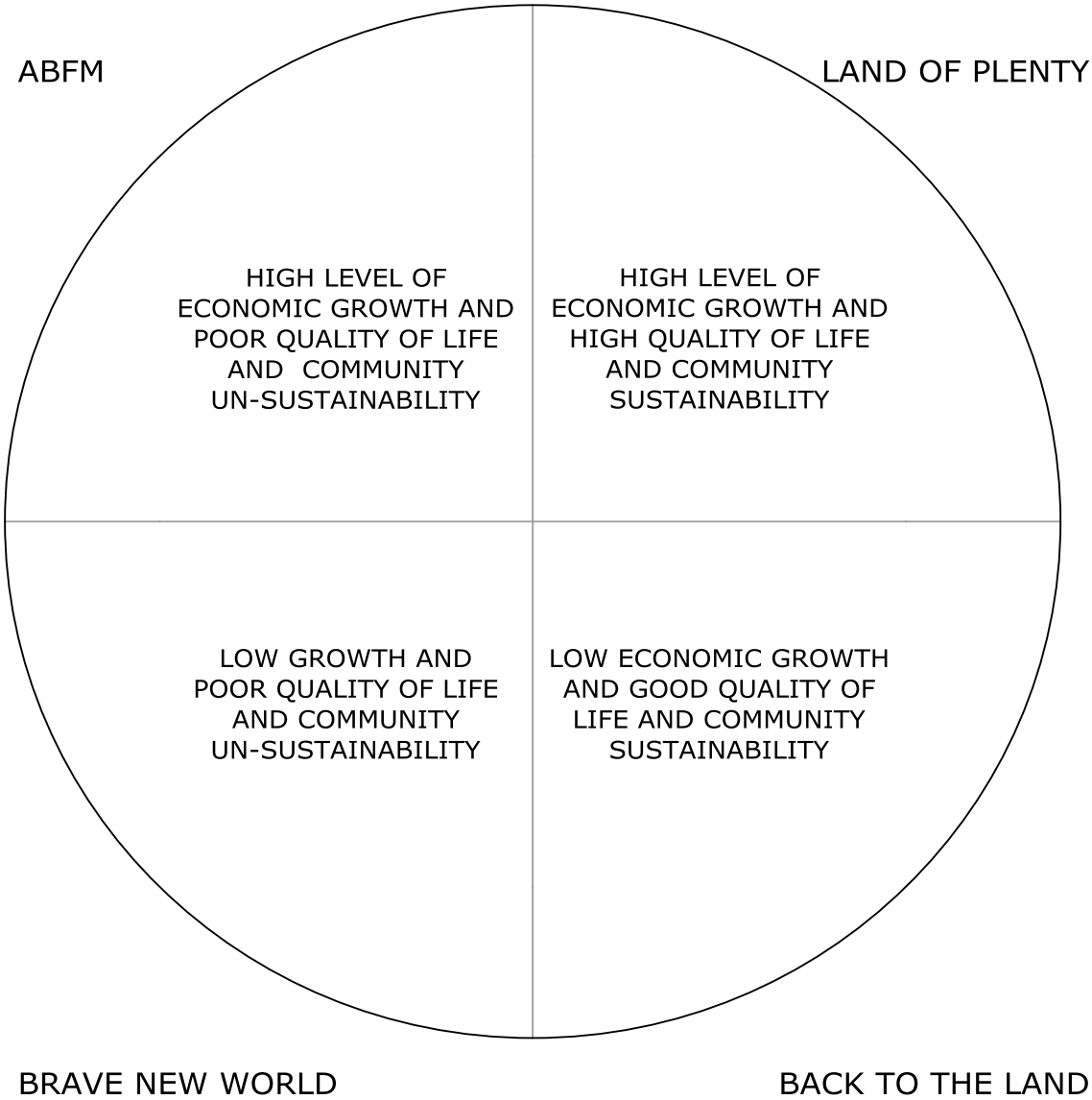
### SCENARIO FRAMEWORK FOR THE NORTH PEACE

EXPANSION/COULD BE IN A BOOM PHASE



STAGNATION/LOW GROWTH

# SCENARIOS



# 1. **ABFM (Anything But Fort McMurray)**

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## **Overview**

**In ABFM**, economics and wealth drive change. A strong global and regional economy drives the need for energy and an influx of individuals continue to find well paying jobs in the North Peace. Pressure for industrial development extends across sectors – gas in particular, however forestry and coal are not immune. This brings pressure to accommodate an influx of workers some of whom have even decided to make the region their permanent home. Some projects are controversial but opposition is fragmented and the industrial sector forges ahead with new work camps in the bush – in fact many of these are starting to look like mini-towns. Provincial interests support development – continuing to call it “green energy” in an effort to shore up support for it. Rising house prices drive up the cost of living affecting low paid service workers and young families. The general attitude to “transient workers” is one of indifference at best and outright distrust and dislike at worst. The need for continuous monitoring of this fragmented social situation is putting a lot of pressure on the local enforcement agencies.

Continued expansion transforms the region into a “go west young man” frontier experience. Young families are few. A polarized social structure contrasts three groups: an aging population of “old timers”; a dynamic globe-trotting young set; and a poor, transient service-work population. Public community participation is minimal.

To some the region becomes what it has always said it did not want to become “Fort McMurray West”. To others it is a place of beauty and simplicity. To the older, longer-term residents, it is a place where the old values need to be preserved and protected. Pressure mounts to restrict industrial development. Loss of environment, loss of friendliness, loss of “small town atmosphere” in Taylor, Hudson’s Hope and especially Fort St. John are lamented. Wildlife is severely altered. Legal battles – have vs. have not’s – dominate any discussion of development.

For the Site C dam alone - it is estimated that the dam will see 7,650 direct construction jobs through the construction period (approximately 10 years), and up to 35,000 direct and indirect jobs through all stages of the project. Population of the region stabilizes at 127,000 but there is little sense of stability in “**ABFM**”

## **The Story – Looking Back from 2030**

The story of the region goes back a long way. And from time to time people in the region actually remember it. The westward expansion during the 18th and 19th centuries had pushed First Nation groups westward and into competition with each other for resources and in this century to competition with the white industrialists. After settling land claims with Treaty 8 First Nations, the government opened the land to

homesteading in 1912. Initially the region grew slowly as agricultural settlements spread westward to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and northward to the muskegs of the Liard. Changes began to speed up with the construction of the Alaska Highway connecting Dawson Creek to Alaska via Fort Nelson. Industrial development began with the provincially funded megaprojects which included the extension of transportation and utility infrastructure across the region and the construction of hydroelectric dams at Hudson's Hope. An oil and gas industry developed and helped Fort St. John's population increase from 3,619 people in 1961 to 13,891 in 1981 surpassing Dawson Creek as the largest city at that time. The region experienced little growth in the late-1980s and the population remained between 55,000 and 59,000 between 1992 and 2003. Since then, with a booming oil and gas industry, the population has increased to a 2030 regional total of 127,000. The focus of most people has been mostly on being able to earn a well paid living in the resource extraction industries.

### **Expansion and Growth**

The momentum of wealth, growth and development accelerated with the development of new technology (fracking) and the increasing world thirst for oil and gas. The assumption that we are going to make do with less is probably not the case any time soon.

Pressure for development was intense. The demand for residential properties sent real estate prices upward. Old residents were appalled, but secretly smiling as the value of their own property appreciated. Newcomers seeking jobs as well as lifestyle were equally dismayed at the lack of rental accommodations or housing at "affordable" costs. For those working in low-paying service jobs, living costs were astronomical. Some hostels and dedicated housing were built for "transient" workers, but the demand far exceeded supply and there was local resistance to such housing. In addition a portion of the population lives in camps and provides added pressure to the services and infrastructure of the local communities.

"It was an interesting message; when you come from a place like British Columbia you can be lulled into the sense that pretty soon we are going to be able to wean ourselves off oil and gas. From a global perspective, that's not the case." (Vancouver Sun 2011)

### **Demand for Services**

The growing and increasingly affluent population created a range of new pressures on the town. There was pressure to expand roads, sewage, water, welfare and other regional services. There was pressure to expand hospitals, protection agencies, schools and cultural facilities as well as recreational facilities. In **ABFM**, the rich can pay for the health care they need and anyway Vancouver is not so far away, although the poor may suffer. An enterprising entrepreneur may even decide to expand private facilities in the region by initiating private clinics, spas, etc.

## **Conflicts**

These developments brought forward an ongoing battle between groups “for” and “against” development. The pro-development group saw growth as exciting, beneficial and inevitable. The anti-development group focused on the loss of habitat and wildlife, loss of natural environment and loss of a sense of community and quality of life. They lamented the loss of the regional character and that uncontrolled development was leading to unsustainable ecological and social outcomes.

It was easier to get approval of an individual project, which might have significant merits, than to stop all development. In part, this reflected legal challenges and in part, constraints and conditions imposed by the B.C. and Federal Government. Conflict across special interest groups and a growing lack of consensus undermines municipal and regional decision processes. How can the elected officials manage this?

Lifestyles are personal – high recreation needs using power machines (for river racing and snowmobiling) and personal fitness. In general, a narrow personal focus with an inability to see larger impacts on environment and community.

Adding to the atmosphere of conflict, there are fewer families and kids – which often are the key element encouraging people to connect. With fewer kids there is less cohesiveness, few “say hello on the street”, lack of “small town friendliness” feel in the region.

## **Transformation**

Growth couldn’t continue forever, but the period of growth had transformed the region. By the second decade the region population was larger and more socially divided. Community and regional events to bring people together were not effective and local participation was weak.

There was little overlap or interaction amongst the different groups – with little or no social or spatial overlap as each group tended to use different places, from restaurants and pubs to stores and means of transportation. Few were committed to the region as a place.

Gradual environmental deterioration occurred despite money to invest in state of the art infrastructure – expanding municipal and industrial footprints encroached on habitat, water flows, and ecological systems. How does the region recover?

## **Beginnings of change through Restrictions**

By 2027 the region's population stabilized at 127,000 people. After the surge, development continued in a piecemeal, ad hoc way. For many, the wealth and night life, typified by the young workers, gave the region a feel of "McMurray West". For some, the remembrance of the former days and the beautiful geography of the region still signaled a place of beauty, simplicity and protection to older residents. There were feelings of nostalgia and a desire to preserve and protect what they themselves had transformed a decade earlier.

The mixture of views created a strong new political landscape. Old enemies started coming together to preserve the community. The nature of oil and gas, coal and water resource developments had distorted the quality of life of the region. Time could not be turned back, but further developments could be stopped or modified to suit what the region itself wanted.

### **2030**

As young people left and both inflation and housing prices rose, the quality of service declined in every area of the lives of those in the region. Those who could afford Vancouver-based services hardly noticed. Those who could not afford these prices, went without for a while and in time sought out less-pricey places to live. Our local businesses suffered. The lack of reasonably priced help drove us out of the low and mid cost markets. Again, the rich hardly noticed. They have options; they can travel the world. By 2027 it was dawning on the region without a vibrant local economy it was not very attractive as it also offered little that made life vibrant, and something needed to be done.



## **2. BRAVE NEW WORLD**

### **Overview**

This is what Orwell and Huxley wrote about in their futuristic books – after a slow decline, the economic boom has collapsed creating community and environmental challenges. Political instability and protectionism slow global economic growth. Oil demand softens and prices fall. The North Peace region's rampant growth collapses in a state of shock. Development grinds to a halt. Employment in the industry and services falls leading to an exodus of both transient workers and young families. Business failures darken store fronts in the downtown. Initially, reduced development pressure eases the demand on municipal resources. But eventually, falling market prices puts pressure on the region's revenues. The region takes leadership in cutting costs but this impacts both social services and maintenance investments in major facilities.

It is hard to blame us. No-one believed that such change was actually real enough to plan for or even think deeply about. No-one had an organized and competent way to understand or do anything about it. All of our energy was devoted to making the world we already knew work for us. We simply missed the fact that a new set of conditions that required new ways of living were sneaking up on us.

By the time enough of us became conscious enough to realize what was happening to us, it was far too late to avoid the place in which we now find ourselves.

### **The Story – Looking Back from 2030**

At the turn of the century, while experiencing cycles of boom and bust – the region was on an economic roll. Go North young man (and woman) was the mantra if you wanted a well paying job. New homes, new hotels, new restaurants, new roads were built – overall the region was booming. Strong global growth and escalating energy prices created conditions for growth in both the extraction and the pipeline areas. Real estate prices jumped. There was concern about the social and environmental impacts of growth, but the momentum seemed unstoppable. It wasn't.

It was 2025, before it became clear that China was getting set to challenge the USA for global dominance. Those with money had invested in gold during the 2008-14 recessions. Softer investments, such as tourism and even education, had dried up. B.C. was no longer attractive enough to sustain the flow of foreign investment. And by 2030, we were in sad shape economically. Rather than being a leader in the process of adapting to new conditions we found ourselves as laggards – unprepared for our brave new world.

## **Global Fall**

The global economic boom proved unsustainable. The hectic global pace of growth in China and India eventually slowed. The US twin deficits could not be maintained forever creating political and economic repercussions. US-China relations, for example, became increasingly strained and conflictual. Political instability in the Middle East created a price premium for some time, but eventually the high energy prices impacted growth – and in turn energy prices. Outsiders from China and the BRIC countries buy up more and more of the economy in B.C.

## **Impacts on the North Peace Region**

Slower growth and the fall in oil and gas prices created a sharp adjustment in cash flow and attitudes in British Columbia. Projected investments in the North Peace, for example, did not materialize. Optimism – some later said blind optimism – was rapidly replaced by dire pessimism. The full impact of the changes in energy took some years to fully unfold. Expectations persisted for some time that the changes were temporary. Energy prices “had to come back” because we are running out of oil. After several years this view began to lose favour. The changes were more than cyclical: they were becoming recognized as longer term and structural in nature.

The economic impact of the changed circumstances was first felt in new energy projects. Layoffs happened quickly. Some found work – temporarily – in service jobs which held up longer. Eventually demand for service jobs also tapered off. The young and mobile needing work – singles and young families – were compelled to leave. The loss of jobs reflected loss of business and increased business failures. In the towns and city “for sale” and “for lease” replaced “open for business”. Co-op and low-cost housing initiatives succeed but are not repeated

The environment is seen as the least of our problems and treated accordingly. Air and water quality continue their slow decline.

## **Regional Pressures**

The impact on the region was more subtle. Initially, the slowdown in development reduced financial pressures as up front costs for sewage, water and roads declined. With time, however, the falling market prices for property undermined the tax base. Resistance to rate increases seemed to increase disproportionately as house prices fell. This necessitated cut backs in some programs and deferrals on capital spending on repairs and maintenance. Putting off maintenance “for a year or two” had little impact in the short term but could prove disastrous in the longer term. Both facilities and social services were affected by the cut backs.

For some – indeed many – the slow down in growth was viewed as a blessing. They were relieved to see the hectic pace of development decline. But few wanted it to collapse completely. As jobs disappeared, property prices fell, businesses failed, maintenance of public facilities and roads showed deterioration and social services declined, views of relief were replaced by views of dismay.

## **Quality of Life**

We have become an inward looking society. The story of the disintegration of the social fabric of the province and the region is the same. It was slow, not well-seen or understood, and ultimately fatal to the town we had known. By 2030, the “small town” feel we had once taken for granted in the region, has been replaced by a market-driven city in which each looked after his or her own.

At first, the increasing prosperity of the North Peace had been welcomed. Rising house prices drove up the value of personal investments. The region’s apparent good fortune seemed to confirm our wisdom and the virtue of free markets. But it also meant that our response in almost all areas was small and slow. This is as true of the provision of affordable housing as it was in our meagre attempts to sustain our social infrastructures. In hindsight, all were too little, too late.

Erosion of our social fabric through the steady increase in the price of housing meant that most of the children who were born here could no longer live here. In one blow, local knowledge was lost and a sense of community was not cherished.

There is a noticeable increase in distrust amongst people of the region, especially those who are “different” than us. High security is available for those who can afford it and high crime for all others. As safety became an issue, those with money invested in security technology and services. It was not their concern that most folks were at risk and exposed to higher crime rates. In fact a small regional “protection force” emerged to ensure that those who needed it were protected, while others suffered.

Social matters, including health, social services and the arts, have always played second or third fiddle to economic wealth creation. So when things began to get tight, at first we scrimped, then offered benign neglected and finally we cut back. The rationale was that first you have to make it before you spend it, so economics trumps all. Depression is common and many people are now regarded as having a low health status.

By 2027, when the global economy virtually collapsed, by its normal pattern of life, the North Peace region no longer remembered its history, let alone honoured the commitment of those who had pioneered and homesteaded in the region.

## **Environmental Strains**

Not all was well in the region. While the regional population stabilized at 100,000, the impact on the environment continued to increase. The driver was not development, at least in the traditional sense, but lifestyles and resources. Constrained resources meant that public facilities such as water and sewage treatment suffered. This was a slow decline, exasperated by falling water flows in the Peace River as the effects of climate change took effect. Having fewer resources had an impact on sustaining ecological integrity.

Ironically, a shift to a more basic lifestyle also had impacts. The number of people cutting trees for wood for home heating increased dramatically. Some cutting was managed: some was not. At the same time, human encounters with wildlife increased. The net result, unexpected by many, was that even with “simple lifestyles” the ecological impact could be high. Sustainability was a complicated and difficult result to achieve.

## **Governance**

Moving Forward fails to grip our imagination; each drifts into looking after him/her self. We did not take the opportunity to engage our minds or our imaginations about what we could become. We wanted comfort now and elected those who promised it to us. We were among the vast majority of North Americans who simply could not bring ourselves to believe that there were good reasons to fundamentally alter either our view of the world or our way of life. We demonstrated no foresight so no preparation for predictable energy crises and resource shortages

Because there is a general withdrawal of energy from public life, the region is left with bossy, immature people who dominate the region’s leadership as they lead us into the past. Collaboration is “for sissies” and so local leadership fails, the gap grows between haves and have-nots, and the inclination to include others declines.

## **2030**

The North Peace has changed. The pace of life has slowed. The driven economy early in the century has contracted and stabilized. The core of the story is that the region’s desire to maximize cash flows as quickly as possible over the last 25 years is that many who no longer live here are very rich indeed. They are thankful for the energy industry in the North Peace, but would not retire here. Having made this bed, they do not way to sleep in it. However, those who could not escape were stuck in a region of the province that has largely been sacrificed at the altar of economic greed. The failure has been widespread, slow and thorough. And, we are no longer the future. We are indeed on a very rocky road to a brave new world.

### 3. LAND OF PLENTY

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#### Overview

**Land of Plenty** is a story of the slow and precarious development to become a model 21<sup>st</sup> century region and to earn a reputation as a living laboratory for the invention of the new ways of living that the world requires in this century. The coming together of a high quality of life in an economically rich region allowed for the development of our capacity to push ourselves beyond the usual assumptions and behaviour patterns. The main drivers are strong economic growth, and an equally strong commitment to being a region that is fit to live in and has the foresight to create a better quality of life.

Some say that the Moving Forward process was the start; others argue that we could not have developed as we have if we were not ready. In any case, 2011 was a turning point. Through it a critical mass of us learned that drifting on the economic tide would almost certainly not lead us to a future that was satisfying for most of us; that as a region we had real choices about our future and that the price of a future that would work for all was that many of us would have to become more inclusive, insightful, and wise. In short, if we were willing to do the work, we could avoid the fate of being just another “McMurray West.”

This was an institutional and organizational governance challenge, as well as a call for personal responsibility. Early moves included the creation of a new council of “Regional Vision Keepers” – an inclusive cross sectoral body to hold and extend the vision and mark its progress. This allowed for ongoing dialogue with interested citizens to be sustained. This, in turn, provided a context for the peaceful negotiation of conflicting interests.

And there were conflicting interests! It was a constant struggle, especially in the first decade, to hold and keep to the vision. By definition, newcomers arrived with their old assumptions. No longer did cowboy capitalists and those who expect that life owes them a living find that they do not fit in. This is an era of conscious responsible enterprise. The region had to become much better at explaining the new assumptions to which we were committed. e.g. “None of us should expect to get everything we want.” Further, it took almost eight years to get the B.C. Government to treat the region as a test bed for new ideas. First they ignored us; then they fought us. At last, they saw us as an asset. In time, however, the journey became easier. More of us understood more deeply just what we are about and why. New technologies and organizational forms enabled more consistent participation. Quite the reverse, our success became self-reinforcing.

## **The Story – Looking Back from 2030**

We can see now that, in 2011, we had only a dim sense of the work that lay before us. Maybe that was a good thing. We now recognize that if we really understood then just what kind of a ride we were in for, that we might not have set our feet to the path we have, in fact, taken.

In 2011, much was working for us – strong regional economic growth, B.C. in general and the region in particular were prosperous, with enough resources to create communities for all the inflowing workers. In short, the pressures for overt change were not huge. But there were also signs that too much of a good thing can be a curse, not a blessing. House prices had already moved beyond the capability of service workers and were moving beyond the grasp of young professionals. The slow degradation of our physical environment and our own community was an increasing worry. There was a wide-spread sense, just under the surface, that we needed a truly new future; that a better version of yesterday might not serve us well tomorrow.

In hindsight, Moving Forward was a critical step in the right direction. One of the surprises was that the vision was not the blueprint that so many of us had anticipated. Rather, it expressed a new aspiration – a new sense of what we could do and become together over time, if we had the wit and courage to commit to finding and marking a new path to the future.

### **Global Trends**

By 2030, it is clear that the dream that all societies will evolve into industrial societies is not on. The limits of the Earth's atmosphere and resources have put an end to this long-held aspiration. The dominant view of opinion leaders has swung from "sustainability means that we can and must keep the industrial game going" to "the only sustainable society and economy is one that has evolved."

We are moving from citizen participation to participation for self-governance, i.e. those legally "in charge" no longer decide for us, but with us. Strong local leadership continues to emerge in over many years. We develop forms of other economies such as the knowledge-based economy in all that we do; it is the addition of knowledge to every process and product that adds value to it. While relatively small, the North Peace prospers in part from a steady stream of folks who want to learn from what is happening in the region.

The worst global nightmares have been managed. Neither the American Empire nor the American dollar, have collapsed. However, both are evolving. A new and more respectful multilateralism is replacing the arrogance of Empire and the Euro has stabilised although it was not accepted beside the dollar as a global currency. This does not mean that all is well. However, it does mean that the long slow slide into international chaos, that marked the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, has been reversed.

## **Economics and Prosperity**

Overall, the North Peace region's economic challenges stem from too much growth and prosperity, rather than too little. Housing costs threatened to rise out of sight for all but the rich; BC's labour shortage was not dealt with by the province; and labour costs fed both inflation and frustration as service-on-demand can no longer be provided.

While it was not obvious prior to 2011, foresight suggested, that business-as-usual would not do; that we must find solutions that reflect what is desirable in the long-run and what can be done now to achieve it. The reality of the end of cheap energy, water and other materials has been accepted and worked into the ways we live. Respect is a major value and common expectation – for each other, the land, flora and fauna, history, and other cultures.

The bullet was bitten, in 2013 when priorities were set for the firing-order of new developments; developments that increased the quality of living for existing citizens were first in line. There is a fierce commitment to holding the tension among community, environment and wealth creation.

The need for effective limits is a major preoccupation – on market forces and on our single-minded demands – be they of money, humanity, virtue or the ecology, More land was made available for affordable housing and growth of developments was deliberately slowed in order to relieve the pressure and maintain a satisfying quality of living.

Over the last twenty years, growth and prosperity have been conceived in ever broader ways and become much more integrated with the other concerns of our citizens – a reliable sense of community, safe streets, a trustworthy society, a thriving physical environment and a final priority on increasing the overall quality of living for everyone in the region.

## **Aspirations and Values**

Explicit and shared aspirations for our future are the way we put our values to work and make them effective. It may well be that our shared aspirations for the future have changed more than any other feature of our lives. In 2011, they were mostly implicit, rather than explicit; kept to ourselves, rather than shared; piece-meal, rather than holistic and region-wide; and focussed on the near-term, rather than the future we are committed to creating together.

However since then, ours has become a personally demanding region – psychologically, intellectually, morally and physically; no place for those who are lazy in any form.

Now our sense of the aspirations we share is so rich and robust that it has political currency. There is greater diversity, tolerance and inclusion of all kinds of differences – culture, gender, age, physical and mental capacities. There is a political will in the region that those who would be our leaders neglect at their peril. We know we are in the process of becoming a leading region that is self-governed, adaptable, robust, caring, capable, inclusive and widely-known, respected and emulated.

## **Leadership and Governance**

From one angle, the story of our success has been a story of the gifted leadership that emerged in the community in all sectors. Of course, the legal leadership provided by members of the Moving Forward process was critical. Without them, none of this would have taken root. However, we soon learned that broader leadership was called for from the opinion leaders in every sector – leadership that seeks interdependence for all, not independence for some. That such leadership emerged within the region is the key factor that led to success.

Over time the region developed to become seriously self-governing. This meant that people worked long and hard to develop a widely-shared sense of what is valued most deeply and what that meant for what we would aspire to and become. We even developed a new dialogue centre as part of the Sa'a Ma'a centre – explicitly designed to allow several hundred people to successfully work through contentious issues together. We are recouping our investment, by hosting groups from all over the world who want to experience the processes, technologies and space that we have developed.

## **Social Fabric/Capital**

Concern that we were losing the original feel of the 1980's came to the fore. Our concerns were well founded and that the region needed to do something about it. A path was created through the Moving Forward process to ensure re-creation of a lively and multi-faceted sense of the region and community. It also alerted us to the fact that urban design, street patterns and architecture all have a huge, if unconscious, impact on the formation of community. Now we are a model for the work of developing and maintaining a robust and reliable sense of place and we are prepared to pay the high taxes to accomplish it all.

Young people are encouraged to leave and experience other places and cultures, before they make a more permanent commitment here in the region.

## **External Reputation/Influence**

The North Peace used to be the place people went to earn a living but never stayed. Now its reputation as new pioneers is attracting others. We now have several research centres and think tanks that are focussed on one aspect or other on the character and requirements of the emerging future. Young people from all over the world are coming to explicitly live in a region that is moving beyond the traditional aspirations of industrial



societies. The upside is that these people revere the aging population; the downside is that we run the risk of filling the region to its carrying capacity.

### **Local Economic Structures**

In addition to the continuing thirst for oil and gas, we now have one of the most knowledge-intense regions in Canada. For example, the North Peace Economic Development Authority is now the North Peace Council for Wealth Creation. It is responsible for all kinds of wealth creation – social, human, environmental, as well as economic. We have moved beyond the sense that “business is just business” or that “the environment must trump all other concerns.” All are being held tightly together by the Regional Vision Keepers.

### **Natural Capital**

This emerging way of seeing, thinking and acting has allowed the region to develop new alliances among those whose primary interest is economics, those whose primary interest is the physical environment and those whose primary interest is human well-being.

Each has come to see that their in order to achieve their primary objective, the concerns and objectives of the others must necessarily be included in their thinking and acting. We stopped talking of “trade-offs” among community, the environment and the economy and began to see synergies. Once this move was made, the synergies among a high quality of living, a relatively pristine environment, a robust and well-knit community and our capacity to create economic wealth became too obvious to deny. Specifically, in 2013, we committed to reducing the per capital use of water by 50% by 2020 and of energy by 35% by the same year. We actually met these targets in 2018, and we renewed these targets by 2030.

### **2030**

We share a lively sense that the region has crossed a historic watershed. The big picture is very satisfying, but it is still a struggle. Being lead dog in deep snow without a map or compass is hard work. But the experience of deep human satisfaction that comes from doing the work and the heart-felt gratefulness of others that we are doing it keeps us going. As does the thought that, great as it was the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is well and truly over. Our work is not to continue it, but to stand on its achievements and move on.

## 4. BACK TO THE LAND

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### Overview

**Back to the Land** is the story of a descent into impoverishment caused by external factors – B.C.’s economy slowly fails resulting in a slowed growth for northern B.C. in particular, despite the continuing rise in the global population. However by 2030 the North Peace has experienced and survived another boom-bust cycle. A new, more stable region with a strong sense of place, self-reliance and local control has emerged. Challenges remain. Although pressure on the environment has fallen from the days of rapid development, new challenges from the lack of resources have emerged.

### The Story – Looking Back from 2030

How did we let all that wealth slip away? That question plagued us in the early 2020’s. In 2030, we know. It turns out that we were not worse than others. But we did suffer from a widespread human affliction – continuing to behave in ways that once worked for us long after the conditions that made them successful had changed into a fundamentally new condition. There is even a name for it – *overshoot*. Just like a frog that is slowly being heated in a pot until it dies, we did not notice the weak signals that our situation was changing enough to warrant new responses, so we just tried harder to make the things we already knew how to do, work for us. We know now that should have been putting our energy into adaptation strategies, rather than assuming continuity.

Many residents are initially relieved at the slow down in growth. But as the impacts, particularly the social impacts, become more obvious, a groundswell of concern arises demanding change. There is pressure on the region’s government and Victoria to act but there even the informal regional leadership borne out of the Moving Forward process that fails to initiate actions.

Lifestyles become more “basic”. Some adapt to reduced opportunities by seeking or creating multiple jobs. Others reduce costs and simplify lifestyles. Biking and walking increase. New entrepreneurs from knowledge-based to craft and art emerge – all attracted by the lifestyle of health, recreation and simplicity. In fact some are reminiscing about the 1980’s - for example, the way Fort St. John used to be.

The environment and the community are cannibalized in the name of necessity and a short, narrow view of life. There are declines in everything - social services, community facilities slowly degrade, the population declines as those who can seek a better life elsewhere and the local economy slowly falls apart. Some people even talk about going back to the land and B.C. Hydro contemplates repatriating some of the farm land bought for the now defunct third dam on the Peace River.

## **Global Trends**

The catastrophe of the collapse of the USA dollar that so many feared in 2011, did not happen. Even the Euro-zone managed to save itself – besides it is so far away. No dramatic action caught our attention. Instead we saw, but missed the significance of, a long, slow deterioration of the value of the USA dollar. While it flirted with parity, it was not until 2022, that a Canadian Looney was worth more than a US buck in a sustained way. China did not seriously attempt to destabilize the USA until 2025. We now live in the global depression that resulted.

The world economy mainly grew, due to the emergence of a strong consuming class in India and China. While the price of oil rose to \$175 before the depression of 2025, this was only a 5% yearly increase. This was only a third of the rate the price increased between 1990 and 2006, so no one was alarmed. At first we coped by spending B.C.'s windfalls, then by increasing energy efficiency and by cutting back on frills. Then, about 2020, we started to cannibalize expenditures that really mattered – housing, food and education. Now even health care has been added to the mix. In time, there was less money from the province and lower discretionary expenditures to fuel the local economy.

It is now obvious that global climate change is real. The Gulf Stream that used to warm Europe is now 10% of what it was in 1975. In 2011, it had declined by 25%, but this was not enough to notice. Now, southern Europe is awash in environmental refugees. There is increasing pressure for Canada to take more than the 2,000,000 to which we have committed. But resistance to taking more than 5% of our population is fierce. We have our own problems of population dislocation, as a multi-year drought has made the Peace District unfit for humans and animals.

## **Leadership and Governance**

We wanted to believe the promises of an easy future made by our leaders. We liked the fact that they ridiculed as extreme and beat down those people who set out a path to the future by thinking, imagination, scrimping, saving and working hard to adapt to new conditions. We spouted the populist frontier view that politicians have an obligation to reflect our views. Give the people what they want. They did. The trouble was that we did not want to hear hard news, anymore than our leaders were willing to speak it. While we told ourselves we were doing heroic work, we conspired together to make sure the truth was not told, and if told, seen as not credible.

However collective initiatives that had already begun such as Moving Forward did not fail, as communities in the region found ways to make things work. Bottom up initiatives developed by strong formal (local and regional councils) and informal leadership (individuals in communities), helped to begin the creation of new small scale economic initiatives.

## **Economics and Prosperity**

In 2009/10, the rise of Asian manufacturing and increasing price of both petroleum products and the Canadian dollar had already taken its toll in Central Canada. We did not really pay attention until 2015, when they began a serious attempt to insist that we share our petroleum-based wealth.

Climate change results in reduced river flows, increased periods of drought; threat of forest fires and because of the economic downturn, the region lacks the money to undertake adaptive measures. In 2013, we had the mistaken notion that we could spend our way out of it. By the time we came to terms with the need to abandon the Peace River farming area, we had wasted billions of dollars and many lives. Of course, every dollar we misspent on this effort was not available for roads or research or other needs.

In spite of the rising price of oil and gas we never seemed to have enough to go around. The list of demands was long – health care, the infrastructure costs to support energy developments, weather-caused disaster relief, drought-related expenditures and growing energy subsidies.

Further, we insisted that we each receive an oil dividend every year. The thought that a few hundred dollars per person is not a strategic amount, but that \$1.5 billion is, began to register. Paying attention was not our strong suit. To make things worse, inflation was back. Our overheated economy was stoked further. It was only after 2016 that the region got back together to realise that changes needed to be made. The idea of actually slowing growth to a more reasonable pace, started with people learning to be satisfied with less.

## **Regional Quality of Life**

As economic and social reality took hold, a bottom-up social response emerged. The social capital of the North Peace – the social networks and relationships that underlay the neighbourhoods, community groups and institutions – began to assert itself. There was a growing sense of “we are in this together” and “we need to take action ourselves”. A need to common action and self-reliance reinforced a sense of social cohesion.

Formal and informal support groups emerged around churches, neighbourhoods and ad hoc groups. Helping the less fortunate was a common theme. Philanthropy from wealthy part-time residents increased. Do-it-yourself projects to maintain or expand trails, clean up parks or streams and help older neighbours – paint the town brought volunteers together to paint the home of less well-off senior in a day – sprang up.

These regional and community changes were supported by the formal leadership that helped to focus and support local projects and coordinated connections between groups. The business community, for example, linked with local groups of volunteers to develop a number of community / business events promoting the region. Joint town,

business and community efforts were also directed to the Provincial and Federal Governments to lobby for support for the community. Some small business initiatives – making and buying locally - were successful.

### **Lifestyle Basics**

Lifestyles were simple and more basic. Although some survived weekly commutes to distant towns and cities or worked at two jobs to make a living, the pace of life was much slower. People had to adapt to live in the region. Walking and cycling was common and supported; cars and trucks were car-pooled. There were social pressures to conform that some found oppressive while others found exhilarating. This new lifestyle and image of the North Peace attracted new residents and entrepreneurs both knowledge based and locally based – arts, crafts, repairs, etc.

### **2030**

Socially the cauldron of the economic bust has resulted in a renewed, cohesive and dynamic community. Lifestyles are simpler and less hectic. The North Peace region has stabilized economically, socially and environmentally. Selective energy development is carefully managed within strict regulations to ensure the region is less buffeted by external forces in the future. New social alliances have emerged supporting efforts to address some of the serious environmental issues and promote citizen input. The region's reputation, now, is not based only on its economy - it is known as a nice place to live.