

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room 2 and via MS Teams
February 15, 2024 at 5:34 pm

Present: Councillor Zac de Vries (Chair) (6:01 p.m.), Jason Arruda, Raymond Chan, Amber Hockin, Patrick Marshall, Richard Michaels (5:47 p.m.), Jesse O'Neill-Bains; Tim Petropoulos and Rob Wickson

Staff: Mitchell Edgar, Economic Development Manager; Sharon Froud, Deputy Corporate Officer; and Megan MacDonald, Senior Committee Clerk

Regrets: Victoria Shannon

The Senior Committee Clerk called the meeting to order at 5:34 as the Chair was not present. Following committee discussion and consensus, committee member A. Hockin assumed the Chair.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

MOVED by R. Wickson and Seconded by R. Chan: "That the Minutes of the October 4, 2023 Economic Development Advisory Committee meeting be approved."

CARRIED

ROUNDTABLE INTRODUCTIONS

Roundtable introductions of committee members and staff took place.

REVIEW OF MEETING DATES AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The 2024 meeting dates and Economic Development Advisory Committee Terms of Reference were reviewed. The following was noted during committee discussion:

- The meeting dates generally work for members, aside from one conflict.
- The committee will have an advisory role for Saanich, however economic development is a regional initiative.
- Participation will increase as the Economic Development Strategy moves forward.
- Committee members who wish to have an item or presentation on the agenda can email the Chair and the Committee Clerk, who will consider inclusion on a future agenda.

CHAIR'S REMARKS

Economic Development is a relatively new concept in Saanich, Staff have done wonderful things so far and the Chair is looking forward to future work with members of the committee.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND WORKPLAN DISCUSSION

The Economic Development Manager gave an update on the Economic Development Strategy (EDS) which was recently adopted by Council (PowerPoint on file). The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- Agricultural tourism is a growing sector which may provide more tourism opportunities.
- The Flavor Trail is an initiative which provides interested people with ideas for farms and farm stands which they can visit. The businesses currently on the Flavor Trail include Central Saanich and North Saanich, this initiative will add more Saanich farms and businesses to the Trail. Creating attractions on the Saanich Peninsula will help bring more visitors to Saanich and promote longer stays.
- The Gardens at the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific is one example of a Saanich attraction which has potential for more tourism visitors.
- An industrial land directory detailing industrial land, and the municipal and provincial policies as they apply to each area would be beneficial. Protecting these areas is important as these businesses are essential to the community, for example car repair shops.
- Efforts to stop the development of industrial land and preserve existing land is needed.
- Intelligent communities are of interest to committee members. More information on these would be appreciated.
- The Province is not willing to take action to preserve industrial lands, there has been a push for housing which conflicts with retaining these important spaces.
- An industrial land inventory would be greatly beneficial to help understand what exists and where it is located. If an inventory was created, it could be used in conjunction with the Regional Growth Strategy and other documents to facilitate preservation of existing land and prioritize growth in areas where industrial space is needed.
- The Province could be encouraged to enact legislation for municipalities to promote food focused industrial use for agricultural lands which are not usable for farming.
- Industrial service providers moving out of Saanich is problematic.
- Cycling in Greater Victoria has tourism potential, these networks can be better marketed, and additional facilities added to create a bigger cycle trail with attractions.
- Development of a business visitation program is essential to understand the benefits and challenges of doing business in Saanich. This information and building these personal relationships will improve the services we provide and promote new business.
- Agricultural tourism is a sector with plenty of opportunity to grow.
- Making connections with business owners and helping them connect to other local businesses is a beneficial way to network and support the community.
- Providing great service to local businesses will in turn attract new businesses as they believe Saanich to be a business-friendly community. Stories coming from the community will help lift the strategy.
- The budget this year will involve difficult decisions, as the proposed tax increase needs to be considered. Council will need to be selective, however one staff person is not sufficient.
- The potential for a life sciences wet lab in Saanich is of interest. Life Sciences is an important target growth sector for Saanich.
- There are many Saanich residents within the industry and several important companies and start ups in Saanich and much of the commercialization of R&D in the sector is spinning out of the University of Victoria (UVic).
- The Province has provided funding to launch the wet lab project. Saanich helped facilitate the process.
- Saanich has the potential to be a high value business community, with high paid employment, and plenty of export, which means more money coming in.

- Utilizing small scale agriculture and helping these farms become more diverse in their offerings is one growing area which Saanich can help farms improve greatly on.
- Resources to fund the Economic Development Office will generate revenue for the District.
- There may be opportunities to work with regional partners to maximize synergies, leverage time and reduce the impact on the limited budget for all.
- Creating new economic opportunity also involves finding items which are in demand. One example is health care, which has a huge budget federally and provincially. There are opportunities to find other items in demand and build on them as well.

The Economic Development Manager gave an update on the Economic Development Strategy Workplan (memo on file). The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- Much of this work is building relationships to plant seeds for the future. This includes outreach and discussions on projects with local business owners.
- The workplan is broken into categories in the memo. One of the most important aspects to a vibrant local economy is the business retention and expansion program.
- The development of a customer relationship management (CRM) system for staff to produce reports that detail the relationship between the District and business owners is important. This foundational piece will help identify how to help attract and retain business.
- Expanding the Flavor Trail into Saanich will help attract tourists.

***Committee member R. Wickson exited the meeting at 7:01 p.m. ***

Further committee discussion ensued with the following comments:

- An additional staff member could create revenue from the film industry, work on the business retention/expansion program and manage administrative duties.
- Eventually building the division to 3 staff members over a five year horizon would be ideal.
- Resource requests have been put forward for \$68,000 for projects and a second request for an additional full-time equivalent (FTE) position for a new staff member.
- Council needs to consider funding the resource requests to move the Economic Development Strategy forward.
- Having an additional staff member will help to support, retain, expand local businesses, attract new business, and further the tax base. There are tangible items to be achieved.

MOVED by A. Hockin and Seconded by T. Petropoulos: “That the Economic Development Advisory Committee endorse the Economic Development Workplan and recommend Council:

- **Support the Economic Development resource requests as outlined in the memo of the Economic Development Manager dated February 8, 2024; and**
- **Support the Resource request for one additional FTE for the Economic Development Division.”**

CARRIED

BUSINESS VISITATION PROGRAM

The Economic Development Manager gave an overview of the potential for a business visitation program, which may involve staff visiting local businesses along with a committee member. This would build relationships and provide valuable insight into the business community. The following was noted in response to questions and during committee discussion:

- This is a great opportunity for committee members to get involved by visiting businesses.
- Doing so would give a sense of what businesses currently exist, how they serve the community interests and what can be done to support them.
- Measure outcomes and reporting the information will be important. Staff will come up with metrics and a way to report them in the new software, if obtained.
- Committee members were encouraged to visit the new Hello Saanich website, which is the District's new online outreach and engagement tool.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion from T. Petropoulos, the meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place Thursday May 16 at 5:30 p.m.

Chair

I hereby certify these Minutes are accurate.

Committee Secretary