



# Proposal for a Feasibility Study

## FOR A MULTI-USE CINEMA IN QUALICUM BEACH

Submitted to the RDN Northern Community Economic Development Grants

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# Feasibility Study for a Multi-Use Cinema in Qualicum Beach

## Background

In 2015, the Economic Development Strategy for Parksville and Qualicum Beach identified a “local entertainment gap” that could negatively impact attraction and retention of residents and tourists in the Oceanside area, specifically noting the lack of movie theatre. A previous newspaper poll featured in the Parksville-Qualicum Beach News reported that over 95% of respondents wished to see a cinema built in Qualicum Beach. Official Community Plans for the area have also placed a cinema among the top of the community’s goals.

When the Town of Qualicum Beach acquired a key property in the heart of downtown and subsequently requested proposals for the site, interested citizens recognized an opportunity to fulfill the community’s desire for a cultural space that could meet the town’s goals and support local businesses by attracting and retaining people in the downtown area. In 2018, these citizens joined together to create The Qualicum Beach Multi-Use Cinema Society (QBMUCS).

Research conducted by the Society supports the idea that community cinemas are vibrant, well-loved cultural institutions that are growing in number and popularity across the province. They are often the centre of local entertainment, creating a sense of community, reducing social isolation, and bringing together multiple generations. Community cinemas create jobs, attract tourism, stimulate education and training in the film industry and create revenue, which they are able to reinvest in the community.

To date the Society has received support from the Town of Qualicum Beach, which has been working with the Society to explore potential spaces for the proposed facility. Other activities conducted by the Society:

- **Preliminary research.** The Society has looked at different models of community cinema in the UK, the US and Canada. We have been in contact with several very successful community cinemas in BC and spoken to key figures in the industry.
- **Reaching out to a diverse community.** The Society has received support from a broad range of local community organizations and businesses.
- **Creating a website and social media accounts.** With a grant provided by the local credit union, board members have crafted information pages and online platforms to keep interested citizens up to date.
- **Launching a survey.** To build on the poll conducted by the local paper, the Society is hosting an online survey to gather more information about local needs, opinions and preferences. Visit [www.qbcinema.org](http://www.qbcinema.org).

The next step is to conduct a feasibility study to optimally position the cinema for success within the community. This third-party feasibility study is required for capital grants from federal and provincial government programs.

## Project Description

The Society envisions a community-owned cinema comprised of 1-3 screening rooms. For its primary function, the cinema will showcase a carefully-curated program of first and second run feature films, independent films, classic films, local and international films and film festivals. Secondary functions include talks, conferences, gaming events, small-scale music performances and private rentals. The question of multiple screening rooms—which is the direction most community cinemas have gone (or are going) because they allow for greater flexibility and responsiveness to community needs—is one aspect the feasibility study will explore. Other aspects include local market and competition, operating environment, and financial analysis.

The study will also explore how the following additional elements might function within the cinema as welcoming social spaces that support the Society’s vision:

- **Family-friendly cafe:** adjacent to one side of the lobby, a relaxed cafe designed to meet the needs of all ages would provide a welcoming social space and opportunities for intergenerational community building.
- **Wine bar:** on the opposite side of the lobby, a sophisticated beer and wine bar would showcase local breweries and Vancouver Island wineries in partnership with these businesses.
- **Tourism features:** As a gateway to the North Island and the West Coast, Qualicum Beach is ideally situated to provide tourists with a cinematic experience showcasing the area. In coordination with the local Tourism Information Centre, a film oriented to tourists could be shown in one of the screening rooms throughout the day during the tourist season. This is a successful practice elsewhere. It provides an all-weather experience and highlights destinations which may be lesser known.

Other aspects the Society wishes to explore are noted in the attached Scope of a Feasibility Study document.

## Service Area and Ownership

The cinema would service the local population in Qualicum Beach, Parksville, and the surrounding area (Bowser, Errington, Coombs, Nanoose) as well as visiting tourists and snowbirds. Estimated population base for the cinema is 30,000.

Once established, the cinema building would be owned by the Town of Qualicum Beach, but the program of events would be curated by the society through its volunteer Board of Directors. The day-to-day running of the facility would involve a combination of volunteers and paid positions. This is a very successful model used elsewhere.

## Strategic Economic Development Links

The proposal for a multi-use cinema in Qualicum Beach meets the area's strategic economic goals in the following ways.

### Arts and Culture

The 2015 Economic Development Strategy for Parksville and Qualicum Beach noted that one critical sector for development was "Retirement community entertainment." The same document said that "*limited entertainment options exist in the region, which could negatively impact retention and attraction (e.g. no nightclubs, no movie theaters, etc.)*." In 2018, the Official Community Plan for Qualicum Beach reinforced the need for a cinema when it prioritized *the need to value arts, culture, and community service as a daily part of life.*

A multi-use cinema space would provide retirement community entertainment by offering a local program of movies available throughout the day. Personal communication with the Cinecenta in Victoria and The Star cinema in Sidney supports the idea that retirees are some of the most enthusiastic and active movie-goers on Vancouver Island. Additionally, to the benefit of all ages, the presence of a local cinema would eliminate the challenges of driving to Nanaimo or Courtenay to view a movie. In the same way, the cinema would expand daily cultural offerings in the area by featuring a broad array of cinematic genres including documentaries, classics, independent, international and local films.

### Tourism

The 2018 Official Community Plan 2018 identified the need "*to promote Qualicum Beach as a tourist destination by providing opportunities for tourist [...] amenities within the "Village Neighbourhood"*."

As indicated above, the multi-use cinema would provide Qualicum Beach and surrounding area with a cinematic experience for tourists, showcasing the West Coast and North Island through a short film presentation, which could show daily during the tourist season. Additionally a bar showcasing local breweries and Island wineries would build on the increasingly popular tourism associated with these businesses.

### Inter-generational community building

The 2018 Qualicum Beach Official Community Plan identified the need to strengthen community and social capital through the creation of public spaces and improved community planning. The Economic Development Strategy has as one of its goals to "*retain the younger demographic*". The OCP 2018 recognized the need to "*explore ways to attract young families to the Town and school catchment area.*"

The multi-use cinema and attached social spaces would provide a significant opportunity for local residents of all ages to gather and share in appreciation of film. A

community cinema provides the opportunity to curate a program of films appealing to all ages.

### **The "nodal community"**

The multi-use cinema venue would help "*prevent economic leakage to Nanaimo and Vancouver - 'the Walmart effect'*" identified in the 2015 Parksville/Qualicum Beach Economic Development Strategy. It is a project that is key to the "nodal community" identified by the Official Community Plan in 2018.

### **Alignment with RDN Program Priorities**

The proposed project fits with the RDN Board's Media priorities in the following ways:

1. **Building arts and culture institutions:** The creation of a community-owned cinema will establish a unique institution in the region well-positioned to support local businesses and attract visitors. Currently little exists to keep residents and visitors downtown in Qualicum Beach after daytime hours. A cinema offering a variety of programming will complement local businesses seeking to expand their hours and service moviegoers both before and after show times.
2. **Promotion of arts and cultural activities in non-urban areas to promote regional tourism:** Successful community cinemas currently operating on Salt Spring Island, in Sidney, in Salmon Arm, and Nelson draw tourists by adding an extra entertainment option to the small community experience. Film festivals and other cinematic offerings can also become tourist attractions in their own right.
3. **Support for innovative or unique events that showcase the region's recreational, environmental and tourism amenities:** Cinemas offering themed film festivals commonly sell out across the province. The Qualicum Beach cinema could offer viewings of festival films (e.g. wildlife or nature-themed movies) that showcase issues and locales relevant to the region's natural amenities. The cinema can showcase the North Island and West Coast to tourists interested in venturing further afield or deepening their understanding of the history and geography of the area.
4. **Identifying needs and opportunities to attract high tech businesses to the region:** Successful community cinemas in BC count among their clients high-tech businesses seeking rental space to host screenings and other events. The cinema could also support the region's growing film industry by providing educational and training opportunities, using the cinema's facilities.

## **Conclusion**

Community cinemas are important to the quality of life of residents fortunate enough to have them located within their communities. They stimulate the local economy in terms of jobs and tourism. Successful community cinemas also reinvest substantial revenues back into the local area. The Qualicum Beach Multi-Use Cinema Society seeks to establish such an institution in Qualicum Beach, to meet the needs of a growing population and fulfill the economic and cultural development objectives identified by local government and citizens. Exploring the models currently used by thriving BC cinemas, along with considering the market, financial viability, and operational issues through a feasibility study will give this project the best chance for success.