

***Building a Vibrant, Connected
Economy in Saanich***



**2005—2009
MUNICIPAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

November 2004

“Serving the People”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the introduction of the Saanich Corporate Plan and the strategic theme “Vibrant, Connected Economy” in 2003, Council and staff have committed to a renewed focus on economic issues. A major supporting initiative of this new focus is the creation of an Economic Development Strategy for the Municipality of Saanich. This strategy outlines the goals, strategic objectives and activities that will be undertaken in 2005 - 2009.

Saanich’s Economic Development Strategy focuses on the areas where the municipality can make the greatest impact and create tangible benefits in the local economy – namely, to deliver excellent service, provide relevant and innovative infrastructure, and consistent, coordinated government.

2005 – 2009 Strategic Objectives

1. **Build a more positive business climate** in the Municipality by developing new processes, partnerships and staff education programs that improve customer service and streamline policy and regulatory processes.
2. **Strengthen links between staff and Saanich business communities** to improve communication and consultation on municipal issues related to economic development.
3. **Collaborate regionally on economic development initiatives.** Ensure that Saanich is actively engaged in coordinated initiatives such as the Regional Growth Strategy and the Greater Victoria Economic Development Opportunities Blueprint.



Introduction

With the introduction of the Saanich Corporate Plan and the strategic theme “Vibrant, Connected Economy” in 2003, Council and staff have committed to a renewed focus on economic issues.

This Municipal Economic Development Strategy provides a framework to coordinate the economic development strategies to be pursued in 2005-2009, and integrates current business support activities such as the grants-in-aid to Tourism Victoria, Vancouver Island Advanced Technology Centre (VIATeC), Victoria Film Commission and the new Cadboro Bay Business Improvement Association.

Municipal Context: Economic Development

Historically, many local governments have participated in economic development planning and related activities. Municipal government can play a role in nurturing and sustaining a vibrant local economy by providing high quality, cost-effective local government services that are focused on meeting the needs of businesses and residents throughout the region. Municipal regulatory decisions should seek a careful balance between competing (and sometimes conflicting) social, economic and environmental needs in order to provide a consistent playing field for businesses to operate.

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Saanich Corporate Plan

In the Saanich Corporate Plan, the desired vision of a *Vibrant, Connect Economy* is described. Based on this vision, the Plan incorporates a *Vibrant, Connect Economy* Scorecard. Many of the Scorecards’ objectives and initiatives are addressed within this Economic Development Strategy.

This short- to medium-term vision is a key driver for the strategy:

Saanich is a community supported by a vibrant, diverse and connected regional economy.

Our economy is connected locally, regionally and globally. Our challenge is to build a vibrant connected economy that is responsive to change and provides diverse and viable economic opportunities in a rapidly globalizing world.

Saanich's clean, appealing environment, skilled workforce and responsive public services make Saanich an ideal location to live, work and conduct business. Our community infrastructure sustains and enhances our economy while meeting social and environmental commitments. Growing the commercial tax base ensures long term financial sustainability.

Saanich will continue to take a leadership role in promoting and supporting community economic interests and actively engage in regional economic development strategies. We will pursue growth in clean economy sectors, and expand commercial opportunities centered around village centres. We will preserve and promote our key economic advantage: the high quality of life, place and environment that Saanich offers citizens and businesses.

Saanich's Official Community Plan

The strategic objectives in the Municipal Economic Development Strategy also complement the vision of balanced economic development in Saanich's Official Community Plan, approved in 1993:

Over the last decade, Saanich has accommodated a large amount of commercial and industrial development. Tillicum Mall and Broadmead Village Shopping Centres were constructed and the University Heights Shopping Centre was upgraded. The core area underwent considerable change, including construction of the Saanich Plaza and Gateway Village within the highway commercial area leading into the City of Victoria.

The Royal Oak Industrial Park and the Douglas Street West Industrial Area are almost fully developed and few opportunities remain to accommodate major new commercial development. Recognizing these limitations emphasizes the need to look to an overall regional strategy.

Commercial and industrial development should not be allowed freely along major transportation corridors. This is especially important along Patricia Bay Highway, where scenic design considerations are paramount.

Over 50% of businesses in Saanich are home operated. This reflects a growing trend to work from the home and the need for persons to develop their own jobs within the economic parameters of a community.

The municipal emphasis will be on strengthening existing centres and accommodating small rural businesses and home occupation uses. Neighbourhood commercial centres, offering a variety of services, can be positive attributes of their community. However, any improvement or intensification of these centres must be sympathetic to the neighbourhood concerns of adjacent residential areas and local area plan policies.



Developing the strategy

This Municipal Economic Development Strategy represents a “first” for Saanich. It will serve to focus our organization’s economic development activities over the next four years, and it will be enhanced and modified as our knowledge and experience working in this area grows. A key strength of this strategy is its integrative, collaborative nature. As noted above, it builds upon ongoing work in several key areas, including the Saanich Official Community Plan, the Vibrant, Connected Economy theme group, and several related initiatives in the Corporate Plan.

Outside the Municipality of Saanich, the strategy is also aligned with regional economic development initiatives such as the Greater Victoria *Economic Development Opportunities Blueprint* and the Capital Region’s Regional Growth Strategy. Future strategic linkages – some of which are already being developed – will include the University of Victoria, Camosun College, Vancouver Island Technology Park and the City of Victoria’s Economic Development Division.

OUR STRATEGY

Building a vibrant, connected economy in Saanich

Uniquely Saanich

At its heart, this strategy is based upon a unique Saanich philosophy towards economic development:

“Saanich believes that the cornerstone for economic development is a coordinated approach based on sound economic, social and environmental values within a regional context.”

Building Upon Strengths

On the whole, Saanich can be characterized as a “bedroom community” with a tax base that is 90% dependent upon residential properties. However, the high-tech industry has called Saanich home for many years, primarily located around the Royal Oak Industrial Park. High-tech is the third largest employer in the Greater Victoria area, with more than 11,000 people employed in 1,273 companies in the region. Additionally, 66% of new 2003 business licenses issued in Saanich were for home-based businesses – a 20% increase over 2002. At present, 52% of all business licenses in Saanich are for home-based businesses.

Recent projects which build upon these strengths have been initiated and/or completed:

- In 2002, the *Vancouver Island Technology Park* (located on 35 acres in Saanich between Wilkinson and Interurban Roads) won the Urban Development Institute of BC provincial award in the area of sustainable development. The converted 14,850 square metre (165,000-sq. ft.) Tech Park is an excellent example of how governments and the private sector can collaborate to create environmentally sustainable infrastructure that boosts local communities and the economy.
- The municipality has completed a study and subsequent implementation of zoning changes in the Douglas East area to provide for additional land uses, including "high technology manufacturing, high density tourist accommodation and apartments".
- Tuscany Village Centre is the first large scale mixed use development in Saanich that combines residential and commercial uses on one parcel. To mitigate parking requirements, this development has incorporated "car share" memberships for the residential component. The internal plaza serves as a gathering spot for community use.
- The creation of Discovery Park, a technology transfer facility located at the University of Victoria, has created a hub for incubating high-tech R&D. Discovery Parks Inc. was granted a long-term lease of the land from UVic, which in turn is guaranteed a minimum financial return on the lease, and had control over the building's design and tenants.
- Agritourism is permitted on lands designated as Agricultural Land Reserve that are operating as commercial farms, subject to regulations that govern how and when agritourism can operate. The Galey Brothers Farm is an excellent example of how agritourism can creatively complement and support a basic farm operation. There are also examples of cottage wineries in more rural parts of Saanich.



Economic Development Strategy

2005 – 2009 Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives identified in this strategy represent priority areas that are intended to build upon our unique strengths in order to foster economic development in Saanich and the region.

1. **Build a more positive business climate** in the Municipality by developing new processes, partnerships and staff education programs that improve customer service and streamline policy and regulatory processes.
2. **Strengthen links between staff and Saanich business communities** to improve communication and consultation on municipal issues related to economic development.
3. **Collaborate regionally on economic development initiatives.** Ensure that Saanich is actively engaged in coordinated initiatives such as the Regional Growth Strategy and the Greater Victoria Economic Development Opportunities Blueprint.

Implementation Activities

2005 — 2006

The following three strategic objectives will be pursued using primarily existing resources and budgets. Within each strategic objective, strategies and activities are identified to achieve the outcomes. Activities have been identified for the present period up to 2006. As the strategy evolves and tasks are completed, activities for 2006-2009 will be identified.

OBJECTIVE 1 - Build a more positive business climate
STRATEGIES
1. Streamline business processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From a customer perspective, review and examine processes for rezoning, development permits, subdivision approvals and building permits. This process is currently underway and will be complete by the end of 2004. Additional high impact business processes will undergo similar reviews and potential streamlining in 2005 and 2006.
2. Review and modernize regulatory, tax and fee frameworks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review existing home-based business regulatory framework and develop recommendations aimed at eliminating red tape and reducing obstacles to growth. Recommendations will be subject to community review and Council consideration late in 2004 or early in 2005. Assess Saanich's current framework. A benchmark report on fees and tax rates of comparable jurisdictions will be completed in 2004, and comparability will be adjusted and maintained, where necessary, in 2005. Prepare at least one revitalization feasibility review by September 2005. Review existing land use policy and regulations. Establish and implement a program to optimize land use and availability for economic development by fall 2005.
3. Promote service excellence and efficiency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase access to on-line transaction services, including GIS, available to both the public and staff on the municipal website by December 2004. Ensure that Saanich's customer service programs include a "business-friendly" component by September 2005.

OBJECTIVE 2 - Strengthen links with Saanich business communities

STRATEGIES

1. *Establish organizational capacity for business liaison activities*

- Creation of a business liaison capacity to encourage and maintain contacts with Saanich's business communities as well as appropriate government and private sector agencies.
- The *Service Excellence* and *Vibrant, Connected Economy* theme groups will continue to emphasize initiatives that address key areas such as customer service, innovative infrastructure and business process improvement.
- Support development of at least one more business improvement area in 2005.

2. *Develop ongoing processes to gather business community input*

- Establish a semi-formal, regular meeting of business leaders, Saanich Development Review Committee and senior staff, starting in Fall 2004. Members will review the municipality's progress towards this strategy, problem-solve specific issues, and identify emerging trends.
- Develop a specific strategy to actively engage the business community in the next Official Community Plan review process.

3. *Forge connections with emerging "new economy" business sectors*

- Create formal links with the region's post-secondary institutions, R&D and technology firms and the Chamber of Commerce by the end of 2004 to begin proactively identifying and responding to opportunities to create new synergies between these non-governmental stakeholders and the municipality.

OBJECTIVE 3 - Collaborate regionally on economic development initiatives

STRATEGIES

1. *Develop collaborative working relationships with other municipalities*

- Develop a Saanich Community Profile by end of 2004 and update it annually.
- Work in partnership with the City of Victoria Economic Development Division to develop a coordinated approach to economic development marketing by fall 2004.

2. *Ensure that regional strategies incorporate Saanich input*

- Ensure that Saanich is actively engaged in the ongoing development and general direction of the economic component of the Regional Growth Strategy.
- Create links between Saanich and the Greater Victoria Enterprise Partnership Society to ensure coordination with activities related to the review and implementation of the Greater Victoria Economic Development Opportunities Blueprint.

Next Steps

The strategic objectives identified in this Municipal Economic Development Strategy represent priority areas that are intended to build upon our unique strengths in order to foster economic development and improve the business experience in Saanich.

Within each objective, strategies and activities have been outlined for 2005-2006. With participation and input from the Saanich business community, the following groups and individuals will be moving ahead on these activities over the next twelve to eighteen months:

1. **Vibrant, Connected Economy Theme Group** – Paul Murray, Director of Finance
2. **Business Liaison** – Wayne Randall, Lands Commissioner
3. **Corporate Projects Coordinator** – Kate Kimberley

These individuals will work with and coordinate the participation of other Theme Group members and Saanich staff to address the objectives outlined in the Municipal Economic Development Strategy.



*For more information or for copies of the Economic Development Strategy, please contact **The District of Saanich** at (250) 475-1775*

Electronic version (in PDF format) available on the District of Saanich website at www.saanich.ca

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