

Sitka Economic Forum
April 17, 2012 - 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm
Summary Report

Goal

The goal of the Sitka Economic Forum was to collaborate, and build support for new ideas, particularly ideas that could bring new money into the local economy. The ultimate goal is to improve and stabilize Sitka's economy by generating new economic activity.

Format

The Sitka Economic Forum was promoted throughout the community for a month and all residents were encouraged to participate.

The event opened with a PowerPoint presentation by SEDA's Executive Director, Garry White, providing a brief explanation of how the local economy works, what economic development means and why it is needed to maintain a high quality of life for residents.

A list of some of Sitka's assets was included in the PowerPoint presentation and then the audience came up with additional assets that should be considered.

A set of rules for participation was provided with a request that ideas presented be specific, realistic, and achievable within two years. The two-year time frame was set to encourage near-term economic development activity. However, ideas that may take longer to complete, would be considered.

- Participants were given three minutes to describe their idea to the audience.
- Every idea was summarized and posted on the wall.
- Twenty-one of the participants presented ideas. Some participants provided more than one idea.
- Over thirty-five ideas were posted on the wall.
- Some were closely related and were later combined for the purpose of voting.

After a little over an hour of idea generation, it was re-emphasized that the Sitka Economic Development Association was sponsoring and facilitating the event, but that others would need to step forward as champions for the ideas and as volunteers to move the ideas forward. Anyone willing to be a champion or lead coordinator for an idea was asked to sign their name on the sheet of paper representing that idea. In addition volunteers would be needed to work on creating and implementing an action plan for the projects selected.

There was a break in discussion as people voted on the ideas presented.

Participants

Approximately 70 people were in attendance during the first half of the Forum including:

- Members of the public at large
- Small business owners
- Representatives from the non-profit sector
- Employees from the government sector
- City and Borough of Sitka staff
- Assembly members
- Staff members for both Representative Don Young and Senator Lisa Murkowski

Twenty-one people participated in provided ideas for economic development and forty-one people participated in the voting process to select the top three ideas for immediate action. The audience represented diverse demographics and included:

- Retired residents
- New graduates entering the workforce
- Members of the Sitka Tribe of Alaska
- The self-employed
- Business owners
- Payroll workers from both the private and government sectors

Participant Ideas

Lisa Busch – Sitka Sound Science Center

- Develop educational programs to bring young people back to the community as students.
- Develop marine science field courses for other universities, eventually creating a semester long program.
- Develop a research park/laboratory (i.e. Ted Stevens marine science lab in Juneau). The Gulf of Alaska provides a great research opportunity.

The [Sitka Sound Science Center](#) is already working on these projects, but would like some community support and volunteer help. If you would like to work on any of these projects, please contact Lisa Busch, Executive Director at 747-8878 or via E-mail:

lbusch@sitkasoundsciencecenter.org

David H. Tjomsland

- Worked for USDA Forest Service for 26 years and has experience in the timber industry.
- The collaborative stewardship group needs to be proactive in developing a comprehensive plan that includes small timber sales.
- Opportunities for small timber sales include the Ocean Boulevard thinning project and the Starrigavan valley watershed.

Eugene Solovyov – [Sitka Rose Gallery](#) 747-3030

- Revisit the possibility of a building a deepwater dock downtown that could accommodate a maximum of two cruise ships.
- A dock could be privately funded and owned or be a public-private partnership.
- Put this to a vote on the 2012 October ballot.

Doug Osborne

Requested community support and help with the following:

- Development of affordable housing. The [Sitka Community Development Corporation](#) needs more support and volunteers. Contact Mim McConnell if you would like to help the SCDC. Phone 747-2860 or E-mail: sitkacdc@gmail.com
- Development of a commercial composting facility would reduce the City's cost for sending compostables south, provide a product that could be used/sold locally, and maybe create a job or two.
- Development of a community greenhouse was a project that came from the 2008 Sitka Health Summit and needs more community support and volunteer help to get it going. To help with this project contact Kerry MacLane, President – Sitka Local Foods Network at 752-0654 or E-mail: maclanekerry@yahoo.com

Scott Harris – [Sitka Conservation Society](#), Restoration and Special Projects

- Identify and pursue opportunities related to Tongass National Forest restoration projects. The Sitka Collaborative Stewardship working group is seeking community participation and support to bring more forest restoration projects to the Sitka area.
- Restoration projects create jobs in construction and support the commercial fishing industry by improving salmon spawning habitat within the forest.

If you would like to be a part of the [Sitka Collaborative Stewardship](#) working group or help in some other way, contact Scott Harris at 747-7509 or by E-mail: scott@sitkawild.org or info@collaboratesitka.com

Bob Medinger – [Sitka Historical Society and Museum](#)

- Bring together all visitor related organizations to create branding for Sitka and to develop a marketing campaign targeting independent visitors and conventions.
- Use data mining to build relationships and bring more travel writers (etc....) to Sitka to promote what the community has to offer and to “sell our story.”
- Develop visitor marketing related to Sitka's assets such as the herring fishery and spawn.

John Holst

- Develop the benchlands property for residential housing, including affordable housing.
- The City should offer the lots at their cost and not try to make a profit. Mr. Holst estimated that the City has invested \$22k to \$23k per lot (purchase and development costs).
- Getting the property into private hands will result in economic activity.
- The development requirements for amenities need to be flexible.

Scott Brylinsky

- A large amount of money is leaving Sitka in order to purchase and import fossil fuels. To cut down on this leakage of money from the local economy we should look at opportunities to develop biomass (wood waste/fish waste) fuels for space heating.
- Harvesting for biomass is not economical. However, utilizing by-product biomass should be viable.

- Biomass opportunities may be tied with small timber sales. The primary use of that timber could create a by-product that would be turned into pellet fuel.

Michelle Putz

- Identify businesses that could succeed in Sitka without the need to ship a large amount of raw materials or finished goods. Examples are businesses related to education or high-tech (i.e. computer programming). Work to recruit/or start these new businesses here.
- Develop some targeted marketing campaigns directed at international tourism markets. For example both Japan and Russia have some cultural/historical interest in Alaska.
- There is a need for pet related service businesses in Sitka (i.e. doggy day care).
- Identify and promote services that are available locally and encourage use of these local services to keep more money in town. There are services available in Sitka that residents may not know exist (i.e. website design and management).

John Stein

- Develop a public pellet fuel depot in cooperation with the US Coast Guard pellet fuel project. Buying in bulk would reduce the cost to the public and allow more people to use this alternative fuel for space heating.
- Look into the potential for using liquefied natural gas, instead of diesel, as a fuel for the City's new electric generators.
- Bring broadband access to the Sawmill Cove Industrial Park.
- Campaign to have an increased US Coast Guard presence in Sitka, such as a small boat posted here.
- Consider the area between the former Sheldon Jackson College campus and National Park Service as the location for a deepwater dock.

Zia Brucaya – [Sitka Conservation Society](#)

- Provide assistance to small businesses and entrepreneurs to help them take advantage of opportunities in the Tongass National Forest.
- Encourage the US Forest Service to capture restoration projects for the Sitka area.
- An asset and opportunity map of the Tongass is being developed. Anyone wanting to help with this project should contact Zia Brucaya at 747-7509 or E-mail: zia@sitkawild.org

Ted Wright – [Sitka Tribe of Alaska](#)

- The Sitka Tribe of Alaska has some significant assets, but needs partners to help market those assets. For example:
 - Seafood from the Sitka Tribe could be marketed to casinos and resorts.
 - The Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahídi community house could be marketed as a place for corporate retreats.

Any person or organization wishing to partner with STA to help market their assets, please contact Ted Wright at Sitka Tribe of Alaska 747- 3207.

Craig Shoemaker – [Seafood Producers Cooperative](#)

- Support existing businesses and keep them healthy.

- Permits currently in effect that allow for the disposal of fish waste will become increasingly difficult to renew. The fish waste now being ground up and dumped is a liability that could become an asset.
- Develop a fish-meal plant or other processing plant to utilize fish waste from Sitka's seafood processors (and maybe regional processors).
- Consider an incinerator for Sitka's trash that could provide waste heat to power the fish-meal plant.
- The City needs to support this effort.

Cheryl Westover – [City and Borough of Sitka](#)

- New EPA regulations will require the use of low-sulfur diesel within 200 miles of the Alaska coastline. This will not only pose a huge burden and challenge to the cruise industry it will affect all shipping coming into Sitka, including barges. This will increase the cost of all products imported into the community. The City Assembly needs to pass a resolution stating that Sitka supports allowing the use of the current, standard diesel fuels by ships entering the port.
- Work to bring more conventions and meetings to Sitka in conjunction with the expansion of Centennial Hall.
- Create a business cooperative to purchase items that residents want and use in order to buy in bulk and reduce costs.

Dan Jones

- Develop a commercial fishing vessel harbor to support the local fishing fleet and attract other commercial fishing vessels to home-port here.

To support and participate in this project, contact Dan Jones 738-6998 or E-mail: danielgjonespe@gci.net

Kerry MacLane – [Sitka Local Foods Network](#)

- Develop a community greenhouse and botanical garden to serve as a horticultural education center, produce food locally, and serve as a visitor attraction.
- Look at geothermal potential located in Fish Bay. This location could be accessible by connecting to the proposed road to the Katlian Bay quarry.
- Combine the fish-waste from the seafood processors and woody biomass by-product to create compost that could be used and sold locally.
- Encourage energy conservation. Money spent on wasted energy not only leaks out of the community but is needed to develop other businesses, such as a community greenhouse and commercial greenhouses.

To participate in these projects contact Kerry MacLane 752-0654 or E-mail: maclanekerry@yahoo.com

Mike Reif – [Sitka Assembly](#) member

- The City needs community participation to conserve electricity and to support the utility rate increase that is needed to encourage conservation and to fund development of additional electric capacity.
- The City needs support for harbor maintenance projects and the coming rate increases that are needed to pay for harbor repair and upkeep. The harbors are vital to the

community and to the commercial fishing industry that provides a huge amount of economic activity that benefits the community.

- Support the move and expansion of the seaplane base. This could bring in new seaplane operations.
- All businesses and residents should keep a welcoming hand out and actively promote a friendly business climate.
- Baranof Brewery is ramping up production and looking at the possibility of exporting its product outside of Sitka. So let's drink local.

Philip Rupell

- Seek alternative bulk water sales. One current obstacle to exporting bulk water is the lack of a deepwater dock at Sawmill Cove Industrial Park. Water is one thing we have that could bring a lot of revenues to the City, if we can move it.
- Consider boats or float houses as a part of the effort to develop affordable housing.
- Downtown businesses should consider changing their winter hours to be open from noon to 8:00pm to capture more local business from folks that work during the day.

Tam Fondell - [Goldsmith Gallery](#)

- Look at development of a deepwater dock downtown.
- Find a way to get the cruise ships to drop anchor close to town. When they anchor closer to town it decreases the time it takes to tender people to shore and more passengers get off and have more time in town. This has proven to increase spending in town. Work to get the closest anchorage possible.

John Young

- Connect the trail system from Sawmill Cove Industrial Park to the Ferry Terminal creating a trail loop.
- Develop special trails for mountain bikes.
- Develop some unusual outdoor activities that are on par with Hoonah's zipline.
- Identify and market Sitka's outdoor recreational opportunities.

Tonia Rioux – [Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau](#)

- Complete a destination branding study that focuses on getting outside opinions from the visitor's viewpoint to create a more focused, marketable message. Ketchikan is working on a branding project for marketing their community.
- Support funding for infrastructure projects.

Garry White – [Sitka Economic Development Association](#)

- SEDA has applied for a grant to contract with a business development specialist to help people with business start-ups and small business expansion. If the grant is approved, SEDA will announce the availability of these services.

Contact Garry White, Executive Director – SEDA, 747-2660 or E-mail: garrywhite@gci.net

Project Selection and Voting Results

A summary of each idea presented was posted on the wall and the audience was invited to vote for their top priority project(s) to move forward.

Each participant was given three stickers: orange worth three points, pink worth two points, and green worth one point. Participants placed their stickers on the sheets for the project that they most wanted to move forward. After the voting period closed, each project was given a score based on the point value of the stickers on the sheet for that project. The projects were scored as follows.

Project/Idea	Score
Affordable House: develop benchlands, boat housing, etc...	61
Agency partnership to market Sitka combined with the branding study	29
Downtown Deepwater Dock	28
Commercial Fishing Harbor	26
Waste to Energy: fish by-product	23
Semester courses by outside universities (SSSC)	14
Commercial greenhouse	12
Community greenhouse	8
Small timber sales	7
Develop biomass industry	6
Recruit New Industry that does not require shipping of goods	4
Full stream recycling	4
Improve business climate	4
Alternative bulk water sales	3
Develop infrastructure resources responsibly	3
Commercial composting	2
Reduce large ship regulations: new EPA low sulfur fuel	2
Scientific research park/lab	2
Local community business co-op	1
Drink Local	1
Specialized outdoor recreation: i.e. connected trail system	1
Asset/Opportunity mapping for the Sitka Ranger District	1
Energy conservation	1
Promote Local Business	0
Renewable Energy other than hydro	0
Winter downtown business hours noon to 8pm	0
Increase Broadband Presence	0
Support restoration projects	0
International tour marketing: Japan, Russia...	0
Mandate closer lightering for cruise ships	0
Discount cards for cruise passengers	0
Partnership development to market Sitka Tribal assets	0
Seaplane base	0
Increase Coast Guard presence	0

Project Action

After project scoring, participants broke into three groups to create action plans for the top three projects.

The top three projects selected for action were:

1. **Development of affordable housing.** This includes development of the benchlands and the boat/float house ideas that were combined under this broader project and scored together. Combined points received = 61

Contact:

2. **Development of agency/organization partnerships to market Sitka** and the idea to do a branding study were combined into one. Combined points received = 29

Contact: Tonia Rioux, Sitka Convention & Visitors Bureau 747-5940

3. **Development of a deepwater dock downtown** received 28 points.

- An idea was brought forward to combine the commercial fishing harbor and deepwater dock into one project by expanding Crescent Harbor and adding a deepwater dock along the relocated breakwater. This idea will be considered further. Development of a commercial fishing harbor received 26 points and ranked fourth on the scoring list.
- The idea of mandating that cruise ships anchor as close to town as possible was also adopted by the group working on this project.

Contact: Tam Fondell 747-5744 – deepwater dock component

Contact: Dan Jones 738-6998 - commercial fishing harbor component

Many of the projects that did not score in the top three are still being pursued at varying levels and anyone interested in helping move them forward is encouraged to do so. For example, SEDA has been working toward the utilization of Sitka's fish waste for several years and will continue to support this effort. The current Strategic Plan for SEDA includes development of affordable housing as a priority.

Event Promotion

Posters advertising the event were distributed throughout the community a month in advance and the event was promoted on both Raven Radio and KIFW. Public service announcements were published in the newspaper and a paid, display advertisement was in the newspaper on Friday, April 13, 2012. The event was announced on SEDA's Facebook page and an invitation to participate was posted on the SEDA website at www.sitka.net/sedanews. In addition people were invited via the Sitka Trends economic newsletter sent via e-mail to over 350 people in March with a second e-mail invitation sent to a list of small business owners the week before the event. A number of business owners in town were also contacted personally and invited to participate. The event was announced and promoted at the Economic Summit held by the Greater Sitka Chamber of Commerce on April 11, 2012. The SEDA Executive Director was interviewed on

KCAW, Raven Radio the week before the event and the interview was posted on the Raven Radio website. The event was included on KCAW's website community calendar and on the announcements bulletin board on www.sitka.com.