

Introduction

Our community partner is the City of Williams Lake. Specifically working alongside the city manager, Mr. Darrell Garceau. While in Williams Lake, we had the opportunity to work with Mr. Chris Hutton and Ms. Leah Hartley as well, who were very helpful in assisting us. The City encouraged our group to analyze the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan that was implemented in 2009 as an overarching framework set to guide community and governmental officials on sustainable practices encompassing all three pillars of sustainability; environmental, social, and economic. However, an analysis of the whole ICSP proved to be a formidable task, therefore our group chose to narrow our scope and look specifically at the Affordable Housing and Liveable Neighbourhoods priority initiative. We chose the housing initiative because we believe it offers a great way to make a difference in the Williams Lake social and economic community, while still intertwining more environmental issues such as land use changes, and natural influences that we all have expertise in.

Objectives

- 1) We were interested in distinguishing if the community of Williams Lake is aware the City has implemented the ICSP. Furthermore, if they understand why, and how necessary it is for the Affordable Housing and Livable Neighborhoods initiative to be included within the City's sustainability plan.
- 2) To amalgamate baseline data for the Affordable Housing and Livable Neighborhoods plan to distinguish if and how the ICSP has implemented any change. We have done so using census data, from Statistics Canada as well as from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to find baseline percentages on average household incomes in Williams Lake and the average rental price of homes. These are then compared to find the average percent of income spent on rent in Williams Lake.
- 3) We also created a base map of Williams Lake to mark points of interest regarding affordable housing in Williams Lake to get a visual sense of the data. We plan on using more informal data to distinguish housing price trends between different neighborhoods and regions in Williams Lake. We did so because Williams Lake is a much smaller town, thus there are not statistical breakdowns of housing prices and income by smaller groupings. We are using real estate websites and craigslist listings to map out differences in housing prices across the city.

With the last two objectives we plan on using our research and analysis of any trends that we find to recommend ways for the City to further promote and implement the ICSP housing affordability based on our survey responses, interviews, and multivariate mapping project.

Research & Methods

Before Williams Lake:

In order to begin our research we wanted to understand the needs, criterias and determinants of housing affordability. We looked at findings from Rory S. Conroy in his study from 2014. Conroy based his study on the RBC Housing Affordability Index, which “provides an indication of the relative costs of homeownership by measuring the proportion of median household income required to service the cost of local taxes and user fees, utilities and mortgage payments for the average-priced single family home on a lot less than an acre in size”

We created an online survey through Survey Monkey and distributed it through the Social Planning Council. However, at first we did not receive many responses. But after using an informal approach and contacting the Williams Lake Tribune via Facebook, who circulated it through their network, we were able to triple our responses. Through the survey, some people vested interest in interviews which was helpful as we had interviews set up for Williams Lake beforehand.

Furthermore, we have engaged with the City of Richmond’s Affordable Housing Strategy wherein they define Affordable Housing, as housing where tenants/owners do not have to spend more than 30 per cent of their gross income on housing costs (excluding utility fees, telephone, internet, cablevision and the like). While using the City of Richmond’s definition of Affordable Housing, we have combined and modeled our own research after Conroy’s study by compiling the census data collected from Statistics Canada and the Williams Lake Housing Need and Demand Assessment Update 2014 regarding median household income as well as percentage spent on housing costs. We also used The UNBC Community Development Institute review on the socio-economic characteristics in Williams Lake by Good et al. 2013. We used this study as a guideline in how to look at the changing age structure and household composition of the population; which is a major concern for the City as they are eager to encourage young families to move back to Williams Lake.

Lastly, we were inspired by guest lecturer Craig E. Jones's research on income polarization and low income housing in Metro Vancouver. We have loosely shaped our project design after Mr. Jones's use of mixed methods research. We will be presenting our project in the form of an infographic, map and report.

During our visit to Williams Lake

While in Williams Lake, the first day we went to visit the City and speak to Mr. Chris Hutton and Ms. Leah Hartley who were our contacts as Mr. Darrell Garceau was away on vacation. They were very helpful in providing further contacts for us to interview. However, from the outcome of the interview, it was made evident that the ICSP policies had been on hold for six months since the new government took over and was not a current priority for the city.

The second day was spent driving around to different locations of Williams Lake so that we could get to know the area better, and visit some of the low income and high income districts that Chris Hutton had mentioned. While at these places, we took photos to inset onto our map and provide better visuals. This activity was very helpful as it gave us a better idea of the conditions the homes were in and we identified the main low income areas in Williams Lake, mainly Glendale and south of the lake, as well as high income areas that were in Westridge and North of the lake.

The last two days were spent interviewing various people from the community which included New world Cafe owner, who responded to our survey, Williams Lake employment services, Social Planning Council, Salvation army, Jubilee Place, Eagles Nest, Thompson Rivers University Campus Coordinator and the mayor of Williams Lake. These interviews were very helpful in gaining knowledge about whether the community knew what the ICSP policies were, while some interviewees had never heard of it, others had only heard the name but were not aware what the exact policies were. There was a main consensus that the rent was too high, and there were two people who owned majority of the rental property in Williams Lake, both of whom are on the current City Council. Purchasing homes is relatively cheaper than renting, for those who could afford to buy homes or pass for a mortgage. A lot of the interviewees felt there was a lack of affordable housing and available rental property. It was apparent that relationships between the First Nations group and the City were not good, and due to certain stereotypes imposed in society, they are a large percentage of the low income group who are suffering due to a lack of affordable housing. We also learned that even though places like Vancouver have higher rental prices near transit, this was not the case in Williams Lake as almost everyone who can afford it, has a car and therefore transit was not a

driver for the housing market. Through the updated need and demand housing 2014 that Ms. Leah Hartley provided us with, it mentions that they have shortfalls in social housing, student housing, senior assisted living and much more. This was apparent in our interviews with Jubilee Place and Thompson Rivers University (TRU) as they both mentioned a lack of housing. Jubilee Place only houses thirty-six people at one time, and have more on their waitlist that could fill the an entire facility. With increasing numbers of international students, TRU voiced concern for a lack of student housing, especially with poor transit options and were hoping to open new dorms for their students. After interviewing the Mayor it seemed clear the working on the ICSP policies was not urgent and that other issues such as the deficit that Williams Lake is facing was more important for the city.

Presentation

We wanted to provide the city with clear visuals of what we discovered in Williams Lake and provide the needs of the community. There were two ways in which we did this.

1) Map

By using the basemap provided by Jeff Bernardy from the city we used the map to mark the low income and high income locations in Williams Lake as well as points of interest. We included the pictures we took in Williams Lake to show the different styles of housing, land use changes, neighborhoods, and areas of recent growth etc.

2) Infograph

Another form of visual presentation that we decided to use is an infographic, which we thought would be an easy way for the city to view our results from the survey as well as our suggestions. It includes graphs and pie charts to display the statistics gained from the survey.

Suggestions

After all the research and interviews, we have compiled a few suggestions for the City of Williams Lake.

Since a lot of the interviewees were not aware of the ICSP policies, we felt there was bit of a disconnect between the City and its citizens. These are the following points that the community felt was needed to ensure housing affordability:

- 1) Family friendly locations
- 2) Variety of housing types and sizes
- 3) Increased accessibility to transit and an improved system in general
- 4) Walkability-access to safe roads and sidewalks
- 5) Fostering relationships between the City council and various community groups

From our findings and from certain policies implemented by the City of Richmond we find that doing the following could help in creating more affordable housing in Williams Lake:

- 1) Rental caps: Making sure that certain housing or certain locations are under a rental cap so that landlords are not allowed to charge tenants more than a certain set amount. This is to ensure that low income people are able to afford the rent in Williams Lake and avoid extortion or exclusion by landlords
- 2) Inclusionary zoning: Developers receive a “Density Bonus” which allows them to build wider and taller buildings if 5% of their units are secured as affordable housing under a rental cap. This would involve the community groups and create an incentive for developers to build in Williams Lake.
- 3) Social Housing & Rehabilitation centre: With a large low income population, there is a high demand for social housing in Williams Lake. Jubilee Place has proved to be a successful project and has lowered crime in the area. Following its model, it would be beneficial to build another social housing complex to battle homelessness in Williams Lake. During our visit, we discovered there was no rehabilitation centre, but with many people facing drug addictions, it would be very helpful to open up a rehabilitation centre within the community to treat patients and ensure that all people in the community get an equal opportunity to succeed.