

Port Alice: - Post Visit Observations and Thoughts

By A.S.Wright

I would like to commence this brief report by stating that it was a privilege to be invited to the community of Port Alice for the purpose of discussing the possible development of closed containment aquaculture. Breaking bread with such a committed group of individuals that are passionate about invigorating their community was indeed an honor.

During the course of the visit and brain storming session many ideas for building economic diversification and enduring resilience, including aquaculture, were aired. Many of these ideas, if not all, were of merit. As an “out of townner” (as opposed to “city slicker”) I was humbled by the complexity of the issues and impressed by the depth of understanding and knowledge offered by the community leaders. The experience has strengthened my belief that solutions that come from within are always more valuable than those that are imposed by well meaning “data and knowledge ignorant” outsiders. So in the spirit of observation here are my thoughts, little of this will be new to the councilors, for they are well briefed and engaged. For the record here are my observations and thoughts.

Observations and Thoughts

Stating the obvious

- The situation in Port Alice is highly constrained by a lack of capital to invoke change.
- There are many great business ideas that are constrained by lack of supporting services and infrastructure
- The number of good ideas dramatically exceeds the means to support a few solid ideas.

Faced with this situation I would be tempted to tackle the “filtering” of ideas and the development of a rejuvenation strategy in the following manner. To guide the development of strategy I would collect core data on the ensemble of ideas presented in a simple matrix / spread sheet. For each idea I would then execute a rough and ready assessment of the needs of each project across a range of parameters that make sense for Port Alice. A suggested list of starting parameters would be;

- Capital costs
- Local skill sets
- Dependence upon symbiotic businesses (hotels, accommodations, etc)
- Seasonal dependence
- Community value defined by permanent local jobs, tax base etc

Once this collection of data is then organized I would then re-order/sort business ideas and community projects into collective sets that support or build on each other. (An idea should be able to belong to more than one group). This then is the core data that can be used to guide and help shape the development of an execution strategy.

On the strategy front when faced with a lack of capital I only have one experience to draw upon and that was when I started my company with my friend and business partner. We essentially boot strapped ourselves by cashing RRSPs and spending every penny we had until we started to see success. With respect to Port Alice I draw a parallel in the following manner; - from the constructed table of ideas I would look to a find a set of ideas or theme that has a range of ideas that span from small community led

endeavors to broad full scale businesses. Hopefully the grouping or collation process identifies those small projects that could be initiated with the finite resources of the community and perhaps some small grants. As success builds these small endeavors becomes the framework for broader endeavors and substantial businesses that develop jobs, skills, depth of community and a broader tax base. A concrete example that reflects this idea was the adoption of a marine biology theme that emerged during the discussions.

- Starting with a small aquarium and afterschool program like the aquarium in Ucluelet
- Leverage the reputation for the diverse marine biology of the area - the community could appropriate an abandoned house or facility to start an easily accessible field station for VIU/SFU/UBC/UVIC.
- The field station builds outreach engagement for visitors to Port Alice
- Field station staff train guides for eco-tourism.
- As the field station matures biological skill sets become spread through the community – these individuals could then consider building in-ocean shellfish aquaculture businesses that ultimately may lead to the original idea of land based closed containment salmon farming.
- The production of food locally allows for a north island eating experience to be developed that helps support the Port Alice visitor experience and contribute to a growing marine biology tourism sector.

I was incredibly impressed by the community's observation that enriching the school program could prove to be a huge investment for both the pulp mill and the community by being a draw to the region. By creating an enriched best in class science program that could "set your kids up for life" would be a huge and easily achieved endeavor that draws prospective employees to the community. Ten years ago I started a science outreach program at Science World for the local inner-city schools. Now ten years later this reaches over 800 kids with a six year rolling curriculum. The program has an outreach package that helps remote communities start and develop their own super science clubs – I have touched base with science world and they would love to help Port Alice get going should this be of interest. This would be an incredibly cost effective way of getting going and a great framework to be adapted with a marine biology theme, forestry theme, chemical engineering (around the pulp mill) etc. For me personally this powerful idea made the trip very worthwhile for it is an incredibly important idea for rejuvenating small communities. If this idea is fostered I would council that the pulp mills current philanthropic giving to the community is channeled to be consistent with this vision – rather than well meaning but adhoc sporadic asks. This then allows the development of proud multi-year giving to the community because the support also assists the mill.

So that's a summary of the brainstorming from my perspective – below is a list of all the ideas for businesses that I recall we discussed. Please remember I am just an engineer who built a high tech company – trivial when compared to the challenges of Port Alice so please do not hang on my thoughts to heavily for I am not skilled in the art of building communities. Once again many thanks for the privilege of spending time in your community. If you think my input can help I would be delighted to return to your community.

Andrew S. Wright.

Standalone Business Ideas (with no order other than mental recall)

- Exploit eco-tourism for wildlife and out door experiences
 - Bears, fish, salmon, otters, whales and sea lions – all cute mega fauna that folks will pay to see
- Fly fishing and river fishing destination – needs creature comfort infrastructure to be developed.
- Kayaking and canoe destination – mothership/crew boat support. Build camp sites at easy paddling destinations and deliver tents and food as required to make for creature comfort glamping trip!
- Use the yacht clubs facilities for a few years to facilitate water based eco tourism before committing to building the marina
- Use the yacht clubs facilities for a few years to facilitate marketing the community as a cruising destination –perhaps a few dollars to invest in the yacht club for facilities and improved mooring allows for the marketing to be supported – in return after a few years the club owns the new assets and the town has the confidence to build a full marina.
- Build the marina as demand grows rather than build and hope they come.
- Start a community lead after school/in school super science club with the help of science world's export package as a means to start the school enrichment and attract employees locally to the mill.
- A community greenhouse growing fresh produce and heated by wood waste and perhaps collocated at the pulp mill for waste heat or built in the heart of town to provide easy access
- Wood carving workshops by your resident carver for the more arty tourists
- A simple ocean front aquarium and visitor experience like that in Ucluelet – it has been a huge success. I am happy to introduce you to my contact there. Adopt the old tanks from Crystal Waters!
- Community scale in-ocean shell fish farm – started with the help of VIU right in the community so you can row to the farm
- VIU undergraduate and postgraduate marine biology field station
- VIU undergraduate and postgraduate forest biology field station – don't forget the forests! Value in studying recovering second cut farmed forests.
- Field station training program for eco-tourist naturalist guides
- Local forestry 4x4 guided tours – heart of the north island backcountry experience
- Closed containment small scale salmon farming at crystal waters with marine harvests assistance.
- Take wild and land based farmed fish + produce from greenhouse to build a north island phenomenal eating experience. Need a back country loving celebrity chief.
- Logging and pulp mill tours – very popular with older folks
- Forestry value add – after school shop carpentry and furniture making program,
- High end furniture and wood products
- With all the heavy equipment in the area – perhaps a heavy equipment skills program could be developed.
 - Hey – why not come and drive a logging truck at the weekend experience destination! Not sure what the liability on that might look like.