



# PROJECT PROFILE

## GABRIOLA ECONOMIC STRATEGY

### MADE-ON-GABE: *Unexpected changes create an opportunity for Gabriola Island to take charge of its economic future*

It's not uncommon for smaller communities to purchase services from other, larger municipalities. That was the case for Gabriola Island, using the Nanaimo Economic Development Corporation to provide economic development services.

Unfortunately, the NEDC was unable to fulfill its commitment to Gabriola.

In the spirit of 'every challenge is also an opportunity,' the Chamber of Commerce - and the whole business community - embraced the challenge, and pushed forward with the development of a new strategy in just six weeks.

Recognizing the potential in Gabriola's untapped community assets, the Chamber embraced the strengths and realities of Gabriola, and with support from ICET, built an economic development strategy to leverage them.

Upon completion, Gabriola was able to fast-track its strategy with access to further funding from ICET's Quick-Start funding steam, which helped to develop a governance and staffing model needed to implement the strategy.

The community has hit the ground running, gaining early momentum with a newly hired Economic Development Officer to spearhead implementation of the strategy.

"The independent commercial culture on Gabriola attracts a diverse community of businesses," said Julie Sperber, Gabriola's new Economic Development Officer. "The Chamber of Commerce is proud to finally deliver a "made-on-Gabe" economic strategy that will help this independent business community thrive."

With a population of 4,000 residents, the Island is home to more than 600 businesses, ranging from brick-and-mortar stores to home-based businesses, and everything in between.

Those 600 businesses provided input that formed a core part of the new strategy, helping to identify their top priorities.

Educational supports for entrepreneurs to manage business growth; a Buy Local Campaign, launching in fall of 2018, and an upcoming offseason tourism attraction plan were the top three priorities identified.

Building from the results of a 2016 Asset Mapping project to identify and inventory business, cultural, and natural assets on the Island, a new 'portal' website is in development that will realize the full brand and marketing picture for Gabriola, reflecting the community's values of work, live, learn, and play on the Island.

The Asset Map will be the foundation of a "virtual concierge" service on the website, directing users to local businesses and services. A "Rent-an-Entrepreneur" program will connect aspiring entrepreneurs on Gabriola with coaching from other local business owners.

"People live on Gabriola Island by choice for the lifestyle," Sperber explained. "This attracts a talented population base with a "bring your own job" mentality, creating a unique entrepreneurial economy for Gabriola to achieve its self-sustainability goals."

Now firmly in control of its economic destiny, Gabriola is ready to build its foundational economic supports from the ground-up: business retention and expansion; entrepreneurial support; youth retention; education, and more.

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**- JULIE SPERBER**  
Economic Development Officer,  
Gabriola Island

