

WE CAN ALL CONTRIBUTE TO (AND BENEFIT FROM) HIGHER WAGES

Talk of the Town - July 2019

by Mayor Bill Beamish

Last month, members of Gibsons' Council teamed up with staff from Town Hall, the Gibsons Chamber of Commerce, the Sunshine Coast Credit Union and other members of the local business community to conduct "Business Walks", a day-long survey of Gibsons' businesses meant to help determine how confident business owners are about their prospects and how our various organizations might better help them to thrive.

It was an interesting undertaking, which revealed that most of Gibsons' business owners are feeling quite positive about the future, both in terms of their own enterprises and the local economy in general. That's great news – and my hope is that these good economic conditions will translate into higher average wages in our community.

According to Living Wage for Families.ca, a "living wage" is the hourly amount a two-parent family of four needs to cover its basic expenses, when both parents work full-time. Basic expenses include food, clothing, rental housing, child care, transportation and small savings to cover illness or emergencies, but not future savings for home ownership, retirement or children's university education.

In BC, the living wage ranges from \$14.03/hour in North Central BC to \$19.50/hour in Metro Vancouver, which includes the Sunshine Coast. It is different from "minimum wage" (currently set at \$13.85/hour in BC), which keeps thousands of hard-working families living below the poverty line.

On our recent Business Walks, we heard that, while the majority of small business owners do pay their employees more than minimum wage, they often struggle to pay even themselves a living wage.

That's too bad, because studies show that employees (and business owners) who earn a living wage are good for the local economy, as higher incomes allow families to purchase more goods and services in their own neighbourhoods. It's a positive cycle that benefits everyone – and one I'd love to see happening on the Coast.

At Town Hall, our purchasing policy rewards businesses that demonstrate positive social values, including by paying their employees a living wage, offering benefits and providing professional development. More broadly, we can all help small businesses, local workers and our economy thrive by spending our dollars in the community. It may cost a little more sometimes, but the benefits come back to us in spades. Please, shop local.

