

MEDIA RELEASE

City of Williams Lake



For Immediate Release

June 14, 2023

450 Mart Street
Williams Lake, BC
V2G 1N3

City to Host Forest Sector Town Hall Meetings

The City of Williams Lake is hosting two Town Hall meetings to provide support information to mill workers, contractors and their employees experiencing impacts from decline in the forest sector.

The Town Hall will be held on Monday, June 19 at the Gibraltar Room at the Cariboo Memorial Recreation Complex with two sessions available to the public from 10:30 am until noon and from 5:30 pm until 7 pm.

Both sessions will be identical and are being held to ensure people who work various hours are able to attend. The session will include panel speakers from a variety of agencies including Work BC and the Ministry of Labour and Service Canada, as well as information booths where members of the public can acquire resource information and ask one-on-one questions.

The Town Hall initiative is being coordinated through a community transition response led by the City and supported by the Province's Community Transition Team. Its purpose is to connect local service agencies, Provincial ministries and resources to align and communicate on supports for the community.

The City's community transition effort is in response to the April 18, 2023 news of a permanent line reduction at Tolko's Soda Creek operation which, in a news release issued by Tolko, announced impacts to 65 workers in Williams Lake. A number of other operations in Williams Lake's forest sector have also seen short-term curtailments and downtime over the past year in response to economic conditions and fibre supply issues.

One of the supports available, which will be discussed at the Town Hall meetings, is the Bridging to Retirement Program offered by the Province. The program is open to impacted and full-time workers at least 55 years old who are B.C. forestry mill workers, forestry-dependent contractors and their employees to help them transition to retirement.

Forestry workers could be eligible for up to \$75,000 in retirement bridging funding, depending on individual factors including years of experience, age at retirement and employer contribution. Other supports at the Town Hall will include: training and retraining support, career planning support, business supports and information about the state of the local economy and forest sector.

Mayor Surinderpal Rathor said he hopes people take advantage of the Town Hall to learn more about resources and how the community's excellent organizations can help. He added the community is strong, and the forest industry is resilient.

"We have some of the most efficient forestry operations in the province and a skilled labour force," Mayor Rathor said. "Layoffs are never easy and for workers and their families this can be a difficult time, but there are many programs and supports available for people."

Questions about the Town Hall can be directed to Beth Veenkamp, Manager of Economic Development, at bveenkamp@williamslake.ca.

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