

= Chetwynd , British Columbia =

Chetwynd / tʃɛtˈwɪnd / is a district municipality located on the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in northeastern British Columbia , Canada . Situated on an ancient floodplain , it is the first town eastbound travellers encounter after emerging from the Rockies along Highway 97 and acts as the gateway to the Peace River Country . The town developed during the construction of infrastructure through the Rocky Mountains in the 1950s , and was used as a transshipment point during the construction of hydroelectric dams in the 1960s and 1970s and the new town of Tumbler Ridge in the early 1980s . Home to approximately 2 000 residents , the population has increased little if at all since the 1980s but is significantly younger than the provincial average .

Once known as Little Prairie , the community adopted its current name in honour of provincial politician Ralph L.T. Chetwynd , just prior to its incorporation in 1962 . The 64 square kilometre (25 sq mi) municipality consists of the town , a community forest , and four exclave properties . Chetwynd has dozens of chainsaw carvings displayed throughout town as public art . It is home to a Northern Lights College campus . Nearby , there are four provincial parks , two lakes , and several recreational trails .

Highways 29 and 97 intersect in town ; the east-west Highway 97 connect the town to Prince George and Dawson Creek while the north-south Highway 29 connects Tumbler Ridge and Hudson 's Hope . A rail line branches off in three directions : northward to Fort St. John , east to Dawson Creek , and west through the Rockies to Prince George . Its economy is dominated by the primary industries of forestry , fossil fuel extraction , and transportation . A member municipality of the Peace River Regional District , it is represented in provincial politics by Liberal MLA Mike Bernier .

= = History = =

From 1918 until the 1930s , the present townsite hosted a trading post on a grassy pasture known to the Sekani and Saulteaux as Little Prairie . In the 1920s , settlers from the Peace River Country began migrating westwards , across the frozen Kiskatinaw and Pine Rivers , to homestead . Little Prairie was homesteaded by Alexander and Lillian Windrem in 1930 and cleared the land by 1935 for hay , oats and gardens . Oil and coal discoveries , west of Little Prairie , near Commotion Creek , led to the construction of area roads . As the area 's natural resource potential became more apparent , a highway was planned in the late 1940s from the British Columbia Interior to the northern side of the Rocky and Omineca Mountains . The John Hart Highway , named after former B.C. Premier John Hart , was completed in 1952 ; designated Highway 97S it stretches from Prince George to Dawson Creek , with an intersection at Little Prairie . This was northeastern BC 's first connection with the rest of the province ; previously a trip through the neighboring province of Alberta was required . Following the opening of the highway , businesses such as restaurants and service stations were opened in Little Prairie to accommodate incoming workers and settlers . The first school was built in 1951 .

Little Prairie was incorporated as a waterworks district on 8 October 1957 ; within the span of a few year a rail line , natural gas pipeline , and telephone line were built along the highway from Prince George . Provincial Minister of Railways Ralph L.T. Chetwynd (who also directed the Pacific Great Eastern Railway) headed the rail line project . The rail line continued eastward to Dawson Creek which was the western-most terminus of Northern Alberta Railways . In early 1958 , the first train ceremonially arrived in Little Prairie from Vancouver . Its load included pipe to symbolize natural gas development , steel railway track for the extension of the rail line , box cars for grain and lumber , and a truck representing freight hauling along the Alaska Highway . The railway station in Little Prairie was completed in 1959 and named after Chetwynd , who had died two years earlier . Soon afterwards the post office adopted this name . Chetwynd became the community 's official name on 1 July 1959 . In 1960 the Chetwynd Waterworks District expanded its mandate to include garbage disposal , fire protection , and street lighting . Led by its Chamber of Commerce , the community incorporated as a municipality on 25 September 1962 .

Growth continued in the 1960s when the town served as the rail @-@ to @-@ truck transshipment point for delivering workers and supplies to the construction site of the W.A.C. Bennett Dam , in nearby Hudson 's Hope . Canfor and West Fraser Timber bought sawmills in 1964 and 1971 , respectively , and eventually became two of the town 's largest employers . The development of its forestry sector led to the town being declared the Canadian Forest Service 's 1992 Forestry Capital of Canada . The community opened a rodeo ground and curling rink in 1963 , a library in 1967 , a new fire hall in 1968 , an airport in 1970 and a hospital in 1971 .

Further growth was stoked in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the construction of the Peace Canyon Dam near the Bennett Dam , the opening of the natural gas and sulfur plant , and the construction of the mining town Tumbler Ridge . Chetwynd thus was re @-@ incorporated as a district in 1983 with a population of 2 @,@ 957 . With no more megaprojects , Chetwynd 's population remained relatively stable at about 3 @,@ 000 , with a peak population in 1996 at 3 @,@ 113 .

On 4 December 1996 , Chetwynd 's boundaries were expanded to include 49 km ² (19 sq mi) of forested land and industrial properties . Most of this came from moving the northern border up 210 metres (689 ft) over Ol ' Baldy Ridge to create a community forest , a concept which originated from a Chetwynd Secondary School proposal in 1980 for a fitness trail . The trail became the backbone of a system of interconnected trails and greenspaces that went up the ridge . Four industrial properties ? a gas plant , sulfur processing plant , coal mine , and pulp mill ? became exclaves of the district as they incorporated to receive municipal services . The coal mine , with an expected lifespan of 15 years , was approved by the province for development in 1998 . It was not constructed until 2004 making it the province 's first new coal mine in 20 years . It only operated for 2 years before closing due to poor yields , equipment failure , and lack of financial backing .

= = Geography and climate = =

Carved out of an ancient floodplain , the small terrace upon which Chetwynd is situated lies in the northern foothills of the Rocky Mountains . Once used as a grazing spot by nomadic Aboriginals , the terrace was farmed by settlers until it was developed into a town . Two types of soil ? namely , the Widmark and Centurion Series ? comprise the terrace 's surface . The Widmark Series ? a moderately well @-@ drained degraded loamy , woody , silty , and clay @-@ like soil ? lies north of Highway 97 . Meanwhile , the Centurion Series ? which lies south of the highway ? is a poorly drained soil with a dark @-@ brown peaty surface material consisting of decomposed leaves and mosses . These soils , also limited by topography and stoniness , are generally used for forage and pasture .

The town is surrounded by forested hills but the prairies of the Peace River Country begin here and continue eastward into Alberta . It lies in a transition area dividing two biogeoclimatic regions : the Boreal White and Black Spruce zone and the Engelmann Spruce @-@ Subalpine Fir zone . The area 's native tree species include deciduous balsam poplar and coniferous spruce and pine . Many fur @-@ bearing animals ? deer , moose , elk , beaver , and bear ? comprise the region 's mammalian wildlife . Three creeks run south through town . Windrem Creek ? which flows down from Ol ' Baldy Mountain ? and Widmark Creek both flow into Centurion Creek , which itself drains south into the Pine River .

The town experiences a cool continental climate , including frigid winters and warm summers . Southwesterly winds , coming off Williston Lake , predominate , with wind speeds averaging around 8 @.@ 2 km / h (5 @.@ 1 mph) . About 318 millimetres (12 @.@ 5 in) of rain and 169 centimetres (67 in) of snow fall on the town annually and about 30 days with some fog are expected per year . Chetwynd , like the rest of the Peace River Regional District , uses Mountain Standard Time year @-@ round . The remainder of the province uses Pacific Standard Time with daylight saving time , meaning that Chetwynd shares the same time with the province during the summer and is one hour ahead during the winter .

= = Demographics = =

An initial 1958 population estimate , associated with Chetwynd 's application for incorporation , recorded 750 residents ? inclusive of nearby work camps . The 1966 Canadian census , the first to define Chetwynd as a distinct subdivision , counted 1 @, @ 368 residents . Subsequent census counts documented a low of 1 @, @ 260 people in 1971 before a population boom between 1977 and 1983 during the construction of Tumbler Ridge and the Peace Canyon Dam . The population count slowly declined for the remainder of the 1980s before rising to a high of 3 @, @ 113 in 1996 ; nevertheless , the population declined in the late 1990s during the U.S.-Canada softwood lumber dispute when several mills either scaled back production or closed .

According to the 2006 Canadian census , Chetwynd had 2 @, @ 633 residents living in 1 @, @ 025 households . With a median age four years lower than the province 's , the population of Chetwynd is young . About 6 % more people were single (and never married) and 4 % less lived in lone @-@ parent households than the province 's proportion . According to the 2001 and 2006 census , while Chetwynd had an increase of 35 families , it had a decrease of 85 lone @-@ parent families and an increase of the same number of common @-@ law families . During the same period , the portion of dwellings being owned shifted from 50 % to 62 % , while the provincial proportion rose from 67 % to 70 % . The last complete census , the 2001 Canadian census , found that less than 5 % of Chetwynd residents were foreign @-@ born , and 90 % of residents had an English @-@ only mother tongue . While not counted as visible minorities during the census , 670 people considered themselves to have an Aboriginal identity , much higher than the provincial 4 % average .

The nine officer Chetwynd Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachment , which covered the municipality and nearby rural communities , reported 981 Criminal Code offences in 2005 . This translated into a crime rate of 158 Criminal Code offences per 1 @, @ 000 people , higher than both the previous year 's rate of 142 and the 2005 provincial average of 125 . In 2004 , compared to the provincial average , Chetwynd had tripled the rates of reported impaired driving and cocaine @-@ related offences . Conversely , Chetwynd had much lower rates of robbery , bicycle theft , and theft from motor vehicle .

= = Economy = =

Chetwynd is the commercial centre for the rural communities of the Pine River Valley , as well as Moberly Lake , Jackfish Lake , and Lone Prairie . These rural residents are mostly cattle , sheep , and bison ranchers and use the town as a transportation hub to ship their products via highways or rail . After the 1950 ? 1980 boom period , the town 's economy has been bolstered by primary industries , including lumber mills (West Fraser Mills , Canadian Forest Industries , Tembec Pulp Mill) , gas plants (Duke Energy , Talisman Energy) , a coal processing plant (Pine Valley Mining) , and a sulfur processing plant (Enersul) . Since the late 1990s , Chetwynd has undergone an economic downturn from the closure of coal mines in Tumbler Ridge and the softwood lumber trade dispute between Canada and the United States , which led to the closure of the Louisiana @-@ Pacific Canada Pulp Company pulp operations in 2001 . The 2001 census recorded 1 @, @ 120 income @-@ earners over the age of 15 residing in Chetwynd ; of these , 690 worked full @-@ time throughout the year . Since then , the economy has rebounded with increased oil , gas and mineral exploration , tourist marketing of the area 's outdoor recreational activities and chainsaw carvings program , new and re @-@ opened coal mines , and wind farm construction . The Dokie Ridge Wind Farm is under construction and is expected to be completed in 2011 .

= = Education = =

The 2001 census estimated that only 10 % of people in Chetwynd between 20 and 64 years old graduated from a university , less than half of the 24 % provincial average and 26 % did not graduate from secondary school , 6 % higher than the provincial average . Chetwynd 's schools are administered by School District 59 Peace River South , which operates one secondary school and three primary schools . Chetwynd Secondary School had a 2003 enrollment of 516 people and a

2009 enrollment of 412 students , with declining enrollment figures projected to continue into the next decade . The three primary schools are Don Titus Elementary , Windrem Elementary , Little Prairie Elementary which had a combined 2003 enrollment of 630 children . Northern Lights College maintains a campus in Chetwynd , which has a 2003 enrollment of 170 students (based on full @-@ time equivalents) . It was established in 1976 with eight general interest and two university transfer courses . Today , the programs and courses offered at the Chetwynd campus are oriented towards training students for work in the local primary industries , including most trades and also Engineering as well as a variety of other minor courses ranging from music to babysitting .

= = Infrastructure = =

The John Hart Highway portion of Highway 97 runs east @-@ west through Chetwynd , connecting the town to Dawson Creek (102 km or 67 mi east) and Prince George (304 km or 185 mi south) . Highway 29 (Don Philips Way) runs north @-@ south through Chetwynd , connecting the town to Hudson 's Hope (60 km or 34 mi north) and Tumbler Ridge (89 km or 47 mi southeast) . The downtown core lies just west of the intersection of Highway 97 and Highway 29 . Chetwynd 's internal street network has 28 km or 17 mi of paved road which uses the highway as its main arterial road with parallel frontage roads for local trips . A site plan by the province in 1957 laid out the basic structure of the town . The residential areas are separated from the industry and the highway by the use of natural features , such as contours or creeks , and vegetative buffers .

Chetwynd has rail , air , and bus service for regional and provincial transportation needs . Rail lines enter Chetwynd from three directions : from Fort St. John in the north , from Dawson Creek in the east , and from Prince George in the south . Pacific Great Eastern Railway (later BC Rail) ran passenger service to Chetwynd until 1990 . Since then the trains have been used solely for moving resources such as lumber and coal . The District of Chetwynd has operated the unmanned Chetwynd Municipal Airport (IATA : YCQ) since 1970 . The runway was paved in 1975 but only handles chartered flights and helicopters . A new airport terminal was constructed in 2008 by students at Northern Lights College . The closest airports with commercial airlines are at Fort St. John and Dawson Creek . Greyhound Bus Lines maintain a bus stop in town on their Vancouver @-@ Prince George @-@ Dawson Creek route .

The District uses the northeast @-@ flowing Pine River as both a source of drinking water and an outlet for sewage . The former comes from an intake pipe southwest of town . Its sewerage consists of 28 kilometres (17 mi) of sanitary sewers and 3 kilometres (2 mi) of storm sewers . Raw sewage is processed by a five @-@ cell lagoon system and released into the Pine River south of town . The water supply was briefly shut off in 2000 when oil pipeline along the Pine River ruptured spilling 6 @, @ 200 barrels (990 m3) of oil into the river . Electricity is supplied by BC Hydro from the Bennett and Peace Canyon Dams and natural gas by Pacific Northern Gas .

= = Culture and recreation = =

The Little Prairie Heritage Museum , located in one of the town 's oldest buildings (a converted post office dating to 1949) displays artifacts and re @-@ creations of the town 's frontier times , and nostalgia pieces from the construction of infrastructure through the Rocky Mountains . A public art program , started in 1987 , showcases over 50 chainsaw carvings spread throughout town with a downtown monument that declares Chetwynd the " Chainsaw Sculpture Capitol of the World " . The town 's first annual chainsaw carving contest was held in June 2005 . A regular contestant in the Communities in Bloom contest , the District built four wind turbines in 2004 to power decorative lights on 25 large trees along its boulevard as an entry to the WinterLights Celebration contest . A statue of a lumberjack entitled " Chetwynd , the Little Giant of the Great Peace " , measuring 2 @. @ 7 metres (9 ft) tall and located alongside the highway , has stood in the town since 1967 . The statue has been periodically altered by replacing the ax with other accessories , such as a lasso , rifle , gold pan and pitchfork , or dressed in other outfits , like a Santa suit . In 2009 the original statue was replaced with a wood carving facsimile , intended to reflect the popularity of the annual

chainsaw carving event .

For outdoor recreation , a community forest on Mount Baldy provides residents with trails for walking , hiking , cycling , and cross @-@ country skiing close to home . There is downhill skiing about 100 km (60 mi) west of town (and closer to the Rocky Mountains) at the Powder King Mountain Resort . Nearby provincial parks include Gwillim Lake Provincial Park (56 km , 35 mi southeast) , Moberly Lake Provincial Park (25 km , 16 mi northwest) , Pine River Breaks Provincial Park (15 km , 9 mi east) , and East Pine Provincial Park (30 km , 19 mi east) . Chetwynd has a large indoor rodeo facility , an outdoor speed skating oval , and a general recreation complex with an ice arena , wave pool , six @-@ lane curling rink , two baseball diamonds , and a skateboard park . It has recently been renovated and now contains a rock climbing wall , indoor walking track and fitness center . Smart Growth BC ranked the town as one of BC 's most livable municipalities in 2004 , due mainly to its large park spaces .

= = Media = =

Since the 1970s , the Chetwynd Communications Society has worked to establish radio and television service . For many years , they rebroadcast pre @-@ recorded content to Chetwynd and surrounding communities via a telecommunications tower on nearby Wabi Mountain . On 5 December 1996 , 94 @.@ 5 CHET @-@ FM ? the town 's first radio station ? went on @-@ air . Since then the station has expanded with a repeater tower in Dawson Creek at 104 @.@ 1 and is now known collectively as Peace FM . Its programming uses a series of specialty programs such as metal , gospel , hard rock , and dance . Chetwynd 's community television station , CHET @-@ TV channel 55 , began broadcasting on 8 March 2000 , in a ceremony attended by Governor General Adrienne Clarkson . The Chetwynd Communications Society also owns a series of low @-@ powered repeaters that rebroadcasts selected Canadian and American stations via satellite . In addition , Chetwynd is served by CBUZ @-@ FM 93 @.@ 5 , repeating CBC Radio One station CBYG @-@ FM from Prince George .

Two periodicals cover local news : the weekly newspaper Chetwynd Echo and the biweekly newsletter Coffee Talk Express . The Chetwynd Echo was created by the Chamber of Commerce in 1959 as The Chinook in a tabloid format . It was renamed the Weekly Advertiser in 1962 and the Chetwynd Echo in 1971 when it switched to a broadsheet format .

= = Government and politics = =

The District of Chetwynd 's council @-@ manager form of municipal government is headed by a mayor (who also represents Chetwynd on the Peace River Regional District 's governing board) and a six @-@ member council . These positions , plus two school board trustees , are subject to at @-@ large elections every three years . The current mayor , Evan Saugstad , was first elected in 2003 , and re @-@ elected by acclamation in 2005 . The city funds a volunteer fire department , which services the town and nearby rural communities . The city maintains the sewer , water , local road , sidewalk , street lighting , animal control , building inspection , park , and recreation services .

The Province staffs a government agent office in Chetwynd for access to licenses , permits , and government programs . Through the Northern Health Authority the province operates the five @-@ bed Chetwynd General Hospital . As part of the Peace River South provincial electoral district , it is represented in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia by BC Liberal Mike Bernier , first elected in the 2013 provincial election . Before Bernier , Peace River South was represented by Blair Lekstrom between 2001 and 2013 , and by Jack Weisgerber , between 1986 and 2001 , of the Social Credit Party of British Columbia (1986 ? 1994) and Reform Party of British Columbia (1994 ? 2001) . In 1996 as leader of the Reform Party , Weisgerber won re @-@ election despite placing second in the Chetwynd polls to the BC Liberal Party candidate .

Chetwynd is located in the Prince George ? Peace River riding which sends a Member of Parliament to the federal Canadian House of Commons . The town has been represented by Conservative Party member Bob Zimmer since the May 2011 federal election . Prior to Zimmer , the

town was represented by Jay Hill , also of the Conservative Party , who was first elected in 1993 , and re-elected in 1997 , 2000 , 2004 , 2006 , and 2008 but retired in 2010 . Before Hill , the riding was represented by former Chetwynd mayor Frank Oberle of the Progressive Conservative Party . Oberle was elected Chetwynd 's mayor in 1968 and its MP in 1972 . He became Canada 's first German born minister when he was appointed Minister of Science and Technology in 1985 . He also served as Canada 's Minister of Forestry in 1989 .