

Mayor's Message – October 2017

Like many of you, I take delight in the beauty of our harbour, with its backdrop of verdant islands and steel-blue mountains. Similarly, your Council values the harbour area, both personally, as we walk, shop and entertain visitors by the water, and professionally, recognizing its importance as a strong attractor for the tourists who are so important to the economic wellbeing of our town.

In order to ensure we are maximizing the potential of the harbour area, we recently commissioned a Harbour Area Development Strategy. The Strategy is based on a business survey of all Harbour Area business owners, a visitor survey conducted from April to August, 2017, and other relevant research. In September, following completion of the Strategy, Gibsons' Committee of the Whole received a report which offered both encouraging information, and several worthwhile opportunities to consider for future planning.

The most encouraging aspects of the report included socioeconomic data indicating strong numbers, including \$49.5 million in annual revenues, and direct and indirect employment for some 420 people. (Indirect employment stems from businesses operating in the Harbour Area which purchase goods and services from other local businesses, which consequently employ additional workers.) Business surveys reflected confidence in the economic future of Gibsons, while visitors surveyed commented on our convenient location to the Lower Mainland; the wealth of outdoor activities available; and the quality of local restaurants and shops.

The report is valuable for these and other encouraging pieces of information, as well as for the opportunities it presents. For example, and not surprisingly, a number of visitors indicated they would be more likely to return to the Landing, and to stay longer, if there were a continuous seawall walk around the harbour; a public beach with change rooms; greater shopping and dining diversity; and improved accommodation options. Boaters surveyed emphasized the need for more available moorage, and convenient access to parts and repairs.

Recognizing that tourism spending is vital to the harbour economy, we were heartened to learn that the Phase One report describes the harbour area as "on the verge of a stable tourist economy". While some tourist concerns, such as ferry waits, are beyond our control, there is much that we can do to enhance the experiences of tourists to our town. We look forward to working with the community, and with local organizations such as Sunshine Coast Tourism, Gibsons Chamber of Commerce, and the Sunshine Coast Regional Economic Development Organization (SCREDO) as we identify concrete actions to increase the appeal of the harbour area as a travel destination, and to support the local businesses and the natural beauty which are integral components of that appeal.

More information about the report can be found on the Town of Gibsons website, and as always, we welcome your feedback.