First Impressions Community Exchange (F.I.C.E.) Report: North Shuswap

Prepared By: The BC Rural Centre



Executive Summary

This F.I.C.E. report synthesizes the observations of volunteer visitors who conducted an 'incognito' assessment of the North Shuswap communities (Scotch Creek, Lee Creek, Magna Bay, Celista, Anglemont) in the late summer of 2025. The aim was to gather unfiltered, honest feedback—both positive and negative—to inform local development and strategic planning.

The prevailing impression is of a **naturally beautiful region deeply rooted in lakeside living and outdoor recreation, characterized by resilient residents and a strong sense of community pride in specific areas**. Volunteers consistently praised the stunning natural environment, particularly the lake and mountain views, well-maintained parks, and the friendliness of locals. Post-wildfire rebuilding efforts showcase significant community spirit.

However, the report also identifies critical challenges. The **visual and economic impacts of recent wildfires** are stark, particularly in Scotch Creek and Lee Creek, creating negative first impressions. A dominant **seasonality** severely affects local businesses and the availability of services outside peak summer months. Significant concerns were raised regarding **housing affordability and availability (especially long-term rentals for staff)**, **limited local healthcare access**, and **perceived inconsistencies in community planning and signage/wayfinding**.

Key Action Areas for Priority

01

Post-Fire Recovery & Visual Enhancement

Aggressively complete wildfire cleanup and invest in beautification, particularly in Scotch Creek and Lee Creek, to improve critical first impressions.

02

Economic Diversification & Seasonality Mitigation

Develop robust year-round tourism and economic strategies, including agri-tourism, winter activities, and supporting businesses that can thrive beyond summer.

03

Housing Solutions for Local Needs

Address the severe shortage of affordable and long-term rental housing, potentially through policy adjustments regarding short-term rentals (STRs) and incentives for new developments.

04

Healthcare Accessibility & Information

Strategically enhance local healthcare services, reduce travel burdens, and ensure clear, updated information on all available health and social services.

05

Cohesive Community Planning & Wayfinding

Develop and communicate a unified community vision, improve signage consistency, and address conflicting land uses to foster a more cohesive identity.

This report offers detailed insights and actionable recommendations, supported by direct observations and testimonials, to guide the North Shuswap Chamber of Commerce and Municipality in fostering a more vibrant, sustainable, and welcoming community year-round.

Introduction

The First Impressions Community Exchange (F.I.C.E.) program facilitates peer-to-peer learning between communities. Volunteers from an external community visit another "incognito" to provide unbiased feedback on their experiences. This report consolidates the findings from such volunteers who assessed the North Shuswap communities on September 8, 2025. Their mission was to tour the area, interact with locals, gather impressions, and complete a detailed survey questionnaire across various aspects of community life. This synthesis aims to provide constructive, multi-faceted insights for the North Shuswap Chamber of Commerce and elected and community leadership.

Overall Impressions

The volunteers' overall sentiments presented a balanced view of North Shuswap's current state:

- **Natural Beauty & Charm:** All volunteers were struck by the natural beauty. "Its natural lake side living" and "The shoreline and backdrop of hills, plus community parks" were highlighted as outstanding features. "Celista, Magna Bay & Anglemont is beautiful to see driving in. Parks are clean bathrooms clean."
- **Resilience and Pride:** The community demonstrated strong resilience, especially in areas rebuilding after wildfires. "Many fulltime residents fought fires & have or are in the middle of rebuilding." Pride was evident, particularly in well-maintained areas:

> "SENSE OF PRIDE IS VERY PREVELANT IN CELISTA, MAGNA BAY, ANGLEMONT"

- **Disjointed Identity & Post-Fire Impact:** A significant recurring theme was a fragmented community identity and the lingering effects of wildfires. "Scotch Creek probably the least attractive. Seems a bit confused, no real identity. A random mix of buildings and uses, some abandoned or run down. Lots of signage." One volunteer felt "Initial Impression for Lee/Scotch Creek was the devastation from the fires... still clearing burnt forest. Road sides not maintained." Also added "it lacks Cohesion, cannot tell if there was a Plan for the communities."
- **Seasonality:** The highly seasonal nature of the economy and activities was a constant observation. "Hugely seasonal (mostly a summer economy and destination)." "OFF SEASON ALWAYS LACKS" activities and businesses "DROP SIGNIFICANTLY AS IN ANY SEASONAL COMMUNITY."

Lessons Learned from Volunteers

Highlights from a few of the reports submitted.

Volunteer 1

"Many of the issues mentioned apply to our town as well." (implying common rural challenges).

Volunteer 2

"WE HAVE A CORE VOLUNTEER GROUP AND OTHER NON PROFITS THAT WORK HARD TO HAVE ACTIVITIES "YEAR ROUND" FOR ALL RESIDENTS. OUR DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMM & OUR DISTRICT REC DEPARTMENT ALSO WORK HARD AT THIS." (highlighting a potential model for North Shuswap).

Volunteer 3

"The need to invest in better wayfinding strategy and signage plan."

Community Entrances & Aesthetics

Average Entrance Ratings

- **Scotch Creek:** 7/10
- **Celista:** 7.5/10
- **Magna Bay/Anglemont:** 8.3/10

First impressions are highly varied, with significant post-fire impacts negatively affecting Scotch Creek and Lee Creek.

Observation: Clearer sections (Celista, Magna Bay, Anglemont) had well-maintained roadsides, welcoming signage, and pride of ownership. This stark contrast emphasizes the impact of neglect and fire damage in other areas.

Key Testimonials

> "Scotch Creek not great. ...the surrounding area been impacted by recent Forest fires."

> "Initial Impression for Lee/Scotch Creek was the devastation from the fires... If I didn't know Celista, Anglemont were past this area I would have turned around. Still clearing burnt forest. Road sides not maintained."

> "it was a beautiful town and despite the wildfire that went through, it's location is picturesque." (Scotch Creek)

Housing & Residential Areas

7.7	8.3	2
Existing/Older Homes	**New Construction**	**Apartments/Condos**
Good/Very good rating out of 10	Good/Very good to Excellent! rating out of 10	Needs Improvement - Urgent attention rating out of 10

Housing quality is generally good, especially new construction, reflecting resilience. However, there's a critical issue with affordability, mix, and long-term rentals.

Key Insights

> "Mostly retiree homes and Seasonal. ...Seems to be good availability."

> "The housest seem to be in mostly good conditions... however there were Some run down/Abandoned houses. ...Not really [adequate mix]. with this being more lake side living the House pricing is out of most peoples Budget. ...STRs seem to be cannibalizing the affordable rentals for seasonal staff."

> "Housing here would be out of most people Price Range unless they sold their Vancouver or Calgary."

Observation: A lack of diverse housing options, particularly for multi-family units, seniors, and affordable long-term rentals, points to a challenge for attracting and retaining younger families and seasonal staff.

Recreational Facilities

Facility Ratings

- **Golf Course:** 9/10 (Excellent!)
- **Youth/Community Centre:** 9.5/10 (Excellent!)
- **Age Group Suitability:** 5-7.3/10 (Satisfactory to Good/Very good)

North Shuswap excels in outdoor, nature-based recreation, with well-kept parks and some excellent specific facilities. However, year-round activities and formal indoor options are limited.

Volunteer Feedback

"Community Parks are lovely. ...What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be lacking? Coffee shops lol. ...Not many [activities] for shoulder season."

"lots of simple beach parks that would be ideal for the community/Summer visitors. ...Many pickleball Courts/tennis but quite a few of them looked privately owned. ...OFF SEASON ALWAYS LACKS -"

"there is lots to do for ed in nature, Hiking, Camping, Biking, Swimming."

Observation: The reliance on natural outdoor amenities is a strength but creates a seasonal dip in activity and may not cater to all interests or weather conditions.

Education Services

Education Ratings

- **Primary School:** 9/10 **(Excellent!)**
- **Overall Education Facilities:** 8.5/10 **(Good/Very good to Excellent!)**

While primary education is locally available and well-regarded, the absence of local secondary and post-secondary options is a significant challenge for families.

Community Concerns

> "Noticed one decent-looking school, probably elementary only. Fairly long commute to other schools in the area. ...there is no school that teaches past grade 10??"

> "ALL I SAW WAS NORTH SHUSWAP ELEM. ...NOT SURE WHERE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GO, SALMON ARM?"

> "Elementary K-8 great. Bussing for older students. ...Not really [appeal for young family]. I would like more access to Schooling and Community Services."

Observation: This "bussing" requirement can deter young families and impact student retention within the community.

Health & Social Services

3	5.5	N/A
Hospitals	**Overall Health Care Adequacy**	**Doctors, Dentists & Nursing Homes**
Needs Improvement rating out of 10	Satisfactory to Needs Improvement rating out of 10	Low confidence in availability

Local healthcare services are perceived as extremely limited, requiring extensive travel. Emergency services are a significant concern.

Critical Feedback

> "A long ways away (Salmon Arm probably)."

> "there is 1 health center - No dentist... No nursing homes... Limited Service in Scotch Creek or have to travel out of Town Sorrento/Salmon Arm/Kamloops." She noted that Interior Health info "does not answer if there is enough or how long the wait is for services."

> "Cost of Driving needed for Day to Day. Emergency is a long Drive away. no local Ambulance Service."

Observation: The lack of local, comprehensive healthcare, including emergency services (post-fire hall, no local police), creates a vulnerability and may deter residents, particularly seniors and young families. Information on available services is also unclear.

Business & Economic Landscape

Economic Health Ratings

- **CBD Economic Health:** 3/10 (Needs Improvement)
- **CBD Shopping Options:** 3/10 (Needs Improvement)
- **Industrial Area Beautification:** 2/10 (Needs Urgent Attention)
- **Business Networking & Chamber:** 8/10 (Good/Very good)
- **Availability of Staff:** 10/10 (Excellent!)

The economic core is perceived as struggling, heavily impacted by fires and seasonality, with limited retail diversity. The Chamber of Commerce is a notable strength.

Volunteer Observations

> "Scotch Creek not great. ...Struggling [economic health]. ...Minimal [shopping options]. ...What shops or services were missing that you expected to find? Coffee shops, gift stores, etc."

> "The devastation from the fires... many buildings that look empty or closed and many sites being Repaired. ...Not Ideal [economic health]. ...many businesses were for Sale and quite a few buildings looked abandoned."

> "Our first question upon driving thought was "What do people do here to make money?" ...A few unique shops and attraction based businesses, but 90% of them were closed for the [off-season]."

Observation: The visual impact of post-fire areas combined with closed businesses during the off-season creates a perception of economic struggle. Despite these challenges, the Chamber of Commerce is recognized as a vital resource for businesses. Interestingly, the availability of staff was rated highly, possibly reflecting interactions with active businesses.

Tourism

Tourism Ratings

- **Visitor/Tourist Appeal:** 8/10 (Good/Very good)
- **Festivals & Special Events:** 4/10 (Needs Improvement)
- **Eating Venues (Summer):** 6/10 (Satisfactory)
- **Eating Venues (Off-season):** 3/10 (Needs Improvement)

North Shuswap has strong tourism appeal based on its natural setting and specific attractions. However, the experience is highly seasonal, with limited off-season activities and dining options.

Most Appealing Attractions



Natural Beauty

"Lake [most appealing attraction]. ...If you are there for the Scenery and the Serenity then it is for you. great relaxing stay. Not really Hustle/Bussel of a large town."



Quaout Lodge & Golf Course

Listed as a top attraction along with Raven, Shuswap Social District, Tsutswecw Provincial Park, and Be Teased.

Observation: Capitalizing on the natural appeal to create more diverse, year-round offerings is key to mitigating seasonality.

Sensory Impressions

The sensory experience aligns with the visual findings.

Taste

Limited dining options. "Didn't see much evidence of this". "Limited dining Spots available". Positive mentions of "Celista Winery was beautiful" and "Raven, Kava Coffee and Quaout Lodge had great offerings".

Smell

Predominantly "Fresh Air"

Sight

Contrasting "beautiful lake and mountain views" with "too much colour in the form of billboards and signs. Very distracting"

Sound

Generally "very quiet" with "very little road noise, primarily the sounds of nature", except for "some construction"

Information Accessibility & Wayfinding

Information Ratings

- **Overall Information Accessibility:** 7/10 (Good/Very good)
- **Tourist Info Centre:** 7/10 (Good/Very good)
- **Community Info Boards:** 8/10 (Good/Very good)

Online information is strong, and community information boards are good. However, there's a perceived lack of direct human interaction for tourist information and clarity in physical wayfinding.

> "Ontime it was a bit difficult to find info, but the chamber website was helpful. ...All there were, were informational boards, Could not speak to a designated visitor information Center."

> "It was easier to find things on Google then through signage in / around the towns."

Observation: While digital resources are appreciated, visitors miss the personal touch of a dedicated info center. Signage needs improvement for clarity and cohesion.

Planning & Land Use

Perceived lack of cohesive planning and conflicting land uses.

> "No. Confused. Strange mix of usages in one area. ...Gravel pit in very prominent location on approach road. Right near salmon spawning river. Unfortunate sight for such an ugly facility."

> "There does not seem to be much of a Community Plan, nothing is very cohesive."

Observation: This highlights a need for strategic land-use planning that protects natural assets and promotes a harmonious community aesthetic.

Key Strengths & Opportunities

Strengths

- **Exceptional Natural Environment:** Beautiful lake, mountain views, numerous well-maintained parks and beaches (CSRD Parks).
- **Resilient & Proud Community:** Evident in post-fire rebuilding and commitment to maintaining properties, especially in Celista, Magna Bay, and Anglemont.
- **Friendly & Informative Locals:** Business staff and residents are welcoming, helpful, and proud of their community.
- **Strong Outdoor Recreation:** Abundant opportunities for nature-based activities (boating, hiking, swimming, camping, snowmobiling).
- **Good Basic Education:** Well-regarded K-8 primary schools.
- **Effective Chamber of Commerce:** Recognized as a vital resource for businesses, providing support and networking.
- **Digital Presence:** Strong online information, including the Chamber website.
- **Unique Local Businesses:** Positive mention of specific offerings like Celista Winery, Raven Coffee, and Quaaoout Lodge.

Opportunities

- **Leverage Post-Fire Recovery:** Showcase resilience and progress as a positive story, drawing attention to rebuilding efforts.
- **Eco-Tourism & Agri-Tourism:** Expand on existing natural assets and local food scene (e.g., Summer Markets) to develop unique eco- and agri-tourism experiences.
- **Winter Tourism:** Capitalize on "decent winter snowmobile visitation" to develop more comprehensive winter activity offerings.
- **Community Events:** Expand beyond summer-centric events to create year-round social connections and economic activity.
- **Youth & Family Appeal:** Develop more diverse activities and amenities for families and young adults to encourage year-round residency.

Key Challenges & Areas for Attention

Post-Wildfire Visual Impact

Lingering devastation, unmaintained roadsides, and empty/closed buildings in Scotch Creek and Lee Creek create a negative, messy first impression.

Extreme Seasonality

Businesses and activities are highly summer-dependent, leading to significant drops in visitation, dining, and event options during the shoulder and off-seasons.

Housing Crisis

Lack of affordable and long-term rental housing, exacerbated by STRs, impacts staff retention and discourages young families.

Limited Healthcare Access

Local services (dentists, nursing homes, specialized care) are scarce, requiring residents to travel long distances, impacting seniors and young families. Emergency services are perceived as inadequate (no local ambulance/police, burned fire hall).

Fragmented Community Identity & Planning

A perceived lack of cohesive community planning, mixed land uses (e.g., gravel pit near natural assets), and cluttered/inconsistent signage dilute a unified identity.

Economic Core Weakness

CBDs (especially Scotch Creek) are seen as struggling, with minimal retail variety and many closed businesses.

Education Gaps

Lack of local secondary and post-secondary education options forces students to commute, deterring families.

Wayfinding & Visitor Information

While online info exists, physical signage is inconsistent, and there's a lack of manned tourist information centers.

Priority Projects: Categories 1 & 2

Category 1: Post-Fire Recovery & Visual Enhancement (Immediate Priority)

1	**Scotch Creek & Lee Creek Gateway Beautification** **Description:** Implement a dedicated cleanup and beautification program for roadsides, abandoned structures, and industrial areas in Scotch Creek and Lee Creek. Focus on landscaping, screening, and removing debris. **Desired Outcome:** Significantly improve the critical first impression for visitors and residents entering the region. **Lead Partner:** Regional District, Chamber of Commerce (local business engagement). **Potential Funding:** Provincial Emergency Program (PEP) grants, BC Community Economic Development Funds, federal infrastructure grants, local community fundraising.
2	**Cohesive Signage & Wayfinding Strategy** **Description:** Develop and implement a unified signage plan across all North Shuswap communities. This includes clear welcome signs at entrances, consistent tourist information boards, and improved, less cluttered business signage. **Desired Outcome:** Enhance navigability for visitors, reinforce a cohesive community identity, and better promote local businesses and attractions. **Lead Partner:** Regional District Planning/Tourism, Chamber of Commerce, local business associations. **Potential Funding:** Destination BC grants, REDIP, Outdoor Rec BC, federal tourism infrastructure programs, local business contributions.

Priority Projects: Category 2

Category 2: Economic Diversification & Seasonality Mitigation (High Priority)

1

Year-Round Activity & Event Development

Description: Fund and promote a diverse calendar of events and activities beyond the summer months. This could include winter festivals, shoulder-season agri-tourism experiences (e.g., winery tours, farm-to-table events), and cultural gatherings.

Desired Outcome: Attract visitors and economic activity year-round, provide more social opportunities for residents, and support local businesses.

Lead Partner: Chamber of Commerce, Destination BC, local event organizers, Shuswap Social District.

Potential Funding: BC Arts Council, Heritage BC, Destination BC, federal grants for cultural and tourism events, local business sponsorships.

2

Business Incubation & Diversification Program

Description: Offer mentorship, micro-grants, and resources for entrepreneurs to establish year-round businesses that fill identified gaps (e.g., diverse dining, gift shops, local retail). Focus on businesses that can thrive outside summer.

Desired Outcome: Strengthen the local retail and service sector, create local employment, and reduce reliance on seasonal revenue.

Lead Partner: Chamber of Commerce, Community Futures Shuswap, local financial institutions.

Potential Funding: BC Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation, Western Economic Diversification Canada (WEDC), local credit unions.

Priority Projects: Category 3

Category 3: Housing & Social Infrastructure (High Priority)

Affordable & Long-Term Rental Housing Strategy

Description: Conduct a detailed housing needs assessment and develop a multi-pronged strategy to increase affordable and long-term rental units. This could involve incentives for developers, exploring community land trusts, and potentially regulating short-term rentals (STRs) to free up units for local staff.

Desired Outcome: Improve housing stability for seasonal workers, attract young families, and retain essential service providers.

Lead Partner: Regional District Planning/Housing, BC Housing, Shuswap Economic Development Society, non-profit housing providers.

Potential Funding: BC Housing (Community Housing Fund, Rental Housing Supply Program), Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), federal Rapid Housing Initiative.

Healthcare Services Expansion & Information Hub

Description: Partner with Interior Health and local providers to advocate for expanded local healthcare services (e.g., dental, increased clinic hours, specialized care). Create a centralized, up-to-date online and physical information hub for all health and social services available in North Shuswap and nearby communities.

Desired Outcome: Reduce travel burden for residents, improve access to essential care, and address public perception of limited services.

Lead Partner: Rural Coordination Centre of BC, Regional District, Interior Health, local health clinics, non-profit organizations.

Potential Funding: Provincial health grants, federal health infrastructure programs, local community foundations, Interior Health grants.

Priority Projects: Category 4, Partners & Funding

Category 4: Education & Emergency Services (Medium Priority - Advocacy & Planning)

Secondary Education Advocacy & Planning

Description: Engage with School District No. 83, parents, and other stakeholders to advocate for enhanced secondary education options within North Shuswap, or improved bussing and integration with neighboring districts.

Desired Outcome: Attract and retain young families by providing comprehensive K-12 education options locally.

Lead Partner: School District No. 83, Parent Advisory Councils, Regional District, elected officials, local community groups.

Potential Funding: Provincial education grants (for planning/feasibility studies).

Emergency Services Readiness & Communication Plan

Description: Develop a comprehensive, transparent plan for emergency services, addressing post-fire hall status, local police presence, and ambulance services. Clearly communicate roles, response times, and available resources to residents.

Desired Outcome: Reassure residents and visitors about safety, improve emergency response capabilities, and increase community trust.

Lead Partner: Regional District, RCMP, BC Emergency Health Services, local volunteer fire departments.

Potential Funding: Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) grants (e.g., Community Emergency Preparedness Fund), Provincial emergency management programs, federal Public Safety grants.

Potential Funding Streams for North Shuswap

- **Tourism & Culture:** Destination BC Co-op Marketing Fund, Community Economic Development Fund; BC Arts Council Grants, Heritage BC Grants; Federal Canadian Heritage programs
- **Economic Development & Small Business:** REDIP; Community Futures Shuswap Loans and Programs; Federal WEDC Programs (various grants for businesses and economic development); BC Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation programs
- **Housing & Social Infrastructure:** BC Housing (various programs including Community Housing Fund, Rental Housing Supply Program); CMHC (various programs including National Housing Strategy, Rapid Housing Initiative); Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) grants (e.g., Housing Accelerator Fund, Local Government Development Approvals Program); Community Foundations (e.g., Shuswap Community Foundation, regional foundations)
- **Infrastructure & Environment:** Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) – various streams (Green Infrastructure, Rural and Northern Infrastructure); Provincial Emergency Program (PEP) and Community Emergency Preparedness Fund (CEPF) through UBCM (for wildfire recovery, emergency services); Federal and Provincial grants for environmental protection and park development
- **Community & Planning:** UBCM grants for local government capacity building, planning, and asset management; BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs grants for local government planning initiatives

Conclusion

This report provides a holistic view of the North Shuswap communities through the eyes of its visitors, offering both affirmation of its charms and clear direction for strategic growth and improvement. By addressing these prioritized areas, the North Shuswap Chamber of Commerce and Regional District Area Directors can foster a more vibrant, resilient, and inclusive community for all.