

September 11, 2008

City Hall-Business Leader Dialogue

VEDC's second City Hall-Business Leader Dialogue on September 11, 2008 focused on development of an economic development strategy (EDS) for the City of Vancouver. VEDC is developing the EDS in collaboration with the Business Council of British Columbia (BCBC).

Representing City Hall at the meeting were Councillors Suzanne Anton, Kim Capri, Peter Ladner and Tim Stevenson as well as City senior executives Laurie Best (Communications), Cameron Gray (Social Development), Karen Levitt (Business and Planning Services) and David McLellan (Community Services).

Representing the private sector were Virginia Greene and Jock Finlayson of BCBC, as well as Bob Wilds, Greater Vancouver Gateway Council and Kenton Low, New Media BC. Also in attendance were members of the VEDC Board with expertise in specific sectors: George Adams (transportation), George Bartel (tourism), Bruce Clayman (post-secondary education), Tom English (legal services), Soren Harbel (innovation), Maureen Kirkbride (telecommunications), Rob Malli (finance) and Gord Stewart (construction).

BCBC is undertaking a major analysis of the Provincial economy, the *Opportunity BC 2020* project. VEDC is contributing one of twenty four papers to the BCBC project, as well as undertaking research focused on the Vancouver city-region. BCBC's project will culminate in a major event in June 2009, while VEDC's EDS report, which will build on BCBC's findings, will be presented in June 2010. Presentations on the two projects were made by Virginia Greene and Jock Finlayson of BCBC and John Tylee of VEDC.

There was strong interest in both the BCBC project and VEDC's EDS project. Other comments included:

- The importance of transportation infrastructure in the Vancouver region and province-wide
- Building links between the wireless industry and the procurement needs of municipalities, the City of Vancouver in particular
- Discussion of region-wide collaboration in economic development, and strong support for the progress being made by the Metro Vancouver Commerce initiative.
- Interest in VEDC's substantial slate of 2010-related programs.

Concern was expressed that Vancouver did not have a simple business tagline for the 2010 Games, comparable to Turino's "Design Centre of Europe". Subsequent discussion of branding the city emphasized:

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- The difficulty of creating a business-oriented brand that would not be completely overshadowed by twenty years of successful international branding of the community (reinforced by the 2010 Games) as a resort/leisure destination
- The need to “sacrifice” other competitiveness features of the business community in favour of focus on a single effective brand, such as LA’s “entertainment capital of the world”
- The need for the brand to be compelling to young talented people; 85% of BC’s university graduates stay in the Province, which is a strength we can build on.

At the end of the meeting, BCBC’s CEO, Virginia Greene, noted that “regular informal discussions like today’s allow us all to work together in developing a more prosperous economy”. VEDC’s CEO, Phil Heard said more City-business dialogue had been a high priority recommendation in VEDC’s Business Climate Report and that “the success of the meetings can only improve the overall productivity of our city.”