

Community Economic Development Committee Mtg. July 23, 2021 (J.P. reporting; italics are hers)

Present: Christine Bossi (chair), Doni Eve, Doug Wittich (also president of VI Family Business Association), Sam Purdy, Karen Mason, Jeffrey Frank (?T'sou-ke rep), Sue Welke (CED Officer), Norm McGinnis (DoS CAO), Chandra Frobel (DoS Corporate Services Assistant), Dana LaJeunesse (DoS councillor), Cheryl McLay (FLNR.EX)

1. Sue Welke update:

The "Business Walk" was done yesterday. This was outlined in her report at last month's meeting. Members of the CED committee split into 4 teams each covering different areas of Sooke and went into businesses asking them several questions about how their business was going. Sue noted that it was fun and appreciated. They will contact home-based businesses by phone. There are on-line surveys (citizen and non-profit) to collect community input on economic development. Also, they will be at the Thursday Night Market on July 29th and the Saturday Market on July 31 or Aug. 7.

Some repeated concerns noted by those teams: lack of commercial space and hard finding people to hire; hard getting parts; folks no longer coming into Sooke from Victoria to access some vehicle repair services; District property taxes for businesses are unmanageable; Indigenous businesses are not subject to same fees and regulations as everyone else which gives them an unfair advantage; getting onto and off of Sooke Rd. is too challenging; need sewers extended to Kaltasin and Sooke River Road areas; many business owners appear to be very independent and team members were not sure that the info left with them will be read. It was thought that the Business Walk should be done annually.

2. There was an "Investment-Ready Workshop" lead by Cheryl McLay Regional Manager of economic development for the West Coast for FLNR (Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development). It was 1 hour and 15 minutes long:

She gave everyone diagrams to fill out that consisted of tools to evaluate the District's "investment readiness". How does the community prepare for investment? How does it promote itself and attract businesses or investors from outside the community (*not specified if this is referring to BlackRock or Van City?*)? How does the community support "home grown businesses"? How is the community providing infrastructure for businesses and investment? Many members of the CEDC noted that they were not aware of the initiatives and options available so could not really answer the questions in the workshop very effectively. What are key organizations in Sooke that can play a role in investment attraction? Real estate, Work Link, Chamber of Commerce. Ms. McLay noted that the Province can arrange virtual visits from interested foreign investors (focusing primarily on the US). They have a "top 5 investment opportunities" tool for potential funding of foreign direct investment. And "Business Watch" matches potential entrepreneurs with folks who want (*have?*) to sell their businesses (most frequent investors are from Alberta). Norm McGinnis CAO noted that the DoS will be working with potential investors to remove barriers (*I didn't catch if he said what barriers he was referring to*).

3. Municipal and regional tax programs:

Discussion on the hotel tax. *Technically* the money collected would go to marketing the area as a "tourist destination". Since hotels/B&B's are full the idea of implementing a hotel tax is contentious.

4. Round Table:

Jeffrey Frank noted that the T'sou-ke have plans for a "big development" behind the Tim Hortons/gas station; Chamber brochure "Everything Sooke" is out; someone (*not sure who*) will put together a "one piecer" with info on subsidized student employees and training grants; **the OCP will go to Council along with the OCP committee recommendations on Aug. 30.**

