



Village of Harrison Hot Springs

RESORT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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1. Introduction and Background

Background

The Village of Harrison Hot Springs has agreed to enter into a Resort Development Strategy Agreement with the Ministry of Community Services.

Jimmy Young from the Tourism Planning Group facilitated this process including obtaining input from stakeholders from the local tourism industry.

The participation by the tourism industry in developing this resort development strategy is key to its ultimate success. The insight and knowledge that the tourism industry brings will ensure that the development strategy truly reflects the community's aspirations, goals and objectives for developing a sustainable tourism industry in Harrison.

This development strategy serves as a roadmap for the village to achieve the community's vision with regard to tourism. While the development strategy articulates clear objectives for tourism, it should also remain flexible enough to take new, unexpected opportunities and challenges into consideration during implementation.

Strategy Structure

The Tourism Plan prepared for Harrison and Kent as part of the Tourism BC Community Tourism Foundations® Program provides the context for the Village's Resort Development Strategy and the majority of the content. The efforts of Jimmy Young in preparing the Harrison-Kent Tourism Plan which forms the basis for this Strategy are acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

This document provides an overview on the current status of tourism, a summary of market potential and tourism opportunities, as well as presenting the issues and challenges facing the tourism sector in the village. The strategy also identifies the destination management and product development initiatives and concludes with a section on the revenue sharing projects for the next 5 years and their funding allocations.

It should also be noted that the Harrison Kent Regional Tourism Plan (April, 2007) developed through the Community Tourism Foundations Program, will still play a vital role in the overall success of the region and Harrison Hot Springs as a destination. Harrison's ability to partner with the District of Kent and operators outside the Village will be key to realizing its full potential as a tourism destination.

2. Situation Analysis

The Role of Tourism

The tourism sector to date has been based around the area's natural resources – Harrison Lake, the beaches and of course the hot springs have all played a key role in attracting visitors to the village along with festivals and events. However, the village has much more to offer and the tourism industry is now recognizing that it can build on these opportunities and the existing product with a destination approach to product development, management, and marketing.

Industry Profile

Key Tourism Products

The village has a number of noteworthy tourism products that focus on the natural resources, festivals and events. The village's key tourism sectors and products are listed in the following table.

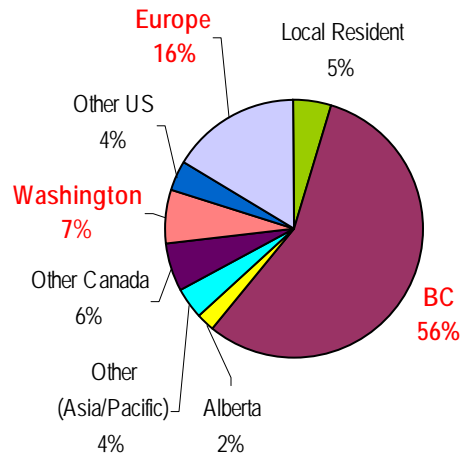
Key Tourism Products

Sectors	Key Products
Spa & Wellness	Harrison Hot Springs Resort & Spa
Sport Fishing	Harrison Lake & River
Nature-based	Harrison Lake, beach, trails
Water based activities	Boating, sailing, windsurfing and kiteboarding
Festivals & Events	Harrison Festival of the Arts, World Championships of Sand Sculpture & Tournament of Champions, H2H - Haney to Harrison Relay Run, Dragonboat competitions, Poker Run, Hobie Cat Races,

Visitor characteristics

The market for many of the tourism businesses located within Harrison is the Fraser Valley and Greater Vancouver area. However, there are a number of businesses (i.e. the Harrison Hot Springs Resort and sport fishing operators) that draw from much further a field including the US and a significant European market (higher than the BC average).

- The Harrison Visitor Centre statistics also confirm some of the above observations with 2005 visitors coming mainly from within BC (56%), Europe (16%), US (11%), other Canada (6%), local (5%) and other international (4%).



Source: Harrison Hot Springs Visitor Centre, 2005

Please note that Visitor Centre statistics are not necessarily representative of ALL visitors to a community.

- The European numbers to the region are well above the average for BC overall (3%) and also Greater Vancouver (5%).
- By contrast, Greater Vancouver attracts 8% of its visitors from Alberta, while Albertans only account for 2% of visitors to the Harrison area.
- the World Championships of Sand Sculpture attracted an estimated 66,000 people in 2005.

Destination Management

Investment in marketing and sales activities in order to generate incremental visitation is often perceived to be the sole responsibility of individual tourism operators. Increasingly, however, communities around the world are recognizing that if they wish to gain a level of awareness in their target markets that leads to increased visitation and tourism spending, it is necessary to take a destination approach to marketing and sales.

This destination approach to marketing and sales does not eliminate the need for continued investment in strategic marketing and sales by individual businesses. Rather, it creates an hierarchy of marketing that begins with enticing the potential visitor to the destination first, and then showcasing the range of activities, attractions and accommodations available.

In order to facilitate this collaboration and coordination, many communities consider the establishment of a dedicated tourism function or organization. This organization is frequently referred to as a ‘DMO’ – Destination Marketing Organization or Destination Management Organization.

Key Organizations

There are currently and number of organizations involved in various aspects of tourism within Harrison, which has lead to a fragmented approach to tourism. Within the village of Harrison

there are currently three organizations responsible for coordinating different aspects of the tourism industry.

The Harrison Agassiz Chamber of Commerce - the Chamber has a Tourism Committee which is currently the most prominent tourism group within Harrison. However, it has a small budget for destination marketing derived mainly from membership dues. The Chamber also hosts/maintains the Harrison.ca website, but because it is a membership based organization only tourism businesses that are Chamber members are listed.

The Harrison Festival Society - the Society, in addition to producing the Harrison Festival, operates the Visitor Centre on a fee for service contract through the Village of Harrison Hot Springs.

The Sand Sculpture Society – the Society is responsible for coordinating the publication of the “*Here’s Harrison*” tourism brochure. The Society has indicated that it will no longer be doing this and that the local newspaper will take over the production and distribution of the brochure for 2007.

Village of Harrison Hot Springs - the Village provides the funding for the Harrison Hot Springs Visitor Centre operated by the Festival Society. The Village has also been the lead organization for the 2% additional hotel room tax application that was approved in January 2007.

Market Potential and Tourism Opportunities

Fit with Global Trends

Tourism is a worldwide industry and British Columbia is a small player. Due to worldwide competition, the dependence on personal disposable income, consumer confidence, and world events that are not within our control (such as war, natural disaster, and disease outbreaks), internationally tourism growth is volatile in the short term.

However, in the last two years tourism has begun to make a recovery in despite of the war in Iraq, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), and a weak U.S. economy. Tourism has proven to be resilient and as a result is expected to grow at a healthy rate over the long term.

For communities in BC, domestic visitors are likely to show less volatility and would be expected to make up the vast majority of visitors.

Other key general consumer and travel trends that are relevant to BC communities include:

- Approved Destination Status for Canada in China
- U.S. Passport Requirements
- Gasoline Prices
- Travel Interest on the Rise
- Baby Boomers continue to be most influential traveller group
- Internet Usage Important in Travel Planning
- Lead Times for Travel Planning – travellers beginning to plan further ahead again in 2006

- The aging population indicates higher growth rates in tourism activities that are less physically demanding
- Automobile key mode of transportation for domestic trips
- International visitors, especially those from Europe and Asia, tend to stay longer and spend more
- Frequent travellers are higher income, higher education, older, and less likely to have children in their households
- Families with children tend to travel during school holidays
- Adults without children travel throughout the year
- Most trips made by Canadians are made in their province of residence

Canadian and American travellers present the largest potential volume of visitors to BC communities. The U.S. market is expected to continue to be an important international market but the number of visitors is not expected to grow in the short term, with challenges such as new passport requirements, border and security issues, and the lower spending power of the U.S. dollar in Canada.

Leisure travel in Canada and the U.S. makes up a larger number of trips and are growing faster than business travel. Baby boomers continue to be the largest demographic segment, with Generation X the second largest segment with a higher growth rate. Having an Internet presence is important as the majority of American and Canadian travellers use the Internet for vacation planning and about half book online.

Niche Tourism

There is significant overlap between many of the niche product sectors such as culture and heritage-based tourism, festivals and events, aboriginal tourism, and spa & wellness. For example, Canadian festival enthusiasts also enjoy other activities such as hiking (45%), golf (35%), fishing (33%) and motor boating (29%). The following bullet points provide very brief highlights of each sector.

Culture and Heritage-Based Tourism

- 37% of all international trips include a culture/heritage component
- 81% of U.S. adults who travelled in 2002 (118 million) are considered historic/cultural travellers.
- 11% of Canadians (2.6 million adults) are considered to be heritage tourism enthusiasts.

Festivals and Events

- Of the 23.3 million Canadian adults in 2000, about 2.0 million are festival tourism enthusiasts (9%).
- The number of Canadian festival tourism enthusiasts taking trips in Canada is expected to grow by 25% over the next two decades and reach 2.1 million.

Aboriginal Tourism

- Travel trade operators reported growing interest in authentic cultural experiences, interactive and hands-on “live it, instead of watch it” experiences, and high quality guided interpretation of local cultures and communities.
- The vast majority of travel trade interviewed (89%) indicated they would consider offering or expanding aboriginal cultural tourism experiences in Canada and ninety-four (94%) said that they would offer more than one.

Meetings and Conventions

- About 5% of visitors came to the province for meetings and conventions. Almost all are Americans or Canadians.
- For large meetings, a space where all attendees can be in the same facility is important.
- A quality facility with entertainment and sights nearby is important as meetings balance work and play.

Adventure and Ecotourism

- Both eco and adventure tourists are looking for specialized guiding services, personalized service
- Ecotourism is expanding to include more mainstream travellers
- Key activities include: walking, wildlife viewing, nature centres

Spa & Wellness Tourism

- The demographics of US and Canadian spa-goers are similar – women, 40-44 years with household income of \$72,000.
- The difference is in the number of Americans (1:5) and Canadians (1:10) who have visited a spa
- One-third of US leisure travellers name access to a spa as a primary consideration while making their travel plans.

Sport Tourism

- In Canada, sport tourism is currently a \$2 billion enterprise and one of the fastest growing sectors.
- 32% of tourists from the US and 31% of overseas tourists travel to Canada to participate in sports or outdoor activities
- Sport tourism is becoming more organized with National and Provincial bodies to support the sector e.g. Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance (CSTA)

While there is a degree of overlap between these sectors communities should try to focus on their strengths and not attempt to be everything to everyone.

Provincial and Regional Context

Tourism BC Forecasts

The Provincial government has set a target of doubling tourism revenues by 2015. This is a very aggressive forecast that is not without risk as all market conditions need to be positive to achieve it. The average annual increase in tourism revenues from 1995 to 2005 was only 1.9%, while the current forecast for tourism revenue for 2007/08 is 4.5%:

- 3.7% for 2006/07
- 4.5% for 2007/08
- 4.8% for 2008/09.

While these growth rates represent a significant increase from recent years, the industry requires revenue growth in excess of 7.0% per annum over the next 8 years to deliver on the Premier's pledge of doubling tourism revenues (\$18 billion) by 2015.

Consistency with Official Community Plans and Regional Planning

The Village of Harrison OCP contains significant reference to tourism mainly related to commercial and tourism specific development. The Community Vision also refers to tourism through a series of statements that refer to enhancing the character and economic base of the village and the downtown lakeshore area.

Within Harrison Hot Springs, tourism is widely acknowledged as the primary industry and key to the community's economic survival. The Village believes the changes to the OCP will help facilitate a number of development projects that have been on hold recently.

While the Village has design guidelines in place for development it appears that these are open to interpretation, which has resulted in an array of styles and structures that detract from the overall aesthetic of the village.

Regional Growth Strategy for the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD)

The 2004 FVRD Regional Growth Strategy outlines eight broad management goals. Tourism is only mentioned once in the entire document where it refers to "supporting transportation improvements to facilitate growth in the tourism".

The strategic directions contained within this Strategy are consistent with the broad growth goals contained in the Regional Growth Strategy and in a number of cases reinforce the importance of: increased transportation choices and efficiency, enhancing the agricultural sector and achieving sustainable economic growth.

Revenue Sharing Agreement for Resort Communities

On May 27, 2006 the Office of the Premier, Ministry of Community Services announced more funding for resort communities through a revenue-sharing agreement with local governments that will see a portion of the provincial hotel tax go towards local tourism development.

Under a new revenue-sharing agreement, an estimated \$10 million in provincial hotel room tax will be returned to participating municipalities for development of their tourism economies. Projects will be based on local needs and could include such things as street or park improvements, festivals or amenities to increase all-season resort opportunities.

Harrison Hot Springs is one of 13 municipalities currently eligible to enter into agreements with the Provincial Government. Communities must enter into a five-year results-based tourism development agreement that sets out what will be achieved through revenue sharing.

3. Issues and Challenges

Seasonality

Harrison Hot Springs is a very seasonal destination with visitation heavily concentrated in the summer months. While significant efforts have been made over the years to build the shoulder seasons in the province, tourism is expected to continue to be a seasonal business. The warm weather months from June to September will likely continue to be the core tourism season for many types of tourism experiences in BC.

While seasonality is a reality for many communities and even major cities like Vancouver, there are initiatives that can lessen its impact. Events and activities like the Sand Sculpture Competition, and sport fishing continue to attract visitors to the village in the fall months, while the meetings market presents an opportunity to focus visitation on the non-summer months. Likewise activities that are of interest to adults without children and appeal to local and regional BC markets, which tend to travel in BC throughout the year, will also help increase visitation in the off season. The challenge is also having the diversity of services and amenities available on a regular basis outside the summer months to support off peak visitation and expand to a year round destination.

Day visits from the region and GVRD are also concentrated in the June – September period and the weekends, so initiatives and packages that give people a reason (e.g. events) or incentive (e.g. pricing discounts) to visit outside these times should be a key focus.

Organizational Structure

There are a number of organizations involved in various aspects of tourism within Harrison Hot Springs which has led to a fragmented approach to tourism within the region. Within the Village of Harrison specifically there are currently three organizations responsible for coordinating different aspects of the tourism industry.

The Tourism Harrison Society that will take on the management of the 2% additional hotel room tax (AHRT) funds will provide for a fresh start and a way of centralizing the village's tourism function under one roof.

Quality Assurance

While there are a number of Tourism BC approved motels in the region many of these are in need of upgrading to bring them in line with marketplace expectations. Tourism BC sources indicate that there are approximately eleven Tourism BC Approved accommodations within the region. However, there are only two hotels that participate in the “*Canada Select*” quality assurance ratings program.

Accommodations

Accommodation properties during the summer season are generally full to capacity, however the waterfront condos located at the east end of Esplanade are largely vacant during the year and often in summer when commercial properties are at capacity. There is a need to look at the strata covenants limiting the rental of these condos and at methods for increasing mid-week and

shoulder season occupancy. More accurate details on annual occupancies by month would greatly assist planning for tourism development.

Harrison Hot Springs Resort and the Village

Harrison Hot Springs Resort & Spa is the village's single largest visitor attraction and drives visitation on a year round basis with over 330 rooms, spa facilities, golf and fishing packages and its famous hot springs pools. While the resort is self contained it also relies on the village infrastructure and other local operators to provide a more diverse experience for its guests. Many of the resort's customers for example also like to dine out in the village during their stay and utilize local guides for various activities.

Retail, Entertainment, Food and Beverage

The village's entertainment, dining and retail amenities provide visitors with additional activities and experiences during their stay. Although these amenities are not travel generators, they are regarded as an integral part of the overall tourism experience.

While there are some excellent retail and dining options in the village, overall there is room for improvement in both sectors by diversifying the experience and raising the quality. Given the success of the arts and culture sectors there is potential for more boutique local products and produce outlets within Harrison. The other concern within this sector are the hours of operation outside of the peak season months, where many businesses are closed mid-week or shut down altogether for periods of the off season.

Branding the Destination

The name "Harrison Hot Springs" is thought to have a strong level of awareness in the marketplace. However, the use of the term "hot springs" creates a powerful expectation in visitors' minds that many operators feel the destination is not living up to.

The development of the resort development strategy for Harrison does not include undertaking a branding exercise.

Infrastructure

While access is excellent via road and rail to the region and it is located in close proximity to Vancouver and Abbotsford international airports, there is a lack of regional transportation options for the visitor. There is also no direct public transportation access from the GVRD to the village. The region has only one official taxi based in Agassiz and there are no other private transportation operators in the village. There are also no car rental companies located in the village; the nearest businesses are in Chilliwack.

Parking will likely become a major issue in the near future for Harrison Village. A number of developments are proposed for sites that have historically served as parking areas. Parking is already an issue in Harrison around festival and event times. Pay parking has been examined in the past but not been proceeded.

Signage wasn't identified as a huge issue in the village, though more can be done to increase the consistency and in some cases visibility of signage.

Human Resources

Staff recruitment and retention are a challenge, mainly because of the seasonal nature of the industry. Volunteerism is also a significant issue within the village, finding and retaining good volunteers without burning out those who give up the most time can be a challenge. Many of the village's key tourism attractions are events and festivals that rely heavily on volunteers, as small non-profit societies manage the regions big events such as the Harrison Festival of the Arts, and World Sand Sculpture Championships.

Marketing

The majority of marketing within the village to date has been undertaken by private sector tourism businesses. The '*Here's Harrison*' brochure produced by the Sand Sculpture society with cooperative advertising from local businesses was originally intended as a fulfillment piece and is now distributed as a destination lure piece which was not the original intension.

There has been no real public sector marketing or coordinated destination promotion for the village. Public sector funding has historically been focused on visitor information services and the operation of the seasonal visitor centre.

While the GVRD, Fraser Valley and Washington State will continue to provide a major source of visitation for the village and a focus for marketing, other initiatives in partnership with regional and provincial partners to reach high yield long haul markets with an interest in culture, heritage and nature-based tourism (including sport fishing) should also be explored.

Expanding the experience

Providing the visitor with more choices and opportunities could be achieved by not only creating more tourism products, but also better packaging and building on the tourism experiences already offered in the village, including complementary services such as retail, food and beverage to enhance visitors overall.

Key product initiatives such as the proposed hot springs source development will also enhance the experience for visitors and lead to increased visitation and lengthen stay.

Identifying Obstacles to the Vision

The following six headings and bullets provide a summary of the obstacles.

1. Fractured organizational structure

- Achieve taxpayers support of community tourism/heritage plan
- Require a united business buy-in
- Creating a attractive and sustainable business environment
- Lack of a common vision
- Lack of design guidelines
- Inadequate water and sewer capacity

2. Centralized resources to communicate

- Communication between local business and awareness of events
- Communication within the industry

- More communication for/to tourists
- Proper networking opportunities to attract businesses
- Inventory and local awareness of products

3. Seasonal and conflicting attitudes to tourism

- Jobs seasonal and part-time
- Keeping the required people year round
- Seasonal climate limitations
- Availability of seasonal labour
- Availability of affordable labour housing
- Seasonal product creates labour problem

4. Under developed relationships with government

- Lack of developed trails
- Government agencies causing time delays
- Undefined municipal support
- DFO hindering progress

5. Limited access to and within the community

- Safe and effective bike path – Agassiz to Harrison
- Public transit (to Vancouver)
- Lack of public transportation
- Parking and traffic management

6. Attracting and developing resources

- Size of business
- Resources to interpret and communicate history
- Young and new businesses still developing (time)

4. Development and Marketing Strategies

This section highlights the strategic areas of destination management and product development that form the context of this resort development strategy.

Destination Management

While not a new concept within the tourism industry, destination management is certainly an area that has been neglected or largely overlooked. The components of a destination management strategy are undertaken in partnership with supporting organizations to provide the resources for communities to accomplish their objectives.

The key focuses for Harrison with regard to destination management are: creating cooperative partnerships both within the tourism industry and with other sectors (e.g. education); looking at training and development opportunities for various sectors within the industry including retail; taking proactive steps towards addressing some of the infrastructure related issues in the village like parking; enhancing transportation services throughout the region; and initiating research projects to better understand consumers and monitor and measure progress.

The strategies and actions outlined in the destination management section of the plan require significant partnering with both internal and external organizations.

Tourism Awareness

Key Objectives:

- Raise the level of awareness of the value of tourism to the economy within the community, including local government

Rationale:

Tourism awareness programs are key to raising the profile of the industry and creating a stronger tourism economy in ways that do not compromise traditional quality of life enjoyed by residents.

Steps to Develop:

Tourism awareness programs can be developed on several levels:

1. Local government workshops on the role of tourism and how it influences public sector activity, including requirements of the tourism sector in such areas as infrastructure, access, planning and environmental protection, and heritage protection;
2. Tourism industry programs on competitiveness, and the availability of programs to assist individual operators with competitiveness;
3. Programs directed at the public to explain the importance of tourism and its contribution to the village.

Communication to these various groups can be a key way to get the message across. An e-newsletter that keeps groups informed about the current initiatives and plans for tourism within the village can go a long way to accomplishing tourism awareness and building support for the

sector. Tourism awareness is also achieved through building cooperative partnerships within the industry and with other sectors of the local economy.

Quality Assurance

Key Objectives:

- Ensure that product quality meets market expectations
- Ensure tourism operators are aware of quality assurance products and product standards (e.g. export ready)

Rationale:

Quality assurance is an increasingly important consideration for destinations, particularly given the growing competitiveness of the wider market. Products that are well-matched to market needs and expectations will prevail. The role at the destination level is to help the tourism industry adopt and maintain the necessary standards to ensure a competitive product market match.

Steps to Develop:

Export ready policy - Tourism BC has developed an export ready policy for tourism products, reflecting the fact that the tourism sector is essentially an export sector. In Tourism BC's terminology, "export ready" for tourism includes not only product standards based on market expectations (e.g. Canada Select standards for accommodation), but also includes "requirements" for doing business with the travel trade and tour operators. Export ready products are equipped to engage in packaging arrangements with tour operators and able to do business both nationally and internationally.

Upgrading products - Individual operators face many challenges in upgrading their products to meet export ready and market-driven standards, not the least of which is in the development of business plans to support access to financing for such purposes. Helping to make the connection with the right organization can go along way to addressing these issues. Some of the organizations that provide this advice and assistance include Community Futures Development Corporation and Small Business BC (Federal/Provincial Partnership), and the Aboriginal Business Service Network (Firstbusiness.ca) that provides advice to BC Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

Training and Development

Key Objectives:

- Provide information and resources to ensure people and organizations in tourism have access to the appropriate training and professional development programs.

Rationale:

Standards of customer service vary greatly within the tourism industry. Human resource issues are also compounded by the seasonality of the industry and the limited availability of staff particularly if the job is only part time. As an initial step customer service training should be encouraged throughout the industry to establish a base-line understanding of standards and to complement any quality assurance programs. A sample of the key resources and programs available are mentioned below.

Steps to Develop:

SuperHost - SuperHost, developed and administered by Tourism BC is a series of eight and interactive customer service based training workshops to support people working in service industries. Content ranges from enhancing core communication skills to dealing with irate customers, understanding and exceeding expectations across cultures, providing excellent service for customers with disabilities, empowering and coaching employees, being an effective problem solver.

emerit - While there may be potential to work with colleges in the region in the delivery of relevant training and the underlying knowledge base, there are also established on-line resources. emerit promoted by Go2, offers all the necessary training resources, including self-study tools and work books, and can be used by an individual to track their professional development.

Retail BC -Retail BC launched Canada's first comprehensive retail skills development program in March 2006 to train front-line retailers in British Columbia. The retail PEAK program was developed to help management and staff enhance retail 'performance, empowerment, attitude and knowledge' (PEAK). The program offers nine skills-training courses: three in customer service, three in sales and three focused on management and staff development.

The training programs are delivered by locally-based organizations throughout BC, including Advanced Corporate Training, JobWave, WCG International, BC Community Futures Development Corporations, Business Improvement Associations, Chambers of Commerce and other organizations interested in the delivery of quality retail training. Interested retail businesses need to register on the retail PEAK website (www.retailpeak.com) to find courses available in their community or to invite a trainer in-house.

Cooperative Partnerships

Key Objectives:

- Increased cultural understanding
- A mentoring program that allows participating organizations to share knowledge and experiences
- A job-sharing plan to connect organizations and individuals interested in sharing time and costs

Rationale:

The concept of cooperative partnerships focuses on creating a more cohesive foundation from which to build greater understanding and better communication channels for sharing experiences and enhancing learning.

Steps to Develop:

Establishing a Mentoring Program - There were two components to this program, the first is based on the sister city concept where Harrison partners with another comparable town nearby and learn from its experiences with tourism. The suggestions included Kimberley in BC and Leavenworth in Washington, two successful small tourism towns. The goal would be to establish formal links with one of these communities to share ideas and experiences in relation to tourism.

The second component to the mentoring program was establishing closer links to organizations locally: University College of the Fraser Valley, Research Station and Business Development Corporation. Key to this is the municipality working more closely together on tourism related initiatives that could include programs such as Communities in Bloom and the Community Tourism Foundations Marketing Program.

Understanding Cultural Differences - There are a number of different cultural groups and ethnicities (e.g. European, Asian and First Nations). The understanding of these various cultures and communication between the groups is very limited. Many members of the respective cultural groups have businesses that are either directly (e.g. motel) or indirectly (e.g. retail) involved in tourism, however their participation in tourism and even business (i.e. Chamber of Commerce) related initiatives is generally limited.

The goal of this initiative is to create greater understanding of cultural differences by firstly identifying the various groups and in particular any formal or informal social or business groups that they may have within their ethnic community. The next step is to facilitate dialogue with these groups and begin to look at ways of engaging them in tourism related initiatives and making them aware of the opportunities available to them.

Explore Job Sharing Opportunities - The challenge of finding seasonal labour particularly in the summer months is an issue. The more businesses within the tourism industry can work together to create jobs and then share resources to offer more hours and greater opportunities for potential employees the more likely they are to succeed in finding staff and ultimately retaining them. Job-sharing also provides the potential for creating year round positions in the tourism industry. With the prospect of Hemlock Resort developing into more of a destination resort and providing winter tourism career opportunities there is potential to create a more formal system to make employees aware of the opportunities for year round tourism employment. Once established this approach would also offer employers benefits such as shared training.

Infrastructure

Key Objectives:

- Improved transportation infrastructure and access

Rationale:

A number of infrastructure related initiatives were identified that would greatly benefit the tourism industry, these focused around transportation routes and parking. The issue of parking in Harrison Hot Springs during the summer particularly on weekends and around festival and events is an issue for the municipality and the community. It can also adversely impact the visitor experience.

Steps to Develop:

Revisiting Fraser Valley to Whistler Highway Concept - One key project that would have a huge effect on the village is the development of a sealed highway from the Fraser Valley to Whistler. The potential for creating circle tour routes and benefiting more directly from the 2010 Games would be substantial. The infrastructure already exists with access to the road from the Fraser Valley currently via Harrison Mills and the Morris Valley.

The route then follows the Harrison West Forest Service Road up along the west shore of Harrison Lake into the Lillooet River Valley, all the way to Pemberton with minimal climbing and descending. There has been a study undertaken by engineers from the Ministry of Highways that looked at upgrading the existing gravel road to a sealed highway. Further research into the study and its recommendations is required and then the process of establishing support could begin.

Establishing a commuter bike path between the communities of Harrison and Agassiz is also an idea that has been talked about. This would also create opportunities for tourism related activities tours by bike. The capital cost for completing a project of this nature without provincial or federal funding could be prohibitive. An outstanding application for a grant from the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund for the sewer line to Kent includes a bike path component.

Develop plans to create more parking spaces, educate the community about the options, examine other parking related alternatives and ensure that solutions can be enforced are key to the success of any parking related initiative in Harrison.

Investment Promotion

Key Objectives:

- Facilitate investment by existing tourism operators (and/or new operators from the communities) in the tourism sector; and
- Attract investment either for joint ventures with local operators or for new investments.

Rationale:

Investment promotion within a community is often the responsibility of an economic development agency or the local municipality and in many communities the management of and commitment to tourism is a key factor in attracting investment.

Through the implementation of this resort development strategy and the newly established Tourism Harrison Society funded through the additional hotel room tax, the village is demonstrating its commitment to tourism which provides a very positive climate for future tourism investment.

Steps to Develop:

Key considerations for prospective tourism investors and their financing sources include not only the business case for the project itself under consideration, but also:

- The commitment of the destination to the tourism sector (business climate for tourism);
- A long-term, sustainable commitment to tourism destination marketing;
- The availability of product development/training programs for the sector; and
- The investment in infrastructure that will benefit tourism sector growth.

Research-based Initiatives

Key Objectives:

- Create an ongoing research program in cooperation with the private sector to measure growth and the effectiveness of marketing initiatives
- Constantly review external best practice and trends in the industry and use this information to maintain a market focused industry

Rationale:

Research initiatives and performance monitoring are an essential part of managing the tourism sector. Effective implementation requires the cooperation of the private sector and awareness on the part of the private sector that the provision of performance data under confidentiality rules will ultimately help the sector and the local government demonstrate the value of tourism.

Steps to Develop:

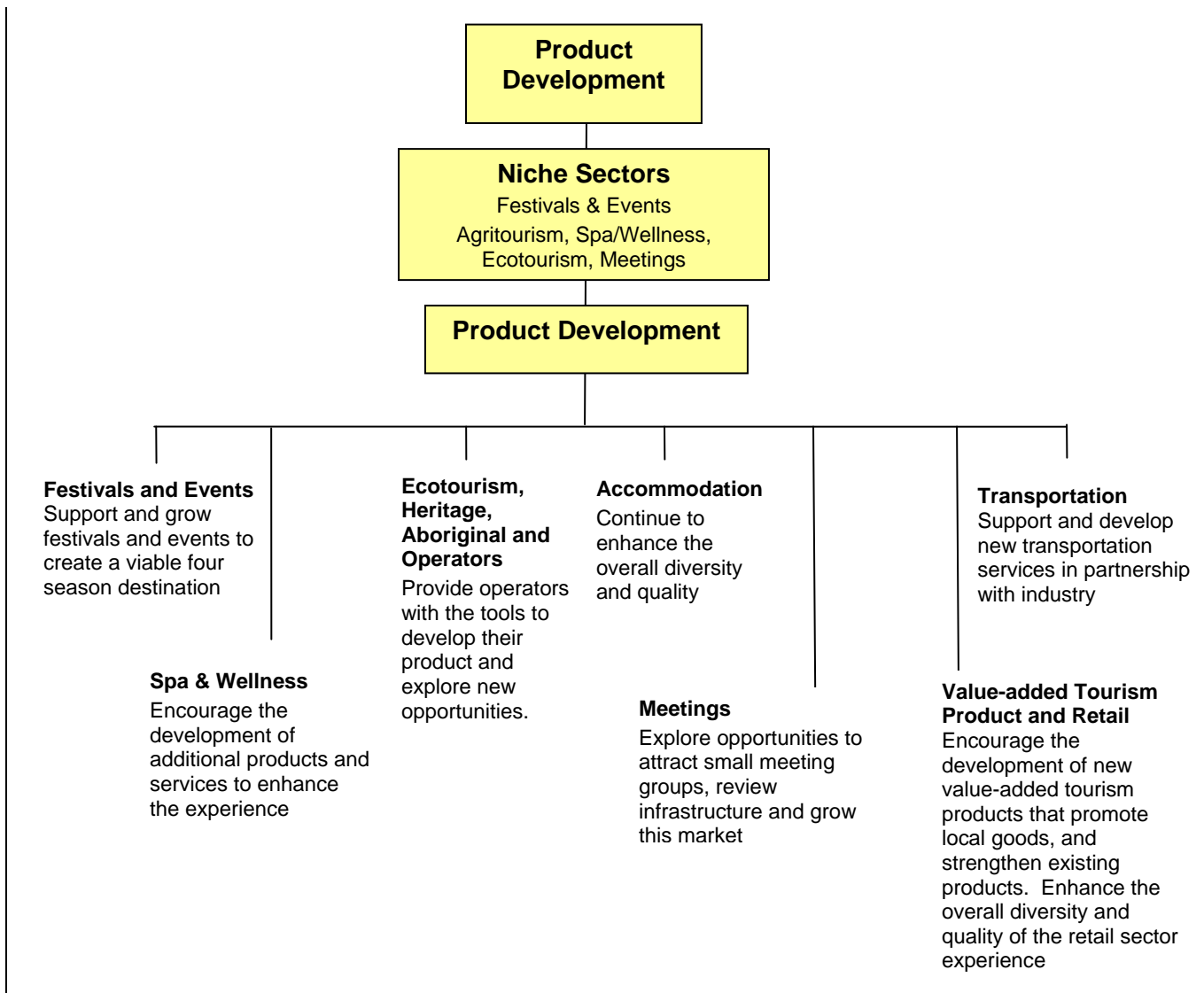
Value of Tourism model - The Value of Tourism model currently being created as part of the Community Tourism Foundations® Program is one tool that can be used to highlight the current size and value of tourism and subsequently used as a benchmark to measure performance and the development of the industry. The tool relies on information from the private sector in order to estimate the size and value of tourism.

Accommodation Tracking - Ongoing commercial accommodation tracking is also a key component for measuring the success of the plan and gauging the performance of the accommodation sector. This will help the sector better understand and manage the industry.

Best Practices File – establish a best practices file for product development, management and marketing that can assist the destination in continuously improving the experience and maintaining a market driven focus. Continue to research and review different tourism regions and organizations to ensure that the village remains competitive. The Village and Tourism Harrison Society should sign-up for tourism industry e-newsletters from Tourism BC, COTA and the Canadian Tourism Commission as they are a great source of information about new initiatives, programs and products in the industry.

Product Development

Quality tourism product is crucial to attracting new visitors and increasing the length of stay of existing visitors. All of the products identified below should receive some degree of attention to achieve the tourism growth objectives outlined in this strategy. While some sectors/products are market ready (e.g. festivals and events) and will form the core messages for promotional materials, others are only developing and require more work to refine the product and supporting infrastructure (e.g. ecotourism).



Festivals and Events

Key Objectives:

- Build on the success of the regions premier festivals and events to attract visitors from other markets; and
- Enhance packaging and partnering around events to increase visitor length of stay

Rationale:

Festivals and events are a major visitor draw for the village. These events will continue to be key to component of the tourism product and experience particularly as many are held outside the peak summer months.

Festivals and events primarily target residents of Fraser Valley and Greater Vancouver. However, as these events continue to mature and the tourism industry works together to package these events with accommodations and other activities they can also appeal to markets outside the Lower Mainland, such as other BC, Alberta and Washington State for longer stays.

Steps to Develop Product Area:

- Event coordinators and accommodations to work together to develop packages for visitors around event itineraries. Investigate the opportunity to include other activities/operators that provide complementary products in the package. For example with arts related festivals there could be an opportunity to package with heritage attractions.
- Cross promotion of events will ensure visitors are aware of other activities and potentially visit multiple times. Event organisers to work collectively towards creating opportunities for each other to promote up coming events at their respective events. As a group investigate tactics for showcasing upcoming Harrison events and festivals at other premier Fraser Valley shows (e.g. Abbotsford Air Show).

Spa and Wellness

Key Objectives:

- To enhance the hot springs experience for visitors to Harrison; and
- To provide a range of spa and wellness related products, programs and services for visitors

Rationale:

This niche sector has the potential to define Harrison by leveraging the hot springs experience. The Resort will play a key role in leading this sector with their mineral pools and Healing Springs Spa and also in partnership with the Village to develop the hot springs source as a major attraction for all visitors.

Further development of spa and wellness programs and services throughout will also enhance this sector. Spa and wellness experiences would be of interest to BC residents in the Lower Mainland, visitors to Vancouver and also US and European markets.

Steps to Develop Product Area:

- Support Hot Springs Source development in conjunction with the Village of Harrison and the Harrison Hot Springs Resort and Spa. Ensure the concept plans are circulated to the tourism industry and public.
- Encourage additional spa and wellness programs and services that will complement the core attractions provided in Harrison Hot Springs.
- Develop a long term plan for the public swimming facility. Initiate discussions with Resort ownership on the future of the public pool as a key hot springs experience and one that has the potential to increase day and overnight visits.

Ecotourism

Key Objectives:

- Use the regions natural attractions to develop self guided tours, programs and products for visitors

Rationale:

The region has excellent natural attractions such as the Chehalis River Hatchery and Weaver Creek Spawning grounds, Sasquatch Provincial Park, Harrison Lake, hiking trails and wildlife viewing opportunities. However, significant investment and development is needed to enhance the infrastructure (trails, signage, maps) and create more programs and encourage more nature-based business development within the industry.

This product would be of interest to BC residents, Albertans and also long haul visitors from the US and Europe. Travel trade would also be interested in packaging programs and trips around well organized ecotourism products and services.

Steps to Develop Product Area:

- Identifying key opportunity areas with potential. Wildlife viewing and birding activities offer some of the best potential for operators and self guided activities
- Review the Green Legacy Report on Flora and Fauna to identify unique attractions and items of interest for tours, brochures and selling ecotourism. Develop a flora and fauna guide.
- The initial Hot Springs Source concept includes not only developing the source physically as an interpretive feature, but also linking in new trails and activities (e.g. ‘Skyway’ systems or ‘Zip’ lines) in the surrounding area. Similar canopy walkways and tree cable concepts have been very successful in other parts of BC and the world.

Case Study

Ziptrek Ecotours in Whistler was first in BC to establish a commercial skyway system. Their 2.5 hour tour combines adventure with environmental education. Guided tours include five zipline rides that gain progressively in height and length with the longest spanning over 1,100ft for \$98.00. The ziplines are joined by a network of ground based boardwalks and trails, and by aerial stairways and bridges at heights of over eighty feet in the tree canopy. Ziptrek Ecotours gives guests exclusive access to areas of rare and untouched ancient coastal temperate rainforest. All this only minutes away from Whistler Village. Tours operate in all weather conditions, 365 days a year. Since its inception Ziptrek has attracted tens of thousands individuals, corporate groups and families.

*The Capilano Suspension Bridge expanded their visitor experience in 2004 by adding the **Treetops Adventures** the first venue of its kind in North America, offering a bird’s eye view of a coastal forest. Visitors venture from one tree to another on a series of elevated suspension bridges, some reaching as high as 100 feet (30m) above the forest floor. Guided nature tours and the Kids' Rainforest Explorer program are some of the activities that enhance this unique rainforest encounter.*

Developing the trails network in and around the Village of Harrison.

- Work with local land owners to review trail access and identify issues and concerns.
- Initiate a bid to obtain East Sector lands from the Crown. The Village owns an 80 acre parcel of land referred to as McCombs Park. The 240 acres of crown lands in the East Sector adjacent to McCombs Park would provide greater opportunities to develop the park and trails in the area and preserve the many threaten and endangered species in the area.
- Develop a trail signage and interpretive plan to further enhance both residents and visitors enjoyment of the trails and habitat around the village. Clear and consistent way-finding signage combined with interpretive panels will create a whole new experience for visitors with self-guided tours of the natural areas surrounding the village and also the opportunity to create guided services.
- Develop guides with maps. The ‘Here’s Harrison’ guide contains two pages describing walking tours in the area and a map outlining some of the trails surrounding the village. The

Kent-Harrison Trails Committee has produced a “Hiking around Harrison Hot Springs” guide that includes a mixture of hand drawn and topographical maps along with text describing several walks in the area. This guide has been photocopied and edited numerous times and is need of a revision. Current walks promoted in the area include:

- Harrison Hot Springs Waterfront Walk
- Terry Fox Circuit
- Hicks Lake Loop (Sasquatch Provincial Park)
- Ultimate Trail
- Bear Mountain Side Trail Loop
- Bear Mountain Plus Spring Park and Miami River

Accommodation

Key Objectives:

- Raise the level of awareness in the accommodation industry of quality assurance products and standards

Rationale:

Tourism BC sources indicate that the majority of accommodation properties are Tourism BC Approved. However, there are only two hotels in the region that participate in the “*Canada Select*” quality assurance ratings program.

Steps to Develop Product Area:

- Develop an awareness program or e-newsletter for accommodation properties on Quality Assurance programs i.e. Canada Select and Camping Select.
- Promote the Tourism BC Approved Accommodation criteria to non-approved properties and encourage participation in the program or the improvements necessary to qualify.
- Explore opportunities to partner and package products with the RV and camping sector

Meetings and Incentive Travel

Key Objectives:

- Increase the number of meetings and business related overnights in Harrison, focusing on small to medium sizes groups that can be accommodated in existing facilities

Rationale:

The meetings and conventions market is worth about \$500 million in visitor revenues to BC and is a high yield market. The meeting market also provides some seasonal diversity as they generally occur in the spring and fall.

Harrison currently has a good bed base and existing facilities to attract small-medium sized meetings. The Resort is already experiencing significant growth in this market.

Steps to Develop Product Area:

- Investigate potential networks and associations for targeting meeting planners and corporations.

- Cooperation and coordination between the hotel properties to assess the potential for attracting larger groups
- Develop a meetings section on the new destination website to enable prospective groups to easily view the facilities and services in the community.
- Explore criteria and benefits associated with participating in Meetings BC (Tourism BC Program)

Value-added Product and Retail

Key Objectives:

- Develop new value-added products that promote local goods, and strengthen existing products; and
- Enhance the overall diversity and quality of the retail sector experience

Rationale:

Shopping and eating are a key component of the tourism experience. This is greatly enhanced when retail and cuisine products and services highlight local arts, crafts and produce. It also provides a technique for differentiating the community, increasing visitor satisfaction and increasing the length of stay.

Steps to Develop Product Area:

- Investigate Retail BC education and awareness programs for the retail sector and promote these services and programs to the local retail sector.
- A formal awareness program or plan should be developed to help retailers appreciate the evolving nature of the tourism industry (i.e. more sophisticated visitors) and the need to provide a retail experience that meets marketplace expectations. The first step in this direction would be communicating the purpose of this resort development strategy and providing information on the newly formed Tourism Harrison Society.
- Encourage and support further entrepreneurial activity to develop value-added products and increase opportunities to purchase local goods. Investigate opportunities to enhance local retail product opportunities in Harrison.
- Explore methods for increasing interest in and supporting local businesses year round. Ideas include retail oriented festivals and events, coupon books and buy-local campaigns.

Case Study

Fernie, BC launched its “Think Local” campaign in winter 2005/06 to encourage everyone to take significant consideration in their shopping and spending decisions. They developed a Think Local, Buy Local, Be Local logo that was placed throughout the community on local business owner’s doors, on shopper’s hemp bags, and on a local shopper’s discount guide.

This winter, the Think Local First Coalition continues to raise local awareness and encourage community self-reliance with a new Community Coupon Book. The booklet gives local businesses the opportunity to market themselves very inexpensively to locals and visitors alike and it gives Fernie shoppers great deals

when they use the 60 coupons in the book. The books are available at local businesses throughout Fernie and online at www.ourfernie.com for just \$5 each.

The Think Local First Coalition advocates that by shopping locally you access unique local products, quality service, and save time and money by not travelling out of town. The Coalition is a partnership between: the Fernie Chamber of Commerce, Advocates for Local Living (a non-profit citizen group) and local business owners.

Transportation

Key Objectives:

- Develop transportation services for visitors; and
- Create packages that include transportation

Rationale:

There is a significant bed base in Harrison and a wealth of attractions and activities that are outside the village. There are currently no private or public transportation services to offer visitors to get them from their hotel in Harrison out to farms in the Agassiz area, the Kilby Historic site and Hemlock Resort. There are also no direct services from the Greater Vancouver area to the village.

Steps to Develop Product Area:

- Explore River transportation options as an alternative means of transportation from Harrison Mills to Harrison Village and as a unique component of a package.

5. Resort Development Projects & Budget

The Village of Harrison Hot Springs is classified as a BC resort community and now with an established 2% Additional Hotel Room Tax (AHRT) has access to the Provincial Government's new revenue sharing program for resort communities. The program provides funding to match the 2% AHRT over a five year term and like the 2% AHRT can be renewed for subsequent 5 year terms. This is provided the 2% AHRT is still supported by the majority of accommodation properties in the community and the revenue-sharing project funds have been administered by the municipality to the Province's satisfaction.

Tourism Industry Consultation

The projects identified in this Resort Development Strategy are the result of extensive consultation with the local Harrison tourism industry. This process started in March 2006 with the Tourism BC Community Tourism Foundations® Program that involved stakeholders from both Harrison and the District of Kent to develop a Tourism Plan for the region. As part of this process a number of product development initiatives were identified by the tourism industry for the Village of Harrison.

Further consultation was undertaken by the Village with a public Council meeting on February 26, 2007 and a further meeting with tourism stakeholders on May 8th to consider the long list of potential projects and determine priorities.

The long list of projects considered at the May 8th Special Council meeting is detailed in the appendix. This Special Council Meeting of the Village of Harrison Council with key tourism stakeholders¹ produced a degree of consensus as to priorities and these are reflected in the next section that details the selected projects and their budgets.

Revenue Sharing Projects & Budget

The revenue sharing budget estimate for the Village of Harrison Hot Springs is \$1.65 million over 5 years. This funding will be allocated to the projects presented in the following table and is based on Council and tourism industry input. By undertaking these development initiatives in combination with the other destination management and product development priorities identified in this document, Harrison Hot Springs will enhance the overall visitor experience.

¹ Also in attendance were Jimmy Young (Tourism Planning Group) and Shawna Leung (Vancouver Coast and Mountains)

Revenue-Sharing Projects and Budget

#	Project	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total**
1	Plaza & Lakeshore Promenade	200,000	105,000		100,000	95,000	500,000
2	Village Centre Renewal			145,000	15,000	235,000	395,000
3	Parks & Trails Development	105,000	200,000	185,000	215,000		705,000
4	Sand Sculpture Competition*	25,000	25,000				50,000
	TOTAL	330,000	330,000	330,000	330,000	330,000	1,650,000

* The addition of Sand Sculpture into the Revenue-Sharing project list was made by the Village of Harrison Hot Springs following discussions with the Society and approved by the Ministry of Community Services.

** The total column does not represent the total project cost, only the portion that would be funded through the revenue-sharing program

Three of the projects (see following bullet points) have also applied to other funding programs (e.g. Local Motion and Spirit Squares), of a portion of the total project costs. The outcome of these applications is not yet known.

Significant consideration should be given to the ongoing maintenance and operational costs of any project undertaken through the resort development strategy, as the Village has limited resources, given existing infrastructure requirements and a limited population base.

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1. **Plaza & Lakeshore Promenade** – enhanced landscaping, boardwalks, walkways, and fountains in the lagoon to enhance water quality. The Village has also made an application under the Spirit Square program for \$500,000 the total project cost is \$1 million. The Village has also budgeted \$60,000 for the Plaza design from the municipal budget.
2. **Village Centre Renewal** including streetscape improvements and possible façade improvement fund for business owners. The Village has also budgeted \$50,000 for streetscape improvements from the current municipal budget.

It should also be noted that the Ministry of Highways is providing \$150,000 in funding for reconstruction of the portion of Hot Springs Road between Lillooet and Esplanade that will be transferred to the Village. The City of Langford on Vancouver Island was mentioned as a good example of urban planning, streetscaping and setbacks etc.

3. **Parks & Trails Development** – trails development and upgrading should be focused on the Miami River Greenway trail as a key connector with multiple access points. The project would also include trail signage and mapping. This project may also include the construction of new bridges over the Miami River at a total cost of \$336,000 a grant application has been made for this through the ‘Local Motion’ fund.
4. **Festivals and events** – an agreement between the Sand Sculpture Society and the Village of Harrison Hot Springs to fund any unavoidable deficit accrued by its annual competition in an amount of \$25,000 for 2007 and 2008. Funds to encourage new shoulder season festivals.
5. **Hot Springs Source** – development of the hot springs source site to provide a year round attraction and public gathering place. The total project cost is estimated at \$750,000 with an application made to the Spirit Square Program for some of that funding and a private sector contribution to be determined from Delaware North Companies (i.e. the Harrison Hot Springs Resort parent company).

The design and concept work for this project has been completed. The hot springs source development also offers the potential to incorporate trail development and new tourism businesses (e.g. Ziptrek tours) into the planning and development of the area to further enhance the experience.

At this stage the 5 year budget does not include this project as the sources and amounts of funding are still unconfirmed. However, should the grant application and private sector funding be approved and a public funding agreement finalized then this project would likely be included in the budget and other projects adjusted accordingly.

The Village Council and the tourism industry stakeholders also discussed the following projects that may be considered in the next phase of revenue-sharing funding.

- **Redevelopment of the Public Pool** – initial steps to progress this potential project further would involve the Village of Harrison Hot Springs initiating discussions with Delaware North Companies, through the Harrison Hot Springs Resort GM to determine the company's future plans and aspirations for the public pool facility and possible public-private partnership opportunities and a share in the water licence.

The services of a consultant that specializes in this type of public-private partnership and the process of negotiating a workable agreement will likely be required.

Potential Long term Funding Options

Other long term funding options should be looked at in greater detail to determine if they are appropriate or possible. The creation of other consistent long term funding sources to complement the 2% AHRT and the revenue haring funding would also help to create a more sustainable and inclusive funding structure for tourism:

- **Broaden the 2% AHRT area** - expanding the geographic area for the application of the additional 2% hotel room tax to include the District of Kent and specific areas of the Fraser Valley Regional District (e.g. Harrison Mills and Morris Valley/Hemlock areas)
- **Establish a tourism business levy** - a tourism business levy within the Village of Harrison to complement the existing 2% hotel tax would create a broader tourism funding model. This type of levy has been successfully applied across the board in communities where tourism is clearly the most significant industry and the connection to all businesses is clear. However, the amount of revenue generated by such a levy is usually small i.e. in the range of thousands not tens of thousands.

Overall Objectives for Tourism

The success of this strategy and the achievement of the objectives outlined will require a coordinated effort by a number of organizations and the ongoing support of the Village and implementation of all the strategies contained in this document. The objectives are as follows:

- Increase tourism **revenue** to the village by **5.0%** annually from 2008-2011
- Increase the **number of visitors** to the village by **3.0%** annually from 2008-2011

The objectives reflect a preference towards growing revenues as opposed to just the number of visitors. This can only be achieved by continuing to address product development, packaging and destination management initiatives. The village needs to give visitors a reason to stay longer and spend more money within the region.

To measure tourism growth and the success in achieving the objectives outlined above, the community will use a number of tourism indicators including:

- Fixed roof accommodations room revenue

- Number of visitors to visitor centres in Harrison
- Number of visitors to key attractions (e.g. Public pool Harrison)
- Occupancy data will also be used to determine the success in expanding mid-week and shoulder season visitation
- Value of Tourism – this model provides an estimate of visitor volume and value to a community based on commercial accommodation data from the private sector.

The growth percentages stated above closely track those produced by Tourism BC for revenue growth for the province. (i.e. 4.5% for 2007/08 and 4.8% for 2008/09.). Due to the limited amount of marketing and advertising that will be conducted in 2007, these objectives have been set to commence in 2008.

Specific Measurable Objectives

The action plan contains specific measurable indicators that relate to the individual actions contained within the plan. These should be monitored on a regular basis to ensure any issues are identified early on and addressed immediately.

The action plan will also serve as a working document to monitor and track progress with columns inserted to enter targets and notes regarding implementation.

Other indicators and studies such as:

- Conversion studies for marketing initiatives
- The Value of Tourism Model – to establish baseline data to measure growth in the industry
- Economic Impact Studies for festivals and events
- The website will also be key to tracking and measuring the success of marketing initiatives and gathering consumer information that can be used to market and promote the destination.

Appendix

Long List of Projects considered for Revenue-Sharing Funding

- Hot Springs Source redevelopment
- Spirit Square Plaza
- Village Centre renewal
- Development of parks and trails
- Lakeshore promenade development
- Two new foot bridges over the Miami River at Maple Street and at Walnut
- Redevelopment of the public pool
- Fountains in the lagoon
- Boat launch and mooring;
- Sand Sculpture Society annual competition contingency funding
- Skateboard park
- Public marina
- Sasquatch museum
- Public water park

Community Partners' Endorsement

As representatives of key community organizations within the Village of Harrison Hot Springs, we the undersigned commit our approval and support for this strategy, including our continuing participation in its successful component planning and implementation.

Agassiz-Harrison Chamber of Commerce

Harrison Festival Society

Sandsculpture Society

Tourism Harrison
