

For Immediate Release

December 16, 2019

Aspen Planers Restores Second Shift at Merritt Mill

Return of Second Shift Brings 50 Jobs Back to Merritt

Merritt — December 16, 2019 — Aspen Planers Ltd. recently announced the return of a second shift at their Merritt Mill. Aspen Planers has been able to secure new timber from the closed Vavenby operation and from clearing work through the forest fire mitigation program, making it possible for Aspen Planers to return a second shift. This shift increase will create work for 50 people on a temporary basis until spring 2020, primarily those persons who were laid off when Aspen Planers reduced operations from two shifts per day to one on June 3, 2019. This addition will provide career opportunities for some new employees where persons who were laid off have retired or found other avenues of employment since the shift reduction. The return of this second shift is good news coming right before the Christmas season and provides a sense of optimism for the forestry industry going into the new year.

“It is great to hear our people are going back to work,” said Merritt Mayor Linda Brown. “The lack of access to logs with a long-term source of fiber for the mill, increased log costs and the weakening lumber market are issues we need to still address though. The return of the 50 jobs in the community is a good thing and especially right before Christmas.”

“This return of the second shift at Aspen Planers is a good start but is not the full long-term solution. Our local loggers are still out of work and our logging contractors need support to help get them back to work. The timber allocation remains the same as it previously was, and we are advocating the Province of BC to review the current stumpage rates. During our recent meetings at UBCM with the Ministry Departments City Council discussed this alongside building a community forest tenure with our local partners here in the Nicola Valley.” said Merritt Mayor Brown.



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The City of Merritt strategic priorities are helping to diversify the local economy and provide a clear sense of direction for current residents and new businesses looking at growing in the BC Interior. Identified as top priorities for the City of Merritt are reviewing the *Economic Development Strategy*, *Airport Master Plan* and *Downtown Revitalization Plan*. These strategic priorities assist to provide the City of Merritt and community residents the vision and direction the community is moving.

Following these projects, the City of Merritt has selected the City focus on:

- Creating a Communication Strategic Plan
- Completing a Housing Needs Assessment
- Reviewing Development Cost Charges and the Subdivision Bylaw
- Reviewing the Official Community Plan
- Reviewing the Marketing Strategy

In response to a diversifying local economy the City of Merritt along with partners from Community Futures Thompson Country, Community Futures Nicola Valley, Government of Canada and Province of BC have created a Thriving Communities Labour Market Study. This survey will be available for community members to have their say until January 20th, 2020. The results from this Labour Market Study will help identify which local businesses have been negatively affected by the declining forestry industry across BC and suggested avenues of assistance from the survey participants.

The City of Merritt is also one of the communities participating in the B.C. Provincial Nominee Program Entrepreneur Immigration Pilot. The City of Merritt has prioritized business start-ups in Truck Transportation, Miscellaneous Store Retailers along with Warehousing and Storage. The direction to invite foreign entrepreneurs to help fill the business gaps in targeted niche areas aims to diversify the local economy.



The City of Merritt continue to explore opportunities to better utilize currently vacant heavy and light industrial zoned land in the community. A focus for business attraction and expansion in the City of Merritt Economic Development Action Plan highlights building Merritt as a transportation and distribution centre for the interior. “The community of Merritt was built on forestry and we must continue to push for those jobs to remain in our community as one of the pillars of our current economy. Along with this we need to ensure we build a diverse local economy and work to ensure those entering the workforce have opportunities in their specialized industry” commented Mayor Brown.

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