

**DATE:** February 5, 2021**FILE:** 1700-02/2021/550**TO:** Chair and Directors  
Regional District BoardSupported by Russell Dyson  
Chief Administrative Officer**FROM:** Russell Dyson  
Chief Administrative Officer***R. Dyson*****RE: 2021 - 2025 Financial Plan – Comox Valley Economic Development Service –  
Function 550****Purpose**

To provide the Comox Valley Regional District Board with the proposed 2021 - 2025 Financial Plan highlights for the Comox Valley Economic Development service, function 550.

**Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:**

THAT the proposed 2021 – 2025 financial plan for the Comox Valley Economic Development service, function 550, be approved.

**Executive Summary**

The Comox Valley Economic Development Service, function 550, is primarily delivered by the Comox Valley Economic Development Society (CVEDS) on behalf of participating members in the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD). The CVRD and CVEDS entered into a new Service Agreement on July 27, 2020. This service agreement expires on December 31, 2022. The new agreement reduced the financial commitment of the CVRD, provided increased reporting and communication requirements, included a service review in 2021 and identified four core service areas – tourist information services, support for destination marketing, economic development activities and supporting the Economic Recovery Task Force. Unlike the previous agreement the financial contribution to these service areas was not defined.

- This service is funded primarily through tax requisition, with the requisition proposed to decrease by \$273,456 for 2021 to \$975,000.
- The 2021 estimated residential tax rate per \$1,000 of taxable assessed value is \$0.0521, a decrease of 0.0177 from the 2020 rate of \$0.0698.
- For a property assessed at \$500,000, the resulting tax impact would be \$26.05.
- The primary cost for the service is the operational grant to CVEDS for the provision of:
  - Support for the Economic Recovery Task Force
  - Core Economic Development Services
  - Destination Marketing
  - Visitor Centre
- There is \$50,000 in the budget to support the logistics and process for the formal service review of CVEDS, currently underway.
- As part of the Rethink CV / COVID-19 Response the function 550 budget has proposed \$80,000 to support potential initiatives from the Economic Recovery Task Force, as approved by the board.
- There are no CVRD personnel costs allocated to this service, however \$50,000 is proposed in the budget to assist in the management and support of the CVEDS contract.

- The board also approved \$70,000 to support CVEDS bookkeeping, payroll and audit work, outside of their operational grant, which provides additional support to CVEDS through this transition to a new contract allocation as well as supports the contract mandate to review shared services from CVRD to support CVEDS in finance, human resources, and office space.
- An annual unconditional grant to the Vancouver Island North Film Commission (INFilm) in the amount of \$20,000 also continues to be included in the five-year financial plan. The CVRD and INFilm entered into a new five-year agreement in 2019.

Prepared by:

**M. Foort**

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Myriah Foort, BBA, CPA, CA  
Chief Financial Officer

**Government Partners and Stakeholder Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)**

Comox Valley Economic Development Society	✓
Vancouver Island North Film Commission (InFilm)	✓

**Board Strategic Drivers**

The CVRD Board has set four strategic drivers to guide service delivery. Not all services will be influenced by all drivers. Table 1 notes the degree of influence the drivers have on projects and work plans.

**Table 1: Board Strategic Drivers**

<p><b>Fiscal responsibility:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 2021 financial plan includes a decrease in the tax requisition in the amount of \$273,456 from 2020.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Climate crisis and environmental stewardship and protection:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects are not significantly influenced by this driver.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community partnerships:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct grant of \$20,000 to support the Vancouver Island North Film Commission.</li> <li>• CVEDS provides support to the Economic Recovery Task Force and maintains several community partnerships.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Indigenous relations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CVEDS engage directly with the K’ómoks First Nation (KFN) on economic activities, and KFN have membership on the CVEDS board.</li> </ul>

**Rethink Comox Valley / COVID-19 Response and Renewal**

One of the main work items under the new service agreement required CVEDS to provide support to the Economic Recovery Task Force. A summary of recommended actions by the Industry Advisor Business Case Action Plan has been completed and forwarded to Comox Valley local governments for consideration.

**Economic Recovery Task Force Actions**

The proposed budget for this service includes \$80,000 to support potential initiatives from the Economic Recovery Task Force, as approved by the board.

## Financial Plan Overview

The 2021 - 2025 proposed five-year financial plan for the Comox Valley Economic Development service, function 550, including service establishment information, the requisition summary and the operating budget, is available within the full proposed budget binder, provided in both searchable PDF and e-reader formats, located on the CVRD financial plan web page at [www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/currentbudget](http://www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/currentbudget).

Table 2 below summarizes the 2021 proposed budget as compared to the 2020 adopted budget. Significant variances from the 2020 adopted budget will be discussed in the financial plan sections that follow.

**Table 2: Financial Plan Highlights**

 <b>2021 Proposed Budget</b>		<b>#550 Comox Valley Economic Development</b>		
<b>Operating</b>	<b>2020 Budget</b>	<b>2021 Proposed Budget</b>	<b>Increase (Decrease)</b>	
<b>Revenue</b>				
Grants In Lieu	31,000	31,000	-	
Requisition	1,248,456	975,000	(273,456)	
Prior Years Surplus	12,491	160,914	148,423	
	<b>\$ 1,291,947</b>	<b>\$ 1,166,914</b>	<b>\$ (125,033)</b>	
<b>Expenditures</b>				
Operating	1,284,897	1,105,667	(179,230)	
Contribution to Reserve	7,050	61,247	54,197	
	<b>\$ 1,291,947</b>	<b>\$ 1,166,914</b>	<b>\$ (125,033)</b>	

Highlights of the 2021 - 2025 proposed financial plan for function 550 include:

### Revenue Sources

The primary revenue for this service is tax requisition which is proposed to decrease by \$273,456 for 2021. The reduction in the requisition is a direct result of the new service agreement and change to the operational grant to CVEDS for economic development services. A breakdown of the proposed \$975,000 tax requisition by participant in 2021 is as follows:

<b>2021 Requisition - Member Municipalities</b>		<b>2021 Requisition - Electoral Areas</b>	
City of Courtenay	\$411,558	Part Area A (Baynes Sound)	\$102,648
Town of Comox	\$192,480	Area B (Lazo North)	\$116,626
		Area C (Puntledge – Black Creek)	\$151,687

### Personnel

There are no CVRD personnel costs allocated to this service, however \$50,000 is proposed in the budget to assist in the management and support the Economic Recovery Task Force (ERTF) over and above the CVEDS contract.

### Operations

The primary cost for the service is an operational grant for economic development services with CVEDS. The new service agreement with CVEDS reduced the operational grant from the budgeted amount of \$1,208,963 to \$1,043,131 in 2020. The new service agreement further reduced the operational grant for CVEDS to \$800,000 in 2021 followed by annual cost of living increases of 2 per cent between 2022 and 2025.

The board directed staff to include \$70,000 in the function 550 budget to support CVEDS bookkeeping, payroll and audit work, outside of their operational grant. The CVRD finance department would manage the work to ensure it meets reporting requirements and to better understand CVEDS financial service needs and activities as noted in the new contract with a consideration of shared services.

There is \$50,000 in the budget to support the logistics and process for the formal service review of the Comox Valley Economic Development service, currently underway. As well as an additional \$50,000 to support contract management to fund emerging opportunities in the service.

The proposed budget for this service also includes \$80,000 to support potential initiatives from the ERFT, as approved by the board.

There continues to be a separate annual unconditional grant to INFilm for \$20,000. The CVRD and INFilm entered into a new five-year agreement in 2019.

### Capital

There are no capital assets associated with this service. The visitor center is owned by CVEDS, with a requirement under the new contract to undertake asset management planning activities to ensure this asset can be maintained and provide ongoing service to the region. Future upgrades and maintenance of this facility are expected to be submitted to the CVRD from CVEDS.

CVEDS has indicated that an estimated \$80,000 envelope repair is required to be completed on the Visitors Centre in 2021 and had enquired whether there were CVRD funds available to fund this repair. This request is not currently included in the proposed financial plan.

### Reserves

A reserve has been established for this service to fund future expenditures. The estimated balance of this reserve as of December 31, 2020 was \$79,851, with a proposed reserve contribution in 2021 of \$61,247 for an estimated ending 2021 balance of \$141,098.

### Tax Impacts

What resident tax impacts will the 2021 - 2025 financial plan have?

- Based on the 2021 completed assessment roll, the estimated residential tax rate for this service is expected to be \$0.0521 per \$1,000 (2020 - \$0.0698) of taxable assessed value.
- For a residence with an assessed value of \$500,000, the total tax impact is estimated to be \$26.05.

### **Citizen/Public Relations**

The proposed financial plan considers the new contract amount enacted in mid-2020, as well as some additional funding to support transition to the new level of service, as well as funding to support the delivery of the Economic Development Task Force priorities. Through COVID-19 recovery being able to support the businesses and residents will be a key focus of this service.

Attachments: Appendix A – “CVEDS 2021/22 Economic Recovery Work Plan”  
Appendix B – “October 29, 2020 CVRD letter to CVEDS advising of board  
strategic priority items”  
Appendix C – “CVEDS 2020 Annual Report”

# Comox Valley Economic Development Society 2021-2022 Economic Recovery Work Plan

Approved at CVEDS Jan xx Board of Directors Meeting



**MANDATE & PURPOSE:**

To encourage the sustainable expansion of the economic base of the Comox Valley with the intent of ensuring an innovative, diverse and vibrant local economy through the process of enhancing community wealth, well-being and employment opportunities, by supporting existing business and encouraging new business investment within the Comox Valley Regional District, City of Courtenay and Town of Comox.

**SUSTAINABILITY, KEY DRIVERS & ENGAGEMENT:**

The 2021–2022 Economic Recovery Work Plan is focused on delivery of short-term economic response programs during the pandemic and longer-term recovery-based initiatives once the pandemic is over. The Work Plan is informed by extensive input and feedback through the Economic Recovery Task Force Industry Advisors Business Case Action Plan recommendations, the CVRD Facilitated Planning session outcomes, and:

- ✓ Innovate 2030 Economic Development Master Plan
- ✓ December 15 /16, 2020 CVEDS Board Facilitated Planning Session

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**



**Entrepreneurship and Service to Business**



**Food Systems and Food Security**



**Infrastructure Development**



**Lifestyle and Workforce**

To support the development of a leading data-driven entrepreneurship and business start-up culture entrepreneurship.

Encourage the development of a diversified and expanding regional food system capable of supporting the food security of the Comox Valley for future generations in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner.

Become a services delivery leader through a client-centric, customer services approach in rural and urban areas, without sacrificing public processes that allows for continuous prompt responses to business opportunities and improvements to the local business environment, which in turn instills confidence in small business and investors.

Support and develop community lifestyle and workforce related amenities, investment in municipal infrastructure and public-private partnerships as important foundations to create an environment that enables a diverse and sustainable next generation of entrepreneurs to work, live and play.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE DELIVERY MANDATE

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The key purpose is in assisting entrepreneurs, businesses, and industry associations in accessing key services and resources, and acting as a catalyst for economic growth in the region. The Economic Development Work Plan is informed by the Innovate 2030 Economic Development Master Plan, as well as feedback garnered from CVEDS Board of Directors work plan session, CVRD strategic priorities workshop items for economic development, and the ERTF recommendations. The plan further aligns with regional local government strategies as well as provincial and federal related programs and initiatives.

### DESTINATION MARKETING

With a primary focus on increasing market share and visitation to the region, the Destination Marketing Plan development occurs through Destination Marketing Advisory Committee and partner planning sessions and meetings. The plans align and leverage the Courtenay & Mount Washington 1 and 5 year MRDT plans, as well as input gathered via the broader tourism industry, analysis of the results of past event & marketing campaigns, while ensuring alignment to Destination BC provincial level objectives and goals, and considering local government priorities.

### VISITOR CENTRE SERVICES

The services of the Visitor Centre reflect the contract requirements with Destination BC to carry out regional visitor services. This is expanded upon with its annual plans supporting the product development and sales fulfilment needs of the Destination Marketing Plans noted. Extensive tracking and reporting allow for daily, first-hand analysis of the destination marketing efforts and greater understanding of how to exceed visitor needs and support changing consumer demands and trends to thereby extend length of stay.

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. Achieve a sustainable, resilient and dynamic local economy that supports businesses and the region's entrepreneurial spirit & diversity.
2. Encourage and advocate for growth in the commercial and industrial tax base via public and private capital investments.
3. Increase awareness and profile of the Comox Valley Provincially / Nationally / Internationally, as a destination for entrepreneurs, immigrants, companies and skilled workforce.
4. Encourage local government plans and policies that continue to support a positive, business-enabling environment and the sustainable growth of the Comox Valley economy where businesses want to invest and grow.
5. Supporting a diversity of housing types so as to attract and retain youth and young families to live and work in the Comox Valley.

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. Promote the Comox Valley as Vancouver Island's leading destination for outdoor, culinary and cultural experiences for travel trade and destination visitors through off-peak periods in the calendar year after the pandemic.
2. Through collaboration and partnerships with tourism stakeholders, encourage the expansion and enhancement of a range of destination marketing opportunities within the Comox Valley.
3. Expand and enhance campaign-based marketing initiatives through stakeholder engagement with a focus on shoulder season destination-level activities/event attraction and expansion that result in increased visitation, overnight stays and business referrals. Modified events/activities as per COVID-19 PHO guidelines and restrictions.

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. To ensure that exemplary visitor services are delivered, using a multi-channel approach, based on our visitors' information needs when and where they are needed, by curating and promoting tourism experiences.
2. Leverage resources to drive direct business referrals of events, activities and stay packages via the Vancouver Island Visitor Centre (Comox Valley).
3. Increase stakeholder collaboration in creating new or enhanced outdoor adventure, culinary and cultural products, tours and activities in the Valley to support increased length of stays, while also enhancing the liveability of the region for local residents.

## ECONOMIC OUTCOMES, METRICS AND REPORTING

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INTENDED LONG TERM ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

- ✓ Class 6 (Business) property assessment
- ✓ Population in core areas and target demographics
- ✓ Food production per acre
- ✓ Exported goods and services
- ✓ Number of business licenses / establishments

### DESTINATION MARKETING INTENDED LONG TERM ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

- ✓ Accommodation revenue
- ✓ Earned media coverage of the Comox Valley
- ✓ Number of tourism businesses
- ✓ Number of new / expanded festivals and events
- ✓ Ticket sales & engagement for supported events
- ✓ Website and related referrals to partner businesses

### VISITOR CENTRE SERVICES INTENDED LONG TERM ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

- ✓ Visitation
- ✓ Visitor spending
- ✓ Accommodation revenue
- ✓ Length of stay
- ✓ New investment or expansion of tourism businesses

### METRICS & REPORTING

1. Online resources updated and accessed
  - Unique page views, click-rate, time spent on site, # of communications, usage
2. Entrepreneurship & Business Client Support
  - # of small businesses assisted
3. Immigration & Relocation
  - Enquiries & exploratory visit applications, referrals to Province
4. Small Business Training & Education (virtual)
  - 20 workshops with 10 partners
5. Trade and Investment
  - 2-3 International Buyers missions supported
  - 1-2 Trade Events Attended

### METRICS & REPORTING

1. Multi-Media Event / Marketing Campaigns
  - \$150k annually matched to leverage MRDT funds
  - DBC and MRDT marketing activities and metrics completed per annual plans
2. Increase in social media followers and engagements
3. New Visitor / Destination Research Reports completed
4. Destination-Level events modified for COVID-19 safety - 2 events created or expanded - post COVID-19
5. Travel Media Relations Earned Media
  - Support / host up to 6 local media visits / year

### METRICS & REPORTING

1. Provincial Visitor Info Network reporting:
  - Mail / phone / email inquiries
  - Total visitor parties
  - True visitor parties
  - Visitor numbers
  - Local / BC consignment sales
  - Online tour / activity sales
  - Online retail sales
  - # of businesses racking / marketing at the VIVC
2. Events / Tours
  - 3 VIVC staff familiarization tours coordinated
  - 2-3 new tours created
  - 1-2 industry events held – Post COVID-19
3. New point of sale system established
4. Increased First Nations Tourism Experiences and Content Inclusion
5. Increase in LiveChat virtual visitor engagements

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 2021-2022 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES		
ITEMS	SUBJECT	PROJECT DESCRIPTION
<b>DAY TO DAY SERVICES</b>		
1.	Business Retention & Expansion	Economic intelligence gathering, business visitation, small business and entrepreneur support.
2.	Training and Education	Small Business training, workshops & seminars with partners in key sectors.
3.	Business Resources	Maintain & develop tools, conduct economic analysis & research.
4.	Investment Prospects & Delegations	Host and support trade & investment inquires and delegations.
<b>PROJECTS</b>		
1.	Economic Recovery Task Force	Support the implementation of the Economic Recovery Task Force recommendations.
2.	Provincial Nominee Entrepreneur Immigration Community Pilot Program	Participate in the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation community immigration pilot.
3.	Puntledge Commercial Business Improvement Area Application	Develop and submit a proposal for establishing a new business improvement area.
4. CVRD #7	Provincial Food Hub Business Case	Support CVRD efforts to develop a business case for a Provincial Food Hub, including aggregation, storage and small scale processing capacity.
5.	Virtual Seafood Expo Global Buyers Mission	Host a Virtual Trade Event to enable local seafood companies and industry to meet global buyers and key stakeholders.
6. CVRD #5	Green Industry, Retrofit & Construction Open House and Strategy	Host open house with topics to include training, grant programs and business opportunities in the green retrofit and construction industry and research grant opportunities.
7.	Young Entrepreneur Match Making Networking Event	Event hosted with focus on match making between young entrepreneurs and existing business owners to support business succession and transition.
8.	Rural Node Area Bizmap Profiles	Research grant funding availability/feasibility to use existing BC Bizmap market statistics and business district data tool to profile the rural settlement node areas via an online dashboard.
9.	Marine Industry and Harbour Economic Development Master Plan Concept	Host a marine industry development roundtable with Baynes Sound stakeholders with topics to include marine debris and environmental considerations. Resulting Master Plan Concept report will include recommendations and available funding for further plans and initiatives.
10. CVRD #1	Early Childcare Business Opportunities Assessment Review	Meet with local stakeholders to discuss and review business and investment opportunities as well as development processes to support increased sector capacity.
11. CVRD #6	Arts and Culture Roundtable	Facilitate an industry roundtable with the Comox Valley Arts Council to review ERTF recommendations and update of industry economic impact survey.
12. CVRD #3	Non-Profit Grant Portal	Develop an online portal that displays and tracks grant availability for non-profits.
13. CVRD #4	Tech Workspace Business Case	Develop a business case that analyzes the concept and economics of shared tech workspaces.
<b>ADMINISTRATION</b>		
1.	CMS Tools	Contact database / e-communications system update.
2.	Partnerships	Establish MOU's with Innovate 2030 aligned partners to support economic recovery related sector groups.
3.	Communications	Website review and update to improve awareness and alignment to regional district and member municipalities.

DESTINATION MARKETING 2021-2022 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES		
ITEM	SUBJECT	PROJECT DESCRIPTION
<b>DAY TO DAY SERVICES</b>		
1.	Marketing Campaigns	Consumer direct marketing program.
2.	Social Media	Social media channel management and expansion.
3.	Events	Event & activity promotion support, DCV event calendar updates.
<b>PROJECTS</b>		
1.	5 Year MRDT Strategic Business Plan	Renew the current 5 Year MRDT Plan with a regional approach at 3% so it addresses economic recovery needs of the tourism sector after the pandemic.
2.	Culinary Tourism and Taste Comox Valley App Phase 2 Plan	Expansion to local independent restaurants, development of overnight stay packages including harvest focused agri-tourism content and fall product positioning.
3.	Celebration of BC Seafood	Adapt BC Seafood Festival and related events for the month of June to reflect and comply with COVID-19 limitations and Public Health Orders (PHOs).
4.	Après Ski Marketing Plan	Re-branding of campaign and development of new winter experiences and activities.
5.	Culinary Campaigns	Promote culinary events, staycation and destination packages that align with current PHOs for Dine Around Festival, BC Seafood Festival, BC Ale Trail, Farm Cycle Tour, Food Truck Festival, etc.
6.	Always-On Outdoor Adventure Campaign	Highlight opportunities for shoulder season outdoor adventure; mountain biking, hiking, climbing/bouldering, golf and marine activities.
7.	Staycation Packages	During pandemic, leverage 'staycation' opportunities amongst Vancouver Island residents.
8.	PRIZM Market Research Profiles	For geographical and interest targeting of consumers interested in travel product offered within the Comox Valley.
9.	Guided and Learning Experiences	Contract an education specialist to work directly with tourism operators to develop learning vacation products and how to target travellers who seek educational learn to do-it-yourself experiences.
10. CVRD #2	Event Hosting Best Practice Guide	Meet with key industry stakeholders and develop a guide for Event Hosting featuring best practices and strategies learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.
<b>ADMINISTRATION</b>		
1.	Collaboration	Collaborate extensively with area tourism partners including, but not limited to K'ómoks First Nation, Mount Washington Resort Association, hospitality, culinary, agri-tourism, accommodation, outdoor tour operators, arts, cultural and heritage, downtown Courtenay and Comox, as well as media outlets.
2.	Partnerships	Partner with DMOs and RDMOs to leverage resources and extend reach of marketing.
3.	Reporting	MRDT and DBC campaign reporting, and related Provincial requirements.
4.	Communications	Delivery of timely, informative tourism industry and consumer-oriented content via digital & traditional media.

<b>VISITOR CENTRE SERVICES 2021 – 2022 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES</b>		
<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>PROJECT DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>DAY TO DAY SERVICES</b>		
1.	TVI Visitor Services Contract Management	Management and reporting of TVI contract deliverables.
2.	VI Visitor Center Operations	Facility maintenance and management.
3.	Industry engagement	Ongoing outreach with tour operators, artisans, event hosts, venues to profile products and experiences via related online systems including live calendar of events, rezgo online tour and activity booking platform and DCV Shopify retail platform.
<b>PROJECTS</b>		
1.	Virtual Consumer Support	Promoting and booking tourism product directly and supporting consumer inquiry virtually through a website chat-service and phone line.
2.	Mobile Visitor Servicing	Staff kiosk at the Comox Harbour with itineraries/experiences/theme-based content and an ability to book experiences and packages.
3.	Comox Valley Growers Guide	Expand publication by onboarding more farms, providing useful information, and linking to the Taste Comox Valley app.
4.	VI Pride	Work collaboratively with Mount Washington Ski Association to support the Annual Vancouver Island Pride Snow Sports event at Mount Washington.
5.	Circle Tour Route Campaign	Promote and collaborate with participating communities in the development and execution of the campaign.
<b>ADMINISTRATION</b>		
1.	Collaboration	Collaborate extensively with area tourism partners including, but not limited to K'ómoks First Nation, transportation, hospitality, culinary, agri-tourism, accommodation, outdoor and indoor activities, marine tourism, arts, cultural and heritage, downtown Courtenay and Comox, to better use and leverage the services of the Visitor Centre.
2.	Partnership Development	Explore options for an indigenous tourism partnership with K'ómoks Economic Development Commission.
3.	Reporting	Visitor Info Network Program reporting including MRDT and DBC requirements as required.
4.	Training & Education	Host tour operator, industry B2B and professional development opportunities and fall tourism networking event.
5.	Point of Sales	Review options for new Point of Sales system and online retails sales capacity.

Office of the Chair

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www.comoxvalleyrd.ca



File: 6750-20/CV

October 29, 2020

Sent via email only: deanasimkin@shaw.ca

Deana Simkin  
President Comox Valley Economic Development Society  
200-580 Duncan Avenue  
Courtenay, BC V9N 2M7

Dear Ms. Simkin:

**Re: Economic Development Service**

As you know, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) recently held a strategic priorities workshop concerning the Comox Valley Economic Development service. At its October 27, 2020 meeting, the CVRD Board endorsed the following strategic priority items that were identified during the workshop:

1. Organize a Childcare Forum
2. Organize an Event Hosting Forum
3. Track grant availability to support non-profits and explore creating a portal on attraction infrastructure in CVRD
4. Explore concept of shared communal tech workspace
5. Support training, grant programs and business opportunities in the green retrofit industry
6. Organize an Arts and Cultural Forum
7. Development of a food hub or aggregation hub

On behalf of the CVRD Board, I respectfully request your consideration of including the above-noted strategic priority items in the CVEDS 2021 work plan that is to be presented to the CVRD Board before December 31, 2020. As such, I would like to invite you to present the work plan to the CVRD Board at one of the following upcoming meetings, all commencing at 4:00 pm:

November 17, 2020;  
December 8, 2020; or  
December 15, 2020.

Please have your staff contact Scott Smith, General Manager of Planning and Development Services, at 334-6077 or via email at [srsmith@comoxvalleyrd.ca](mailto:srsmith@comoxvalleyrd.ca) to confirm CVEDS availability to present on one of these dates and with any further questions you may have.

We look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jesse Ketler', is written over the text.

Jesse Ketler  
Chair

cc R. Dyson, Chief Administrative Officer  
S. Smith, General Manager of Planning and Development Services  
J. Watson, Executive Director, Comox Valley Economic Development



*COVID-19 Pandemic: Response and Recovery*



# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Comox Valley Economic Development & Tourism

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## Board of Directors

Deana Simkin, *President*  
 Brucer Turner, *Vice President*  
 Justin Rigsby, *Past President*  
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 Paul Ives, *Director*

Tony Hayes, *Director*  
 Diane Naugler, *Director*  
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 Mike Obal, *Director*

## Members

Russell Arnott, *Town of Comox*  
 Melanie McCollum, *City of Courtenay*  
 Daniel Arbour, *CVRD Electoral Area A*

Arzeena Hamir, *CVRD Electoral Area B*  
 Edwin Grieve, *CVRD Electoral Area C*

# President's Message & Executive Summary



This past year has been a significant and difficult one for Comox Valley Economic Development (CVEDS), as it has been for many Comox Valley businesses, our communities, and residents, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its significant impact on the economy and peoples livelihoods. As the effects of the pandemic became quickly apparent in March, CVEDS Board and staff pivoted to respond quickly to the daily changes in current business conditions and orders from the Provincial Health Office. This response included implementation of short term responsive measures via a wide range of projects and partnerships, specific leadership initiatives, alongside regular industry communications and supportive programing. On behalf of the Board and staff, I am pleased to highlight some of these items that formed the majority of our 2020 Strategic Priorities response to the pandemic in the following annual report.

2020 also included a renewal of the service agreement contract with the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD). This process was supported by a working committee of CVRD and CVEDS Directors, and chaired by City of Courtenay Councillor Doug Hillian. Councillor Hillian's efforts, along with Committee Members Councillor Ken Grant, Town of Comox, Electoral Area A Director Daniel Arbour, together with CVEDS Directors Bruce Turner and Brian Yip, resulted in support for a collaborative approach to this process during the pandemic, and in recognizing the importance of including economic recovery in the new agreement as a primary focus of the next few years. Despite the challenges of 2020, we continued to significantly leverage the funding we received from local government to the tune of over 1 million dollars, which enabled us to extend the reach and depth of our programs and activities.

Finally, I would like to recognize our staff who moved quickly to ensure business continuity and open lines of communication in the early days of the pandemic as its impacts became apparent. Our staff and Board have supported many projects and programs during these difficult times, and it is my pleasure to recognize their dedication and commitment to local business and industries that have, and continue to struggle from the economic impacts of the pandemic.

As we move into 2021 we will continue to support the work of the Comox Valley Economic Recovery Task Force (ERTF) as a top priority, and look forward to continued collaboration with our local governments and business partners as we implement many of the recommendations that will support long term economic recovery and resiliency for our region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deana Simkin". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Deana Simkin  
President, CVEDS Board



# 2020

## Comox Valley Economic Snapshot

Population

**74,383**

(BC Stats Projection)

Population Growth

**+6,309**

+9.3%  
(2015 - 2020)



Growth in Business  
(Class 6) Assessed

**\$461M** Values  
(+25.6%) (2017-2021)

Air Transport Passengers

**127,633**

(CV Airport)



Largest  
Economic Sectors\*  
(by employment)



Retail Trade  
**3,885** (17.1%)



Health Care  
**2,970** (13.1%)



Federal/Provincial Government  
**2,275** (10.0%)

\*2016 data

Construction and  
Real Estate

Housing Starts

**476**

(-5%)

Unit Sales

**778**

(+13.6%)

Average Price

**\$631,705**

(+9.1%)



Hotel Room  
Revenue

**\$8.88M**

(+17%)



(June-Oct, Courtenay MRDT)

BC Ferries Traffic

**104,733**

(Passengers, Comox-Little  
River Terminal)



# COVID-19 Pandemic Response Highlights

Early response to the impact on local business throughout the Comox Valley required increased communications to local industry sectors and business organizations regarding timely COVID-19 program information, including details around health orders for businesses, as well as distilling and disseminating information about the range of support programs being announced for various industries.

## COVID-19 Business Resource Centre

Rapid development and deployment of a Comox Valley Business Resource Centre, which was updated and refined regularly, for the purpose of providing a “one stop shop” for small business resources and supports. The page was informed by dozens of industry and government business directives and measures and broken down to reflect key sectors programs and resources.

## Online Business Directory

Early in the pandemic crisis, a responsive Business Directory platform (AirTable) was created, with an intake form and digital marketing campaign for small businesses, direct farm markets and restaurants to profile their current status and services available.

Business Name	Status	Business Category	Hours	Website	City
Green Gate Farm	Open (with caution)	Farm Markets/Stands	Open most hours but please call ahead.		Courtenay
Wicklow Farm and Botanic Garden	Outdoor area open to public	Farm Markets/Stands	Friday and Saturday 10 am - 4 pm until September 12	www.wicklowfarm.ca	Courtenay
Ironwood Farm	Essentially closed	Farm Markets/Stands	The farm stand will open mid April		Courtenay
Kalbar Vegetable Company	Regular hours	Farm Markets/Stands	Tuesday - Saturday 10am-4pm	www.kalbarvegetables.ca	Swartz Bay
Goodness Farm	Essentially closed	Farm Markets/Stands	June-October, Tuesday-Friday 12pm-7pm		Courtenay
Looted Lavender Market	Essentially closed	Farm Markets/Stands	everyday 9am - 1pm		Courtenay
Looted Lavender Market	Physical location open to public	Farm Markets/Stands			Courtenay

## Comox Valley Business Impact Survey

Developed and launched early into the crisis and modified as new information was made available, this survey tracked financial impacts of businesses throughout the Valley, and enabled staff to refine the information being provided via the multiple channels, as well as enable direct, one-on-one follow-up with the businesses expressing specific areas of assistance needed.

## Stakeholder Communications, Leadership Groups & Outreach

Weekly Leadership calls were established to collect real time feedback, identify critical early issues, and ensure increased communications with local industry, regional and provincial economic development organizations and Ministries.

## Small Business Communications

CVEDS maintained timely, responsive communications across all online platforms throughout the pandemic, including industry specific e-Newsletters developed and distributed to thousands of Comox Valley businesses with a specific focus on key sectors including small business, agriculture & seafood, tourism & hospitality industries.

## Taste Comox Valley Growers Guide App

The Taste Comox Valley App was launched in June 2020 as a guide to exploring the Comox Valley's extensive & diverse farms, markets & stands, wineries and other producers, safely while supporting local.

## COVID-19 Response

133

Survey responses

290+

Business Directory listings

3,400+

E-Newsletter distribution

37

COVID-19 E-News

## COVID-19 Resources Webpage

3,100+

Unique Pageviews

5:24

Average Time on Page

## Taste Comox Valley App:

700

Downloads

6,600+

Locations' page views

2,400+

App launches

**COVID-19 Business Resources Update**

**BC's Restart Plan Announcement**

**Premier Outlines Plan to Restart BC Safely**

BC is currently in Phase 1 of the plan. Phase 2, which will begin mid-May, includes:

- small social gathering;
- a resumption of elective surgeries and regulated health services like physiotherapy, dentistry, chiropractors and in-person counselling;
- provincial parks open for day use;
- opening more non-essential businesses in keeping with safe operations plans;
- recalling the provincial legislature for regular sittings.

**BC's (careful) Restart Plan**

**PHASE 1** (Current) - Essential services & some business

**PHASE 2** (Mid-May Commence) - A resumption of elective services, elective non-essential businesses, and regulated health services

**PHASE 3** (June Commence) - Further relaxation of business and non-essential services

**PHASE 4** (July Commence) - Further relaxation of business and non-essential services

**BC'S RESTART PLAN**

# Economic Recovery Task Force

The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) initiated the establishment of the Economic Recovery Task Force (ERTF) in May 2020, to develop and direct implementation of an Economic Development Recovery Plan to mitigate the potential economic impact to local businesses from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ERTF is a collaborative initiative representing the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD), City of Courtenay, Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland, K'ómoks First Nation, and CFB 19 Wing Comox. Industry Advisors have been submitting Business Case Action Plans containing recommendations for consideration of the ERTF, after facilitating small working-group meetings within their sector/organization, for a total of over 900 engagements to date.

The ERTF efforts have focused on the review of those submissions, including evaluation of recommended actions that have the greatest consensus, will have the most meaningful impact, and are viewed to be realistically achievable from a local government perspective.

After reviewing the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan, the following were identified as key priority projects for economic recovery:

- Shop local / arts
- Agriculture
- Tech / digital support for businesses
- Childcare
- Transportation and regional connectivity
- Streamline permitting process for businesses

Based on these priorities, and in collaboration with local governments, applications for economic recovery funding were completed to support food hub upgrades to the Merville Hall, environmental stormwater infrastructure improvements at the Comox Valley Airport, and replacement of the Marine Services Building at Comox Marina.

## Support Local BC

In October 2020, Courtenay & Comox joined Support Local BC which is an online gift certificate purchasing portal that allows customers to support their favourite local, independently owned businesses. A Support Local Campaign was also launched early December to create awareness, as well as encourage to spend local. Contesting ran for the 4 weeks which saw over 370 entries.



## ERTF Analytics

- 34 Industry Advisors
- 29 Business Case Action Plans
- 150+ Total recommendations
- 900+ Local business engagements
- 9 Committee Meetings
- 22+ News Articles

# Work Plan Project Highlights



## Employment and Workforce Training

Successful funding applications to the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training – Community Workforce Response Grant program were submitted in order to establish a Small Scale Sustainable Farming & Craft Brewing and Malting program in partnership with North Island College.



## Virtual Events

Included a “Wish You Were Beer” Craft Beer Virtual Happy Hour series and support local, buy local campaigns to feature and amplify local businesses and their modified services offered during the pandemic.

## Ambassador Program

Delivered a mobile Visitor Centre Ambassador program and kiosk at the Comox Marina. The program ran from July – September and ambassador fielded 5,000 enquiries to support increased tour and activity bookings, business referrals, increase length of stay, and provide Visitor Center services.



## Virtual BC Seafood Expo

Hosted a virtual BC Seafood Expo Trade event on November 17-18, 2020 with 140 participants. This event allowed for companies to meet international buyers and other businesses directly online, through an innovative Virtual Trade Show Portal. Event presentations are available online at [www.bcseafoodexpo.com](http://www.bcseafoodexpo.com).



## Website Redesign and Update

Review, update and overhaul of CVEDS Discover, Invest, Business, Agriculture, and Technology microsites into an updated website structure. This included new layout, navigation, colour palette, content update and resources.

# Marketing Campaigns Snapshot



## Après Ski Comox Valley Campaign

This Winter campaign promoted Après Ski and Stay in the Comox Valley, to highlight the range of activities, events, and hotel packages that could be paired with the Vancouver Island and BC winter enthusiasts when they visit for a day of skiing at Mount Washington. In total, 4 ticketed events and over 40 free events were held.

## Comox Valley Untapped Contest

This targeted promotion within the Untappd app, offered users the chance to win a Vancouver Island Part II Ale Trail Experience (Parksville to Campbell River). The contest drove 1,230 contest entries at an entry rate of 18.6% over one month.



A screenshot of a Facebook post from 'Discover Comox Valley'. The post is titled 'Dine Around with Us from Feb 20 - March 15!' and includes a photo of a plate of food with a 'COMOX VALLEY DINE AROUND FESTIVAL' logo. The post text describes the festival and provides a link for more details. Below the post, engagement statistics are shown: 4,071 People Reached and 106 Engagements. A 'Boost Unavailable' button is also visible.

## Comox Valley Dine Around Festival

The Dine Around Festival celebrates the depth of foodie experiences and attractions in the Comox Valley. The campaign encouraged travellers to visit participating local restaurants, wineries, breweries, and distilleries and attend exclusive events. To increase awareness, online, print and radio ads ran promoting the Dine Around Festival and hotel bookings.

## Take-Out Comox Valley Campaign

After the initial shutdown, when restaurants began to reopen, CVEDS promoted takeout, patio services, and those offering dine in options, all with a focus on COVID-19 safety protocols and supporting local restaurants messaging.



**West Coast Traveller**

Discover the Comox Valley feature on the West Coast Traveller website resulting in nearly 300,000 page views and 60,000 impressions.



**Outdoors Are In! Campaign and Contest**

Launched the day Dr. Henry moved to Phase III of BC’s Restart Plan, this campaign was designed to drive referrals to tour and activity providers’ websites and social media channels, as well as to our accommodation providers. The campaign highlighted inspiring and informative content, encouraged longer stays in the Comox Valley, while addressing consumer concerns about safe activities. The primary campaign channels were on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and



via weekly e-Blasts (17k+ dist.) targeting BC residents. The campaign ran from June 25 - Sept 25, with ads being viewed 10,800,204 times! Ads focussed on Arts & Culture, Culinary, Marine Adventure, Outdoor Adventure and the new Mount Washington Ziptour. The summer campaign resulted in 12,801 destination visitations/conversions.

The Outdoors Are In summer campaign also featured a photo contest which received 502 photo entries and ended in a People’s Choice award where voters voted a total of 659 times.



**Visa-With Thanks Campaign**

This Fall Campaign was designed to increase the number of accommodation bookings through incentivizing stays at Island accommodations among a BC audience. The offer was to book a 2 night stay and receive a free \$75 Visa gift card at participating hotels on Vancouver Island. CVEDS helped amplify Tourism Vancouver Island’s marketing efforts through social media, website engagements and eblast content development.



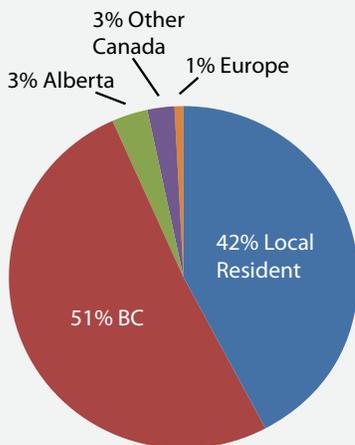
**Farm Cycle Tour**

This year’s modified Farm Cycle Tour encouraged downloads of the new Taste Comox Valley app, featuring local growers, farms, wineries, breweries, and distilleries. The campaign invited cyclists and their “safe bubble” to follow Discover Comox Valley on Facebook for suggested cycle routes to use for self-guided, and socially-distanced, visits to local businesses in the Comox Valley and surrounding area.

# Visitor Centre Services

Total 2020 Visitors  
**16,678**

## 2020 VISITOR ORIGIN



## Visitor Services & Fulfilment

The Vancouver Island Visitor Centre (Comox Valley) continues to be one of the busiest information centres on Vancouver Island and was one of the first tourism centres to reopen after the initial shut down due to COVID-19 in March. The Visitor Centre re-opened near the end of May to locals and the staff were able to welcome BC residents once the province moved into phase 3.

## VIVC COVID-19 Reopening Plan

A WorkSafeBC based Safety Plan was established for all front and back of house operations and procedures. This enabled the VIVC to be one of the first Visitor Centres in the Province to reopen in alignment with the BC Restart Plan which allowed for safe travel within BC.

## VIVC Online Retail Store

The creation of a Vancouver Island Visitor Centre online retail store, via Shopify platform, which features some of the amazing local artists of Comox Valley. The online retail store showcases locally created jewellery, cards, and photography and prints by local artists plus locally produced products like beeswax wraps, natural soaps and salves and more!



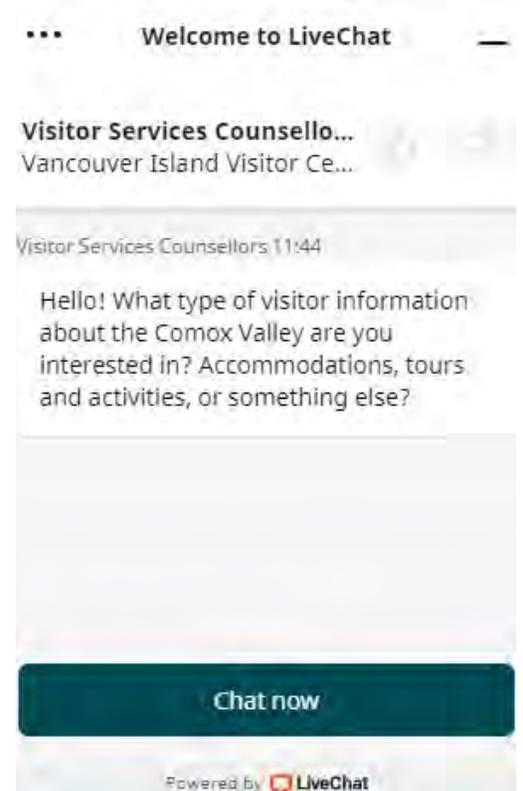
## Vancouver Island Pride Weekend

The Vancouver Island Visitor Centre participated with the Mobile Visitor Centre, as a focal point for pride participants and visitors to obtain schedule of activities and information pertinent to the event. Pride Weekend was a very successful event.



## LiveChat

A new LiveChat feature was added to the Discover Comox Valley website allowing visitor centre staff to provide real-time information to visitors and locals wanting to plan a staycation or a visit.

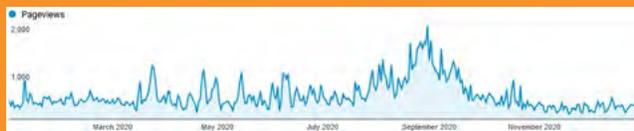


# Communications

## Website Stats

	2019	2020	% Change
<b>DISCOVER COMOX VALLEY</b>			
Sessions	72,625	76,334	5.1%
Pageviews	95,476	112,158	17.5%
Unique Pageviews	78,119	90,999	16.5%
<b>INVEST COMOX VALLEY</b>			
Sessions	11,093	11,802	6.4%
Pageviews	21,965	23,138	5.3%
Unique Pageviews	17,273	17,890	3.6%

## CVEDS Website Pageviews



## E-Newsletters

#	#	#	#
of Tourism Industry e-News	of Consumer Tourism e-News	of Business e-News	of COVID-19 e-News
Open Rate: 35%	Open Rate: 31%	Open Rate: 31%	Open Rate: 41%
Click Rate: 11%	Click Rate: 11%	Click Rate: 10%	Click Rate: 19%
<b>15</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>37</b>

## Social Media

	2019	2020	Y/Y Increase	% Increase
<b>DISCOVER COMOX VALLEY</b>				
Facebook Likes	18,685	18,828	143	0.77%
Twitter Followers	2,449	2,517	68	2.78%
Instagram New Followers	2,201	2,991	790	35.89%
<b>CVEDS</b>				
Facebook Likes	1,474	1,614	140	9.50%
Twitter Followers	2,333	2,350	17	0.73%
<b>TOTAL SOCIAL FOLLOWERS</b>	<b>27,142</b>	<b>28,300</b>	<b>1,158</b>	<b>4.27%</b>

# Partnerships

Comox Valley Economic Development & Tourism has formed and enhanced dynamic partnerships with hundreds of companies and organizations within the region; the Society cannot do what it does without their support and collaboration.

<b>AGRICULTURE CANADA</b>	<b>COMOX VALLEY FARMERS' INSTITUTE</b>	<b>MNP</b>
<b>BC ALE TRAIL</b>	<b>COMOX VALLEY FARMERS' MARKET</b>	<b>MOUNT WASHINGTON RESORT ASSN</b>
<b>BC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSN</b>	<b>COMOX VALLEY HARBOUR AUTHORITY</b>	<b>MOUNTAIN BIKE BC ASSN</b>
<b>BC HOTEL ASSOCIATION</b>	<b>COMOX VALLEY REGIONAL DISTRICT</b>	<b>NORTH ISLAND COLLEGE</b>
<b>BC RESTAURANT &amp; FOOD SERVICES ASSOCIATION</b>	<b>CRAFT BREWERS GUILD</b>	<b>OCEAN WISE</b>
<b>BC SHELLFISH GROWERS ASSN</b>	<b>DESTINATION BRITISH COLUMBIA</b>	<b>PACIFIC SEA CUCUMBER HARVESTERS</b>
<b>BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK OF CANADA</b>	<b>DOWNTOWN COURTENAY B.I.A.</b>	<b>PACIFIC URCHIN HARVESTERS</b>
<b>BUY BC</b>	<b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSN OF CANADA</b>	<b>SID WILLIAMS THEATRE</b>
<b>CFB 19 WING COMOX</b>	<b>EXPORT NAVIGATOR</b>	<b>SMALL BUSINESS BC</b>
<b>CITY OF COURTENAY</b>	<b>INNOVATION ISLAND TECHNOLOGY ASSN</b>	<b>SMALL SCALE FOOD PROCESSORS</b>
<b>COMMUNITY FUTURES DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION OF STRATHCONA</b>	<b>INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF SHOPPING CENTERS</b>	<b>TRADEMODO</b>
<b>COMOX B.I.A.</b>	<b>ISLAND COASTAL ECONOMIC TRUST</b>	<b>TOURISM VANCOUVER ISLAND</b>
<b>COMOX VALLEY AIRPORT COMMISSION</b>	<b>K'OMOKS FIRST NATION</b>	<b>TOWN OF COMOX</b>
<b>COMOX VALLEY ARTS COUNCIL</b>	<b>LENTELUS FARMS</b>	<b>UNDERWATER HARVESTERS ASSN</b>
<b>COMOX VALLEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE</b>	<b>MID ISLAND FARMERS' INSTITUTE</b>	<b>UNION BAY, SARATOGA BEACH AND PUNTLIDGE AREA BUSINESSES</b>
<b>COMOX VALLEY CYCLING COALITION</b>	<b>MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE</b>	<b>VANCOUVER ISLAND COAST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSN</b>
<b>COMOX VALLEY DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION ASSN</b>	<b>MINISTRY OF JOBS, TRADE &amp; TECHNOLOGY</b>	<b>VANCOUVER ISLAND COMMUNITY DMO'S</b>
<b>COMOX VALLEY EXHIBITION</b>	<b>MINISTRY OF TOURISM, ARTS &amp; CULTURE</b>	<b>VANCOUVER ISLAND ECONOMIC ALLIANCE</b>
		<b>VANCOUVER ISLAND REAL ESTATE BOARD</b>



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