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STRONGER TOGETHER: ISLAND COMMUNITIES JOIN FORCES TO CREATE TECH ATTRACTION STRATEGY

PORT ALBERNI – In response to the emerging opportunities in the technology sector, a group of Vancouver Island communities has come together to create a regional strategy designed to grow a robust tech sector in a corridor ranging from the Cowichan region, through the mid-island, to Campbell River and north.

The project has received \$15,000 in funding from the federal government’s Invest Canada - Community Initiatives (ICCI) program. This funding will be used to develop a strategy to support the attraction of foreign technology investment from the United States and potentially some European nations, to new markets outside of the capital region. Specifically, the strategy will assess the region’s tech related assets and readiness for foreign direct investment, define the region’s competitive position and target markets, and identify key partners and marketing tactics.

A truly regional initiative, the project is being led by the Vancouver Island Coast Economic Developers Association (VICEDA). Seven communities - Campbell River, Comox Valley, Cowichan Valley, Nanaimo, Parksville, Qualicum Beach, and Port Alberni – are the key financial and organizing partners. These seven participating communities have matched the \$15,000 in funding from ICCCI for a total budget of \$30,000. In-kind project development and management support is being provided by Innovation Island, Island Coastal Economic Trust, City of Campbell River Economic Development and Province of BC regional staff.

VICEDA Chair Patrick Deakin sees the communities’ collaborative approach as the key to success for this next stage of tech sector attraction and retention in the region.

“While each of the seven communities in this project has their own unique attributes, it was their leadership around a desire to work together for a bigger, more regional impact that brought this project to fruition,” Deakin explained. “Innovation Island spearheaded the process, by guiding and inspiring communities to think about pooling their resources to take advantage of emerging tech attraction opportunities”.

The project steering committee, chaired by City of Campbell River Economic Development officer Rose Klukas, took the approach that no single community could market to a global tech sector on their own. However, as a collective they could leverage strengths and assets in the region to develop a ‘corridor’ of communities with the capacity to compete globally for investment, relocations of existing firms, and start-ups.

“The Island is already known as a great location for the tech sector, and of the 1,500 or so companies, nearly 600 are already located outside the Capital region,” Klukas said. “By marketing our region as a corridor or hub, we can build on that success in a way that is very difficult for smaller, individual communities to do on their own.”

Klukas notes that with an emerging regional tech sector, which includes some companies making a name for themselves internationally, the time is right to develop a business case to attract new tech players to the region. A stronger, more diverse tech sector will create the critical mass required to improve infrastructure, workforce training and other supports, which will in turn benefit the region's existing tech businesses and startups.

She explains that the region's quality of life is a significant draw for industry professionals who can work remotely from anywhere in the world. A highly-educated workforce with well-resourced universities and colleges is also a significant asset for tech companies. And finally, relatively easy and quick access to other major tech hubs in Seattle and Silicon Valley adds value to the region's competitive position.

The strategy will be completed by end of 2018.

About VICEDA

The Vancouver Island Coast Economic Development Association (VICEDA) is a non-profit society established in 1987 to support regional economic collaboration. Membership includes organizations and individuals working to address economic development issues in the Vancouver Island and Coast region.

The organization serves as a regional umbrella to provide a common voice on issues affecting the region and to lead collaborative initiatives to enhance the region's economic opportunities.

VICEDA's membership meets quarterly, in different communities throughout the region, to discuss current issues related to economic development, share information and best practices and develop new partnership and collaborative initiatives.

More information can be found at www.viceda.com.

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