

Sullivan Mine Closure and Reclamation

Context

Kimberley is a town in southeastern British Columbia with a population of approximately 6,500.¹ The discovery of a rich mineral deposit in 1892 resulted in the development of one of the world’s largest mines. The Sullivan Mine, which operated from 1909 until its closure in 2001, employed nearly 3,500 people at its peak. The mine was consistently one of the world’s biggest sources of lead and zinc, producing over \$20 billion in lead, zinc, and silver, which was processed at nearby smelters in Trail and Nelson, British Columbia. In the 1980s there were some preliminary discussions about the eventual closing of the Sullivan Mine, but it wasn’t until the early 1990s, roughly ten years before the expected closure, that planning became more deliberate. The combination of strong municipal leadership and a more open and collaborative attitude from Teck Resources Limited created an environment that was more conducive to focusing on the future of Kimberley following the closure of the Sullivan mine.



Lead: Industry (B.C.)

Steps of the Mineral Development Sequence: Closure, Post-closure

Key Finding: The development of a partnership between the City of Kimberley and Teck was critical to the success of the project. The strong and collaborative relationship that emerged created a unified voice and a shared vision for the long term sustainability of the region.

Description of Measures Implemented

In early 1999, the company announced that the mine was no longer viable and that it would be closing in 2001. The number of mine workers dropped from 2,000 to 650 in 2000. With the impending mine closure and job losses, many people moved away, raising concerns about Kimberley’s survival. The announcement raised some fundamental questions: How could Kimberley broaden the city’s tax base to compensate for the loss of revenues from the mine closure while at the same time diversifying employment and transitioning from mining to a tourism-based economy?



Sullivan Mine located in southeastern British Columbia

In 1991, the company submitted a mine closure and reclamation plan to the Ministry of Mines of British Columbia, which led to the creation of the Sullivan Mine Public Liaison Committee (SMPLC) as a means of engaging the public in the review of the plan. Members of the Committee included the Kimberley City Council, the East Kootenay Environmental Society, the Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council and the Union. The community identified two main areas of focus: i) The economic and financial sustainability of the municipality of Kimberley; and ii) Managing the environmental legacy of the Sullivan Mine. In tackling

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the issue of Kimberley's financial viability, Teck recognized that the mine closure represented a \$2-million loss of tax revenues to the municipality of Kimberley. In order to mitigate this loss, the City of Kimberley and Teck worked with the community to define a vision that would leverage the area's natural assets and diversify the future economic development of Kimberley by creating a four-season resort built around golf and skiing. To promote economic development and facilitate the transformation of Kimberley from a mining town into a resort community, the town established a non-profit development corporation (Kimberley Community Development Society) to plan, develop, promote and operate some of the city's economic assets. The use of not-for-profit entities provided the municipality with greater flexibility to manage risks and reinvest earnings from the operation of commercial ventures while minimizing the burden on the municipal budget.

Additionally, the City of Kimberley collaborated with Teck and the EcoSmart Foundation to develop a one-megawatt solar power plant on the site of the former Sullivan Mine concentrator. The project, SunMine, is the first of its kind for British Columbia and provides Kimberley with a long-term source of revenue from the sale of energy.



Employees of SunMine

Results

The Sullivan Mine closure has received international recognition for its proactive reclamation and mine closure work—both on the environmental side and in helping the community rebrand itself. Kimberley has made a successful transition from a company town whose livelihood was dependent on the extraction and processing of minerals to a self-reliant four-season resort community with a growing knowledge-based economy that serves the region. The ownership and management of a ski hill, the commissioning and construction of several golf courses, the operation of a campsite and the eventual packaging and sale of the ski resort and golf courses to a developer provided the city of Kimberley with valuable revenues, a stronger and more predictable tax base and a competitive advantage in attracting people looking for a new place to live or retire.

SunMine now has 4,032 solar-cell modules, mounted on 96 solar trackers that follow the sun's movement, producing one megawatt of electricity, or enough energy for 250 homes. It is British Columbia's largest solar project, Canada's largest solar tracking facility, and the first solar project in British Columbia to sell power to the BC Hydro grid thereby providing the City of Kimberley with a steady source of income from the sale of energy.

Lessons Learned

The process that led to the development of a mine closure plan and an economic development strategy for Kimberley required the active and sustained participation of leaders from the city, the mine and the community; however, gaining this participation required a more open and transparent approach to dialogue and engagement than had traditionally been used. Local leaders can play an instrumental role in creating an environment that is conducive to the building of trust and confidence, and fostering an openness to approaching issues and challenges as partners rather than as adversaries.

The development of a partnership between the municipality and the mining company was critical to the success of the project. The strong and collaborative relationship that emerged between the City of Kimberley and Teck enabled them to team up, creating a unified voice and a shared vision when seeking support from the province, investors or the community.

It is important for communities to understand that the life of all mines is finite, and their closure can come much sooner than expected due to factors beyond their control. In order to ensure a positive legacy, new mines must plan for closure from the beginning and existing mines must engage stakeholders, sooner rather than later, so that they can help shape the future they want to have for their community.

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