

# A Proactive Approach Leads to Multiple Funding Streams for New Port Alberni Food Hub



BRIGHT IDEAS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## SYNOPSIS

When a request for qualifications was posted by the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture to secure funding for the creation of Provincially supported regional food hubs, the City of Port Alberni along with the Port Alberni Port Authority knew that with their proactive approach to economic development, they had a strong business case already in development.

## LOCATION

Port Alberni

## REGION

Vancouver Island and Coast

## POPULATION

17,678

## INNOVATORS

Port Alberni Port Authority

## ECONOMIC BASE

Healthcare, Tourism, Retail and Manufacturing



## INTRODUCTION

In the Port Alberni business community, relationships are everything. The Port Authority works closely with local businesses, the City and the region's First Nations communities to build strong networks and find opportunities for collaboration.

This proactive approach to economic development has led to many successes in this coastal city, most recently by securing the seed funds necessary for the creation of the Port Alberni Food Hub.

## THE CHALLENGE

Part of the Port's business plan involves identifying existing assets within its holdings and finding ways to revitalize and rejuvenate the spaces.

Through this process they identified a former fish processing plant, located in a prime location adjacent to Port Alberni Fisherman's Harbour, that wasn't being used.

Over the past two and a half years, the Port has offered a matching



development incentive of up to \$500,000 to investors who may be interested in bringing the plant up to Canadian Food Inspection Agency standards and operating it as a seafood processing business to create local employment.

When the B.C. government released a request for qualifications for the development of a regional food hub, the City reached out to its network and the Port offered the processing plant and quickly worked to shift their funding model to support this project.

## THE STRATEGY

In June of 2019, the call to communities who believed they had a facility and a development plan for a Food Hub was posted. The deadlines for the phased submission process were short, and the City, Port and its partners needed to act fast.

Once they had been approved to go to the second phase, they knew they were on to something.



By using their networks and their existing knowledge of the proposed location, they were able to show that they had a 'shovel-ready' project, and a solid plan to deliver it.

In the fall they received a \$750,000 funding contribution from the B.C. government, which, in addition to the Port's own \$500,000 contribution was leveraged to successfully apply to the Island Coastal Economic Trust, which then committed \$350,000 to support the development of the Food Hub.

The vision was coming to fruition: The Port Alberni Food Processing Hub would be operated by the Port and would primarily serve seafood processors. It would help clients research and develop innovative products, grow their businesses and support the local economy, community and farmers and create local jobs.

A commercial kitchen space would be made available on a rental basis to local chefs and bakers as well as individuals looking to try their hand at a small business.

The many non-profits in the community that require a certified commercial kitchen space will also benefit with a new space to prepare meals and baked goods for delivery.

This model is great for businesses looking to grow, as the space is being built to meet Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Vancouver Island Health Authority standards. This means processors and producers will be able to sell at farmers markets and be approved for exporting.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

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As the vision for the Food Hub was coming to life, the Port recognized another opportunity. By connecting with their current network, they were able to find seafood businesses that were interested in becoming anchor tenants. There are currently five anchor tenants, with many more in line to fill future vacancies.

The Food Hub is currently undergoing renovations and is anticipating opening its doors in summer 2020.

## SUCCESSES

- The Port Alberni Food Hub, through the City of Port Alberni, received the Community Project Award from the BC Economic Development Association for their work delivering various economic development initiatives that provide economic benefits in their area.
- Five anchor tenants have been secured pre-launch to lease space which will help support the incubator operations of the Hub.
- Many aquaculture and other businesses have approached the Port and the City to learn about opportunities for growth in their industry and partnership opportunities.
- More than two dozen direct, immediate jobs will be created for Food Hub operations with more expected as new business join or grow.
- The Port Alberni Food Hub is one of four regional food hubs supported by the Province and will be part of the BC Food Hub Network under development by the Ministry of Agriculture and partners.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Creativity is at the heart of innovation: the motto of the Port is "Start at yes!", and this slogan gives them the opportunity to be creative in making things happen.
- Network, network, network! Without the existing relationships in the community, the Food Hub would not have gotten to where it is now.
- Be proactive: knowing their assets in advance of the opportunity to apply for funding allowed them to be quick and tactful in their application.



For more information, visit [gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment](http://gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment)

