

MEMORANDUM



DATE November 28, 2023 FROM Andrew Cuthbert RPP, MCIP
TO Chantal Wentland FILE 3893.0007.01
CC JP Raulot-Lapointe, Anna Sokolowski SUBJECT NCRD Sustainable Economic Development Strategy
What We Heard Report (Draft)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In August 2023, Urban Systems Ltd. (Urban Systems) was retained by the North Coast Regional District (NCRD) to prepare a Sustainable Economic Development Strategy for Electoral Areas A and C. The primary intent of the Strategy is to support economic development in the communities of Dodge Cove and Oona River. The Strategy will assist the NCRD in evaluating economic development capacity, needs, and opportunities in each community and outline recommendations for strategically directing NCRD efforts and resources into Electoral Areas A and C.

Urban Systems developed a communications and engagement program to support the preparation of the Strategy. Meaningful engagement with key stakeholders is vital to a) build a complete picture of the economy in the NCRD and b) to understand the economic needs and opportunities for the communities in Electoral Areas A and C so that appropriate tools and resources can be offered.

Over the past few months, Urban Systems, in collaboration with the NCRD, engaged community members, local business owners/operators, government agencies and First Nation partners on the project. Engagement was delivered through a series of activities, including letters, interviews, and in-person workshops. This What We Heard Report presents an overview of the engagement program and a summary of what was heard through each of the activities. This information will be used in the preparation of the Strategy. This report also includes a draft vision and guiding principles for the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy.

2.0 ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

2.1 LETTERS TO FIRST NATIONS

Including Indigenous perspectives in the preparation of the Sustainable Economic Development Strategy is a productive step towards reconciliation. The NCRD reached out to the following First Nation partners to discuss the project:

- Gitga'at First Nation
- Gitxaala First Nation – Gitxaala Enterprises
- Kitselas First Nation
- Kitsumkalum First Nation
- Lax Kw'alaams First Nation – Lax Kw'alaams Business Development LP
- Metlakatla First Nation – Metlakatla Development Corporation

2.2 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interviews were held with representatives from government agencies and local business owners/operators in the communities of Oona River and Dodge Cove. In total, nine (9) interviews have been held to date. Table 1 below presents the government agencies and local businesses that were interviewed.

Table 1: List of Stakeholders Interviewed

Government Agency	Date
District of Port Edward	August 15, 2023
Prince Rupert Port Authority	August 29, 2023
City of Prince Rupert – Planning, Transportation and Economic Development	August 31, 2023 September 12, 2023
Fisheries and Oceans Canada – Small Craft Harbours	October 24, 2023
Local Businesses (Oona River)	Date
Oona River Harbour Authority	August 28, 2023
Oona River Community Association	September 11, 2023
Community Hall	September 11, 2023
Active Pass Charters	September 12, 2023

2.3 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

In October 2023, two in-person community workshops were held to engage Oona River and Dodge Cove community members. The purpose of the workshops was to formally introduce the project and to learn more about the desires, challenges, and opportunities for sustainable economic development in each community.

The community workshops were two hours in length and attended by 28 community members in total.

Table 2: Community Workshop Details

Workshop	Date	Number of Participants
Dodge Cove	October 3, 2023 (6-8 pm)	6
Oona River	October 4, 2023 (10 am - 12 pm)	22

3.0 WHAT WE HEARD

3.1 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interviews with stakeholders revealed shared challenges and illuminated ideas and opportunities for improving local business operations in each community. A summary of what was heard from stakeholders in Dodge Cove and Oona River is presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: What we heard from stakeholders about Dodge Cove

DODGE COVE	
Challenges	Opportunities and Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited access and transportation options Harbour is at capacity Aging infrastructure Lack of servicing and infrastructure (road, waste collection) Unreliable cell/Internet service Limited properties readily available for new residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve access/transportation (charters) Expansion of outdoor ecotourism (short excursion-based activities, educational opportunities) Recreational property development Business licensing and database for record keeping Improved collaboration between government agencies and Electoral Areas (funding, marketing) Building/upgrading road from ferry drop-off Creating access to beaches on Digby Island Shoreline clean-up Different sized lots for different sized houses Attracting new residents

Table 4: What we heard from stakeholders about Oona River

OONA RIVER	
Challenges	Opportunities and Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access and transportation options • Harbour is at capacity • Balancing different users accessing very small harbour • Dredging is needed • Aging infrastructure • Lack of servicing and infrastructure (road, solid waste collection) • Unreliable cell/Internet service • Limited properties readily available for new residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access/transportation (charters) • Expansion of outdoor ecotourism and educational opportunities • Recreational property development • Business licensing and database for record keeping • Improved collaboration between government agencies and Electoral Areas (funding, marketing) • Shoreline clean-up • Different sized lots for different sized houses • Attracting new residents • Long-term harbour plan

3.2 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

The in-person community workshops offered an opportunity to discuss experiences and challenges with living and operating a business in the communities of Dodge Cove and Oona River. Community members also shared their ideas for improvements and opportunities to support the local economy. A summary of what was heard from community members in Dodge Cove and Oona River is presented in Tables 5 and 6. The feedback has been organized into key themes and presented in no particular order.

Table 5: What we heard from community members about Dodge Cove

DODGE COVE	
Challenges	Opportunities and Ideas
<p>Transportation and infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe transportation across harbour • Harbour capacity for long-term boat storage • Harbour capacity in Prince Rupert (parking) • Rail line crossing in Prince Rupert • Inadequate water and sewer services in community <p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No properties for sale • Empty and derelict homes • Increase in recreational properties <p>Jurisdiction/enforcement issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreshore access • Interactions with government agencies • Enforcement of known issues <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollution issues (noise, air, light) • Aging population 	<p>Infrastructure and accessibility improvements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger dock • Additional slips • Access to Airport Road • Access to west side of Digby Island (trails, beaches, campground) • Trail maintenance <p>Tourism and recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational fishing • Kayaking, windsurfing • Historical maritime museum/workshop • Arts and culture programming and promotion (newsletter) • Filming locations • Tours, excursion in partnerships with cruise ship industry • Opportunities on west side of Digby Island (trails, beaches, campground) <p>Skill-based employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apprenticeship opportunities (boat building, arts, fishing, etc.) in partnership with educational institutions <p>Community services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenhouse, gardening • Improved water supply • Reliable Internet access <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives to fix up vacant, derelict properties (top priority!) • Protection of high ecological value areas and species

Table 6: What we heard from community members in Oona River

OONA RIVER	
Challenges	Opportunities and Ideas
<p>Inadequate community services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent power outages • Unreliable Internet service, incomplete fibre optic connection • Public/private issues related to provision of Internet services • No regular service inspections (e.g., BC Hydro) • High fire risk <p>Transportation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reliable, affordable transportation in/out of community • Challenges with ferry service (schedule, reservations) • Challenging to maintain hatchery without reliable transportation in and out of the community <p>Affordability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High development costs • Tax increases and land assessment values create affordability concerns • High cost of boat operations <p>Harbour maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dredging needed but expensive • Short window for dredging (winter only) <p>Harbour capacity and regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harbour is over capacity • Strict regulations limit fishing opportunities • Double moorage issues in Oona River and Prince Rupert <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity around business approvals with First Nations 	<p>Community services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved water treatment services • Waste/recycling services on quarterly basis • Arrangement of transfer of waste/recycling from dock to facility • Improvements required as population grows • Reliable Internet service • Compostable toilets <p>Harbour improvements and employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing harbour maintenance • New dock plans • New breakwater on fishing dock • FT employment to maintain and manage harbour <p>Tourism, recreation and employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities for visitors (education, events) • Sport and charter fishing • Kayaking • Funding for hatchery • Educational opportunities, school group tours <p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More housing options for new residents • Update subdivision requirements • Secure mortgage • Housing as leverage to improve services • Possibility of new lot creation • Home maintenance (drywall, insulation, plumbing, electrical) <p>Transportation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better coordination with ferry services (scheduling, booking reservations) • Reduce barriers to access

OONA RIVER

Challenges

Opportunities and Ideas

- Potential for jobs in transportation services

Other

- Small business opportunities (online programs, ecotourism, composting, artisans, science-based tourism)
- Look to other small coastal communities for service options
- Partnerships with First Nations (transportation, small business operations)

4.0 VISION & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

4.1 VISION

A vision for the NCRD Sustainable Economic Development Strategy is presented below:

Economic development initiatives will generate local employment opportunities, promote sustainable growth, and improve the quality of life for residents in the communities of Electoral Areas A and C.

This vision builds upon on the regional vision and planning principles for the North Coast as outlined in the North Coast Official Community Plan Electoral Areas A and C (2021).

4.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following guiding principles will help to achieve the vision for sustainable economic development in Electoral Areas A and C:

- Transportation services will offer safe, reliable, and affordable access to/from the communities of Dodge Cove and Oona River and the Regional District.
- Infrastructure upgrades and ongoing maintenance of the dock and harbour will increase access, safety, and capacity for community growth and economic development.
- Housing and community services (water, sewer, waste disposal) will support the needs of the current population and attract new residents.
- Eco-tourism and recreation will offer unique experiences for visitors and generate local employment opportunities for residents.
- Areas of high ecological value, wildlife habitat and plant species will be protected to ensure the long-term environmental health of the region.
- Partnerships with First Nations will foster a coordinated approach to the provision of community services and economic development initiatives.
- Strengthened relationships between the communities of Dodge Cove and Oona River with the broader region will support coordinated planning and investments.