

DISTRICT OF SQUAMISH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EMERGING SECTOR ROADMAP AND ACTION PLAN



Introduction

Economic development plays a vital role in improving local quality of life. The District of Squamish aims to work collaboratively with the local community, its partners, and other levels of government to support the vibrancy of existing businesses, while strategically positioning the community for future growth. This translates into: providing local business intelligence for decision making, conducting business development to grow high-value sectors of our economy, and supporting programs and services which encourage strategic sector development.

The modern-day economy of Squamish has significantly evolved from a century ago when it was a southern railway terminus. Logging and tourism, stimulated by transportation and railway improvements, proximity to natural resources and regional markets, and the establishment of large-scale, industrial manufacturing and deep-water break-bulk facilities, set the foundation for Squamish. Today, Squamish is on the forefront of considerable change and is well-positioned to share in B.C.'s leading economic and job growth for Canada. Squamish is now leveraging its enviable geographic and recreational assets and quality of life amenities to help diversify the local economy. It has experienced employment growth in several emerging sectors, from clean technology and renewable energy, to creative industries, including digital media and film production.

In 2017, the District's Economic Development team began the process of developing a data-driven sector development plan to support strategic goals for the community. In its initial phase, federal funding supported foundational research work to inform sector recommendations. This research, combined with insights from local business stakeholders, created a vision for a proposed diversified business ecosystem:



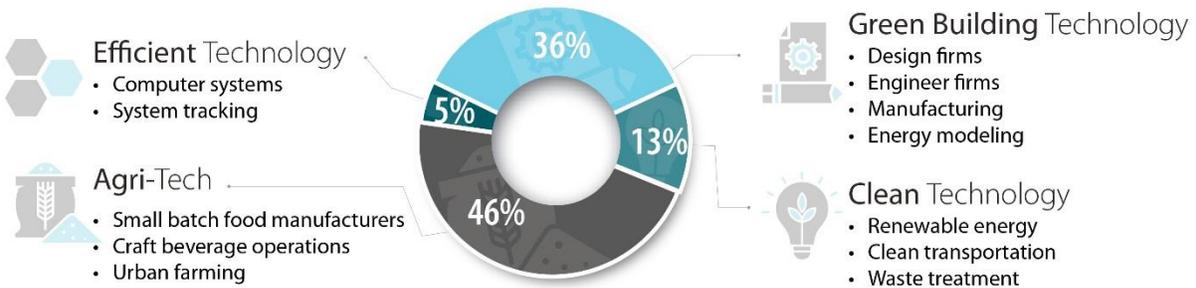
Building on the District's initial work, the District of Squamish has undertaken the development of a Squamish **Emerging Sector Roadmap and Action Plan (Action Plan)**. While Core and Enabling Sectors serve as a foundation for local economic growth and continue to be supported by economic development action, the purpose of this project was to develop a plan which provides the District and its stakeholders with tactics, timelines and ideas for emerging sector development. The desired outcome of this plan is to facilitate a local business ecosystem that supports high-value local employment and employment reflective of the local workforce. Ideally the composition of the local economy is diverse and adaptable to changing conditions, and local firms are supported by innovation, research and development capacity, supportive infrastructure and a positive business climate. Squamish will be a business destination known for its creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

The District of Squamish would like to acknowledge the contributions made by partners and industry stakeholders participating in the development of this plan and recognise the valuable guidance that they will continue to provide throughout the implementation phase and beyond.

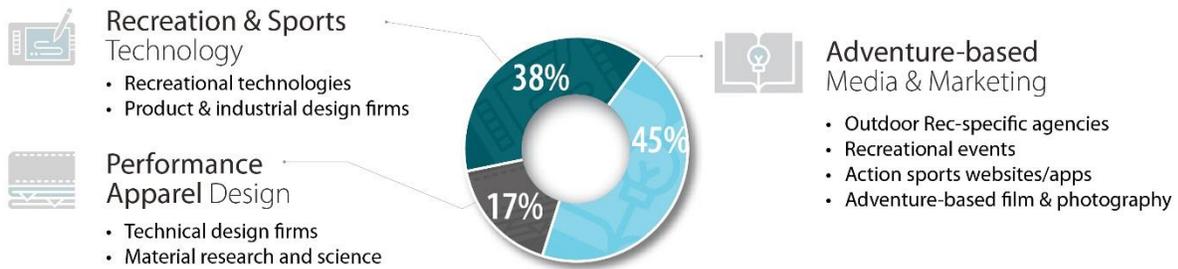
Project Scope

An essential step in the process is identifying the right market opportunities in which the District of Squamish is best positioned to offer a compelling business case and can create a vision and story going forward. The team reviewed data, reports and initiatives on socio-economic, infrastructure, land, and detailed industry assets and trends. The research was supplemented by stakeholder workshops, surveys, and interviews and reviewed through the lens of best practices and national and international market trends. By highlighting B.C. and Vancouver growth sectors, the report assesses where Squamish already has momentum and the assets to accelerate cluster growth. Opportunities were chosen on a combination of factors, including current business activity, workforce assets or new policies and initiatives. Two strategic reports were produced as a result: **The Green Economy Profile** and **the Outdoor Recreation Profile**. The reports suggest that these two industries could complement existing businesses in Squamish.

The **Green Economy** encompasses activities that aim to reduce environmental risks, ameliorate ecological scarcities, and support sustainable development without degrading the environment. All industry opportunities are focused on technologies that reduce dependence on natural resources, help the economy shift away from fossil fuels, support a transition to a zero-waste economy and enable global warming to remain below 1.5 °C. This includes efficiency and energy technologies, green or high-performance building innovation and sustainable and innovative agri-food technologies.



Outdoor recreation activities are supported by an increasingly diverse cluster of companies, from consumer products to business services to green initiatives. What they all have in common is that they do not just sell a product, but a lifestyle, to increase awareness and engagement by using the natural resources to link into consumer trends in fitness and environmental sustainability. The Outdoor Recreation theme reviewed here in the Squamish context focuses on recreation and sports technology, performance apparel design, as well as adventure-based digital media and film.



What We Have Learned

1. In reviewing current dynamics and assets in the District of Squamish supporting the two themes, five very specific niche subsectors rose to the top of promising growth: Clean Technology and Renewable Energy, Green Building, Agri-foods, Sporting Technology and Performance Apparel Design and Digital Media and Film. These are nascent, emerging, but very energetic groups of businesses and entrepreneurs. Building foundations for their cluster development would ready them for further initiatives and more targeted business and investment attraction efforts.
2. Interviews and the engagement with stakeholders in the workshops highlighted a vast but mostly informal network of companies, business owners and non-industry actors with a lack of consensus across the community regarding a vision for the sectors or available resources. Bringing the players together in a more comprehensive and collaborative setting will mobilize cluster growth and ensure resources are not duplicated, maximizing the impact of initiatives.
3. The District of Squamish has many additional ongoing development initiatives and projects underway. Once the next round of initiatives and reports are more fully understood, the timeline recommendations and priorities of this report beyond 2020 will be reviewed.

Strategic Recommendations

Given these insights, the Action Plan provides and prioritizes recommended next steps to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the sector and investment strategies. The recommendations are derived from research findings, key investment trends in the province and region, and an understanding of how Squamish's assets link to these trends. They also reflect an understanding of existing constraints and the District of Squamish's current capacity to undertake a comprehensive sector and investment plan. In some cases, the recommendations will be more aspirational or long-term than immediately achievable. Those long-term goals, however, help to frame the incremental, more achievable steps that the District can undertake in the immediate term. Having a universal understanding of the big picture goals shared by all stakeholders helps to ensure that near-term steps continue to advance in the right direction.

Many of the recommended strategies are setting the stage to allow the District to respond to, attract, and retain businesses over the next 5-10 years that support the District's Official Community Plan (OCP) and the Council Strategic Plan objectives. Although the two target themes and its subsectors are positioned as priorities, this does not imply that no other opportunities exist for the jurisdiction. One example is the link to recreation technology within the outdoor tourism sector, which should be a focus of further investigation and analysis.

The Action Plan also highlights the importance of an approach that supports the overall strengthening of the local economy and enhances investment readiness while engaging the existing business community. This focus on the existing business community will be key to the success of any business and investment attraction strategy going forward. A strong and vibrant business community will provide the foundation for further growth and will support the attraction of innovation, skilled people and businesses. Success at cluster economic development depends heavily on how, and in

what ways, businesses coalesce around a cluster vision, goals, and interdependent networks in the first year or two. Consequently, this report details a number of areas for immediate action as precursors to more sector-specific investment strategies that will build on the existing business attraction efforts of the District.

The Roadmap

The Action Plan provides a process for moving the District’s emerging growth sectors forward. The first priority is seen as a crucial sector foundation building exercise. Given Squamish’s exceptional growth in recent years, combined with limited resources, capacity-building is one of the most important fundamentals for sector growth and business attraction. The collaborative nature of many of the strategies proposed is a first step in making sure all stakeholder input is part of the process going forward – to validate and participate in any new actions and initiatives affecting their sectors. Once more well-defined sectors and networks have emerged, the District can start to shift focus on capacity building for investment attraction for the best-positioned sectors.

The table below summarizes the key proposed strategies for the next three years for cluster growth and business attraction success for the District of Squamish. It is assumed that the cluster foundational strategies and the longer-term visions outlined in the Action Plan will continue to run parallel to the investment foundation building. Once the foundations are built, a full sector-specific outreach campaign is envisioned that will start a typical 18-24 month project life cycle. This could include in-market representation at trade show events and in-house or external lead generation prospecting.

Priority Area 1 - Foundational Cluster Development Strategies

Documenting Clusters	1. Document initial ecosystem maps and inventories of clusters and create tool to promote collaborative updating
Cluster Organization	2. Identify cluster stakeholders to support Action Plan implementation
Cluster Visioning	3. Support development of cluster vision statements and communicate that vision to key community stakeholders
Cluster Needs Assessment and Actions	4. Engage with cluster stakeholders to further specify priorities and needs (shared resources, marine, land, and built space, infrastructure, workforce, training, research and development, innovation, policy/regulatory) and plan action items
Sharing and Cluster Networking	5. Convene initial cluster kick-off events

Priority Area 2 – Foundational Business and Investment Attraction Strategies

Attraction Vision	1. Define strategy for business and investment attraction
Resource and Capacity Build	2. Build team (internal/external), and develop team’s capacity to pursue business and investment attraction
Investment Readying	3. Enhance investment readiness with data, communication, partnerships
Develop Messaging	4. Develop and implement a targeted communication strategy, including marketing collateral
Test and Target	5. Market test subsectors
Evaluate and Share	6. Evaluate and share impacts

Going Forward

The output of this project should be seen as a living document rather than a stand-alone report. It is a starting point to build an understanding of the potential of Squamish ‘next economy’ businesses and as a guide to allocate resources to efforts that have the most significant impact on the future attractiveness and business growth in Squamish for the target sectors. It is part of a collaborative framework that is being developed with local stakeholders and as a complement to the other initiatives and projects currently underway in the District.

It will also provide not just the District, but its business, education and non-profit stakeholders with an overview of where their activities might fit into the strategic focus areas and the wider community development and what actions they can take to contribute to the success of the target sectors and business growth. Over time, with continued engagement, each of the steps will evolve into more sector-specific initiatives and results, though interviews and the workshops have pointed to a clear overlap between the concerns and needs of all target subsectors.