



Ready or Not: Metro Migration to Smaller Communities

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Both local and provincial governments need to plan and prepare for the increasing migration of residents to smaller communities from major urban centres such as Vancouver, a recent virtual panel presentation and discussion determined.

The event, entitled Ready or Not: Metro Migration to Smaller Communities, was hosted by The Community Development Institute (UNBC) & The Housing Research Collaborative (UBC). It included four panel presentations followed by break-out discussion groups and a plenary report.

The panelists were Marleen Morris, the Co-Director at the Community Development Institute (CDI) at UNBC; Owen Torgerson, Mayor of the Village of Valemount; Peter Bourke, Executive Director of the Columbia Valley Chamber of Commerce; and Frank Quinn, Principal at A&T Developments Inc.

“While growth, and the ability to attract residents, are good news for non-metropolitan BC communities, metro-migration to smaller communities has exposed challenges in the non-metropolitan housing market and created new pressures for those communities,” the Report from the Virtual Panel Presentation and Discussion states. “Affordability challenges due to high demand, low supply, and a sudden influx of capital are one aspect; the state of the housing stock and a lack of appropriate housing meeting today’s standards and expectations for people from all ages and stages of life pose another important barrier.”

Negative impacts included:

- conflict and disagreement about change and how to handle it;
- increased delays in administrative processing due to capacity shortages;



- regulation lagging the realities of housing needs;
- increased infrastructure maintenance costs;
- overtaxed utility and traffic networks;
- increased wait times for contractors and trades;
- decreased housing affordability;
- decreased local tourism sectors because Metro-migrants and industry workers occupy hotel rooms and short-term rentals;
- displacement of local residents by the influx of metro-migrants.

Proposed solutions for local government included:

- more public consultation and education;
- strategic planning with updated data and innovative solutions;
- improving and adjusting regulations and bylaws to create more efficient and effective processes;
- incentivizing development in the desired directions to offset challenges;
- increasing administrative capacity and building relationships with developers;
- communication with other communities to share information and experience;
- collaborating regionally on efforts and approaches;
- diversifying planning perspectives to achieve well-informed and balanced development.

The group said there was an “urgent need” for more support from provincial government.

“Neither human resources nor financial means of non-metropolitan municipalities are sufficient to address their challenges,” the report said. “No one solution fits all; but not



every small community should have to ‘re-invent the wheel’, and no regional developer should have to adapt every single project to a different set of requirements.”

Proposed solutions for higher levels of government included:

- regulatory support and the elimination of regulatory barriers;
- a greater role in infrastructure funding and maintenance;
- guidance and information sharing to lighten the overwhelming load for smaller communities