

**EDG Bulletin Article**  
**PNEDC Conference**  
**August 14, 2008**

Nanaimo Economic Development Group was recently one of the proud sponsors of the first multi-day conference in the new Vancouver Island Conference Centre. Hosted by the Pacific Northwest Economic Development Council, delegates were welcomed to Nanaimo from July 20-23, generating an approximate \$85,000 into the local economy.

A key part of Nanaimo's Community Economic Development Strategy is to create a positive reputation for Nanaimo outside of the region. This was achieved as 65 delegates from British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Georgia and Hawaii met to discuss and learn about key economic issues impacting the Pacific Northwest. Many delegates brought their families and extended their stay, or were so impressed with our community they planned to return for a vacation.

Speakers included Helmut Pastrick, Chief Economist from the Credit Union Central of BC who gave his outlook on the US and Canada economic relationship and Dr. David Hill, of the Idaho National Laboratory who spoke about global energy consumption and the importance of a diversified primary fuel supply to support economic prosperity.

Local economic development best practices were also shared. Amrit Manhas, Research Analyst for Nanaimo Economic Development explained the City's Business Retention and Expansion Strategy and its importance to the community, since existing businesses generate up to 80% of new employment. Dave Mannix, Economic Development Officer for the Snuneymuxw First Nation and Ian Howat, Director of Legislative Services for the City of Nanaimo spoke about the historic protocol agreement signed between the two parties and its provisions for economic development opportunities, municipal services and land use planning and development.

Delegates were taken on three tours featuring Oliver Woods Community Centre, Inuktun Services Ltd., and Nanaimo's revitalized downtown. Inuktun Services Ltd. is a small Nanaimo company with 30 full-time employees and significant ties to the US. They are known world-wide for their innovative mobile robotic systems and provided search-and-rescue remote-operated robots to the 9/11 Rescue Team at the World Trade Centre.

Downtown revitalization is a key component of many communities' economic development strategies, and delegates learned how in just four years, downtown Nanaimo has gone from boarded-up buildings to offering boutique shopping, many food choices, and a world-class conference centre. Representatives offered their expertise on topics such as heritage improvement grants, development cost charge exemptions and community policing.

With climate change on the forefront, Oliver Woods Community Centre was also an interesting tour, showcasing Nanaimo's commitment to offering a new community centre which meets LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver Classification, utilizing water efficient plumbing, native plant species on the grounds, and recycled timber.

Building on the success of the first multi-day conference, the VICC is now ready to host more upcoming events such as a 400-person Municipal Information Systems Association conference in September. Nanaimo can look forward to continued economic spin-off from this and other conferences booked well into the future, which contributes to why we call Nanaimo one of the most desirable, livable small cities in North America.