

Appendices

APPENDIX A: REVELSTOKE B.C.

Nestled in the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia, Revelstoke was the quintessential boom town. Settled first on account of regional minerals and lumber, sustained by its strategic location on the Canadian Pacific railroad, it profited in the 1970s and early '80s from massive hydroelectric projects on the Columbia River.

By the same token, its dependence on megaprojects, over which locals had no control, had a price. Dam construction in the '60s, '70s, and '80s turned some of the region's finest forest and agricultural lands into reservoirs. Before completion in 1985 of the final megaproject, the Revelstoke Dam, the town was already suffering serious decline. Dependency on large-scale employers hit hard and deep. Revelstoke's dilapidated downtown said it all.

Yet now, at the turn of the century, Revelstoke has stemmed the tide of economic and social decline. Unemployment is down to 10%. There is a healthy demand for property. Where once existed merely a "boom mentality" which purely measured economic growth, the city has developed an identity as a vibrant mountain community with a diversified, sustainable local economy.

By revitalizing the downtown, Revelstoke rekindled local pride & confidence, & created an opportunity for a new generation of leaders to come forward & work together. (Photo credit: Centre for Community Enterprise)



To attribute this success to somebody's masterful planning and insight would be a conceit. Local people would be the first to deny it. But there are definitely elements of sustained good sense, loyalty, courage, trust, and patience which have enabled residents of Revelstoke to get and keep high-caliber leaders - the sort of leaders who can turn luck into an opportunity which local people are willing and able to seize.

These qualities are manifested in a number of organizational accomplishments: the drafting and regular renewal of a comprehensive strategy for local change; the development of a capacity for local research; expertise in select economic sectors; the creation of a network of organizations that can and do work together to implement projects consistent with the community's strategy.

Sowing New Leaders

The sheer breadth and depth of Revelstoke's leadership - and the will of leaders to extend that capacity - is a salient part of the story.

In the early '80s - before the final crunch - a planning process commenced. In fact, it was a series of interviews with business and other community leaders which issued in two major courses of action: the hiring of a municipal economic development commissioner (1983) and the completion of a local economic strategy (1985 - one of the first in B.C.).

Significantly, the public sustained its will to follow through on these plans even when their town's fortunes hit rock-bottom. Maybe people just knew when their backs were against the wall: the completion of the dam and the closure of both a local sawmill and mine terminated over 2500 jobs within the space of 24 months. Although the Canadian Pacific Railway remained, staffing at its maintenance yards steadily declined. By 1986 unemployment was at 25%; over a third of the houses were on the market.

At this critical juncture, the economic development commission put the community's seal of approval on the principle (and cost) of municipal intervention in the local economy. The community economic strategy specified priorities for action to stem the depression: a co-ordinated effort to market the town to new forest or mining investors, to encourage local entrepreneurs, and to promote tourism.

It was tourism that got the wheels turning. A serious tourism strategy obliged residents to start thinking about their identity. What did Revelstoke really mean to them? What did it mean to outsiders? Downtown revitalization had been attempted in the late '70s. But the notion of attaching alpine facades to storefronts never caught on. 1986 was different. This time, taking advantage of a provincial heritage restoration program, taxpayers approved a major investment to restore old buildings, rather than conceal them. Retrieving the authentic beauty of Revelstoke's core literally "put the heart back in the town" - and provided the stage upon which a first generation of leaders emerged, worked together, and tasted success.

Organizational Capacity

The years 1987-92 witnessed the emergence of a number of local organizations that became key players and partners in development decisions.

Concerted efforts on the part of City Hall, the Economic Development Commission, and the local Member of Parliament led to Revelstoke's designation as a Community Futures community in 1987. It was one of the first places in the country to receive this designation

and to successfully assert a local, rather than regional, sphere of operations for the program. The Community Futures (CF) Society steered the federal assistance into a multi-faceted strategy that included a self-employment program, various community development projects, and a Business Development Centre that managed a small business loan fund.

In 1988, the Chamber of Commerce, the CF Society, the Business Development Centre, and the Economic Development Commission elected to “co-locate” in the Revelstoke Enterprise Centre. At one level, this move simply reduced overhead costs by permitting the organizations to share an office, receptionist, photocopier, and coffee maker; and as a one-stop shop for entrepreneurs and developers, it also increased the profile of all four organizations.

However, most significant - and probably the easiest to overlook - is the fact that co-location made it far easier to tightly interlink local development initiatives. Everybody could now get a precise idea of what the others were doing and dovetail rather than duplicate their agendas. The Enterprise Centre itself, moreover, began to actively promote the projects of the member organizations and connect them with additional resources and opportunities. All four began to take a hand in financing and undertaking the completion of feasibility studies, as circumstances required. (“Throwing money at the wall to see what sticks,” as they say.) The Enterprise Centre epitomizes the will of Revelstoke’s leading lights to plan and work in partnership, rather than compete for turf or credit.

In 1990, these same leaders started to bring the Revelstoke Credit Union on board. First as rank and file members, then as board members, they nudged the credit union toward a more activist role in local renewal. A threshold was crossed in 1996 with the selection of a manager who was particularly skilled in commercial loans, rather than residential mortgages.

That’s helped to close some of the local capital gap. To narrow it still further, another community institution was launched in 1999. The Revelstoke Community Foundation will act as an administrator and disbursing agent of charitable funds donated by local people and other sources. Its board of 12 volunteers is supported operationally by Community Futures and the Credit Union. Interest from the fund’s investments will be available to support a variety of designated and discretionary projects in the town.

Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation

One stumbling block to Revelstoke’s recovery after 1986 lay in the paltry number of local jobs created by the logging companies active in the area. The vast majority of the harvested timber went to other towns for processing. That had to change. The City began to accumulate

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expertise in forest industry research and analysis, tracking the performance of local forest tenure holders and comparing it to the terms of their licenses. On several occasions in the years 1987-92, the City was able to challenge the companies' forest practices and impress upon the provincial government the need for local input in forest management planning. (The cutting rights of one tenure holder were actually suspended on the strength of the municipality's case.)

This in-house capacity was put to the test in 1992. Late in the year, City Hall and the Economic Development Commission acted to forestall the sale of a nearby tree farm license (TFL) to out-of-town interests. Why should local people remain "out of the loop" when decisions about the use of local resources are made? The City was able to formulate a credible counter proposal for the creation of a local community forest corporation that would assume management and harvesting of a portion of the TFL. The City and three local sawmill owners were to become partners in the venture, with a total investment of \$4 million (including \$1 million in City money).

The Province permitted the mavericks to proceed, given their mobilization of the necessary cash and public approval. The City was already in for \$200,000 - the cost of developing a

quality business plan at this level of complexity. An extensive public information campaign was launched to prepare people for the referendum, including workshops, meetings with community organizations, televised public meetings, pamphlets and newspaper articles, and a radio open-line program. Instead of a mere information blitz, the events facilitated an open discussion of real options. The referendum passed with a 78% majority. The entire process, from initial proposal to the incorporation of Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation (RCFC), took about 14 weeks. Business operations commenced scarcely six weeks later.

Value-added wood processing is one of the means by which local industry has created more forest-related jobs than Revelstoke ever enjoyed in the past. (Photo credit: Selkirk Specialty Woods)



RCFC continues to present a fine return on investment, not just in profits but in terms of local jobs. There are now actually more forestry-related jobs in Revelstoke than there were ten years ago. This testifies to both the corporation's cultivation of local talent, and to its partners' commitment to invest locally. One of them now employs 75 people at a new wood value-added enterprise, Selkirk Specialty Woods.

Community-Wide Planning

The tumult surrounding the launch of RCFC disturbed but was not allowed to derail another process of local consultation. In 1991, there was a prospect that an outside developer would turn nearby Mount Mackenzie into an international ski destination resort. The impact that this and certain opportunities in the communications sector could have on the local quality of life raised a thorny issue. What did Revelstoke want to be “when it grew up”? The initiatives taken in the mid-80s had elicited some ideas from some influential residents. Since then, new organizations and projects had dramatically increased the number of community leaders and active citizens.

To arrive at a more accurate idea of the future that Revelstoke would have for itself, the mayor struck an ad hoc committee of 40. A vision statement was drafted and presented at public meetings, but then the forestry crisis shelved the whole process. Only in late 1993 did the visioning process recommence. The distribution of a multi-page survey to every one of Revelstoke’s 3,000 households elicited a response from one in three - a deluge of information about the residents’ values and hopes for their town. Collated and analyzed, it helped to finalize a collective vision statement, which in turn shaped a second major process: a new strategic plan.

It wasn’t that the 1985 plan had been accomplished. It was just that so much water had flowed under the bridge in terms of action taken, opportunities opened up, and purposes clarified. Also, there was a need to open up the planning procedure. This time, 14 public meetings were held to discuss the ideas which different groups and organizations wished to see emphasized. Newspaper articles and advertisements encouraged broad public participation.

The finished plan, “Revelstoke Community Economic Development Strategy 1995-2005,” brought an entirely new level of precision to the town’s understanding of its situation and aspirations. In addition to a sectoral breakdown of opportunities and weaknesses was an analysis of where Revelstoke stood in terms of the basic ingredients of a healthy economy: credit and equity, planning and research, promotion and brokerage, and human resource development.

Since that time, an annual planning meeting has been introduced to keep the strategic plan tuned up. At this event the public receives reports from every major community organization (including Community Futures, the City, the Chamber, Enterprise Centre, and RCFC), and there they can discuss priorities for future action. Subsequent meetings then iron out who is to do what - not a difficult procedure, since strategic planning has become a standard

practice of all these organizations. Clearly, strategic planning and thinking has become a part of the local culture.

Preparing the Workforce

Increasing that pool of talent is the business of several training organizations that have emerged in the past ten years.

Much of the credit for this goes to the CF Society. In the late '80s its sponsorship and advocacy of employability training carried a lot of weight in a place which hitherto had no adult education programs. To start closing that gap, the Society brokered partnerships first with the school district, then with the regional college, and finally brought these and other interested citizens together into an Adult Learning Council. When provincial program funds became available in 1996, that council was ready and waiting to become the board of the Skills Centre, a focal point for employment training programs offered by the college, Forest Renewal British Columbia, and Community Futures.

With the Skill Centre in place, Revelstoke was not caught off guard when Human Resources Development Canada announced in 1997 its intention to close the local employment centre. For years, the centre had merely functioned as a distributor of employment insurance. Here was an opportunity for "value-added" of a different kind. On the same premises, with HRDC's full co-operation, a Career Centre was established which, in addition to EI cheques, could link clients to counselling, skill upgrading, job opportunities, and other employment and education information available through the Skill Centre. The Career Centre also forwards prospective entrepreneurs through to Community Futures' self-employment training program.

Another human resource project launched in 1997 was a database of local business activity to supplement information from the City, the Chamber, and Statistics Canada. Community Futures hired an intern to conduct interviews with every business person in town. Information was collected and collated on 600 enterprises. In addition to matters such as income, staff, and how long they had been in operation, the database records each business' local expenditures and purchases.

A map of how local people spend and invest is thus beginning to take shape. If updated regularly and supplemented by similar information about community organizations, it could help future planners shape initiatives that re-circulate local dollars more efficiently. An inventory of labour market information - what skills people have, and which skills local employers require (or expect to require) - is also contemplated.

It is noteworthy that Revelstoke's training resources have recently co-located after the example of the Enterprise Centre. The Community Learning Centre, as it is called, brings together under one roof the resources of the School District, the Skills Centre, and the regional college to create a one-stop shop for people looking for work and training.

The Creation of a Development System

Is this local economy too municipally driven? Some might say so, in light of the \$1 million that the City invested in RCFC. As the mayor points out, however, the City only acted when the local private sector could organize no alternative (on its own, at least). When it comes to fulfilling the community economic strategy, the municipality's rule of thumb is to wait for local volunteers or entrepreneurs to have sufficient commitment and confidence to adopt the proposed initiatives. If no one comes forward, the initiative "rolls over" into the subsequent plan.

Significantly, even though some political troubles delayed City Hall's approval of the 1995 economic strategy until 1996, it didn't really matter. As the Economic Development Commissioner had to advise the Council, its approval was just a formality anyway - local people had already undertaken many of the projects listed.

A good example of this astute application of municipal resources to private initiative is the aforementioned Mount Mackenzie ski resort. The ski area was sold in 1990 to a Toronto company for development, but the City cancelled the contract a year later when the company failed to meet performance clauses. No new takers for the project could be found nationally or internationally, and the project lay fallow until 1998. In the interim, however, some local

businessmen became quite successful transporting skiers by caterpillar tractor to slopes on the top half of the mountain. The City and the cat-ski operators agreed to become partners in the mountain's redevelopment for conventional skiers. Part of the City's obligation was to cut a \$850,000 road further up the mountain - which RCFC accomplished, and in the process harvested timber which offset one third of the road building costs. By strategically supporting private business, Revelstoke has created access to first-class facilities and snow for all manner of skiers.

As owner of RCFC, Revelstoke was able to dovetail its responsibility to its Mount Mackenzie partner with local forest industry development. (Photo credit: Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation)



Incubation, not intervention, is the rule of thumb at Revelstoke City Hall. The CF Society (now the Community Futures Development Corporation) has long followed the same

principle. As in the case of the Skills Centre, Community Futures makes a habit of helping citizens get promising ideas organized. Then, should an opportunity arise (financial or otherwise), an organizational machine is ready and waiting to shift into high gear. In 1989, for example, Community Futures assisted a group of railway buffs with planning, research, and structuring an organization. In 1993, as the Revelstoke Heritage Railway Society, those people assumed responsibility for the design and management of an outstanding railway museum in town.

This incubation of initiative and responsibility on the part of ordinary citizens has many payoffs. For one thing, the town can move fast and effectively when time is precious. When a mill in an outlying settlement shut down in 1995, the response of Revelstoke was little short of instantaneous. Community meetings were held, the credit union made arrangements for emergency loans, and training programs for re-skilling the employees were prepared. Ironically, members of neighbouring communities, affected by the same closure, had to make use of Revelstoke's services, their own institutions not being quick enough off the mark.

Likewise, Revelstoke's elected and appointed leaders have recourse to a local "grapevine." They are not the only ones in town with their ears to the ground. When unwelcome changes to the terms for the export of softwood lumber to the United States became a possibility in 1998, it was an ordinary citizen who picked up and relayed the news release to City and RCFC staff. They then organized a counter-campaign that helped protect local mill-owners. (The Ministry of Forests received 400 letters of protest from Revelstoke alone.)

What has emerged in Revelstoke is a local development system rather than just a collection of programs. All the components required for successful economic development are present:

- an equity building strategy (RCFC);
- locally accountable sources of business credit and project finance (Community Futures, the Credit Union, and the Community Foundation);
- a capacity to plan and implement human resource development programs;
- a capacity for strategic planning and research;
- and last, but by no means least, leadership that can broker opportunities and co-ordinate grassroots initiative.

Small wonder actions in Revelstoke are not attributed to the nameless and mysterious "they." People instead say "we" and "us."