

**Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission
Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 23rd, 2025, 7:30 AM
Regional District of Central Okanagan, Woodhaven Boardroom
1450 K.L.O. Road, Kelowna**

✓ = attended X = Absent * Not required A = Alternate Attended

Advisory Committee Executive:

✓	Hughes-Geekie, Sharon, Chair
✓	Larson, Janice, Past Chair
✓	Malcolm, Ryan

X	Nagy, Angela
✓	Quinn, Paula, Vice-Chair

Advisory Committee:

X	Alexander, Andrea
X	Alluri, Rama
X	Ballantyne, Lianne
✓	Berrie, Carla
✓	Bowles, Ron
X	Bruns, Myles
X	Burleigh, Mark
X	Carnio, Alex
X	Collins, Dave
X	Dawn, Jeremy
✓	DeVeer, Cassidy
X	Douglas, Laurel
X	Dyas, Tom
✓	Friesen, Jason
✓	Ferreira, Christina
✓	Gatzke, Alan

✓	Gratz, Derek
A	Harper, Shauna
X	Ireland, Blair
✓	Jones, Garrett
A	Kam, Michelle
X	Labrecque, Cory
✓	Lake, Brea
✓	Lovegrove, Gord
X	Metvedt, David
✓	Mullings, Dale
X	Popoff, Chantel
✓	Rezania, Sepideh
X	Ritchie, Geoff
A	Robinson, Heather
✓	Schlosser, Joanna
X	Selby, Robert

X	Spencer, Sandra
X	Sulentich, Ruth
X	Threlfall, Rich
✓	Thurnheer, Laura
X	Walker-Matthews, Ellen
X	Wall, Jonathan
✓	Wang, Bill
A	Widmer, Larry
X	Wolf, Mike
✓	Wong, Roger

Staff and Consultants:

✓	Mallory, Krista
✓	Lesack, Sascha
X	Rambe, Mohana
✓	Ververda, Brianne

✓	Walraven, Jen
X	Weston, Eva
✓	Foster, Jodie
X	Ginter, Sally

✓	Miller, Tory
✓	Stark Leader, Myrna

Guests:

Carter, Thuy

O'Connor, Sean

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1. Call to Order

Chair Sharon Hughes-Geekie called the meeting to order at 7:32 am.

2. Land Acknowledgement

The Chair acknowledged our presence on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded tñxʷúlaʔxʷ (land) of the syilx / Okanagan people who have resided here since time immemorial. We recognize, honour, and respect the syilx / Okanagan lands upon which we live, work, and play.

3. Adoption of Minutes

Minutes of February 26, 2025, unanimously approved as corrected.

4. Cultivating Agri-tech

Brea Lake, CEO, Accelerate Okanagan

Thuy Carter, Director of Programs, Accelerate Okanagan

Accelerate Okanagan (AO) provides mentorship connections to the technology driven business community. They help companies from the idea stage through venture validation and market readiness to high growth and scale ups. The tech sector has close to a \$5 billion impact in the larger region. AO has recently launched their next 3-year strategic plan including the cultivation of Agri-tech innovation.

AO and COEDC attended the World Agri-tech Summit which brought a variety of stakeholders together to share advancements in agriculture. Robotic technology is emerging along with genetic breeding innovation, AI tools for climate resiliency and biological products for crop protection. Opportunities lie in building global partnerships, field testing pilots for new technologies, and access to education strategies and funding support for farm technology adoption.

Federal and Provincial funding sources, cheap energy, and UBCO's school of engineering could be good partner resources. Within Canada AO is building connections with Agri-tech innovators to unearth best practices that can translate to our region. COEDC's Taste of Kelowna Event garnered significant interest in the Okanagan region including from many Canadian companies.

See presentation attached.

5. Facilitated Agriculture Industry Panel

Facilitator: Myrna Stark Leader, Consultant, COEDC

Panelists: Alan Gatzke, Owner, Gatzke Orchards

Joanna Schlosser, Co-Founder & CEO, Niche Wine Company

Roger Wong, Owner, Intrigue Wines

Sean O'Connor, CEO, 4AG

- 4AG builds robots that pick mushrooms and has its products around the world. It's a challenging job for human bodies so it's great to be able to provide a tech product that helps.

- Small to medium farmers often need a side job to be able to keep going. Larger companies are often able to facilitate innovation through their research and smaller operators can benefit from that.
- Accelerate Okanagan has helped several farming small businesses. Crop insurance can be difficult to attain but using tech to show weather data may help over time. Ground temperature measurements may be helpful to diversify crops as well as specialized equipment such as machine weeders and soil water meters to improve efficiency.
- There are farmer chat lines in the valley for communications and collaboration. Half of the farmers out there don't know what tech is available and are therefore not putting it to use. This led to development of a data collection system to track environmental conditions to adjust spraying, irrigation, insect life cycles, etc. This could be built out more. A lot of tech isn't getting used due to large costs per acre. Barriers include money, education, and time, including human capacity and growing season time.
- Adoption of new tech won't be fast or even combined when you can only take on one item/15 years for example. Implementation can be slower when dealing with translation challenges with foreign workers as well.
- Startup CEO's can be far off on timeline and costs to get a product ready for market. New products need field testing, but the early adopters don't really benefit from their use nor realize cost savings while working out the functionality, so it can be daunting to take on new tech. If there were a way to allow the early adopters to test without upfront costs that may help.
- Mapping systems can track pesticides, nutrients, fertilizers, etc. at the field level right through to retail. We don't have that here yet but hope to.
- The workforce here is primarily foreign labour and can be resistant to new technologies but will embrace them when they see the benefits.
- When Grower's Supply closed, we lost a one stop shop with experienced employees who could transfer technology knowledge.
- AI and cameras are at the point where robots can be trained to think like humans through pattern recognition. Difficult jobs will be taken away and new, higher paying jobs will be developed, but we need to consider the effects of displacement on the existing workers, immigration, etc.
- Partnerships between farmers and tech to sell between growers in a co-op could help agricultural producers. Winery purchasing consortiums help in fruit when needed or equipment to share. Learning from each other is going strong.
- We need more Agri-tech businesses to establish here.
- There is a gap between different cultural groups of growers that can make it challenging to achieve unified group momentum.

Discussion:

- The City of Kelowna could help by decreasing the time it takes to get Agri-tourism short-term stay-on-the-farm permits for example. The Agricultural Land Commission is relatively open to these options. Drone mapping data has been released to local farms by the City. Investing in education of the Agriculture Advisory Committee members, and

empowering firefighters by advocating for Provincial legislation change to allow burning of old plant materials so orchardists can renew their crops would be helpful.

- The City could encourage the development of this region as an Agri-tech hub building on the momentum of Accelerate Okanagan and the COEDC by hosting conferences, getting Agri-tech companies and investors here to visit, and directing Federal and Provincial funding to build this ecosystem.
- Farm-trail buy local programs and participation are very empowering.

6. Connector Update: Call for new Connectors

Tory Miller, Connector Program Specialist, COEDC

Tory shared information about the Connector program and invited Advisory Committee members to participate. This program helps newcomers, recent graduates or people changing careers develop networks in the region. Connectors give back and can meet talented potential new employees.

See presentation attached.

Action Items for Advisory Committee: Please sign up to become a Connector and share the opportunity with your networks.

7. New Business

- Celebrating Myrna Stark Leader's nomination in the Kelowna Chamber's Top 40 over 40
- Vitalis is opening a 2nd manufacturing location in Kelowna and has a project with UBCO replacing a boiler with the largest natural refrigerant air-source heat pump in North America!

Adjournment:

Meeting adjourned at 9:02 am.
