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North Shuswap Shaping Our Future Together A Community Report

A Message to Our Community About This Project

We recently participated in a First Impressions Community Exchange (F.I.C.E.) project led by the BC Rural Centre and funded by ETSI-BC, with the project initiative lead being the Sicamous Chamber of Commerce.

Through this project we invited some independent visitors from another participating community to experience the North Shuswap through "fresh eyes" as part of the First Impressions Community Exchange (F.I.C.E.) program.

These visitors spent a day exploring our communities – Scotch Creek, Lee Creek, Magna Bay, Celista, and Anglemont – acting as tourists, potential residents, and business owners.

Their detailed feedback helps us understand how outsiders see us, confirming our strengths and highlighting areas where we can grow. This report summarizes their findings, focusing on what matters to you – our residents – and how we can all work together with our local government and Chamber of Commerce to build an even better North Shuswap.

This isn't just about official initiatives; it's about the collective spirit and actions of every community member in shaping our shared future.

What We Heard: Our Community's First Impressions

The visitors' feedback provided valuable insights, both affirming what we love and showing us where we can grow.

The Good News: What The Visitors Loved About North Shuswap

The Stunning Natural Beauty

"Its natural lake side living," "the shoreline and backdrop of hills," and "beautiful lake and mountain views" were consistently praised as our greatest assets. The well-maintained parks and beaches were also highlighted.

The Resilient Spirit

Visitors recognized our strength in rebuilding after the wildfires. As one volunteer noted, "Many fulltime residents fought fires & have or are in the middle of rebuilding." This demonstrates true community character.

Friendly & Welcoming People

The warmth of the community shone through. Visitors described the locals and business staff as "friendly, engaging, and informative" and "kind and easy to talk to." This is a testament to the community spirit.

Excellent Outdoor Recreation

North Shuswap shines in outdoor activities! Visitors praised "lots of opportunity for outdoor recreation" including hiking, biking, swimming, boating, and even winter snowmobiling, recognizing the potential as an outdoor paradise.

Quality Primary Schooling

The K-8 primary schools were noted as "well maintained" and "great," serving as a central hub for our children.

Strong Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber was recognized as a valuable asset for local businesses, offering support and networking opportunities.



Specific Gems: Shout-outs were given to the "beautiful" Celista Winery, the "interesting" Raven Coffee Shop, and the "beautiful" Quaaout Lodge & Golf Course.

Areas for Growth: Where We Can Improve Together

Our visitors also identified key challenges that, if addressed, can make North Shuswap even stronger.

Lingering Fire Impacts

"Scotch Creek and Lee Creek still a mess from fire" and "Still clearing burnt forest. Road sides not maintained" were stark observations. These areas unfortunately create a negative "first impression."

Seasonality is a Big Hurdle

This was a major theme. Our visitors noted that "Businesses and activities DROP SIGNIFICANTLY AS IN ANY SEASONAL COMMUNITY." This affects our local economy and limits year-round services.

Housing Crunch

Finding affordable and long-term rental housing is a big problem. One volunteer shared, "STRs seem to be cannibalizing the affordable rentals for seasonal staff," and another noted, "Housing here would be out of most people's Price Range." This impacts families and local workers.

Healthcare Access Concerns

Local medical services were described as "limited" with "no dentist" or "nursing homes" locally, requiring residents to travel. "Emergency services are a long drive away; no local Ambulance Service."

Areas for Growth: Where We Can Improve Together Continued

"Confused" Community Identity & Planning

Our communities lack a "cohesive layout" and a clear overall "community plan." Conflicting land uses, like a "gravel pit in very prominent location" near natural assets, were mentioned.

Struggling Business Core

Our main business areas, especially in Scotch Creek, were seen as "struggling" with "minimal" shopping and many empty or closed businesses.

Wayfinding & Information Gaps

While online info is good, visitors felt physical signage was "cluttered" or missing, and missed having a dedicated, manned tourist information centre.

Education Beyond Primary

The need to bus students to larger towns for secondary education was seen as a deterrent for young families.

Our Path Forward: Key Initiatives & How You Can Contribute

These insights are not criticisms, but opportunities!

The local government and Chamber of Commerce are working to tackle these challenges, but their success depends on the collective community effort.

Here's how we can all lead and get behind these initiatives:

1. Revitalizing Our Gateways: Cleanup & Beautification

- **The Challenge:** The visual impact of wildfires and neglected areas, particularly in Scotch Creek and Lee Creek, creates a poor first impression.
- **The Initiative:** Dedicated cleanup programs, improved landscaping, screening of industrial areas, and better road maintenance.

How Residents Can Help:



Volunteer

Participate in community clean-up days (watch for announcements from the Chamber or local associations).



"Adopt a Spot"

Take pride in your own property and consider beautifying public areas near your home or business.



Report Concerns

If you see areas needing attention, report them to the Chamber or your local community association.

Chamber's Role: Engaging local businesses in cleanup efforts and promoting pride of place.

Local Government Role: Leading road maintenance, waste management, and larger-scale beautification projects.

2. Building a Unified Image: Better Signage & Wayfinding

- **The Challenge:** Inconsistent, cluttered, or missing signs make it hard for visitors and residents to navigate and understand our community.
- **The Initiative:** Developing a clear, consistent signage plan across all communities – from welcome signs to business directories and tourist information.

How Residents Can Help:



Business Owners

Ensure your business signage is clear, well-maintained, and aligns with any community standards.



Advocate

Support local planning efforts for unified signage.



Share Ideas

Offer suggestions for improved local signage to the Chamber or Municipality.

- **Chamber's Role:** Working with businesses on aesthetic and functional signage improvements, promoting local businesses through clear directories.
- **Local Government Role:** Implementing a comprehensive wayfinding strategy, approving new signage standards, and installing consistent community-wide signs.

3. Thriving Year-Round: Economic Diversification

- **The Challenge:** Our economy heavily relies on summer tourism, leaving businesses and services quiet in the off-season.
- **The Initiative:** Developing year-round tourism, promoting agri-tourism (like winery tours and farm-to-table events), and creating more winter activities and events. Supporting local businesses that can operate year-round.

How Residents Can Help:

Shop Local, Year-Round

Support our local businesses outside of summer to help them stay open.

Participate & Promote

Attend local events throughout the year and spread the word to friends and family.

Innovate

If you're a business owner, explore ways to offer services or products that appeal to off-season visitors or local residents.

- **Chamber's Role:** Marketing North Shuswap as a year-round destination, organizing events, supporting business owners in adapting to seasonality.
- **Local Government Role:** Investing in infrastructure that supports year-round activities, facilitating permits for diverse business ventures.

4. Homes for All: Addressing Our Housing Needs

- **The Challenge:** A shortage of affordable and long-term rental housing, especially for local workers, impacts our ability to attract families and support our businesses.
- **The Initiative:** Creating a strategy to increase affordable housing and long-term rentals, possibly by encouraging different housing types and managing the impact of short-term rentals (STRs).

How Residents Can Help:



Engage

Participate in community discussions and surveys about housing solutions. Your input is vital.



Support

Be open to diverse housing options in our communities that can accommodate families and workers.



Long-Term Rentals

If you own a property suitable for rental, consider offering it for long-term lease to local residents or workers.

- **Chamber's Role:** Advocating for business-friendly housing policies, connecting employers with potential housing solutions for staff.
- **Local Government Role:** Developing and implementing housing policies, incentivizing developers, and exploring innovative housing models.

5. Better Care, Closer to Home: Improving Healthcare Access

- **The Challenge:** Limited local medical services and concerns about emergency response mean residents often travel far for essential care.
- **The Initiative:** Advocating for more local healthcare services (dentists, specialized care), ensuring clear information on all available services, and strengthening our emergency services.

How Residents Can Help:

- **Advocate**

Share your experiences and concerns with local officials, supporting efforts to attract more healthcare professionals and services.

- **Volunteer**

Support our volunteer fire departments and other local emergency services.

- **Be Informed**

Know where to access healthcare and emergency services, even if it requires travel.

- **Chamber's Role:** Highlighting the need for improved healthcare to attract residents and businesses, supporting recruitment efforts for health professionals.
- **Local Government Role:** Lobbying provincial health authorities (Interior Health), investing in local health facilities, and coordinating with emergency service providers.

6. A Vision for Our Future: Cohesive Planning

- **The Challenge:** The perception of "confused" and uncoordinated development can detract from our community's beauty and functionality.
- **The Initiative:** Developing and communicating a clear, shared vision for our communities that guides development, protects natural assets, and addresses conflicting land uses.

How Residents Can Help:



Participate

Attend public meetings and provide feedback on community plans and zoning proposals. Your voice helps shape our future.



Respect Environment

Continue to take pride in maintaining your properties and respecting our natural surroundings.



Share Your Vision

Communicate your ideas for how our communities can grow sustainably and beautifully to your local representatives.

- **Chamber's Role:** Advocating for thoughtful development that supports local businesses and enhances community character.
- **Local Government Role:** Leading the development of comprehensive community plans, updating zoning bylaws, and facilitating transparent public engagement processes.

Conclusion: Our Community, Our Responsibility

The First Impressions Community Exchange report provides us with a clear roadmap. It affirms that North Shuswap is a place of immense natural beauty and resilient, friendly people. It also reminds us that we face common challenges that, with concerted effort, we can overcome.

The local government and Chamber of Commerce are committed to driving these initiatives forward. However, the true strength of these efforts lies in your active involvement and support. Whether it's through volunteering, participating in local discussions, supporting local businesses, or simply taking extra pride in our shared spaces, every action contributes to a more vibrant, sustainable, and welcoming North Shuswap for everyone.

Let's work together to ensure that the lasting impression of our community is one of beauty, cohesion, and thriving year-round vitality. Our future is in our hands, and by getting behind these initiatives, we can collectively build the North Shuswap we all envision.