

Community Advisory Committees: Practical Tools for Meaningful Engagement?



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Post-consultation era?

Engagement fundamentals are well-known

Gap between theory and practice

- The result: frustration, disillusionment, mistrust, disengagement

Case study: community advisory committee

- Trust, communication, administration



Impact assessment in B.C.

Legislated community advisory committees

- Revitalized Environmental Assessment Act in force in 2019
- Key purpose: “facilitating meaningful public participation throughout assessments”
- Community advisory committee (CAC) with “sufficient community interest”

CAC implementation challenges

- Cariboo Gold CAC: best example of intent



Cariboo Gold: Unique factors

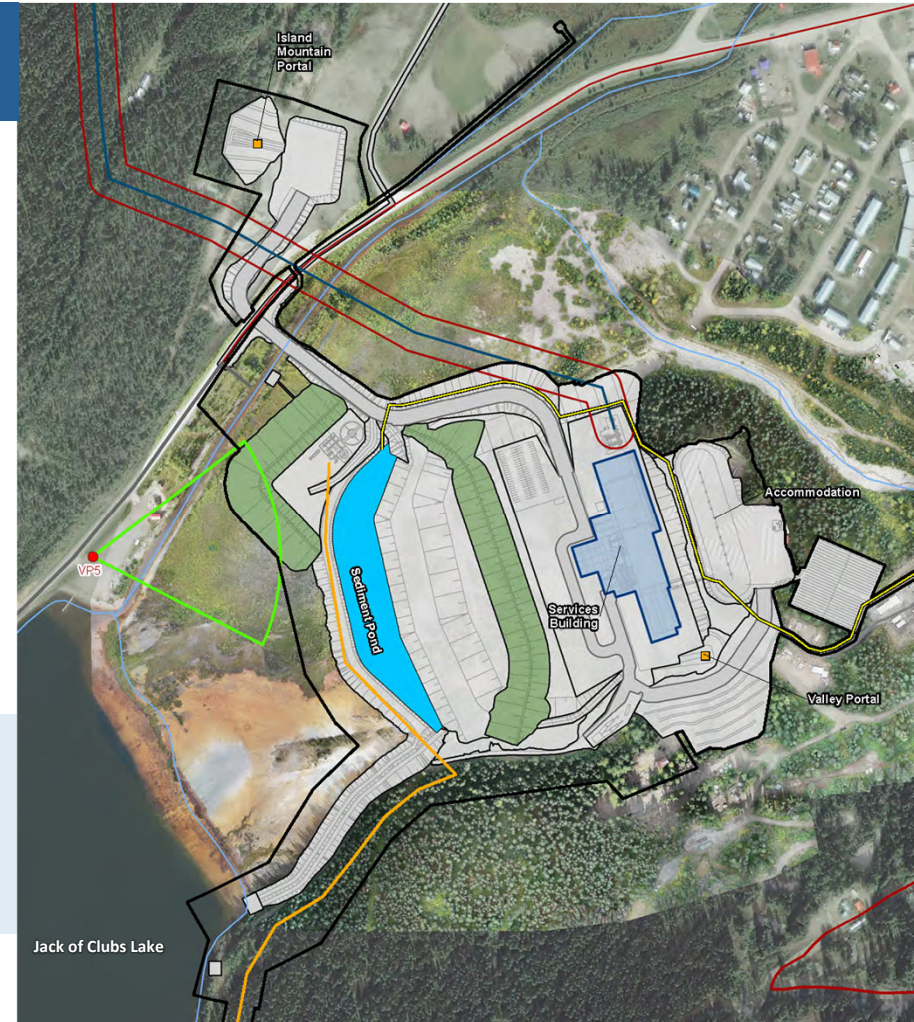
Mine site location

- Mine site within municipal boundaries
- Nearest dwelling < 250 m away

Assessed during pandemic

- Assessed from 2020 to 2023
- Travel and gathering restrictions

"We're talking about real molecules in the air, in the land... It's not a vaporous virtual place. It's a real place with real lives around it." (CAC participant)



Case study: Cariboo Gold CAC



Participation and structure

- 25 residents signed up for CAC
- 10 participated – all regularly
- 9 meetings over 2 years

Terms of reference - goals

- Support information sharing
- Foster learning re: assessment & project
- Advise on positive/negative effects & mitigations



Research approach

Cariboo Gold CAC

- What worked and didn't work?
- What changes could be made?
- What are the barriers?

*"We were just this tiny voice
and trying to do our best
with no resources or support"
(CAC participant)*

22 interviews

(Aug.-Dec. 2025)

- 9 CAC members
- 11 EAO staff, leaders & decision-makers
- 1 ministerial decision-maker
- 1 proponent representative

Document reviews

When CACs work – and don't

Public engagement valued across the board

- Main benefit of community input: local knowledge

Narrow scope for highest CAC benefit

- Proximate project or direct community impacts

Central tension point: what constitutes influence?

Mistrust undermines participation

"it's really hard to understand the effects on a community that aren't technical...and you would only know if you lived there" (EAO staff participant)



Key take-aways

Trust is built – or lost – through design choices

- The cornerstone: good communication

Institutional administration shapes credibility

- Representative membership recruitment
- In-person engagement

Capacity is a constraint – resource both sides

- Support participants: funding for liaison
- Support staff: guidance, training, mentoring





Let's continue the conversation!

Message me your questions or comments in the IAIA26 app.

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Appendix: Preliminary Recommendations

Early recommendations for successful community advisory committees

- A must for projects close to community or with direct impacts
- Establish early, while project is still in concept stage & respond to community interests/concerns – show that responsiveness
- Set credible membership process – lean on existing community groups
- Be clear on roles & scope for committee members, other participants
- Design format to meet needs of committee – in-person important, frequency/timing/duration to accommodate schedules, accessible info
- Enable cross-pollination – technical advisors, other participants/ stakeholders, proponent, broader community
- Support participation by funding liaison role for committee
- Employ tailored feedback loops for committee & use throughout process
- Improve staff engagement competencies & create good guidance material

