

Ucluelet maintains 'life in the balance'

Mayor Dianne St. Jacques of the District of Ucluelet is celebrating recognition and economic development gains. She's pleased the District is being awarded a community forest tenure just under 19,000 cubic meters she believes will add to the local economy. The recent signing of the Maa-nulth Agreement, St. Jacques said, puts Ucluelet "in the middle of it all" (land base for the agreement) and will mean establishing partnerships and working together with the Ucluelet First Nation as they determine best use of the 12,000 acres of waterfront land they've been allocated.

Unlike Tofino which has a population of about 1,500 and tourist guest traffic of between 15,000 to 20,000 in their prime season, Ucluelet has opted for a different ratio of hotel rooms. "We are maintaining a balance," she said. "We want our community to be for regular working people, and our quality of life is predominant in our planning," said St. Jacques. Ucluelet has won awards internationally for taking that road. They are seen as one of the world's Most Liveable Communities, are recognized for their Official Community Plan and have earned a designation as the Most Sustainable Community.

"Our building boom is relatively recent," the mayor said. Ucluelet's development includes duplexes, affordable housing and condominiums with the Whiskey Dock development on the downtown waterfront part of the totals. Locals don't want significant growth and expect to double their population to about 3,400 over the next decade. With that said, new tourism draws include Black Rock, Marine Drive Property's \$650 million Wyndansea Golf Resort offering the resort plus a Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course on 370 acres near Pacific Rim National Park.

Geoff Lyons as economic development officer can identify the following: building permit values for 2004 amounted to

\$78,000, in 2005 totaled \$38,300 (mostly minor home renos) and in 2006 with Black Rock on the books, amounted to \$195,000. Development cost charges for the past nine years added up to \$1,000,000 but in 2006 alone, the overall total was \$1,016,000.

Ucluelet has done the groundwork, literally, for their building boom. They've partnered with government funders, sold off some of their prime real estate and upgraded the local water and sewage treatment system to "maintain a diverse economy," said St. Jacques. The District has raised an additional \$11 million (in land, amenities and cash) through Density Bonusing and in negotiations with developers to finance community facilities including an upcoming community centre project and parks.

"Tofino got a hospital and we have a high school," said Mayor St. Jacques. But leaders aren't letting those realities deter them from adding possible partnerships with the province for Ucluelet to host a "community hub service centre" to bring additional children and family care services to



their proposed community centre project.

An ongoing challenge is the improvements to Highway #4 from Port Alberni. Originally built as a logging road with a foundation of tree stumps, the wood base is slowly decaying and after 30-40

years, major upgrades are vital. The mayor said the province is aware of their highway needs and one of the priorities is a distance between Kennedy Lake Hill and what has been dubbed Hydro Hill that will have "expensive" plans and tight timelines.

Ucluelet residents are looking forward to a secondary access road. Soon Marine Drive will be extended into the Weyerhaeuser Lands to form a secondary route into Ucluelet as Weyerhaeuser's plans for a subdivision (D.L.283) are a priority.

Not all west coast tourists arrive by road. Many come through the Long Beach Airport owned in partnership between

Ucluelet, Tofino and Area C (Long Beach). It covers 700-800 acres, has the distinction of being North America's closest airport to Japan, with lengthy runways that could facilitate large aircraft, after some needed repairs (some to be funded by ACAP Transportation).

The airport lacks its own building, requires management personnel and funding to give it the capacity to meet anticipated traffic demands. Marine Drive Properties has contributed \$100,000 for a study related to possible scheduled flights, and the owners know the airport needs new technology.

Marine traffic is consistent to the area and the District manages its own docks and small craft harbour. Tourists know the Barclay Sound and Broken Group Islands from global promotion and the local waterway is deep enough to support large yachts and pocket cruise ships. The mayor and council are examining forestry traffic movement on barges rather than along the highway as an alternative.

"Seniors are living in a new facility and folks are playing ball and soccer on a new sports field," she said. "There is always a lot of work to be done, but we are accomplishing many good things. Our little village is an energetic, supportive and giving group of people and we are very blessed."

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Congratulations
to the citizens of Ucluelet for their contributions and volunteer time towards the development of Ucluelet's award winning Official Community Plan.

Judy Gray & Staff

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