



Island Coastal Economic Trust Announces Funding for High-Speed Broadband Infrastructure and Services to North Island Communities

For Immediate Release – August 15, 2007. Mayor W.J. (Jack) Peake, Chair of the Island Coastal Economic Trust (Trust), today announced funding approval by the Board of Directors of \$72,625 for the expansion of high-speed internet services to the North Island communities of Zeballos, Coal Harbour and Quatsino First Nation. The total project cost is estimated at \$352,825 with financial contributions from other funding organizations and community sources.

“The objective of this project is to provide high-speed broadband infrastructure and services to three North Island communities in order to enable them to communicate with the greater world as well as establish viable, sustainable business that will assist in both economic development and diversification on the North Island,” stated Mayor Peake. Construction is expected to start in September.

Ragged Edge Community Network Society will be undertaking the construction and related actions for this project. “At present, the ability of remote North Islanders to participate in commerce, education, health care and accessible government services is greatly hindered by our limited high-speed Internet. Although organizations and individuals with financial ability can access high-speed Internet via expensive satellite hook-ups or the small amount of ADSL lines offered by Telus, the majority of North Island communities are relegated to dial-up networking at low delivery speed. As a result, the North Island faces becoming more of an economic backwater, unable to keep up with the infrastructure demands of the 21st century. This is an exciting opportunity for the North Island.” said Project Manager Evelyn Clark.

About the Island Coastal Economic Trust

The Island Coastal Economic Trust was established by Provincial legislation on February 27, 2006. It provides \$50-million that is managed by an independent board of directors made up of 8 locally elected government representatives and 5 provincially appointed members from the community. The board’s mandate is to makes strategic investments in regional economic priorities such as forestry, transportation, tourism, mining, energy, Olympic opportunities, economic development, agriculture and aquaculture, and small business. Information about the Trust can be found on www.islandcoastaltrust.ca.

For further information call:

Mayor W.J. (Jack) Peake
Town of Lake Cowichan
250-749-6681

Al Baronas, CEO
Island Coastal Economic Trust
250-334-2427 Extension 223

Evelyn Clark, Project Manager
250-956-2220

FACT SHEET

Ragged Edge Community Network Society, the project development arm of this project, has been incorporated since November of 2005. It was created and developed by Community Futures Mount Waddington and has a 5 member Board of Directors. As well Ragged Edge Community Network has two part-time employees (administration and field personnel) and the services of an expert network developer on a contractual, ongoing basis.

The long-term vision is that once the project is beyond the incubation stage, Ragged Edge Community Network Society will become wholly independent from Community Futures Mount Waddington. This will only happen when the organization has completed it's build-out phase and is financially viable enough to proceed independently.

Communities

Coal Harbour – Coal Harbour is an unincorporated community in electoral Area C located on Holberg Inlet. This town is located on North Vancouver Island, 13 kilometres from Port Hardy. Today Coal Harbour is an unincorporated community of approximately 450 persons (1996 census). Due to its strategic location, and the highway link to Port Hardy, Coal Harbour has developed as a marine gateway to Quatsino Sound and the west coast. It also serves as both a residential area and service center for the fishing, forestry, and aquaculture industries.

At present, the community is semi-rural in character and although only a limited range of public and commercial services is available, the area has significant suitability and attraction as a living environment.

Quatsino First Nations - The Quatsino First Nation is located on North Vancouver Island about 20 Kilometres west of Port Hardy, near Coal Harbour. The Band covers 346 hectares and services nineteen Reserves.

The band is in the treaty process and is currently in Stage 3 working within the Winalagalis Treaty Group. The band has about 250 members living on reserve with about 50 living off reserve. The band has three shellfish tenures on Holberg Inlet. They hold a crab license and dog fish license and own a boat for these activities.

Zeballos - Zeballos is accessible via 42 kilometers (26 miles) of gravel road. From Port Hardy, the 126-kilometer trip takes about two hours. Zeballos has a current population of 232 people with 99 households and 10 active businesses.

Today Zeballos is a logging town. Western Forest Products Ltd. is the main employer and there are three fish farms down the inlet providing steady work at the ice plant for a dozen or so.

Tourism is beginning to make itself felt as the more adventuresome travelers tackle the 40 km gravel road to enjoy the natural beauty of the area. Located at the head of Zeballos Inlet, the town offers great opportunity for kayakers, canoers, hikers, fishermen and scuba divers.

Most of the village, along with the population of the two neighboring Native reserves, Oculucje and Ehatis are employed in the forest industry, with Western Forest Products. Small business, fish and oyster farming are also an important part of the local economy.

Previous Activities

Community Futures Mount Waddington has been working on the high-speed Internet project since 2004. Understanding that there was need for an administrative arm for the project, Ragged Edge Community Network Society was formed in 2005. Ragged Edge Community Network Society has launched all prior projects and is currently running in four North Island communities. Those communities (Sointula, Holberg, Hyde Creek and Old Quatsino) are at varying stages of development. Holberg has had high-speed Internet service for approximately 18 months, Sointula for about one year while Old Quatsino has just in the last 2 months received high-speed service.

Construction and related activities

Marketing: Information and pre-marketing meetings are to be held during the first weeks of September 2007. The aim of these meetings is to make the general community aware of the progress to date, to seek volunteers for the ongoing work and to obtain commitments from the expected core subscribers.

Site surveys and final planning: September – October, 2007. Sites previously identified will be propagation tested and rights of way finalized. During the CNIG application field work two or more sites were identified for each community along with agreement in principle from the owners or responsible agencies.

Raising Towers and distributing signal would take place over the fall of 2007.

The timetable for subscriber uptake and network launch in these communities would be the summer and into the winter of 2007. The exact timing will be dependant on the availability of connections and equipment.

Trouble-shooting, revising the network and operational “tweaking” would take place from the fall into spring of 2008.

Economic benefits

Quality of life and the local economy will be improved. Specifically, the following is expected:

- support for current business activity and an increase in new business formation in the emerging sectors of the economy such as tourism, aquaculture, arts, crafts and cultural activities, and in web based and other services.
- immigration to these areas by semi-retired, retired individuals as well as individuals who are looking for alternative living environments, lifestyles, and a quality of life based on rural and community values who need broadband access to generate an income while retaining links to the rest of Canada and the world.
- improved access to services, and goods through e-commerce. Banking, paying bills, and retail shopping could be done on line, and with the convenience of not having to travel to out of town.
- increased investment, increased use of web-based education and training, increased job creation and employment opportunities, and improved community participation and collaboration in events and activities.