

# 'NAMGIS FIRST NATION – THE VILLAGE OF ALERT BAY

## TIDES OF CHANGE: CORMORANT ISLAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



### PATHWAY OVERVIEW

Located a short ferry ride from Port McNeil on northern Vancouver Island, Cormorant Island is home to 'Namgis First Nation and the Village of Alert Bay. The two governments have a long history of successful working relationships that stretches back to the signing of a protocol agreement in 1998 and beyond. As part of the Alert Bay Accord, the two governments set up a joint economic development corporation in order to facilitate joint projects. While the Corporation ceased operations in the early 2000s, the Accord was renewed in 2012 and the importance of working together “to promote a high standard of cultural, economic and environmental quality of life for the benefit of all residents of Cormorant Island” was affirmed.

### PATHWAY ACTIVITIES

The collaborative pathway activities undertaken by 'Namgis and Alert Bay include the following.



**Protocol and  
Communications Agreements**



**Servicing Agreements  
and Infrastructure**



**Land Use Planning  
and Development**



**Joint Economic  
Development Initiatives**

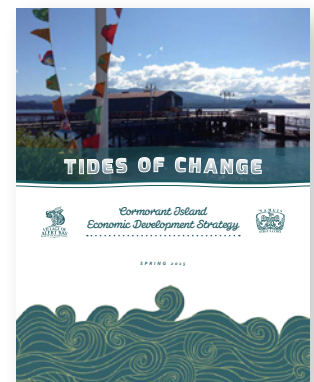


**Shared Tourism  
Projects**

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

Faced with a shrinking, aging population and dwindling local economy, the two governments realized the need for working together, and using the Alert Bay Accord as a starting point, they took a hard look at the barriers and opportunities for supporting and growing their shared local economy. The result was an innovative economic development strategy called *Tides of Change*, one of the first joint economic development strategies in BC.

Supported by an Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET) grant, financial support from the Regional District of Mount Waddington and other funding sources, *Tides of Change* engaged the broader community in both planning and implementation. Centered on face-to-face engagement, over 200 residents and 'Namgis members participated in community engagement events out of a total population of 1,000 people living on Cormorant Island.





## OUTCOMES

The plan outlines a clear vision for Cormorant Island supported by several concrete objectives which boiled down to five areas of focus:

- Harbour development
- Business support and entrepreneurship
- Quality of life improvements
- Downtown revitalization
- Tourism

Several “quick-start” actions to put the plan into action and build momentum for additional projects were identified and implemented. These included:

- New interpretive signage for historic and cultural features and recreational trails
- A summer market
- Tourism branding and visitor attraction projects

A unique pilot program to support and train entrepreneurs was implemented by multiple partners, including Reconciliation Canada, SFU’s Beedie School of Business, Cuso International, Community Futures Mount Waddington, Vancity Savings Credit Union, and Indigenous Services Canada. Ten proposals to create or grow businesses were selected for a six-month program. A fish processing plant, graphic design start-up, and hairdressing business were some examples of resulting businesses. The graphic designer and hairdresser remain in business today.

The level of detail and community support for *Tides of Change* also helped persuade Vancity Credit Union (Canada’s second largest credit union) to open its first rural branch in BC with basic branch banking three days a week, and workshops for



**PHOTO:** ‘Namgis and the Village of Alert Bay sign an agreement with Vancity Credit Union to provide financial services on Cormorant Island.

young people and entrepreneurs to increase their financial literacy and develop business skills. The new branch is now self-sustaining and replaced a credit union that had closed its local branch and left the island with no banking services.

In late 2017, *Tides of Change*-related studies were completed on the harbour with funds from the BC Rural Dividend Program to assess the current state of the waterfront assets, the potential for a new breakwater, and to assess the best locations for new assets including a new fuel dock and an ice plant. Safety improvements to the ‘Namgis wharf were completed in spring 2019 with grant funding. Other harbour improvements and a targeted marketing program has helped attract small pocket cruise ships to Cormorant Island, with 18 stopovers scheduled for 2019.

In February 2019, the creation of ‘Namgis Economic Development Corporation (NEDC) was announced to identify opportunities and work on initiatives that support





the community's economic growth. NEDC will be offering initial advice and support to entrepreneurs and be the lead on business case assessments for many initiatives from *Tides of Change*. 'Namgis First Nation is also currently working to revitalize and restore a historic nurses' residence located on the Cormorant Island Waterfront near the culturally important 'Namgis burial grounds, a project that was first identified in *Tides of Change*. "It's a really nice asset that is right on the water and there is a need for more retail space or some kind of tourism related component in Alert Bay," said Karla Duarte, former Economic Development Officer for *Tides of Change*.



**PHOTO:** One of the new historical and cultural interpretive signs installed around Alert Bay.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND KEYS TO SUCCESS

The main take away from the project was for the two partners to "leverage what you have." For 'Namgis and Alert Bay, this included building on their existing relationship to openly and honestly take stock of available assets and assess in relation to the community vision and to fill the gaps that need addressing. Other lessons learned and keys included:

- ✓ **Foster personal relationships.** Good institutional relationships depend on the strength of personal relationships – spend the time to keep building them.
- ✓ **Create an action implementation plan.** Ensure all plan actions have a timeline and details about who, what and how to implement them.
- ✓ **Hire or assign a project lead.** Hire a dedicated staff person or assign staff time to implement the plan.
- ✓ **Create a joint Advisory Committee.** Develop a steering committee of representatives from the two governments and members from the business community or residents to oversee plan development and implementation.
- ✓ **Make use of external resources and partners.** This can include regional districts, First Nation organizations, financial institutions, Provincial and Federal government, economic development associations and small businesses.
- ✓ **Start small and include individual-level actions.** Include actions that all community members can take (more local purchasing, picking up litter, starting a business, selling arts and crafts)
- ✓ **Fundraise.** Implementation funding is an ongoing challenge that has limited some actions, including the summer market which is currently operating on an ad hoc basis.



**PHOTO:** The Alert Bay Summer Market



“We’re planning a new economic path that combines established opportunities and new ones, built on shared values. A sustainable economy requires collaboration, and our history and relationship with the Village of Alert Bay provides a solid foundation to build on.”

*‘Namgis former elected Chief Debra Hanuse*



## PATHWAYS TO COLLABORATION

Pathways to Collaboration is a joint initiative of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), the Province of British Columbia, and the First Nations Summit with funding from the Indigenous Business & Investment Council (IBIC). The project aims to showcase the growing number of successful economic development collaborations and partnerships between First Nations and local governments, while highlighting lessons learned and key steps to success.

The pathways to collaboration communities take are unique, reflecting the context of the communities involved, and involve different activities. Common pathway activities include protocol and communications agreements; servicing agreements and shared infrastructure projects; collaborative land use planning and development projects; joint economic development initiatives; and shared tourism projects. Like signposts along a pathway, these pathway activities are identified in the case study series.

For more information on the project, please contact the communities profiled, or visit [www.ubcm.ca](http://www.ubcm.ca).



**Indigenous Business and  
Investment Council**  
*Sharing Success*