

COWICHAN VALLEY REGIONAL DISTRICT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COWICHAN – REVIEW

NEILSON
August 20, 2025
ANALYTICS STRATEGIES

Municipality of North Cowichan Council



PRESENTATION

- The Assignment
- Economic Development Cowichan
- Context
- Preliminary Findings
- Discussion





ASSIGNMENT

- Review economic development function (Economic Development Cowichan)
- Assess existing services (value)
- Identify potential changes to scope and/or level of services
- Consider and advise on delivery model

NEILSON
STRATEGIES

April 8, 2025

Cowichan Valley Regional District
175 Ingram Street
Duncan, BC, V9L 1N8

ATTENTION: CLAYTON POSTINGS
DEPUTY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Dear Mr. Postings:

REFERENCE: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIVISION (FUNCTION 121) SERVICE REVIEW

Thank you for reaching out to me to discuss the interest of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) in undertaking an independent service review of *Function 121 – Economic Development Division*. This letter confirms my interest in working with you on this project. The letter sets out my understanding of the assignment, and provides a proposed work program, budget and timeline.

UNDERSTANDING OF ASSIGNMENT

The CVRD Board of Directors has identified a need to review, in advance of the 2026 budget process, the Regional District's Function 121, which focuses on the provision of regional economic development services through Cowichan Economic Development, the CVRD's stand-alone economic development division. The service review sets out to:

- fully document and understand Function 121 as it exists today, including the full set of services undertaken, the levels of service provided, service funding and governance, and the method of service delivery
- assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the services and their delivery
- identify potential changes to the suite of services offered and/or the levels of service, in the context of other economic development services in the region, perceived economic development needs, existing service gaps and incidents of service duplication
- identify and assess potential changes to the suite of services and service levels
- identify current and future regional economic development challenges, including those that have helped to inform the direction set out in the DRAFT *Economic Development Cowichan Strategic Plan (2025-2029)*
- determine whether Function 121 services would be best delivered as a separate function by a stand-alone economic development division, as at present, or best delivered through a model that disperses responsibility for the work to other existing CVRD functions

A report on the service review, with recommendations on potential changes, is required by the Board for consideration leading up to the 2026 budget process.

Neilson Strategies Inc.
(t) anelson@neilsonstrategies.ca (w) neilsonstrategies.ca (f) 778.234.3405
Innovation Centre, 106-460 Doyle Avenue, Kelowna, BC, V1Y 0C2

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COWICHAN

- Regional service with full participation, including North Cowichan
- Governed by CVRD Board of Directors (no advisory committee in place)
- Costs apportioned on basis of converted assessment – 34% of total requisition from North Cowichan (\$230,000 in recent years)





ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COWICHAN

► Activities guided by *Strategic Plan*

BRE

Sector
Development

Strengthen
Communities

Communicate
Our Story

Align with CVRD
Strategy



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COWICHAN

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BRE

Sector
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Align with CVRD
Strategy

Reconciliation



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COWICHAN

- ▶ Activities guided by *Strategic Plan*
 - partnerships (First Nations, Chambers, others)
 - information resources (state of economy, profiles of sectors, tariffs)
 - convening tables on emerging topics and joint initiatives (Workforce Summit 2025)
 - strategy development (Workforce Housing, Internet & Cellular)



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COWICHAN

- ▶ Activities guided by *Strategic Plan*
 - studies on needs and opportunities (Accommodation Needs Assessment)
 - responding to investment inquiries
 - sector support (Cowichan Green Community Farm and Food Hub, Cow-op, Young Agrarians)



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COWICHAN

- ▶ Activities guided by *Strategic Plan*
 - joint initiatives (Circular Economy Accelerator Program)
 - local business support (Business Connector Program)
 - sub-regional economic strategies, village core strategies, other community-based economic development initiatives



CONTEXT

- Large region with several jurisdictions, rural-urban character, range of needs, interests and expectations
- Different understandings of economic development – that is, what it is
- Tight – and tightening – budgets; resulting competition for resources
- Service that is inherently difficult to measure



CONTEXT

- Relatively limited service in terms of budget and numbers
- Economic development ecosystem – different agencies, varying capacities



SOME FINDINGS

- Considerable uncertainty around "what it is" and "what it does"
- On the whole, Directors – jurisdictions, too – feel less-than-optimal role in setting priorities and giving direction
- Broad scope of services at regional and local levels; need to tighten focus
- "Regional" economic development efforts supported; less certain about "local"



SOME FINDINGS

- Sector focus strongly supported in some cases (agriculture); not in others
- Intelligence (knowledge), advocacy, coordination (convening), partnering – all important
- Oversight and integration important to most (not all) – informs discussion on delivery
- Communication to Board and member municipalities important to address



SOME FINDINGS

- ▶ Barriers to economic development exist outside of service – need to address



DISCUSSION

- ▶ Do you feel that Economic Development Cowichan, through its services, provides value to Municipality of North Cowichan?
- ▶ What are the types of activities on which EDC, as a regional service, should be focusing its resources?



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