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*What in your opinion were the two most relevant issues discussed at the 2019 Conference? Why? Discuss how you might address these issues.*

After attending the 2019 CPAA Conference I felt a lasting impact from two presentations which both highlighted similar issues facing rural municipalities today. These issues were:

- a) demographic shifts and global trends that tend to affect rural municipalities negatively
- b) strategies for municipalities to leverage these global trends to their advantage

In today's global culture there are powerful economic, societal, and environmental trends that are reshaping people's behavior and expectations with the potential to leave reactionary (rather than proactive) municipalities behind to suffer general decline. This reality can be particularly concerning for rural municipalities that are already struggling to create jobs or present themselves as having world class lifestyle amenities. Therefore, municipalities must position themselves through planning policy, community economic development, and political will to identify their unique strengths and create an environment that is attractive to international immigrants and working age people. The intersection of these global trends and local solutions is where economic, environmental, and societal sustainability can be fostered. Communities must take a proactive approach to policy and development by understanding larger societal trends and creating localized solutions that strategically position the community to attract people and businesses and generate future prosperity.

To illustrate these two important issues, I will draw from Dr. Wayne Caldwell's "Community Economic Development: Building on Your Strengths for a Better Tomorrow," and

B&A Planning Group with Chris Fields' "Business as Unusual: Economic Development + Planning in Small Communities – a Case Study of Canal Flats" presentations.

Dr. Wayne Caldwell's research clearly highlights several trends that are already affecting Canadian municipalities today, and are certain to continue:

- Immigration will become the sole source of population growth in Canada due to lower birthrates.
- While continental and global migrations are probable, many rural communities will struggle to attract immigrants resulting in inevitable population decline.
- Climate change will have massive global impacts on food security, loss of biodiversity, and political instability, all at a time where global population growth will continue to grow exponentially.
- Global economic power will increasingly shift to emerging economies such as China, India, and Brazil.
- Economic stagnation (including no growth scenarios) driven by climate change, restructuring and related political instability.
- Humanity will increasingly reach for technological solutions, but our success with this is unknown.

Chris Fields took these insights another step further and discussed generational change and lifestyle trends that play a large factor in a municipality's attractiveness:

- The rise of the creative class; People of the creative class find a location to live and build their life around their chosen community, not the other way around. They expect lifestyle amenities, population diversity, entertainment experiences, outdoor recreation, an authentic and interesting sense of place, and an open and tolerant society.
- Fibre network connecting residents to the internet is not a luxury anymore, it is a necessity for business and quality of life.
- The population demographics in Canada show an aging population, putting huge demands on healthcare, housing, and community resources.
- Millennials feel that the government should do more to solve housing affordability.
- Industry 4.0 is a term that references the current trend of automation and data exchange. This trend will shape the types of jobs people will have over the next 25 years and beyond.

These are some of the important trends that are shaping people's behaviours in Canada and around the globe today. It can be hard to see how these global trends can affect a rural municipality in Alberta, but the speakers were convincing when they say that these trends matter, and they will determine whether a municipality will prosper or decline in the coming decades.

This brings us to the second issue of how rural municipalities can leverage these societal shifts to create an environment of prosperity and vibrancy moving into the future. Dr. Wayne Caldwell presented several high-level responses that a municipality should embody when looking to the future; bring a global perspective to local issues, position the community for change, and develop a long-term perspective. By framing these fundamental challenges with this

mindset, the municipality will find itself in a position to build a strategy for community-based economic development. Dr. Caldwell's research on the subject included case studies from rural municipalities across Canada, and from these studies he was able to identify seven key factors of success that led to prosperous community economic development:

- **Leadership** from the community and local government that challenges conventional thinking, inspires others and provides energy and drive to the community.
- **Planning and visioning** that provides focus and sets out a path to success.
- **Community engagement** that allows for relationship building and open dialogue between community members.
- **Financial capital** that is essential for new initiatives and to increase capacity and scope of projects and build new relationships.
- **Localization** of products and services that generate local dollars, provide a means of self-reliance and therefore resilience to economic change.
- **Partnerships** that combine individual strengths and pool limited resources of individuals and community groups.
- An attitude that is **adaptive to change**, a willingness to use existing assets in new ways, an environment where local solutions can be created.

Many of these ideas were reflected in B&A Planning Group and Chris Fields' presentation which outlined the Village of Canal Flats strategic plan and marketing campaign that encapsulates many of these key success factors. The first question that Chris Fields suggests the municipality answer is this, "Who are we? And why do we matter?" What can this place offer in terms of lifestyle, a unique sense of place, housing choice and affordability, and ease of

doing business. These ideas must be conflated into a value proposition that is attractive to millennials, working age people with families, entrepreneurs, and investment dollars. This value proposition is the first step to generating modest employment and building a distinctive community. The local government must also launch exciting development projects in coordination with the new strategic direction to attract investment dollars. In the case of Canal Flats, the Industrial Land Strategy outlined a new master planned work-live community on vacant industrial lands (former mill site). This project motivated the Village of Canal Flats to update their zoning bylaw to allow for mixed-use street frontages, higher-density via accessory dwelling units, the reduction/elimination of parking standards, all while connected residents of the Village to its historical roots. The town also targeted fibre upgrades as necessary to attract future business owners and entrepreneurs who wanted to take advantage of the affordable lifestyle that the Village of Canal Flats can offer residents. The last important step for the Village of Canal Flats was a rebrand based on lifestyle marketing, a refreshed website aligned to the new brand, and a comprehensive investment guide that outlines exactly what the town has to offer businesses and individuals who are open to relocating to the Village. It is quite evident that the strategy outlined by B&A Planning Group and Chris Fields features all of the key factors of success outlined by DR. Caldwell; Leadership from local government to facilitate new development, planning and visioning that outlines a clear direction for the town, attraction of financial capital to stimulate the economy and infrastructure upgrades, generation of local dollars through entrepreneurial endeavours attracted to the work-live lifestyle, and a community that is willing to embrace change, build new relationships, and engage with one another to create a brighter future for their community.

I felt that these two presentations discussed the most relevant and pressing issues facing rural municipalities. The speakers provided constructive approaches for rural municipalities to

first identify and then proactively plan for the pervasive societal changes that are sure to have a lasting impact on Albertan's and all those that will one day call this place home. Some of the takeaways that I feel are particularly important for planners to consider when practicing include:

- The need to facilitate community discussion about the changes that residents are already seeing in their communities and discuss how global and generational trends will help or hurt the municipality.
- Provide leadership through innovative thinking and provide an inspirational long-term plan and vision that the community members can feel a sense of ownership over.
- Update policy and landuse bylaw to allow for a greater mix of uses, densities, and lifestyles.
- Work with council and community members to develop a unified development strategy, an impactful value proposition, recognizable brand identity, and a strategic plan that is clear, attainable, and inspirational.

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