

IS GREENSTONE INVESTMENT READY?

By Edgar J. Lavoie

At the AGM of Greenstone Economic Development Corporation on April 29th, this question was addressed.

The first presenter, Renée Bélisle, explained the results of the two projects she coordinated, the Commercial Land Asset Inventory, and the Satellite Imagery. The projects embraced all communities in the Greenstone region, including First Nations communities.

The results can be viewed on the website www.gedc.ca; simply click on the Site Selection tab, and then on the Available Properties subtab. Several dozen properties can be examined in detail.

On the first page, ten commercial or industrial properties appear with a thumbnail photo of each, a name, a property type (such as Commercial Retail), and a status (such as For Sale). By clicking on the View Details button, one gets more detailed information.

Details include street address, owner's contact info, building size, building age, available utilities, and distances (such as kilometres to Greenstone District Airport). By clicking on the Maps tab, one brings up a satellite image of the community, complete with street names and the property location. By clicking on the Reports/Photos tab, one can access thumbnail photos which

can be enlarged.

After the presentation, Dina Quenneville, GEDC's Executive Director, commented that already the asset inventory had enticed an investor to Geraldton who would lease a property and employ 15 people. (The comment may have referred to a new business, ActLab, now operating out of 801 Main Street.)

The second presenter, Michael Dunlop, described the provincial government program that funded the two GEDC projects. Dunlop, Advisor for the GO North initiative of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, explained MNDM's Northern Communities Investment Readiness program (NCIR).

The NCIR program was launched in March of 2006, and since April 1 of '08, 54 communities had participated, including 24 First Nation communities. Some communities participated more than once. Recently, GEDC had chosen the asset inventory and satellite imagery projects from a list of about a dozen.

Dunlop explained that companies which are expanding or relocating their businesses, often investigate multiple locations. Very often Northern Ontario communities are in a position to satisfy the criteria that certain investors are demanding, which could include housing prices, availability of commercial properties, labour force costs, access to transportation/markets, and business competition (or the lack thereof).

Ten years ago, Dunlop explained, a community's economic development officer (EDO) put together a paper



Mike Dunlop, GO North Advisor, and Renée Bélisle, GEDC project coordinator.

package for a potential investor, and sent it off. He or she sent it immediately if the information had already been compiled, which, of course, in most cases it wasn't. If the client received the package within 48 hours, that was considered first-class service.

Then came the popularity of e-mail and the advantages of hyperlinks and attachments, and the possibility of same-day service. With communities developing their own websites, the EDO could also talk to the client on the phone and guide him or her through the website to appropriate information.

Today, Dunlop said, the client expects "instant gratification"; he expects to review all the community's information on the public portal within a few minutes and to make a short list of prospects to follow up. Hence the importance of the NCIR program.

The GEDC website can, for example, give information on demographics, on transporta-

tion facilities, climate, the state of economic sectors (such as forestry and mining), and, of course, a commercial land inventory - everything a potential investor needs to know to decide, within minutes, if the community has anything to offer his business, anything that he can investigate more thoroughly.

Dunlop pointed out that the NCIR has four Strategic Sector Coordinators in Northern Ontario, one of whom, Steve Roberts, is stationed in Thunder Bay, in charge of the Forestry Sector. Other sectors include mining, the bioeconomy, alternative energy, and aviation.

The NCIR program is open to economic development corporations, municipalities, First Nations, and partnerships of the aforementioned.

Dunlop's presentation was entitled "How Prepared Is Your Community?", in the area of investment. The answers are just beginning to emerge