

Towards Sustainable Community Economic Health

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Salt Spring's Community Economic Development Commission (CEDC) embraced new directions in 2018. We focused on initiatives that facilitated collaboration, coordination and advocacy on behalf of our island's economic health and well-being.

Here's an overview of the areas we expanded into and the progress we've achieved in 2018.

Championing Entrepreneurship Across All Economic Sectors

Much of Salt Spring's economic culture is shaped by resilience and a do-it-yourself ingenuity. We are a community comprised of smaller businesses and many micro-businesses, with the vast majority being sole proprietors. Many of these entrepreneurs create and produce a variety of products that are becoming known near and far as unique to Salt Spring.

Being an entrepreneur is hard work and can be isolating. Through our experience with the *Rural Business Accelerator Program*, we know that most local small business operators are busy working "in" their business, and don't have a lot of time to work "on" their business. CEDC is helping our entrepreneurs find ways to "group-export" items and leverage the value of the Salt Spring brand. When Island entrepreneurs are able to focus on growing their business and not juggling one or two jobs to stay afloat, then year-round employment, income, and financial security can be a reality – certainly good medicine for community economic health.

Partnering With Agriculture

Salt Spring's agricultural sector is the Island's economic mainstay. We are strong advocates of the work of the *Farmland Trust* and are active in supporting the creation of 'The Root' facility. Through the *Rural Business Accelerator, Phase-II*, and through our initiative to build a shared business services program for Island entrepreneurs, the inter-relationship between food growers, producers and sellers can be leveraged for the benefit the entire agricultural sector and our overall economy.

Attracting Green Business

On a macro-level freelancing, start-ups and working remotely offers working-age people the option to work anywhere and live anywhere. This growing lifestyle trend increases the attractiveness of a Salt Spring location. We believe "green" business providers are part of this trend and can thrive here. To support this goal CEDC, in 2019, will be building the foundation for a *Rural Green Business-Learning Lab*. Through this pilot project Salt Spring will host and model green business solutions and opportunities for rural communities. Salt Spring will serve as a demonstration centre for ways green business best practices can produce innovative and sustainable economic solutions for rural communities across British Columbia.

A Demographic Succession Plan

CEDC is keenly aware of the aging demographic of our island and we are seeking ways to diversify our economy so that families at all life stages can live and flourish here. Through our social media channels, networking and information sharing we are exploring ways to encourage non-islanders to move here in their younger years, particularly those who are self-employed or self-employable. Additionally, we're supporting initiatives, such as a youth entrepreneurship program via School District 64, where dual credit transferable skills and self-employment training will be offered to encourage youth to remain here after high school, or return to Salt Spring after post-secondary studies.

Evidence-Based Decision Making And Using A Strategic Approach

Due to our status as a regional district, it can be difficult to find data that accurately captures the economic reality of Salt Spring Island. Most of the data about Salt Spring is grouped with Vancouver Island and doesn't reflect our reality. To begin to remedy this gap, we recently completed an economic profile of Salt Spring Island. This data will form the basis of an updated economic strategy that will enable us to fully analyze gaps, explore needs, identify opportunities and focus on meaningful economic solutions.

Towards A Longer Gentler Visitor Season

A giant step forward towards achieving a sustainably managed tourism industry in the Salt Spring – Southern Gulf Islands Region was achieved in 2018. CEDC worked with the Southern Gulf Islands Economic Commission, the Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands Chambers of Commerce and the local CRD, to gain support of the majority of our Region's commercial tourism accommodators and tourism sector for the Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT). Beginning sometime in 2019, the MRDT program will provide a much needed boost to year-round revenues. The elected tourism sector board of the *Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership Society*, guided by a strategic business plan, will be responsible for implementing more seasonally balanced economic activity and diversity while ensuring greater conservation of our precious natural resources, and more satisfying destination experiences for both visitors and residents alike.

Coordinated Advocacy For Permanent Rural Designation

Over the years Salt Spring and the Southern Gulf Islands have been incorrectly categorized as urban due to inclusion in the Capital Regional District. This urban label has prohibited Salt Spring and the Southern Gulf Islands from having access to millions of dollars of rural economic improvement programs designed to support rural and island coastal communities. In 2018, through a coordinated advocacy campaign, we have and are successfully working with government staff at the regional, provincial and federal level, as well as elected officials, to move our Region fully into the permanent rural status category at several levels:

- **Rural Dividend Fund** – This program is intended to support rural communities with building their economic strategies and capacity. When the program was launched we were excluded from this \$50 million program. We advocated for inclusion and we were granted an exemption. This benefitted our Commission and it also opened the door for other organizations to apply, such as the Farmland Trust. We are awaiting formal statement from the provincial government that confirms permanent rural designation for the Rural Dividend.
- **Islands Coastal Economic Trust (ICET)** – Has supported coastal communities with economic improvement program funding since 2006. Millions of dollars have been expended, yet not to our island coastal region. Happily, we are now at a point of being reviewed by the Province for inclusion. Notice of inclusion is expected to be announced mid-2019.
- **Community Futures** – This 30-year federal program provides funding for business training and loans to rural communities across Canada. Again, Salt Spring was excluded. Recently we held initial dialogue with local and federal representatives to explore aligning our Region with the Cowichan Valley Community Futures location.

In summary, 2018 was a very productive year, thanks to the dedication and hard work of CEDC Commissioners, the support of CRD staff and the CRD Director. As we move into 2019, we are continuing – to build meaningful partnerships with all economic sectors – to become more flexible in our ability to innovate and develop economic products and services – to access funding for programs that support our rural protected environment. And, above all, we seek to connect with the entire community in achieving the vibrant, diverse, and sustainable economy we all desire for Salt Spring Island.

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