



Roundtable Meeting Backgrounder

Roundtable Meetings were started in January 2015 as a result of feedback from a membership survey that people wanted more opportunity to engage and mobilize around business issues and initiatives. The idea behind the Roundtable process is that the membership can come together in an open, sharing environment to discuss issues affecting the business and community and to strategize ways and means to improve conditions. While discussions at Roundtable meetings tend to build on one another it's easy for a member to get up to speed and join in the process whenever one's interest peaks. In an effort to bring newcomers up to speed (or remind participants where we left off) the following is a brief review (in reverse chronological order) of the discussions that have happened in past meetings. If you would like further information on the Roundtable process please do not hesitate to contact Mark Drysdale, Chamber Manager, by email at mark@ladysmithcofc.com or by phone at (250) 245-2112.

Meeting 5:

On January 27, 2016, following the work of those gathered on September 23, 2015 to review the 57 'Actions' identified in the 'Town of Ladysmith 2008-2012 Economic Development Strategic Plan and who developed a shortlist of 4 priority projects, another small group met to begin the process of identifying detailed steps required in order to effectively pursue two of the four projects: (1) Recruit a Major Attraction and/or Hotel and (2) Tourism Product Development and Packaging.

Priority Action Short List:

1. Recruit a Major Attraction and/or Hotel (G2:01:PG3)
 - Background Thinking – prospective visitors need reasons to stay as well as places to stay. Which comes first may be more circumstantial than strategic. Both are desired.
 - i. Have a Chamber committee develop a strategic action plan to bring a music & arts focus;
 - ii. Use/develop the water side of the highway for a music & arts centre – funky, old-fashioned workshop/performance space – Expos legacy building might be a starting place;
 - iii. Identify available land and create a business plan which might include studio space to provide a core business 'anchor';
 - iv. Sell concepts to City Council identifying barriers needing attention and work required to move community forward—welcoming business and development;
 - v. Develop a feasibility plan for a project with mid-Island reach – perhaps also attracting film industry;
 1. This might be a school that teaches art, music, film and attracts teachers, students, performers, festivals, etc.

- vi. Find partners – e.g. VIU, to program (little arts campus) – perhaps a VIU satellite;
 - vii. Include shops, food & beverage amenities in the centre;
 - viii. Develop or improve accessibility via walkway crossing the highway or via existing tunnel;
2. Tourism Product Development and Packaging (G1:03:PG2)
- Background Thinking – The volunteers felt that the community needs a ‘hook’ and that effective packaging of what already exists and developing more product to complement was most important so that the community has something tangible to market/sell.
 - i. Take an inventory of existing tourism product offerings;
 - ii. Identify target markets – At what cost? What resources are available?
 - iii. Explore accommodation partnerships – e.g. Ladysmith B&Bs, Nanaimo and Victoria hotels;
 - iv. Develop a budget and find funding to get started – co-op of operators, government/municipal seed funding;
 - v. B&Bs already work together. Develop an attraction pamphlet to distribute with B&Bs;
 - vi. Develop a calendar of events and post of Chamber website. Broadcast the existence of the calendar and encourage links from City, operators, B&Bs, etc.

Worth Noting:

- While the plans identified above should be considered for the future it was generally recognized that these two tasks probably required more resources than could presently be brought to bear by the Chamber or the community.
- The next Roundtable meeting will be focused on the exploration of the remaining two identified priorities, namely: (1) Cost of Doing Business Research; (2) Business Climate Survey (‘Business Walk’). The feeling among many of those in attendance in previous meetings is that one or both of these priorities is likely to be the “low hanging fruit”, that is, the project(s) that the Chamber has the capacity and resources to successfully complete and that will have a meaningful impact on the economic conditions in the community.
- Other insights from the days deliberations included:
- “We’re competing with lots of pretty places. We need an attraction and a way to stay overnight.” Those gathered in January noted that the logical and practical place to start would be to strengthen collective capacity to package and market attractions that already exist while also engaging related businesses such as B&Bs to participate in ‘selling’ the community.
- “More information is needed regarding the actual benefit of film location business. The anecdotal feedback from merchants is that filming downtown is NOT good for business.”
- “The Strategic Plan assumes the existence of an Economic Development Commission. Do we need to revisit this? Some of the proposed ‘Actions’ in the Plan are too far down the road; some are already being pursued by the City; some would require the hiring of consultants for which we may not be ready. Where will resources come from to enable economic development.”

Meeting 4:

On September 23, 2015 thirteen people volunteered their time and knowledge to review the 57 'Actions' identified in the 'Town of Ladysmith 2008-2012 Economic Development Strategic Plan. The objective of this review session was to develop a short list of priority actions from this plan so as to identify how to best use limited resources to affect positive change in the Ladysmith economy in the immediate term. The meeting was facilitated by George Hanson of Clayton Consulting.

The thirteen volunteers divided into four small groups that were each assigned 13-16 'Actions' from the Strategic Plan. The task of each group was to choose their top four 'Actions' from their assigned lists and then to choose their primary 'Action' from their short lists. Thus, from the 57 Actions identified in the Strategic Plan, 16 priorities were identified which were then narrowed to 4 priorities:

Priorities (in no particular order)(Letters/Numbers correspond with Strategic Plan):

1. Recruit a Major Attraction – G2:O1:PG3
2. Recruit a Hotel – G2:O1:PG3
3. Marine Sector Promotions and Communications – G2:O1:PG1
4. GIS Map project – G3:O1:PG1
5. Develop/Update Community Investment Profile – G3:O4:PG1
6. Marketing Materials for Business Attraction – G3:O4:PG1
7. Cost of Doing Business Research – G3:O4:PG2
8. Focused Marketing/Sales of a Few Specific Opportunities*
9. Resident/Business BRE Survey ('Business Walk') – G1:O1:PG1
10. Business Enabling Environmental Review – G1:O1:PG2
11. Regional Retail Expansion Group – G1:O2:PG1
12. Strategic Plan Evaluation – G5:O2:A1
13. Tourism Satisfaction Survey – G1:O3:PG4
14. Tourism Web Site – Development and Maintenance – G1:O3:PG2
15. Tourism product Development and Packaging – G1:O3:PG2
16. Development of Tourism Regional Partnerships – G1:O3:PG2

* This is a synthesis of several 'Actions' related to recruiting business investment and recognizing that this action should focus on developing a couple of specific business cases to be marketed to investment targets—'building one brick at a time' rather than a broad, generic 'come to Ladysmith approach.

Priority Short List:

3. Recruit a Major Attraction and/or Hotel
 - Background Thinking – prospective visitors need reasons to stay as well as places to stay. Which comes first may be more circumstantial than strategic. Both are desired.
4. Cost of Doing Business Research
 - Background Thinking – This emerged as a priority from items 5,6,7 & 8 in the list of 16 priorities (above) because the volunteers recognized that this research would be the first step needed to then proceed with the other three 'Actions' identified.
5. Resident/Business BRE Survey ('Business Walk')

- Background Thinking – This is ‘low hanging fruit’ because the Chamber and City are already committed to the Business Walk process.
6. Tourism Product Development and Packaging
- Background Thinking – The volunteers felt that the community needs a ‘hook’ and that effective packaging of what already exists and developing more product to complement was most important so that the community has something tangible to market/sell.

Worth Noting:

- “We’re competing with lots of pretty places. We need an attraction and a way to stay overnight.”
- “More information is needed regarding the actual benefit of film location business. The anecdotal feedback from merchants is that filming downtown is NOT good for business.”
- “The Strategic Plan assumes the existence of an Economic Development Commission. Do we need to revisit this? Some of the proposed ‘Actions’ in the Plan are too far down the road; some are already being pursued by the City; some would require the hiring of consultants for which we may not be ready. Where will resources come from to enable economic development.”

Next Meeting:

Further exploration of the 4 short listed priorities to determine if and what the Chamber of Commerce together with community partners might be able to do to have an impact.

Meeting 3:

The third Roundtable Meeting was held on Wednesday, March 25th at Ladysmith Little Theatre and was facilitated by George Hanson of Clayton Consulting. The meeting included presentations by volunteers who provided reviews of 15 economic development reports that had been produced over the past decade for the Town of Ladysmith. The objective was to try to find some initiatives, or “low hanging fruit”, that the Chamber could take on that would require minimal resources but provide significant impact.

One of the key outcomes of this meeting was the discovery of a Strategic Planning document covering the period of 2008-2012 that had been prepared by the now defunct Ladysmith Economic Development Commission. A cursory review of this document suggested that it was very thorough and much of it remained relevant. That is, the economic issues facing the community in 2008 were not so different than the issues of today. There were over 50 economic development projects outlined in this document ranging in scope, complexity and resource requirements. It was felt by those attending that there was a strong likelihood that within this collection of projects was the “low hanging fruit” that we were seeking.

It was determined that this Strategic Planning document would be distributed to Roundtable participants for their review and the subsequent meeting would involve a discussion and selection of the appropriate project to undertake.

Meeting 2:

Held on February 25th at the Ladysmith Little Theatre this meeting was facilitated by George Hanson of Clayton Consulting and, as requested, was focused on how the Chamber of Commerce (and partners) could or should be involved in Economic Development and what tasks/priorities made sense to tackle

over the next few months/years. Recommendations ranged from creating a business recruitment strategy to working with Town Council to develop a “can do,” friendly approach to business development and support. More support and resources for small business were seen as priorities too.

A key result of the meeting and a next step in coming up with a plan, was that members in attendance volunteered to review previously-produced Economic Development Reports, each would provide a brief synopsis, and be prepared to speak to these reports at the subsequent Roundtable Meeting. ..

Meeting 1:

Held on January 21, 2015 at Cottonwood Golf Course this meeting included a Powerpoint presentation about the Chambers programs and services and an overview of the Strategic Planning process that was the focus of the organization in 2014. This was followed by a free flowing discussion around the table about the issues that were most pressing for business at the present time and what the Chamber (and the community) might do to have a positive impact on these issues.

Issues and concerns regarding Economic Development predominated the discussion and the desire amongst those in attendance was to meet again soon to focus specifically on economic concerns.