



COWICHAN BUSINESS ROUNDTABLES SUMMARY REPORT

April 2017



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	2
Priorities by Sector	3
General Analysis	4
Roundtable Consultation Partners	6
Resource Guide	7
Strengthening Partnerships	11

BACKGROUND

Between November 2016 and January 2017, a series of six Roundtable Consultations were held at the Community Futures Cowichan Boardroom in Duncan. Business leaders from six industry sectors were invited to share information that would improve the business climate within the Cowichan region collectively, and within their individual sectors.

The roundtable consultations were supported by:

- Community Futures Cowichan
- Duncan Cowichan Chamber of Commerce
- Economic Development Cowichan (CVRD)
- MNP LLP

Sectors involved in the consultations included:

- Retail
- Tourism
- Technology
- Manufacturing and Processing
- Construction and Real Estate
- Agriculture

The discussions were facilitated by Ron Lees, MNP Director of Public Sector Advisory Services. More than 60 business leaders responded to questions in group discussions to identify areas of priority for potential further exploration and action.

This summary represents the cumulative feedback and opinions drawn from the roundtable sessions.

PRIORITIES BY SECTOR

For each of the six sectors, the top three priorities identified were:

	RETAIL	TOURISM	MANUFACTURING & PROCESSING	CONSTRUCTION & REAL ESTATE	AGRICULTURE	TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION
PRIORITY 1	Increase customer base by attracting people to the region and make way finding easier for them – through transportation infrastructure, transit services, information and signage	Increase collaboration opportunities and collective involvement amongst operators and retailers	Improve communication and collaboration with local government	Improve communication and collaboration with local government	Streamline the regulatory environment for producers	Ensure that our connectivity in the region supports tech growth
PRIORITY 2	Create a cohesive brand or identity for the region that reconciles past perceptions	Develop a cohesive brand for the region that shares our story with the world	Attract and maintain a skilled, stable and experienced work force	Create a unified vision for the entire region	Provide funding to implement pilot projects that produce sustainable results	Increase the available talent pool
PRIORITY 3	Implement and promote a buy local campaign for region	Sell the experience and be product and service ready when people arrive in the region	Reduce or eliminate barriers to productivity, growth, and expansion	Create a stronger economic base by building an optimal mix of housing options in the region	Develop a recruitment and retention model that is suitable for agriculture	Define the sector within the region and who we are likely to attract

GENERAL ANALYSIS

Analysing participant feedback common across all sector roundtables, the most significant topics of discussion included:

1. STRENGTHENING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

According to many sector participants, the relationship between business and government needs to be strengthened to create mutual understanding of the needs and aspirations of the business community, the community at large and current government policies, services, taxation and zoning regimes.

In fostering an improved relationship with local government, business leaders sought the following outcomes:

- Improved collaboration and consistency amongst local governments to provide greater regulatory alignment and clarity for local businesses
- The development of a Regional Master Plan that will define the priorities for growth across the region
- The reconciliation of boundary related taxation challenges
- The provision of tax incentives to increase business retention and expansion
- Meaningful opportunities for two-way communications and collaboration with the business community
- Tangible efforts to create an “open for business” culture that is responsive, supportive, collaborative and service-orientated

2. CREATING A SHARED VISION

Cowichan is a region rich in tourism, recreational, retail and cultural business opportunities for locals and visitors to enjoy. Given the large geographic area within the Cowichan region and the diversity of these offerings comprised within it, capturing a shared brand or vision that everyone supports was acknowledged as being a challenging task.

To move the economic dial forward, roundtable participants sought the following outcomes:

- Developing a more cohesive and collaborative approach toward promoting our offerings in the region and planning for growth
- Increasing customer confidence in our product
- Creating a shared lifestyle attraction and tourism vision for the region
- Ensuring that businesses are product and service ready for new and existing clients
- Increasing First Nations involvement across all sectors
- Expanding our accommodation offerings in the region

3. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Infrastructure - in terms of tourist accommodations, residential housing options, public transit and transportation - was seen as an impediment to growth opportunities. A lack of affordable and mid-range housing was raised as a barrier to existing and potential residents. Commuting and transporting goods to the region over the Malahat was perceived as challenging, as was universal access to regional transit.

Participants also noted a lack of signage around public transit to inform visitors of local attractions, shops, etc. This was particularly noted in the case of marine travelers looking for transportation to on-shore excursions and things to explore around the region.

Desired outcomes for improving infrastructure included:

- Increasing the options and availability for public transit within the region as well as from Victoria
- Improving transit signage by using it as mechanism for tourism and resident information
- Creating a wider variety of housing options for residents, particularly workers
- Addressing parking issues in high traffic regions of the Cowichan

4. LABOUR AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Minimum and nominal wage earners find the economics of living and working in Cowichan difficult, especially with respect to accommodation and transportation costs.

Roundtable participants also reported a shortage of skilled workers within the region, especially younger skilled workers. This information is in keeping with current labour market information for the Island and locations across BC.

Desired outcomes for improving Cowichan's labour and skills development environment included:

- Addressing issues that influence our ability to attract, develop, and retain the local labour force
- Creating targeted opportunities to attract and retain skilled workers
- Developing and improving the overall quality and skill level of existing employees

ROUNDTABLE CONSULTATION PARTNERS

Community Futures Cowichan

Community Futures is a community and business development organization that supports small and medium sized enterprises throughout rural BC, paving the way for diversified local economies and job creation. They provide financing alternatives when access to credit is a challenge to starting or growing a business. Community Futures also works with community partners to help foster entrepreneurship and economic development in our region. For more information, contact Cathy Robertson, General Manager, at 250.746.1004 (x222) or croberston@cfcowichan.ca

Duncan Cowichan Chamber of Commerce

Providing professional development and networking opportunities for 500 members and continued advocacy for a vital business environment in the Cowichan Region. **The Duncan Cowichan Chamber** operates the Cowichan Regional Visitor Centre that directs tourists and locals to the region's attractions, accommodations, restaurants, stores and services. For more information, contact Sonja Nagel, Executive Director, at 250.748.1111 or manager@duncancc.bc.ca

Economic Development Cowichan

Economic Development Cowichan (EDC) is the economic development arm of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD). EDC works collaboratively to develop an amenable and sustainable business climate in the region, support new business attraction and sector development, create a sustainable framework for business growth and to promote the business and lifestyle advantages of working and living in the Cowichan. For more information, contact Amy Melmock, Manager, at 250.746.7880 or amelmock@cvrd.bc.ca

MNP LLP

Committed to being your partner in business, **MNP** is one of the largest accounting and business consulting firms in Canada, and was the first national firm to establish an office in Duncan. Through a full suite of accounting, tax and consulting services, MNP's professionals deliver clear, straightforward business advice from a local perspective to help clients succeed. For more information, contact Chris Duncan, Business Advisor, at 250.748.3761 or chris.duncan@mnp.ca



RESOURCE GUIDE

This section provides detail on information presented at the **2017 Business Leaders Breakfast**. It is intended as a **Resource Guide** for activities taking place in the Cowichan region.

COMMUNICATING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

PlaceSpeak

PlaceSpeak is an online platform that lets citizens talk to and engage directly with local government. You can now share your thoughts anytime and from anywhere using the Place Speak website. The Cowichan Valley Regional District, Municipality of North Cowichan, Town of Ladysmith, City of Duncan, Town of Lake Cowichan and the Electoral Areas are now using PlaceSpeak to inform, consult and engage with citizens throughout the region. Local governments are reaching out to citizens who have challenges attending public meetings and open houses and would like to contribute their input on issues they care about. To sign up for PlaceSpeak, please visit www.placespeak.com/Cowichan

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COLLABORATIONS

Throughout the Cowichan region, discussions are taking place that focus on the economic readiness of communities to take on new opportunities and the future of iconic downtown and waterfront areas. Examples include:

- **City of Duncan Initiatives** – Duncan is revising their Works and Services bylaw to clarify requirements for new developments, and has completed a draft zoning bylaw that includes less zones and more flexibility. This year the City is holding public consultations for the Downtown Parking Strategy and Master Transportation Plan. They are upgrading the boulevards along the Trans-Canada Highway and erecting a new Totem Pole to acknowledge Canada's 150 Celebration. The City will embark on a joint Online Marketing Project with the DDBIA, and participate with them on their BC Rural Dividend Project, to clarify the role and vision for downtown Duncan. For more information contact Duncan CAO Peter de Verteuil at peter@duncan.ca
- **Cobble Hill Design Charrette** – a three-day workshop was recently held with community stakeholders in Cobble Hill to discuss future design and planning considerations in the historic downtown core. For more information on the charrette, contact CVRD Area C Director Matteus Clement at mcllement@cvrd.bc.ca
- **Ladysmith Waterfront Development Initiative** – The Town of Ladysmith and the Stz'uminus First Nation are working in partnership to develop a plan for the Ladysmith Waterfront Area. For many years, Ladysmith has grappled with how best to further develop the waterfront to maximize community benefit and create a thriving, inviting and exciting place to be. For the past several months, citizens, town staff and a consulting team have been working to create a new and exciting plan with a strong focus on implementation. For more information, contact Ladysmith CAO Guillermo Ferrero at gferrero@ladysmith.ca

- **Lake Cowichan and Western Region Economic Readiness Assessment Project** – a project that is bringing together stakeholders from the Town of Lake Cowichan and the surrounding region to discuss opportunities and partnerships built on the region’s strengths in recreation, tourism and small business development. For more information, contact Amy Melmock at Economic Development Cowichan amelmock@cprd.bc.ca
- **North Cowichan Revitalization Program Bylaw**
This Program has three key objectives: to support development of industrial land in North Cowichan; stimulate the rejuvenation of mixed-use commercial areas; and to encourage construction of rental, supportive, and higher-density housing. Program applicants can receive significant tax exemptions over a ten-year period, or a waiver of development charges for eligible projects.
For more information, contact Mark Ruttan at 250.746.3117 or review the bylaw online by visiting www.northcowichan.ca/Documents/Cache13/Bylaws/Revitalization%20Program%20Bylaw.pdf

CREATING A UNIFYING VISION FOR THE REGION

Cowichan 2050

Cowichan 2050 is a regional planning exercise that will be undertaken by the Land Use Services Department of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) in the coming year. The project is intended to build a collaborative and coordinated approach to land use between the various CVRD local government jurisdictions as the region explores options for managing and balancing growth. For more information on the project, please contact Ross Blackwell, General Manager, Land Use Services, CVRD at rblackwell@cprd.bc.ca

Vision 2050

www.socialplanningcowichan.org

Social Planning Cowichan (SPC) knows that our social system needs to invest more time and resources into creating systemic change versus social change; to move from isolated responses and disconnected projects, planning and programs towards cross-sector collaboration. And, most importantly, moving forward must include everyone in the conversation, from community members to governments, from community benefit organizations to businesses.

For more information, contact Michelle Staples, Executive Director, Social Planning Cowichan at 250.746.1004, ext. 250 or email michellespcowichan@gmail.com

Tourism Cowichan Society

www.tourismcowichan.com

An industry driven not-for-profit organization, Tourism Cowichan manages destination marketing activities for the Cowichan Region. Since officially undertaking this mandate in June 2016, the organization has created an enhanced brand identity for Cowichan and launched a new website. Tourism is a major economic driver for Cowichan and the society encourages all stakeholders to work together for the economic wellbeing of the region.

To find out about becoming an industry stakeholder or affiliate with Tourism Cowichan, contact Executive Director Shelley Knott at 250.746.1099 or email shelley@tourismcowichan.com



COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Cowichan Housing Association (CHA)

www.cowichanhousing.com

CHA believes that stable, secure, accessible and affordable housing is foundational to healthy individuals, families and communities. The organization works to prevent homelessness and increase affordable housing options in the Cowichan Region through research, community development, homelessness prevention programming, and facilitating affordable housing development. For more information, contact Terri Dame, Executive Director at 250.746.1004, ext. 240 or email TDame.cowichanhousing@gmail.com

Public Transit

Cowichan Valley Regional Transit Services are offered in partnership with BC Transit, the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) and local operating companies. Fixed route transit service is available throughout the CVRD with the exception of Electoral Areas G (Saltair / Gulf Islands) and H (North Oyster / Diamond) which do not currently participate.

Cowichan Valley Regional Transit System: <https://bctransit.com/cowichan-valley/home>

Transit Information Line: 250.746.9899

General comments about the service, call 250.746.2500 or email: transit@cvrd.bc.ca

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES:

Creating a Regional Signage Strategy

The Northern Sunshine Coast, with support from the Rural Dividend Fund and Island Coast Economic Trust, developed and implemented a Regional Signage Renewal Strategy. For details on their project and to download the report, go to www.islandcoastaltrust.ca/project/sunshine-coast-regional-signage-strategy

A similar strategy in the Cowichan would create harmonious way finding and tourism signage for both locals and visitors, and benefit a number of industry sectors, such as retail. Developing attractive and informative signage ensures a consistent visual identity, fosters a positive community image, and enhances the visitor experience, which contributes to the economic vitality of our region. For more information, please contact EDC Manager Amy Melmock at amelmock@cvrd.bc.ca

LABOUR CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Canada-BC Job Grant (CJG)

www.canadabcjobgrant.com

CJG is an employer-driven, cost-sharing program that helps employers invest in training for their current or future employees. The CJG assists eligible employers to offset the cost of training up to a maximum of \$10,000 per participant per fiscal year, and up to a maximum of \$15,000 per participant per fiscal year for the Unemployed stream. The employer contributes at least one-third to the cost of training, with the exception of the Unemployed stream. The employer of all streams must have a job for the participant at the end of training.

For more information contact Cheryl McLay, Regional Economic Operations - Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, Nanaimo. Phone 250.751.3217 or email Cheryl.McLay@gov.bc.ca

Cowichan Intercultural Society

www.cis-iwc.org

Whether you are a newly arrived immigrant, or have lived in Canada for many years, finding employment can be difficult. Our trained staff are equipped to assist newcomers find and maintain their first Canadian jobs and then work towards maximizing employment outcomes. CIS offers one-to-one services and workshops to improve knowledge of the local labour market, help map career options in Canada, support with preparing targeted resumes and cover letters, facilitate important networking opportunities, and increase understanding of labour laws and workplace culture. Employment assistance is available to all immigrants and temporary foreign workers eligible to work in Canada. Please contact the CIS Settlement Team for more information or to make an appointment. Phone: 250.748.3112 or Email: settlement@cis-iwc.org

Global Vocational Services (GVS)

www.gvsjobs.com

GVS, in coordination with community partners, delivers a range of employment services through Work BC Employment Service Centre storefront locations in Duncan and Ladysmith, as well as a satellite office in Lake Cowichan. Resources can also be accessed online through this website and via E-Coaching.

Duncan ESC:	#301-80 Station Street	Phone 250.748.9880
Ladysmith ESC:	#1 – 740 First Avenue	Phone 250.924.2884
Lake Cowichan:	121 Point Ideal Road	Phone.250.749.6822

Small Business BC

www.smallbusinessbc.ca

Small Business BC provides entrepreneurs with products and services that will assist with their successful entry into small business ventures. They also provide small businesses at every stage of development with products, services, and support that: assist in development and growth; improve productivity; increase profitability; and enable businesses to take advantage of new opportunities.

Vancouver Island University Cowichan Campus

www.cc.viu.ca

VIU's Cowichan Campus provides a practical and innovative array of educational programming and services created and sustained to meet the unique needs of the local community, with a focus on addressing skills shortages in the Cowichan Valley region. Cowichan Campus training and educational programming facilitates learner transition to meaningful careers and further education, and includes an array of Trades and Applied Technology Training, Adult Basic Education, Literacy and Employability Skills, Health and Human Services, University Programming, Contract Services and Professional Development and Training, and a 5-year Bachelor of Education Degree. Contact Keith Chicquen, Instructional Director, phone 250.746.3526, local 3526, Keith.Chicquen@viu.ca

Youth Internship Program www.coscowichan.ca/youth-employment-mentorship-program

Administered through Community Options Society (COS), the Youth Employment Mentorship Program (YEMP) is an employment program for youth aged 15-30 years old. The five weeks of classroom work place training is followed by seven weeks of paid work experience with a Cowichan Valley employer. The seven weeks has a wage reimbursement incentive for 75% of minimum wage for 30 hours per week. Call 250.748.0232 for more information.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES:

Labor and Employment Action Committee

Economic Development Cowichan is working with local business leaders, Vancouver Island University and other community and government stakeholders to create a *Labor and Employment Action Committee*. The purpose of the group will be to explore how skills shortages in the region can be addressed and how regional employers can share best practices in recruiting, training and retaining employees. For more information, contact EDC Manager Amy Melmock at amelmock@cprd.bc.ca

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

Community Futures Cowichan

www.cfcowichan.ca

For more information on the programs below, please contact CF General Manager Cathy Robertson at 250.746.1004 (x222) or crobertson@cfcowichan.ca

Export Navigator

The Export Navigator Program offers businesses access to community-based export specialists who will provide a personalized, step-by-step approach to exporting / market expansion and help connect businesses to market information, export programs, financial services, and business development experts at every stage of the export process.

Export Navigator Services:

- Market expansion readiness assessment
- Business needs assessment
- Customize market expansion approach
- Streamlined service connections
- Ongoing export / market expansion support

Cowichan Valley Manufacturing Productivity Project

This Project has been developed to assist with improving the productivity for select manufacturers and processors in the Cowichan. The project will connect local businesses with productivity experts *GO Productivity*, a Canadian company who works with organizations to improve productivity, internal capacity and streamline processes. *GO Productivity* works directly with a company to begin their productivity journey, assess their weaknesses, identify opportunities, and execute a strategy. Ideal participants are companies that have 15+ employees and their leadership team has made a commitment to grow.

The Project is a partnership between Community Futures Cowichan, the Government of Canada's Industrial Research Assistance Program, and *GO Productivity*. It is a fully funded initiative, with limited costs to eligible companies. This is an investment to assist in increasing the competitiveness and ensuring long-term sustainability for businesses in Cowichan.

Duncan Cowichan Chamber of Commerce

www.duncancc.bc.ca

For more information about this committee, please contact Executive Director Sonja Nagel at 250.748.1111 or manager@duncancc.bc.ca

- **Business Advocacy Committee** – The Chamber has an active Business Advocacy Committee whose primary objective is to work with and on behalf of the Chamber Board and its members to identify issues or barriers to growth for businesses, and to develop strategies through which to address and resolve these issues. The Chamber has been successful in advocating for business at the municipal level as well as provincially through membership in the BC Chamber of Commerce.

Economic Development Cowichan

www.cvrd.bc.ca/business

For more information on the projects listed below, please contact EDC Manager Amy Melmock at 250.746.7880 or amelmock@cvrd.bc.ca

- **Tech Strategy** -- Technology related employment now accounts for more than 100,000 jobs in British Columbia and a regional strategy is in development to help foster new growth in this sector in the Cowichan. The strategy will look at the infrastructure, investment, academic and lifestyle considerations that drive tech growth on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, and how we can build a “made in Cowichan” plan for attracting increased tech activity here.
- **Industrial Land Use Study** – A comprehensive industrial land use study for the region is needed to contemplate the type of industry that will be viable and sustainable within Cowichan in the coming decades and to identify if the location, size and character of the region’s current industrial land base is sufficient to meet projected demand. Preliminary work on the study will be undertaken this coming summer, with the goal of launching the study in September 2017.
- **New Website Development** – Economic Development Cowichan will be launching a new website this June, aimed at attracting new businesses and new residents to the region. The site will also provide existing businesses with detailed information and tools to help sustain and expand their operations.

MNP LLP

www.MNP.ca

For more information about MNP, please contact Chris Duncan, Business Advisor at 250.748.3761 chris.duncan@mnp.ca or Peter van Dongen, Regional Marketing Manager at 250.734.4321 peter.vandongen@mnp.ca.

- **VIEA State of the Island Economic Report** – MNP is leading the economic research and analysis for the *2017 State of the Island Economic Report* published annually by the Vancouver Island Economic Alliance. To view past reports, go to www.viea.ca.
- **MNP Cowichan Business Leaders Survey** – MNP spearheaded the first *Cowichan Business Leaders Survey* in 2016, in partnership with the Duncan Cowichan Chamber of Commerce and Community Futures Cowichan. View the 2016 results at www.MNP.ca/leaders. Plans are underway to repeat the survey in 2018 to monitor our progress.



Vancouver Island Economic Alliance (VIEA)

www.viea.ca

For more information on the projects listed below, contact VIEA President George Hanson at 250.667.5225 or george@viea.ca

- **Value-Added Forestry Study** – VIEA is currently conducting a value-added forestry study that is aimed at finding out who is involved in value-added wood manufacturing in the region and how products are distributed. The study will examine the economic impact that wood manufacturing has on Vancouver Island and identify new products that could be manufactured here.
- **Annual State of the Island Economic Report** – VIEA's *Annual State of the Island Economic Report* provides factual insights on the economic performance of Vancouver Island. The report looks at workforce, cost of living, and sector development trends across the Island. The report is unveiled each November at VIEA's Annual State of the Island Economic Summit. The 2017 Summit takes place on Oct. 25-26, 2017 in Nanaimo. For more information, go to: <http://viea.ca/vi-economic-summit/>

Other Chambers of Commerce in the Cowichan Region

- **Chemainus & District Chamber** www.chemainus.bc.ca
Located in the Chemainus Visitor Centre in Waterwheel Park (102-9799 Waterwheel Crescent)
Phone 250.246.3944 or email chamber@chemainus.bc.ca
The Chemainus and District Chamber is a non-profit organization that acts as vehicle to promote cooperation between businesses, community based organizations and governments in order to create a livable and healthy community. The Chamber participates in a broad range of business and social initiatives and operates the Chemainus Visitor Centre in Waterwheel Park.
- **Cowichan Lake District Chamber** www.cowichanlake.ca
Located in the Lake Cowichan Visitor and Business Centre, 125C South Shore Road
Phone: 250.749.3244 or email lcchamber@shaw.ca
The Cowichan Lake District Chamber of Commerce operates the Lake Cowichan Visitor Centre and works hand and hand with the Town of Lake Cowichan and the CVRD Electoral Area's F & I for the betterment of business in the region.
- **Ladysmith Chamber** www.ladysmithcofc.com
Located in the Ladysmith Visitor Centre, 33 Roberts Street
Phone 250.245.2112 or email Chamber Manager Mark Drysdale at mark@ladysmithcofc.com
The Ladysmith Chamber operates the Ladysmith Visitor Centre and offers a host of member benefits, promotional opportunities, business contacts and networking and business referrals to its members, along with numerous workshops and professional development opportunities.