

# NEWS RELEASE

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## The Legacy of a CED Course

*An eight month odyssey in Alberta's cow & cookie town*

(Golden, BC) – It's surprising how a few regular trips to small town Alberta can help with small town BC's Community Economic Development. And it's astounding how Community Economic Development philosophy can reshape one's view of the world. But that's what happened to this small town BC resident after taking Simon Fraser University's certificate program.

But, before I arrive at the discovery, let me outline how I started on the journey.

From small town Ontario, I moved to Golden, BC 6 years ago for the same reasons thousands have moved before me - the natural capital found in the snow, mountains, forests and rivers. Golden's small town community was a secondary consideration.

I worked in business – specifically resort sales and marketing – for the first few years before 'making the switch' over to work with a non-profit for the last three years. And as both the private and non-profit sectors are deeply influenced by public policy, I chose to follow local government dealings, too. It has become apparent that Kicking Horse Country's many businesses and non-profits (over 400 and 125, respectively) want the same thing – a strong and vibrant community, with local decision-making control and prosperity for future generations. The challenge for all three sectors is ensuring that the goals and resources to achieve them are understood and aligned for the benefit of our communities. But it seemed that each sector was using a different language, terms, or metrics, which prevented holistic progress.

That's why when I heard about an opportunity to take a community economic development (CED) course in little High River, AB – home to Cargill's cows and Lotus' cookies – I jumped at it.

What is CED? Simon Fraser University (SFU) explains it as, *"Community Economic Development (CED) explicitly combines social and economic development to increase community control, build self-reliance, restore ecological integrity and create meaningful employment. Community Economic Development builds the green economy by crafting solutions that simultaneously address the dual problem of ecological degradation and social inequality."*

Personally, CED is the framework for helping community initiatives, created by local residents, for local residents, to be successful on a triple bottom line of financial, social and environment targets. CED is the missing piece helping non-profits, businesses and local government relate to each other and produce something that is greater than the sum of the parts. It is not focused

on growth. It is focused on improving the community's quality of living and long term prosperity.

The Certificate Program for Community Economic Development is jointly delivered by the Centre for Sustainable Community Development and the Canadian Community Economic Development Network, ensuring that the instructors are truly experts in their field.

The exceptionally small class size of students (10 in my case) provides ample opportunity to sort out concepts to bring back to the community. Students accepted in the program do not have to be working in a local CED office, but classes often include planners, housing officers, grant makers and social service managers, bringing another level of learning.

I admit it. I am a course junkie. After a couple degrees and finishing another project management certificate last year, my appetite for learning was unsatisfied. And after a detailed search, I realized that SFU's CED course was one of the best courses in Canada. I soon wanted to bring this opportunity back to Golden, for others to enjoy.

It should be noted that the SFU program provides significant opportunities for the host municipality. Over the duration of the course, CED practitioners and experts travelled to the host community from northern Alberta and across BC, providing numerous opportunities to show off the community's assets, discuss current challenges and even recruit new staff and consultants. A side benefit for the host was the ability for the Town of High River and the Municipal District of Foothills to train multiple staff on premise and eliminate their travel and accommodation costs – a great example of reducing leaks and increasing inflows!

While the order of courses is dependent on instructor availability, the material covers the full range of CED issues: community-based venture development, community organizing, local development in the global economy, social enterprise, sustainable community development, co-operatives, affordable housing and sustainable food systems.

Why is CED important to someone like me living in a small, rural community like Golden & Columbia Shuswap Regional District's (CSRD) Electoral Area A? The small Town of Golden (pop. 4,498) and CSRD Area A (pop. 3,097) cover 11 and 13,514 square kilometers, respectively, and collectively comprising Kicking Horse Country. With global changes negatively impacting the forest and transportation industries, the community has attached itself to tourism as its savior.

Kicking Horse Country is in a particularly tough, yet spectacular geographic location. It is the meeting place of two rivers, two highways, two rail lines, and it is partially isolated by two mountain passes. As the Trans-Canada Highway is slowly reconstructed and the trip time from Alberta decreases, it makes it easier for people to flow in, often bringing their supplies from Alberta stores and service stations, with requiring minimal supplies from (and inflows of cash

to) the BC community. One may wonder how more isolated communities remain strong and self-sufficient without this degree of global pressure.

The shorter trip between BC and Alberta also makes it easier for Golden residents to make a quick day trip to Calgary to do most of their grocery and big ticket shopping (saving some tax in exchange for increased fuel charges). With these purchasing leak pressures squeezing out from our community it is easy to see why the local retail community is struggling, and with it the negative effect on its associated jobs and entire tax base.

In fact, the only core industry that will benefit under this current economic state is sellers of real estate, as local land and homes are purchased at locally-unsustainable prices by non-residents. This phenomenon results in the most significant challenge this community has: housing unaffordability for full-time residents of the community. (The ratio of average house price to household income is over 5:1, when the CMHC considers 3:1 to be the threshold of affordability.) While it's not a challenge unique to Golden, our community has yet to meaningfully address it. Long-time residents say they don't want to end up like Canmore, AB, yet the Town of Golden is already the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest resort municipality in BC. Ultimately, we need to know what our community economy bucket looks like; how do we control the inflows and plug the leaks?

For each 2-day course, participants brought their stories of community successes and challenges, from small town Vanderhoof, BC and northerly Brazeau County, AB to the western economic centre of Calgary, and used the teachings to develop solutions that could be discussed back home. From MBA-level decision-making tools, to social science statistics and diffusing emotionally charged issues, each lecturer made use of a variety of development, analysis and communication techniques. A focused CED assignment was required after each course.

Over the two semesters, the feasibility of some incubating concepts and projects were hashed out, including a local builders & developers association (BDA); co-operative succession planning for heli-cat skiing operations; the adaptation of the National Park's 'requirement to reside' in community-developed affordable housing; an assessment of our community's sustainable food system status; and community organizing techniques that can help these types of grass roots initiatives off the ground and into the community's priorities.

Like most post-secondary education, the program costs correlate to the quality of training. The \$3,600 course (not including meals, travel and accommodation for eight weekend sessions), was partially covered by a BC Workplace Training for Innovation Program (now discontinued) grant of \$1,500 and a \$1,000 bursary from the Canadian CED Network, Coast Capital Savings and the Vancity Community Foundation. (For those in the Columbia Basin, this course could also qualify for Columbia Basin Trust's Training Fee Support Program.) Without this support,

this experience would have been unattainable for students travelling from afar, like from the Columbia Valley.

Chances are if you are from a small community in western Canada, many of the challenges mentioned above ring true to your personal and professional circumstances. If this journey of discovery sounds interesting and inspiring, upcoming courses will be held in Vancouver and Prince Rupert. For more information, please visit <http://www.sfu.ca/cscd/professional-programs/community-economic-development/> and contact Nicole Chaland at [nicole@sustainabilitysolutions.ca](mailto:nicole@sustainabilitysolutions.ca).

While each of our communities are unique the challenges are common, and CED literacy can help us to build real prosperity for all stakeholders and sectors. The more we understand how our economy works and the tools available to us all, the more residents and organizations will be able to stay and thrive in our small communities. Are you ready for the journey?

***About the Golden & District Community Foundation***

*The Golden & District Community Foundation's mission is to attract and effectively grow permanent funds; provide leadership and administration that helps in addressing significant community needs; and help donors fulfill their philanthropic interests.*

To learn more about your community foundation and the current Vital Signs project, please bookmark [www.goldencommunityfoundation.ca](http://www.goldencommunityfoundation.ca).

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