

Life "On the Edge" Is A Delicate Balancing Act

Published Date: 2007/3/23 0:10:00

Article ID : 1801
Version 1.00

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Special to the Westcoaster.ca

What makes a community livable or sustainable?

The citizens of Ucluelet seem to know and have been recognized for their achievements and plans for Ucluelet's future.

They have built a path for future growth while maintaining the natural beauty and small town atmosphere of their village.

They were recently rewarded with high placements in several categories at the International Awards for Livable Communities in Hangzhou, China.

Ucluelet received a Gold Award for their Official Community Plan, a Silver Award and second place for the Most Livable Community below 20,000 population, and the Winner's Trophy for the Most Sustainable Community.

Ucluelet, and one other Canadian town, were the only locations under 20,000 population from North America in contention.

The other communities came from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

"The LivCom awards were a great recognition for what we in Ucluelet have been trying to achieve," says Mayor Dianne St. Jacques. "We were one of two finalists from North America for a community under 20,000 and we are very proud of that achievement."

The entire town worked to create the Official Community Plan through questionnaires, community barbeques and open houses.

The result is a blueprint for the evolution of Ucluelet from a resource-based village to a diversified vibrant tourist destination where people can live.

"Everyone in the community should be proud to be part of this world recognition," says Geoff Lyons, chief administrative officer of Ucluelet. "These awards go a long way to recognizing just how far we have come in embracing growth and tourism while retaining our small village heritage."

The community-university research alliance between Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo and the District of Ucluelet was singled out as an "example of the world's best practice" at the international competition.

Felice Mazzoni, Ucluelet's planner, and professor Dave Robinson formed the research alliance in 2004.

In China, Mazzoni, Robinson and two Malaspina Students, Heather Richards and Richard

Crowley made presentations before an international audience, describing the Malaspina-Ucluelet research alliance, and how Ucluelet's Official Community Plan was created using grassroots community involvement.

Ucluelet's Awards in the category of Environmentally Sustainable Project Awards, Ucluelet's Official Community Plan received a Gold Award.

District Of Ucluelet

The OCP is not just about encouraging growth and development but is a visioning document for Ucluelet's future. Provisions in the OCP include the building of affordable housing and staff accommodation in projects, density bonusing to reduce building footprints and increase revenue, and 100 per cent public waterfront access. "The awards are validation that we are definitely moving in the right direction, but there is still room for improvement" says Mazzoni.

The LivCom Awards

The International Awards for Livable Communities, LivCom, are a worldwide competition for communities that focus on environmental management and the creation of livable communities.

Their objective is to encourage innovation and leadership by towns and cities when creating communities that are vibrant, environmentally sustainable, and, most importantly, livable.

The LivCom Awards have five population categories. Ucluelet was in the Below 20,000 population category. Communities can be compared against others within their population category but are judged on how they perform within the cultural, political, economic, geographic and climatic environment in which they are situated. The participating communities receive worldwide recognition and opportunities for promotion of tourism and investment.

"Ucluelet has benefited greatly from participating in these awards," says St. Jacques. "The application process gave us an opportunity to see our progress and clarify future plans. We learned new ideas and solutions by seeing submissions from other communities. Finally, attending the ceremonies allowed our staff to network with other communities from around the world."

"But the greatest reward for any community, in the end, is a great place to live with its citizens taking an active part in the process and planning for the future."

(Editor's note: This article was submitted by Seasmoke PR, Ucluelet's public relations company. Margo Malcolm is a professional freelance writer and communications consultant living in Victoria, BC who has written on diverse subjects such as Egyptian Hieroglyphics and British Columbian Insects to the island of Curaçao and Mayan Ruins.)