



Salt Spring Island Community Economic Sustainability Commission **ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

PREPARED BY
Patricia Huntsman Culture
+ Communication.



Community Economic
Sustainability Commission
ECONOMIC ACTION PLANNING

CRPD
Making a difference...together

INDIGENOUS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



We honour the common interests we have with the Saanich, Cowichan, and Chemainus First Nations on whose ancestral and unceded traditional territory we have the privilege to reside.

By doing so, we contribute to ensuring that the decisions being made support the sustainability of the land and natural resources of the island now known as Salt Spring.

CONTENTS

- 1. INTRODUCTION** 2
 - PROJECT PURPOSE 2
 - BACKGROUND 3
 - APPROACH 3
 - TIMELINE 4

- 2. PLANNING CONTEXT** 5
 - UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MODEL 5
 - BROADER ECONOMIC TRENDS AND CONSIDERATIONS 5
 - LOCAL COMMUNITY PROFILE 6
 - LOCAL PLANNING CONTEXT CONSIDERATIONS 7

- 3. ENGAGEMENT: MAJOR FINDINGS** 9
 - COMMUNITY ECONOMIC FORUM WORKING GROUP 9
 - INTERVIEWS 16
 - COMMUNITY ECONOMIC FORUM 18
 - DATA-GATHERING AND FACT-SHARING 19

- 4. STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS FOR ECONOMIC ACTION PLANNING** 20
 - VISION INPUTS 20
 - ECONOMIC ACTION PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS 20

- 5. GOING FORWARD** 23
 - CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE ECONOMIC ACTION PLANNING 23

- APPENDIX A** 24
 - Salt Spring Island Economic Action Plan—Engagement: Context Brief 25
 - Community Economic Forum: Towards Strengthening the SSI Economy Workshop Summary 31
 - Session Overview 31
 - Forum Summary 32
 - Planning Sheets 40
 - Community Interview Summaries 46

1. INTRODUCTION

PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to design and carry out a process to engage with key stakeholders, local community organizations and individual business owners to identify their vision for the local economy and strategic priorities, and to summarize recommendations for an Economic Action Plan (EAP) for Salt Spring Island (SSI).

The intention of the Economic Action Plan engagement process was to define future directions, investment priorities, context considerations, funding mechanisms, and actions for establishing a sustainable organizational framework and funding mechanisms that can support economic resilience and sustainability on SSI.

The process also involved sharing evidence-based research, and researching trends and gaps facing the SSI economy and region. It is envisioned that these results will be used to development an EAP in 2023 or 2024.

The work was supported by an engagement team and primarily led by the Salt Spring Island Community Economic Sustainability Commission (CESC) which had a mandate to:

- Develop a sustainable economic strategy for Salt Spring Island through cross-sector engagement
- Provide guidance, support and resources to island enterprises to help achieve economic sustainability through capacity-building, diversification, retention and business attraction

The CESC has operated under the name Opportunity Salt Spring and has served as an advisory commission established by the Capital Regional District (CRD). CESC volunteer commissioners have worked together since 2015 to seek ways to facilitate and promote strategic initiatives that can build economic capacity and resiliency on SSI through collaboration. Key accomplishments of the CESC include:

- Championed a strategic approach to economic development
- Obtained 'Rural' designation for SSI-SGI
- Rural Business Accelerator; Green Biz Lab; Rising Tide Business Services
- Opportunity Salt Spring website
- 2018 Economic Profile and Governance Report
- Founded SGITP
- Rural Islands Economic Forum
- Won ICET Inclusion; Community Futures
- Strengthened regional, Provincial, Federal government relations

Partners

- Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership Society (SGITP)
- SGI-CESC, SGI-CRC
- Rural Islands Economic Partnership
- Islands Coastal Economic Trust

Further information about the CESC can be found at opportunitiesaltspring.ca

The engagement process and report on economic action planning serves as CESC's Opportunity Salt Spring's final piece of work before its dissolution and it is hoped that consensus-building can be achieved through this initiative.

BACKGROUND

In August 2022, the CESC hired a consulting team to design, facilitate, manage and report on a cross-sector stakeholder engagement process that will inform the development of an Economic Action Plan for Salt Spring Island.

The EAP is an economic capacity-building strategy that will be developed in the future to strengthen existing businesses, to attract green and clean new businesses, and to encourage collaboration among the sectors to achieve a sustainable island economy.

The project scope shifted in late October 2022 as a result of the local and regional government elections and a decision was reached to dissolve the CESC. That said, the CRD and CESC agreed to continue with a revised engagement process until March 2023 and report out on the findings towards economic action planning.

APPROACH

The scope of work involved the design and implementation of a community engagement process outlined in the Engagement Framework and included:

- Forming a Community Economic Forum (CEF) Working Group representing various aspects of the local economy;
- Data-gathering, reviewing previous planning documents, and data analysis;
- Interviewing 20 local business owners;
- Facilitating the CEF event; and
- Preparing the present report on the recommendations that emerged from the engagement process.

A Community Economic Forum was held in March 2023 to engage local community organizations, stakeholders, and individual business owners on economic capacity building that is strategic and sustainable. Relevant research, current experience and recent data was shared with the CEF participants and stakeholders during the engagement process. The CEF served to inform a forthcoming EAP, a roadmap for future community and collaborative action on economic sustainability for Salt Spring.

The perspectives and recommendations gathered from the engagement process have been compiled in the present report and presented to the community and stakeholders. Recommended strategic priorities for the EAP are included at the conclusion of this report.

TIMELINE

The engagement and data-collection process was anticipated to be a six-to-seven month-long process of research and community engagement to chart a course for Salt Spring’s future economic development through a sustainability and community-based lens.

The process involved four phrases, with completion of the Plan and associated documents by April 2023:

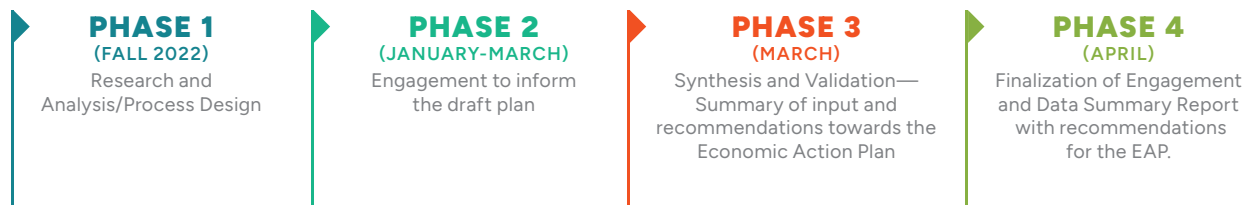
Phase 1 (Late Fall 2022): Research and Analysis/Process Design:

Phase 2 (January-March): Engagement to inform the draft plan

Phase 3 (End of March): Synthesis and Validation—Summary of input and recommendations towards Economic Action Plan Development

Phase 4 (April): Finalization of Engagement and Data Summary Report with recommendations for the EAP.

The planning process was carried out by a project team of consultants with support from CESC Commissioners and CRD staff.



2. PLANNING CONTEXT

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Community economic development encourages using local resources in a way that enhances economic opportunities while improving social conditions in a sustainable way. It equally facilitates the effective exploration and utilization of local resources for optimal community advantage. It uses a place-based approach and involves extensive community input and planning focused on the well-being of people in the local area.

BROADER ECONOMIC TRENDS AND CONSIDERATIONS

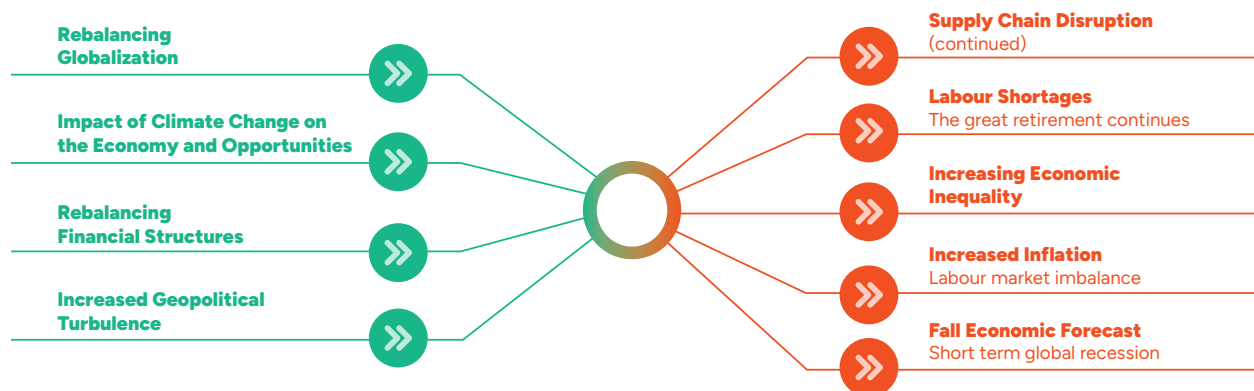


Figure 1. Broader economic forecast 2023-2024

The project team included noted Canadian economist Dr. Daniel Muzyka, who advised on economic analysis considerations for near-term planning. Identifying broader economic trends for SSI's consideration involved: consulting with Dr. Muzyka, reviewing previous key planning and analysis documents to identify what trends were still valid and occurring, conducting media scans on major economic and fiscal policy trends (fall 2022-early 2023, and reviewing available 2021 census data.

Broader trends for in the near term (2023-2025) centre on four primary forces:

Rebalancing globalization: Due to rising national interests (e.g., the rise of China and its interests, the Russian war in Ukraine, Saudi Arabia's and Iran's interests in the Middle East, Trump's "America First" position, etc.) there is increasing interest in reversing some aspects of globalization (e.g., reshoring manufacturing, protecting services and products on a national level through rising tariffs, etc.)

Increasing economic inequality: Either real or perceived due to rising asset costs, particularly housing, younger generations feel they don't have equal access to ownership as did prior generations.

Rebalancing financial structures: There are multiple issues at play when considering financial structures. Asset inflation is occurring due to persistent low interest rates in previous years (impacts

housing, infrastructure, etc.) which was part of rescuing the developed economies after the 2008 financial crash. Another contributing factor is dealing with the massive deficits caused by the COVID lockdown. A further aspect include the financing of the developing world and its debt, particularly with the rising interests of “lenders” like China.

Impact of climate change on the economy: Cited by The Economist as one of Canada’s largest ‘wedge’ issues, the impact of climate change on the economy results in lower GDP and by 2025, climate impacts are forecasted to slow Canada’s economic growth by \$25 billion annually, which is equal to 50 per cent of projected GDP growth. Serious investment in changing our energy infrastructure and climate impact could lessen the impact of jobs. At a local level, this can play out in several ways including: further droughts and increased limited water access; a decline in household income, particularly for low-income households which could see income losses of up to 19 percent; and job losses which could double by mid-century, to name a few impacts. SSI is already well-tuned to sustainability as a result of its agriculture context, and continuing to adapt and introduce new measures can include both direct and indirect economy-wide benefits.¹

LOCAL COMMUNITY PROFILE

Salt Spring Island is an unincorporated rural electoral district under the jurisdiction of the Capital Regional District (CRD), and is located in the Southern Gulf Islands.

The SSI population is older than the provincial average with 31% of residents aged 65 and over (Figure 2), significantly higher than the CRD regional average (22%) and the provincial average (18%). This is also a significant increase from 2006, when 22% of SSI residents were age over 65. The Labour Force participation rate, at 58%, lower than regional and provincial averages (64%). These statistics are unsurprising for a community with a large number of retired people.²

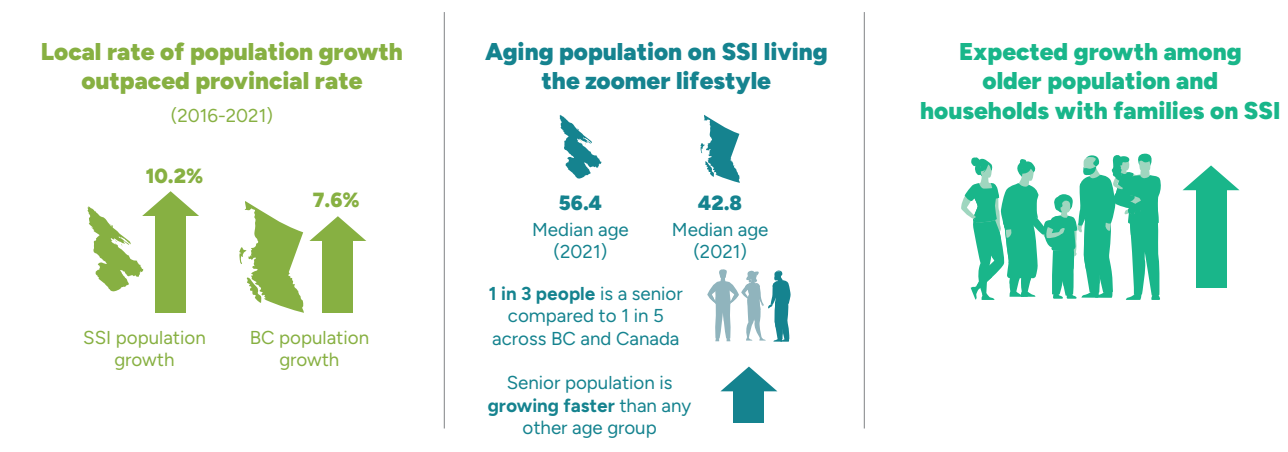


Figure 2: Population and Demographics

The CRD serves as the local government for electoral areas and most administrative functions are handled from the SSI CRD administrative office. However, on December 14, 2022 the Capital Regional District Board adopted bylaw No. 4507, to establish a Salt Spring Island Local Community Commission (LCC), following voter endorsement by referendum.

1 Sources : The Economist (2022); Canadian Climate Institute/L’Institut climatique du Canada.

2 Source: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>

The SSI LCC will comprise five members, one of whom will be the electoral area director for Salt Spring Island, Gary Holman. In spring 2023, a public election will be held for four commissioners in accordance with the *Local Government Act* (LGA). An LCC, with an elected membership, is the highest form of delegated commission contemplated in an electoral area under the LGA.

The LCC will oversee Salt Spring Island-wide services currently managed by existing appointed commissions, such as parks and recreation, transportation, economic development, and liquid waste disposal. The LCC will administer certain local services now overseen by CRD staff and the electoral area director, including street lighting, a livestock injury compensation service, and approval of grant-in-aid applications. The proposed services the LCC will oversee include:

- Electoral Areas Committee
- Ganges Sewer Local Services Commission
- Salt Spring Island Liquid Waste Disposal Local Service Commission
- Beddis Water Service Commission
- Cedar Lane Water Service Commission
- Cedars of Tuam Water Service Commission
- Fernwood Water Local Services Commission
- Fulford Water Service Commission
- Highland Water & Sewer Services Commission
- Salt Spring Island Electoral Area Emergency Program Advisory Commission
- Salt Spring Island Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission
- Salt Spring Island Community Economic Sustainability Commission
- Salt Spring Island Transportation Commission

LOCAL PLANNING CONTEXT CONSIDERATIONS

The CEF Working Group, interviewees and CEF event participants identified and validated the following local planning context considerations for SSI:

- Unique government structure
- Simultaneous over-regulation (e.g. housing, zoning) and under-regulation (e.g. business licences)
- Mixed identity: rural or urban?
- Outdated Official Community Plan (2008) without a Ganges Village Centre Plan
- Significant number of part-time/seasonal homeowners and residents
- Large number of full-time residents opting out or choosing part-time participation in the labour market (e.g. retired with pensions)
- Challenging communications infrastructure and transportation logistics
- Water and housing are tied together from both a climate change and access to points of view

- Acute shortage of low to middle-income housing. Housing supply is an issue but also quality of existing housing
- Generational shift in local business leadership and decline in volunteerism
- Community collaboration is often fractured and divisive
- Expensive commercial and retail leases; limited commercial zoning



Figure 3: Local Economy Characteristics

3. ENGAGEMENT: MAJOR FINDINGS

Through a combination of data-gathering, review of 32 existing reports, interviews, a community economic forum workshop event attended by 30 participants, and discussion among the CESC Working Group, the following section summarizes key findings and major themes including opportunities, challenges and priorities, shared through these engagement activities.

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC FORUM WORKING GROUP

The CEF working group served a think-tank, sharing community knowledge and observations which contributed to engagement input.

The CEF working group included representatives from the community along with the consulting team and CES Commissioners.

| | |
|--|---|
| CEF Working Group Jennifer Maksymetz, SSI Arts Nicole Melanson, Farmland Trust Dayle Murray, SSI Chamber of Commerce | Consulting Team Patricia Huntsman, Culture & Communication Karen Moola, K.A.M. Consulting Karin Lengger, Recast Works |
| CESC CEF Working Group Representatives Francine Carlin Theresa Duynstee Daniel Muzyka Gerard Zentner | CRD Staff Support Karla Campbell, Manager Shayla Burnham, Administration |

Myths vs Realities: Perceptions vs Evidence

Over the course of several sessions, the CEF Working Group identified 10 notable commonly shared “myths” relating to the local economy that are often perpetuated by the community. The group then reviewed the associated data to share fact-based and evidence-based ‘realities’ relating to those 10 economic myths. These were shared at the CEF attended by over 30 business community representatives and largely validated by most of these participants.

It should be noted that, like any community, there are mixed levels of understanding and support of economic data among community members. This disparity fuels healthy dialogue but can also perpetuate resistance to change and affect economic planning progress.

The 10 myths and realities validated by CEF participants included:

MYTH 1: Salt Spring Island Is A Great Place To Grow A Business

Realities

- Labour shortages
- Inconsistent or lack of bandwidth (WIFI)
- Ferries have limited capacity and inter-island ferry hampers commerce
- Fragmented last mile product distribution
- Considered to be urban due to our relationship with the CRD but are in reality rural
- Environmental (water) constraints
- Limited light industrial and commercial zoning
- No consensus on a vision for SSI

Potential Opportunities

1. Remove administrative barriers and simplify processes
2. Establish governance that is commensurate with a new policy and permitting regime
3. Permit mixed commercial, agricultural and living spaces
4. Support a town square approach for Ganges central
5. Engage in a regional approach to economic development (similar to tourism)

MYTH 2: Agriculture On SSI Can Increase Its Economic Impact

Realities

- Small farms predominate on SSI and have limited economies of scale
- Profitability for small farms is dependent on selling at retail prices
- Increased input costs such as animal feed impacts economic viability
- New, often young farmers, can't afford to buy land
- Short term leases limits investments in necessary farm infrastructure
- The total number of farms on SSI have decreased by 40.6% (192-114) between 2011 and 2021¹
- In 2021 gross farm receipts were down, reflecting a decrease of \$3.2M¹

Potential Opportunities

1. Increase direct to consumer sales through farm stands and a year-round farmers' market
2. Encourage value-added farm products
3. Facilitate collaboration among local farmers to create economies of scale
4. Explore additional sources of income from agri-tourism
5. Support the Farmland Trust initiatives to secure long term leases for farmers

MYTH 3: SSI Is A Thriving Arts Community

Realities

- Artists are aging out— the median age of artists who present at Art Craft is 68
- Young, emerging and mid-career artists struggle because of cost of living and lack of affordable studio space
- There is not an integrated nor cohesive art and culture community—many silos fighting for limited funding and space
- SSI does not have a cultural plan nor cultural lead
- The once 'hippie artist community' does not apply to the changing sense of place and island identity

Potential Opportunities

1. Arts District—joining Art Spring to SIMS to Salt Spring Arts to Townsquare
2. Hire a Community Cultural Coordinator
3. Artist live studios/subsidized studios
4. Develop incentives for young and emerging artists to return to or come live on SSI
5. Culture Hub—a place to gather, artist residencies, cafe, exhibition space, makerspace, coworking space, equipment library
6. Foster cross-generational learning

¹ Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture

MYTH 4: SSI Has Too Many Tourists

Realities

- Tourism is a major driver of the economy on SSI that builds infrastructure for visitors and residents.
- In 2016, tourism revenue for the Southern Gulf Islands Region = \$40-\$50 million²
- 6.4% of the SSI working population of SSI work directly in the Accommodations or Food Service Industries and supporting industries employ an additional 26%²
- Tourism is small business based that diffuses wealth—a ripple effect
- In 2022, 22% of enquiries at the SSI Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center were from local homeowners that don't live on SSI permanently
- Annual occupancy rates for accommodations are 40-50%. Other tourism communities (resort municipalities) have occupancy rates of 70-80%

Potential Opportunities

1. Develop a year-round tourism economy
2. Establish year round, indoor farmers' market at Old Fire station in Ganges
3. Increase the vibrancy of Ganges—improve walkability and parking options
4. Promote educational and experiential tourism
5. Coordinate food and drink tours, wine tours, themed tours
6. Increase hours of the Visitor Center—currently volunteer-run

MYTH 5: AirBnB Is A Positive Contributor To The Economy On SSI

Realities

- Provides additional unlicensed short term accommodation
- Some people need the extra income
- Real estate prices are artificially driven up
- Longer term housing opportunities are reduced for residents and employees
- Competes with locally-owned inns, cottages and bed and breakfasts
- Not paying commercial rates for services, insurance and resources used
- Does not assist in the development of neighbourhoods and communities

Potential Opportunities

1. Use business license, capacity limits and fines to manage AirBnB
2. Encourage 30-day and long term rentals rather than daily and weekly rentals
3. Increase the tax on Airbnb with a percentage of sales reinvested in local housing
4. Increase the Municipal Regional District Consumer Flow Thru Tax to 3% from 2%

2 Source: How AirBnB has affected the Hotel Industry <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/beyond-bls/how-airbnb-has-affected-the-hotel-industry.htm>

MYTH 6: Housing Crisis On SSI Can Be Solved By Public Institutions And Funding

Realities

- Lack of funding for public housing not likely to change as larger centres continue to take priority, SSI falls to the bottom of the list
- SSI cannot compete or stop the basic economic forces—the ongoing desire for retirement and second homes on SSI
- Regulatory and zoning issues prove to be insurmountable barriers

Potential Opportunities

1. Place practical zoning limits on the sizing of houses; options for secondary dwellings
2. Update bylaws to require some portion of low cost housing in new developments
3. Establish a local real estate transfer tax for housing investments
4. Regulate illegal short term vacation rentals
5. Address water restrictions that limit purpose built rental housing
6. Explore non-market housing development opportunities such as community land trusts, co-op and cohousing.

MYTH 7: Local Home Services & Trades Can Meet Future Demands

Realities

- A lack of on-island apprentices and workers to support trades
- Increasingly long delays inconsistent access to services
- Average price per foot in Victoria vs SSI approximately \$375 to \$500
- Pricing of products and services increasing beyond broad inflationary trends
- Larger numbers of off-island trades, services and workers attracted to island with premium pricing

Potential Opportunities

1. More zoning for commercial and light industrial land (eg. warehousing, workshops, etc.)
2. Increased affordable housing, particularly for younger apprentices and workers
3. Last mile delivery costs very high for SSI and the islands overall

MYTH 8: The SSI Economy Thrives With Volunteer Leadership & Good Coordination

Realities

- Limited coordination between the layers of authority: Islands Trust, CRD, BC Government, Canadian Government
- No professional and funded economic development staff in local government
- No independent professional economic development organization
- No common socio-economic vision or plan for SSI
- Short term and inconsistent government grants to local non-profits does not lead to coherent and sustainable economic development
- The volunteer economy is not sustainable

Potential Opportunities

1. Establish a independent economic development organization to coordinate and drive economic activity across all sectors
2. Hire professional economic development staff to support a community of 11,000 residents
3. Designate robust economic development funding as an integral component of CRD government funding to Salt Spring
4. Establish a budget that is based on strategic priorities for achieving economic capacity building across all economic sectors, thus eliminating the silo approach to funding projects.

MYTH 9: SSI Is Welcoming Place For Everyone

Realities

- SSI is driven by retirees and second home owners with purchasing power on the island resulting in expensive housing
- Ganges is 'care-worn' and not vibrant—sidewalks are limited and many businesses are not accessible
- Weak rural infrastructure limits services and growth
- Lack of safe pedestrian and bike transportation options

Potential Opportunities

1. Establish an effective local governance structure and planning process for Ganges Village
2. Culture planning: Create a enhanced sense of community
3. Focus on inclusivity including accessible paths/sidewalks/wayfinding
4. Establish a summer weekend shuttle service
5. Beautification and vibrancy plan for Ganges

MYTH 10: We Cannot Change Anything On SSI

Realities

- Established economies to build on and improve:
 - ▶ Tourism
 - ▶ Value-added products
 - ▶ Services
 - ▶ Accommodations/construction
 - ▶ Cultural economy

Potential Opportunities

1. Develop a year round economy that supports local businesses including a year round, indoor farmers' market at the Old Fire station in Ganges;
2. Establish a destination events economy ie: sports, arts, festivals, food, tech, culture
3. Use business license, capacity limits and fines to manage AirBnB
4. Use zoning to increase access to commercial, light industrial land and housing
5. Make economic development a stated and funded CRD strategic priority

INTERVIEWS

Sixteen interviews were conducted with a cross-section of Island residents involved in the local economy. The interviews helped inform an understanding of the local economic context including key issues and trends affecting SSI's economy and current and potential opportunities and challenges to sustaining and growing the local economy. A summary of the transcripts is included in Appendix A.

Key Interview Highlights

Economic Drivers Of The SSI Economy

- Tourism
- Followed by retirement, healthcare, small businesses (e.g. construction and trades, tech)

Priority Focus Areas For Community Investment

- Housing
- Transportation
- Healthcare
- Community planning
- Labour

Strengths And Weaknesses Of The Economy

Strengths

- Location and accessibility
- Population (e.g. active volunteers, creatives)
- Lifestyle/community

Weaknesses

- Housing
- Community planning
- Administration/governance
- Labour shortage

Local Economic Opportunities And Threats

Opportunities

- Community revitalization and planning
- Agriculture
- Accessibility
- Education and mentorship,
- Small businesses
- Tourism
- Centralized spaces (e.g. work, gathering),
- Housing
- Business diversification, marketing and support

Threats

- Housing and homelessness
- Government and regulation
- Transportation and services
- Labour
- Demographics
- Island culture
- Business
- Safety

Challenges and Priorities

- Housing (supply challenges, opportunities to create workforce and family housing)
- Collaboration (challenging to break down silos, opportunities for cooperation and communication)
- Business opportunities (challenged when people sell enough just to get by, opportunities to expand tourism, the arts, sole proprietorships)
- Year-round economy (challenged by access to SSI, opportunities for an expanded tourism, year-round craft market, supported by Ganges)
- Land and services—challenged by lack of commercial and industrial land, access to water and sewer, opportunities to work outside of home—more land commercial/industrial land and servicing
- Labour (challenged by labour supply, opportunities to attract younger families, workers, immigrants)

Partnerships

- Diverse partnerships needed (e.g. among governments, to support housing, businesses and community collaboration)

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC FORUM

The CEF held in the Lion's Hall in early March 2023 was attended by over 30 representatives of the business community. The purpose of the CEF was to:

- Share evidenced based findings of the economic reality of SSI
- Engage community leaders and gather input on potential opportunities
- Identify priority focus areas for economic planning and investment

A discussion of the myths and realities revealed broad agreement among participants in most instances. There was mixed understanding relating to tourism statistics which is not uncommon in community workshop settings. Inputs towards a vision for economic action planning, priorities, considerations and opportunities revealed consensus and agreement by participants. A full transcription of the input gathered at the CEF in March is included in Appendix A.

Strategic Focus Areas And Key Themes

Priority focus areas and major themes that arose from the workshop:

- There is a desire to see **more collaboration and coordination among the various jurisdictional bodies** (e.g. CRD, Water Commission, Islands Trust, Ganges Planning etc.); and **among the over 30 non-profit entities and commissions** that are direct and indirect service-providers on behalf of government.
- Participants also recognized that there are **jurisdictional and infrastructure considerations** within the community's ability (e.g. Ganges move to incorporation) whereas others are **limited and endemic** due to the nature of an Island (e.g. only so much land).
- There is a desire in the community **to move forward with strategic economic action** planning with a vision that centres on collaboration, sustainability, climate change and the environment, employment opportunities for all ages, housing and livability and healthcare—i.e. the well-being of residents.
- Participants saw the need to **identify key roles and responsibilities** in economic action planning to ensure accountability and transparency.
- Priorities focused first on **addressing housing and livability issues** and thereafter on **other infrastructure items** such as the need for commercial zoning, improved shipping and efficient on-island transportation, as well as the water issue, and the need for more venues.
- **Opportunities** in addition to the above centred on **advancing sustainable, year-round tourism** (including experiential tourism economy, agriculture-related, and wellness tourism), and capitalizing on, and enhancing the **growing recognition of SSI's artisanal and value-added agriculture products** (e.g. cheeses, wines, soaps, candles etc.) and **attracting a diversified resident base including remote and creative workers**.

DATA-GATHERING AND FACT-SHARING

Data-gathering work largely centred on the statistics from the most recent census as well as previous reports. Identifying gaps in local economic data was also a priority in keeping with general local economic development/sustainability goals of increasing money coming into the community and decreasing money leaving.

Current gaps include data on exports and imports, off-island ownership of local businesses, shopping off-island, tourism statistics (i.e. employment by sector, BC Ferries stats, MRDT data etc.), business registration, and overall competitiveness (i.e. zoning flexibility, process streamlining, available suitable land etc.).

Although a significant amount of useful data was collected during this project, much of the available data relating to Salt Spring Island is too broadly based (i.e. based on larger jurisdictions, too general, etc.) and requires more specific data-sets to help inform unbiased future decision-making and planning.

Four major areas identified for future data collection initiatives revolve around housing and business. Future research should focus on the following specific analyses:

- Travel
 - ▶ Statistics relating to travel on and off the island could identify information relating to business services on and needed on SSI, tourism traffic and destinations and other workers coming to SSI for other purposes like construction. Also, what is the need for inter-island travel? Specifically, BC Ferries and float plane travelers should be surveyed to determine:
 - ▶ What, why and how many service providers are coming to SSI?
 - ▶ What SSI business owners are needing to leave SSI, why and how often?
 - ▶ How many tourists are coming to SSI and where are they headed?
 - ▶ How many other Gulf Island residents are visiting SSI, why and how often?
- Arts and Culture
 - ▶ What are the annual sales of cultural workers?
 - ▶ What and how impactful are the remote services that are being provided on SSI to local and off-island customers?
- Development
 - ▶ Residential starts and completions? How many of these are affordable units?
- Business Licensing
 - ▶ Identify the nature and types of businesses operating on the island
 - ▶ Special focus should include business licensing of all short-term rental units

4. STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS FOR ECONOMIC ACTION PLANNING

VISION INPUTS

While inputs towards a vision for economic action planning were collected, some of the inputs may relate more so to *values* which could be considered for the EAP. Values expressed by community participants included *resiliency*, *openness* to new ideas, solutions and approaches (especially when proven elsewhere), *inclusiveness*, and *sustainability*.

The vision is for SSI's future economy (which the EAP will help realize). Consider:

SSI has a thriving and sustainable local economy for all ages, that attracts and welcomes new residents, tourists, and businesses. Community economic development initiatives support collaboration; build off our strengths, promote innovation; and preserve the Island's ecosystem for generations to come.

ECONOMIC ACTION PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the various engagement activities and the resulting findings, the following strategic goals and supporting actions are recommended for moving forward in community economic action planning.

EAP STRATEGIC GOAL 1: Lead sustainably and regionally

Integrate climate change resiliency into economic action planning strategy including land-use considerations and water conservation.

Rationale: Without considering the climate change impacts, efforts towards regional community economic development will have limited or short-lived success.

Supporting actions could include but are not limited to:

- Exploring and considering adapting the doughnut economic model which sees a threshold on growth tied to the limits of the local environment
- Working with organizations such as Transition Salt Spring to help guide sustainable community economic development initiatives
- Lobbying for better local area planning from the LCC
- Integrating climate emergency planning such as forest fire mitigation and droughts into local economic planning
- Engaging with Islands Trust to provide a roadmap to create more public housing

EAP STRATEGIC GOAL 2: Improve community collaborations and partnerships

Develop strong and healthy community collaborations and regional partnerships for sustainable economic planning and implementation.

Rationale: Any effort toward community economic development will not be successful unless there is commitment to building trusting, effective and long-lasting local and regional partnerships for the purposes of collaboration, sharing knowledge and resources.

Supporting actions could include but are not limited to:

- Creating an Community Economic Development Coordinator (CEDC) position to support community economic development opportunities and provide coordination
- Establishing regular collaboration and sharing opportunities through networking. Organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Sustainability Salt Spring, Agriculture Alliance, and Salt Spring Arts, to name a few, could meet every quarter and form a Community Economic Sustainability Roundtable, which is a common solution in smaller communities to encourage more coordination and collaboration amongst community groups.
- Establishing learning opportunities wherein entrepreneurs are connected with training programs, workshops, mentorships
- Working with the Chamber or another group to support current businesses in housing programs for workers and attraction strategies
- Leveraging local and regional resources for developing and enhancing community economic development opportunities

EAP STRATEGIC GOAL 3: Play to our strengths

Focus on advancing SSI's proven and growing areas of the local economy including sustainable year-round tourism (experiences, arts and culture, and culinary and agri-tourism) and value-added agriculture and artisanal products.

Rationale: Taking steps to enhance areas of the local economy that are already performing well will help to advance efforts by ensuring early wins in community economic development implementation.

Supporting actions could include but are not limited to:

- Developing an island-wide brand that can be applied to value-added products and experiences
- Looking at forming a Destination Marketing Organization for Salt Spring to benefit all tourism operators and accommodation providers

EAP STRATEGIC GOAL 4: Overcome local constraints

Address contextual challenges of housing, livability and water access, and deficiencies in local planning.

Rationale: Economic action planning is limited in its implementation without these constraints being addressed by jurisdictional leaders.

Supporting actions could include but are not limited to:

- Increasing density and housing choice within Ganges
- Supporting workforce housing (e.g. policy incentives, investments, partnerships)
- Supporting affordable housing for families (e.g. through policy incentives, partnerships, housing pilot projects that explore new building innovations)
- Creating an empty home tax—targeted with proceeds towards housing and infrastructure

EAP STRATEGIC GOAL 5: Welcome new leadership

Encourage ‘new voices and fresh thinking’ to further resiliency and welcome new local leaders.

Rationale: Gen X and millennial entrepreneurs and non-profit leaders are challenged by retirees who over-represent community organizations and initiatives, and newcomers cite feeling unwelcomed by the community; this can lead to social cohesion issues that impact community economic development.

Supporting actions could include but are not limited to:

- Ensuring diverse and equitable representation in community planning initiatives (economic and social)
- Leveraging the experience of retired professionals and business leaders through mentorship to develop leadership skills and soft skills in order to innovate and collaborate.
- Providing intergenerational learning opportunities for new entrepreneurs
- Willingness to try pilot projects and create an innovation lab

5. GOING FORWARD

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE ECONOMIC ACTION PLANNING

The community economic development engagement process synthesized and validated stakeholder inputs to inform a forthcoming EAP.

The EAP will serve as a roadmap for future community and collaborative action on economic sustainability for Salt Spring.

The perspectives and recommendations gathered from the engagement process compiled in the present report will be presented to the community and stakeholders through the Chamber and to CEF and interview participants. Recommended strategic priorities for the EAP included in Section 4 are hoped to serve as a draft for future implementation by community groups wherein resources, key metrics/success indicators, lead and supporting partners, and timelines will be identified.

At this time, with the move towards an LCC, this report will be shared with the CRD, and kept by the Chamber of Commerce for future implementation with community groups.

While a few of the economic action planning priorities and opportunities shared by the community relate directly to local areas of the economy, the context for change, innovation and implementation largely centre on the conditions for successful economic development, namely the ‘people’ aspect of community economic development.

Supporting generational shifts in leadership, creating a welcoming, equitable environment for business and residents, addressing local climate change impacts on the economy, improving relational and communication skills among residents to foster collaboration, and developing relationships and respecting protocols with local First Nations—are all essential aids in navigating a successful course ahead for community economic action planning on Salt Spring Island.

For a full transcript of all interviews and community economic forum participant input, please see Appendix A.

“ In running businesses my whole career, I think the keys to success for any organization is to have solid goals, based on a strategic long term plan with a workable timetable and delegating responsibilities to the appropriate parties. The important key part is to have strong leadership and accountability from the top down. I understand that there are gaps on Salt Spring, but I also feel that if you clearly and simply state the path, this report will be a success. ”

APPENDIX A

Context Brief and Documents Review
Interview Transcripts and Summaries
CEF Workshop Transcription

Salt Spring Island Economic Action Plan

—Engagement: Context Brief

The consultant team reviewed documents provided by Opportunity Salt Spring to identify a broad understanding of key issues/trends, local approaches, opportunities and challenges as related to Opportunity Salt Spring and Salt Spring Island. This Context Brief summarizes the documents review.

The Context Brief informed additional review of current data and analysis in key areas affecting the local and regional economies, provided separately to this document.

1. Community Economic Development Commission

Strategic Goals

Diversification and resiliency go hand in hand, and serve as one of Opportunity Salt Spring's three potential strategic goals for 2022/23. Other goals include balancing environment and people, and enabling sustainable businesses that support working families and increase average year-round income.

Opportunity Salt Spring's 2022/23 goals reflect priorities and initiatives of recent years. For example, Opportunity Salt Spring has:

- Worked toward supporting a **sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem** that leverages economies of scale to grow and sustain local producers' operations for example, through the pilot of a Rural Business Accelerator Program (2020).
- Supported **rural islands-wide economic resilience** through for example, the launch of the Rural Islands Economic Forum (RIEF) (2019), with salient themes from the recent Forum (2021) including: Strengthening Existing Connections, Creating New Connections, Building Year-Round Livelihood for Long Term Sustainability, Applying a Climate Lens to Community Economic Resilience, Doing It the Island Way—Innovation, Collaboration & Out of The Box Creative Thinking. The RIEF resulted in a move to form the RIEP (2020).
- Applied a **climate lens to community economic sustainability**, focusing on innovation for climate positive solutions. For example, it commissioned a feasibility study to determine the economic viability of strengthening the green and clean tech sector (which recommended the establishment of an Innovation Centre for Rural Sustainability) (2019)¹, and identified the goal to obtain seed funding for developing a business case to attract social impact investors who seek to engage in 'responsible local investing' (2020).

Priorities and Areas of Focus

Connections

Opportunity Salt Spring's goal is to strengthen and unify all sectors of SSI. This goal is achieved in part by maintaining existing connections and developing new ones. Year-round programs that connect Southern Gulf Island communities, mentoring and business coaching, are among the ways that the Opportunity Salt Spring maintains and builds connections locally and regionally. The Rural Islands Economic Partnership (RIEP) is a prime example of how Opportunity Salt Spring is making this happen. Connections are also built by collaborating with other levels of government, the private sector and media outlets to promote the economic enhancement, economic diversity and community economic development.

¹ The Innovation Centre for Rural Sustainability was not launched.

Economic Capacity Building

Potential strategic initiatives in 2022/23 point to the Opportunity Salt Spring's focus on local and regional economic capacity building. For example, developing a Regulatory Roadmap to support adoption of Green solutions and enable businesses to understand the development process for commercial businesses, and forming the Rural Islands Economic Partnership (RIEP) to connect rural islands to share ideas, seek solutions and form partnerships to build regional economic capacity and resilience.

Communications and Advocacy

Opportunity Salt Spring builds support for economic development through on- and off-island communications. Communications tools (e.g. website, social media, SSI Forum) are used to transfer information and facilitate collaboration among stakeholders.

Advocacy is a cornerstone of Opportunity Salt Spring's mission. It advocates for the economic enhancement and the economic diversity of Salt Spring Island. Examples of recent advocacy are Opportunity Salt Spring's focus on including the region in the Islands Coastal Economic Trust (ICET) service area (2019 and 2020), seeking inclusion in the Cowichan Valley Community Futures Boundaries to partner in the Community Futures Federal Program, and advocacy for local issues such as housing and Village planning. Opportunities Salt Spring has also been involved in Village Planning. A potential strategic initiative in 2022/23 is to gain access to funding for rural coastal economic recovery and resilience.

Organizational Challenges

Challenges facing Opportunity Salt Spring include:

- Reinforcing the role of Opportunity Salt Spring
- Fulfill economic vision (achieved through economic partnerships with key sector organizations)
- Volunteer capacity—attracting and retaining commissioners
- Leverage approved position—Economic Development Coordinator
- Sustainable funding/budget allocation
- Moving past silos
- Grant preparation
- Project management continuity

In some cases, these challenges may have been accentuated by the pandemic, economic downturn, etc.

2. Key Issues and Economic Barriers + Opportunities

Key Issues and Economic Barriers

The documents reviewed pointed to some key issues and economic barriers facing Salt Spring Island including:

- Population and demographics
 - ▶ Population growth is not significant.
 - ▶ Aging population (living zoomer lifestyle)—older demographic than provincial and CRD averages
 - ▶ Expected growth among older population and households with families

- Labour force
 - ▶ Approximately 24% of labour force works from home (this may have increased since the pandemic)
 - ▶ Lower labour force participation rates compared to regional and provincial
 - ▶ Labour force growing very slowly compared to regional and provincial (about half the rate)
 - ▶ Self-contained labour force and job market

- Housing
 - ▶ 1 in 3 residents in the summer are second homeowners (live in them or rent them out)
 - ▶ Short-term rentals supporting tourism affects housing supply
 - ▶ New housing development is constrained by water supply, types of housing permitted
 - ▶ Summer workforce is short term but puts demands on local infrastructure, housing, etc.
 - ▶ Workforce housing goes hand in hand with attracting workers
 - ▶ New workforce housing must be affordable—cost of building and local market impacts

- Food and food security
 - ▶ The Southern Gulf Islands Region and Island engaged in RIEP have very limited staff resources (most of the work in food resilience-food security is volunteer)
 - ▶ Operationalizing sustainable support for food resilience
 - ▶ Food security further impacted by covid
 - ▶ Training and workforce development is an issue in food industry

- Market access and distribution
 - ▶ Especially for small farmers/processors accessing retail markets.

- Tourism
 - ▶ Tourism focused on summer season—water and wildfire threats

- Economic recovery
 - ▶ Covid-recovery, building back what was lost during the pandemic (economic opportunity, connections)

Opportunities

The documents also revealed key local/regional opportunities including:

- Leverage economies of scale
 - ▶ Producers sharing the cost of services and/or resources needed to grow and sustain their operations).
 - ▶ Creation of a commercial distribution and export hub, dedicated marketing and sales agents; shared labour force resources, and a value chain designed to facilitate more efficient production of supplies.
- Collaboration, Capacity Building and Supports
 - ▶ Strengthen opportunities to collaborate and promote/implement cooperative principles (e.g. shared work spaces, Shared Business Services Society, cooperative buying and shipping groups)
 - ▶ Advance small business and entrepreneurial supports (recognizing strong entrepreneurial base and limited local jobs)
- Strengthening the green and clean tech sector
 - ▶ Innovation Centre for Rural Sustainability to help foster an environment appropriate for testing and scaling innovative green business solutions and technologies.
 - ▶ A virtual Green Learning Lab to develop a niche for, and support the adoption of, green products or services. A way to help local providers test business hypotheses and incubate solutions (a Rural Business Accelerator).²
- Using a regional model to address food resilience
 - ▶ Potential to address food economy and food vulnerability issues across the Southern Gulf Islands
 - ▶ Learning from local models (e.g. Galiano Island) and scaling regionally
- Building on Strengths and Diversifying the Economy
 - ▶ Focusing on employment sectors that are 'large, growing, and where SSI is especially strong compared to the rest of the province': Accommodation & food services, Professional, scientific & technical services, Educational services, Administrative and support, waste management & remediation services, Arts, entertainment & recreation, Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting.
 - ▶ Professional services sector is favoured (growing, less sensitive to remote context, opportunity for labour force working from home?).
 - ▶ Attract diverse, low impact sectors
 - ▶ Target sectors that might be open to remote work—possibly tech sector
 - ▶ Focusing on innovation and collaboration (e.g. ICRS)
 - ▶ Research and advance opportunities to create new year-round jobs
 - ▶ Apply a climate lens—focus on economic development with economic and environmental benefits

² The Rural Business Accelerator has not been resumed since it was operated in 2017/18.

- ▶ Explore potential new agricultural sector—recreational cannabis market
- ▶ Tap into increased demand for luxury, artisanal, and health products
- Tourism
 - ▶ Long term tourism development and support for off-season events (shift to a longer, gentler tourism season)
 - ▶ Advance green tourism through partners—Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership Society, Southern Gulf Islands
 - ▶ Target tech sector (e.g. attract off-season visits from tech companies for company health and wellness retreats)
 - ▶ Travel co-working spaces and long-term vacation rentals (e.g. supporting the digital nomad)
 - ▶ Educational tourism (e.g. youth travelling field trips, workshops, adult study tours)
- Economic Recovery and Resilience
 - ▶ Launch SSI-Economic Leaders Group to create recommendations for sustainable SSI Economic Recovery & Resilience
 - ▶ Leverage economies of scale
 - ▶ Consolidate marketing

3. Learning From Others

The following criteria were used to identify economic development organizations that would be suitable to review in support of continued research:

- Similar population (size, demographic composition)
- Geographic context (rural, remote, coastal)
- Regional ties
- Green focus
- Arts and culture hub

Based on future discussion with Opportunity Salt Spring, the consultant team will research what has worked (and not worked) for the following communities/economic development organizations:

- Sunshine Coast Regional Economic Development Organization (SCREDO)
- Nelson and Area Economic Development Partnership
- Campbell River
- Port Alberni
- Tofino/Ucluelet
- Others?

4. Documents Reviewed

A total of 32 documents were reviewed, as provided by Opportunity Salt Spring in August 2022. Refer to 'keydocumentsreview' channel on Slack (Opportunity Salt Spring Planning) for a complete list of documents.

Community Economic Forum: Towards Strengthening the SSI Economy Workshop Summary

Prepared by Patricia Huntsman Culture + Communication

Attendance

Present Working Group Members: Francine C; Gerald Z.; Theresa D.; Daniel M.; Nicole M; Dayle M.

Regrets: Jen

Staff: Shayla Burnham

Facilitation Team: Patricia Huntsman, Karen Moola

SESSION OVERVIEW

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 5:30pm | Welcome, Land Acknowledgement, Session Outline |
| 5:35pm | Introductory Presentation |
| 5:50pm | Myths Discussion |
| 6:30pm | BREAK |
| 6:40pm | Vision, Opportunities, and Moving Forward Workshop |
| 7:50pm | Wrap up/Next Steps |

FORUM SUMMARY

Welcome, Land Acknowledgement, Session Outline

Francine opened the session, introduces Patricia to the group as session facilitator. Patricia shared a land acknowledgement and an outline of the session agenda.

Introductory Presentation

Francine provided a quick overview about the Community Economic Sustainability Commission (CESC) and the broader economic development action planning context.

Myths and Realities Discussion

Francine, Gerard, Patricia, and Dayle led a presentation on a series of myths about economic development related to "Place to do Business", "Agriculture", "Arts", "Tourism", "Airbnb and Housing", "Trades", "Volunteers", "Welcoming", and "Change". The group then took time to listen to participants comments and to reflect and share thoughts.

WORKSHOP: Visioning and Prioritizing

Through interactive planning sheets, working group members shared ideas and comments in response to the question, "What are the elements of a vision for SSI's economic future?".

What We Heard

On Housing

- Increase density of Ganges (10 upvotes)
- Ability to hire someone off island and have housing available (6 upvotes)
- Support affordable family housing: Kids/teens are shift works for retail/restaurants (7 upvotes)
- Housing (8 upvotes)
- People come here to live in nature. Green housing developer in that vein not just boxy apartments (1 upvote)

On Strategic Planning

- Strategic planning (get buy in) (2 upvotes)
- Strategic planning, economic development = housing. Need coordinate approach (1 upvote)

On New Approaches/Pilots/Change

- ▶ Willingness to try pilot projects and create an innovation lab (6 upvotes)
- ▶ Don't try to reinvent the wheel, use other communities to reference successes. And not what hasn't worked. (5 upvotes)
- ▶ Take changes (2 upvotes)

On Climate/Environment

- Articulate goals for "growth" within constraints (we're losing forest cover) otherwise its growth (2 upvotes)
- Integrate climate change resiliency into strategy right or it's a caboose. No economy if we have a major forest fire (2 upvotes)
- Resilience also in economic development opportunity: forest stewardship training, value-added forest, food security (Cali. is toast!) (4 upvotes)
- Balancing sustainability and environmentalism (4 upvotes)
- Local capacity to provide Island services to mitigate. Be resilience in the face of climate change (1 upvote)
- Vision: Climate change resilience and adaptations, partnerships
- Climate action presents opportunity for SSI in addition to threats (4 upvotes)
- Components of vision: sustainability, preservation of clean air and water, employment opportunities for all ages, housing, healthcare (4 upvotes)

On Community Planning

- Regional viewpoint
- Vision: Planning responsibility under local elected officials—not from 'staffers' following an 'away from Salt Spring mandate'
- Town square: place-makers (1 upvote)
- End the control of our water supply by a volunteer-led improvement district who would choose to have a \$50 million asset run by (often) inexperienced volunteers
- Incorporate the Town of Ganges (3 upvotes)

On Collaboration

- Engaged individuals in a community that speaks to them
- Seek ways to turn the diversity of local opinions into an economic strength
- Improved mechanisms for democratic collaboration + planning (municipality?) (2 upvotes)
- We all win together! No Silos! (3 upvotes)

- Learn to work together by communicating thoughts of cohesiveness. Where one sentence can be compiled by 3 people
- Vision: repairing a fractured community to get more done (5 upvotes)
- Healthy collaborative society (1 upvote)
- Collaboration
- Get everyone on board for a plan (1 upvote)
- Overcome communication challenges: people come to hide and tune out
- Shooting into the echo-chamber: how do we get it done?

Marketing/Messaging

- Targeted marketing to group(s) you want to attract
- Consistent messaging about what it means to be on Salt Spring (2 upvotes)
- Authenticity is Salt Spring's #1 product (2 upvote)

Other

- Vision attends to desired demographic outcomes (i.e. 5/10 years, etc.) (1 upvote)
- Leadership skills and soft skills in order to innovate and collaborate (1 upvote)
- Broad range/diverse elements (1 upvote)
- Quality of life for residents (safe, culturally vibrant, supportive)
- Realism about the fact that we live on an island → it has inherent challenges and some are not "fixable"
- The big vision (2 upvotes)
- All ages friendly (2 upvotes)
- Beauty Nature Art (1 upvote)

WORKSHOP: Opportunities

Through interactive planning sheets, working group members shared ideas and comments in response to the question, “What do you see as the best economic opportunities for SSI?”.

What We Heard

On Products

- More value-added local food (6 upvotes)
- Value-added to many sectors
- Consider southern Vancouver Island to be part of our market for “Buy Local”
- More should-season events (6 upvotes)
- Artisanal products

On Educational/Experiential

- Best opportunities: educational tourism, high quality internet connection to support digital economy
- Explore educational tourism (1 upvote), wellness tourism (especially for winter season), a “wellness centre” to support diverse practitioners
- Boutique health services: cancer care centre, rehabilitation centre (1 upvote)
- Create a Salt Spring Arts School—Consult with Banff Centre for the Arts + determine if we can create a “satellite school” using their admin infrastructure
- Recreation tourism (spring and fall): tournaments, coaching (6 upvotes)
- Misc: Demographics representing all age groups; goods produced at home; health tourism; web-based products and services

On Tourism

- High value “boutique” tourism (2 upvotes)
- Year round tourism/visitor interests (4 upvotes)
- Pay an event coordinator and/or cultural coordinator
- Mapping agriculture and food supply chain for better economy of scale and for food security (1 upvote)
- Eco-tourism (4 upvotes)
- Year-round farmers market (10 upvotes)
 - ▶ Indoor market year round? (2 upvotes)
- Tourism agriculture, education tourism, arts town square
- Agro-tourism + food (3 upvotes)

- Agritourism (3 upvotes)
- Driving a positive visitors economy: food, agro, eco, arts, culture (1 upvote)

On Climate

- Green tourism: Eco home tour, apple fest, more of that (6 upvotes)
- Carbon sequestration → oceans → economic + first nations opportunities (1 upvote)
- Monetizing carbone value of our forests for fire protection and sequestration value (4 upvotes)

On Employment/Work Infrastructure

- Digital entrepreneurs + remote workers: Integrating those who came here during the pandemic into the community. Buy local/work local, year round economy (1 upvote)
- Year round economy: focus on local community investing in local businesses and services (not just tourism) (3 upvotes)
- Co-working space/meeting rooms (5 upvotes)

On Wellness/Health

- Seniors facility (1 upvote)
- Wellness spa
- Walk-in health clinic (10 upv

WORKSHOP: Moving Forward

Through interactive planning sheets, working group members shared ideas and comments in response to the question, “How should we move forward with coordinated economic planning and investment?”.

What We Heard

On Housing and Livability

- Commercial landlord responsibility in Ganges revitalization
- Empty homes! Tax exemption removal. Money to support building (public) housing (5 upvotes)
 - ▶ Empty home tax-targeted with \$ towards public having more high density (5 upvotes)
- Support small business to pay cost of living wages (1 upvote)
- Live aboard boats at marina’s (housing)

On Collaboration and Planning

- Fund collaborations and coordinations (3 upvotes)
- Strategic process for collaboration (1 upvote)
- Third-party to write a plan (1 upvote)
 - ▶ Prioritize to void spreading resources thin (1 upvote)
- Build an economic plan based on environmental realities (3 upvotes)
 - ▶ Otherwise you’re missing opportunities + ignoring climate risk. That would be real collaboration (1 upvote)
- Talk together. Organize needs between short/mid/long. Ensure all are addressed (1 upvote)
- Business improvement association (BIA) needed (2 upvotes)
- Ganges Village but with preparation for climate change (6 upvotes)
- Best economic opportunity are here already—how to coordinate e.g. asset mapping (2 upvotes)
- Develop focused strategies—can’t be all things to all people (2 upvotes)
- Integrate the wealth of knowledge in areas you consider extraneous or at odds with economy

On Capital Regional District/Jurisdictional Considerations

- CRD needs to create an economic plan that is resourced and funded; a coordinated approach (4 upvotes)
- Re-evaluate power of Island Trust and jurisdiction (3 upvotes)
- Remove Islands Trust power to block housing development including public housing (5 upvotes)
- CRD needs to institutionalize management of water systems for housing (5 upvotes)

- CRD needs to lead a housing assessment (2 upvotes)
 - ▶ Consider commercial land development assessment
- Start with Ganges (7 upvotes)
- Moving forward—detailed land use inventory with climate hazards (5 upvotes)
- Immigration: join rural and northern immigration program
- Get School District 64 on board for Ganges land
- Summon senior politicians/ministers to a forum to discuss a non-mandate (?) of “forced coordination + cooperation” with a vision to having coordinate planning, OCP changes, and access to funding! (2 upvotes)
- We need governance!! Municipal incorporation (5 upvotes)
- Update the OCP (10 upvotes)
- Ensured continued advisory input to the Local Community Commission (LCC) on economic development (5 upvotes)
- Economic development funding requires increased taxes. Is there an appetite for that? (2 upvotes)

On Comparable Jurisdictions

- Look at other Island communities that have thrived for lessons learned (5 upvote)
- Look at other places for models to emulate or avoid (6 upvotes)

On Roles/Responsibilities

- LCC to create an advisory economic committee (1 upvote)
- Community economic planner (7 upvotes)
- Examining plan A and plan B. Give agency to a group that is able to stay in place over time (2 upvotes)
- We need a Salt Spring Tourism board/hub. Develop the brand (4 upvotes)
- It is critical to have one central planning authority and there must be a way to create that. (4 upvotes)
- Functional governance (2 upvotes)

On Infrastructure

- Event hosting and infrastructure (if we don't have it, build it) (3 upvotes)
- More efficient transportation and shipping (BC Ferries).
- Create commercial/industrial zoning first, then water; the economic activity that follows! If no zoning, we stifle possible economic advancement!
- Affordable housing is foundational (7 upvotes)
- More commercial land, diverse population economically, solving our water issues (2 upvotes)

- Parking outside of town with shuttles/walking paths (3 upvotes)
- Build a toll bridge (1 upvote)
- More entertainment venues for youth, young couples, etc. (4 upvotes)
- Music venues, festival, recording studio + rehearsal space (2 upvotes)

Other

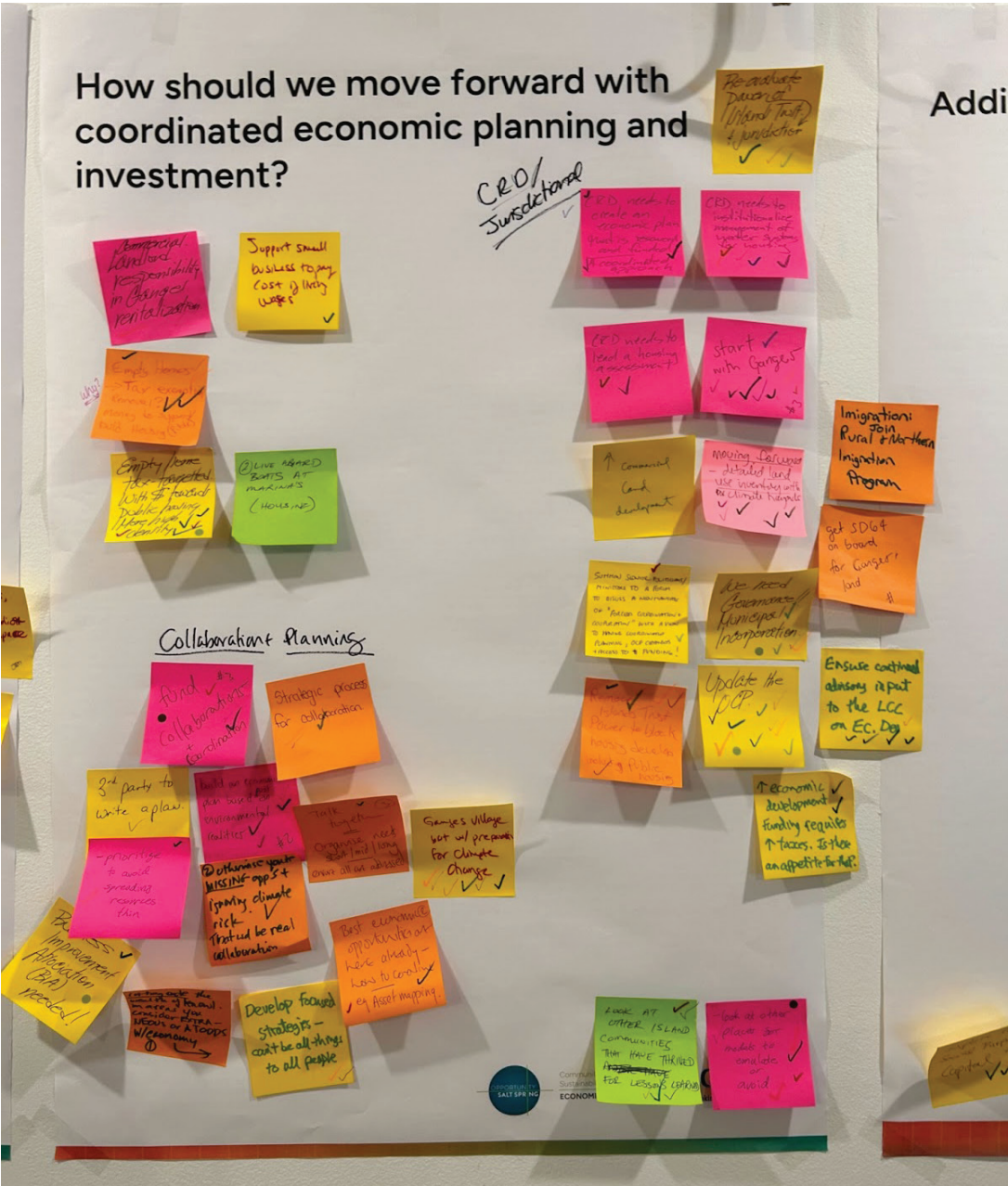
- Create mentoring opportunities for youth
- Cooperatives: businesses, housing, agriculture, energy (2 upvotes)
- Explore different business models e.g. co-ops

Wrap Up/Next Steps

- Opportunities exist to build on local strengths and address key threats/challenges
- Issues affecting local economic development are interconnected - consider this when prioritizing focus areas for economic planning and investment
- Ways forward may consider improved governance structures, community planning and collaboration
- The Consultants are compiling all the feedback into a report to be released in April based on information and feedback collected
- The CEF final report will be presented at the last CESC meeting on April 17, 2023
- The CESC will prepare recommendations for the CRD and new Local Community Commission

Planning Sheets

The following pictures capture the planning sheets used to facilitate the session and summarize the ideas and conversations that took place.



How should we move forward with coordinated economic planning and investment?

Roles / Responsibilities

LCC to create an advisory economic committee

Community Economic Plan

and plan B
- give options to a
- give plan B to be able to
stay in place sometime

We need a Salt Spring tourism board / hub
develop the brand

It's critical to have some capital planning
- and think
- what do we want to
- create?

Financial governance #3

③ MORE ENTERTAINMENT
FOR YOUTH
FOOD COOPERS
ETC

Create mentoring opportunities for youth

Infrastructure +

Client housing & infrastructure
(IF WE DON'T HAVE IT, BUILD IT)

More efficient transportation & shipping (BC ferries)

Climate Economic / Industrial Economic
- TRANSITION
- THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY
- THAT PRODUCES IT
- IS AN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY
- BUILDING ECONOMIC
- ACTIVITIES

Alternative energy

Options
- more efficient
- diversify people from
- economically
- building our
- water resources

Parking outside of town w/ shuttles / walking paths

Build a toll Bridge #2

More local trades

Music - venues, festival? Recording studios / rehearsal space

Cooperatives
- businesses
- housing
- agriculture
- energy

Explore different Biz Models
i.e. Co-op.

What do you see as the best economic opportunities for SSI?

Educational
Experiential

Products

Tourism

Good Climate

Eco-Tourism

Agri-tourism

Deriving a positive visitor economy

Indoor market year round?

Best opportunities

Recreation Tourism

High Vibe "Boutique" Tourism

Year round tourism/visitor interests

Agro Tourism

Carbon Sequestration

Monetizing carbon value of our forests for fire protection & ecosystem services

Green Tourism

Artisanal products

more value-added local food

Consider Southern Homecovers to be part of our market for Bayland

more shoulder-season events

mappping ag + food supply chain for better economic scale + for food security

Year-round Farmers market

Agri-tourism

Deriving a positive visitor economy

Indoor market year round?

Education

Experiential

Best opportunities

Recreation Tourism

High Vibe "Boutique" Tourism

Year round tourism/visitor interests

Agro Tourism

Carbon Sequestration

Monetizing carbon value of our forests for fire protection & ecosystem services

Green Tourism

Artisanal products

more value-added local food

Consider Southern Homecovers to be part of our market for Bayland

more shoulder-season events

mappping ag + food supply chain for better economic scale + for food security

Year-round Farmers market

Agri-tourism

Deriving a positive visitor economy

Indoor market year round?

Economic opportunities

CRS

Community Economic Sustainability Commission
ECONOMIC ACTION PLANNING
Making a difference...together

What do you see as the best economic opportunities for SSI?

Digital entrepreneurs
Remote workers
Integrating these
who came here
during the pandemic
with the community
using local resources
and services

Year Round
economy
- Focus on
local community
marketing in local
business & services

more
Value-added
local food

co-working
space /
meeting rooms

- value-add to
many
sectors

Wellness/Health

Seniors
facility

Wellness
Spa

Health
Walk in Clinic

Boutique
Senior
- care co
- rehab ct



Community Economic
Sustainability Commission
ECONOMIC ACTION PLANNING



Making a difference...together

What are the elements of a vision for SSI's economic future?

Regional viewpoint

Local capacity
- provide island services to mitigate the risk of climate change
- climate resilience and adaptation
- Partnerships

Vision
- climate resilience and adaptation
- Partnerships

Climate action presents opportunity for SSI in addition to threats

Resilience also an economic development opportunity.
- forest stewardship
- value-added forestry
- food security (Calif. is toast!)

Balance Sustainability & Resilience

ARTICULATE GOALS FOR GROWTH W/OUT CONSTRAINING W/OUT LOSING FOREST COVER. OTHERWISE IT'S GROWTH WITHOUT GROWTH

Integrate climate change resilience into strategy, right? it's a checkbox. no economy if you have a major forest fire

Climate Environment

Community Planning

Town Square plus meetings

ENGAGE INDIVIDUALS IN A COMMUNITY THAT SPEAKS TO THEM

Collaboration

WE ALL WIN TOGETHER! No Silos!

Learn to work together by communicating thoughts of collectiveness. When one sentence can be completed by 3 people.

overcome communication challenges - people come to table + tune out + #1

get everyone on board for a plan #1

Leadership skills + soft skills = order to execute + collaboration = #1

Health, Collaborative, Society

Collaboration

get everyone on board for a plan #1

Marketing/messaging

Authenticity is Salt Springs #1 product

Targeted Marketing to the Group(s) you want to attract

Consistent Messaging means what it means to be a Salt Springs

Beauty Nature Art

Leadership

The Big Vision

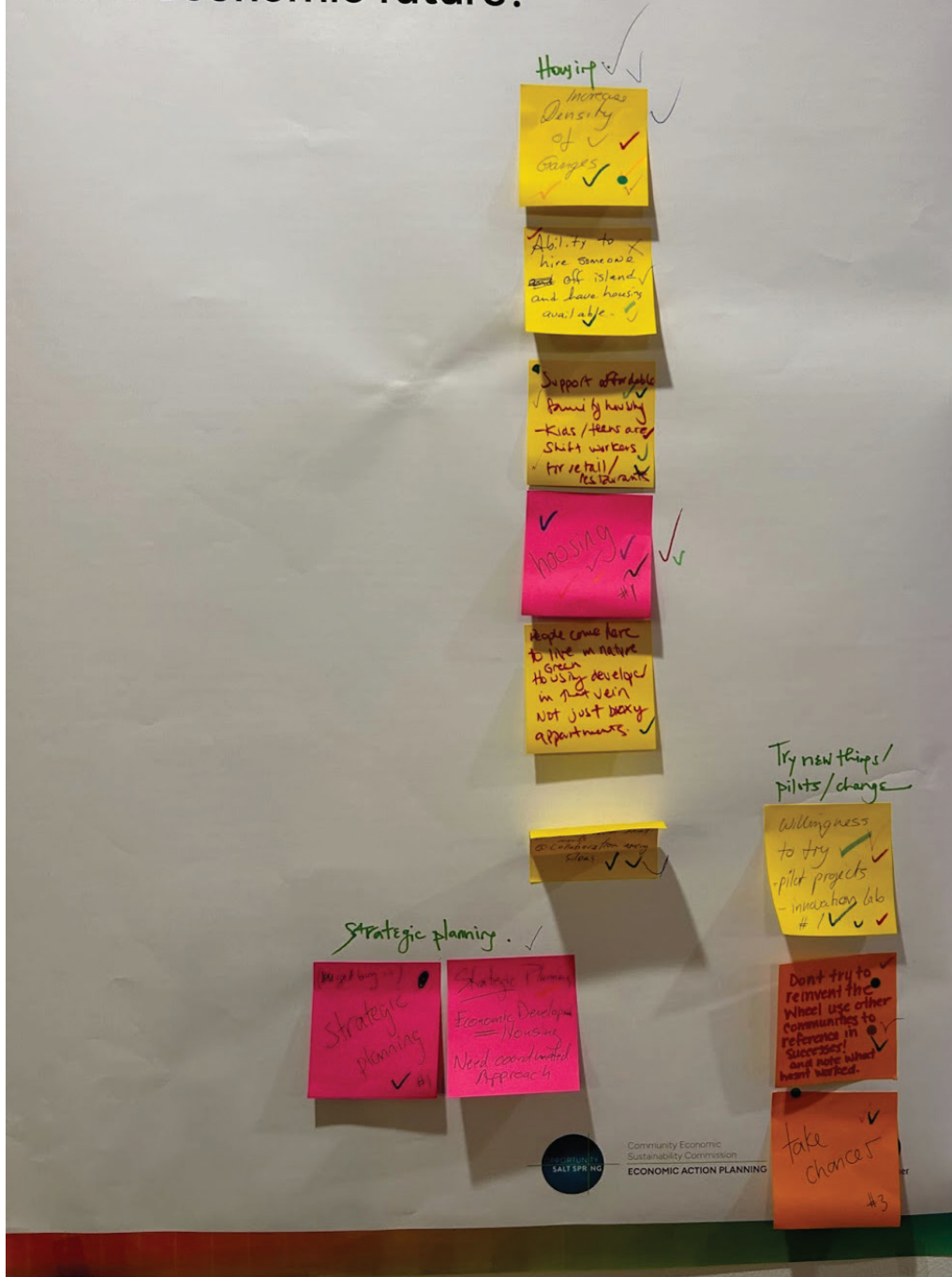
Broad range / diverse elements

Beauty Nature Art

Miscellaneous

Community of Sustainability Economic

What are the elements of a vision for SSI's economic future?



Community Interview Summaries

1. What are your top three priority focus areas for economic investment and economic action planning on SSI?

Housing

- Employee housing (e.g. for hospital)—spinoffs for the economy
- Densification in Ganges—more housing
- Access to housing—increase in housing type (affordable housing, housing for families, rental housing, employee housing), density
- Limited supply of rental, need adequate housing

Transportation

- Ferry service optimization—Fulford gets messed up when ferries are delayed (e.g. parking, etc.)
- Transportation macro and micro—both Ferries and the ability for seniors to get around. More or right size the Ferries
- Ferries and road—reliance on the Province for the latter

Healthcare

- More efficient and more healthcare (e.g. for senior population)
- Demographics of the population (e.g. older population)—how will the hospital be staffed
- New hospital wing will encourage more people to make SSI home (e.g. older people)
- Viable hospital (relates back to staffing issues)
- Government to support alternate health practices to address deficits in healthcare

Community Planning

- Invest in planning
- Densification and revitalization of Ganges—more commercial and residential, create a vibrant town centre, Harbour Walk, tourism benefits, leadership and community investment required
- Catch up on over-stretched infrastructure (e.g. roads and facilities maintenance)
- More access to commercial land/real estate (there is demand but no place to locate)—places for storage and commercial warehouse/shops to operate businesses
- Less restrictions on commercial
- Clarity on light industry versus manufacturing uses

Labour

- Skilled labour—housing, wages, etc. impacting retention
- Labour required to support businesses
- Trades and construction—short on trades in all sectors.

Other

- Tourism—more focus on longer stays (fewer visitor numbers but longer stays)
- Training and development—economic literacy training, employment development for individuals
- Review demographic trends
- Services, amenities and supports (e.g. for seniors and families)
- Telecommunications—upgrade connections to enhance service and allow businesses to expand
- Educational institutions—establish more
- Investment in agriculture
- Support for small businesses
- Communication within the community

2. What do you see as the economic drivers of the Salt Spring economy?

Tourism (top driver)

- Huge source of revenue for everyone—many spinoffs all retail, accommodation, restaurants, artists and artisans are direct beneficiaries)
- Culinary and agritourism, educational, weddings, etc.
- Sector is at capacity—exceeding SSI's infrastructure
- Changes in tourism—instead of big tours now day trips and regional tourism, increase in weddings, need more niche/concierge, packages, tour operators for more activities and experiences, need more festivals and events
- Tourists include those looking to purchase—younger people moving here with more financial means (tech/finance), retirees
- A feast and famine model

Retirement

- People choose to retire to SSI for e.g. arts, tourism—spurs building and renovation
- Retirement income residents

Healthcare

- Includes hospital, pharmacies, alternative health, physical therapy
- SSI is the only southern gulf island with a major medical facility—proximity to healthcare is important for seniors
- Hospital is a major employer

Small Businesses

- 'mom and pop' businesses—beaten down with e.g. taxation and insurance
- Most tourism businesses are small
- Drive the economy through innovation

Other

- Development—construction and trades from off Island
- Tech and tech adjacent industry—allows for remote work, niche tech industry
- Arts—attract and draw other creatives
- Transportation
- Education—major employer
- Vibrant centre
- Service providers (e.g. health and wellness, food—both connected to tourism)

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of our economy?

Strengths

Location and Accessibility

- Landlocked consumer base
- Environment, natural beauty, access to space for hobbies, etc.
- Location is a draw for people to buy products and services—capture of regional market
- Largest gulf island with the most amenities and services (diversity of services)
- Accessible to major cities and regions (ferry service, float plane)
- Tourism—brings people to SSI and drives demand

Population

- Consistent population base—drives demand for goods and services
- Affluent and land locked consumer base—willing to pay a little more to buy things on SSI

- Diverse skills set (what they are doing is maybe not what they were trained for)
- Diversity—diminishing as families move away due to lack of housing
- Arts community
- Professional and service-oriented population
- Seniors population—time to volunteer, share knowledge

Island Lifestyle/Community

- Desirable lifestyle
- Sense of Community—community support
- Resilient (adaptive to seasonality)
- Volunteerism among population
- SSI brand is a strength and a weakness (mythology)
- Relatively safe
- Outside of capitalism/gift economy

Weakness

Housing

- Lack of housing, affordable housing and workforce housing
- Supply (no rental, no diversity in housing stock) and condition (renovations without permits, etc.) issues—people are living in precarious conditions, garages, trailers, etc.
- Housing stability is an issue for renters/employees
- Housing can be a strength if you have equity but difficult if you don't have roots in SSI/financial ability/employment stability (e.g. high paying contract employees may not want to invest)
- Housing deficit leads to lack of employees in all businesses (skeleton staff, restricted operating hours)
- No incentives to build affordable housing (e.g. restrictions on rent increases) and construction costs are an issue
- Homelessness issue developing (perceptions of safety, growth and tourism impacts, no municipal enforcement to e.g. tow trailers)

Community Planning

- Land use planning is restrictive, (e.g. for commercial) not flexible for adapting to changing times
- Access to land
 - ▶ lack of industrial land for medium to large size businesses (businesses are leaving)
 - ▶ lack of commercial zoned land (quantity and location—dispersed/not cohesive—not enough to create a vibrant centre)
- Infrastructure—overstretched, power/water/septic issues impeding business growth
 - ▶ Lack of water, water restrictions on piped water, no promotion of water conservation/better use
- Great deal of land closest to Ganges is ALR—prevents expansion of Village (commercial, residential)

Administration/Governance

- Bureaucracy—jurisdictional nightmare
- Governments are disjointed—division of responsibilities means often going in different directions—CRD is responsible for buildings, Islands Trust controls land use, NSSW and CRD water works
- Chamber, Commission and Tourism partnership don't work together
- Too many community organizations are going in their own directions—division among community groups.
- Lots of volunteer efforts that don't go anywhere and people are burning out—volunteers are aging out.
- Governance processes and mechanics undermine volunteer efforts.
- Chamber of Commerce is a weakness (dysfunctional)
- Lack of strong leadership on Salt Spring and lack of respect for leadership.
- No economic plan for SSI or coordinated focus on marketing

Labour

- Labour shortage—impacts ability for businesses to grow
- Employers are arranging staff housing and paying for commuting costs
- Some workers are commuting from Duncan and Crofton (an expensive way to conduct a business—cost and commute time)
- Big picture labour shortage due to baby boomers is exaggerated on SSI
- Small workforce
- Departure of young people for career opportunities

Other

- Loneliness among retirees
- Difficulty of importing to SSI (transportation schedule, cost)
- SSI is not where people go to get ahead—in search of alternative lifestyle
- Nature of why people come to SSI—not where people go to get ahead—alternative lifestyle
- Over reliance on tourism
- Isolation—from other communities, economically closed due to Island location, access impacts tourism

4. What are the opportunity and threats?

Opportunities

Revitalization

- Revitalize Ganges—beautify, make interesting, walkable, Harbour Walk (tourism driver)
- Getting more buy-in from downtown landowners. What are we going to with the downtown? Locals don't want to go downtown.

Agriculture

- It is the pride of the island—good reputation
- Farm stand festival
- More people involved

Accessibility

- Make Ganges walkable
- Cycle pathways—benefits for tourism and local
- Better access to natural beauty

Education and Mentoring

- Cross-generational mentoring (need training beyond high school)
- Careers awareness promotion—grow the jobs from within (e.g. career/trades fair)—build capacity locally

Small Businesses

- Small business can grow at a sustainable pace
- Sole proprietorships—not just limited to tourism
- Small businesses that are light on staff

Tourism

- High-end tourism
- Electric vehicle tourist culture
- Climate is favourable to extending tourist season
- Healing, wellness, spiritual focus
- Market SSI to Canadians
- Need more commercial accommodation

Centralization

- Co-work spaces for the creative online workers
- Centralized office or business centre to help with administration of small business.
- A central place where people can come together—a community centre

Housing

- Affordable housing to retain workers
- Work from home

Business Diversification/Marketing/Support

- Diversify businesses—provide more variety
- Online businesses/marketing to expand beyond locals
- Referrals among businesses to support each other
- Need marketing/support—no avenues to find and engage people with new technology in various fields
- Coordination of product exports

Land

- Free up poorly zoned land
- Industrial land for e.g. light industrial, sawmill—hard to grow a business

Threats

Housing and Homelessness

- Lack of housing supply—affordable and workforce housing
- Homelessness

Government and Regulation

- Government overreach
- Regulatory hurdles—need to streamline the process
- Uncertainty about jurisdictional issues, what is permitted and not
- Divisive

Transportation and Services

- Time and expense of getting on/off Island
- Perceived reliability of ferries—impacts on seniors who want access to health care
- Servicing—water (shortage), sewer (combination of septic and sewer)—improvements are expensive
- Administration of servicing, roadblocks to extending services

Labour

- Businesses will close if don't get staff—domino effect if one closes then others do too
- Contractors and services that don't live here.
- No threat with off-island contractors now, but don't know uncertainty in the future with a potential recession
- Local businesses can't grow with labour shortages
- Staff shortages and lack of qualified staff (e.g. for hospital)
- Burnout when staff can't be hired
- Smaller labour pool—change in work ethic

Demographics

- Not having a whole community with full spectrum of age groups (not focused on seniors)
- Lack of opportunities/amenities for younger people—supports for families
- Concern about aging out—farmers, artists

Island Culture

- “Reluctance to change and even to talk about change there is resistance.” The culture is messed up—not a majority culture but a vocal one.
- Polarization
- Vocal minority opposing ideas
- People attracted to SSI do not want to be led.
- Lack of leadership
- Lack of autonomy to do what needs to be done

Business

- Hard to run business sustainability—costs have gone up
- More challenging for many small businesses
- High cost of labour
- Poor internet service—impacting businesses, people working from home
- Almost no room to expand commercial activity—will take their good ideas elsewhere

Safety

- Personal safety/crime

5. What are the challenges and opportunities associated (short- and long-term)?

This question did not have a very good response rate (some referred to opportunities and threats already answered). Themes were difficult to identify as recorders did not separate out challenges from opportunities.

Housing

- Affordable housing availability—people make it work—live in poor conditions until get something better as it becomes available
- Can't create housing overnight— long time from planning to development
- Get a job but have no place to live
- Zoning and servicing
- Opportunity to create housing—including workforce housing, housing for families

Collaboration

- Absent a municipal government structure, finding a way to bring all parties together—difficult with organizational structure/administrative boundaries (e.g. for servicing authorities)
- Getting everyone on the same page is challenging—people are very opinionated
- Break down silos and become more cooperative.
- Need town meetings to break down barriers and improve communication with professional facilitator to create a plan with cooperation across all groups.

Business opportunities

- People come to SSI for the lifestyle—small businesses sell enough to get buy
- Opportunities for small businesses (e.g. sole proprietorship, small restauraners)
- Expand tourism (opportunity to increase tourism from US)
- Arts marketing—festivals to draw people to SSI

Year-round economy

- Fostering a year-round economy—not an easy place get to in the winter
- Year-round craft market—such as at the Farmers' Institute, covered markets (e.g. winter market at the Firehall)
- Trying to expand the tourism season into shoulder season
- Ganges to support businesses and tourism

Land and Services

- More commercial and industrial zoned land
- More commercial opportunities—not just people working from garages and homes
- Easier access to water, sewer more easily (long-term)

Labour

- No shortage of opportunities—just a function of finding the right people
- Trades to get business up and running (long-term)
- Immigration as a source of labour
- Attracting younger families and workers

6. What partnerships need to be formed/strengthened/dissolved to address challenges and/or promote change in the local economy? In what way?

- Some interviewees had a lack of familiarity with partnerships on SSI
- Too much jurisdictional overlap and confusion
- Need eloquent, experienced leaders that can get along with others and create a common middle ground
- Community is fractured—generational divide (e.g. boomers have the time, under 55s aren't heard)
- Turf war mentality—too much infighting and confusion about mandates, vocal part of community is resistant to change
- So many partnerships that have been attempted with economic development—so much of SSI is non-profit, volunteer, for older people
- Need to be bigger to get attention of senior governments (e.g. Salish Sea Inter-Island Group)
- More communication across sectors is needed (e.g. recreation, arts, agriculture)
- More efforts on attraction strategies to promote change
- Partnerships needed:
 - ▶ Housing—need a housing coordinator for the Island (maybe the Chamber?), partnership needed between rental owners and businesses (motivation to rent not just to tourists). Hospital has staff that forges housing partnerships with rental owners.
 - ▶ Government—e.g. need partnership between CRD and water works, Partnership Islands Trust and CRD
 - ▶ Tourism—needs to be balanced since it has a regional focus
 - ▶ Business—e.g. for Ganges, networking events (Chamber should be doing this), support from Southern Gulf Island Tourism Society, between employers
 - ▶ Restaurants—working together
 - ▶ Transportation—e.g. with other Gulf Islands (better access to other islands, not just for tourism), local advisory committees give feedback to BC Ferries
 - ▶ Recreational—golf course, CRD Parks and Recreation are a good example. Other recreational clubs are working together.
 - ▶ Arts partnerships—e.g. music school at SIMS, music events at community hall
 - ▶ Hospitality—hospitality industry and services (e.g. health services and resorts), accommodations and restaurants
 - ▶ Mentorship—more partnerships with off-island groups and companies to each students, mentorship program
 - ▶ Community—community partnerships—work together as opposed to competitive environment that currently exists

7. Is there anything else you wish to add?

Refer to compilation of interview transcripts at opportunitysaltspring.ca