

April 5, 2022 Regular Council Meeting

Presentation notes: Millie Stirling, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce

Good evening everyone and thank you for inviting me.

I am currently under contract with ICET as Economic Recovery Coordinator for the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce. In this role, I have been able to fulfill the duties set out in the current Economic Development and Tourism Support Program Administration Service Agreement.

In particular, I conducted a Business Walk in October 2021 whereby I connected with 114 local businesses to take the “pulse” of local businesses. Although the world has felt like a pretty negative place over the past two years, the business walk in Ladysmith showed me something else. It showed me that we have a strong sense of community, that there were people who opened businesses during covid, people that expanded businesses during covid and businesses that thrived during covid. Yes, there was also hardship, but when I asked businesses what their plans were over the next 5 years, 70% plan to expand/grow. When I asked them what they like the most about doing business in Ladysmith 53% chose location and 40% chose clientele. This is where the seed was planted for Locals Love Ladysmith.

Another take away from the Business Walk was the lack of employees to fill the job vacancies. I don't need to get into this as we are all very familiar and aware of this. In answer to this call, I have established a relationship with WorkBC and we are now in the process of organizing a Job Fair in Ladysmith on May 11. We will be holding it at LSS and I am working with the principal and one of the counsellors to involve the students in the set up of the event as well it being open to grade 10-12 students to attend.

Next came the Shop Local initiative supported by our Federal Government and the BC Chamber. You may have heard that we applied for and were granted just shy of \$60,000 for our shop local initiative. It was both exciting and intimidating as Mark had left and I had never done anything like this. Initially we worked with LDBA and FOL to support the Old Time Christmas, we updated the Heritage Walking Tour App to remove the Church and we also created a Christmas Light walking tour that highlighted and explained several of the light displays in Town. This app has been upgraded and I am making inquiries to see

if we can add audio to the app as suggested by Rob Johnson. We created a poster with a QR code on it so that the app is easy for our tourists to download.

We also initiated a Gift Certificate program and a print ad campaign to educate and encourage the community to shop local. But, more relative to this contract is our Locals Love Ladysmith campaign which has been a tremendous success! Once again I found myself out in the community and we interviewed a diverse group of 41 local businesses, asking all of them the same 5 questions and getting amazing photos of their businesses. We then created a Locals Love Ladysmith Instagram, Facebook and Tik Tok. These interviews now feed content into our Tourism Ladysmith Facebook page as well as the Chamber's Facebook page. They are advertising, but the best kind of advertising, we are telling their stories. Each business will have 3-5 posts and we are now getting requests from other local businesses for interviews to continue this program. Our initial post reached 2814 people in the first week and by 3 weeks, the page had reached 7840 people!

With this initiative we updated our website which now displays the photos posted on our LLL Instagram page. Our website contains the pages for Invest Ladysmith and Tourism Ladysmith. The photos freshen up our website and show the visitor our beautiful community on the first page.

I brought a stack of publications that we have placed our LLL ads in. We have a beautiful, eye catching, ad this year (show ad in Explore Ladysmith) that has been placed in all the publications we participated in last year. This includes the most popular map we have and use, we give out at least one a day. And with the renewal of this contract, we plan to place ads in these two magazines that we have not appeared in before.

LLL is a fantastic initiative that we would love to keep going. I hear a lot of tourists comment on how beautiful our town is and of course they come to us to help them decide what to do. Our next project is to create 3-5 "a day in Ladysmith" posts for LLL and the Ladysmith Tourism Facebook page whereby we give our tourists ideas of a great way to spend the day in Ladysmith, ie: cinnamon bun for breakfast, hike Holland Creek trail, relax and enjoy lunch at transfer beach, afternoon heritage walking tour with our app and dinner with a glass of wine on the patio at Zak's lounge. I also spoke with Rob Johnson and have reached out to him, Marina and the Historical Society to choose 3-5 buildings in town that we can feature with the same structure. We have posted a couple of old photos in LLL and they got a lot of social media interest and attention. These posts would peak our tourists interests and direct them to our business community, recreation and attractions.

Our activity caught the attention of the Nanaimo Chamber and they have invited 8 of our local businesses to participate in their online business directory. I oversold this and sent 12 businesses their way. Nanaimo is considering one of our local businesses to offer a sponsorship to Island Good. I am just waiting to hear back from them.

Recently, I met with our MP Lisa Marie Barron. She was curious about the business climate in Ladysmith. When I shared with her some of the stories I had heard in my Business Walk and Locals Love Ladysmith interviews, she was intrigued. I got a call from her staff within a day of our meeting letting me know that Lisa Marie would like to come to our community and meet some of our local businesses. We spent an afternoon together, she had a cinnamon bun and I introduced her to 3 local businesses who got to share their covid journey and provide her with real life stories to take back to her office. I didn't arrange for her to meet the "easy" ones yet even the most challenged of the businesses she interviewed were professional and well spoken with their opinions and feedback. It was impressive

Moving forward

I have accepted the position of Executive Director at the end of July when the contract with ICET is complete.

Social Media: Now that events are starting to happen, we will be posting the upcoming events on the Tourism Facebook page. We started this last year and it was very popular on the page. As previously mentioned, our LLL posts will be featured on our Tourism Facebook page this season.

Print ads: We have been in discussion with Landmark and have asked them to Add Ladysmith to the Chemainus map or possibly get our own. With Covid this was not possible this year but our rep said we can discuss it again next year.

What I would like to see: I would like to update/ freshen up the VC, give it a coat of paint! I would like to display some of the photos from LLL as well as art from local artists.

And I would like to sell some swag: We have a local photographer printing photos for postcards. I would love to see Ladysmith be a Christmas Town as our FOL is so famous and spectacular. With this in mind, I would love to sell beautiful Christmas ornaments at the visitor centre.

I know our tag line is a view to sea: we have asked the designer of the LLL logo to create an “A view to sea” logo that would marry LLL as we would like to sell reusable shopping bags like these.

Poster Board like the one outside the post office. We use an old cork board leaning up against the window

Thank you everyone for your time, do you have any questions?