FACTS

Population: 7,500
Location: Columbia Shuswap

BUILDING WITH LOCAL PLAYERS
Just Like That!

When fibre optic Internet came to Revelstoke in 2015, the city wasted no time figuring out how to take full advantage of it by developing a tech strategy.

Taking the lead from the local tech community, Revelstoke moved quickly to form the strategy, test new ideas and begin attracting tech talent. The city wasn't even sure how many tech entrepreneurs were in Revelstoke, let alone if other companies or tech talent would be interested in relocating – quite the opposite of where they're at now.

These days, the economic development office gets calls all the time from tech workers and remote workers interested in moving to Revelstoke.

DEVEOPING THE STRATEGY
Collaborating with Local Tech Players

The strategy was built using input from a tech task force made up of local tech players. They explored what sort of "tech" the city was trying to attract; what characteristics would appeal to tech and knowledge workers; and how the city could build a tech-friendly ecosystem. The strategy included key elements to:

> Promote Revelstoke as an innovative and tech-friendly community

> Identify challenges to attracting and retaining tech workers and companies

> Foster a "technology positive environment" through networking opportunities for tech professionals, youth involvement, and training and education

> Identify and target specific tech opportunities

The task force was formalized by the city, working as the tech steering committee, to get the strategy off the ground. A tech strategy co-ordinator was hired with funding from BC Rural Dividend Fund and the Columbia Shuswap Regional District, to move the strategy forward and to build relationships with tech entrepreneurs and local educational institutions.

Revelstoke has been busy since the beginning of the tech strategy in 2015, responding to the needs of local tech entrepreneurs by encouraging a number of spaces, networks and events to grow and support a tech-friendly ecosystem.

• Mountain Colab is a co-working space for entrepreneurs, freelancers, non-profits and remote employees to work, meet, play and network. In two and a half years of operation, the Colab has grown to 50 members and brought hundreds of professionals together to build the community and integrate sustainable businesses.

• Third Street Offices is a co-working space for entrepreneurs based out of Revelstoke's oldest historical buildings located in the heart of the city. In addition to co-working, they offer conference rooms, mail services and secretary services.

For more information: gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment

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• Monthly Tech Meetups offer tech and knowledge workers the chance to network, connect, learn and collaborate to improve the community and the Revelstoke economy. Meetups have been sponsored by the Kootenay Association for Science and Technology, the Columbia Basin Trust, Telus and Community Futures.

• Start-up Revelstoke is a collaborative partnership between Community Futures, City of Revelstoke and Mountain Colab developed to move Revelstoke's start-up ecosystem to the next level. Key elements of the strategy are providing mentorship, networking opportunities and entrepreneurial infrastructure (i.e. a fabrication lab, exponential technologies) to ensure that more entrepreneurs and businesses commercialize and innovate faster and more sustainably.

• Innovation Nights - Startup Revelstoke and Mountain Colab also host Innovation nights for the broader community to learn about innovative new trends and support growth of the whole community.

LOOKING AHEAD
Strong. Sustainable. Stoked.

The city is feeling the impacts of the tech strategy in a variety of ways. It has attracted new, well-paid tech and knowledge workers to the city who are buying local goods and services.

It has become a more attractive place to live – with higher overall education levels, and an entrepreneurial spirit that is contagious for local businesses. As well, more services are now available within the community.

LESSONS LEARNED & FINAL THOUGHTS

At times, bringing the tech community together with local government to achieve the city's tech goals can be a culture clash. The unstructured, fast-paced world of tech start-ups moves very differently than the structured, process-oriented world of municipal governments.

For Nicole Fricot, director of community economic development for the City of Revelstoke, bridging these two worlds to form an effective partnership means working flexibly and adapting existing processes to meet the needs of everyone involved. Translating the free-flowing discussions of the tech community into what the local government is familiar with, and creating processes that work for both the city and the tech community is a challenge being overcome through common goals, hard work and constant collaboration.

Fricot's advice for other communities interested in developing a tech strategy is to "just start." The conditions may never be perfect, but starting with something simple is all you need to get things rolling.

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