

# Local Trends Lend Naturally to Clustered Innovation Approach



BRIGHT IDEAS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## SYNOPSIS

What do university sustainability research, mass amounts of harvestable wood biomass, and over 70 clean tech firms have in common? They are all found in the bustling northern community of Prince George! When the City's economic development office came together to discuss creative ways to continue to support and empower local business, these key assets shone through and the idea for a Clean Tech Cluster was born.

## LOCATION

Prince George

## POPULATION

78,670

## INNOVATORS

City of Prince George

## ECONOMIC BASE

Construction, Forestry, Mining, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services



## INTRODUCTION

Prince George is a nationally recognized leader in bioeconomy, with the largest amount of harvestable wood biomass in Canada. This, paired with ongoing sustainability research at the local [University of Northern B.C. \(UNBC\)](#), has piqued the interest of over 70 clean tech firms that have set up shop in the busy northern city, and now have a platform to continue innovating this developing sector.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

When the City's [economic development](#) team came together to discuss creative ways to continue to support and empower local business, they saw an opportunity to build on their current clean tech success and to develop a brand that showcased this emerging sector.

They identified their strengths and came up with an innovative approach to put Prince George on the map. Their goal was to "...lead the province into a new era of sustainability."



Aside from the current engagement and interest from clean tech firms, the City identified many other competitive advantages in the sector: ongoing innovation projects like the [UNBC gasification plant](#), the [Downtown District Energy System](#), the [BC Biocarbon plant](#) and [UNBC's Wood Innovation lab](#) showed their commitment to applying clean alternatives, and their export-ready transportation corridor via rail, airports and major highways highlighted the potential for growth.

## THE STRATEGY

The economic development team worked with [Community Futures Fraser Fort George](#) to develop the newest community initiative: the [Clean Tech Cluster](#).

The strategy was strong, beginning with targeted consultation with existing tech firms to understand where the gaps were that could potentially prevent future investment in the area.



The aim was to build a coaching plan, finding out how the City could help new and existing businesses.

A roundtable session was hosted in October 2018, gathering input from 12 firms on economic development practices and workforce retention in the city. As a result, P.G. learned that the areas of focus most valuable to the firms were: talent recruitment, access to development, and market intelligence and access. They wanted strong staff, an inside view on key areas of market focus, and opportunities to meet with potential investors to build sustainable investments.

Having identified the gaps, work began to address workforce development. To attract new talent, P.G. would market itself as the home of the Clean Tech Cluster – where people could work, live and invest sustainably.

Internally, P.G. focused on commercialization of new clean tech products and services. They developed strategies to improve their financial capacity, so they could pursue technology development and commercialization, and as a result, help clean tech firms expand, modernize and export.

They also wanted to increase competitiveness by building capacity at the firm and community levels to encourage growth in the clean tech sector through increased access to capital, talent, and new markets.

But their efforts were not only locally focused. P.G. developed a strong international engagement component of the cluster to continue to attract investors. They began marketing their local clean tech products and services at trade shows and through targeted marketing campaigns.

They hosted workshops and sent delegations to engagements such as the Clean Tech Forum to gain visibility and traction, and partnered with [UNBC](#), [Western Economic Diversification Canada](#) and staff at [The Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology](#) to expand and access new networks.

As an ongoing initiative, P.G. has created a workforce study to establish baseline data to accurately measure the impact of their various efforts and continue to evaluate over time.

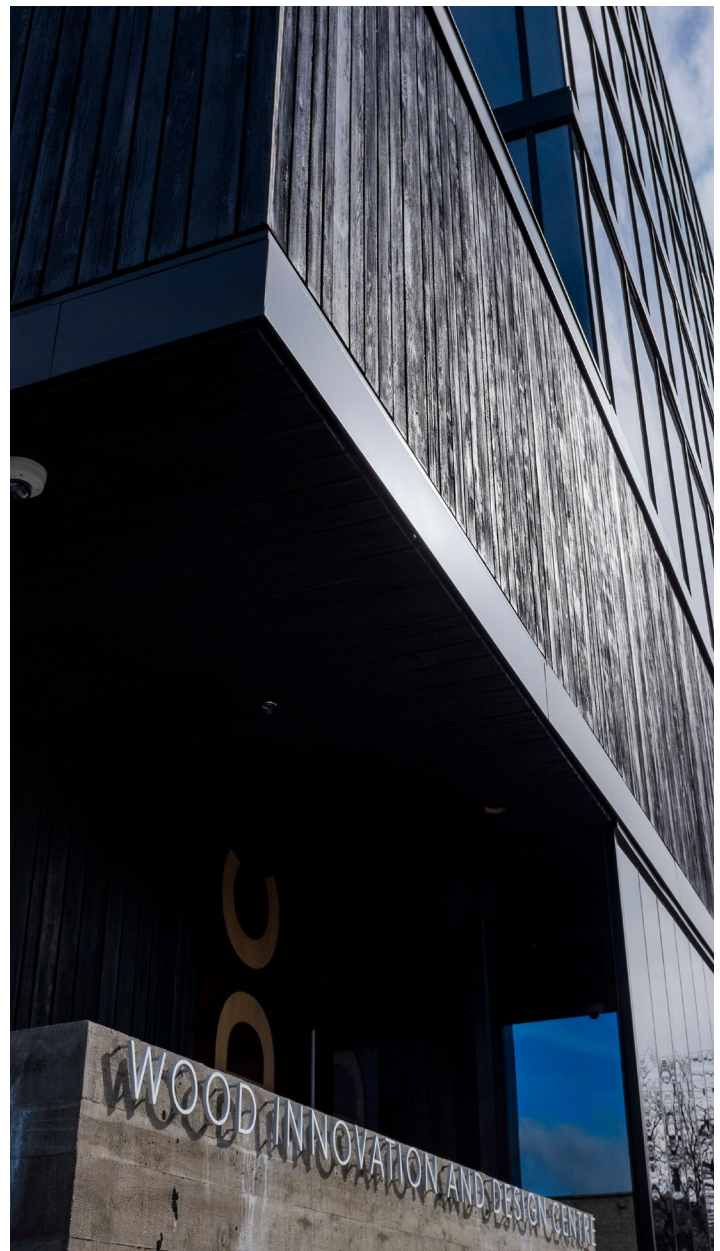
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## SUCCESSES

Prince George's Clean Tech Cluster approach has generated nearly \$1.5 million in additional business activity in the city. Reports from firms also show increased sales and business collaborations in the community. The workshops conducted locally have built strong relationships, and as such, partnerships between firms are beginning to emerge.

In building out the Clean Tech Cluster, P.G. is growing its economy through a strong, evidence-based investor plan. Their message is clear: Prince George makes clean tech a priority, and our firms are seeing the benefits.



For more information, visit [gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment](https://gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment)

