



PROJECT PROFILE

LADYSMITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Town of Ladysmith enjoys a unique opportunity to build its economy, thanks to its strategic location between the Cowichan Valley and Nanaimo, and its economic assets, which include a stunning waterfront and historic downtown.

Over the years, multiple organizations in the community have shared a common interest to promote Ladysmith as a great place to live and invest. Although each contributed to the economic development in their own way, there was an opportunity for stronger outcomes through collaboration and coordination.

In 2017, stakeholders in the community mobilized with a plan to revitalize the waterfront. The project formed the basis for a new partnership to develop a unified **economic development strategy**, supported by the Economic Development Strategy funding stream of ICET's Economic Development Readiness Program (EDRP).

The partnership included the Town of Ladysmith, Economic Development Cowichan, Ladysmith Downtown Business Association, Nanaimo Airport Authority, Stz'uminus First Nation, the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce and Community Futures Central Island.

"Economic Development Cowichan was key to bringing the members onboard," explained Tammy Leslie, President of the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce. "Once there was someone willing to spearhead the project, it was easy to get everyone else together."

When the diverse groups came together, there was a strong sense of excitement and forward momentum. Collaboration between stakeholders with different needs and aspirations can be challenging, however the partnership quickly evolved into a model demonstrating how to bring multiple organizations – and a community – together under one common objective.

The result is a comprehensive economic development strategy for the Ladysmith region and, through extensive stakeholder consultation, an inventory of projects in progress, a priority project list, and a three-year implementation plan.

On the heels of the newly minted strategy, enthusiasm translated into quick implementation.

An **investment attraction website**, featuring an innovative app, was agreed upon as the next logical step to move the strategy forward. With support from the EDRP Investment Attraction Tools funding stream, this innovative project will provide potential investors with a mobile database of on-the-spot information about investment opportunities in the community.

"When you get a chance to collaborate it builds trust. The investment attraction tools are not just a conduit for information, but another opportunity to

work together and continue building that relationship," said Amy Melmock, Manager of Economic Development Cowichan.

The strategy identified mountain biking as a source of new visitors and economic opportunities for the community. Since its completion, the Cowichan Trail Stewardship Society has approached the working group to spearhead the development of a trail network within the community, once again demonstrating rapid movement to implementation.

Most notably, consultations and research revealed the waterfront plan as a key priority, with the highest economic impact identified among potential projects.

Building on ICET supported investments in **transient boater facilities**, there is an opportunity to grow the marine tourism market in addition to the existing arts and heritage tourism infrastructure in the area. In an active partnership with the Stz'uminus First Nation, a key

feature of the waterfront plan is an 'Arts and Heritage Hub,' with galleries, artist studios, showcasing Coast Salish art and artists, Stz'uminus heritage as well as the area's industrial heritage.

"After speaking to a broad subsection of the community, it was not surprising to learn there was desire to act on the waterfront plan, and its significance as a cultural hub. But it was important that we arrived at that by consensus," explained Melmock.

Strong community buy-in has enabled the community to, once again, move quickly to detailed planning and implementation. Funding applications for the first phase of implementation have already been submitted to senior governments and other funding sources.

Leslie said that all the parts of the project worked because of the focus on collaboration.

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- AMY MELMOCK
Manager of Economic Development Cowichan

"The process revealed we all had the same objectives and goals in mind, we were all on the same page. Anytime business does better, we all do better, so it wasn't a surprise," concludes Leslie.