

Communities' Transition Pathways - Hinton, Alberta

Session One, January 24th, 2022

Summary

This report outlines the event held by Iron & Earth in Hinton, Alberta, in January 2022, as part of the Green Resilience Project on the topic of climate change, income security, and community. Participants discussed how the climate increasingly affects their community, daily lives, and income sources. They expressed the need to be proactive, to support workers in the transition, and that potential solutions should focus on diversifying local sources of income and must have economic, environmental, and social components. Following this session, Iron & Earth plans to hold a second community discussion in Hinton, to continue the conversation started in this session.

1. Introduction

About the Green Resilience Project

This community session was part of the Green Resilience Project, a Canada-wide series of conversations exploring and documenting the links between community resilience, income security, and the shift to a low-carbon economy. Through working with a designated partner organization from each community, the Green Resilience Project aims to create spaces in which a wide range of participants can talk through the links between climate change and income security and identify possible next steps to build or maintain community resilience in the face of these challenges.

This Community Summary Report reflects what we heard and learned in our community's conversation. Each Project partner organization across Canada will be producing a similar report. In March 2022, the Green Resilience Project will produce a final report summarizing findings across conversations, which will be available to the public and shared with Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Funding for the Green Resilience Project is generously provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada's Climate Action and Awareness Fund. The project is managed and delivered by Energy Mix Productions, Basic Income Canada Network, Coalition Canada Basic Income - Revenue de base, Basic Income Canada Youth Network, national experts, and local partners.

About Iron & Earth

Iron & Earth (I&E) is a worker-centred organization that seeks to empower fossil fuel industry workers and their communities to build & implement climate solutions. Our reach extends to various provinces across Canada with a strong presence in Alberta.

We were happy to take part in this project due to its thematic approach on the intersection of climate change and income security, as well as its emphasis on local solutions. Also, we

considered that the funding provided was reflective of how difficult it is to have conversations with communities, allowing space for potential supports to lessen barriers to participation.

We prepared a 2-page project proposal and offered it to potential facilitators from various communities in Alberta, as our priority was to be able to develop a truly local session, considering both the project's timeline as well as local capacity. We were able to select Hinton as our community thanks to the interest and the hard work of three local facilitators that were invested in creating this type of space in their town.

Why this community was selected to have a conversation

Oil, gas, and coal have built prosperity for Hinton, and its people are grateful for the hard work of those who have contributed to the well-being of the community. However, the uncertainty in weather patterns leading to environmental climate events have taken a toll on the community. We offered this session as a space to talk about these issues, understanding the diversity of opinions, and bringing the community together to find innovative solutions tailored specifically to Hinton.

In the past couple of years, the town has been experiencing:

- Extreme weather changes: cold snaps, heat waves, droughts, excess rain, mild/dry winters, pests including mountain pine beetle, and ecological impacts including Woodland Caribou population reduction and fish kill off due to extreme heat waves
- Thermal coal phase out: over three hundred employees face income insecurities moving forward as well as secondary industries and contractors that have connections and/or contracted by said coal industry
- Inconsistent income avenues: fossil fuel industry having unstable prices related to both energy transition policy and market fluctuations
- Several green projects with various degrees of success: a geothermal pilot project, LED streetlights, electric car charging stations, hydro power station, and lignin plant

And Hinton also has many strengths:

- The town started out as a diverse economic community (Pulp, forestry, coal, oil and gas, tourism, and hydro power), which suggests that a diverse economic future is a possibility
- Hinton is the “gateway to the Rockies” so there is a certain connection, familiarity, and sense of pride with regards to the environment for the community as a whole

About the conversation participants

Our goal was to gather diverse people from various industry and local government groups, ages and races, and educational backgrounds. Our facilitators led the outreach campaign with the support of I&E, who prepared an amplification document to be used during this stage with scripts ready for email and social media.

I&E also prepared a google sign-up form with all the necessary registration details, as well as accessibility and demographic information. We wanted to ensure that we considered all



potential barriers to participation during our planning phase. We identified that the major accessibility supports were competitive reimbursement, childcare assistance, and access to stable internet for the duration of the session, which we included in our form. We also added an open-ended question for participants to include any other accessibility requests that they may have, as we knew that each person's needs are different and that our planning might not include them all.

From the data collected, 50% of attendants opted for reimbursements with no other accessibility requests. None of the participants identified as racialized, however 10% described themselves as Indigenous. Our session reached gender parity, with 50% self-identified men and 50% self-identified women. With regards to age, 60% of attendants were in the 20-40 range, 30% were in the 41-60, and 10% were over the age of 60. All the participants spoke English at home, and none described themselves as recent immigrants to Canada, with a disability, or being part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. With regards to socio-economic status, 70% of the participants identified as middle income, while 20% were high income and the remaining 10% were low income. Their job sectors showed that 50% of attendants were part of the agricultural/natural resources category, while the rest belong to various sectors: 10% in business, finance, and administration; 10% in arts, culture, recreation, and sport; 10% in education; 10% in health; and 10% in management.

Compared to our original goal, these statistics show that we succeeded in some areas, while we were not as effective in others. We recognize the absence in our community session of racialized, migrant, disabled, 2SLGBTQ+ peoples, and youth. However, it is important to point out that our participants' demographics are representative of federal census data¹ for the Town of Hinton.

The Community Conversation

Our community conversation was held via Zoom on Monday, January 24th, 2022, from 5:30 to 7:30pm MST. The session started with a 20-minute plenary introductory talk presenting the topics to be discussed, followed by a 70-minute breakout conversation, where participants were split into groups with facilitators asking our key questions. After a 10-minute break, the community session ended with a 15-minute wrap-up that included concluding remarks and next steps.

During our planning process, we took great care in the language we would utilize during our conversation and developed a comprehensive script that reflected this (see Appendix A). We wanted to make sure that the language was not confrontational or polarizing and considered our target audience. This examination led to the avoidance of potentially contentious terms such as universal basic income, and just transition. Likewise, we used human-caused extreme weather or environmental changes when referring to climate change, and energy transition instead of net-zero emissions or net-zero 2050. Additionally, we focused on the town of Hinton and its peoples, leaving out any provincial, federal, or global associations. These

¹ Statistics Canada. 2017. Hinton, T [Census subdivision], Alberta and Division No. 14, CDR [Census division], Alberta (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017.
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

considerations should allow the participants to use any terminology they felt comfortable with and not feel the burden of imposed narratives.

Our planning also led us to avoid language regarding resilience, and focus instead on the intersection of climate change, income security, and community. Again, we wanted to avoid imposing narratives to participants as resilience is quite a complex term. And while it is key for a community to respond to and recover from the effects of climate change, not everyone is ready and accepts the end of their normalcy. Grief, denial, and acceptance are some of the aspects that need to occur before resiliency can take place, and it is the community who should decide when and how to talk about it.

Our planning led to a successful community conversation. Facilitators' observations and feedback forms related positive experiences, highlighting a communal and agreeable session. Participants felt engaged and comfortable sharing their opinions, even when they may have been apprehensive before the event. Our main challenge was the ongoing pandemic. We may be in year 3 of the pandemic, but the new variants made the development of the session and its attendance quite difficult. We are grateful for those who participated during these very uncertain times.

2. What We Heard

During our breakout session, we invited participants to discuss the three key questions that are the focus of this section. Facilitators used these as guides and had the freedom to expand their questioning depending on the fluidity of the interactions.

How are the changes to the community's environment and economy affecting you, your family, or the community as a whole?

The coal phaseout, transition preparedness, and extreme hot and cold conditions affecting industries, municipal and housing infrastructure, as well as mental health and well-being, were identified as the main issues participants were experiencing. With regards to the coal phase out and the transition, attendants were quite cognizant of the need to support workers with the necessary skills and competitive incomes to transition, as well as diversifying the existing industries to attract and maintain workers and their families. As one participant expressed, "[We] have to keep not only in mind the worker of today, but the worker of tomorrow".

Participants also described how these extreme temperatures affected their day-to-day - how they unsettled their workplaces, affecting equipment or number of customers, to their daily life, with dangerous road conditions during commuting or the higher cost of their electricity bills. Attendants also talked about how the inclement weather was upsetting their well-being, with a participant simply stating, "The summer kill off of [sic] the fish in the rivers and the lakes really affected my entire fishing season which is 90% of my life. That's that". Another participant described how challenging it was to work with vulnerable populations during this time, stating diminished staff capacity and increased demand for services.

How are these environmental and economic changes related to each other?

The narrative presented by participants in the previous section showed awareness of the economic impacts to the extreme weather they have been experiencing. Due to this, when asked this question, attendees led the conversation towards strengthening the previous themes, further expanding on how the environment was affecting extractive industries, i.e., mitigation plans never implemented before, and how it influenced businesses outside this field such as retail, environmental services, and tourism, with an added layer created by the current pandemic.

Moreover, this question ushered the discussion towards interconnectedness and balance as the key concepts behind a stable economy in the face of climate change. As one participant put it, “It is definitely a balancing act between the pros and cons of the economy and the pros and cons of the environment. And what we're willing to take and lose”. Attendees identified a historical approach, still observed to this day, where, as one participant stated, if “you care about the environment, you have to conflict with either these [extractive] industries or an economy”. The group acknowledged that this approach cannot continue, that the environment and the economy are interconnected, and that it is the avenue that needs to be pursued. As an attendee expressed, “we can have an economy that is strong, and we can still protect ... these areas and values within the environment that we do care about”. Moreover, participants indicated that it is not only the economy and the environment that are interrelated. Social and cultural aspects should also be included. As the community's wellbeing is a key component of stable and balanced livelihoods.

What are some possible solutions to the challenges we have discussed that will help the community respond to these extreme environmental changes and create income security for all community members?

Diversification was the main theme identified from the discussion. From energy sources to industries, participants expressed positive associations to this concept. As one attendant explained,

if we can diversify where we're getting our energy from [And if] we're starting to lose some of these coal jobs, or oil and gas jobs, ... we could start to move some of those people, ..., and bring them into these different jobs that are emerging. Maybe build up this different sector within our community. It could really make a big impact and really make our community a little bit stronger, by utilizing the talents that we already have.

Several participants mentioned Hinton's geothermal potential while others referred to its biomass capability. Some emphasized the town's key geographical location, and how the community had responded to previous boom and bust cycles. The group was keen to point out how they felt their community could respond to climate change. What is needed, as one attendant indicated, is to be “proactive rather than reactive [W]e are going to have these immense changes, and what can we do to sort of prepare ourselves before it happens”. And as another stated, the community must have “the capacity to shift”.

This narrative led to the other major theme identified from the discussion, awareness. For a participant, it is crucial to have “clear, [and] factual information out in a positive manner”. As another stated, people want

to be familiarized with these topics [And understand] that they're not as polarizing and toxic as they're portrayed in [the] media or ... in certain groups We're all part of the Hinton community, and we would like to see the betterment and a stronger community. So, looking at those points where we can each relate to each other, ..., [and that] we're not all working against each other, whether or not ... we all share the same views.

Attendees were conscious of how contentious it can be to talk about the environment, and how important it was for the community, from decision makers to business owners and families, to have a clear understanding of any potential solutions offered, i.e., the provincial carbon tax. As one participant indicated, if this were evident, that would be “one thing that they can get behind and ... then it sort of starts shifting, because then they have a frame of reference to say, oh, climate change, environmental and economic. It actually did this”.

Other barriers identified during the breakout session were affordability and how to remain competitive in the market economy. Participants expressed how it may be more environmentally conscious to shop local but how chain stores or franchises offered more competitive prices. The group further emphasized on the need for a comprehensive approach that supports local business and changes consumer mindsets.

As it was mentioned in previous sections, we wanted our audience to use terminology they could relate to and not feel pressured by any imposing narratives. This resulted in participants organically bringing up their ideas about resilience, the government, and potential supports, such as universal basic income (UBI). Several attendants see diversification as the key to a resilient community. Participants are cognizant of how public policy can be helpful, yet it can also create anxiety, uncertainty, and bureaucracy. They see that decision makers, from the local to the federal level, can implement comprehensive solutions involving communities in the process. Moreover, several attendants recognized that part of that public policy could include economic support for those who are most affected.

3. What We Learned

Feedback

We shared a google feedback form at the end of our session which was completed by 80% of our participants. We were able to discern their level of satisfaction with 75% being very satisfied and the remaining 25% being satisfied. Only 12% of our participants were not familiar with the links between extreme weather events, income security, and community. Yet 88% of them felt they learned something about these topics during our session. Seventy five percent of respondents felt that there was nothing missing in the conversation. However, 50% felt that there were some groups absent, such as youth and other vulnerable populations. The feedback ended on a positive note with 100% of participants expressing interest in continuing the conversation later. And what is more, all respondents welcomed an invitation to future projects or activities related to these topics that take place in the community.

Conclusions

The community of Hinton displayed a strong sense of compassion amid discussion of income insecurity and environmental dilemmas. Attendees found common ground with ease and tackled difficult topics to find relevant solutions and commonality in opinions.

Participants were pleasantly surprised by the friendly atmosphere throughout the event and by their ability to provide input regardless of past involvement or knowledge of the discussed topics. Community members thought connecting climate change with its economic impacts was a sensible concept which generated positive engagement throughout the session. This allowed the participants to begin to conceptualize local solutions based on their current knowledge and experiences. Emphasis should be given in raising awareness on these issues in a clear and positive manner, where affected groups' concerns are heard, and solutions are inclusive to their needs.

Solutions regarding the complexities between income security and climate changes need to be comprehensive and support both social and cultural aspects for economic transitions to be robust and inclusive. The participants emphasised the desire to see decision makers implement these approaches, but to be involved throughout the process, and have transparency regarding directionality and decisions.

The language used by facilitators allowed participants to discuss these topics in a constructive manner. Community members were the main protagonists, using terminology and narratives they felt comfortable and familiar with. To begin with, the discussion needed to be comprehensive to all levels of past knowledge and backgrounds, so a base level of understanding and comfortability was met. This seemed successful throughout the event, given that complex and divisive terminology was introduced by the participants with no conflict. As well, though some point of views did not necessarily always align, people were able to discuss these differences in a constructive manner, and this strengthened that there is a diversity in perspective and ideas within the community of Hinton.

Community conversations such as these can be a great catalyst for future discussions and should include diverse groups and perspectives.

4. Next Steps

Iron and Earth would like to move forward with sharing the knowledge gained from this community event with the community of Hinton and other communities across Canada. The dialogue that was had at this initial event could be an inspiration for future conversations, ideas, and community interest.

A second event in Hinton is being planned for this summer. It will expand on the conversations that were had in the first session and will also bring new ideas and perspectives from the community. Beforehand, a local campaign will be developed to bring in more diversity in our participants to achieve representation of the community's diversity in future sessions. Information regarding this second event will be made available in the coming weeks and months.

Appendix A

The following appendix contains the script that was used as a general guide by the facilitators for the Hinton Community Conversation conducted by Iron and Earth for the Green Resilience Project.

Script for facilitating a Green Resilience Project Community Conversation

Conversation time breakdown:

- Introductory plenary session: 20 minutes
- Setting Breakout groups: 5 minutes
- Breakout conversations: 70 minutes
- Break: 5 minutes
- Reporting back to the room: 5 minutes
- Conclusion: 15 minutes

Total time: 120 minutes.

1. Introductory Plenary Session (20 minutes)

- a. Conversation introduction: Welcome to the Hinton community conversation. Today's conversation is being led by Iron & Earth as part of the Green Resilience Project, which is working with local partners like us to host these conversations in communities across Canada.

We want to acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples from this area, their traditions, cultures, and ways of life. We are grateful to share this land with you all.

For the rest of this introductory session, we'll talk a bit about Hinton and the issues it's facing, review some key ideas and discuss what will happen after this conversation. Then we'll be sorting you into breakout groups to talk through some questions related to extreme weather events, income security and community. Each group will have a facilitator. You'll be in those breakout groups for about 70 minutes.

Finally, we'll come back together for a quick wrap-up and aim to be done by 7:30pm. If you haven't filled out our registration form, please click on the link we are providing in the chat.

- b. Privacy policy: We shared a letter of consent for you to sign in our registration email. In it we explained the participation, reimbursement, and confidentiality processes. From it, we would like to highlight that we will be recording today's conversation, but the transcripts will only be shared between Iron & Earth and Green Resilience Project staff.

After the Green Resilience Project ends, the notes will stay with Iron & Earth. These notes will be used to produce our reports. However, your participation

will remain anonymous. We do want to include some quotes in the community and final reports, but they will have no name attached to them.

We also want to make sure that you know that you are free to leave at any point during this session. We truly appreciate your time and respect your privacy.

Lastly, we ask that you please do not record, photograph, or take screenshots of the conversation.

- c. Facilitator and community partner introductions: Iron & Earth is a worker-centred organization that seeks to empower fossil fuel industry workers and their communities to build & implement climate solutions

[Facilitators please introduce yourselves]

- d. Why was this community selected to have a conversation? Oil, gas, and coal have built prosperity for Hinton, and we are grateful for the hard work of the people that have contributed to the wellbeing of our community. However, the climate has become increasingly uncertain, and it has taken a toll on our economy. We are opening this space to talk about these issues, understanding that there are diverse opinions on the subject, and bringing our community together to find new solutions tailored specifically to Hinton.

Our community is experiencing:

- Extreme environment changes: extreme cold snaps, extreme heat waves, drought or extreme excess rain, mild/dry winters, pests (mountain pine beetle), fish killed due to extreme heat waves
- Coal phase out, specifically surrounding thermal coal phase out. 300 plus employees face income insecurities moving forward
- Oil and gas inconsistency related to both energy transition policy and market/economic fluctuations which creates inconsistent income avenues
- Energy Transition: Geothermal pilot project, LED streetlights, electric car charging stations, and Hydro power station, Lignin Plant (West Fraser)

Our community also has strengths:

- Hinton started out as a diverse economic community (Pulp/forestry/thermal coal/metallurgical coal/oil and gas/tourism), so a diverse economic market is not unfamiliar to this community
 - Hinton is the “gateway to the Rockies” so there is a certain connection, familiarity, and sense of pride to the environment throughout the community.
- e. Who have we invited to participate in this conversation? Diverse people in various industry groups, local government groups, various ages and ethnicities, and people of various education background

f. What is this conversation about?

- Livelihoods: Our livelihood is our means of meeting our basic needs, such as food and shelter
- Income security: Having income security means having enough money to meet our basic needs on a regular basis, including having some sense of security about the future
- Extreme environmental changes: The rise of temperatures and its impacts on weather systems are producing major challenges in the community. Current changes are not a natural occurrence, and it is caused by human activities
- Energy transition: The shift from an energy mix based on fossil fuels to one based on renewable energy sources to alleviate extreme environmental changes

How do these relate to each other?

- Energy transition has a large impact on how industries change and adapt and in doing so creates impacts on income for involved community members, businesses, and employees: What's going to happen to the people working on the thermal coal mines in the area needing to transition?
- Energy transition can bring solutions that reduce instabilities that are currently present in impacted industries, and can create new job opportunities that are sustainable for generations to come, creating a stronger community:
 - TC Energy Canyon Creek Pumped Hydro Energy Storage Project which utilizes an existing disturbed footprint from the now closed Obed Mining Operation. This gives sustainable job opportunities for the community
- Examples of the types of solutions that have the potential to address both issues
- New industries that harness similar needs and skills of their workers that provide similar wages (Sustainable mills, mining alternative resources, geothermal etc.)
- Income support and incentives for people directly impacted by industry changes (e.g., income support for people in career change due to coal phase out)

g. Desired outcomes and impacts of this project: After this conversation is over, folks from Iron & Earth are going to be writing up a short report about what was shared in this conversation. They will be sharing that report back to you and to the rest of the community. This report will hopefully be a useful resource for understanding the needs and desires of the community.

Iron & Earth wants to develop a second session later this year here in Hinton. We want to continue this process and facilitate a space for further discussion, where local ideas can lead to local solutions.

The Green Resilience Project will be combining the community reports from all the conversations across Canada into a final report, which will be shared with the federal government in April 2022. They'll also share the report on their website, greenresilience.ca.

2. Breakout conversations (70 minutes)
 - a. Extreme weather changes and income insecurity in your community (40 minutes): This section is geared toward the impacts of and links between problems in the community.
 - i. **How are the changes to our community's environment and economy that we discussed in the introduction affecting you, your family, or the community as a whole?** (20 minutes)
 - ii. **How are these environmental and economic changes related to each other?** (20 minutes)
 - b. Building community (30 minutes): This section is focused on identifying solutions and supports to the challenges discussed in part 1.
 - i. **What are some possible solutions to the challenges we've discussed that will help the community respond to these extreme environmental changes and create income security for all community members?** (30 minutes)
3. Conclusion (15 minutes):

We will share our community report via email after February 10. The report will also be available on our website ironandearth.org. The final report from the Green Resilience Project will be available on their website, greenresilience.ca, in early April 2022.

Participants will receive a google form asking for feedback on the session: we'd like you to take some time and give us your feedback on this conversation. This is your chance to tell us if there's anything you wish we had talked about, anything you learned, or anything else you want to tell us! Our report and the feedback form will inform the development of a second session here in Hinton to occur later this year

On behalf of Iron & Earth, and the Green Resilience Project, I'd like to thank you again for joining us. Have a wonderful rest of your day!