



February 2006



SLOCAN VALLEY, BRITISH COLUMBIA

VISITOR/TOURISM ASSESSMENT



Western Economic
Diversification Canada

Diversification de l'économie
de l'Ouest Canada



Slocan • Silverton • New Denver • February 2006

First impressions

...and some ideas to increase tourism spending.



In January of 2006, a Tourism Assessment of the Slocan Valley was conducted, and presented in a two-hour workshop. A "Tourism Assessment" is a process in which the area is looked at from the eyes of a visitor. No prior research was facilitated, no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project, and the town and surrounding area were "secretly shopped."

The assessment is a no-holds-barred look at the community from a visitor's perspective. It includes marketing, signage, things to see and do (attractions mix), critical mass, ease of getting around, customer service, availability of visitor amenities (information, rest rooms, parking, etc.), general appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors, who spend three times that of day visitors.

There are two primary elements to the assessment process:

- 1) A Marketing Effectiveness Assessment
- 2) On-site Assessment

In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment two people were asked to plan trips to the area both as leisure and business travelers. They are not told in advance what communities are actually being assessed. They are to use whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel guides, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, etc.

The community has four opportunities to close the sale:

- Personal contact (visitor information, trade shows, etc.)
- Internet (websites)
- Brochures and printed materials
- Word of mouth (referrals, image)

In this process we test all four methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, looking for activities via the internet, requesting and reviewing printed materials, and asking visitors and regional contacts about their opinions of the area. This last method also includes looking at on-line articles, AAA Tour Book reviews, etc.

The findings determine how "visible" the community is during the research and whether or not the materials and/or per-

sonal contacts were good enough to “close the sale,” convincing the potential visitor to make the community worth either a day trip, stop, or an overnight stay.

The On-site Assessment process includes a look at enticement from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, things that would pull a visitor off the primary roadways), beautification, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public restrooms, visitor information, parking), things to see and do, overall appeal of the community, business attractiveness (drawing power), signage (public and private), customer service, area attractions (things that might prompt a visitor to spend the night), retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass (are these things concentrated in a pedestrian-oriented area?), availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The “Recommendations” made herein are referred to as “suggestions,” as they were developed without consulting the local community. It will be up to the community to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we have provided a low-cost suggestion (when possible) on how the challenge, obstacle or negative element can be corrected. It’s important to point out, that to increase the community’s tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions will have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all of them, can have a profoundly successful impact on the community’s ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a community effort - involving both privately owned businesses as well as county and state agencies, where appropriate.

A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO or CVB, Chamber, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not a community-wide effort.

Tourism is largely a private-sector industry, after all, the benefit of tourism is to convince visitors to come, spend money, then go home. That spending takes place, primar-

ily, in local businesses.

Product development is far more of a driving factor in tourism than marketing. After all, you must be able to deliver on your marketing promises. Visitors are drawn to activities, not cities or counties.

The Visitor/Tourism Assessment took place over a period of several weeks, providing a low-cost overall assessment with ideas the community can discuss and hopefully implement.

Successful tourism translates to cash

- The idea is to import more cash into your community than you export. When local residents earn money in the community and spend some of it outside the community, this is referred to as “leakage.” Tourism is a way to fill that gap, importing cash into the community, without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services.

Communities with successful tourism programs will see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas communities which don’t have successful tourism programs find that they are subsidizing visitors - providing services which visitors use, but don’t leave enough money behind to cover the cost of having them available.

There are three kinds of tourism

• 1. Status quo

If you do nothing to further the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, just by the fact that some visitors will pull off local highways or freeways for services (gas, food, lodging), and by the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have tourism.

• 2. Getting people to stop

Getting people to stop is always the first priority of successful tourism. Imagine how successful the businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through (there are hundreds of thousands every year) pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community.

And if there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which almost always translates to additional spending.

• 3. Becoming the destination

You cannot be a successful tourism destination if you can't get people to stop. And to become the destination, you must have attractions (things to see and do) or amenities that will convince visitors to spend the night.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors making a "pit stop."

The Four-Times Rule

• Visitors will make it a point of stopping or staying in your community if you have enough to offer to keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes). If a visitor drives an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

In a nutshell, if you hope to keep visitors overnight, you must make it worth the drive.

The more you have to offer, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay. This is why rural communities MUST typically market more than just the immediate downtown areas. You need to market neighboring communities, outdoor recreational opportunities, exploration, and discovery.

Finally, you must also be different. Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as a primary draw. But if residents living in the markets you're hoping to attract can enjoy the same activities closer to home, then why should they go out of their way or the extra distance to visit you?

Branding

The biggest challenge communities make is trying to be all things to all people. When marketing your community ask yourself this primary question:

"What do we have that the visitor can't get closer to home."

Nearly every community promotes:

- Outdoor recreation
- Hunting, fishing, biking, hiking
- Wildlife viewing, birding
- Local events
- Museums
- Unique shops, dining
- Historic downtown

Is there a town anywhere in North America that doesn't offer these things? You MUST find the things that:

1. Make you worth a special trip
2. Are different than what the visitor can get closer to home. This might even be a specific restaurant or a specific shop that is truly unique.

Words to avoid in your marketing efforts:

- Gateway
- We have it all
- Something for everyone
- Four season destination
- Outdoor recreation
- Unique
- The center of it all
- Discover
- Explore

Don't just list what you have, but always tell the visitor WHY they should discover or explore the area.

Branding is the art of differentiation. What makes you special? If you don't have a hook, you may need to create one.

Critical mass means cash

- While it may not be the primary reason *why* visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity - and where visitors spend the most amount of money - other than lodging.

Do you have a pedestrian-oriented shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many rural communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian “village” which would include visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, restrooms, etc., all in an attractive, well-landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb is seven to nine retail stores (more on that in a minute), and three or more dining establishments which can include sit-down restaurants, espresso bars, cafes, dessert and ice cream shops, etc.

“Visitor Retail” would include antique stores, galleries, collectibles, souvenir shops, T-shirt shops, outfitters, bike and jeep rentals, guided tour operations, activity shops (kites, hiking, climbing gear, etc.), home accents, jewelry, old-fashioned hardware stores, casinos, entertainment facilities such as movie theaters, pubs, etc.

By grouping these businesses together, you will create the “critical mass” in a pedestrian setting that will draw visitors and will make it worth their while to stop and shop.

Have you ever noticed at major intersections you will see a Chevron, Union 76, Conoco, and Shell on each

of the four corners? Or how about fast food franchises? McDonald’s, Burger King, Jack In The Box, and Wendy’s on each corner. You would think these places would avoid being next to the competition, but they know that visitors are drawn to the “critical mass” where they have multiple choices that are convenient.

Where are your visitor-oriented shops? If they are spread out, they will be marginally successful when it comes to tapping into visitor spending. Put them all together, and you have what it takes to get visitors out of their cars (or busses and RV’s) and into your stores.

Market the broader package

- Every community **MUST** market more than just the community in order to be successful with their tourism efforts.

Remember the Four-Times Rule and also remember that visitors don't stay within or care about boundaries - so market the attractions you have around your community that might keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some shopping, or an overnight stay.

The more you have to offer "collectively," the longer visitors will stay. And the longer they stay, the more they spend.

You must be different or better than everyone else

- To become a destination community where you're the place visitors spend the night or multiple days, you must set yourself apart from everyone else.

In order to make your community "worth the drive" and/or "worth a special trip," you must be better or different from other competing communities.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, adopted its Shakespeare Festival which runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. It became "different" than other communities and the festival set it apart.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and all of their events revolve around the Bavarian theme. The town is one of the primary tourist attractions in Washington state, hosting more than two million visitors annually. They have something different to offer.

Okanogan County, Washington (just south of the Canadian border in central Washington) is an outdoor recreational paradise - but so are 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guide books, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. They started using quotes along the line of "Pinch Yourself, you're in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent."

This, and numerous other quotes,

makes it "worth the extra drive" to visit Okanogan Country. They used third party endorsements to show that they are the "best."

Just look at how powerful movie ratings are when it comes to box office receipts. "Two thumbs up" carries a lot of weight.





Tourism is all about cash.

The idea is to import more than you export.

Tourism is an economic development activity

The object is to have people come, spend money, then go home

90% of tourism industry businesses are small businesses.

83% of tourism spending is by visitors with annual household incomes of \$70,000 plus.

Tourism is a \$9.5 billion dollar industry in British Columbia

British Columbia hosted 22.5 million visitors: Half from BC, 4.8 million from other areas of Canada, 5 million from the U.S.

Kootenay's tourism is \$104 million annually up 7.1%.

The assessment process:

- Marketing effectiveness
 - Visibility (finding information)
 - Effectiveness: Ability to close the sale
 - Competitive analysis
 - Convenience
- On-site assessment
 - Signage, gateways, wayfinding
 - Overall appeal
 - Critical mass
 - Amenities: parking, restrooms, information
 - Attractions: things to see and do
 - Customer service, cross selling

NOTE

There are three primary steps to a successful tourism program:

1. Getting visitors to stop. You can't become the destination if you can't get them to even stop.
2. Becoming a day-trip from another destination or area. If you can provide activities in the area for at least two hours, chances are good you'll see more visitor spending. Becoming a day-trip destination is the first step in developing a strong tourism effort.
3. Becoming the destination is what every community should strive for. Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors.

The three communities, Slocan, New Denver and Silverton all have excellent opportunities to capture pass-through visitors traveling between Castlegar and Revelstoke. Things that will get visitors to stop, and then spend some time and money might include:

- Public restroom facilities
- 24 hour visitor information
- Attractive and unique restaurants, delis, treats and retail shops
- Quality lodging

RULE
1

**First Impressions Really Are
Lasting Impressions**
The rule of perceived value

Would you eat here ?



Suggestion #1

This welcome sign is attractive, but looks worn and dirty. Each March or April work with local volunteers to clean and repaint welcome signs. They are your first opportunity to make a good impression, and if they're dirty and worn, they give the impression that your town is too.



Suggestion #2

Consider the creation of a simpler brand identity or icon. From a distance, it's hard to even tell what the icon (logo) represents. Use one simple graphic and don't try to be all things to all people. If the lake is the main attraction, develop something that represents water.



Suggestion #3

Consider removing this sign or refurbishing it. Your welcome signs should all be similar in style. With the different font, the miner and flower, this one looks out of place and not as professional as the others. Down in the snow and weeds is a second sign that should be removed.



Suggestion #4

All the communities need to put together a gateway maintenance program. First impressions are lasting impressions, and your welcome signage tells visitors what they can expect of your town, creating a “perceived value” of your community. Maintaining and repainting of the lettering make great projects for scouting programs, auxiliary organizations, and other volunteer groups. Add landscaping, annual color around the base of each sign.

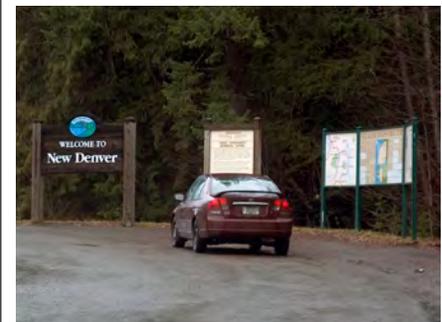


Suggestion #5

Work with property owners to keep the first impression a good one. Screening, a fence or a good clean-up can do wonders to improve the appearance (below left.) Always put your gateway signs where you will make the first, best impression. If the area doesn't present a good impression, consider moving the signage to another location.



(Below) This is a nice pull-off area. The sign is in good shape.





Suggestion #6

Once again, work with property owners to keep the first impression a good one. The gateway sign, here, is in a great location if the homes around it also develop nice landscapes. They represent the community and its first impressions.

(Middle left) The fewer signs, the better. Perhaps this one should be placed somewhere in town. It really serves no purpose at this location and is easy to miss and difficult to read from a distance.



NOTE

Nothing increases spending like beautification. The town of Sisters, Oregon (bottom left) has invested in beautification and it's paid off by making Sisters one of the most popular towns in the State of Oregon (population 1,100). Studies have shown that the addition of street trees (bottom right) will increase retail sales by an average of 18%.





Suggestion #7

The signage is attractive, and probably the spring/summer curb appeal is terrific. Consider winter cabbage and plantings to enhance the winter-time appeal. The steps should be pressure washed monthly to keep them looking clean. (Below)



Suggestion #8

First impressions are critical for lodging, dining, golf, wineries, and retail shops. Consider a new blade sign, landscape planters, weed abatement - these steps would greatly increase the appeal. (Below)

Suggestion #9

Change the sandwich board to very large letters that say "Homemade soup, sandwiches & famous apple pie" or to the key items that would draw patrons inside.

Always sell the sizzle. The general rule of thumb for lettering on retail signs is 1" in lettering height for ev-

ery 12' of distance. Secondly, never use more than about a dozen words, if possible, and make the words, in this case, about 4" tall. When visitors see signage in poor condition, they assume that the interior will also be lacking in appeal.





Suggestion #10

This restaurant looks very nice, but was closed. For the season? The day? Let people know when you'll be open by posting opening dates or times, and making the signage visible from the street.



NOTE

This store is clean, well signed, and obviously a good fit for the community. It makes a very positive first impression. Imagine the appeal with some hanging baskets and planters.



Suggestion #11

This could be a very attractive building, but perhaps once a month in the winter clean the awning with an algae cleaner. The overall first impression is poor and that can lead to a loss in sales. If you've ever traveled you've probably said "that looks like a good place to eat." We all judge the book by the cover. Curb appeal can account for as much as 70% of all sales for restaurants, lodging facilities, wineries, golf courses, and retail shops.



Suggestion #12

The plain expanse of this side of the building would be a perfect candidate for murals and a little paint. Make it colorful, fun, vibrant. Get rid of the drab appeal. Consider murals, or multi-colors, or hanging baskets, ivy and other enhancements. There are many other businesses besides this one that could see increased sales from some exterior maintenance and beautification.



NOTE

The use of plastic tarps, unfinished siding, etc. led me to believe that this motel no longer operates as such, or is a seasonal place to stay. Eighty percent of leisure travelers will pay more to stay in quality accommodations.



Suggestion #13

Always place your signage where it will make the first, best impression. In this case, the sign is on the back side of the motel, where the appeal of the property is very poor. Consider removing the sign entirely. The words “nice rooms” are cancelled out with what is seen around the signs including 1960’s style curtains, rusty flashings, drain pipes, wiring, a rusting air conditioning unit, and Christmas lights still up in mid-February. Just a little maintenance and a few enhancements can increase sales.



Suggestion #14

Even though established in 1965, perhaps it's time to bring the property into the new century. Curb appeal sells.

**RULE
2**

20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$
The rule of signs that sell



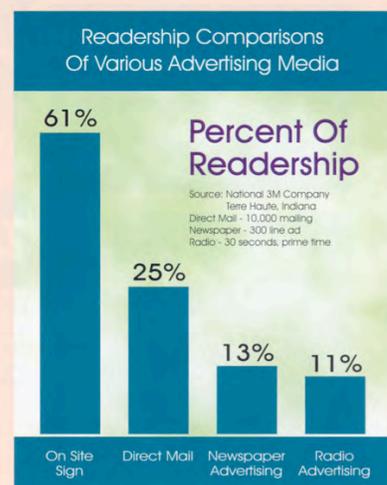
NOTE

Nothing attracts pass-through visitors as much as effective signage, particularly perpendicular or blade signs along the lines of those used in Leavenworth, Washington (left). Visitors see signage that is perpendicular to them as they pass through. Also promote on the sign your greatest lure, not the name of the business.

NOTE

The charts (right) show the cost for every thousand people who will read your signage, the percent of readership. The lowest cost, and highest percentage of readership. But the signage must be attractive, have few words (four or less is always best), sell the primary lure, and use block lettering so it's legible from a distance.

Signage is a great investment - if done right



Cost per thousand exposures in a community of approximately 130,000 population
Source: Signs and Your Business
US Small Business Administration / Claus and Claus



NOTE

A very nice sign, well done. This sign is so well done visitor just gravitate towards the garden. A good first impression will help pull visitors towards an attraction or even a small business.



Suggestion #15

General rule of thumb for lettering on signs: 1 inch for every 12 feet of distance. Lettering height: 8 inches should be about right. Only use one graphic on all signs - more than that makes the visual confusing. Also use contrasting colors. The sign (left) is very busy and very difficult to read, even up close.

Suggestion #16

(Near right) A car wash bucket and some soap once a month would make this display more attractive.

(Far right) This sign, standing alone, is confusing. What is the Silverton Gallery and where is it? This looks like a museum, but the sign says it's a gallery. If people can't figure it out in a few seconds, they tend to just move on.





Suggestion #18

(Right) Sometimes simpler is better. Consider replacing the sign with a simple blade sign with easy-to-read text using block lettering. Use just one simple graphic, if any, on retail signs. Let the shape and border of the sign carry the artistic message.

Suggestion #17

(Left) This building is darling, but what is it? Is it open to the public? When is it open? Consider blade signage and better window lettering. Promote the primary lure not everything you have to offer. Don't promote the business name on your perpendicular sign but what it is you are selling.



Suggestion #19

Consider removing the word "motel" from the sign shown below. Visitors love cabins more than motel rooms and the word cabins is already on the sign.



Suggestion #20

What is "Our Wine Mine"? Is this a retail store? Make it very easy to determine what you are selling, and you'll attract more customers. Wine stores should be stand-out beautiful. Wine is classy. The retail store needs to be as well.

**RULE
3**

Real men don't ask for directions
The rule of wayfinding



NOTE

Good signage leads to 100% occupancy levels - no vacancy on a weekday in February! The Silverton Resort added to their sign a teaser that helps sell the experience: "log cabins on the lake."

NOTE

All of your wayfinding or directional signage should fit the ambiance of the community. If the area is going for the lodge/mountain-style ambiance, then the signage should follow suit. Appleton, Wisconsin (center far left) put up several decorative signs, which has increased sales in their downtown core area.



Suggestion #21

Good highway signage (right) to the Kohan Garden, but once off the highway, there's no directional signage. Add signage from the highway to the gardens to connect the dots.

Where's the attraction? Which way do I go?



Enumclaw, Washington (middle right) is developing an equestrian theme and the signage design reflects that ambiance.



Suggestion #22

(Top left) Sometimes signage can be easy to miss as at this intersection.

(Left) Use decorative signage and a single sign for these attractions. As visitors approach intersections, they are looking for traffic, watching the street light, are looking at retail signage, and looking for directions. The signs (left) were very easy to miss. If these were larger, decorative signs, like the sample shown above, they would draw attention and would increase visits into the downtown district and to the museum.



Suggestion #23

What is the Nikkei Centre?

To entice visitors to turn, use “downtown,” or better yet, “shopping district.” “Business Centre” doesn’t create a draw for visitors.

Consider developing a better sign that combines these two signs. Include “Japanese Internment Center” and “Shopping district.” Sell the experience before the name.





Suggestion #24

This sign is difficult to read because the lettering doesn't contrast enough with the background. Consider painting the lettering white.



Suggestion #25

Don't just say you are closed - tell the visitor when you WILL be open to entice them to come back. This seemed to be a pattern throughout the area: most of the businesses are closed and there is no information as to when they'll be open. Thus, a normal visitor will assume the "safe" time to visit (when businesses will be open) would be in July and August, which shortens your seasons. The fastest growing seasons for travel now include May, June, September and October. Are you open for business during any of these months? If so, tell people so they'll know when to come back. Otherwise they'll just always drive past, heading somewhere else.

NOTE

You may have attractions that are easily missed because there is not a coordinated wayfinding system, like this pathway (left) that might be a visitor amenity that could keep visitors in the community longer, leading to additional sales.





Suggestion #26

Having these signs along the highway is excellent. Consider making these “visitor information” oriented instead of “community information.”



NOTE

Taking the exit to Slocan was easy, but finding the town proved to be impossible. Does the community have a downtown area? There is little or no signage to anything that would appeal to visitors.



NOTE

This is a nice information area, but it still doesn't help me get my bearings or tell me where I can spend time and money. Consider adding “Things to See and Do in Slocan” on the right side bulletin board.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



NOTE

I had no problem finding the boat launch. (Upper left) It and the parks (center photo) were the only attractions with any signage, but neither had any information or places where a visitor could spend money - the purpose of tourism.

(Above) I found Main Street, but still no downtown area.

(Left) Directions to the park were good, but there was no information about the park in terms of distance from Slocan, what there is to do there, etc.

The three communities should consider developing a cooperative wayfinding signage plan that would cross-sell visitor attractions and amenities, and each other. The more you have to offer, collectively, further people will come and the longer they will stay.



What to do:

Every community should develop and implement a signage plan & program:

- Wayfinding
- Gateways & entries
- Attractions
- Amenities
- Billboards and marketing displays

Less than 5% of visitors stop at visitor information centers - IF they can find that!

RULE 4

Restrooms attract more than flies and other notes of convenience

The rule of visitor amenities



Visitor info should be working 24/7

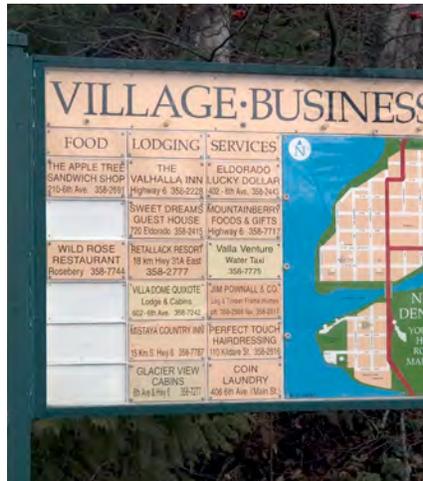


NOTE

The number one reason for stopping is to use the public restrooms. Put your restrooms where visitors can spend money. Once you get a visitor out of the car, you have a four-times greater chance of getting them to spend money. Have you ever stopped and said “while we’re here, why don’t we get something to eat - to drink...”

Suggestion #27

These signs (above) are really terrific, but are very community-oriented. Include things to see and do in the area, and then places to spend money.



Suggestion #28

(Left) Include the name of each business and a two-line teaser as to why a visitor should stop in. Include a simple hand-out that a visitor can take with them showing the locations of the businesses. Mark the locations of the businesses on the map. You want to make it as easy for visitors as possible to spend money locally.



Suggestion #29

Tell visitors how or where they can take the tour. I could find no information anywhere about the tour. There was no signage, brochures, or fliers showing the locations or telling the story.

Keeping visitors “captive” for two hours leads to more spending. The tour could easily do that.



Suggestion #30

Include brochure distribution at the kiosk in simple, weather-proof holders. This way visitors can get back in the car and will have information, maps and things that will get them to explore or come back again to find other hidden treasures.



Suggestion #31

(Above) This is a nice kiosk that might be replicated for visitor information throughout the lake area.



Suggestion #32

(Left) Add visitor information - and add park information. This is a perfect opportunity to cross-sell other activities and attractions in the area.



NOTE

Once again, where is the tour route? Perhaps it should be included in the wayfinding program. These are great opportunities, but without any follow-up information, visitors will simply move on.



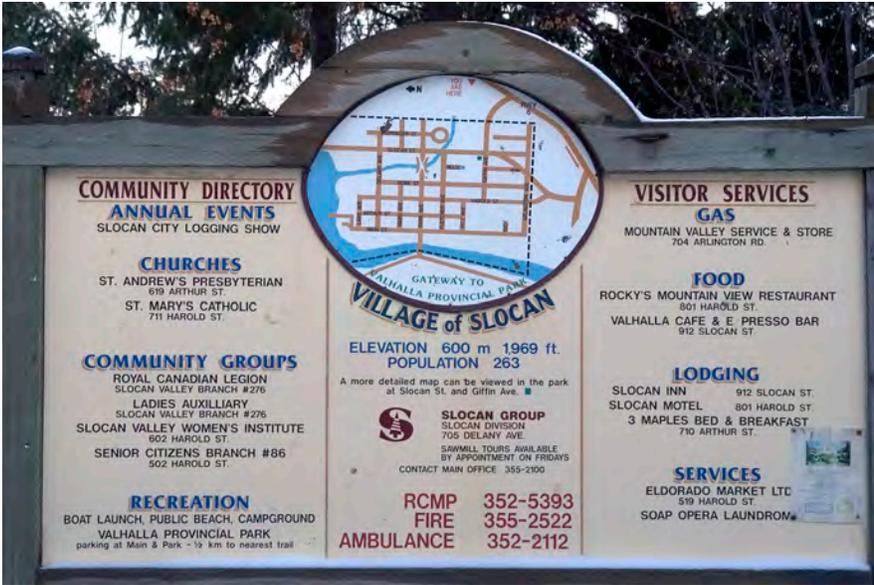
Suggestion #33

This would be a great place for a visitor information gazebo or exterior kiosk of some kind. Without an active visitor information center, developing five or six visitor information kiosks can help “connect the dots” between attractions and visitor amenities.



NOTE

People do travel during the winter months, yet it's nearly impossible to get to many of the visitor information boards along the highway. Perhaps the Ministry of Highways could clear out this space a couple of times in February and March as the peak snow season winds down.



Suggestion #34

Consider adding activities, attractions, amenities. Under annual events, "Slocan City Logging Days" is listed, but without any dates. Even "third weekend in June" would perhaps sell the event to visitors.

Include a two-line teaser for the Provincial Park as to why a visitor should see it. This signage presents a good opportunity to make a sale.



Suggestion #35

Another ideal location for a small wall-mounted brochure holder. Memorial Hall is beautiful. Consider adding planters and landscaping around it to showcase it more.



Suggestion #36

Always work to "connect the dots" and to cross sell other communities, attractions, activities, and visitor amenities.

(Below) Include seasonal information and more information. Without specifics, visitors will move on.

