



Elk Valley
Economic Initiative

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INVESTMENT, and LAND:
FIRST POINT OF CONTACT REPORT**

Taylor Jenkins
EVEI Coordinator
Elk Valley Economic Initiative

January 19th, 2023

Introduction

As part of the Elk Valley Economic Recovery Advisor – 6-month extension workplan, the EVEI Coordinator was tasked with presenting a report to the EVEI committee on findings from EVEI members on first point(s) of contact for new business / development inquiries.

This task coincides with Focus Area 3 in the 2021-22 EVEI Strategic Plan: Business Investment & Attraction – Identify opportunities to strengthen initial point of contact and follow up with investors. Two strategic areas of focus from this were “Investment Preparedness” and “Business and Investment Attraction”.

The EVEI Coordinator has separated the report into 3 categories that were identified when conducting research through EVEI committee interviews, Selkirk College reports, and data from the 2021 EVEI local business retention and expansion survey. Each category is accompanied by action items that the EVEI, or its member organizations, should take to improve investment preparedness and business & investment attraction in the Elk Valley.

The first two categories were obtained from Selkirk Innovates “Investment Readiness Assessment – Elk Valley Corridor” report, published in 2020, and listed as key investment preparedness items. EVEI members were interviewed in June 2020 for this report.

- 1) Economic Development Contacts**
- 2) Navigating Municipal Development and Business Regulations**

Based on the 2021 Elk Valley Business Retention and Expansion survey data, the EVEI Coordinator included a third investment preparedness item to feature:

- 3) Land Awareness & Industrial Land**

- 1. Economic Development Contacts**

The findings and opportunities sections below are sourced directly from the RDI “Investment Readiness Assessment – Elk Valley Corridor”.

“A foundational component of investment preparedness is having a designated and knowledgeable point of contact to respond to investor inquiries and facilitate access to information about local investment opportunities.” (2)

Findings

All three Elk Valley communities have designated contacts for economic development inquiries, but this is not necessarily widely understood or known within the local community.

Opportunities

- Increase awareness of designated contacts for local economic development inquiries within and between Elk Valley communities.
- Assess need to formalize the role of the EVEI coordinator in responding to corridor-level economic development inquiries.

EVEI Representative Questions

Based on the 2002 Investment Readiness report and the “Opportunities” listed above by Selkirk Innovates, the EVEI Coordinator contacted each EVEI representative to understand how new business and development inquiries are currently funneled and how they would like to see the first point of contact managed moving forward.

The EVEI Coordinator asked committee members five questions to identify opportunities for improvement around new business and development inquiries. The five questions asked were:

- 1) If the (specific EVEI committee member) receives a new business inquiry, how is that dealt with?
- 2) How does the (specific EVEI committee member) and the (corresponding EVEI member) work together on this?
- 3) Are there opportunities to improve this process?
- 4) How would you like to see the first point of contact managed moving forward?
- 5) What role can the EVEI play in the first point of contact?

The answers provide by EVEI voting members were varied, however there were items that aligned regionally. **Increasing collaboration, communication, and transparency were highlighted by respondents as ways to improve the first point of contact for new businesses.** The below action items are sourced from EVEI committee member answers to the first four questions.

Action Items:

- The EVEI committee should discuss whether the Chambers of Commerce should receive a yearly “new business list” and standardize the practice in the region. The EVEI could use these lists to collect data on types and amounts of new business coming to the Elk Valley.
- EVEI Coordinator could facilitate a meeting between representatives of each community to discuss how communication and collaboration can be improved for new business inquiries and share their current practices.

For question 5, members hesitated to recommend a specific role for the EVEI Coordinator to play in development inquiries, pointing to issues around perceived fairness, differences in communities, and the lack of organizational capacity of the EVEI.

Overall, it was recommended that the EVEI Coordinator, or the Economic Development Officer (EDO), be involved in economic development inquiries as a support role, by providing Elk Valley data and keeping the EVEI, and its member organizations, updated on current development inquiries. Developing regional resources was highlighted as an important role, allowing EVEI members to point developers towards the EVEI as a regional hub for information.

Action Items:

- The EVEI Coordinator has updated the “resources” page on the EVEI website to include relevant economic development contact information for each community and outlined first point of contacts for economic development in the Elk Valley.
- Municipalities should ensure that their municipal website states who the first point of contact is and include contact details in an easy to find manner.
- Municipalities and Chambers of Commerce could include the EVEI Coordinator / EDO in local economic development inquiries to provide regional support, data, and information sharing.

2. Navigating Municipal Development and Business Regulations

The findings section below is sourced directly from the RDI “Investment Readiness Assessment – Elk Valley Corridor”.

“Communities with clear, streamlined development approval processes help minimize risk for developers, convey clear expectations for developers and residents alike, and communicate that they are “open for business”. (3)

Findings

Municipal, chamber, and business sector respondents from all three communities indicated that there are opportunities to update and streamline their regulatory frameworks for business and development to facilitate investment.

Municipalities indicated that while there are opportunities to update and streamline regulatory frameworks, they did not see this as a beneficial collaborative effort.

Action Items:

- Municipalities should review their economic development webpages and update them to include all relevant information. The EVEI Coordinator could audit each municipalities economic development website content and make recommended changes, and ensure consistent messaging about the EVEI, ICBL’s and regional investment opportunities.
- The EVEI, in partnership with the Chambers of Commerce should identify where improved education and online resources for building permits on municipality websites could reduce wait times for building permits and user errors on application for.

3. Land Awareness & Industrial Land

A. Land Awareness

The 2021 Elk Valley BRE Report had an action item that stated:



ASSISTANCE WITH IDENTIFYING AND SECURING NEW SITES

In 2019 an employment lands inventory research project was conducted by Selkirk College on behalf of the Regional District of the East Kootenay and is available online. The EVEI should explore creating a webpage to highlight this resource, discuss who will update pertinent information, and identify appropriate contact information for businesses that are looking to identify and secure new business sites.

This action item was sourced from local business data, most notably the below question and data table:

What are the major barriers for your expansion?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Local regulations	12.80% 21
Finance	26.22% 43
Lack of skilled staff	39.63% 65
Availability of appropriately zoned and/or serviced land	16.46% 27
Availability of buildings for lease or purchase	26.22% 43
No barriers	13.41% 22
Other (please specify)	Responses 14.63% 24
Total Respondents: 164	

After completing research around land inventories, it was determined that keeping the “RDEK [Employment Land Inventory](#)” updated was not the preferred method of the EVEI municipalities. Instead, they would rather focus on their own specific land inventories.

Action Items:

- The EVEI Coordinator has created a webpage under “resources” called “Elk Valley Land Inventories” which highlights land inventories including agricultural land.
- Municipalities should ensure their own land inventories are easy found on their websites, which can coincide with the economic development website updates listed above.
- The EVEI Coordinator should include questions about land and land inventory mapping to realtors when completing interviews for the Realtor report.

B. Industrial Land

When reviewing the quantitative data from the 2021 Elk Valley Business Retention and Expansion survey, the EVEI coordinator noticed multiple business comments around industrial land.

BRE qualitative data from local businesses

- No incentives from local and regional governments to attract developers to build much needed commercial space or to improve and enhance existing business/commercial landscape or planning for future growth. Specifically light industrial 2500 sq/ft or greater.
- Why municipalities are not involved in creating more commercial and industrial land for development is hard to understand.
- Industrial zoned property is too limited. How can we expand without property to do so?
- Not enough industrial units in town.
- Industrial land availability (is a barrier to growth).
- Need more available light industrial land ready for development.
- Would like to have a shop and a big enough yard to store material and equipment, but no land or shop space is available or affordable.

Action Items:

- The EVEI could lead a joint initiative with the three chambers of commerce to contact business that use or require light industrial land to build on this data set and share the findings with the EVEI Committee.
- The EVEI Coordinator could then schedule a meeting with the EVEI municipal voting members and relevant parties to discuss industrial land and possible regional approaches to increasing the supply of industrial land in the Elk Valley.

SUMMARY

Overall, it was recommended that the EVEI Coordinator, or the Economic Development Officer (EDO), be involved in economic development inquiries as a support role, by providing Elk Valley data and keeping the EVEI, and its member organizations, updated on current development inquiries. Developing regional resources was highlighted as an important role, allowing EVEI members to point developers towards the EVEI as a regional hub for information.

Increasing collaboration, communication, and transparency were highlighted by respondents as ways to improve the first point of contact for new businesses.

Municipalities indicated that while there are opportunities to update and streamline regulatory frameworks, they did not see this as a beneficial collaborative effort.

Municipalities need to increase economic development information on their websites and increase awareness of their land inventories and designated contacts for local economic development. The EVEI could support by ensuring consistent messaging about the EVEI, ICBL's and regional investment opportunities on municipality websites.

Local businesses have identified a lack of light industrial land in the Elk Valley resulting in a barrier to business growth and expansion. The EVEI could led a joint initiative to obtain further data from local businesses and discuss possible regional approaches to increasing the supply of industrial land in the Elk Valley.

References

- 1) Investment Readiness Assessment: Elk Valley Corridor. Liepa, I., Howse, T., Glassford, B., Rethoret, L., Clovechok, S., McCormick, D., & Tomlin, S. (2020)
<https://sc.arcabc.ca/islandora/object/sc%3A5427>
- 2) Province of British Columbia. (December 2018). Investment Readiness Assessment Checklist – Business Attraction Toolkit for B.C. Communities:
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/employment-business-and-economic-development/economic-development/market-and-attract/business-attraction-toolkit/investment_readiness_assessment_checklist_fillable_dec18.pdf
- 3) Province of British Columbia. (2020). Community Investment Readiness Toolkit:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/economic-development/market-and-attract/business-attraction-toolkit>
- 4) Elk Valley 2022 Business Retention and Expansion Report:
<https://theelkvalley.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Elk-Valley-BRE-Report-2021.pdf>