

An Overview

The nucleus for an Economic Development Plan was the desire of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) in 2015 to strengthen West Vancouver's local economy. The first step was to understand the community's current population profile and how it was trending into the future, based on updated demographic, housing and employment forecasts. Then, work was undertaken to determine West Vancouver's competitive identity and "place equity"¹, and how to enhance its economic vitality and resiliency over the long term. These consultant studies were completed by early 2016. At the same time, the CAO approached the Manager of Community Planning to take on a new role within the organization focussed on economic development.

This mandate was essentially a blank slate for the now Manager of Economic Development. As a "department of one" with no operational budget², establishing the municipality's direct role in local economic development and advancing the preparation of an Economic Development Plan required both creativity and innovation. As this position is a direct report to the CAO, the Manager is able to work cross-divisionally within the municipality – to leverage other staff expertise and divisional resources, and to ensure alignment of District initiatives with local economic goals and opportunities.

A key learning is that, while this work has been focussed on local economic development, this is not a stand-alone municipal function. Rather, fostering growth and diversification of the local economy is a fundamental requirement for transitioning West Vancouver from a mature bedroom municipality to a more resilient community. As such, local economic development is very much tied to land use planning, and addressing the community's housing, transportation, and related issues.

Work over the past two years has clarified the role of municipal economic development in West Vancouver – that is, to grow and diversify the local economy to support existing and future businesses, provide more local employment opportunities, and broaden the municipality's tax base. The primary means to achieving these goals is to shift thinking about West Vancouver's economy from purely serving the needs of local residents (its historic role), to what it takes to build a more vibrant, thriving, and sustainable local economy over the long term.

During 2016 and early 2017, additional research was undertaken to delve further into West Vancouver's comparative economic strengths and weaknesses, untapped local opportunities within the region's leading economic sectors, and West Vancouver's potential to become a visitor destination. This work has included original research by District staff and a student intern (summer 2017), and a series of academic partnerships with Canadian and international universities.

Development of this Plan has directly engaged West Vancouver's business community, subject matter experts, and various partner agencies. This approach has enabled the District to leverage outside expertise and resources, and build strong working relationships for ongoing Plan implementation. West

¹ "Place Equity" is a measure developed by Resonance Consultancy to quantify and benchmark the relative quality of place, reputation and competitive identity of one city to another by analyzing a variety of factors that add to or subtract from the perceived attractiveness of a city or destination.

² During 2016, the District's direct investment in economic development was the annual salary for the Manager of Economic Development, but no operational funding.

Vancouver residents have also engaged in a discussion of the local economy through the ongoing Official Community Plan review.

The Economic Development Plan is founded on three strategies:

1. Visitor Strategy

The impetus for developing a Visitor Strategy is to leverage the community's natural and cultural assets to position West Vancouver as a visitor destination. The goal is to increase visitor spending in West Vancouver both to support existing businesses, and attract new businesses and services that residents would like to see, but do not provide a strong enough local market to support them. Visitors to West Vancouver also support local arts and culture, as well as public recreational facilities and programs – making the delivery of these services more economically viable for local government.

2. Commercial Areas Strategy

With the absence of industry and large-scale employers in West Vancouver, the local economy largely exists to serve the daily needs of West Vancouver residents. As such, it is physically manifested in five commercial districts of varying size.

This strategy speaks to the need for better definition of the role, function, and scale of West Vancouver's existing commercial areas; and establishing a broader economic and land use hierarchy for West Vancouver. This would provide the appropriate context for understanding future development opportunities in these centres, and considering targeted opportunities to grow the local economy, and to guide municipal land use planning, private development proposals, and public investments in infrastructure within these centres.

3. Emerging Opportunities Strategy

Future opportunities to grow existing local businesses, support new business start-ups, create local jobs, and expand the non-residential tax base in West Vancouver are very much tied to the regional economy, and growth in key sectors such as technology, film production, green industries, health care, tourism, and related sectors. Through this strategy, the District hopes to capitalize on regional economic growth to expand and diversify the local economy.

However, realizing future opportunities will also depend on the availability of land designated for commercial use; municipal policies that support commercial and mixed-use development; and greater housing options and transportation improvements to support a broader demographic profile and local workforce.

Plan implementation will be led by inter-divisional municipal staff teams working in partnership with community stakeholders, industry organizations, and other government agencies. This will enable the District to continue to leverage outside expertise and resources, as is already the case in implementation of the Visitor Strategy.

West Vancouver's Economic Development Plan

Some Challenges	Some Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entrenched municipal bureaucracy and departments working in silos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cross-divisional role of municipal economic development (silo-busting)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - History of business community disengagement with local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of Ambleside-Dundarave BIA in 2016 provides a strong voice for >700 business and commercial property owners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disconnect between local and regional economies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for local economic growth require integration with regional economy – particularly in key sectors (technology, film, health care, tourism, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2004 Official Community Plan is focused on preserving status quo (no change) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New OCP (2018) is a key opportunity for building a more resilient community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of community vision and leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic Development Plan is an “influencer” document for thoughtful land use change - 2018 is a pivotal (election) year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pervasive influence of NIMBY groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More diverse groups are becoming politically active – including the business community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited capacity of traditional partner agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Redefinition of the District’s established partnerships, and investment in capacity-building - Mobilization of business community as a collective voice - External partnerships (industry sectors, academia, destination marketing, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aging bedroom community – as seen in demographic profile and suburban land use pattern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Silent majority is starting to speak up in support of greater housing options, and expansion of commercial land base