

Year In Review – 2020

What can we say that hasn't already been said a hundred times in 2020?

Entering 2020, we had some clear goals on tech strategy, workforce development and Columbia Valley identity and signage. We were looking years ahead. And by mid-March, those all had changed in priority and we were trying to stay up to date in the moment.

The pandemic brought us many challenges. But by working together with local organizations and leaders, through the **Columbia Valley Business & Community Support Team (CVBCST)**, we were able to support all residents (9,482), businesses (1,500+), local governments (7) and organizations (104).

We understood early on that in order to have a strong and resilient economy, we needed to have strong and healthy residents. Our daily meetings dealt with fast, ever-changing news. Our sprint turned to a marathon, and then into an ultra-marathon, and then into daily life. **Strategy “pivots” turned into “swivels.”**

From reacting hour-by-hour, day-to-day, we began to look ahead.

Local food security and farmers markets were the first piece we chewed on, hosting regular Zoom check-ins in with **farmers' market managers**. We focused on safety and sharing best practices, planning for success despite the challenges of the pandemic.

The local Destination Development Strategy was finalized in spring, then immediately tweaked and re-tweaked.

And by summer, we began to look and plan into the fall and winter, through a never-ending barrage of announcements, emails, Zoom meetings and phone calls.

While the macro-economic situation was challenged, it created the right conditions for our communities to look inward and adopt wise community economic development practices out of necessity. Economic leakage dropped because people couldn't go anywhere else. And at the same time, with global supplies chains in tatters, local businesses stepped up and filled demand for PPE, hand sanitizer, signs and barriers. After preaching “shop local” for the last decade, we became the converted overnight.

Then, this local resilience resulted in some interesting trends. **Remote workers, snowbirds and post-secondary students became more prevalent. School enrolment increased. And real estate activity heated up.**

Some businesses recovered quickly. Some had their best months ever. Some did not. Some still struggle. For some businesses, their plan to “get online” was fast-tracked. And some individuals and families are hurting; as jobs have been lost, hours reduced, or work has to be done in a new way they're not trained in or comfortable with. That's why our upcoming **Tech Ecosystem Analysis, Tech Strategy and workforce development initiatives are so important for the Valley**, supporting long-term prosperity for all organizations and individuals.

In the fall, we focused on the winter, 2021, and beyond.

Employment lands inventory and investment readiness studies by Ingrid Liepa were shared. And now we're leading the charge toward exploring an East Kootenay **Workforce Development Board**. Workforce and community asset mapping, as it's become clear to attract investment, we need to understand the entire investment picture – the land, the community and the people.

Every level of government, non profit and industry support organizations have been reviewing and adjusting their supports. COVID-19 recovery funding has created many opportunities for community, business (especially tourism) and recreation supporting organizations. There will be more opportunities in 2021, so it's important now to get aligned and elevate priorities appropriately now. **Advanced broadband, housing affordability and transportation access are just three of the goals that are emerging.** And these goals remain, as they are tough to solve in multiple, small, rural communities.

Now, entering the winter, we look to the spring and summer. Our newly drafted Columbia Valley Events Strategy will provide the guidance on what can be done in the near term to buoy businesses and organizations, while keeping an eye on long-term strategic fit.

What's next? In 2021, we expect to see some news collaborative Columbia Valley signage along the highways – some that begin to **support reconciliation**. We expect to see some meaningful **integration of data mapping for lands, community assets and workforce characteristics**, so we all can make better evidence based decision-making and **investment attraction**. Safe recreation and active transportation infrastructure has become increasingly important and there is exciting work to underway to support healthy lifestyles, the environment and the local economy.

How will we accomplish those goals? More teamwork, more trust, more responsibility will get us through the next phase and 2021.

There have been incredible challenges and lessons from this year. Lessons we share every day. And with each challenge, we learn that we are all stronger together.

Great partnerships have formed, underpinned by common values and purpose, positioned to deliver incredible impact together and for all residents of the Columbia Valley.

Thanks to all of our Advisory Commission members, regional & local government staff and community partners who have collaborated on so many initiatives. We're not through the pandemic yet. But we're well positioned to be stronger and more resilient than ever before.

If you have questions you can reach out to me directly through phone, email, and all our online and social media channels.

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