

Mid Island Business Initiative
Recommendations for Future Economic Development
(July 18, 2019)

About MIBI:

- a) MIBI was formed as a BC Society in February 2017 to raise awareness of the region to attract and facilitate businesses to locate or invest here. The geographic reach is Ladysmith to Qualicum Beach.
- b) Having immense pride in this place where we all live and do business, and valuing the opportunities for success and balance; our aim is to continue to facilitate the growth of this region by inviting and helping other companies find their success and achieve their goals.
- c) MIBI is currently funded by 15 community business and organizations. Its sole employee is a half time CEO. Even with this limited financial and human capacity, we have achieved significant success in advancing the awareness of our region and its competitive advantages.
- d) Notwithstanding these achievements, we recognize that much more work needs to be done to build a vibrant local economy.
- e) The following recommendations represent the collective views of our membership augmented with input from two round table discussions which we convened in January and April this year.
- f) We have appreciated and enjoyed the opportunity to meet with Allan Neilson in his role of consultant to the City. Our recommendations are intended to be considered alongside those he presents.

Why Economic Development:

- a) A successful local economy is one which employs its own children and enables its families to prosper.
- b) It supports existing jobs and facilitates the creation of new, family sustaining jobs.
- c) The drivers of our local economy continue to change in response to local conditions and global forces. Witness the shift from resource based jobs to knowledge based jobs just in the last 50 years
- d) Central Island competes with regions within North America and throughout the world for these family sustaining jobs
- e) To be successful, we need to identify and continually refine our competitive advantages and then actively help existing and new organizations develop new jobs in our region
- f) This is a long term game and requires focussed and determined efforts to generate results

- g) The term economic gardening is often applied to the process of helping existing organizations preserve and grow their jobs. The process of identifying the appropriate crop, preparing the ground, planting the seeds, fertilizing, watering, weathering droughts and pests, harvesting and then repeating the process parallels the steps of economic development.

Services to be Delivered by the New Economic Development Organization (“New EDO”):

- a) Research and analyze global, national and regional factors to identify our competitive advantages. Doing so will help us to identify the employment sectors where we can effectively compete and where to focus our efforts.
- b) Establish base line data in key areas by which to measure future progress.
- c) Actively support our region’s existing businesses and organizations helping them to maintain and grow their employment base. This includes helping them to overcome challenges which inhibit the growth of their enterprise so that we can encourage them to remain in the region.
- d) Enhance availability of human capital to meet the needs of existing organizations and identified new employment sectors.
- e) Identify the current infrastructure challenges which need to be addressed in order for us to successfully attract jobs in the identified employment sectors. This may include education programs, transportation enhancements, communications upgrades or hospitality capacity. New EDO needs to actively champion those changes.
- f) Provide input regarding municipal policy, planning and services necessary to support development of new jobs.
- g) Study the efforts employed to develop a circular economy in other jurisdictions and incorporate best practices in our growth and development strategy.
- h) Collaborate with and encourage input from all other community organizations who have an interest in and contribution to economic development. To ensure the efficient use of scarce resources and avoid duplication of efforts, New EDO will be responsible for coordinating the economic development efforts of these organizations.
- i) Ensure visibility of New EDO through regular reporting on activities to the citizens of Nanaimo, the City and other funding partners, including a formal quarterly report to Council. As part of reporting, help the citizens of Nanaimo understand the benefits effective economic development can provide for their families.
- j) Actively promote our City and region together with its competitive advantages. This promotion should be both broad based and targeted at prospects in our targeted employment sectors.
- k) Act as the front door for prospective new employers and facilitate both connections and information exchange. Collaborate closely with the City staff and Council to encourage qualified prospects. These, our prospects, need to be nurtured and assisted with the intent of getting them to locate here and build our employment base.
- l) Where necessary, act quickly in an entrepreneurial fashion to create solutions to identified impediments faced by potential employers or for the needed changes to infrastructure.

Organizational Structure:

- a) We recommend that New EDO be independent organization which operates under a Formal Agreement with the City and is supported by City staff. New EDO must be proactive, sustainable, nimble and outcomes based.
- b) We anticipate that the City will continue to provide some economic development functions including data gathering and assisting with promotion (Concierge services).
- c) New EDO must have sufficient permanence to allow it to attract and maintain qualified staff. The collective knowledge and experience of the organizations staff will be critical to delivering on the objectives set for the organization.
- d) The legal form of the New EDO and Agreement with the City must permit entrepreneurial activity including borrowing and investing when such activities can generate long term gains for the community.
- e) The contract with the City should be multi-year, performance based and structured so as to avoid short-term political interference.
- f) While the majority of operational funding would come from the City, other stakeholders would contribute funding and resources for specific initiatives or projects
- g) We recommend that City Council have “noses in but fingers out”. Working collaboratively with the community organizations having an interest in and contribution to economic development, the City Council will establish specific objectives and deliverables for New EDO but will then leave governance to the board of directors.
- h) As New EDO becomes established, it would be appropriate to consider expanding the membership to include the Regional District of Nanaimo and its member municipalities.

Governance and Staffing:

- a) We recommend that New EDO be governed by an independent board of 9 appointed directors ensuring the appropriate mix of skills and experience to support the objectives set for the organization.
- b) The City would appoint one member of City staff as a board member.
- c) The board would have the facility to establish advisory panels for specific issues or projects.
- d) We propose that initial staffing would consist of a CEO, two managers and one admin support position. One manager would be responsible for helping grow existing businesses together with action on infrastructure development and policy adjustment. The second manager would be responsible for new business attraction and promotion of our competitive advantages. This structure may be refined as the Agreement is finalized.
- e) Progress against objectives and appropriate staffing to be reviewed at the end of the first 12 months of operations.

Next Steps:

- a) We recommend that the City strike a task force comprised of City representatives and community stakeholders with adequate funding and resources to finalize the vision for New EDO, legal form, operating Agreement terms, and board structure for the New EDO.
- b) Members of MIBI are fully prepared to participate in this task force but we also recommend that other community stakeholders including Snuneymuwx First Nation, Chamber of Commerce, Community Futures and VIEA be invited to participate too.
- c) Once the City has finalized the terms of the Agreement in collaboration with the task force, we recommend that the task force recommend, for City approval, the initial board of directors who would be responsible for forming the New EDO, finalizing the Agreement with the City and hiring the staff.