

EDG Bulletin Article June 12, 2008

Challenge of Change a Success

On June 4, 2008, over 60 people attended the Challenge of Change Forum at the Coast Bastion Inn. They were reminded of Nanaimo's ability to weather economic changes due to its commitment to a diversified economic strategy. Representatives of six major economic sectors in Nanaimo gave presentations explaining the changes they are facing, and the opportunities these changes will invite.

This year, the sectors profiled were forestry, retail, education, knowledge-base, aboriginal economic development and tourism. As keynote speaker, Mike Hooper brought 26 years' experience working for forest companies and offered his insight into the current state of the forest sector in Nanaimo.

Hooper explained some reasons for the downturn in the coastal forest industry, including outdated technology geared toward old growth logs, the need for more nimble harvesting equipment that could access steep-grade forests and government policies which base the selling price for logs on the raw log values, instead of pricing the logs based on the end of the production line when value has been added such as for windows or doors. The Province bases the stumpage price for logs on only those that are delivered into a scale site, which results in more fibre and stumpage left in the forest. Lower value timber, and non-timber forest products such as salal and edible berries remain in the forest instead of being harvested. He suggested that if the log price was based on the final product, it may encourage more multi-use mills creating value-added products. Despite the drastic fall of housing starts in the United States, he is confident that because of continued world population growth projections, the market will come back. He also noted that there is a growing market in Asia, as many of these countries increase their economic standing.

Jolynn Green, a Tourism Nanaimo director and owner of Peppermuffin Country Inn spoke to the group about Nanaimo's growing Tourism industry. Nanaimo was listed in the top 25 in Canadian destinations based on stories and reviews from visitors. Jolynn is pleased visitors are enjoying the Harbour City, but according to Tourism Nanaimo's 2007 visitor statistics, 79% of visitors did not stay the night in Nanaimo. "This needs to change and hopefully the airport expansion, new cruise ship terminal, opening of Port of Nanaimo Centre and new tourism providers will encourage people to stay the night, which brings dollars into the community," Green said. She also reminded us that Tourism Nanaimo is a great resource for locals to discover Nanaimo, be a tourist in their own town and be reminded of attractions such as Nanaimo's jewel in the harbour, Newcastle Island Provincial Marine Park.

A critical role of the Economic Development Group is to help generate greater public understanding of the key issues impacting the Nanaimo economy. Pat Ahern, co-chair of EDG says, "The Challenge of Change event hosted by EDG was a wonderful opportunity to connect with Nanaimo residents and provide insight into critical challenges facing many sectors of the economy, and help folks participate in shaping the future." It's public events such as the annual Challenge of Change which contribute to making Nanaimo one of the most desirable, livable small cities in North America.