

MEDIA RELEASE

City of Williams Lake



For Immediate Release

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New Economic Development Strategy Approved for the City

At its Regular meeting on December 18, 2018, City of Williams Lake Council approved a new Economic Development Strategy. Funded through Northern Development Initiative Trust, the Strategy is the result of six months of focused work undertaken by the City's Economic Development Officer, developed by Randy Sunderman of Peak Solutions Consulting in association with Trevor Kier of Kier and Associates.

A draft of the report was presented at a recent Committee of Whole Council meeting, and received praise from several Councillors for its depth in addressing some of the challenges that the City is expected to face; notably, as the forest industry continues to refine operations in preparation for a reduction in the annual allowable cut.

An aspect of the report highlighted by Economic Development Officer Beth Veenkamp was the amount of community consultation that formed the basis for much of the Strategy. "We looked at the community from a wide range of perspectives," says Veenkamp. "We were really impressed by the participation of our community members, and believe that this level of engagement will assist us in creating the kind of liveable community that we are all interested in." More than 300 people responded to the on-line survey, and ten focus group sessions with more than 60 participants were held capturing a wide range of perspectives. "We had great attendance at all of our focus group sessions, which ranged from tourism, health, senior residents, value-added forest products, and education, as well as the more traditional groups you would expect to be captured in a Strategy like this, such as heavy industry, small business, and downtown Williams Lake merchants."

The survey results showed that most residents were happy living in Williams Lake, due in large part to the small town feel and sense of community. Most respondents indicated that they would like to see Williams Lake grow a little, but not too much.

Four major themes emerged from the consultation sessions, and have been captured in the Strategy as follows:

1. **Enhanced Liveability and Quality of Life:** includes housing diversification and rental development, increasing investments, and partnerships in mountain biking development, which repeatedly emerged as a community asset worth investing in.
2. **Investment Attraction and Business Development:** includes opportunities such as airport development, tourism product development and agriculture diversification.
3. **Skill Development and Labour Force Attraction:** includes attracting skilled workers and expanding education opportunities.
4. **Partnership Development:** includes collaborating on projects with neighbouring First Nations communities, leveraging opportunities with the Cariboo Regional District, and focused work with the Province to tap into its programs and initiatives.

Overall, the Strategy breaks down these higher-level priorities into actionable items that will form the basis of the work and focus of the City's Economic Development Office for the next 3-5 years. In addition, the Strategy outlines a monitoring and reporting initiative that highlights tracking the progress of implementation.

"There were a few topics that we heard repeatedly from just about every group we spoke with, such as telling better stories about what a great place Williams Lake is to live, capitalizing on the potential that Williams Lake has to become a premier mountain biking/outdoor destination, and being home to a micro-brewery. Every single group, as well as many survey respondents, stated that Williams Lake needs its own brewhouse," continues Veenkamp.

A baseline report was created to assist in the Strategy development that includes area demographics, income levels, and survey question results. The baseline report and Economic Development Strategy are available on the City of Williams Lake's website at www.williamslake.ca, or follow the links to the **Economic Development Strategy** at <https://www.williamslake.ca/DocumentCenter/View/2396/FINAL-Williams-Lake-Econ-Strategy-Dec-17-2018>, and the **Baseline Report** at <https://www.williamslake.ca/DocumentCenter/View/2395/FINAL-City-of-Williams-Lake-Economic-Development-Baseline-Report-Oct-30-2018>.

"We encourage other groups to use this Strategy to help guide their priorities, and hopefully align their focus so that we are all working together to achieve some good outcomes in the next five years," says Veenkamp. "There is a lot of positive momentum happening in the community right now, and it is exciting to see this work come together so we can continue to capitalize on all the great things about Williams Lake."

For more information, contact Beth Veenkamp, Economic Development Officer, at bveenkamp@williamslake.ca, or call 250-392-8480 / 250-302-1585.

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