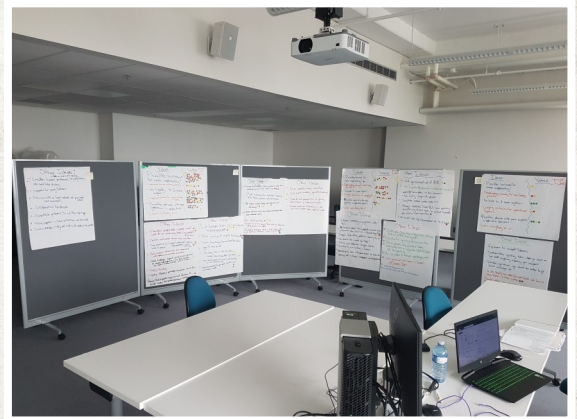


Agriculture Land Reserve Policy Review Project

By Paula Roballo-Corallo

In an unassuming room at UNBC's Prince George campus, Matt Henderson sits among whiteboards and a sea of chart papers taped to the walls. The scene could be one out of the latest spy thriller, but Matt's aspirations are infinitely more complex and sincere. What surrounds him is the product of months of research into understanding the issues and obstacles of rural planning in British Columbia and the nuggets of inspiration that led to his research project on reviewing the policies of the Agricultural Land Reserve.



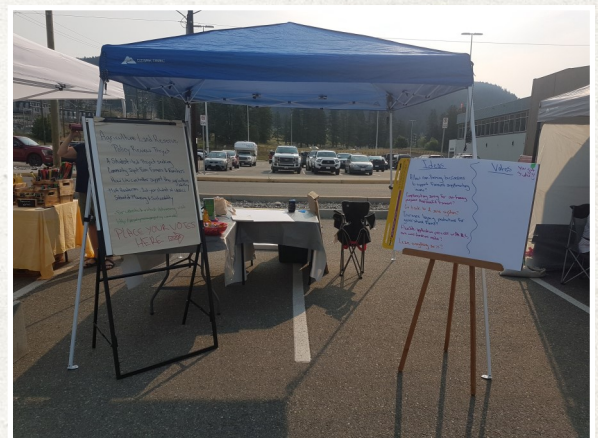
In a time where most conversations around community planning are dominated by buzz words like Urban Metabolism and 15-minute Cities, Matt talks about things like intergenerational housing solutions, food security, sustainability, and legacy succession. Concepts and ideas that were not dreamed up in a thinktank in Vancouver, but rather from the very farmers and ranchers Matt has been meeting with. This is where Matt's research really stands out, with a concept so simple yet powerful, it's a wonder it isn't the standard; to solve the unique problems surrounding planning in rural British Columbia, you must *listen* to the people who live and make their living there. So instead of constructing "a solution" and taking that to the stakeholders, Matt headed to the farmers and ranchers themselves and simply listened.



The more time Matt spent at farmers markets, rodeos and in face-to-face conversations with people living and working in the North Cariboo region, the deeper the problems ran. And so, an idea that was born of addressing housing issues and affordability quickly unearthed a bigger issue of systemic encumbrance that is quickly eradicating small and medium farms and seeing the average ages of farmers steadily increase without hope of younger farmers either breaking into the sector or taking over the family farm.

The data is staggering, despite the many different struggles faced by rural communities and the incredible diversity of land and climate, it became abundantly clear that the Agricultural Land Reserve policies represent a huge stumbling block to sustainability, security and growth in the agricultural sector of rural British Columbia. Suggested policy changes that were born out of his community engagement sessions include things like flexible business income to allow for non-farming activities, Complimentary Zoning for non farming purposes, returning to a 2 zone system, Legacy Protection for generational farms and flexible policies with more support being provided through the application process. The research also contained one key control concept: everything remaining as it is. It is important to note that out of all the people who Matt has talked to, not a single person agreed with this concept.

Despite Matt's clear frustration with the system, he remains positive and optimistic about the people involved. There are good people doing the best they can within an antiquated and cumbersome system, and he is adamant that they really are trying to do the best they can. It's refreshing to see such hope and love of community from a generation who currently have no hope of living and working the land of their hometowns. When asked about the future Matt was clear "we have been kicking the same can down the road for decades and we just can't continue to do that. The can is so battered and torn there is barely any can left to kick" The metaphor, though dire, also captures Matt's fire for change. He has a few elegant and simple ideas for change that he is still flushing out. I won't spoil them here, for that you will have to come out and listen to Matt himself when he returns to Quesnel later this fall to discuss his findings and next steps. In the meantime, you can get involved either through Matt's booth at the Quesnel Farmers market on August 5th or by visiting his website at <https://alrpolicyreviewproject.my.canva.site/>



Matt Henderson is undergraduate student at UNBC's School of Planning and Sustainability at the Prince George Campus. His major is in Northern and Rural Community Planning the passion he is bringing to this project is a drive to see governance and policy more responsive to and inclusive of local people and local circumstances.



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