

**Economic and Socio-economic Planning Processes:
Beyond the Document**

Town of Tilting Economic Development Plan, December 2006

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Introduction

Tilting, a small community of approximately 250 people located on Fogo Island, Newfoundland and Labrador started a plan to bring about economic sustainability to the community in 2004¹. The Tilting plan was put into place to bring forth the concepts of economic sustainability and to help address issues such as a declining fishery and decreasing population. There is a large outmigration problem in the town of Tilting that contributes to this problem, leaving only the older population in the community. With the problem of outmigration growing, the community runs the risk of losing their valuable volunteer base as the volunteers in the community are the same people who have been volunteering for many years. Tilting is currently home to 248 residents; 19% of the population is over 60 years of age.²

This document will assess how the planning process was approached in Tilting, the degree to which implementation has occurred and how the overall process may be improved. The majority of the information used in this document was obtained from interviews with individuals involved in the planning process, which were conducted in October, 2009. Unless otherwise stated, all figures, quotes and statements directly related to the planning process in Tilting have been taken from the interview responses and the Town of Tilting Economic Development Plan Final Report (2006).

¹ Town of Tilting (2006) Town of Tilting Economic Development Plan states that there were 200 permanent, full-time residents in the community, while Statistics Canada (2006) reports 248 residents. This could, in part, be due to a high number of summer residents, some of whom may have completed the 2006 Census in Tilting.

² Statistics Canada. 2006 Census. Retrieved on December 4, 2009. www.statcan.gc.ca

Description of the way the planning process was conducted

The Town of Tilting developed a Strategic Economic Development plan to develop an economically sustainable community which will expand and generate new growth. The purpose of the Tilting Economic Development Plan was to increase economic sustainability on Fogo Island and more specifically in Tilting. In 2004, the development plan was first introduced to the Town Advisory Council. In the fall of 2004, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis was conducted through a community workshop in Tilting. It was hosted by representatives from the Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development (INTRD) and Kittiwake Economic Development Corporation (KEDC), and it was attended by 30 community members. This early process included a skill set inventory. It was not until March 2006 that the Tilting Town Council, the Ireland Business Partnerships and INTRD held a community planning workshop and identified the need to revise the earlier Strategic Economic Plan for the Town of Tilting.

In September 2006, two focus group sessions, involving representatives from key organizations in the community, were facilitated by an Economic Development Consultant, at which point the information collected in 2004 was validated. The Town of Tilting Economic Development Plan was completed in December 2006, it was presented to partners and funders, and then implementation began in 2007. The development plan is tourism-based and is targeted to provide employment opportunities in the community, and hopes to slow down outmigration. Tilting has received a significant amount of

attention for its cultural significance, as the community tries to build upon its reputation and capitalize on its unique cultural assets.

The need for an economic development plan in Tilting was apparent as it was identified by numerous groups and individuals throughout the community. The Advisory Council for the town was formed in 1992 to facilitate decision making regarding the town. The Advisory Council originally applied to the provincial government for funding for the plan. The Tilting Recreation and Cultural Society (TRACS), a subcommittee of Town Council, Tilting Expatriates Association, community members, members of the provincial government, The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Professor Robert Mellin, an architect, and small business owners all supported the movement. Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador together with TRACS had already established an initiative to rebuild and restore the old infrastructure throughout the town.

Numerous factors were taken into account in the early stages of planning, including a focus on initiatives that were realistic and practical to implement. Provincial and federal governments aided in the funding, but would only provide support for economic development initiatives if there was a planning process in place. Although the plan was quite proactive, as its purpose was to anticipate future changes and create opportunities, the plan was also reactive to an aging population, where outmigration is a serious problem, in part due to the decline of the fishery.

The Economic Development Plan for Tilting was coordinated by a development consultant who worked closely with a local development researcher (i.e. the Junior

Economic Developer), with the support and direction of steering committee that was formed and used as a funding agent for the project. The total cost of the planning process is estimated at \$80,000. Funding was provided by the Ireland Business Partnerships, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), and INTRD, with funding for the Junior Economic Developer provided through IBP and INTRD and for the mentoring senior consultant through ACOA.

The plan has six core goals that sought to: expand and improve the tourism industry; provide infrastructure improvements; social, economic and human resource development; and improve external communication and marketing, through initiatives such as roadside signage and dispersal of brochures across the province. Moreover, the plan was proposed as a tool to: develop the physical landscape by developing a “Tilting Townscape” plan in conjunction with a landscape architect, among other possible projects, and to improve internal communications through initiatives such the Town Council publishing quarterly newsletters, which would outline all council, TRACS, Tilting Expatriates Association, and fire department activities and plans. Different initiatives were prioritized by the Town Council to bring the plan and its goals down into separate, specific initiatives, which were given specific target timelines. Specific initiatives addressed the main priority of using and rebuilding existing infrastructure to enhance the tourist industry in the community, including accommodations rental and restoration of homes or old buildings into studios. This type of development is becoming more popular in Tilting and nearby communities. Furthermore, one goal was to develop an Interpretation Centre and the Centre for Newfoundland and Irish Studies as a high calibre field school and archive that would provide learning opportunities to the general

public and research opportunities for post-secondary students and scholars alike. Another, less expensive and more immediate, initiative is to produce more signage around the community (e.g. road signs, parking signs, and tourist attraction signs). Other proposed initiatives include establishing camping/RV sites and a food catering co-operative to accommodate seasonal tourists' needs.

Since 2004, there have been many groups, volunteers, organizations, and stakeholders that have participated and have had significant impact on the process. A special partnership with the Irish Government helped fund some of these opportunities. Service Canada, ACOA, INTRD, local business owners, residents, along with TRACS have all been actors that have aided in the implementation of certain initiatives. Community workshops, focus group sessions, public meetings, newsletters and brochures were all tools used to further the involvement of all significant members, including representatives from a range of different organizations that operate across multiple scales, to incorporate ideas for potential projects, and to aid in the overall planning process.

Moving from planning to implementation

There are aspects of the economic plan that are being implemented. According to one representative from the planning committee, there has been a lot done beyond completion of the plan itself, including signage, marketing – which is always evolving and included a tourism website, a feasibility study for the Centre for Newfoundland and Irish Studies, advancing water infrastructure and promoting seasonal homes, by using the homes of expatriates, who live in Tilting seasonally. Also, there is heritage restoration

underway, including homes and fishing stages, and the ability to utilize existing infrastructure, such as the Reardon House as an artist retreat/studio, has been made possible by implementation of the plan. One representative mentioned that they are now seeking further funding to upgrade heritage structures, such as fishing stages, develop studios and to promote Irish culture.

The steps taken by the planning steering committee to go from planning to implementation were to work together with as committees and prioritize recommendations into both short term and long term actions to find ways to enhance the community. One interview respondent explained, “the plan included an implementation plan, with priorities and timelines.” Specific timelines were assigned to each priority in the plan and proposals have been written. The timeline had to be stretched because of “road blocks” with the implementation of the plan, which has taken years, not months, as originally planned. Initiatives that had timelines included the website and water/sewer amenities along with development of the Centre for Newfoundland and Irish Studies. One Town representative explains, “we have been plugging along. We did have it ordered in priority, but you do what you can.” Additionally, proposals for an interpretation centre and a food catering cooperative have been approved. For the most part, the implementation timelines for these projects have been met.

The main actors that have helped in the implementation process were the provincial and federal government, including regional INTRD and ACOA support staff, and community groups like TRACS. The Town of Tilting was responsible for taking the lead on implementing their own initiatives, along with participating in planning with a

broader outlook with other Fogo Island communities as part of an island-wide planning process in 2008. Town Council, as well as the staff in the town hall, steering committee and TRACS are the major groups involved in implementation. The Town Council is continually looking for funding support. In addition to town staff, the steering committee is providing the human resources to implement the plan, most of whom are volunteers. According to one representative, INTRD is also providing human resources to help in implementation.

The financial resources involved in implementing these initiatives include contributions from the Town of Tilting, which was allotted to the planning committee to help the plan follow through to the end. The Town provided funding; however they have relied on funding agencies for additional resources to pass on to the committee. Financial resources have been made available through INTRD to investigate the feasibility of the Centre for Newfoundland and Irish Studies, for example. Ireland, specifically the Ireland Newfoundland Partnership has also helped. Tilting and Ireland have an agreement to assist each other for tourism purposes. The implementation process has been monitored and evaluated by the organizations involved, on a small scale because they had to monitor the timeline to a degree to make sure the planning committee stayed on the right track with everything. There is no formal monitoring and evaluation process built into the plan, but stakeholders are monitoring the plan to accommodate new initiatives and changing factors in the community.

Outcomes to date

All of the intended outcomes of the Tilting plan have not been achieved, however those involved have taken steps to start implementation and continue to move forward. Signage and a website were intended outcomes on a shorter term basis; both of these objectives have been met and a food service co-op is underway. The Interpretation Centre and the proposal for the Centre for Newfoundland and Irish Studies is still in the process of being developed but will eventually offer an academic aspect in the community and a field trip option so students can gain firsthand experience of Newfoundland and Irish culture. There were other long term community goals and infrastructure needs that have not yet been met but the implementation of these is in the process of being addressed.

With regards to the outcomes the planning committee were not expecting, there were a few, including the Arts Festival of Tilting, workshops, visitors from Ireland, and a radio signal that was carried over to Ireland so they could listen to Tilting talk about the planning process. The people from Tilting are very accepting of individuals and community support from outsiders, which is important given a shrinking local human resource base. Tilting as a whole is also known for their volunteer base, but, without an incline in population, the volunteer base is going to gradually die out, therefore causing a decrease in community-based development. Another benefit of this process is that it has enhanced partnerships, and attracted broad recognition and support. Economic planning has strengthened the ties Tilting has with the government, both federal and provincial, and also their ties to Ireland.

The Economic Development Plan only involved the Town of Tilting directly, but other communities on the island also benefit from the planning process. Nearby communities have, perhaps unintentionally, been involved in helping development in Tilting by opening small businesses that benefit both Tilting and their own communities. A resident of Tilting provided an example: a nearby community has opened a high-end restaurant that accommodates the tourist industry that is occurring in Tilting. According to one representative, there were several benefits that were achieved because planning was conducted in communication with multiple communities. Tilting's initiatives provided opportunities and initiatives in many other parts of the Island as Tilting is becoming the anchor of Tourism on Fogo Island; such that one community compliments another and they help each other out when needed. This linking of the resources enhances the community's regional involvement.

Key factors in implementation success (or lack of)

The key factors that have helped facilitate the planning process are funding, dedicated volunteers and community support, which have made the development plan as successful as it is. The commitment of individuals was noted as important, including “a tenacious mayor and deputy mayor,” as well as support from ACOA and INTRD regional staff. Although implementation has not occurred exactly as planned, the fact that Tilting has been recognized as a heritage site or district³, that they have worked to celebrate a

³ Tilting was designated as the province's first Provincial Heritage District in Dec 2002 (ceremony June 2003) and as a National Historic Site of Canada in September 2003. In 2005 it was designated a Cultural Landscape District by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (NL 2008).

unique Irish culture, and that there are multiple levels of government involved has aided in planning success. Some of the initiatives that have not yet been implemented include, but are not limited to: providing infrastructure improvements, improved external communications and marketing, and physical land development. One of the representatives felt that implementation was not happening to the extent they wanted it to because there was a lack of resources and funding, as well as limits to the town's mandate, problems with obtaining full time staff, and the need for more volunteers. Another representative concurred that the main problems are lack of: human resources, financial support and recognition from government, and the fact that the volunteer numbers are declining due to outmigration and an aging population.

Removing barriers and addressing challenges

There were a number of challenges that could have been overcome during the implementation process. According to one local representative, one solution could be to draw opinions from outside communities. Other solutions offered were to try to get more involvement within the community, try to get more support from people with a strong affiliation with Tilting, and try to enhance the events that are offered in the community, including festivals and future events at the Centre for Newfoundland and Irish Studies. Another representative mentioned that they are hoping for more funding for human resources to have someone assist with the implementation process. The government is an important factor with regards to overcoming challenges. One way they can help is by providing more funding. For example, funds could be made available to hire a community planner to oversee project implementation. Respondents also suggested that

governments cut out what they refer to as “red tape” – rules and procedures that are seen as overly bureaucratic and time consuming. Surrounding communities can also offer more involvement to help move the process along, although one representative feels that working with other communities will further exhaust Tilting’s community volunteer base. Community groups and volunteers, they suggest, are already doing what they can.

Conclusion

This plan was put in place to allow the community of Tilting to discover how they can bring in more tourism, economic activity and volunteers. There were six main goals that the planning committee were trying to achieve with the plan. The goals were to: expand and improve tourism; provide infrastructure improvements, social, economic and human resource development; improve external communications such as signage; physical land development; and improved internal communications. The planning process has taken a good thorough look at what Tilting has and what else is required to make it a better community. The planning process brought people together to figure out what can work in a small community of less than 250 residents, and to keep the town stable with the residents that are there, as well as to find a way to bring in new residents. Ultimately, despite the challenges faced, the Economic Development Plan is a feasible tool to further the development in the Town of Tilting. Further development in the town is required, but it is still early in the implementation process. As the town continues to develop, economic prosperity will follow.

References

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