

Report on Attendance at *Opportunities North*
Whitehorse, Yukon
October 7-8, 2014

By Debra Schnabel, Assembly Member

Opportunities North was a regional conference sponsored by the Yukon Chamber of Commerce. Its purpose was to update industry on developing opportunities and threats and to provide a forum for governments and industry to exchange ideas and collaborate in planning for development of the north. The theme of the conference was **Pushing Boundaries**.

Inspirational Bring-Back: The most interesting comment on the theme of the conference was made by Mr. Ken Coates, a public commentator, historian and professor. He suggested that pushing boundaries is passive action, and that sometimes one must explode a boundary to make any significant change. It made me think about the courage it takes to do something different. Another speaker made a related point: Incremental investments in government programs are not adequate to generate change...sometimes you have to step back and take a full swing...“It’s the difference between shooting with a rifle, when you make a consequential hole that requires attention vs. shooting with a shotgun when the impact may be wider, but it is only an irritation.. “

Vision: Mr. Perrin Beatty, President and CEO, Canadian Chamber of Commerce
Government is positioned to focus on infrastructure, and make those investments that benefit the economy overall. Energy, transportation and mineral exploration are all subsets of resource development and the *basis* of economic development. Resist the temptation to separate projects; the vision for a vibrant economy must be held “in the window” because all development is movement toward a vision. “Every single citizen has a vested interest in seeing their community prosper.”

Issues important to the Haines Borough:

(1) Communications (and Potential for Broadband)

Stan Selmer, former Mayor of Skagway and currently a consultant to AP&T reported to me that last week AP&T submitted its application for a permit to extend its fiber optic cable from Haines where it now terminates to Juneau, along the Lynn Canal. The purpose of the extension is to provide “redundancy” for fiber optic-driven data in the Yukon. Redundancy is another word for security, or “back-up.”

Northwestel owns communications infrastructure in Yukon and NWT. Curtis Shaw, VP Consumer Market challenged the proposal to extend the fiber optic cable into Alaska to provide redundancy for Yukon. He advanced the idea that Yukon needs to create rings of fiber optic networks within the boundaries of Canada.

I am unsure how the extension of the fiber optic cable relates to our having broadband capability, but this discussion was an opportunity to draw attention to our desire to upgrade, and get the attention of AP&T. Mr. Selmer expressed surprise that Haines did not now have broadband, because it is his belief that the termination of the cable in Haines would currently allow for it. **Follow-up required.**

See **Knowledge Economy** report section below.

(2) Transportation and Port Development: Skagway's Gateway Project (and opportunity to Haines port)
Dr. Chad P Gubala , consultant to Skagway's Gateway Project, which aims over the long term to provide means for intermodal shipment of goods between Skagway and Inuvik (an identified site for port development to serve shipping in the Arctic Ocean) reported on the project. Skagway is challenged to restructure its ports for handling mining industry cargo and commodities while retaining the tourism industry (cruise ships). The project recently got a jump-start due to its qualification for the federal Brownfields Redevelopment Program. Remediation of lead-contaminated soils remaining under the port from the days when Faro Mine was operational will provide material for the reconstruction of the existing ore terminal and an expanded dock. The existing ore terminal will be relocated under a roofed facility. When the Moore Bridge out of Skagway and the narrow bridge in Carcross are rehabilitated and or replaced in (scheduled) 2017, Skagway will have the capability to offering a complete Roll-On, Roll-Off corridor to feed the supply chain to the Arctic.

Some predict that the Gateway Project does not have the ability to overcome the non-compatibility of priorities of the mining and tourism industries. **Important for Haines Borough to maintain connection with mineral industry on the west side of the Alaska Highway and with cruise industry.**

(3) Tourism (some thoughts to plan by)

The necessary components of a profitable destination: Awareness, Access, Product

(4) Knowledge Economy

Several people including Currie Dixon, the Minister of Economic Development for Yukon spoke about the knowledge economy in this way: exploit internal knowledge for export. The knowledge economy is fostered by telecommunications. "Just as government invests in traditional infrastructure, the government has a responsibility to invest in fiberoptics, the highway of a digital economy."

Northwest Territories is building a strategic plan for economics on the belief that a strong economy is built on small business and grass roots initiatives. This seems to ring for Haines, so I offer its terms of reference for economic development:

- A. Attitude: be ready to engage all sectors (aboriginal, new residents)
- B. Blueprint: Have a plan
- C. Commitment: take the steps to implement the plan

1. Create a climate for growth of small business: attract and keep people, especially young people
2. Have government investment in infrastructure that supports small business
3. Support entrepreneurship
4. Build on local resources...work with what you have. Building on local natural resources will foster knowledge-based supportive industries.

"Mines are big, but it is a diverse economy that keeps people in town."

(5) Note: There were several mind-blowing presentations made on development and the future of geopolitics and commerce in the north. These should be available on the Yukon Chamber of Commerce website soon.