

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

A SWOT analysis is a summary of the key internal and external factors that are influencing the economic development of the community. The SWOT is not exhaustive, but rather a summary of the main points that have been highlighted by community participants in focus group analysis, or in research.

After reviewing the SWOT, community participants should ask “Does this list accurately reflect the key economic development issues in Delta today?”

Strengths

- Rural, farming areas
- Environmental awareness
- History of agriculture and fishing
- Good schools
- Low crime
- Wildlife and parkland
- Affluent area with nice homes
- Large industrial parks
- Strong community business groups, service clubs
- Large and cooperative social network
- Strategic location

Delta is an attractive place to live. It is close to the city but not in it. Residents talk about the relaxing, rural euphoria that they feel when they come through the tunnel and pop up into Delta. The farmland, the fields, the river shore, Bog and estuaries, the wildlife and parkland all contribute to this feel of clean air and open spaces, that is unique to Delta.

Delta enjoys low crime; good schools and is an affluent area. Family is important in Delta. Residents enjoy strong social and community groups that offer varied and well-supported services, for children and families. Examples of community spirit include the Sun Festival, Outdoor Markets, Quilt Walk and Car Show, May Day Parade, North Delta Days and many others. Delta has a strong sense of community.

History is important in Delta. The community has a strong tradition in farming and fishing. Many heritage buildings in Delta survive.

Economically, Delta has strengths in agriculture, manufacturing and transportation. It is strategically located as a rail terminus and major international port. BC Ferries has a major facility in Delta. Boundary Bay Airport is a major center for light aircraft. Delta is home to 2 of the largest industrial parks in British Columbia. The warm climate, high sunlight hours and rich soil have contributed to a strong farming industry that has recently seen growth in the greenhouse sector.

Weaknesses

- Lack of a single downtown core – 4 different communities separated by culture and distance
- Traffic - trucks, ferry traffic and commuter
- Inter-governmental relationships
- Perception of safety issues in North Delta
- Lack of residential growth, closing of schools
- Spending leakages and retail decline
- Lack of village character in Tsawwassen
- Lack of local post secondary education
- Lack of jobs in Delta causing long commutes
- Lack of land outside ALR
- Lack of affordable housing for young families, seniors
- Lack of encouragement for development
- Greenhouse concerns

Delta behaves more like a regional district than a single municipality. Town centers each have their own issues and priorities. This dispersion requires more resources to administer, more issues to resolve and fewer opportunities for economies of scale.

Transportation is a major issue for Deltans. Deltans commute to work outside of their community more than any other municipality in British Columbia. Transportation infrastructure has not kept up with population growth in the Lower Mainland. Tunnel traffic into Vancouver and Richmond is a major frustration for businesses and commuters alike. There are no immediate plans to increase capacity at the Massey Tunnel. Port expansion has greatly increased truck traffic and caused community safety concerns.

Farms in Delta are feeling increasing pressure. Farm viability is threatened by road expansions, residential encroachment, an inability to effectively move farm vehicles on roads, closure of local processors (longer distances to market) and global competition. Delta is one of the slowest growing municipalities in the Lower Mainland. School enrolment is declining and the rate of decline is expected to increase. The population of Delta is aging, most rapidly in Tsawwassen.

Retail spending leakages are occurring as residents increasingly shop in neighbouring communities, where they feel they can get better selection and better prices. Retailers offering family oriented services are finding it increasingly difficult to compete, as their customer base erodes. North Delta is the only community that is forecast to grow.

However there is a perception that safety is a major issue that is hurting retail growth in North Delta.¹

Opportunities

- Port and transportation expansion
- Eco-tourism in the river delta, sloughs, Burns Bog, bird sanctuary and waterfront
- Tourism gateway development (e.g. to BC Ferry destinations)
- Agricultural industry expansion, especially value-added food processing
- Industrial park expansion
- Heritage-themed downtown development in Ladner
- GVRD population growth and housing demand
- Mixed-used commercial/residential property development
- First Nations land settlement and development
- Post secondary education (Agri., Trades, Tourism)
- Commuter airport development
- 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games
- Small business supply to major companies (BC Ferries, Port)
- Marketing of education facilities to out-of-region students
- Regional shopping center in North Delta

There are many opportunities for Delta to increase jobs and community wealth.

The transportation cluster in the community is undergoing unprecedented growth. The Port of Vancouver would like to grow the container business at Deltaport by 50% by 2012. Beyond 2012, a second container terminal is planned that would increase capacity at Roberts Bank and allow container business to grow by a further 100% by 2020.

Ancillary services in maintenance, service, storage and trucking will add many other jobs. Tsawwassen First Nation has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Port to participate in this expansion. Boundary Bay Airport is poised for a major expansion as a commuter hub for Lower Mainland travelers, and to take traffic away from the South Terminal at YVR. A new agreement between the City and the Airport will allow development to proceed.

The agricultural community would like to work closely with Delta to remove barriers that are hindering growth and competitiveness. There are opportunities and issues in on-farm processing, improved traffic bylaws, agri-tourism and on-farm labour housing.²

¹ Focus group comment from North Delta retailers regarding a recent shoppers' survey.

² Comments from agricultural focus group.

Tilbury needs a solution to traffic problems that are preventing the timely movement of goods and people from the industrial park. Access issues impede development. Tilbury would also like to see commercial/retail development to provide services, i.e. banking, restaurants, and dentists for tenants. This might require a mixed-use development with residential space as well in the industrial park.³

The Delsom estates residential development in North Delta will add 800-1000 new housing units to the community. Retail/commercial redevelopment along Scott Road may reduce concerns about safety and provide a regional shopping cluster to keep more retail dollars in Delta. Ladner has redevelopment opportunities in the downtown around a heritage and eco-tourism theme. The Ladner waterfront could attract destination tourism, similar to La Connor, Washington. Tsawwassen's retail and commercial core is lacking in character and requires themed mix use development. It should be stressed that any retail development must be accompanied by a plan for managed community growth, to stimulate demand for retail space.

Eco tourism is a big opportunity for Delta. It would enhance the viability of parkland and nature preserves. Birding is a growing pastime. Burns Bog, Deas Park, Reifel Bird Sanctuary and the Ladner waterfront are all accessible by canoe, kayak, boat, bicycle or trail.

³ Recommendation from industrial park tenants focus group.

The Smart Growth Opportunity

The issues of accommodation urban growth and protecting farmland and the environment are not unique to Delta. In the United States, a sophisticated support system has been developed to assist communities in dealing with these issues. Smart Growth America is the umbrella organization working to achieve sustainable urban development.

(www.smartgrowthamerica.com)

Principles of Smart Growth

- Mixed land uses
- Compact building design
- Walkable neighbourhoods
- Concentrating new growth into existing areas
- Enhancing the range of housing options (more affordable, appropriate, accessible)
- Fostering distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Linking new development to public transit and other transportation options
- Using Demand Management techniques that reduce the amount of a service or resource used, rather than simply increasing its supply
- Integrating storm water management with stream corridor and riparian area protection strategies
- Reducing the overall amount of impervious surfaces, while maximizing the use of public open spaces as rain-water catchment areas
- Preserving and linking greenways, open spaces, farmland, and environmentally sensitive areas
- Ensuring effective citizen participation in development decisions

“Smart growth is well-planned development that protects open space and farmland, revitalizes communities, keeps housing affordable and provides more transportation options.”

Source – Smart Growth America

Impacts of Smart Growth

- Succeeds economically, attracts businesses and a skilled workforce
- Consumes less water and land, causes less pollution, preserves farms and wildlife habitat
- Creates more options in transportation, affordable housing and jobs for residents
- Encourages greater participation in community planning

Communities in British Columbia that wish to incorporate principles of Smart Growth have support. Smart Growth BC (www.smartgrowth.bc.ca) is a provincial non-

governmental organization founded to promote responsible, sustainable urban development principles and practices throughout BC. Many communities are working with the agency to develop urban growth strategies to accommodate growth, yet preserve and protect agricultural and environmentally sensitive areas.

“Good, affordable housing is the foundation of communities. Without it, it is difficult for people to sustain a healthy, active and participatory community life.”

Source - Smart Growth BC

Threats

- Loss of existing employers due to transportation access issues
- Development community investing elsewhere
- Stagnant or declining tax base
- Declining school enrollment, loss of population based community services
- Un-resolved concerns with greenhouse industry
- Un-resolved concerns with First Nations, provincial government

Delta faces some serious threats to its economic viability.

The residential population is not growing and industrial areas while large are currently unable to grow. The municipal government has done a good job in matching municipal revenues to expenditures to date, and kept tax increases to moderate levels. However, unless some growth occurs soon, taxes in the community will inevitably go up. The family nature of Ladner and Tsawwassen is being compromised. Population is aging, school enrolment is declining and there is little affordable, starter housing available for young families. Retail services for families are on the decline. Hospital services have been reduced. As schools and stores close and services diminish, the nature of these communities will change. Less and less government money from taxation will be available to support families with community infrastructure (libraries, community centers, etc).

Developers have indicated a troublesome ‘business climate in Delta that is not conducive to project development’⁴. Concerns center around uncertainty and lack of timely decision making. Neighbouring municipalities of Langley and Surrey encourage development by pre-zoning, and market themselves to the development industry. The development industry is competitive. Developers invest where they see a supportive business climate that actively helps them to move projects ahead.

The transportation access issues in Delta are a challenge for local industrial park tenants. It is difficult to get goods or people in and out of the park. Delta is losing business expansions and jobs, and is unable to attract new investment. ‘River Road has become a parking lot’⁵.

Delta and the business community do not do a good job in proactive communication. Un-resolved concerns exists with the local First Nation, the provincial government and the agricultural community. Some of these tensions are bound to take place, as different points of view prevail. However, without communication and goodwill, gaps widen and points of view become more polarized, and dialogue does not have a forum to begin.

⁴ Focus group comment from developers.

⁵ Focus group comment from industrial park tenant.