



BLUE GREEN CANADA CONFERENCE BACKGROUND

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COMMUNITY TRANSITIONS

Please see Blue Green Canada's complete set of Fact Sheets:

- Just transition and good green jobs - update and progress
- Context: Alberta coal and other transitions
- Worker transitions - training and green jobs
- Financial security for workers in transition
- Community transitions

See also:

- Blue Green Canada, "Just Transition and Good Green Jobs for Alberta - Edmonton 2016 Conference Summary"
- Alberta Coal Transition Coalition, "Getting it Right: A Just Transition Strategy for Alberta's Coal Workers."

Blue Green Canada is an alliance between Canadian labour unions, environmental and civil society organizations to advocate for working people and the environment by promoting solutions to environmental issues that have positive employment and economic impacts

WHEN A MAJOR EMPLOYER DOWNSIZES OR SHUTS DOWN, LAYING OFF A LARGE WORKFORCE, THERE ARE MANY COMMUNITY IMPACTS -- OUT-MIGRATION OF WORKERS AND FAMILIES, LOSS OF LOCAL PURCHASING AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, SHRINKAGE OF THE PROPERTY TAX BASE REQUIRING OTHERS TO PAY MORE OR FACE REDUCTIONS IN PUBLIC SERVICES, ETC.

THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMMUNITIES, AND THOSE DIFFERENCES ARE IMPORTANT FOR ASSESSING THE IMPACTS AND IDENTIFYING OPTIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

FACTORS INCLUDE:

- how large the layoff is, compared to the overall number of jobs in the community
- proximity to other employment options
- proximity to markets for local businesses - inputs and outputs
- available infrastructure to support different sectors - water, electricity, highways, broadband internet
- quality of life and social infrastructure, which affects willingness of new workers and firms to locate in a community
- how community leaders and influencers address the transition, e.g. harmful political opportunism vs. working toward community economic development.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT ACTION

The Alberta government has committed to supporting affected communities through the transition. As part of this, the government recently announced a Coal Community Transition Fund, which will provide economic development grants to the communities affected by the coal phase-out.

The Town of Hanna, near the Sheerness power plant and coal mine, was the first grantee. It has undertaken a project called Community Action to Create Diversification with a \$450,000 grant from the provincial government. The project will create Community Action Teams that consult widely to prepare community economic development options.

The government also established an Advisory Panel on Coal Communities, which has conducted community outreach, and at time of this fact sheet was close to releasing a report that will help inform the government's further steps to support communities. The report was to have been released earlier in 2017, and is now expected in Fall 2017.¹ The Ministers of Economic Development and Trade and Municipal Affairs also have held outreach sessions with communities to hear directly their concerns.

CHARTING A COURSE FORWARD

The actions needed for each community will need to be tailored to that community. This in turn will require that government hold detailed discussions involving industry, labour and community leaders within each community. Workers and community members need to be at the table, and the discussions need to be informed by studies on local workforce characteristics, asset mapping, labour demand, and economic activities and opportunities.

Some of the actions that could be adopted in some local communities include:

Utility-scale renewable electricity generation.

There are several ways to encourage renewable generation in affected communities. The government is committed to purchasing 5,000MW of generation capacity by 2030, and has begun using an auction based process. The process could be tweaked to prioritize proposals located in affected coal communities, e.g. on reclaimed coal mine sites.

In addition, the government can help reduce the costs by making crown land in and near affected communities available at low or no cost for renewable generation projects, and by prioritizing affected communities for any public infrastructure investments needed by renewable generation projects.

Energy efficiency and rooftop solar.

The government is already, through Energy Efficiency Alberta, supporting households and businesses in energy efficiency and solar power installations. This support could prioritize affected communities, helping to create local employment and lower the costs of living and doing business.

Low-carbon transportation.

The government is investing in low-carbon transportation infrastructure (short term jobs) and operations (long term jobs) that will reduce emissions while creating good green jobs. Again that investment could prioritize affected communities.

Encourage local new economy initiatives.

In order to attract younger workers and innovative companies that can generate local economic growth for the future, the government can prioritize granting programs and other support for new economy developments in affected communities and in economic development clusters in regions. High-speed broadband, for example, is already strong in some towns and rural areas, and could help support local high tech firms.

Expand public sector investment in affected communities.

The government can invest in improved health care, education, and community wellness in affected communities, providing local economic stimulus, assurance to residents and prospective residents that the needed services will be there for them, and local economic diversity and resilience to economic shocks.

Sequencing of support for communities.

It makes sense to prepare short-term, medium-term and long-term actions to support communities affected at various points in time. The currently anticipated sequence of coal unit closures, which is subject to company decisions to further accelerate, is as follows:²

1. 2017 - H.R. Milner
2. 2018 - Sundance 1,2
3. 2019 - Battle River 3
4. 2020 - Battle River 4,5; Sheerness 1,2
5. 2021-23 - Keephills 1,2; Sundance 3-6
6. 2030 - Genesee 1-3, Keephills 3

1 While the report is overdue, it is important to bear in mind that other governments (Provincial and Federal Conservatives) and coal plant owners that have taken steps that shorten coal unit operational lives have done nothing to support communities or workers.

2 See Fact Sheet on Alberta coal and other transitions.