



## **Nanaimo Economic Development Group Industry Roundtable Series**

### **Summary Report**

Outcomes of roundtable consultations with leaders in the Retail, Technology and Tourism sectors in Nanaimo.

Thanks to our community partners (Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce, Mid Island Science, Technology and Innovation Council and Tourism Nanaimo)

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## **Background**

Starting in late 2008, the downturn in the global economy affected businesses across Canada. To gauge the level of impact locally, the City of Nanaimo's Economic Development Office surveyed business owners on different factors contributing to overall business confidence including investment and staffing plans, as well as product or service demand.

Although nearly 79% (817) of businesses who responded to the survey predicted their overall situation to be the same or better in one year, the Nanaimo Economic Development Group (EDG) saw the need to engage the 21% (217) who were not as confident, and identify ways to assist them. The EDG Industry Roundtable Series was created to discuss sector-specific issues and opportunities.

## **Process**

EDG partnered with a local stakeholder organization for each industry roundtable. Partnerships included the Mid Island Science, Technology & Innovation Council (MISTIC) for the Technology Roundtable, Tourism Nanaimo for the Tourism Roundtable, and the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce for the Retail Roundtable. Invitations were targeted to ensure an adequate cross-representation from each sector, and a focused discussion with leaders, business owners, and decision makers. Participants were asked to discuss challenges/opportunities which their respective industry was facing and to recommend ways which EDG and its community partners could assist.

In addition, the importance of wellness in the workplace emerged as a common theme in each of the industry sectors. In response, EDG partnered with the Chamber to host a Wellness in the Workplace Seminar where businesses shared strategies and best practices.

## **Outcomes / Summary**

Key opportunities, challenges and actionable recommendations were identified by each sector and are listed in this report. In response, projects were undertaken by EDG and its partners, and businesses were made aware of existing projects and initiatives. In addition, the recommendations will aid the Economic Development Group's Steering Committee to develop its 2010 workplan and implement new projects with its partners to assist local businesses address the challenges as identified. EDG will continue to collaborate with stakeholder organizations to host industry roundtables in other economic sectors in 2010.

## **Retail Sector**

### **Opportunities:**

Lifestyle continues to draw new residents  
Destination marketing and tourism infrastructure improvements attract visitors  
Partnerships with businesses who share similar customer base  
Continued advertising will help businesses capture larger market share  
Large small business base with the ability to be flexible  
Optimism among local business owners

### **Challenges:**

Market shifts due to recession  
Negative messaging in media  
Reduced consumer confidence  
Health & wellbeing of employees  
Housing and transportation  
Businesses are forced to streamline, and sometimes layoff valuable staff

### **Recommendations:**

1. Undertake positive messaging campaigns in community
2. Host health & wellness workshops for employers
3. Create awareness of business services available in the community

### **Outcomes to-date:**

1. City of Nanaimo's Business Information Guide available at Chamber of Commerce and Nanaimo Economic Development Office
2. EDG Positive Messaging Committee created to disseminate good-news stories, and develop image and reputation strategy beginning in 2010
3. EDG and Chamber of Commerce held Wellness in the Workplace Roundtable to discuss/share strategies
4. Transportation Task Force is doing a scoping study to identify areas of transportation on Vancouver Island that need to be addressed via a full Vancouver Island Transportation Strategy

## **Tourism Sector**

### **Opportunities:**

Lifestyle and location

Infrastructure improvements (airport, cruise ship terminal, VI Conference Centre, etc.)

Unique tourism products (WildPlay, floatplanes, diving, etc.)

Proximity to 2010 Olympics in Vancouver

Municipal investment in destination marketing

Leveraging advertising dollars with local tourism organizations

### **Challenges:**

Global recession

Transportation infrastructure

Decline in Vancouver Island Conference Centre bookings

Decline in tourist visitations and hotel occupancy rates

Insufficient number of hotel rooms to accommodate maximum capacity of convention facilities

Labour shortage indicated by several attendees

Negative publicity, local and elsewhere

Need destination development, tourism product development

Cooperation of businesses during cruise ship visits and conferences

### **Recommendations:**

1. Workshops to inform retail community of tourism opportunities (i.e. cruise ship visits, VICC)
2. Market Nanaimo as a hub city
3. Host hospitality job fair
4. Promote good news stories in community and elsewhere

### **Outcomes to-date:**

1. Transportation Task Force developing scoping study which will identify transportation links on Vancouver Island which need to be addressed/improved
2. City of Nanaimo investing in Destination Marketing, Destination Development and Downtown Revitalization
3. City of Nanaimo creating Wi-Fi visitor exit survey in Departure Bay Ferry line-up to gather experience feedback which will be distributed to tourism stakeholders
4. EDG Positive Messaging Committee to share good news stories locally

## **Technology Sector**

### **Opportunities:**

Co-location/cluster with similar technology businesses  
Collaboration with Vancouver Island University and other education providers  
Lifestyle can draw quality skilled workers and tech entrepreneurs

### **Challenges:**

Rise of Canadian dollar makes it difficult to bid on US Government contracts  
'Buy American' policy  
Cross-border policy can make small-business travel difficult  
Nanaimo's perception outside of the region can deter skilled workers to relocate here

### **Recommendations:**

1. Create a technology park to cluster similar/complementary businesses
2. Improve Nanaimo's image via a marketing campaign
3. Market the region including businesses' positive success stories
4. Increase networking opportunities between tech entrepreneurs
5. Install wireless technology throughout the entire region

### **Outcomes to-date:**

1. City of Nanaimo invited tech businesses to input session in order to incorporate needs of the Technology sector in the revised Zoning Bylaw
2. EDG formed Positive Messaging Committee to disseminate success stories
3. Destination Nanaimo's 'Amazing Nanaimo' multi-media marketing campaign targeting Vancouver Island, Lower Mainland, and Alberta
4. MISTIC is organizing a Science, Technology & Innovation Tradeshow in November 2009
5. City of Nanaimo establishing wireless access in Departure Bay, downtown, and Newcastle Island areas
6. EDG formed a Networking Committee to identify range of meeting opportunities currently offered