

# Illuminating New Economic Possibilities – Snapshot of the Let the Sparks Fly Interviews and Emails

On November 24, 2015, *Let the Sparks Fly* interviewees and Powell River Chamber of Commerce members will come together for a business breakfast and a learning circle to respond to the question:

Understanding that the economy is created by a constellation of small actions taken by multiple players, what is it that we are already doing to construct an economy that enhances well-being in the region? What more could we be doing?

As a tool to advance dialogue, the *Let the Sparks Fly* articles which featured interviews with local business people as well as email feedback from interviewees about their experience participating in the articles have been analyzed for emerging themes that might relate to our current research question. The interviews focused on the synergy between our economic, social, and environmental well-being. Most interviewees emphasized the amazing people in this community in both Powell River and Tla'amin so please consider the entire region in all that follows. **Quote** The partnership between Sliammon and Powell River is nationally recognized and is an example of solid leadership. (K. Harry)

## Small actions we are already doing to contribute to the economy; things we can and should build on!

Interviewees were very clear that we are already doing many things that contribute to economic success in this region. Some of the things we are doing well already – and we could benefit from doing more of – include investing in people, investing locally, and thinking about long-term quality of life rather than short term profit. There was a huge emphasis on the ‘people’ side of the economy – supporting people helps individuals and businesses to support one another through partnerships, leadership, mentorship, and relationships. Interviewees suggest that what makes Powell River unique – the natural beauty and the lifestyle – are keys to our emerging economy.

**Other key words or themes:** Pride and passion, gratitude, ethical commitment, connectedness, exciting time of transition, appreciation for our history.

**Quotes** •The revival of entrepreneurship in Sliammon is a big part. (Katrin Harry) •It is an unexpected evolution – a surprise that various unknown people can become partners to bring visions to life! (Paul Cummings) •There is a brand new vibe in town; it feels different than it ever has. I can't put my finger on it, but it feels very positive. (Walter Martella) •The most helpful was the Community Futures program. It's made such a big difference. (Christina Maitland) •We collaborate with other businesses ... who have the same challenges. Everyone wants to see each other blossom. (Matt Klasen)

## Small actions we could be doing to further contribute to the economy; things we need for our future well-being.

There is a lot of overlap between what we are already doing and what we could be doing to further contribute to the economy. In addition to doing more of what we are already doing, interviewees also said that in order to facilitate positive developments, more must be done to eliminate barriers to local initiatives (including at a policy level), to support new and innovative initiatives, and to invest in infrastructure. They said we need to consider jobs for young people, how to bring money in from outside the region, and how to increase our commitment to clean industry in a meaningful way.

**Other key words or themes:** Support innovation especially green innovation, consider how to bring money INTO the region, build on existing assets and reputation, support local by buying local, invest in youth, be patient – do thorough research.

**Quotes** •Take an inventory of what we have in the community... Find ways to expand and connect the dots between these assets. (Peter Mitchell) •Embrace big ideas and eliminate rules and constraints that grind them to a halt. (David Bowes & Patty O'Neill) •Go to established businesses and ask for help when you need it. Pay yourself adequately but focus on building the business. Do your research. Finally, have confidence in yourself, in your great idea. (Jim Agius) •We need to connect knowledge with land. I would like to see land owners allowing young people to farm their property and support the young agrarian movement. (Kristi McCrae)

## Who are the players in the local economy?

All interviewees were very clear that economic success is a collective effort. In addition to people (business owners, customers, mentors, service providers, and staff), the focus was on government at all levels – local, provincial, and federal. There are some factors that are also players in the local economy. Some are human capital (arts and culture, talented and inspiring individuals, friends and family), others might be classified as infrastructure (transportation, policies, suppliers), and others still are non-human (the beauty of and resources in the natural world). Recognizing all of these diverse players in the local economy can help us be thoughtful and strategic when illuminating new economic possibilities for the region.

**Other key words and themes:** Transportation (especially ferries) tourism, aquaculture, agriculture, Community Futures, talented individuals – early adopters of innovation & long time business people with family roots in our community, young people, Tla'amin Nation.

**Quotes** •The largest impact was the idea we were operating businesses that were as much the community's as our own. (Peter Mitchell) •The economy is not a mystical force or a deity, just people doing business with people. (David Bowes and Patty O'Neill) •We have a good balance with a committed mayor interested in job creation and a council that is listening. (Jim Agius) •Distance can be both a barrier and a benefit. Transport costs are high, but it creates a filter that keeps Powell River special. (Christina Maitland) •Sustainability is at the heart of Aboriginal culture. Our business is knowledge-based with low impact while technology allows us to connect with our market. (Katrin Harry)