



## Business Clustering a Popular Concept at Community Development Meetings

Geraldton, Ontario – Wednesday, March 01 – On Wednesday, February 16, the GEDC held meetings in Geraldton and Longlac with local and regional business leaders, business association representatives, elected and non-elected government representatives to discuss economic opportunities for the Greenstone region and the broader northern Ontario economy. The conversation was lively and interactive. The Geraldton meeting held at the Centre Culturel Francophone de Geraldton in the afternoon on February 16 focussed largely on the potential for Greenstone businesses to grow by addressing barriers to growth and creating and fostering business relationships within and beyond the Region. Representatives of the GEDC provided an overview of the business clustering concept that encourages small to medium-sized businesses to work together so they

can take advantage of a combined workforce and capital to help them go after customers and contracts that might not be attainable on their own. It was discussed that local companies are losing out on contract opportunities that they used to bid on due to changes in the structuring of the contract process. This gives the advantage to the larger contractors from outside the region. Although it will take some time and effort, it was discussed that local companies might have a better opportunity to compete for larger contracts by clustering together through partnering in order to increase their total size and capacity. Business leaders spoke about the need for a trained workforce and the challenges of investing too heavily in business opportunities that may not be a sure thing. It was agreed by all participants that having more certainty around resource projects would help business owners



know where to invest and how much to invest. A representative of Greenstone Gold Mines spoke positively about the prospects for their proposed open pit gold mine project, once the Company has completed the Environmental Assessment process and optimized the feasibility study. Recognizing the current challenges in the commodity market have led to tight cost controls for the project, they are cautious about predicting a definite timeline for construction. However, they remain optimistic that the business climate will improve. The Company aims to hire locally, providing

support for the idea of companies partnering with other companies to expand their business opportunities. Training and the development of a skilled labour pool was recognized by all participants as being key to the future of business growth in Greenstone. Everyone recognized the importance of creating a future that stimulates the youth and encourages them to stay in school, and get an education that will help them see a future for themselves in the community. An evening meeting was held in Longlac, hosted in style by the Longlac Pizzeria & Steakhouse. Many of the same concepts were discussed although there was a strong focus on the shortage of skilled and experienced labour. Forestry representatives pointed out that they have job openings, but are not getting applications from experienced skilled workers, particularly heavy equipment operators with experience in the bush. It was revealed that the Forestry industry has opportunities now and need resources to expand. A lively discussion was held around the process of encouraging youth to obtain training in the areas where the jobs exist, and focussing training resources on the supply of qualified workers where they are needed. There was also a good discussion about the benefits of clustering and partnering to achieve greater capacity and create new markets. One Owner of a small Greenstone business shared his success, indicating that his business has grown from a one-man operation. He identified the potential for his

business to continue its growth through strategic partnering and relationships, especially with businesses involved in regional transportation, logistics and warehousing. He indicated that these types of partnerships and relationships would help companies like his reach a broader regional market more efficiently and cost-effectively. Participants at both meetings appeared to be interested in these types of meetings happening on a more regular basis. There was a general understanding that business clustering requires networking, communication and follow-up to be successful. It was also recognized that having local and provincial government representatives sitting with representatives of training institutions, business operators and elected officials, presents excellent opportunities for a broad and open exchange of ideas. GEDC Executive Director Sylvie Goulet indicated she was very happy with the outcome of the meetings and looks forward to doing it again. "Many of our local businesses are interested in growing," Ms Goulet said, "and GEDC would like to provide the resources and opportunities we have available to contribute to that growth. Networking is a very important part of business growth, and clustering is a way to make networking come to life and provide our businesses opportunities to access broader markets." If you are interested in participating in our Business Clustering Initiative and to be added to our mailing list; please email us at [info@gedc.ca](mailto:info@gedc.ca) or telephone 807-854-2273.





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