

# Municipality of North Cowichan

## Economic Development Committee

### AGENDA

Friday, October 18, 2024, 1:00 p.m.  
Municipal Hall - Large Committee Room

Pages

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER

This meeting will be conducted in-person in the Large Committee Room where the public are invited to attend to observe the meeting.

#### 2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Purpose: To consider any items of business not included in the Agenda, that are of an urgent nature, must be introduced and approved at the time the agenda is adopted. Matters must be taken up in the order that they are listed unless changed at this time.

Recommendation:

That the agenda be adopted as circulated [or as amended].

#### 3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

3 - 4

Purpose: To consider if there were any errors or omissions prior to adopting the minutes.

Recommendation:

That the Committee adopt the minutes of the meeting held May 31, 2024.

#### 4. BUSINESS

##### 4.1 Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities

5 - 22

Purpose: To seek input on Economic Development Action Plan development. A presentation by project consultant Deloitte will be provided.

Recommendation:

That the Economic Development Committee recommends that Council:

1. Amend the Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report dated October 2024 as attached to the Climate Change Specialist's October 18, 2024 report by [...amendments to be identified by the Economic Development Committee]; and,
2. Accept the Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report as amended.
3. Direct staff to undertake additional engagement with CVRD, First Nations and business community.

**4.2 Update from the Cowichan Valley Regional District**

Purpose: Barry O’Riordan from Economic Development Cowichan and Steve Nicol from Lions Gate Consulting to provide the Committee with an update on the Economic Development Cowichan Strategic Plan.

**4.3 Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program**

Purpose: George Farkas, General Manager of Planning, Development and Community Services to outline recommendations for funding application.

**4.4 Development Services Review**

Purpose: George Farkas, General Manager of Planning, Development and Community Services, to provide an update on the Development Services Review.

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

# Municipality of North Cowichan Economic Development Committee MINUTES

May 31, 2024, 1:30 p.m.  
Municipal Hall - Large Committee Room

Members Present Mayor Rob Douglas Chair  
Councillor Bruce Findlay  
Councillor Chris Istace

Staff Present George Farkas, General Manager, Planning, Development and Community Services  
Jeff Miller, Senior Manager, Engineering  
Jennifer Aldcroft, Climate Change Specialist  
Neil Pukesh, Director, Parks and Recreation  
Tricia Mayea, Corporate Officer

## 1. CALL TO ORDER

There being a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

## 2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

IT WAS MOVED AND SECONDED:

That the agenda be adopted as circulated.

CARRIED

## 3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

IT WAS MOVED AND SECONDED:

That the Committee adopt the minutes of the meeting held February 23, 2024.

CARRIED

## 4. UNFINISHED AND POSTPONED BUSINESS

None.

## 5. BUSINESS

### 5.1 Cowichan Trail Stewardship Society

Neil Pukesh, Director, Parks and Recreation, provided an introductory presentation outlining previous Council direction given in relation to reviewing Mt. Richard's trail sanctioning. A copy of the presentation is available as a Supplemental Item on the Agendas, Minutes & Video webpage.

Aggie Weighill, Vancouver Island University, Faculty of Management, provided a presentation on behalf of Cowichan Trails Stewardship Society, sharing the results of the Trail User Survey, and answered question from the Committee. A copy of the presentation is available as a Supplemental Item on the Agendas, Minutes & Video webpage.

**5.2 Economic Development Action Plan – What We Heard Report**

The Economic Development Action Plan – What We Heard: Engagement Summary Report was reviewed by the committee and received for information.

**5.3 Economic Development Action Plan - Requests to Present**

- (1) Sarah Campbell, Craft Cannabis Association of BC provided an overview of their business, highlighted tourism, and sector development opportunities, and suggested policy considerations.
- (2) Ben Clark, Director, Delphi Group submitted his regrets and indicated he would be happy to present at a future meeting.
- (3) Randal Huber, Managing Director, Chemainus Theatre Festival provided an overview of the Chemainus Theatre Festival including its history, benefits to the community, opportunities, the path forward, and some of the challenges they've had.
- (4) Heather Young, Under the Oak Farm provided a brief overview of their farm and submitted a list of key points to support agriculture.
- (5) Alan Hoffman, SkeenaPublishing provided an overview of their business.

IT WAS MOVED AND SECONDED:

THAT the meeting be extended until 4:30 p.m.

CARRIED

Copies of the presentations and materials provided by the businesses are available to view as Supplemental Items on North Cowichan's Agendas, Minutes & Video webpage.

**5.4 Update from the Cowichan Valley Regional District**

Barry O'Riordan and Brittany Taylor from Economic Development Cowichan provided a status update on regional projects.

**5.5 Industrial Lands Servicing Activities**

Jeff Miller, Senior Manager, Engineering, provided a verbal update on industrial lands servicing activities.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting ended at 3:53 p.m.

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Certified by Recording Secretary

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Signed by Chair;

# Report

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Date October 18, 2024  
Subject Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities

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File:

## PURPOSE

To seek input on Economic Development Action Plan development. A presentation by project consultant Deloitte will be provided.

## BACKGROUND

The Economic Development Committee's workplan includes an update to North Cowichan's Economic Development Action Plan. Grant funding for the Action Plan has been provided by the Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program (REDIP) and Island Coastal Economic Trust. Jamie Vann Struth (Deloitte) was retained through a competitive process to develop the Plan. The Economic Development Committee received updates on this project's workplan at the [February 23, 2024](#), meeting and engagement conducted at the [May 31, 2024](#), meeting. A project engagement page has been developed and can be found at [www.connectnorthcowichan.ca/ec-dev](http://www.connectnorthcowichan.ca/ec-dev).

Economic Development Cowichan is also updating its Economic Development Strategic Plan in a parallel timeline to North Cowichan's Action Plan, and coordination activities have been considered through the Action Plan's workplan.

## DISCUSSION

The workplan for this project included initial research and data analysis, consultation, interim reporting, and action plan development. An Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report (Attachment 1) organizes the information compiled and identifies key themes and outcomes.

Engagement for this project has included:

- Invitations for businesses to present to the Economic Development Committee, which occurred during the May 31 committee meeting.
- What We Heard report presented to the Economic Development Committee on May 31, which summarized feedback from the business community and organizations with business interests.
- Coordination of engagement activities with the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) to ensure that the business community did not experience consultation fatigue with the parallel projects. Material was reviewed from the CVRD focus group sessions and staff participated in the manufacturing focus group input session.
- Additional direct meetings with local businesses.
- Workshop with the Chemainus business community on June 13.

A letter introducing the Economic Development Action Plan was sent to Quw'utsun Nation in December 2023. We have not heard input from First Nations yet. Staff recommend that a follow-up letter be issued to provide an update on the project and let them know that we are still interested in engaging and that a draft report will be sent for their comments.

Following review of the Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report by the Committee, the following activities will take place ahead of the draft action plan returning to committee:

- 1) Coordinate direction with CVRD to fill in additional insights that resulted in the division of consultation responsibilities.
- 2) Provide an update on the engagement page on Connect North Cowichan.
- 3) Follow up with Quw'utsun Nation to discuss strategic directions and request input per the format that would suit the Nation the best. The request will take the form of a letter with a request for a meeting for further discussion.

A draft Action Plan will return to the Economic Development Committee, incorporating feedback from the October 18 meeting. The Action Plan will be action-oriented, with a clear implementation sequence for each initiative based on a combination of importance, urgency or timeliness, availability of supportive resources or partners, or other factors.

## OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** That the Economic Development Committee recommends that Council:
  - (1) Amend the Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report dated October 2024 as attached to the Climate Change Specialist's October 18, 2024 report by [...*amendments to be identified by the Economic Development Committee*]; and,
  - (2) Accept the Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report as amended.
  - (3) Direct staff to undertake additional engagement with CVRD, First Nations and the business community.
  - *This option incorporates direction from the Economic Development Committee ahead of the draft action plan development.*
2. That the Economic Development Committee:
  - (1) Accept the Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report dated October 2024 as attached to the Climate Change Specialist's October 18, 2024 Report; and,
  - (2) Direct staff to undertake additional engagement with CVRD, First Nations and the business community.
  - *This option provides direction to proceed with the directions as presented.*

**IMPLICATIONS**

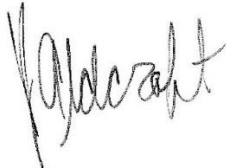
Input from the Economic Development Committee gives staff direction on issues and opportunities to shape priority focus areas in the Action Plan and undertake additional engagement activities and development of the draft action plan. Activities are currently taking place in accordance with the project scope of work, and there are no financial implications. The draft action plan will have costed and prioritized actions developed, resulting in financial impacts dependent on implementation pace and Council’s direction.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Economic Development Committee recommends that Council:

- (1) Amend the Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report dated October 2024 as attached to the Climate Change Specialist’s October 18, 2024 report by [...amendments to be identified by the Economic Development Committee]; and,
- (2) Accept the Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report as amended.
- (3) Direct staff to undertake additional engagement with CVRD, First Nations and business community.

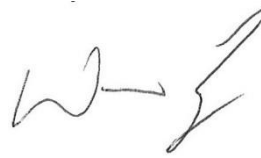
Report prepared by:



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Jennifer Aldcroft  
Climate Change Specialist

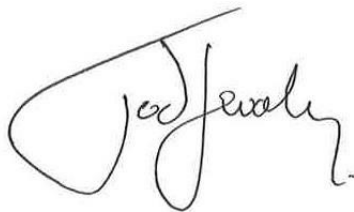
Report reviewed by:



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David Conway  
Director, Subdivision and Environmental Services

**Approved to be forwarded to Economic Development Committee:**



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Ted Swabey  
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment:

- (1) Economic Development Action Plan Strategic Priorities Report

# Overview to Strategic Priorities

The purpose of this “Strategic Priorities” document is to provide a summary of research, data analysis, and consultation undertaken in support of the Municipality of North Cowichan Economic Development Action Plan, and to synthesize this work into proposed strategic priorities for the Municipality to pursue.

Following review and input from municipal staff and the Economic Development Committee, the full Action Plan will be developed with specific recommended activities under each of the identified Strategic Priorities.

## Context

Successful utilization of the Action Plan requires a clear understanding of the context of the Plan and its intended purpose.

There are several key points that frame the economic development situation in North Cowichan:

1. **The Municipality is located on the traditional and unceded territories of the Quw’utsun First Nation**, which includes the Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, and Stz’uminus First Nation. Economic development initiatives in North Cowichan are pursued with a spirit of openness and engagement with Quw’utsun peoples, guided by mutual respect, shared values, and a commitment to balance environmental conservation, cultural heritage preservation, and shared economic benefit. Opportunities for direct partnership and cooperation on programs and initiatives will regularly be explored.
2. **The Municipality of North Cowichan has recently reconstituted its Economic Development Committee** (comprised of three Council members, including the Mayor). It does not currently have dedicated staff and resources for economic development and this plan has been shaped, in part, by the need for implementation to either (a) fit into existing areas of municipal activity, or (b) to be implemented through partnerships and/or grant funding support.
3. **The Municipality is part of the regional Economic Development Cowichan** service through the Cowichan Valley Regional District. Concurrent with the preparation of this plan, a regional economic development strategy process was undertaken. The two organizations and their consulting teams collaborated at several points in the process to share information and to avoid overlap in consultation efforts. While the strategic priorities of this plan were developed independent of the regional process, there is significant potential symmetry in the regional plan establishing high-level strategic directions and this more action-oriented plan pursuing complementary on-the-ground initiatives in North Cowichan.
4. **The Municipality’s Official Community Plan provides a regenerative approach to economic development.** A “regenerative” economy is one where activities reverse ecological damage and have a net-positive impact on the natural environment. This is accomplished by reducing waste and pollution and recirculating products and materials to achieve their highest value. Certain priorities in this plan more directly address regenerative opportunities, but it should be understood as an underlying principle throughout the plan. This approach is also consistent with the “doughnut economics” concept, which is a holistic perspective of economic development that recognizes ecological limitations and a focus on achieving social foundations.



# Competitive Assessment

Economic development plans need to reflect the competitive realities of the local economy. While being mindful of regenerative growth principles, the benefits of economic development (such as enhanced municipal tax base, increased local employment opportunities, and improved commercial amenities) will be achieved only through capitalizing on viable business opportunities.

The Action Plan will build on local strengths, support the realization of local economic opportunities, and attempt to mitigate or remove local challenges. The assessment summarized below is based on consultation with the community, review of previous studies and other relevant documents in North Cowichan (and elsewhere, if relevant), and the economic analysis outlined in the Appendix. While such an assessment cannot possibly cover all aspects of a community, the points highlighted below are most relevant to local economic development success in North Cowichan.

## Strengths and Opportunities

*These are the strengths and opportunities from the perspective of local economic development. They have the potential to be leveraged or enhanced to further the community's economic development goals. Additional detail on opportunities is provided in the discussion of strategic priorities in the next section.*

**Very diverse community** with multiple settlement areas and natural assets from the waterfront to forest and mountain recreation amenities.

**Traditional industrial strength in wood products manufacturing**, including pulp and paper and various related manufacturing and service industries.

**Famous tourist attraction with the murals in Chemainus**, creating potential to leverage visitors for additional activities in the community.

**High-traffic location** between larger urban centres to the north (Nanaimo) and south (Greater Victoria), providing a readily-available market for business growth opportunities.

**Opportunity to increase tourism promotion that leverages recreational assets, such as mountain biking trails**, to increase visitation.

**Variety of food, beverage and potentially cannabis production and processing, including adding agri-tourism** as a way to diversify farm incomes.

**High quality of life** with beautiful natural surroundings, wineries, outdoor recreational opportunities.

**Growth in local population of working professionals**, partly due to COVID-induced move out of larger urban centres.

**Favourable view of front-line municipal staff**, based on experiences with tasks like renewing business licenses. This is relevant for future municipal-led initiatives that would benefit from existing good relationships with staff.

**Opportunity to encourage evolving forms of higher-density industrial and commercial development** by removing current density limits in industrial areas (e.g., office above) and commercial areas (residential above). Reduction in on-site parking requirements also identified to encourage higher density.

**Various opportunities associated with the new Cowichan District Hospital.** In addition to the stimulus impact of this massive construction project, there is significant business development potential in the surrounding area.

## Challenges and Limitations

*The following are identified challenges and limitations from a local economic development perspective. The strategic approach is to acknowledge and work within these limitations, while taking active steps to improve them over time.*

**Rising housing costs.** While a common challenge for communities on Vancouver Island and through much of British Columbia, the reality is housing costs are limiting the ability to recruit skilled workers from lower-cost jurisdictions, while also limiting the ability of the current workforce (particularly lower-income) and youth populations to secure long-term housing and put down roots in North Cowichan.

**Limited housing supply for staff.** In addition to the high cost of housing, efforts to recruit workers are hampered by the lack of available housing options.

**Labour shortages,** connected to the housing challenges noted above. Local employers are limited in recruitment and retention of staff due to the difficulty they have entering the housing market.

**Deteriorating conditions in the coastal forest sector** creating risk of further closures of major forest products manufacturing facilities (the Paper Excellence paper mill was closed early in 2024). This would negatively impact all aspects of municipal service delivery and shift the tax burden in a significant way to other local taxpayers, including residents. Wages paid at these facilities are also among the highest in the community, creating negative repercussions for other local businesses that rely on the patronage of mill workers or the mill itself.

**Limited supply of light industrial land** contributing to very high land costs and limiting ability to both attract new industrial business and expand existing business. Risk of current industrial businesses leaving the community is present.

**Unfavourable views of the development approval process,** including timing.

**Recent pattern of high property tax increases for business** contributing to a challenging time for business viability.

**Limited promotion of local companies,** including to travelers passing through North Cowichan on the highway and are not aware of what is off the highway, as well as promotion within North Cowichan to residents who may be unaware of what is in other parts of the community.

**Limited public transit** for residents to access services and return home in a timely fashion.

**Relatively low level of post-secondary completion** among the resident workforce and **lower average incomes.**

**Older population** relative to BC and most similar communities, which may cause shrinkage in the resident workforce and exacerbate labour shortages without significant inflows of new, younger residents.

# Strategic Priorities

The strategic priorities provide an overall framework for the more detailed action plan that follows. The priorities reflect major themes from the competitive assessment and provide an easy digestible summary of the plan contents for communication purposes.

The Strategic Priorities are numbered for convenience, not based on priority order. The final Economic Development Action Plan will provide a recommended sequence and/or priority order for each initiative, based on a combination of importance, urgency or timeliness, available of supportive resources or partners, or other factors.

Upon staff and EDC input on these priorities and the list of potential action items, the individual actions will be fully developed with additional background information and economic development rationale, along with specific implementation steps, potential partners and funding supports, and performance measures. Specific actions may be a policy change, a strategic investment, a one-off project (often with grant funding), or a new program or initiative.

The Action Plan will also be structured to align with the Economic Development Committee's overall objectives and vision for economic development, which (pending further discussion) may include strengthening the municipal tax base, broadening the range of quality employment opportunities for residents, enhancing public and commercial amenities, and ensuring that growth supports opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged members of the community.

## Strategic Priority #1 – Improve the Local Business Climate

*Business climate issues are common to most industries and types and sizes of business. Building a more supportive, efficient, and welcoming climate for all business will help both the attraction and retention of investment and employment.*

Potential Action Items:

- **Collaborate with Quw'utsun Nation on economic development partnerships of mutual interest.** There are many potential collaborations, including on fundamental issues like workforce development (there are many opportunities for the youthful QN population to better integrate into the local labour force), as well as sector-specific opportunities in tourism, aquaculture, forestry (building on the current Municipal Forest Reserve working group), commercial services, housing, health care, and potentially others.
- **Streamline development approval process.** A review of existing processes is underway with the goal to improve processing timelines. Staff are working towards streamlining application reviews and updating development regulations and policy.
- **Ensure competitive municipal taxation of business and industry.** Move toward competitive municipal property taxes relative to competing municipalities, based on annual increases, taxation level relative to the residential class.
- **Industrial site servicing.** A shortage of serviced industrial land is constraining existing business expansion and investment. Work is underway to design and construct potable water infrastructure that would support new development in existing industrial zoned areas. This servicing will help support both the Cowichan Valley Regional District's Bings Creek expansion project and the Bell McKinnon area development.

- **Messaging and relationships with the business community.** Improve public messaging with respect to the importance of local industry. Pursue engagement activities for Mayor and Council to hear directly from significant local employers.
- **Relationship management in economic development.** Clarify the relationship between the municipality, Economic Development Cowichan, and other stakeholders (e.g. Tourism Cowichan) to ensure efficient alignment of services and clear points of contact for local business and interested investors.
- **Continue supporting initiatives to address public disorder challenges in the Highway 1 Corridor.** The public disorder issues that negatively impacted North Cowichan's South End businesses have been addressed through past initiatives addressing covering law enforcement, street cleanup, public safety, and enhanced social supports. Partnerships are required with the City of Duncan and Cowichan Tribes, who share common issues in the highway corridor through their jurisdictions, along with the RCMP, health and social service agencies, the business community, and impacted populations.
- **Continue the implementation of the Crofton Local Area Plan and Chemainus Town Centre Revitalization Plan.** These plans each support public investment in infrastructure, beautification, and other initiatives that provide for a strengthened commercial core in each community that service both residents and visitors. Additional Local Area Plans may be considered elsewhere in the municipality with similar potential for creating commercial revitalization outcomes (among other community benefits).
- **Collaborate with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) on highway improvement projects.**
- **Support the creation of a Regional Growth Strategy** in the Cowichan Valley to ensure population and employment growth is effectively planned with required infrastructure and public services in place.

## Strategic Priority #2 – Support the Adaptation and Resilience of Traditional Industries

*Forestry and related manufacturing and support industries are the traditional bedrock of the North Cowichan economy. Along with agriculture and tourism, these traditional strengths are undergoing a challenging period of transition and some are at risk of being lost. They will be different in the future but have the potential to continue playing a major role in the local economy.*

Potential Action Items:

### Forestry

- **Continue to advocate for the retention of major forestry-based employers.** Challenges in the coastal forest sector on Vancouver Island are beyond the direct influence of North Cowichan, but the local government can continue to advocate for the provincial government to ensure a supportive regulatory and policy environment for major employers.
- **Explore revenue-generating opportunities in the Municipal Forest Reserve, in collaboration with Quw'utsun First Nation.** The MFR serves a variety of purposes in the community and options may include new revenue opportunities such as carbon offset credits.
- **Explore opportunities for productive re-use of paper mill and deep-sea port facilities in Crofton.** There are many advantages from productive re-use of existing industrial sites, including ready access to deep-sea facilities, existing power servicing and electrical grid integration, and potentially reusable buildings.

### Agriculture and Agri-Food

- **Support expansion of local food processing.**

- **Support expansion of agri-tourism operations**, including through linking with existing tourism promotion tools in the community and region.
- **Connect local farms to existing marketing programs like Island Good.**
- **Support economy-related initiatives led by the Agricultural Advisory Committee and outlined in the upcoming Agriculture and Food Security Strategic Plan.**
- **Support the co-operative sector as it relates to local food access.** Examples include farmers' markets, fisheries cooperatives, produce box delivery services, and similar programs.

### Tourism

- **Support the right-sizing of tourism in high-traffic areas like Chemainus.** Tourism around the world is reaching a turning point in awareness of high visitor volumes on local communities as well as its implications for climate change. There is a need to ensure that visitation does not overwhelm local capacity and degrade the experience for both residents and visitors.
- **Build North Cowichan visitor packages that link multiple local companies.** Examples include a farm tour combined with a walking tour or theatre performance in Chemainus with a local accommodation provider with a kayaking outing in Maple Bay with one or more local restaurants.
- **Continue to invest in community amenities that appeal to both tourists and residents**, such as waterfront amenities in Chemainus.
- **Ensure that tourist areas in North Cowichan are fully represented in regional Tourism Cowichan promotions.**
- **Explore expanded marina facilities** to increase marine-based tourism.
- **Provide resources for local tourism development initiatives**, such as new event creation or beautification initiatives.
- **Improve connectivity for travelers**, including bus service and linkages to float plane and ferry services.
- **Expand the range of accommodation options.**

## **Strategic Priority #3 – Nurture the Growth of Emerging Economic Opportunities**

*This priority provides an over-arching umbrella for actions that support emerging opportunities for economic diversification. Some are relatively new industries to North Cowichan, while others have a long history but with new opportunities on the horizon.*

### Potential Action Items:

- **Capitalize on the new Cowichan District Hospital** to create an adjacent mixed-use community with a range of medical-related business and employment opportunities. As implementation proceeds for the Bell McKinnon Local Area Plan, ensure that business and employment opportunities are prioritized along with infrastructure, transportation, parks and green spaces, and other important community-building factors.

- **Foster the development of a professional/knowledge-based community in North Cowichan.** Building a formal or informal community can help with attracting and retaining more similar skilled workers and entrepreneurs and may support the creation of facilities like a co-working space or increased local office development.
- **Expand range of locally provided post-secondary and other training opportunities.**
- **Consider modifying planning guidelines to recognize the increasing convergence between industrial and commercial activities.** Many modern, smaller-unit industrial park developments achieve higher densities by combining ground-floor industrial, often consisting of an industrial space with loading dock in the back and sometimes a small retail or food service establishment in front, with upstairs offices. Modern industrial development is increasingly happening on computers first and may appear just like traditional office work, but also has requirements for research and development, prototyping, and goods storage needs in the unit's industrial space.

### Strategic Priority #4 – Continue Building an Attractive Sense of Place

*Economic development opportunities of the future are increasingly less tied to a community's physical assets and more to the human capital that lives and works there. Continuing to build sense of place through public and private amenities, housing options, transportation linkages, and more will make North Cowichan more desirable for new and current residents.*

Potential Action Items:

- **Expand availability of a range of housing options.** Work with private and non-profit housing developers to expand a range of market and non-market housing alternatives. The housing issue is much larger than just economic development and existing housing-related initiatives should be acknowledged and supported.
- **Improve public transit service.** Support improved public transit alternatives between population nodes within North Cowichan and to transit nodes outside the municipality.
- **Recreational facilities.** Continue expanding the quality and range of public recreational amenities, including both built facilities and outdoor amenities.
- **Support development of recruitment-focused information tools** to support local businesses attempting to attract skilled workers to move to the community.

### Strategic Priority #5 – Support the Widespread Adoption of Regenerative Economic Principles

*Based on a combination of active promotion of circular economy opportunities, the embedding of regenerative principles in new employment space design, and the quiet support and encourage of principles across all sectors.*

Potential Action Items:

- **Provide information and links to support resources for materials re-use programs.**
- **Embed regenerative principles in development of new industrial lands.**
- **Highlight existing regenerative success stories** in the local economy as models to be emulated by other businesses and to demonstrate the link between financial benefits and materials reuse.

# Action Plan

Each Action Item will have a stated explanation rationale, and a matrix of detailed implementation information similar to the outline below.

**Strategic Priority ....**

Action Item #....

Performance Measure:

<b>Required Actions</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Potential Partners / Funders</b>	<b>Timing</b>
<b>Action 1:</b>			
<b>Action 2:</b>			
<b>Action 3:</b>			

# Appendix: Statistical Profile

This Appendix contains a variety of economic and demographic data that were analyzed over the course of the project to provide insight into the characteristics and evolution of the North Cowichan economy, as well as comparative strengths and weaknesses compared to similar communities.

This strategic plan is designed to positively influence the future development of the community and should start with an understanding of current conditions and how North Cowichan has changed over recent years.

## Industrial Specialization

The following charts outlines industries by the concentration of jobs relative to the province of British Columbia. To determine job concentrations, a location quotient (LQ) analysis was completed. This analysis compares an industry's share of total jobs in North Cowichan to its share of total jobs in BC. Where the North Cowichan share is higher, the industry is more concentrated (more specialized) in the local community and North Cowichan is considered to have a comparative advantage in this industry. This analysis was completed at industry sector (3-digit) level of NAICS (the North American Industrial Classification System).

### Most specialized industries in North Cowichan, relative to BC average

Using estimated local employment data from Lightcast, the most specialized industry in North Cowichan at the three-digit NAICS level is paper manufacturing, with a location quotient concentration of 13.53. These figures were clearly measured prior to the announced closure of the Paper Excellence paper mill early in 2024, but the concentration more than 13 times higher than the BC average is a testament to the historical importance of this industry to the local economy.

Other related industries to paper manufacturing that also have high concentrations of jobs are forestry and logging (8.95 LQ) and wood product manufacturing (2.15 LQ). Combined, these industries made up more than 1,000 jobs in the community, or 7% of all jobs, prior to the recent changes. The industries listed in the following table are the most concentrated industries in North Cowichan and include a variety of other manufacturing.



**Table A-1: Most specialized industries in North Cowichan, relative to BC average**

NAICS (3 Digit)	Industries Description	North Cowichan Jobs, 2024	Concentration relative to BC (Average = 1.00)
322	Paper manufacturing	349	13.53
113	Forestry and logging	468	8.95
114	Fishing, hunting and trapping	77	8.76
712	Heritage institutions	84	4.50
562	Waste management and remediation services	123	3.36
444	Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	300	3.13
333	Machinery manufacturing	158	3.07
323	Printing and related support activities	56	2.84
452	General merchandise stores	414	2.73
327	Non-metallic mineral product manufacturing	77	2.50
321	Wood product manufacturing	227	2.15
622	Hospitals	768	1.91
443	Electronics and appliance stores	43	1.89
418	Miscellaneous merchant wholesalers	107	1.84
519	Other information services	46	1.73

Source: Lightcast, Datarun 2024.1

**Largest industries with average specialization in North Cowichan, relative to BC average**

For the next table, industries with a location quotient concentration between 0.85 (15% less than BC) and 1.25 (25% more than BC) have been characterized as having average specialization. This means they have about as common locally as they are across the BC economy and indicate no particular specialization or absence.

**Table A-2: Largest industries with average specialization in North Cowichan, relative to BC average**

NAICS (3 Digit)	Industries Description	Jobs Based in North Cowichan, 2024	Concentration relative to BC (Average = 1.00)
237	Heavy and civil engineering construction	173	1.23
336	Transportation equipment manufacturing	50	1.18
713	Amusement, gambling and recreation industries	219	1.09
711	Performing arts, spectator sports and related industries	127	1.09
236	Construction of buildings	382	1.06
484	Truck transportation	178	1.05
339	Miscellaneous manufacturing	48	1.05
611	Educational services	989	1.04
332	Fabricated metal product manufacturing	59	0.98
914	Aboriginal public administration	61	0.97
115	Support activities for agriculture and forestry	33	0.95
561	Administrative and support services	611	0.92
445	Food and beverage stores	357	0.91
813	Religious, grant-making, civic, and professional and similar organizations	166	0.88
413	Food, beverage and tobacco merchant wholesalers	91	0.88
722	Food services and drinking places	835	0.87
531	Real estate	251	0.86
511	Publishing industries	55	0.86

Source: Lightcast, Datarun 2024.1

## Least specialized industries in North Cowichan, relative to BC average

The industry with the lowest relative concentration of jobs in North Cowichan is food manufacturing (0.27 LQ). Industries with a low concentration of jobs may not be well-suited to the local economy based on factors such as geography or available skills in the area. This is definitely not the case for food manufacturing, however, given the base level of agriculture in the community, the market for locally-produced food products, and the supportive infrastructure for food processing development. It does indicate, however, that there is substantial room for growth before food manufacturing reaches even an average level of concentration in North Cowichan.

The other industry of note in the following table is professional, scientific and technical services. It is quite large in absolute numbers with more than 600 jobs, but has only half the concentration of the BC average. This is a valuable industry for larger rural communities as there is typically a concentration of professionals like lawyers, accountants, engineers and architects that locate in regional centres and provide an important element of knowledge-based and well-paying employment. This industry is currently not well represented in North Cowichan.

**Table A-3: Least specialized industries in North Cowichan, relative to BC average, based on “fixed place of work” jobs**

NAICS (3 Digit)	Industries Description	Jobs Based in North Cowichan, 2024	Concentration relative to BC (Average = 1.00)
451	Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores	51	0.69
524	Insurance carriers and related activities	111	0.67
238	Specialty trade contractors	457	0.66
911	Federal government public administration	139	0.65
221	Utilities	35	0.62
522	Credit intermediation and related activities	129	0.55
453	Miscellaneous store retailers	56	0.54
541	Professional, scientific and technical services	630	0.49
523	Securities, commodity contracts, and other financial investment and related activities	46	0.37
446	Health and personal care stores	49	0.29
311	Food manufacturing	38	0.27

Source: Lightcast, Datarun 2024.1

## Benchmarking

Benchmarking North Cowichan to a set of similar communities is a useful way to identify its unique characteristics and comparative strengths and weaknesses within the broader regional economy.

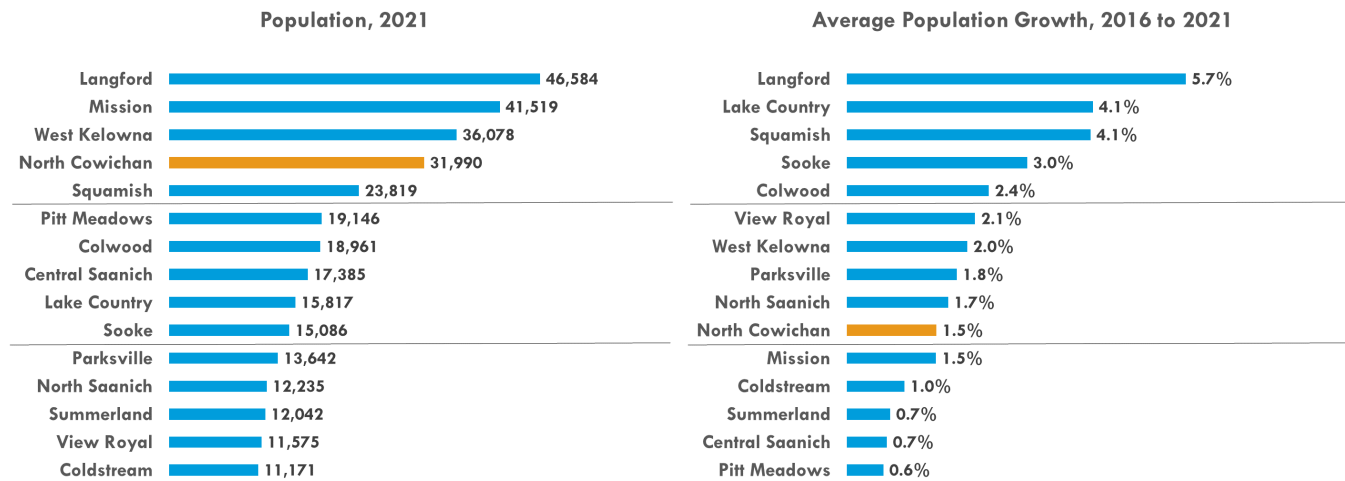
For most data topics, North Cowichan is compared against a consistent group of communities chosen for their proximity to North Cowichan and their similar population size. It should be noted that most of the comparators are closer to larger metropolitan areas. The comparator communities are:

- North Cowichan
- Central Saanich
- Coldstream
- Colwood
- Lake Country
- Langford
- Mission
- North Saanich
- Parksville
- Pitt Meadows
- Sooke
- Squamish
- Summerland
- View Royal
- West Kelowna

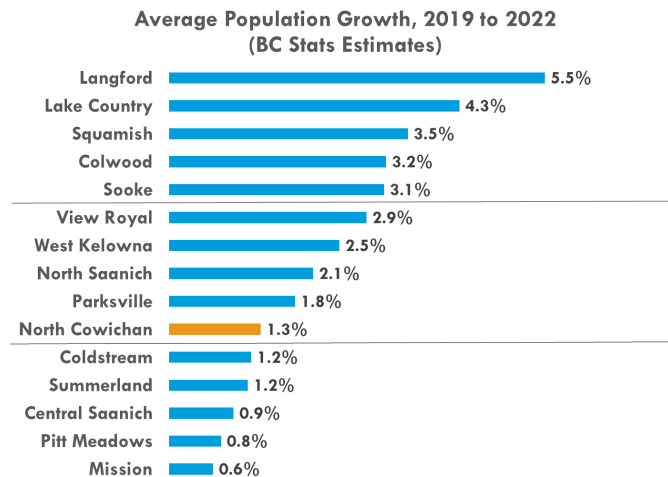
The following charts are Census-based comparisons unless otherwise noted.

## Population

In 2021, North Cowichan’s had a population of 31,990. The population has increased by 2,294 residents since 2016 or 7.7%. During this period, North Cowichan’s population grew at an average rate of 1.5% per year. This was the sixth smallest increase in population among comparator communities. Of the other four largest comparator communities, only Mission had a lower yearly average increase in population growth. Langford, the largest compared population centre, saw the largest average yearly increase in population at 5.7%.



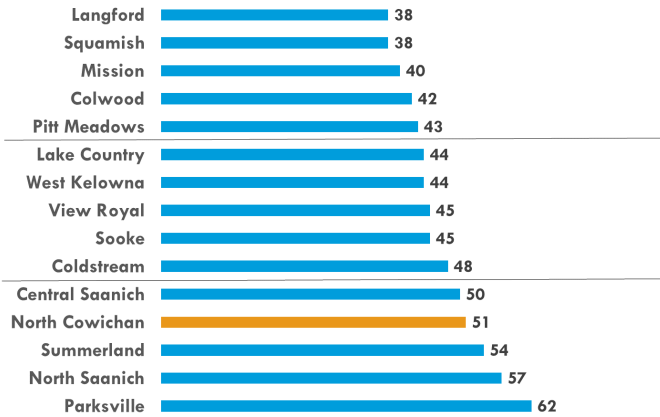
Population estimates from the province of British Columbia indicate similar yearly population growth percentages compared to the Canadian Census data. Provincial data from British Columbia show that North Cowichan’s population grew at an average rate of 1.3% per year as opposed to the 1.5% growth figure from the Canadian Census.



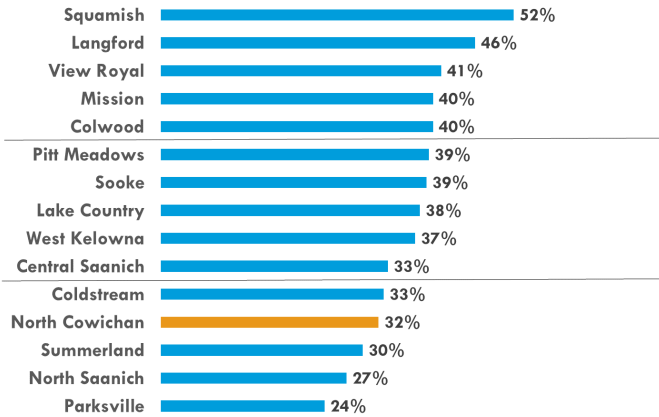
## Population Age

North Cowichan has the fourth oldest median age of all comparator communities at 51 years old. This is 13 years older than Langford. Contributing to this North Cowichan’s relatively older demographics is its low percentage of population in their prime working age (25-54) at 32%. Comparatively, Squamish has the highest percentage of its population in their prime working age at 52%.

Median age of the population, 2021

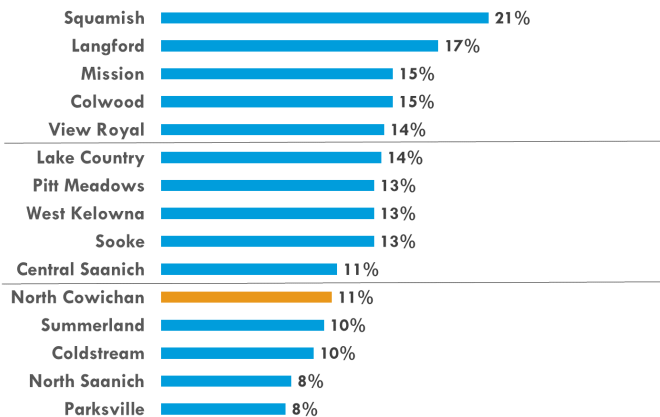


Population of Prime Working Age (25-54), 2021

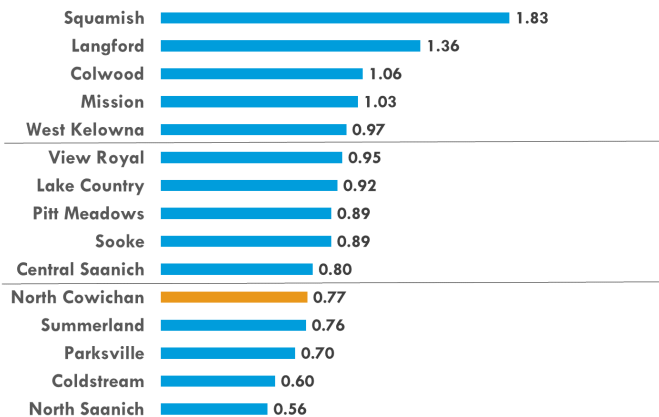


Continuing this trend, North Cowichan has the fifth lowest percentage of its population in their thirties at 11%, the same percentage as Central Saanich. Squamish and Langford have the largest percentage of their population in their thirties at 17% and 15% respectively. North Cowichan has a ratio of 0.77 of the population in thirties compared to their fifties. This is an indication that as the current experienced workforce in its 50s moves toward retirement and less participation in the labour force, there may not currently be enough younger workers to replace them.

Population in their 30s, 2021



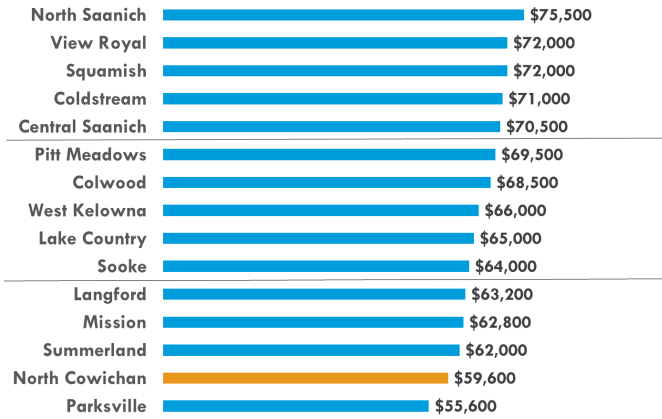
Ratio of Population in their 30s to their 50s, 2021



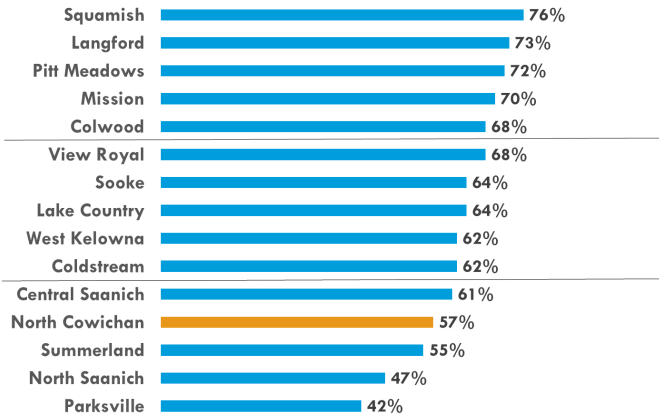
## Employment Income

North Cowichan had the second lowest median employment income in 2020 for full-time workers at \$59,600. Only Parksville had a lower median income in the comparator communities. North Cowichan also had the fourth lowest share of total income from employment in 2020 at 57%. This indicates that there was a higher reliance on government programs or retirement income than other comparator communities.

**Median employment income in 2020 for full-year full-time workers**

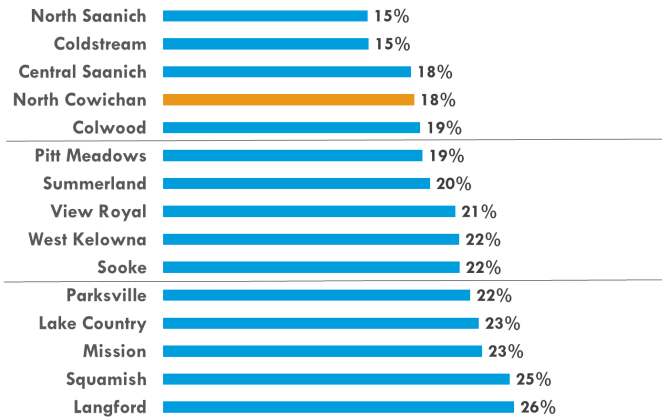


**Share of Income from Employment, 2020 (Lower in 2020 due to COVID income programs)**



Even with a lower median wage compared to other similar communities, North Cowichan has a lower percentage of residents spending over 30% of their income on housing (18%). Spending 30% or less of income on housing is an indicator of housing affordability.

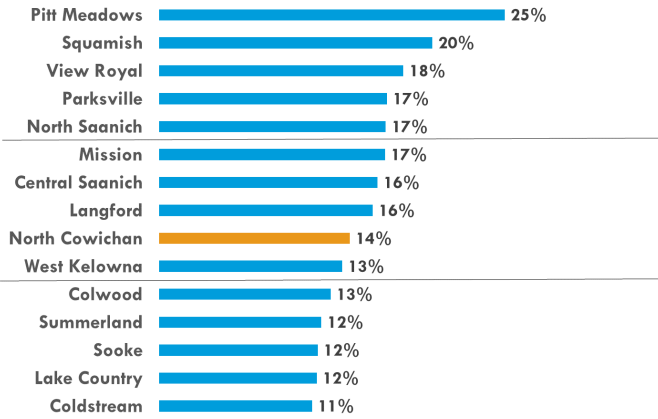
**Households Spending 30%+ of Income on Housing**



## Immigration

In 2021, 14% of North Cowichan’s population was immigrants to Canada. This is similar to other larger population centre comparators such as Langford (16%), Mission (17%), and West Kelowna (14%).

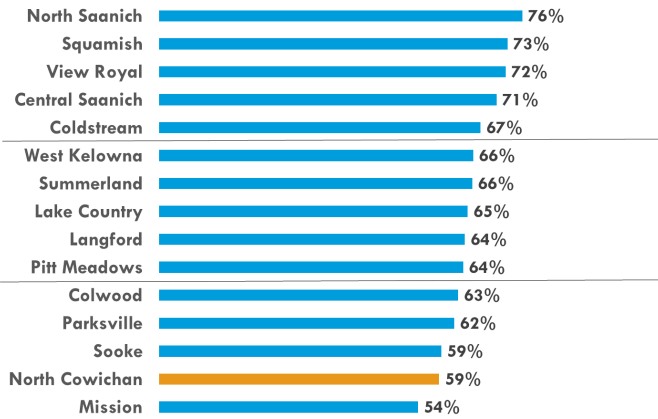
### Immigrants as Share of Population, 2021



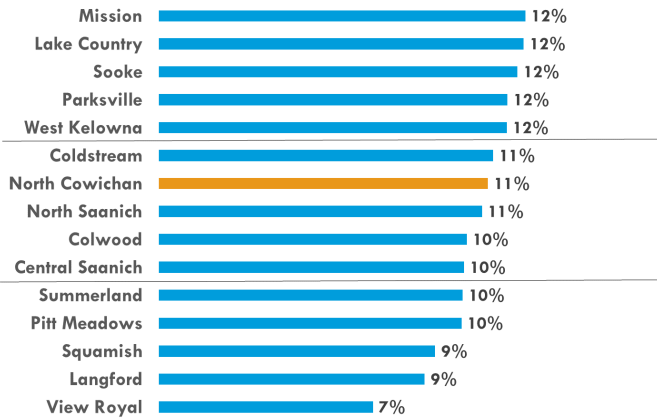
### Educational Attainment

North Cowichan has a relatively low percentage of its population between the ages of 25 and 64 with any post-secondary credential (59%). However, in the same age bracket, North Cowichan has 11% of its population with a trades or apprenticeship credential which is similar to the other comparator communities.

Age 25 to 64 with any post-secondary credential, 2021



Age 25 to 64 with trades or apprenticeship credential, 2021



# COWICHAN REGION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Preliminary Goals, Initiatives and Actions

October 18, 2024

# TERMINOLOGY

1. Goals—the targets or end points for the Strategy
2. Initiatives—broad themes and strategies designed to achieve goals
3. Actions—tactical steps required to implement strategies



# METHODOLOGY

- All content derived from community engagement
  - Business Survey 191 responses
  - Community Survey 122 responses
  - Focus Groups 42 participants
  - Key Informant Interviews 50+ participants
  - Planning Workshop 21 participants
  - First Nations involvement in surveys, focus groups and interviews

# WHAT WE HEARD – GOALS

1. Improve services to businesses
2. Support sector development and competitiveness
3. Enhance regional collaboration and partnerships

# WHAT WE HEARD – ACTIONS

## GOAL 1 IMPROVE SERVICES TO BUSINESSES

Initiative	Action
Provide access to available business planning, development, marketing and financing resources	Develop data, research and government program resources that can be used to increase outreach and engagement with the business community
Provide business, retention and expansion services to foster internal development	Business walks, one-on-one meetings (target 30 businesses per year)
	Produce regular what we heard reports to circulate to planners and others for use in policy development
	Work with employers to explore shared transportation solutions that complement transit services
	Continue to implement existing EDC strategies, such as the Industrial Land Use Strategy, Tech Strategy, Connectivity Strategy

# WHAT WE HEARD – ACTIONS

## GOAL 2 SUPPORT SECTOR DEVELOPMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS

Initiative	Action
Help link local talent with local employers	Advocate for education and training programs that will better position workers for local employment
	Promote diversity in the labour market
	Work with business and sector organizations on recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce
Foster an innovation ecosystem to diversify the economic base	Strengthen programming around the innovation economy
	Conduct research on and advocate for opportunities with a sustainability focus.
Attract investment in growing economic sectors	Strengthen the region’s investment readiness
	Establish an investment attraction program that supports the region’s sector and business potential

# WHAT WE HEARD – ACTIONS

## GOAL 2 SUPPORT SECTOR DEVELOPMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS

Initiative	Action
Strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of key sectors (agriculture & food processing, technology, film, tourism)	Continue to advance the growth of the Cowichan tech sector in line with regional opportunities, including training, access to capital and networking opportunities
	Address critical challenges for agricultural producers and processors, including access to land and processing facilities and climate change adaptation
	Collaborate with regional stakeholders in supporting tourism destination development, in particular, around sports and Indigenous tourism
	Identify and promote film infrastructure that will attract more projects to the region
	Increase local capacity to participate in the film sector through training opportunities and networking events

# WHAT WE HEARD – ACTIONS

## GOAL 3 ENHANCE REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Initiative	Action
Build closer intra and inter-departmental relationships	Develop a framework for collaboration with municipalities
	Work with other local government departments on projects, programs and initiatives that involve economic development
	Reconfirm the economic development function's service priorities provided to the region and municipalities
	Contribute to policy development to support economic development opportunities; and where desired collaborate with municipal partners on initiatives to support investment attraction into the region
Seek greater collaboration between key partners to address key economic challenges	Continue to leverage relationships with local and regional organizations to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan
	Continue to advance community-based initiatives

# WHAT WE HEARD – ACTIONS

## GOAL 3 ENHANCE REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Initiative	Action
Support Indigenous economic reconciliation that aligns with CVRD Corporate Strategic Plan	Support reconciliation initiatives at the CVRD and member municipalities
	Work with local First Nations to partner on initiatives that support our shared environmental, social, economic, and governance goals as directed in the CVRD Corporate Strategic Plan
Develop a performance measurement framework to inform and engage the community	Enhance the State of the Economy report in line with the Doughnut Economics model to support decision making