



The Comox Valley

2004 Quality of Life Report



*Funding for this project provided by
HRSDC and the Comox Valley
Social Planning Society*



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

The Government of Canada has contributed funding to this initiative.
Le gouvernement du Canada a contribué au financement de cette initiative.



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Published by the Comox Valley Social Planning Society. Printed in Canada, June 2004 on material containing 100% post-consumer fibre, produced chlorine free.

Front cover: From top to bottom, Courtenay Air Park, hill at Goose Spit, and Helliwell Provincial Park on Hornby Island. All photos by K.E. Jones, © 2004.

Letter from the President

July 1, 2004

Dear Reader,

Established as a collaborative group, the Comox Valley Social Planning Council was formed in the early 1990s to respond to a range of community issues. Members include professionals, local government officials, and community citizens. Our objectives are to foster awareness of existing service networks, develop a consolidated approach for improving existing services and creating new ones, prioritize community needs, and serve as an advisory body. Since its inception, the Council has been gathering statistics from the community for analysis and discussion. We address social issues and support community initiatives to improve the quality of life in the Comox Valley.

Early initiatives of the group include a survey and a Healthy Communities Project. These initiatives identified youth as a predominant concern in the Valley, resulting in the employment of a youth coordinator to establish a number of youth programs. A community report card, published in 2002, serves as a benchmark for comparison and evaluation over time. The current report analyses the quality of life indicators using the most current statistics, and examines a number of new indicators. A new website at <http://www.cvsocialplanning.ca> allows all citizens to have access to the report.

We thank the Advisory Committee members who spent many hours volunteering their time in advising us as this project progressed. We also thank all those community members who participated in the focus groups. Your assistance throughout the project was invaluable. And, finally, we thank Human Resources and Skills Development Canada for their funding and support. The quality of the people who worked on this report was outstanding.

We hope community decision-makers will use this report to create meaningful strategies and plan for the future. The Comox Valley is a paradise. By assessing our strengths and weaknesses, by examining how we are doing compared to a few years ago, and by acting on the basis of these statistics, we can make this an even better place in which to live. In the words of David Ross, Canadian Council on Social Development:

We want to see policymakers' adrenaline react to social indicators the same way it responds now to economic indicators. Our future prosperity depends on it. Economic indicators only measure current output resulting from past investments made in the population's well being.

Sincerely,



EM (Bunny) Shannon, President
The Comox Valley Social Planning Society
PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

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Executive Summary

“The Comox Valley is a magical place to be.”

Whether retirees, business owners, health professionals, or young couples starting families, it became evident in the early stages of our research that “quality of life” is a priority for many Comox Valley residents. The Valley has much to offer: luxurious recreational and natural features, access to lower housing costs, and smaller community living. Quality of life is defined by the values and beliefs of residents in the Comox Valley; however, demographic, economic, and social changes in the Valley will continue to present opportunities and challenges to community groups and non-profit agencies that provide services to Comox Valley residents.

Defining quality of life is not new to the Comox Valley. Beginning in the early 1990s, a council was formed to conduct a survey in the Valley regarding what constituted a healthy community. Two key issues were documented: youth and community planning. The latter led to formation of the Comox Valley Social Planning Society (CVSPS) in 1996. Comprised of diverse and talented people, the CVSPS identified the need to develop a “report card” for the community. Using reliable and documented Canadian models, the 2002 Quality of Life project took form to establish a baseline “snapshot” of the Comox Valley. The CVSPS commissioned the 2004 Quality of Life project in response to the overwhelming positive feedback from the 2002 report.

Before discussing some of the findings of this study, it is important to provide some background information. The Quality of Life project team worked with 11 members of the Comox Valley Social Planning Advisory Committee to identify the quality of life indicators described in this report. The Advisory Committee also assisted in identifying potential data sources, acted as a “sounding board,” and revised report sections. For more information on the methodology used, please refer to the Methodology section in the appendices. The CVSPS and Human Resources Skills and Development Canada provided funding for this initiative.

Quality of Life reports are meant to be snapshots of communities at specific moments, albeit snapshots in hindsight to previous years. They compare social, economic, and environmental categories representing the overall health of communities across time. Their purpose is to assist in community-based planning. This community report card addresses the Comox Valley, including Cumberland, Comox, Courtenay, and Regional areas A, B, C, and K (Denman and Hornby Islands). The information presented comes from two sources: secondary data sources (information collected by others), and project interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Most of the secondary information is based on the 2001 Census and is several years old. However, wherever possible the most recent data was obtained to reflect the current profile of the Comox Valley. The interviews, focus groups and surveys facilitated the primary data collection portion of our research. Discussions at these events provided the research team with a wealth of anecdotal information. They also raised awareness of the project.

The following bullets highlight key findings from this report:

- The number of families in the Comox Valley has increased significantly since 1996; however, the average number of children has decreased from 1.8 to 1.0 per family in corresponding years.

-
- Sixteen percent of the total population in the Comox Valley is 65 years and over, higher than the BC rate of 13%. The percentage of the population over 65 in the three main centres is: Comox – 20%, Courtenay – 16%, and Cumberland – 14%.
 - Affordability is changing in the Comox Valley. Since 2001, average house prices have increased 31% from \$140, 852 to \$204,467 in 2004.
 - In 2003, the Comox Valley had a vacancy rate of 3.7%; the lowest it's been since 1992. Since 2001, the vacancy rate has decreased 6.6%, but average rents have increased 5.8% and 3.3% for row housing and apartments, respectively.
 - In 2001, almost half of all renters in the Comox Valley (47.2%) paid 30% or more of their gross household income on rent, an increase of 2.8% since 1996.
 - The number of public transit riders for the 2003-2004 period was 321,500; a 21.5% jump since 2002/03 and a 67.8% jump since 2000/01. Students and adults make up the largest portion of transit users.
 - In Courtenay, the Comox Valley Food Bank gives out an average of 1,000 bags of groceries a month.
 - The Sonshine Lunch Club, the largest community soup kitchen in the Comox Valley, served 38,100 meals in 2003, a figure that has increased 15.5% from 2002. On average, 186 people are served each day.
 - The Comox Valley's Infant Mortality Rate is ranked approximately 15th out of 78 Local Health Areas in BC.
 - The Comox Valley Transition Society (Lilli House) received 904 crisis calls in 2002, and 1,171 calls in 2003. These numbers remain somewhat consistent with the 1997-2001 average statistics of 1,089 calls annually, as reported in 2002.
 - Life expectancy in the Comox Valley is 76.9 years for males, and 82.3 years for females.
 - Of the 43 general practitioners in the Comox Valley, six are accepting new patients who are new to the Valley.
 - The number of reported violent crimes in the Comox Valley in 2003 was 776, an increase of 6% from the 729 reported incidents of violent crime in 2002.
 - The number of sexual assaults reported in the Comox Valley in 2003 was 61, higher than the 45 reported incidents in 2001.

-
- The ratio of grade 12 students graduating and students entering grade 12 has been declining in the Comox Valley; whereas, the province ratios are increasing.
 - There are 66 Municipal parks (29 serviced and 37 unserviced) in Comox, Courtenay and Cumberland, plus 33 Regional parks and 10 Provincial parks.
 - In 2003, \$139,967 in donations were made to the United Way Comox Valley; a 6% increase from 2002.
 - The largest employers in the Valley continue to be Canadian Forces Base Comox 19 Wing, School District #71, St. Joseph's General Hospital, and Mt. Washington Alpine Resort.

The quality of life indicators in this report cover a broad spectrum of areas. The various levels of government have a multitude of legislative responsibilities for addressing these issues. In some cases there may be overlaps, while in others, there may be gaps in responsibility. When all three levels of government work together with the business sector, community groups, fund providers, non-profit agencies, and residents, the community benefits. Our hope is that the Comox Valley will continue to grow as a healthy and strong community.

2004 Quality of Life Report

Statistics: The only science that enables different experts using the same figures to draw different conclusions.

Evan Esar (1899 – 1995)

American Humourist

Introduction

You may smile or laugh out loud at the quote above by Evan Esar, but the people who worked on this report know the truth behind the words. Despite our best intentions to glean the best statistics from the labyrinth of available data, we knew in advance the improbability of attaining this goal. Data is never perfect, and neither are the people who interpret them. However, we have tried to present the numbers in a succinct and clear manner, as well as to provide a context that is relevant and meaningful to the Comox Valley. We apologize in advance for the imperfection of our endeavour. Statistics have made us humble. Our experience on the project has opened our eyes both to the incredible number of people who work so diligently for our communities, and to the many challenges facing individuals and groups who enhance our quality of life in the Valley.

About the 2004 Report

The Comox Valley Social Planning Society commissioned the 2004 Quality of Life project in response to the community report card produced in 2002. The current report incorporates 2001 Census data into all sections of the original report and uses the new information as a basis for analysis. Quality of Life reports are meant to be snapshots of communities at specific moments, albeit, snapshots in hindsight to previous years. They compare social, economic, and environmental categories representing the overall health of communities across time. Their purpose is to assist in community-based planning. Part of the 2004 project objective was to generate such a report.

Another project goal included expanding the utility of the report. In conjunction with the publication of this report, a website has been launched by the Comox Valley Social Planning Society at <http://www.cvsocialplanning.ca>. The website provides ongoing access to the *2004 Quality of Life Report*, and allows information to be updated in a timely manner.

The Quality of Life team conducted interviews, focus groups and surveys in order to raise awareness of the project and to collect anecdotal information. This does not imply that the information is of little value. Often the passion and colour of a community are best conveyed by the citizens' intimate experiences of daily living.

The report is a tool to help people and organizations make decisions, decide future directions, and identify strategies. Despite the ever-present draw for our research team to state the obvious, to draw conclusions, or to make suggestions, from the outset our primary goal has been to remain neutral. Any hint of bias or favouritism is inadvertent, except where the citizens themselves speak about their personal experiences. The report is the messenger, not the message.

People will draw their own conclusions as to the success of our endeavours, the usefulness of the data, and the relevance of the *2004 Quality of Life Report*. Feedback is a valuable part of the process, and the project has provided a forum for feedback at the Comox Valley Social Planning Society website. We are confident that the report will promote discussion and, perhaps, challenge some preconceived notions about the social conditions and issues in the Valley. Beyond that, our sincerest hopes are that it will inspire and encourage new appreciation for our diverse community.

About the Indicators

Never assume. Indicators are as useful as the data that is collected. We rely primarily on data gathered by other agencies and organizations. Sometimes, the numbers from two or more reliable sources don't match, no matter how many times we check our mathematical calculations. This could be due to human error, lack of documentation, or a simple difference in methodologies. Sometimes the numbers simply don't exist. Air quality for example is an important indicator of environmental health; however, air quality is not yet measured in the Comox Valley. What is missing often speaks louder than what is present. Wherever possible, we have indicated when data conflicted, when we chose among options, or when information was incomplete.

What is relevant today may be immaterial tomorrow. The importance of indicators will change according to the needs of a community. Our choice of indicators in each of the general categories is based partly on the previous report of 2002, and partly on what we felt needed clarification or expansion as we conducted our research. We examined additional indicators set by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The 2004 report examines 70 indicators that are grouped under 11 broad categories; whereas, the 2002 report had 12 categories. Including "health professionals" into the "health" category seemed a logical change. We have also changed the title for "leisure, parks and recreation" to "cultural and recreational opportunities" in order to include a broader range of activities beyond those traditionally associated with recreation or leisure. The 11 categories in this report are:

1. Population Demographics
2. Housing
3. Transportation
4. Food Security
5. Health
6. Education
7. Arts, Culture, and Recreation
8. Public Safety
9. Environment
10. Community Involvement
11. Employment and Economy

Many of the categories and indicators often intersect in surprising ways. Consequently, we felt it was valuable to note related indicators wherever an overlap occurred. Since the 2002 report, assessment of the indicators show there are:

- 30 representing a change, either an increase or decrease;
- 8 representing no significant change; and
- 32 assessments with no comparable data or incomplete data.

There are 32 new indicators in the 2004 report: nine in health, three in transportation, four in housing, three in population demographics, six in public safety, and six in environment. The arts, culture and recreation section has an additional indicator. Other changes to note are name variations for individual indicators. “Non-Market Housing” replaces “Available Affordable Housing” and “Social Housing.” The latter two are closely related, and the new title removes the stigma usually attached to the other names. For the same reason, we have changed “Percentage of Families on Social Assistance” to “Income Security.” “Bankruptcy and Incorporation Rates” is expanded to reflect the traditional inclusion of both in economic discussions. “Homelessness and Emergency Shelter Usage” are placed together, again to reflect the relationship between the two. In some cases, we were able to collect data over a range of years for the new indicators. A comparison chart of the indicators is in the appendix.

Population Demographics

Population Indicators

- Population Growth
- Lone Parent Families
- Number of Families
- Marital Status
- The Aging Population
- Aboriginals

DID YOU KNOW?

2002 population growth in BC translates into a growth rate of five people per hour.

*NEW, Population Reprise:
Births and Migration in the Northwest.*

Importance of Population Demographics

Understanding population growth and the characteristics of a population are vital to community planning. As population increases, so do energy consumption and waste generation, which place additional burdens on the environment. Projections of expected growth help architects, engineers, and municipal planners design future developments, and make policies that support a sustainable environment and economy. Analysis of population characteristics also allow for planning around the needs of a specific target group, such as youths or seniors. For example, the number of students enrolled in schools changes over time. School officials respond to these changes by increasing or decreasing the number of schools in a community. Also, the number of staff in each school will vary, as will the arrangement of transportation needed for students. Service organizations respond to changing population demographics because they provide support to certain segments of a population, such as seniors. Consider that as the overall population ages, demands increase on the health care system, long-term care, and affordable housing. Knowledge of population statistics influences the way governments, health agencies, and other service groups meet the needs of the communities they serve.

Population Growth

From the census years of 1996 to 2001, the population in the Comox Valley has increased 0.7%. Population in the province has grown by 4.9%. Cowichan Valley, a community of a similar size and demographics, has experienced a population increase of 1.4%. The Capital Regional District and the Nanaimo Regional District populations increased 2.4% and 4.3% respectively in the same time period. Although the Comox Valley experienced slower growth, the basic population increase projected by BC Stats for the Valley is 1.2 – 1.5% per year. Gender percentages remain unchanged from the previous report: 49% male, and 51% female.¹

¹ Source: BC Stats, Census of Population and Housing, 2004.

Table 1: Population Growth of the Comox Valley

	2001	2003
Total Population	55,314	58,521
Comox	11,660	11,937
Courtenay*	18,304	20,340*
Cumberland	2,732	2,747

Source: 2001 Census, BC Stats, Community Facts.

*Includes 773 people annexed in from Sandwick and Arden Areas.

Lone Parent Families

In 1996 there were 2,115 lone parent families in the Comox Valley. This increased to 2,555 families in 2001. Although it appears to be a 21% increase, a criteria adjustment made by Statistics Canada has set the increase at 10.5%.²

Lone parent families often struggle with more poverty, unemployment, unaffordable housing, and other stress-related issues. In 2001, females headed 87% of lone parent families in the Comox Valley, versus the BC total of 81%. Low wage single parents in BC spend over 85 % of their take-home income to cover rent and childcare expenses (*Income for Living*, 2004). These parents struggle to find alternate childcare, or they rely on childcare subsidy to afford their basic needs despite working year round.

Number of Families

The number of families in the Comox Valley has increased significantly since 1996; however, the average number of children has decreased from 1.8 to 1.0 per family in the corresponding years. This figure is slightly below the provincial average of 1.1 children per family.

Table 2: Number of Families and Children at Home in the Comox Valley

Year	Census Families	No Children	Children	Avg. No. of Children
COMOX VALLEY				
1996	15,935	44%	56%	1.8
2001	16,465	46%	54%	1.0
BRITISH COLUMBIA				
1996	1,008,440	39%	61%	1.8
2001	1,086,030	44%	56%	1.1

Source: BC Stats, Census of Population and Housing, 2004

Why the number of families matter: Recognizing the trend of less children coming into the district, the Comox Valley School District #71 established a Declining Enrollment Task Force in

² Source: BC Stats, Census of Population and Housing, 2004.

2003. A report produced by the Task Force (SD71, p. 6) concluded that the number of students in the district would drop from approximately 9,300 in 2003 to 8,300 by the year 2007. This is the equivalent loss of one school per year, or approximately 250 to 300 students annually.

Related Indicator: Student/Educator Ratios and Graduation Rates, Education Section.

Marital Status

Although the percentage of people legally married and not separated has fallen from 56% in 1996 to 53% in 2001, the percentage of people divorced, widowed, and separated remains unchanged. The rate of single people increased only slightly by 1%. BC Vital Stats reports that over 340 marriage commissioners perform approximately 57% of the roughly 22,000 marriages solemnized in BC each year. There are six marriage commissioners in the Comox Valley. These numbers do not include the recent number of same-sex couples who are, effective July 2003, able to legally marry. An article in the Comox Valley Echo states that by January 2004, local marriage commissioners had performed 16 same-sex ceremonies (Purdon, p. A4). In a phone conversation, a local marriage commissioner has performed three more ceremonies and has five more scheduled for the summer (Bruce Curtis, phone conversation, June 1, 2004).

The Aging Population

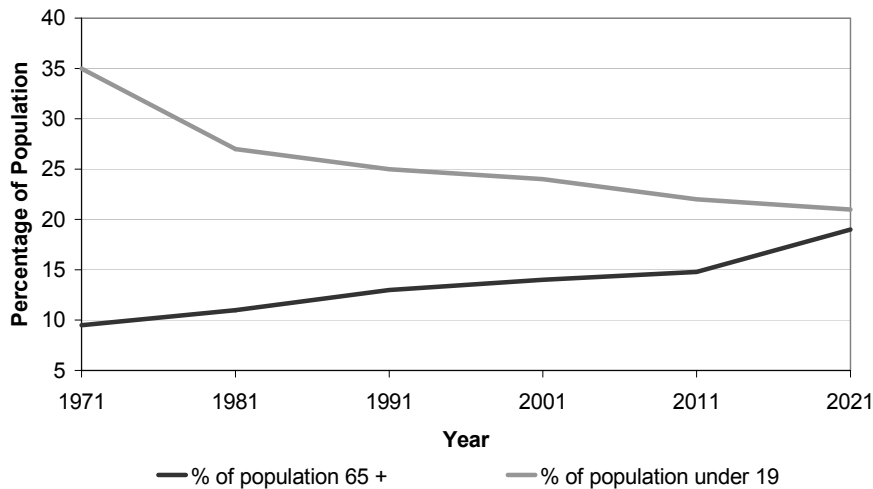
Like the rest of Canada and the U.S., BC's population has been aging steadily since the beginning of the 1970s. As we head towards 2010 and beyond, the proportion of people 65 and over will accelerate significantly. The projected rate for BC will increase from 13.5% in 2003 to 15.9% in 2012. For the Comox Valley, the corresponding figures will jump from 16% to 18.7%. These increases in the retired

population will require planning in the areas of programs, services, and the types of facilities needed. Health and long term care facilities are already on the public radar, but the challenges of finding the right mix will continue to intensify overtime. The housing needs in general will vary with demands being placed on developing accessible and affordable housing.

Life expectancy is 80.7 years in BC. If BC were a country, it would have the second longest life expectancy in the world, trailing only Japan. Life expectancy in Japan is 81.7 years, and in Canada is 79.2 years.

*Cascadia Scorecard, p. 15.
Based on 2001 statistics.*

Figure 1: Seniors and Children as a Percentage of the Population

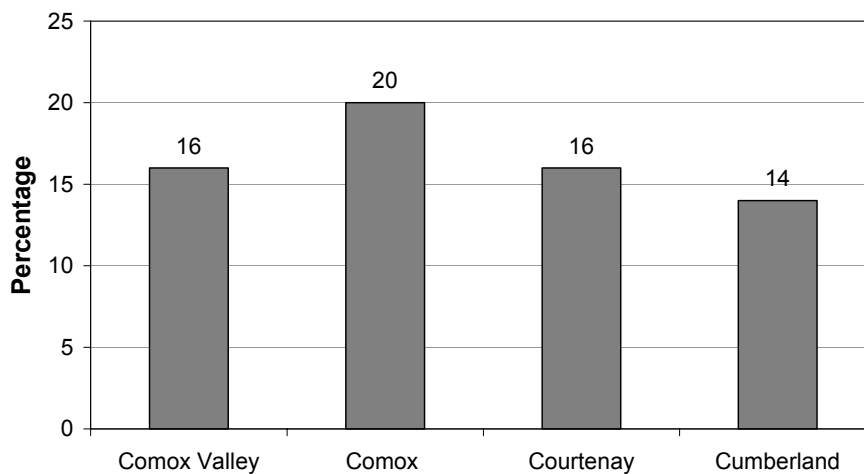


Source: Based on Shrier, Figure 2, p.2.

There are currently 8,530 people over the age of 65 in the Comox Valley. That figure represents 16% of the total population. This figure is higher than the BC rate of 13%. The percentage of the population over 65 in the three main centres is: Comox – 20%, Courtenay – 16%, and Cumberland – 14%. Within the total number of seniors, 34% are classified as non-family, and of these seniors, 85% live alone, a percentage that is five to six per cent higher than the whole of BC.

Related Indicators: Premature Mortality Rates, Health Section.

Figure 2: Percentage of the Population 65+



Source: BC Stats 2001.

Aboriginal Identity

There are 1950 declared persons of aboriginal identity in the Comox Valley, about 4% of the total population. The percentage of people with aboriginal identity in all of BC is also 4%.

Assets and Resources

- BC Statistics: Population and Demographics at <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/pop/popstart.htm>
- Statistics Canada 2001 Census at <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/home/index.cfm>
- BC Vital Statistics at <http://www.vs.gov.bc.ca>

Housing

Housing Indicators

- Housing Tenure
- Housing Costs
- Housing Starts
- Vacancy Rates and Rents
- Non-Market Housing
- Homelessness and Emergency Shelter Usage

Importance of Housing

The housing sector is a major component of the Canadian economy. Housing increases benefit a broad range of industries. For example, residential expenditures create movement in new construction and renovation, as well as industries such as manufacturing, retail trade, and transportation, all of which supply goods and services to the construction and renovation industries. Investments in housing facilitate high employment growth, creating jobs and business opportunities in communities across the country.³

In conjunction with its direct contribution to employment and investment, housing plays a fundamental role in supporting steady economic growth. A community's economy relies on the ability of workers and businesses to adapt to new opportunities and challenges. An adequate supply of housing, capable of accepting a growing population and labour force, is pivotal in attracting the quality and variety of employment needed to maintain a dynamic and expanding economic base.⁴

Housing and the built environment are an important part of BC's family life. According to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), "Housing is the most variable component in family budgets, and is the largest financial commitment of many families".⁵ For those who are able to purchase homes, housing constitutes a major financial asset, contributing to their longer-term financial security. According to Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), "Canadian Housing Observer", having a secure source of housing is widely regarded as a stepping stone in gaining and maintaining employment, in providing a secure and supportive environment for raising children, and in accessing key public services such as health, education, and social services.⁶

³ : CMHC, 2003 Canadian Housing Observer. Introduction: Why Housing Matters. Online at <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/cahoob/inwhhoma/index.cfm>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Quality of Life in Canadian Communities* (1999). The FCM Quality of Life Reporting System. p.44. Ottawa: Ontario

⁶ CMHC, 2003. *Canadian Housing Observer. Introduction: Why Housing Matters*. Online at <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/cahoob/inwhhoma/index.cfm>.

Housing Tenure

In 2001, there were 25,492 total dwellings in the Comox Valley and according to the Comox Valley Economic Development Society, 71.7% of these private households were owned. The remaining 28.3% of dwellings were rented.⁷

Housing Costs

The Average Housing Price indicator shows where the cost of housing has gone in the Comox Valley, and its relationship with low-income populations and the need for affordable housing. Compared to provincial average housing prices, the Comox Valley is still one of the most affordable locations on Vancouver Island in which to purchase a home.

Affordability is changing in the Comox Valley. Since 1991, average house prices have increased 31% from \$140,852 to \$204,467 in 2004. Table 3 shows the average housing prices for the Comox Valley for the month of April 1996, 2001 and 2004 as well as the percentage change. The Comox Valley is still considered affordable, according to provincial and Vancouver Island housing price averages; however, with the recent and continued increases in housing prices, this current view may change in the near future.

Table 3: Average Housing Price in the Comox Valley, 1996-2004

Average Price 1996	Average Price 2001	Average Price 2004	% Change 1996-2001	% Change 2001-2004
\$154,818	\$140,852	\$204,467	- 9%	31%

Source: Multiple Listing Services (MLS) sales data from the Vancouver Island Real Estate Board. Online at <http://www.vireb.com>.

BC citizens face some of the highest housing costs in all of Canada, with almost half experiencing challenges with housing affordability. With the increased costs of buying a home in BC, homeowners are more likely to feel the negative effects of paying beyond 30% of their income for housing costs. Increased housing costs force many families to make difficult decisions about how to budget their housing and basic needs.

One of the main reasons I moved to the Comox Valley was because housing was so affordable. That was almost 15 years ago, and look where [housing] it is today.

Female, 50-59 years, moved to Royston in 1990

Related Indicator: Average Income in the Employment and Economy section.

Housing Starts

Housing starts track the number of new single-family homes or buildings constructed throughout the year. They are considered a leading economic indicator for predicting future trends. Declining housing starts indicate a slowing economy, while increases in housing activity can pull an economy out of a downturn.

Table 4 shows the Housing Starts in Comox Valley by Area from 2001-2003. There were 366 Housing Starts in 2003 and housing starts appear to have steadily increased since 2001 in both

⁷ Comox Valley Economic Development Society. *Quality of Life Report*, p. 11.

Comox and Courtenay with little change in Cumberland. The largest change in housing starts was in Courtenay from 2001-2002 at a 134% change, and in Comox from 2002-2003 at 119%.

Table 4: Housing Starts in Comox Valley by Area and Year (1996 to 2003)

	2001	2002	2003
Comox	47	42	92
Courtenay	103	241	268
Cumberland	2	5	6
Other	35	68	86

Source: British Columbia Housing Starts for Urban Areas and Communities. Online at <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/dd/handout/HSTART.pdf>

Vacancy Rates and Rents

According to CMHC, a contributory factor to rent increases is the vacancy rate. When a community experiences fewer vacant market rental apartment and row houses, the rental market often becomes more competitive. When the supply of rental housing is low and demand is high, rental prices increase. Consequently, those individuals faced with lower incomes have a higher likelihood of paying 30% or more of their gross income on rent.

Markets with more varied economies, such as the Comox Valley, have lower vacancy rates than markets with resource-based economies. According to CMHC, in October 2003, the Comox Valley had a vacancy rate of 3.7%; the lowest it's been since 1992 (CMHC, FastFax, p. 3). Since 2001 the vacancy rate has decreased 6.6%.

Table 5 shows the Vacancy Rates by Dwelling Type and Bedroom Type in the Comox Valley. In 2003, bachelor suites had the highest vacancy rates while three bedroom townhouses recorded the fewest vacancies. One-bedroom apartments showed the largest decrease in vacancy from 1.7% to 6.4% in 2001.

Table 5: Vacancy Rates by Dwelling Type and Bedroom Type in the Comox Valley

Dwelling Type	Bachelor		1 Bedroom		2 Bedroom		3 Bedroom		Total	
	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001	2003
Row Housing	N/A	N/A	58.8%	N/A	21.6%	4.2%	4.1%	0.0%	17.4%	2.6%
Apartments	4.0%	9.3%	6.4%	1.7%	10.6%	4.8%	2.3%	4.2%	8.6%	4.0%

Source: FastFax: Northern Vancouver Island/Sunshine Coast. 2001-2003 Rental Market Report. CMHC. Victoria, BC.

Table 6 shows the Average Rents by Dwelling Type and Bedroom Type for the Comox Valley. According to CMHC, in 2003 the average rent for row housing was \$581 and \$524 for apartments. Since 2001, average rents in the Comox Valley have increased 5.8% and 3.3% for row housing and apartments, respectively.

Table 6: Average Rents by Dwelling Type and Bedroom Type in the Comox Valley

Dwelling Type	Bachelor		1 Bedroom		2 Bedroom		3 Bedroom		Total	
	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001	2003
Row Housing	N/A	N/A	\$411	N/A	\$494	\$519	\$659	\$675	\$549	\$545
Apartments	\$348	\$358	\$451	\$469	\$541	\$559	\$604	\$610	\$507	\$524

Source: FastFax: Northern Vancouver Island/Sunshine Coast. 2001-2003 Rental Market Report. CMHC. Victoria, BC

According to Statistics Canada, in 2001 in the Comox Valley, almost half of all renters (47.2%) paid 30% or more of their gross household income on rent. Since 1996, the percentage of renters in the Comox Valley paying 30% or more of their gross income has risen 2.8%. By Statistics Canada standards, households paying 30% or more on housing costs are considered to have housing affordability problems. The downward trend in rental vacancies means that the Comox Valley can expect higher rent increases in the future.

Related Indicator: Average Income, Employment and Economy Section.

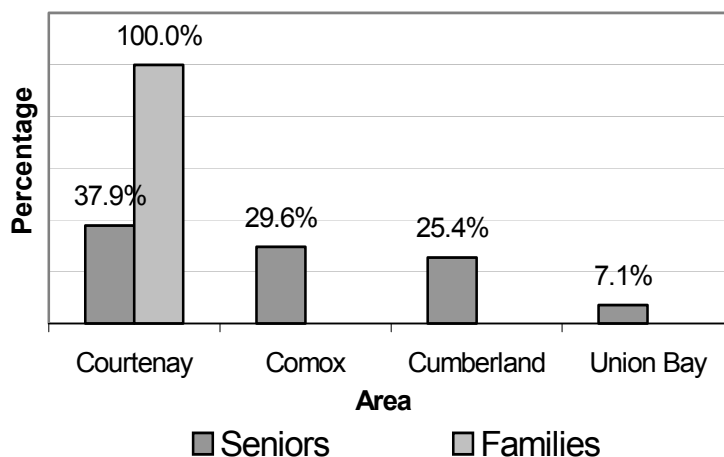
Non-Market Housing

As previously indicated, affordable housing is key for those individuals facing income-related challenges. Non-market housing, or subsidized housing, provides individuals, families and seniors with affordable housing at 30% or less than their gross monthly income. However, if there isn't enough affordable housing, more people with lower incomes are at risk of becoming homeless or "near homeless."

In the Comox Valley in 2004, there were 15 non-market housing developments with a total of 243 units. Non-market housing provides affordable housing to individuals and families on lower incomes by ensuring that housing costs are no more than 30% of gross monthly income. Thirteen housing developments and 71.9% units were for seniors and/or adults with a disability. The remaining two housing developments and 28.1% of units were for families. Of those non-market units for families, almost 54% are for First Nations. Currently, there are no non-market housing units available for single people with low incomes.

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of units for seniors and/or adults with a disability and families. Family units are only available in Courtenay, while seniors units are available in Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland and Union Bay.

Figure 3: Non-Market Housing by Type and Area in Comox Valley, 2003



Source: *The Link. BC's Affordable Housing. July 2003. BC Housing, Vancouver, BC.*

Assisted Living for Seniors

It is well known that seniors want to stay in their homes as long as possible. The majority of seniors live in private housing that is mainly owner-occupied and single-detached housing. However, as they age and as their health status changes, seniors want a choice in the type of care they receive and where they receive it. They are looking for a broader range of options than is currently available—options that will promote independence, choice, and quality of life.

The Independent Living BC (ILBC) program under BC Housing, announced in 2003 that it will create 3,500 housing units of independent living with support services by 2007. Of these units, 1,000 will be built by the private sector; the remainder will be subsidized under the ILBC. Low-income seniors are able to rent these units for 70 % of their after-tax income. This fee covers their accommodation, personal care, and hospitality services, such as meals, housekeeping, laundry, recreational opportunities, and 24-hour response system.⁸

A total of 363 assisted living units were announced in late April 2004 for Vancouver Island. Of those, 75 units are slated for Courtenay at the Laurel Lodge site. Built in two phases, the development includes 110 assisted living apartments, 75 of which will be subsidized through rent supplement. Construction is slated to begin in the summer of 2004.⁹

Related Indicator: The Aging Population, Population Demographics Section.

Supportive Living for Persons with Mental Illness

Since March 2004, Vancouver Island Health Authority is providing partial subsidies for an apartment complex for persons with serious and persistent mental illness. The apartment complex can hold up to 12 persons and as of March 2004, occupancy was at about 58%. Similar to a transition society, the stays of residents will vary and will be determined by their abilities. Residents

⁸ Vancouver Sun, 23 March 2004.

⁹ Vancouver Island Health Authority, 29 April 2004.

pay for rent and partial costs for the food program. Vancouver Island Health Authority provide three staff members, and the apartment is somewhat subsidized.¹⁰

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) administers a nine-unit apartment complex in the Comox Valley. Funding of the New Horizons complex comes from BC Housing.¹¹

Habitat for Humanity

In early June 2004, the Comox Valley Habitat Humanity Chapter announced its first family to have a home built. Habitat for Humanity builds homes and sells them to low-income families for affordable, no-interest mortgages. Habitat clients must volunteer 300 to 500 hours to help build their home or homes for others.¹²

Homelessness and Emergency Shelter Usage

Identified as a national issue, many Canadian communities, including the Comox Valley, are experiencing more homeless people living on their streets and in emergency shelters. Concurrent to this trend is a rise in the number of individuals who are considered “hard to house.” While the magnitude of the problem, and the profile of the homeless and the hard to house vary from community to community, the common experience is that communities are struggling to address this difficult and complex issue (Shelter Net, online).

The literature on homelessness demonstrates there are strong relationships between homelessness and the health care, social service, and criminal justice systems. Individuals who do not have access to ... safe, secure, affordable shelter have more health problems than the general population; experience social problems that may be exacerbated by their lack of shelter; and are more likely to become involved in criminal activity than the general population.¹³ Consequently, this results in greater use of community services, causes higher costs to the health care system, and decreases quality of life.

Acquiring an accurate picture of homelessness is very difficult in the Comox Valley. According to the literature, a common way of counting and describing homeless in a community is through the use of emergency shelter nights.¹⁴ However, this approach doesn't capture the full extent of homelessness, nor does it include those who do not use shelters, such as those living on the streets or doubling up with family and friends. Shelter data can still provide a clear snapshot view of homelessness in a community.

In the Comox Valley there are two Emergency Shelters: the Salvation Army Shelter for Men, and the Lily House, a transition home for women and children run by the Transition Society. The Salvation Army has 16 beds for men, although women and children are welcome when a man accompanies them. Lily House has 12 emergency shelter beds available for women and children who are feeling unsafe and who need a supportive environment. They accept abused women and other women who do not have anywhere else to go.

¹⁰ Comox Valley Record, 10 March 2004.

¹¹ Jill Marston, Eureka Clubhouse, 11 June 2004 and Roz MacKinnon, Manager, MHAS NI, 15 June 2004.

¹² Comox Valley ECHO, 8 June 2004.

¹³ BC Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security, Homelessness: Causes and Effects. Volume 1, p. 1. Online at http://www.mcaws.gov.bc.ca/housing/homeless/Vol1_execsum.pdf. Retrieved June 16, 2004.

¹⁴ Homelessness. Volume 2. BC Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security. Feb. 2001. Online at http://www.mcaws.gov.bc.ca/housing/homeless/Vol2_Ch2.pdf. Retrieved 16 June 2004.

In 2003, the number of bed nights for the two shelters was 4,895, an increase of 14% since 2001. What the numbers don't show are the demographic characteristics of the users. Nor do the numbers depict the changes in clientele, or provide an estimate of absolute homelessness in the Valley. They do not show the challenges faced with government guidelines. For example, the men's shelter is for emergency three-day use only and the Lily House had to turn away 62 women in 2003 because the house was full or because the women did not fit the mandate. There are no alternatives for those men who need assistance beyond the three-day limitation. Additionally, the Lily House is seeing more women who are street-involved, have substance use issues, and are experiencing mental illness.

In summary, housing advocates and shelter providers in BC see the following trends:¹⁵

- There is a lack of facilities for certain sub-groups such as women and youths;
- Seasonal patterns of homelessness exist;
- There is a correlation between homelessness and transience; and
- Homelessness is becoming more visible.

Assets and Resources

- BC Housing, a crown agency that develops, manages and administers a wide range of subsidized housing options across the province at <http://www.bchousing.ca/>
- Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation has a website for housing and mortgage insurance information in Canada at <http://www.cmhc.ca/>.
- Choosing a Care Facility or Home: A Guide to Choosing a Licensed Residential or Residential Care Home at <http://www.healthplanning.gov.bc.ca/ccf/adult/com031.pdf>.
- Choosing a Care Facility or Home: A Guide to Choosing a Licensed Long Term Care Facility at <http://www.inglewoodcarecentre.com/other/com031.pdf>.
- Abbeyfield Houses Society of Canada at <http://www.abbeyfield.ca/>.
- The Vancouver Island Real Estate Board represents approximately 720 licensed REALTOR members in more than 66 member offices on Vancouver Island (North of Victoria) <http://www.vireb.com>.
- Shelter Net BC, a website dedicated to providing suitable shelter for all people in BC at <http://www.shelternetbc.ca/>.

¹⁵ Homelessness. Volume 2. BC Ministry of Social Development & Economic Security. Feb. 2001. Online at http://www.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/housing/homeless/Vol2_Ch2.pdf. Retrieved 16 June 2004.

Transportation

Transportation Indicators

- Public Transit Usage
- Accessible Services
- HandyDART Usage
- Mobility Impairment Permit Holders
- Comox Valley Airport Usage

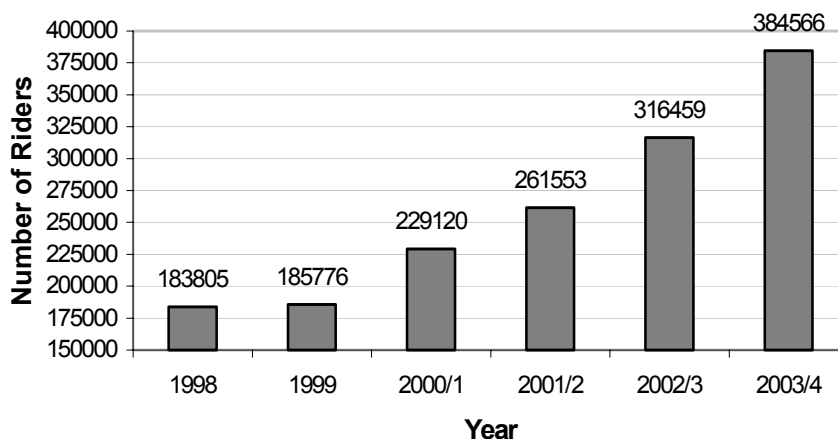
If you drive less than 16,000 kilometres a year, consider car sharing, a less expensive alternative to owning or renting a vehicle. For information on car sharing in the Valley, phone 1-877-226-2277 or visit the Comox Valley Co-operative Auto Network (CAN) website at <http://www.cooperativeauto.net>.

Importance of Transportation

Although public transit is important for people who cannot afford an automobile, or for those who are unable or ineligible to drive, such as children and people with disabilities, there is also a new interest in reducing automobile dependency. When citizens rely less on motor vehicles to get around their communities, the benefits include, but are not limited to: user savings, reduced traffic congestion, parking cost savings, fewer accidents, and better air quality. Construction and maintenance costs for roads and parking facilities are significant, as are traffic control and enforcement costs. The financial savings increase when municipalities offer alternative transit. Development strategies are beginning to promote pedestrian-friendly communities, where public transit plays a key role in meeting the needs of the citizens, providing low-cost access to jobs, services, social contact, and housing.

Public Transit Usage

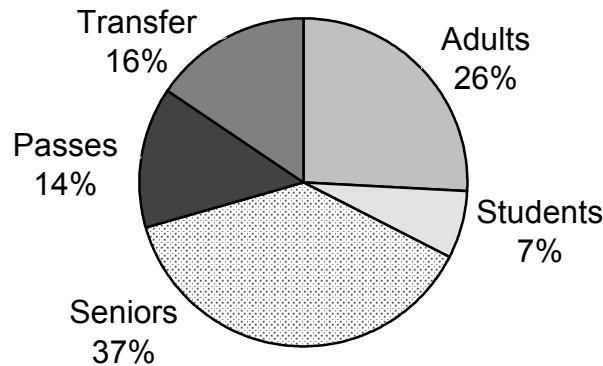
Figure 4: Annual Conventional Ridership, 1998 – 2004



Source: Watson and Ash Transportation Co. Ltd., March 2004.

According to the records of the Comox Valley Transit operators, Watson and Ash Transportation, use of the conventional transit system has increased yet again. The number of riders for the 2003-2004 period was 321,500; a 21.5% jump since 2002/03 and a 67.8% jump since 2000/01. Figure 5 shows the breakdown of ridership. Students and adults make up the largest portion of transit users.

Figure 5: Percentage Breakdown of Ridership for 2003/04



Source: Watson and Ash Transportation Co. Ltd., March 2004.

Accessible Services

There are three types of accessible transit service in the Comox Valley: handyDART, the Community Bus service, and the Taxi Saver Program. The conventional bus service also has a fleet of nine buses, and seven of these are low-floor buses that allow access for riders who have difficulty climbing steps, and for those who use wheelchairs and scooters.

Although the handiDART and bus system do not run in late evenings and Sundays, the Taxi Saver Program is available at these times.

handyDART Usage

As of May 2004, there are now four full-time handyDART vehicles on the road in the Comox Valley. Altogether, the transit company has six handyDART vehicles: one is a spare, one is used for the Community Bus service, and the other four are in service eight hours a day from Monday to Saturday. On average, each vehicle picks up four rides each hour.

Mobility Impairment Permit Holders

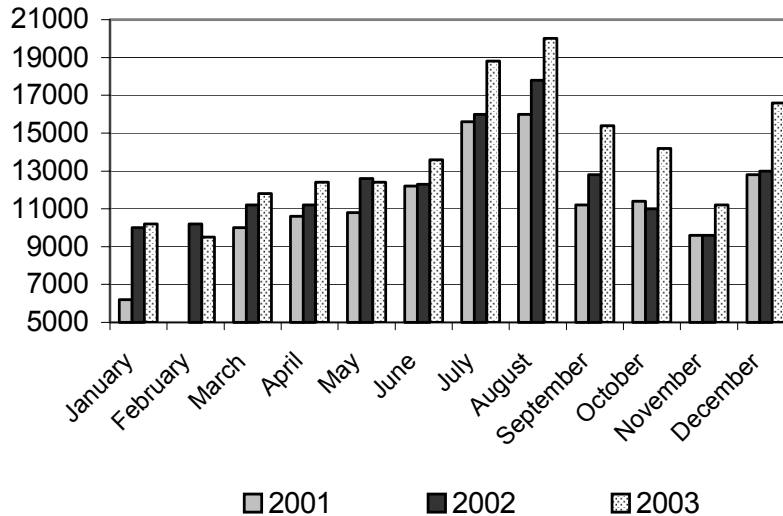
The Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (SPARC BC) is celebrating the 20th anniversary of their Parking Permit Program for people with disabilities. Overall, the number of permit holders has increased throughout the province; however, a switch to a new system that generates reports at SPARC is now based on postal codes. This means that the current figure of 425 is not comparable to the one reported in 2002.

Comox Valley Airport Usage

The Comox Valley Airport Commission employs 102 staff. Three airlines currently provide service to the Valley: West Jet, Pacific Coastal, and Central Mountain Air. Figure 6 shows that volume has increased since 2001, and continues to increase in since the opening of the new terminal on April 4,

2004. The accumulated passenger numbers for first four months of 2004 are at 51,980; whereas, the first four months of 2003 were 44,558.

Figure 6: YQQ Comox Passenger Statistics



Source: Comox Valley Airport Commission, Chuck Fast, General Manager, May 2004.

Assets and Resources

- SPARC BC, *Making Our World Accessible*: a website resource available at <http://www.sparc.bc.ca/accessibility/index.html>.
- SPARC BC Parking Permit Program: forms and information about the program is available at <http://www.sparc.bc.ca/parkingpermit/index.html>.
- Comox Valley Paratransit: For information on handyDART, Community Bus, and Taxi Saver programs phone 339-5442 on Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.
- Comox Valley Transit System: For information about the conventional bus system, call 339-5453 or visit the Bus On Line website at <http://www.busonline.ca/>.
- Comox Valley Airport: for flight information and more about YQQ Comox visit <http://www.comoxairport.com/>.
- BEST (Better Environmentally Sound Transportation): promotes sustainable transportation and land-use planning, and pedestrian, cycling and transit-oriented neighbourhoods at <http://www.best.bc.ca/>.

Food Security

Food Security Indicators

- Food Bank Usage
- Community Meal Programs
- School Lunch Programs
- Cost of Food for a Family of Four

Importance of Food Security

Food security is more than not knowing when or where your next meal is coming from. Most of the food in our grocery stores has to be grown elsewhere, processed elsewhere, and trucked in from elsewhere. A recent ferry strike in BC put people on Vancouver Island at risk, because most of the food is shipped across to the Island. Food security is also directly related to income level. People who are low wage earners or on fixed incomes often cannot afford regular, nourishing meals. Poor nutrition increases health problems, placing additional burdens on the health system. Hunger and poor nutrition contribute to lower performance levels at school and in the work place.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

*The Canadian Association of Food Banks, Hunger Count 2003-
A National Survey of Emergency Food Programs, p. 6.*

Although there are many programs across the province and in the Comox Valley that provide basic food to people in need, it is not clear how much of that need is being met. Food banks and soup kitchens were supposed to be temporary measures, but they have become permanent fixtures in most communities. While most of the food banks and soup kitchens keep statistics in the Comox Valley, they are not always comparable. Some look at the number of people served, while others look at the number of bags given out.

Food Bank Usage

In Courtenay, the Comox Valley Food Bank gives out an average of 1,000 bags of groceries a month. Anyone with two pieces of identification can access food at the food bank. The recipient is then able to obtain a bag of groceries once a month that covers basic meals for three days. The photograph at the right displays a three-day supply of food for a single person. The approximate



value of the groceries is \$20.00. A typical bag of groceries includes:

- 1 litre of milk;
- 2 cans of soup;
- 1 can of baked beans;
- 1 500 gram package of butter;
- 1 large can of spaghetti sauce;
- 1 package of ichi-ban noodles;
- 1 box of Kraft dinner;
- 1 can of fruit; and
- 16 individual bags of tea.

Additional items that may be added depend on availability. There may be a package of hamburger meat, or a package of dry cereal and/or oatmeal, or bread and baked goods (mostly day old), or perishable fruit and vegetables.

To gain a deeper understanding into the workings of the Food Bank, one of our team members worked at the Comox Valley Food Bank on distribution day. The range of clientele covered all ages, male and female, single and families. More people in their early 20s, as well as more single parents and their children are using the food banks. The Comox Valley Food Bank estimates that 62% of their clients are on social assistance.¹⁶

Other food banks include Cumberland Helping Hands, the Salvation Army, Four Square Gospel Church, and Hornby Island's Hope Kitchen. In 2003, the Salvation Army gave out emergency food support to 574 families. They also gave an additional 466 single food bags in their Christmas Hamper program.¹⁷ Saint George's Pantry, operated out of St George's United Church, has increased its food bank program over the last few. In 2003 they gave out 799 bags of food to feed 1454 people.¹⁸ Hornby Island's Hope Kitchen opened in March 2003. They cooperate with the Comox Valley Food Bank and gather their own food donations.¹⁹

Community Meal Programs

The Sonshine Lunch Club, the largest community soup kitchen in the Comox Valley, operates out of the St. George's United Church. They served 38,100 meals in 2003, a figure that has increased 15.5% from 2002. An average of 186 people are served each day. On December 8, they serve an average of 260 Christmas dinners. The Lunch Club is only open on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. On Tuesdays the Comox Valley Head Injury Program runs a lunch program in the church for their clients.²⁰

Other food programs cater to specific groups. The Family Services "Healthy Babies" program, which has a weekly drop-in meal group, helps up to 22 women. They also have a postpartum weekly meal group assisting 8-12 women.²¹ The Stone Soup Program moved into a larger building in February of 2004, to accommodate its mandate of providing a safe neighborhood place for young families to meet. Their program helps parents and children build relationships and support networks with other families. They serve hot lunches, provide safe indoor and outdoor play areas, and give

¹⁶ Comox Valley Food Bank. Grover Stuart, manager. Interview, March 17, 2004.

¹⁷ Salvation Army. Program staff. Interview, February 20, 2004.

¹⁸ St Georges United Church. Liz Naish, Coordinantor. St. George's Pantry Report, June 2004.

¹⁹ April Lewis, Hornby Island Community School liason. Interview, April 19, 2004.

²⁰ St. Georges United Church. *The 2003 Sonshine Club Report*.

²¹ Comox Valley Family Services Association, *2003 Annual Report*, p. 9.

talks about nutrition, health, and other parenting issues. Parents can also meet with health nurses at the house for consultation and discussion.²²

On Saturdays, the Four Square Gospel Church runs a soup and sandwich program that has grown from 20 people four years ago to the current average of 85 people. Some days there have been 130 people in attendance.²³

The Salvation Army provided 3,860 breakfasts and dinners at its men's shelter in 2003. They have helped 2,238 people over the last year.²⁴

The Wachiay Friendship Centre holds a dinner for 35 to 50 people on Monday nights. The centre serves mostly aboriginal youths; however, anyone can attend for a nominal annual membership.²⁵

The Hope Kitchen on Hornby Island is a progressive food resource, integrating a food bank with a soup kitchen and acting as a resource center. They also make over 300 muffins for the "Muffin in the Morning" program at the Hornby Island Community School. In addition, a cooking group gets together once a week to prepare meals that can be shared and taken home by each of the participants. All of the kitchen equipment and utensils are available so that the participants gain new cooking skills and learn about nutrition.²⁶

School Lunch Programs

Over a dozen schools have meal programs. They range from basic dry food snacks, to daily breakfast and lunch programs, some of which have a nutritional education component. Students participating in school food programs are identified in a variety of ways: students self identify by stating that they have not yet eaten; teachers or staff (principals, lunchroom supervisors, and counselors) may observe that the student has had no food; and requests are made by parents.²⁷

Delivery of breakfast and lunch programs is achieved in a variety of ways throughout the district. At the Middle Schools and High Schools, programs are incorporated with normal concession and cafeteria provisions. The Elementary Schools are not set up for food distribution. They have to be creative in finding suitable spaces to deliver meals, whether in the gym, served through a window to waiting kids outside, or in a school's medical room. Some schools serve an average of eight kids breakfast and lunch each day, while other may have over 30 children in their programs.

One of the challenges for school officials is to make the food available to children and teens without any negative stigma attached to it. The Boys and Girls Club has been working with Glacier View Elementary School to develop a program that addresses the need for food with fun and nutritional education. Although the program runs one day a week, they are hoping to increase the service in the 2004/2005 school year.²⁸

School officials recognize that the food programs help the targeted children. Administrators and teachers have noted improvements in attendance and punctuality. Students are also able to

²² Program Manager, Stone Soup Program. Interview February 27, 2004.

²³ Helen Brown, Coordinator. Four Square Gospel Church.

²⁴ Salvation Army. Program staff. Interview, February 20, 2004.

²⁵ Wachiay Friendship Centre, program staff. Conversation June 15, 2004.

²⁶ April Lewis, Hornby Island Community School liaison. Interview, April 19, 2004.

²⁷ School District Annual Report for Children and Family Development, March 2003.

²⁸ Ibid.

concentrate better and learn. Classes at Sandwick School go a step further and include lessons in budgeting, food shopping, food preparation, cooking and serving skills.²⁹

Cost of Food for a Family of Four

The monthly cost to feed a family of four in British Columbia as determined by the Dietitians of Canada in 2003 was \$648.00, up 3% from 2002 at \$629.00. The reference family is two adults each aged 35, a 13-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl.³⁰ The income assistance for food, provided to this reference family per month is \$401.06. The shelter monthly rate is \$590.00, based on the Ministry of Human Resources current 2004 rates.³¹

Assets and Resources

- Comox Valley Food Bank. 1126F Piercy Ave., Courtenay.
- Cumberland Helping Hands. 2718 Dunsmuir, Cumberland.
- St George's Pantry, St. Georges United Church. 505 6th St., Courtenay
- Four Square Gospel Church. 1640 Burgess Rd., Courtenay.
- Salvation Army Family Services. 10-2966 Kilpatrick St., Courtenay.
- Comox Valley Family Services Association. 1415 Cliffe Ave., Courtenay.
- Stone Soup Program. 240 Back Rd., Courtenay.
- PovNet is a website for advocates, people on welfare, and community groups and individuals involved in anti-poverty work. The website address is <http://www.povnet.org/>

²⁹ School District Annual Report for Children and Family Development, March 2003.

³⁰ Dietitians of Canada. The Cost of Eating in BC: The Challenge of Feeding a Family on Low Income, October 2002. Available at <http://www.dieticians.ca/news/media.html>.

³¹ Ministry of Human Resources website. Income Assistance and Disability Assistance Rates. Available at http://www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/publicat/bcea/bcea_rates.htm. Updated April 23, 2004.

Health

Health Indicators

- Live Births to Teenage Mothers (15 – 19 years)
- Low Birth Weights
- Infant Deaths
- Breast-feeding Rates
- Crisis Line Usage
- Mental Health Programs
- Addiction Services for Adults and Youth
- Suicides
- Premature Mortality Rates
- Obesity
- Immunization Rates
- Sexually Transmitted Disease Rates
- Number of Health Professionals
- Dentists Accepting Clients on Social Assistance
- Number of Doctors Accepting New Patients
- Number of Walk-In Clinics

Importance of Health

In 2000-2001, total health expenditures in Canada were \$97.6 billion, up 7.2% from its expenditures of \$91 billion in 1999-2000. Total health expenditures in 2000-2001 amounted to \$3,174 per capita.

Health Canada Online: Health Spending

Health care spending in Canada accounted for 9.8% of the gross domestic product in 2002 (Buske, 2003). That translates into \$3,245.00 per Canadian. The spending for 2003 is expected to reach or exceed \$121.4 billion dollars (National Health Expenditure Database, 2004). Increases of diseases, injuries, and other health problems place serious demands on community services and health care organizations. Although many Canadians enjoy universal access to insured medical health services, there are differences that exist. Individual health and wellness is strongly influenced by age, sex, location of residence, and socio-economic status.

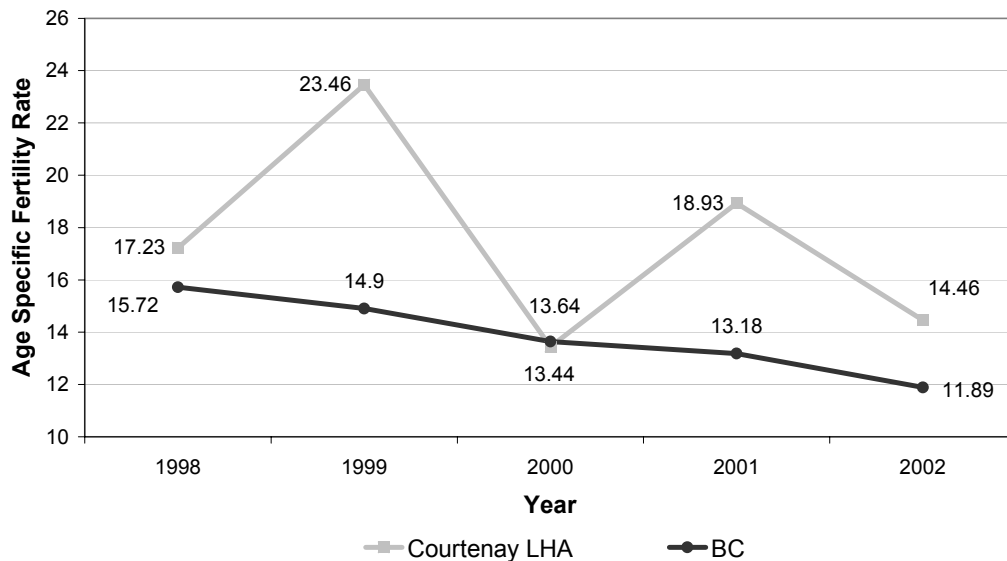
Research shows that living and working conditions have a larger impact on people's health than health services. Societies that are prosperous and have an equitable distribution of wealth have the healthiest populations, regardless of the amount they spend on health services (Regionalization Research Centre 2000). Reports from the Provincial Health Officer have repeatedly supported this relationship in BC, showing that regions with the highest levels of education have the lowest levels of poverty, the least unemployment, and the highest rate of healthy behaviours.

*Vancouver Island Health Authority
Integration Plan 2007, p.6*

Live Births to Teenage Mothers (15 – 19 years)

Teenage pregnancy is a health and social concern, as it can affect a young woman's development and life opportunities. An unintended pregnancy exposes the parents and the child to a number of risks – physical, psychological, and/or social, which often begin a cycle of poverty and dependence.³²

Figure 7: Age Specific Fertility Rates for Teens (15 - 19 years)



Source: Vital Event Statistics, and Selected Birth Statistics, BC Vital Statistics Agency, Quarterly Digests: 2001, 2002, and 2003.

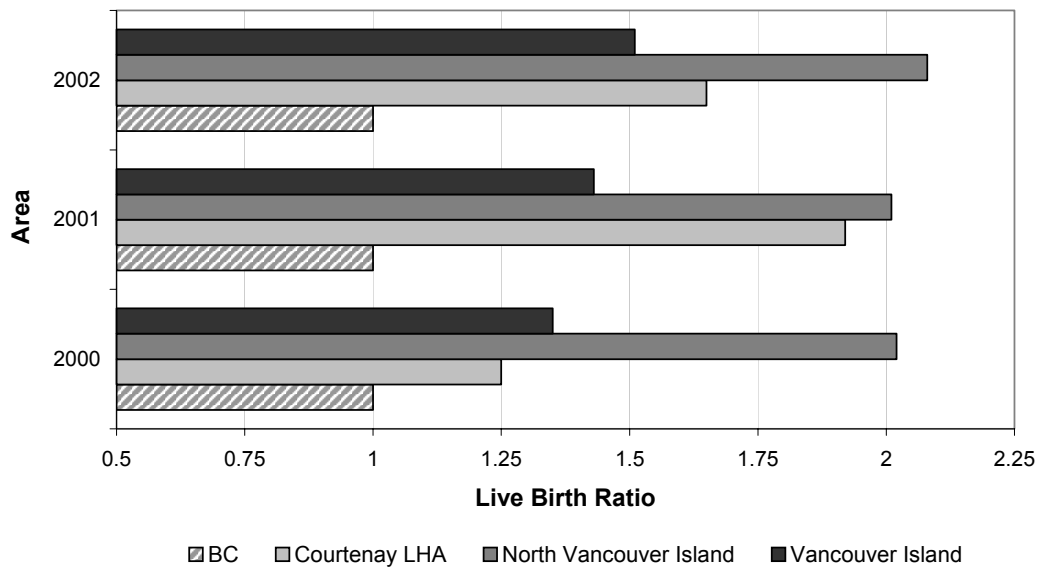
³² Vancouver Island Health Authority Integration Plan, 2007.

Age Specific Fertility Rates are calculated as the rate of live births per 1,000 women in the specific age group. This is a more detailed measure than the crude birth rate, as it reflects variations in the birth rate by age groups of the female population.

Although all births are suppose to be reported to BC Vital Statistics Agency within 48 hours of the event, databases are updated on a regular basis to include late arriving registrations. Thus, event totals can change from those published in Quarterly and Annual Reports.

The live birth ratio is of the number of live births that occurred to residents of a geographic area (such as the LHA), compared to the expected number of live births in that area based on the provincial (crude) live birth rate. The ratio for the province of BC is always one; therefore, comparisons can be made between LHA, HSDA, and HA ratios and the provincial ratio, but NOT to one another. When the lower confidence interval is greater than 1.0, the ratio is significantly high. When the upper confidence interval is less than 1.0, the ratio is low. In the Comox Valley, from 1998-2002 there were 173 live births to mothers 15 to 19 years of age, resulting in an ASFR of 17.46 (BC Vital Stats, 2004).

Figure 8: Live Birth Ratios for BC, Vancouver Island HA, North Vancouver Island HSDA, LHA 071



Source: BC Vital Statistics Agency, Knowledge Management and Technology Division, Rosemary Armour, May 2004

Both the Comox Valley and the Province are showing decreased ratios of teenage mothers. The reason for the higher percentage of Comox Valley teenage mothers to the BC percentage is unclear.

DID YOU KNOW? The average age of BC women giving birth in 2002 was 29.6 years old. Statistics Canada reports that two decades ago mothers in their 20s had by far the most live births, but that has changed (Selected Vital Statistics and Health Status Indicators, Annual Report 2002).

...the proportion of births to mothers in their 30s has grown, particularly for mothers in their early 30s. By 2002, 44.8 per cent of births were to mothers aged 30 to 39, up from only 23 per cent of births in 1982.

Dunfield, 2004

Low Birth Weights

Low birth weight refers to any live born infant weighing less than 2,500 grams or 5.5 pounds. Infants with low birth weight are more likely to die in the first year of life. If they survive, they usually have birth defects, chronic illnesses and/or poor health throughout their childhood.

Low birth weight is probably related to socio-economic factors, including low income, smoking by the mother during pregnancy, poor diet, pregnancy-induced hypertension, and multiple births. The trend of women postponing pregnancy until age 35 or older can also be a factor as these women are more likely to have pregnancy-induced hypertension and gestational diabetes.

*Provincial Health Officer
Annual Report 2002, p.51.*

Table 7: Low Birth Weight to Total Live Births

Year	Comox Valley	BC
2001	7.9%	4.8%
2002	3.3%	5.3%
2003	7.1%	5.3%

Source: Selected Birth Statistics, BC Vital Statistics Agency, Quarterly Digests: 2001, 2002, and 2003.

Infant Deaths

Infant deaths are the deaths of children less than one year of age. The infant death rate is the number of deaths per 1,000 live births. From 1998 to 2002, there were 19 infant deaths in the Comox Valley, resulting in a rate of 7.74. The provincial infant death rate for the same period was 4.0.³³

The Comox Valley's Infant Mortality Rate is ranked approximately 15th out of 78 Local Health Areas in BC.³⁴

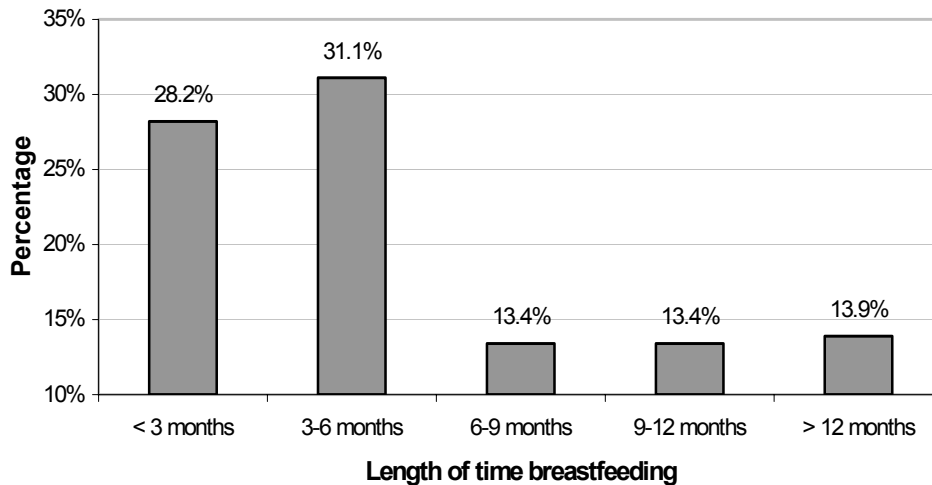
³³ Summary Statistics by Local Health Area, BC Vital Statistics Agency.

³⁴ Indicators of Children at Risk, Local Health Area 71, BC Statistics.

Breast-feeding Rates

Breast-feeding provides the essential nutrients for healthy infant development and provides antibodies to protect against infection and allergies. Experts agree that human breast milk contains the optimal balance of nutrients needed for brain and body growth. In addition, it also allows emotional bonding between mother and child, fostering positive child development. Breast-feeding can continue as part of the diet into the second year. Returning to work and unsupportive environments are common reasons for women to stop breast-feeding. Public places, however, are beginning to allocate family rest areas that allow mother and child quiet spaces to breast-feed (Provincial Health Office Annual Report 2002, p. 52).

Figure 9: Length of time of reported breast-feeding in BC, 2000/01



Source: Statistics Canada. Prepared using Share Files, (Community Health Survey, 2000/01). From Information Support, BC Ministry of Health Services.

The trend for the Comox Valley is that more women breast-feed than in other regions of BC, and they do so for longer periods of time. Although no surveys have been done in the Valley since 1996, greater numbers of women are attending weekly breast-feeding clinics. Also, more women from groups that have typically had lower breast-feeding rates, such as immigrants and teens, are attending. In 1996-1997, in the Comox Valley, 62.5 % of women were continuing to breast-feed past six months; whereas, in BC as a whole, 13.5% breastfed past six months.³⁵

Sexually Transmitted Disease Rates

Trends for the Comox Valley are similar to those reported for the province of BC. In the Comox Valley, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) continue to be a significant health problem, especially in the 15-29 year age group. Sexually transmitted diseases frequently go undiagnosed and untreated and reflect continuing unsafe sexual practices.

Results from the 1998/99 McCreary Adolescent Survey revealed that fewer teenagers are having sex before age 17 and more are waiting longer before becoming sexually active. However, a substantial fraction of those who are sexually active are not protecting themselves against STDs - more than half said their partners did not use a condom the last time they had intercourse. (McCreary Centre Society, 1999)

³⁵ Margaret Griffith-Cochrane, Public Health Nursing, May 2004.

As of May 1, 2003, HIV infection became a reportable disease, meaning that each new positive test will be reported to local and provincial health authorities for follow-up contact tracing. The person being tested has the option of remaining anonymous. Those who test positive and who give a list of contacts have the option of telling contacts themselves or a public health nurse will notify contacts for them. If that choice is made, partners will only be told they have been exposed to HIV and should be tested. Confidentiality of test results is a priority, with fines of up to \$200,000 for unauthorized disclosure. In rare cases, when physicians are concerned that HIV infected patients are knowingly exposing others to the virus, they can discharge their ethical duty by reporting the case to the public health officer who will investigate and if necessary, notify those who are being exposed.

Provincial Health Officer Annual Report 2002

Rates of gonorrhea and chlamydia in BC are highest in young women age 15 to 19. Young women in this age group have also been found to be at the highest risk of infection from human papilloma virus (HPV), the causative agent for genital warts, and the vast majority of cervical cancers (Sellors et al., 2003, On-line). Chlamydia causes reproductive complications for females, such as pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, and ectopic pregnancies. Though rates of chlamydia have remained relatively stable for a number of years (there were 89 lab positive reports in the Comox Valley in 2003), the actual numbers of cases are thought to be much higher due to under testing. In 2003, there were three confirmed cases of gonorrhea.³⁶

Hepatitis A, B and C

Periodic outbreaks of Hepatitis A have hit BC over the last decades, but Hepatitis B rates are leveling off. Hepatitis C infections, however, continue to increase. In 1992, BC became the first province to have a universal Hepatitis B vaccination program for all Grade 6 students. By 1999, the majority of BC teens aged 11 to 19 had been immunized against Hepatitis B.³⁷

HIV Infection

In BC, rates for positive HIV reports declined from 22.7 per 100,000 population in 1992 to 10.2 in 2000 and increased to 10.7 in 2002. High-risk groups for HIV include people who engage in unprotected sex and intravenous drug users. HIV is a serious health issue affecting the Aboriginal communities, causing as much as seven times more deaths amongst Status Indians, than other BC residents.

The Needle Exchange Program³⁸ reports in the six-month period, from March to September 2003:

- Needles distributed from March to September 2003: 44,250
- Total number of registered clients in the needle exchange program: 254

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Provincial Health Officer Annual Report 2002.

³⁸ Operated by the North Island AIDS Society, but, as of publication, the program is now run by AIDS Vancouver Island.

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- Identified by disease in the Needle Exchange Program: five HIV positive (as of May 3/04), 62 Hepatitis C, and three individuals diagnosed with both HIV and Hepatitis C
 - 20% of clients are First Nations or Metis

Condoms distributed over the North Island in the same 6-month period (March-September, 2003): 22,826. An estimated 14,000 were for the Courtenay area, which includes students at alternate, North Island College, and other schools who regularly pick up condoms.

Crisis Line Usage

There were a total of 1,831 calls to the Crisis Crossroads Centre from 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. Callers reported a total of 7,769 problem areas. Psychological issues accounted for 63% of the problems reported (Crisis Crossroads Centre, May 2004). Corresponding figures in the 2002 Report were 2045 calls from 2001 to 2002, reporting 3,772 problem areas. Psychological issues accounted for 50% of the calls. The Comox Valley Transition Society (Lilli House) received 904 crisis calls in 2002, and 1,171 calls in 2003. These numbers remain somewhat consistent with the 1997-2001 average statistics of 1,089 calls annually, as reported in the 2002 QOL report.

Mental Health Programs

The Courtenay Mental Patients Association operates the Eureka Clubhouse. The Clubhouse provides a wide range of social, recreational, and arts and crafts activities to adults with long-term mental illness. There are approximately 85 members, with a daily drop-in rate of 25 and a monthly drop-in rate of approximately 53 members. The Courtenay Mental Patients Association recently purchased a building, with funding from grant monies and donations, thus securing a permanent location for the Eureka Clubhouse.

Mental Health and Addiction Services in the Comox Valley is part of a continuum of local health services in the North Island service delivery area provided by Vancouver Island Health Authority. The Health Service delivery area of North Island stretches from Bowser to Mt. Waddington covering over half the geography and one third of the population of Vancouver Island. There is one manager based in Courtenay and coordinators at all sites. The following programs are available in the Comox Valley:

- Walk-in counselling 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Monday to Friday, 941C England Ave., Courtenay. This is a new service that was started 1 April 2004 to enable people to have their concerns dealt with in a timely manner.
- Crisis Network effective 1 April 2004, Mental Health and Addiction Services has expanded its partnership with the Crisis lines for 24 hour service accessed through the local crisis line number.
- One-to-one services are offered through the short term/long term and geriatric adult teams for mental health issues and the addictions team for addictions.
- Registered Mental Health and Addiction Services clients can also access detox and supportive recovery resources, and rehabilitation services that include supportive work and housing components.

-
- A variety of groups are offered both for registered and non-registered clients for example in the areas of co-dependency, addictions management, depression, anxiety, life skill development and assertiveness training.

In 2003, there were 878 adult Mental Health clients registered in the Comox Valley. Elderly services workers assist an additional 158 people over the age of 65. Addictions records are not kept on an individual basis; rather, a number of contacts with the service are counted. This means one person could be counted several times. For 2003 there were 1,912 addiction contacts through groups, intake and individual appointments. In addition there are many individuals who receive walk-in counseling or crisis services one time, in person or by telephone, that are not registered - approximately 100 to 150 per month.

Over the past two years, services in North Island have been augmented through the 6.47 million dollar Mental Health Renewal Initiative. In the Comox Valley this translates into an enhancement of clinical positions and additional rehabilitation beds, six in a new apartment program in Courtenay, with an additional six to follow over the next year and a half.

In 2003, Mental Health received 1,778 crisis calls. Mental illness is one of the largest contributors to disability. Twenty per cent of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness during their lifetime. Of the 10 leading causes of disability world wide, five are mental disorders; major depression, schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, alcohol use disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Health Canada, 2002). Vancouver Island Health Authority's utilization rate for mental health is the highest in the province at 15.3 weighted cases per 1000 population. The provincial average is 11.3. This represents 21% of hospital days that are utilized by alternative care patients or clients that could have been released from hospital but have no discharge residence. Seniors over the age of 70 represents only 21% of mental health/addictions cases in acute care and utilize 43% of the overall days due to longer stays.³⁹

Related Indicators: Emergency Shelter in Housing Section.

Addiction Services for Adults and Youth

ADULT ADDICTION SERVICES

The Comox Valley Transition Society (Lilli House) offers one detox bed and one support recovery bed for women with addictions. Often, women are turned away because the beds are occupied. The Transition Society reports that in 2003, 25 women used the detox bed and this one bed was utilized 163 bed nights. Fifteen women used the support recover bed in 2003 for a total of 220 bed nights in that year.⁴⁰

The Comox Valley Recovery Centre provides two social detox beds, and offers 16 support recovery beds for men.

Community Drug Strategy Resource Manual
Available online at <http://www.city.courtenay.bc.ca/>.

The City of Courtenay, in conjunction with the Community Drug Strategy Committee and the Sorptomist Club, created a Resource Manual listing services and resources available to support people with addictions. The manual contains over 20 programs or services available to adults and/or youths and include: prevention, education and early intervention programs, day treatment and residential resources, as well as support groups.

³⁹ Vancouver Island Health Authority. Integration Plan 2007 Report.

⁴⁰ Comox Valley Transition Society, June 2004.

They have a 28-day residential support recovery program for men only.

St. Joseph's Hospital provides medically supervised detoxification services, assessment, and intervention. They also assist clients to access other community resources to support persons with addictions.

YOUTH ADDICTIONS

The John Howard Society receives funding from Vancouver Island Health Authority to provide youth prevention and addiction programs in the Comox Valley. They are seeing increased use of cocaine and ecstasy among youths ages 12-19 years. Ecstasy is often mixed with other substances such as crystal meth, heroin, and cocaine. Negative health symptoms include physical deterioration, dental problems, sleep disorders, stomach problems, weight loss, hepatitis C, and mental health problems such as depression. Although the John Howard Society has reported no deaths from drug use, they are reporting an increase in the number of youths seeking emergency medical treatment for seizures and other serious medical conditions.⁴¹

2002 Statistics for John Howard Society Youth Programs:

- Alcohol and Drug (A & D) services for youths and families / A & D School Suspension (combined) = 138 youths served
- A & D School Based Prevention Program = 64 youths (one-on-one or group sessions)
- Youth Alcohol/Drug Outreach Support = 129 contacts (youths, parents, community members)⁴²

Between 1 April 2003 and 31 March 2004, the youth treatment program provided service to 53 clients. Service was provided to 80 youths in the school suspension program during this same time period.⁴³

Currently, there are no detox beds in the Comox Valley for youths. Local detox services include a withdrawal management program offered by one worker in Campbell River. There is one youth detox bed available in Campbell River for Comox Valley referrals, however this one bed is very actively used, and seldom available. Since no residential treatment facilities are available on Vancouver Island, local youths are referred to a residential program in the Lower Mainland. This program usually has a six-month waitlist.⁴⁴

Suicides

Between 1998-2002, there were 38 deaths from suicide in the Comox Valley. This number of suicides is represented by 1.28 on the Potential Years of Life Lost Index, compared to 1.0 for BC, which indicates a significantly decreasing trend for the province.⁴⁵

⁴¹ John Howard Society, phone conversation with Suzanne Bennett, 8 June 2004, and Diane Collins, 10 June 2004.

⁴² Community Drug Strategy, City of Courtenay at <http://www.city.courtenay.bc.ca/>. Visited 4 June 2004.

⁴³ Diane Collins, John Howard Society, phone interview, 10 June 2004.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Mortality in British Columbia by Local Health Area, Summary Statistics, British Columbia, 1998-2002.

In 2001 there were five suicides in the Comox Valley. In 2002 there were eight suicides, and in 2003, three suicides.⁴⁶

Premature Mortality Rate

Statistical summaries of local health areas from 1998-2002 show that life expectancy in the Comox Valley is 76.9 years for males, and 82.3 years for females. From 1998 to 2002 there was a total of 2,184 deaths in the Comox Valley, of which 918 were deaths of people under the age of 75. The number of deaths under age 75 is represented as 1.09 on the Potential Years of Life Lost Index. This number is a statistically significant decrease and is a reflection of the provincial trend, where the Potential Years of Life Lost Index is 1.0.⁴⁷

There were 207,408 deaths from all causes among Canadian adults in 1995, of which 35.8% were due to the main diseases known to be associated with physical inactivity, namely, CAD (coronary artery disease), stroke, colon cancer, breast cancer and type II diabetes... If physical inactivity were completely eliminated in Canada, we could theoretically increase life expectancy and save 21,340 lives that are lost prematurely each year — 10.3% of the total deaths among adults.

Katzmarzyk, Gledhill, and Shephard, p. 1438

Obesity

The Comox Valley population duplicates the trends in BC and Canada of increasing obesity rates, both in adults and children. Obesity rates for the Comox Valley are difficult to track due to a lack of human resources. Nutritionists in the Valley are working with community members on several initiatives to decrease obesity rates. Initiatives include: policy review, public education, and advocacy on access to healthy foods and recreation.⁴⁸

According to a Canadian Community Health Survey, the number of obese adults (aged 20 to 64) in the Upper Island/Central Coast health areas is 9,828, or 14.5%. This number is similar to the national percentage of 14.9%, but higher than the BC provincial level of 12.1%.⁴⁹

To calculate the BMI (body mass index), divide your weight in kilograms by your height in metres squared. A number of 18.4 or less is considered underweight, 18.5 to 24.9 acceptable weight, 25.0 to 29.9 overweight, while 30 or more is considered obese. BMI calculations are reliable only for the adult population between the ages of 20 to 64.

(Canadian Community Health Survey, Statistics Canada, 2001.)

Immunization Rates

Immunization is a process that helps your body fight off diseases caused by certain viruses and bacteria, by exposing your body to vaccines that contain tiny amounts of material that make the immune system produce certain substances called “antibodies.” These antibodies attack and destroy viruses and bacteria. Immunization in BC is not mandatory.

⁴⁶ External Causes of Death, Quarterly Digests: 2001, 2002, 2003, BC Vital Statistics Agency.

⁴⁷ BC Vital Statistics Agency, Selected Vital Statistics, Mortality in British Columbia by Local Health Area and Statistical Summaries - Appendix 1, Summary Statistics, British Columbia, 1998-2002.

⁴⁸ Anthea Kennelly, Community Nutritionist. Comox Valley Public Health Nursing, phone conversation, 13 May 2004.

⁴⁹ Body Mass Index Tables, Statistics Canada, 2001.

BC's immunization programs are among the highest in the world. In the last 10 years, 93% of all BC children have had all their "shots" by the time they start school. Public Health Nurses in the Comox Valley have seen an increase in the number of people accessing immunization clinics. Infants are vaccinated against Hepatitis B, Pertussis, Diphtheria, Tetanus, Polio, Haemophilus Influenzae Type B, Pneumococcal Disease, Meningococcal C Meningitis, Measles, Mumps, and Rubella. Grade 6 students receive Hepatitis B and Meningococcal C vaccines. Grade 9 students receive Tetanus, Diphtheria, and for the first time this year, Pertussis. Tetanus boosters are routinely recommended for adults every 10 years.⁵⁰

For more information about childhood vaccines or immunizations, contact your local public health unit, or family doctor, or the CV Public Health Nursing at 338-1711. There are a number of websites that provide information on childhood vaccines:

- The National Network for Immunization Information available at <http://www.immunizationinfo.org>.
- Canadian Immunization Awareness Program available at <http://www.immunize.cpha.ca/>.
- Canadian Paediatric Society at Caring for Kids available at <http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/index.htm>.
- *Your Child's Best Shot: A Parent's Guide to Vaccination (2nd edition), 2002*. A publication of the Canadian Paediatric Society available at <http://www.cps.ca/english/publications/Bookstore/YourChildsBestShot.htm>.

Number of Health Professionals

According to the Comox Valley Nursing Centre and St. Joseph's Hospital, there are currently 48 community physicians: 43 are general practitioners, and five are emergency physicians. There are a further 45 specialists, and 15 psychiatric nurses at the hospital. The Comox Valley physician to population rate is 1 physician to 1,216 individuals.⁵¹ Presently, there are no neurologists or cardiologists practicing in the Valley. Patients must go to Victoria for these specialized services. Since the 2002 report, there are now two pediatricians in the Comox Valley. The local Registered Nurses Association of BC chapter reports a total of 500 members in the Valley. This is a decrease from the 600 recorded in the 2002 report (McLean, p.48).

The total number of dentists in the Comox Valley is 26 (includes one resident dentist on Hornby Island), less than the 28 reported in 2002. In 2004 the BC provincial rate of dentists to population is one dentist per 1,525 individuals.⁵² The Comox Valley dentist to population rate is 1 dentist to 2,245 individuals.⁵³

Dentists Accepting Clients on Social Assistance

The Ministry of Human Resources will subsidize some dental work for clients on social assistance. Of the 26 dentists in the Comox Valley, 14 will accept patients on social assistance. This number is

⁵⁰ Tetanus – Vaccine Preventable Diseases. Department of Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. Retrieved 27 June 2004. Available online at http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/dird-dimr/vpd-mev/tetanus_e.html

⁵¹ Calculated using the Comox Valley population in 2003 (58,384) divided by 48 general practitioners.

⁵² Association of Dental Surgeons of BC (1-888-396-9888), telephone conversation- May 25, 2004.

⁵³ Calculated using the Comox Valley population in 2003 (58,384) divided by 26 dentists.

an increase of the nine willing to accept social assistance clients, with or without conditions, in 2002 (2002 Report, p. 49). Individuals may contact the Vancouver Island Health Authority Community Dental Hygienist office for a list of dentists accepting new patients on social assistance.⁵⁴

Number of Doctors Accepting New Patients

Of the 43 general practitioners in the Comox Valley, six are accepting new patients who are new to the Valley. One of these physicians is accepting only maternity patients, and one is accepting the patients of local, retiring or retired physicians (Comox Valley Nursing Centre, 2004). The 2002 Report stated that five doctors of 40 were accepting new patients (McLean, p. 48).

Number of Walk-In Clinics

There are two medical 'walk-in' clinics in the Comox Valley. No appointments are necessary. Patients are seen on a first come first served basis, but they are not guaranteed to see a specific doctor since different doctors are on duty at any given time. Medical services offered at walk-in clinics may be limited, and a visit to your family doctor may be recommended for certain services.

Both walk-in clinics are in Courtenay: Washington Park Medical Clinic on Ryan Road near the Superstore, and Comox Valley Medical Clinic on Cliffe Avenue in the Safeway Plaza.

Assets and Resources

- The Comox Valley Nursing Centre, a service of the Vancouver Island Health Authority, is a unique health centre offering a holistic approach to health services. Services include: private health consultations with a nurse, information about traditional and complementary health services, an extensive lending library, and a public Internet station. Various groups operate out of the Nursing Centre providing support for people with health challenges such as chronic pain, eating disorders, epilepsy, life-threatening illnesses, and others. Their location is 961 England Avenue in Courtenay. Telephone: 338-1711. Fax: 338-9985.
- Crossroads Crisis Centre provides a 24-hour telephone crisis line for people in emotional stress. They have extensive information on community programs and services, also. Business telephone: 338-0512. Fax: 338-2996. **24-hour Crisis Line: 334-2455.**
- 24-Hour BC Health Guide Nurse Line toll-free within BC at 1-866-215-4700. A Registered Nurse will answer questions about symptoms, health concerns, recommended course of action, when to call a health professional, and further health resources. Order a copy of the BC Health Guide Handbook, or download it from <http://www.bchealthguide.org>.
- 50 Plus – British Columbia, for Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP) members in BC at <http://www.carpbc.ca/home1.asp>
- Seniors Network, BC is an advocacy group for seniors and people advocating for seniors at <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/srsnetbc/>

⁵⁴ Vancouver Island Health Authority Dental Hygienist Office, telephone conversation, May 25, 2004.

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- Canadian Health Network, a national, non-profit, bilingual health information website by Health Canada and other major health organizations <http://www.canadian-health-network.ca/>
 - National Institutes of Health - Senior Health, a website developed by the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine provides easily accessible health information for adults 60 and older at <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/>
 - Vancouver Island Health Authority at <http://www.viha.ca/>
 - Fact Sheets on Mental Health and Addictions Issues by the Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division at <http://www.cmha-bc.org/content/resources/primer/primer.htm>
 - BC Health Care: Today and Tomorrow, information on health from the Ministry of Health Services at <http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/bchealthcare/>
 - BC Health Coalition speaks out against user fees, privatization, corporatization, and other barriers to equal access to health care at <http://www.bchealthcoalition.ca/index.html>
 - Health Care Network, provides access on-line materials related to the planning, delivery, cost and evaluation of health care in Canada at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/healthcare/>
 - The Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) is an independent, pan-Canadian, not-for-profit organization working to improve the health of Canadians and the health care system at <http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/splash.html>
 - Provincial Health Officer Annual Reports available at <http://www.healthplanning.gov.bc.ca/pho>.

Public Safety

Public Safety Indicators

- Police Call Volume
- Crime Prevention Programs
- Violent Crime
- Property Crime
- Youth Crime
- Restorative Justice
- Sexual Assault
- Spousal Assaults
- Drug Trends
- Organized Crime Syndicates

Importance of Public Safety

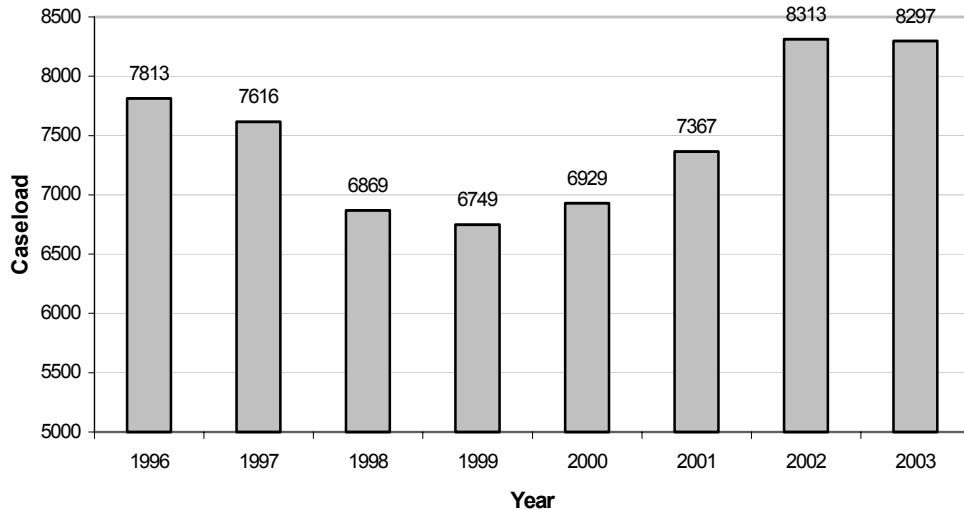
A perceived sense of public safety is directly related to a person's quality of life. High crime rates affect property values and contribute to mistrust and intolerance. Public perception of crime often does not mirror reality because of the sensationalism in media reports. Many communities have crime prevention programs, also known as Neighbourhood Watch Programs. Through these programs, citizens become involved in reducing crime and the fear of crime in a proactive and positive way. Other programs provide support to victims of crime and their families. More communities are using a restorative justice system as an alternative to traditional methods of processing some offences. A restorative justice process involves complainants, respondents, and other community members. They demonstrate that when citizens participate in the process, the sense of public safety increases. Support services and restorative justice processes can also mitigate damages, thus reducing the burden on the court system.

Police Call Volume

The Comox Valley Detachment is comprised of 56 active regular RCMP Members, 16 support staff (excluding four jail guards), casual employees, and numerous volunteers. The Detachment has a historical call volume of approximately 22,200 files per year. The City of Courtenay had the highest per officer Criminal Code case burden in BC for the year 2000, and has been ranked at, or near, the top for many years. One of the reasons they are so busy is that the Comox Valley is a desirable place to live, and attracts many visitors throughout the year. For example, Hornby Island has a population of 966; however, every summer that number climbs to 4,000 or more (Kneffel and Griggs, p. 11.)

Tourist attractions and special events keep the RCMP busy. When comparing Criminal Code Case burdens with other municipalities across the Province, both the City of Courtenay and the surrounding jurisdiction are well above the average. The average 1999 BC municipal case burden was 101 (for municipalities over 15,000), whereas the Courtenay municipal area was 147. The average case burden, for the BC provincial area was 90, with the Courtenay provincial area at 117.

Figure 10: Criminal Code Caseload at Comox Valley Detachment From 1996 to 2003



Source: Comox Valley RCMP Crime Statistics, 2004

Several other issues affect the increasing caseload:

- The rapid pace of social, economic and environmental change;
- Changing demographics and an aging population (fear of crime etc.);
- Lack of youth opportunities (*i.e.* careers) and social disengagement;
- Provincial funding decreases and “downloading” of costs;
- Capacity of municipal governments to fund services;
- Lack of capacity to effectively address technology crime;
- Influx of organized crime syndicates into the Valley; and
- The 2010 Olympic bid and growth of Mt. Washington with the possibility of it becoming a training centre for world-class athletes.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Source: Comox Valley RCMP Detachment, Strategic Plan, 2004-2009, p. 7-8.

Crime Prevention Programs

Neighbourhood Watch: The RCMP cite that an estimated 70% of neighborhood areas in the Valley are involved in Neighborhood Watch Program.⁵⁶ Neighbourhood Watch is a community-based program that encourages neighbours to alert each other to the potential of crime and to look out for one another's interests.

Citizens on Patrol (COP): Citizens on Patrol is a group of community volunteers who assist the police by patrolling the streets. They have a communications system that includes a dispatcher who is in contact with the local RCMP Detachment. They also carry data base instruments to check for stolen vehicles. In Spring 2004 there were 137 Citizens on Patrol in the Comox Valley.⁵⁷

Comox Valley Crime Stoppers and Student Crime Stoppers: Crime Stoppers is a program that encourages people to submit an anonymous tip about a specific crime or about other criminal activities. Similarly, Student Crime Stoppers encourages students to leave tips without fear of repercussions. Three high schools currently use the program.

Table 8: Crime Stoppers Number of Calls for April 2004

Type	Number
Drug Trafficking	5
Warrants	5
Grow Show	5
Mischief	2
Rape	1
Break and Enter	1
Robbery	1
PSP	1
Total	21

Source: Crime Stoppers website at <http://www.comoxvalleycrimestoppers.bc.ca/>

RCMP Victim Services: The Victim Services Program is a resource to help individuals affected by crime or a traumatic incident. Victim Services provide emotional support, counseling referrals to appropriate agencies, and information about the criminal justice system. There are two community-based victim services programs funded by the Ministry of Public Safety and the Solicitor General. One program supports adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse and children of sexual abuse. The other program supports victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Auto Theft Prevention: The Combat Auto Theft Program (CAT) is a program operated under the RCMP. CAT stickers are available at the Comox Valley RCMP Office.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design: The Crime Prevention through Environment Design program is presently active in Comox only. The program evaluates new development

⁵⁶ 26 April 2004 phone conversation with Constable Dean Maxwell, Crime Prevention Coordinator/Media Liaison Representative.

⁵⁷ 26 April 2004 phone conversation with Chuck Perry, COP member.

applications and determines if the design has potential security problems (e.g. poor lighting, blind corners, etc.).

Block Parent Program: The program is inactive at present in the Valley.

Auxiliary Constable Program: The Comox Valley Auxiliaries gave 2397 volunteer hours.

In response to the increasing population of seniors, the RCMP is implementing a new crime prevention program targeted towards the elderly. The elderly are vulnerable to crimes such as theft and fraud.⁵⁸

Violent Crime

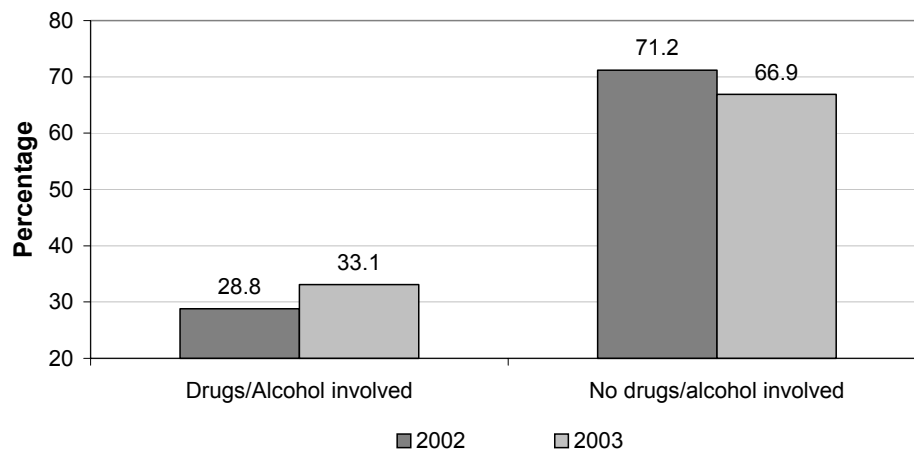
Crimes against persons, more commonly called violent crimes, accounted for 10% of all crime reported in BC during 2002. These crimes include homicide, attempted murder, sexual and non-sexual assault, robbery, and abduction. The number of reported violent crimes in the Comox Valley in 2003 was 776, an increase of 6% from the 729 reported incidents of violent crime in 2002.

Table 9: Breakdown of Violent Crimes in 2002 and 2003

	Sexual Assault	Assault	Assault with Weapon	Aggravated Assault	Assault on Police	Total Violent Crime
2002	82	579	60	1	7	729
2003	61	639	60	0	16	776

Source: Comox Valley RCMP Crime Statistics, 2004

Figure 11: Percentage of Violent Crimes Involving Alcohol



Source: Comox Valley RCMP Crime Statistics, 2004.

Figure 11 shows the percentage of violent crimes that involved alcohol or drugs for 2002 and 2003. Involvement of drugs or alcohol increased from 28.8% to 33.1%. In 2002, the province experienced a 1% decrease in the number of violent crimes and less than 2% decrease in the violent crime rate

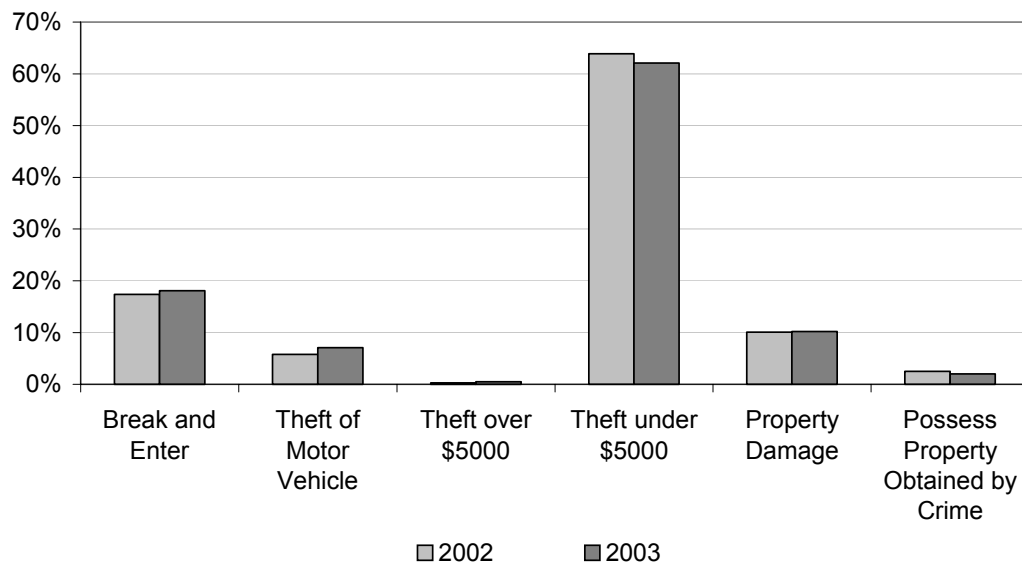
⁵⁸ Comox Valley RCMP, Constable Dean Maxwell, May 2004.

(from 12.2 violent crimes per 1,000 population in 2001 to 12 violent crimes per 1,000 population in 2002). In BC, there were 49,686 violent offences in 2002, 355 less than the 50,041 violent offences reported in 2001. About 87% of those charged were adults and approximately 84% of those charged were male.⁵⁹

Property Crime

Property crime in the Comox Valley remained relatively constant during 2002 and 2003. The total number of reported property crimes in 2002 was 3,854. The number fell slightly in 2003 to 3,829, less than 1% decrease of reported property crimes.

Figure 12: Percentage Breakdown of Property Crime in 2002 and 2003



Source: Comox Valley RCMP Crime Statistics, 2004.

Property crimes represented 56% of all Criminal Code offences reported in BC during 2002. These crimes include break and enter, motor vehicle theft, other theft (such as shoplifting, theft of bicycles, theft from motor vehicles) as well as fraud and possession of stolen property. Three out of five reported crimes are property offences. In 2002, property crimes had increase by 2% over 2001. Most property crimes are either thefts or break and enter offences. Together, they represented 80% of all property crimes and 45% of total Criminal Code offences in 2002. Of those charged with property crime approximately 82% were adults and 18% were youths between 12 and 17 years of age. Males represented 77% of total persons charged and females 23%. These percentages have remained about the same over the last 10 years.⁶⁰

Youth Crime (12 to 17 years)

In 2002 the Comox Valley RCMP had 602 criminal code files involving youths, compared to a total 8,386 criminal code offences not involving youths. There were 606 criminal code offences involving youths in 2003, compared to 8,397 criminal code offences not involving youths. These

⁵⁹ Police Services, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Province of British Columbia, June 2, 2003.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

numbers do not reflect the actual number of charges against youths. In 2002, the percentage of youths involved in violent crime in the Comox Valley was 9.78%. In Canada, youths between the ages of 12 and 17 who break the law are subject to the same charges as adults; however, they are processed under the Youth Criminal Justice Act. They may be diverted from the court system through various justice programs, or police may use discretion in recommending charges.⁶¹

The percentage of youths involved in violent crime rose by 0.5% to 10.27% in 2003.⁶²

Youth Justice Services

The Ministry of Children and Family Development provides youth probation and youth custody services to youths aged 12 to 17. Services provided include:

- Extra Judicial Sanctions (used to be known as Alternative Measures);
- Supervision and case management of youths who are subject to a bail or probation order;
- Preparation of reports for court and Crown Counsel;
- Community-based residential and non-residential programs; and
- Custody of youths awaiting trial or serving a custody disposition.

Extra Judicial Sanctions (formerly Alternative Measures) is an option that Crown Counsel can recommend as an alternative to prosecution. A youth probation officer supervises youths participating in Extra Judicial Sanctions. The number of youths referred to this program has been fairly low since the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) came into effect in 2003. The focus of the YCJA is on restorative justice rather than criminal prosecution. First time offenders of minor criminal infractions are often referred to a restorative justice program such as the Community Justice Centre, and diverted from court. Community service or volunteer work is another alternative option.⁶³

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is a discretionary option that RCMP can utilize in the Comox Valley to divert young offenders away from court. The Community Justice Centre facilitates a restorative justice approach for first time offenders, or repeat offenders of minor crimes. In a voluntary process, the complainant (victim) and their supporters meet with the respondent (offender) and their supporters. In a safe and neutral environment, a facilitator assists the parties to come to a mutually acceptable agreement so as to repair damages that have been caused. The process is a very powerful solution to assist both youths and adults in demonstrating responsibility and remorse. Participation in the process results in no criminal record for an offender.

⁶¹ Comox Valley RCMP Statistics, produced 4 June 2004.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ministry of Children and Family Development, phone conversation, 3 June 2004 and the Youth Justice section of the Ministry website. Available at http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth_justice/index.htm.

NEW LEGISLATION

In 2002, the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) received Royal Assent, replacing the Young Offenders Act effective 1 April 2003. The new legislation is primarily aimed at differentiating between violent or repeat offenders, and first-time offenders who commit non-violent or less serious crimes. The Act provides not only for sentencing based on the seriousness of the crime but also encourages sentencing which is community based (i.e., victim compensation, community service and supervision). In addition, the YCJA provides for the imposition of adult sentences as well as rehabilitative custody and supervision sentences in the case of violent and high-risk offenders.

In BC, there were 9,894 young offenders charged with Criminal Code offences in 2002, an 8% decrease since 2001. This represents a youth charge rate of 31 charges per 1,000 youths, an overall decrease of 6% from BC's youths charge rate in 2001. Approximately 73% of the criminal offences for which young people were charged were non-violent crimes (i.e., crimes against property or other Criminal Code offences). The remaining 27% of charges against youths were for violent crimes. Youths represented 15% of total persons charged in 2002.

Police Services, Ministry of Public Safety
and Solicitor General, Province of BC.

Over the past five years (1998 – 2003), the annual average number of cases referred to the Community Justice Centre is 78. Both youths and adults are referred with less than 25% being adults. The success rate varies each year from 59% to 96% of completed cases. Some cases are returned to the RCMP because the complainant (victim) declined to participate or is seeking punitive measures (not restorative). This also happens when the offenders do not accept responsibility, or when the cases are outside the mandate of the Community Justice Centre. Persons referred to the Centre range from 12 to 19 years of age, with an average age range of 12 to 14 years. About 89% of the youths are male.⁶⁴

Sexual Assault

The number of sexual assaults reported in the Comox Valley in 2003 was 61. These numbers are higher than the 45 reported incidents in 2001.

In 2002, a total of 3,801 sexual assaults and other sexual offences were reported in BC, a decrease of 7% from the offences reported in 2001. The 3,801 sexual crimes reported in 2002 represent the lowest number of sexual crimes reported during the last 10 years. Of the persons charged with sexual offences in 2002, 84% were male adults, 2% were female adults, 14% were male youths and less than 1% were female youths. These proportions have remained about the same over the last 10 years.

Sexual assault victims are primarily female between the ages of six and 12. The accused is usually a male relative or friend of the family over the age of 17.

Police Services, Ministry of Public Safety
and Solicitor General, Province of BC.

⁶⁴ Community Justice Centre, Althea White, 7 June 2004.

Spousal Assault

In the Comox Valley, statistics on spousal assault are recorded under three categories: Domestic Dispute – Male Offender, Domestic Dispute – Female Offender, and Domestic Dispute – No Assault. The “no assault” category would include disturbances that the RCMP responded to, where no physical assault is reported. The “no assault” domestic disputes are often verbal disputes. Spousal assaults by a male offender increased by 25% from 2002 to 2003. For the same time period, spousal assaults by female offenders doubled.

In 2002 there were 9,694 incidents of spousal assault reported in BC, a decrease from the 9,953 reported in 2001. The spousal assault rate in was 2.34, a decrease of 4% from the 2001 rate of 2.43. Spousal assault offences fall into three categories: incidents where the offender is male, incidents where the offender is female and incidents where both spouses are involved. In 2002, 78% of spousal assault incidents involved a male offender, 15% involved a female offender, and 7% involved both spouses assaulting each other. These proportions have remained relatively constant since 1993.⁶⁵

Spousal Assault Policy

The provincial government’s Violence Against Women in Relationships (VAWIR) policy directs officials in the justice system (including police, Crown counsel, probation officers, victim assistance workers, and others) to emphasize the criminality of violence and to ensure the protection of those who may be at risk. When an offence involving violence between spouses has occurred, the policy directs police officers to make an arrest. The policy shifts the responsibility to lay charges from the victim to the criminal justice system. A spouse is defined as: a marital partner, a common-law partner, or a partner in a dating or intimate relationship. Spousal assaults also include assaults between partners in same-sex relationships. The policy was last revised in 2002.

Ministry of Public Safety
and Solicitor General.

Table 10: Reported Domestic Disputes in 2002 and 2003

Classification	2002	2003
No Assault	348	380
Male Offender	96	120
Female Offender	21	42
Total Reported	465	542

Source: *Comox Valley RCMP Crime Statistics, 2004*

The Comox Valley Transition Society provides Stop the Violence Counseling program to women. Client numbers in this program have remained consistent during the last few years. In 2003 the program assisted 237 women. The Transition Society also provides a Children Who Witness Abuse Counseling program. There were 398 clients in 2003. The use of this program has increased during the past few years.⁶⁶

Related Indicators: Emergency Shelter Usage in the Housing section.

⁶⁵ Police and Crime, Summary Statistics, 1993-2002; Police Services-Publications - Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

⁶⁶ Comox Valley Transition Society, Karen Turner, June 2004.

Drug Trends

In recent years, the Comox Valley RCMP have noticed a large increase of cocaine (especially crack cocaine), heroin, ecstasy and most recently crystal Meth (Methamphetamine) in the Comox Valley. Marijuana grow-ops continue to be an issue. Case files involving grow-ops will typically take the RCMP 130 personnel-hours to process. Crystal Meth will be the biggest concern and highest growth field of drugs because of low cost to manufacture; however, the RCMP hope to identify sources where supplies are purchased in order to interfere with the manufacturing stage.⁶⁷ The John Howard Society, a local non-profit society serving youths, is echoing the same concern regarding the arrival of Crystal Meth into the Valley. One-time use of the drug can cause permanent brain damage.⁶⁸

Organized Crime Syndicates

The RCMP is seeing an influx of organized crime syndicates into the Comox Valley. When organized crime syndicates move into a community, they experience increased drug problems (e.g. use and manufacture of methamphetamines and marijuana) and increased criminal behavior (e.g. property theft, assault, prostitution). RCMP stress that overall, the Comox Valley is a very safe community. People in the drug trade mostly victimize those involved in the drug culture.⁶⁹

Assets and Resources

- BC Institute Against Family Violence promotes the elimination of violence in all families at <http://www.bcifv.org/>
- TheAntiDrug.com was created by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign to equip parents and other adult caregivers with the tools they need to raise drug-free. Visit them at: <http://www.theantidrug.com/>.

⁶⁷ Constable Dean Maxwell, Comox Valley RCMP. June 2004.

⁶⁸ Diane Collins, John Howard Society. 10 June 2004.

⁶⁹ Constable Dean Maxwell, Comox Valley RCMP. June 2004.

Education

Education Indicators

- Student/Educator Ratios
- High School Graduation Rates
- Education Levels Attained
- Literacy
- Public Library Usage

Importance of Education

Education, values, and personal experiences contribute to peoples' involvement and understanding of their communities. Learning and personal development are life-long pursuits that enhance quality of life and physical health. People with limited education often have fewer opportunities for employment and financial security.

In 2002, when the baseline report was written, the Comox Valley School District (SD#71) had just completed the construction of Courtenay Middle School. Since that time, declining student enrollment has forced closure of Black Creek Elementary. Declining enrolments present a challenge to local educators who are committed to providing the best education possible.

Student/Educator Ratios

There are 30 public schools in the Comox Valley School District (SD#71). This includes the alternate schools and North Island Distance Education School (NIDES). Since 2001 one school has been closed (see above). Table 11 depicts the student/educator ratio, or the number of students per educator, which have increased since 2000. An educator is defined as a teacher, principal, or vice principal.

Table 11: Student/Educator Ratio

School Year	1999 - 2000	2000 - 2001	2001 - 2002	2002 - 2003	2003 -2004
BC	16.59	16.34	16.34	17.12	17.26
Comox Valley	16.88	16.46	16.38	17.37	17.63

Source: Ministry of Education, Report 2077. 25 November 2003.

The School District has 9,333 students registered for the 2003/2004 school year. In the 2001/2002 school year there were 9,791 students. In its March 2003 report, SD#71's Enrolment Task Force outlined some of the likely challenges as student number continue to drop, with elementary school enrolment falling by 150 students, and middle school enrolment by 250 students. The reduction of students and staff limits capacity for extra-curricular programs, and increases the number of split

classes, with two to three grades in one classroom. Students may not have access to a full choice of course electives, nor have adequate support services like counseling and learning assistance.

High School Graduation Rates

When the Ministry of Education refers to its graduation rate, it is called the six-year Dogwood completion rate. It represents the proportion of students completing grade 12 within six years of entering grade 8 for the first time. The cohort uses all students who either start at grade 8 in year one, and all those who arrive in higher grades in the later years during the six-year period allowed for high school completion. Table 12 shows the graduation rate increased from 1997/98 to 2001/02, but then dropped in 2002/2003. The Comox Valley School District is looking into the possible reasons for the 6% decline. The six-year average is 76.8%. They also report a difference of 10% between the number of females graduating versus males (81% females, 71% males) in the 2002/03 school year.

Table 12: Dogwood Completion Rates for SD #71 and BC

School Year	Comox Valley SD #71	BC
1997/98	69	70
1998/99	75	73
1999/00	79	74
2000/01	80	75
2001/02	82	76
2002/03	76	78

Ministry of Education, Six-Year Dogwood Completion Rate Report, January 2004.

School District 71 looked at the original cohort group that entered grade 8 in 1997 (873 students). Using the ministry's graduation rate of 76%, and calculating it with the number graduated, the graduation rate would be 90.7% for those 873 students.

The ratio of grade 12 students graduating and students entering grade 12 has been declining in the Comox Valley; whereas, the province ratios are increasing (Table 13). A graduate is a student who has completed provincially prescribed graduation requirements as stated in Ministerial Order M145/90. The percentages do not include Adult Secondary Program students, or those students completing graduation through correspondence who are not registered in a public school.

Table 13: Percent of Grade 12 Graduates Compared to Students Entering Grade 12

School Year	Comox Valley SD #71	BC
1998/99	69.81%	74.55%
1999/00	71.48%	75.07%
2000/01	75.73%	76.22%
2001/02	72.75%	77.65%
2002/03	70.77%	78.73%

Ministry of Education Report 1561, November 5, 2003.

Education Levels Attained

The 2002 report looked at the number and percentage of the population (15 years and over) with less than a Grade 9 education. Those numbers were taken from the 1996 Census data. The 2001 Census data changed the indicator from 15 to 20 years and over.

Table 14: Education Levels Attained as a Percentage of Total Population Over 19 Years

Education Attained	BC	Comox Valley*
University with degree	17.6	12.0
University without degree	9.1	7.2
College with certificate or diploma	16.7	18.8
College without certificate or diploma	7.2	7.8
Trades with certificate or diploma	12.8	15.7
High school with certificate or diploma	12.3	13.3
High school without certificate or diploma	17.7	20.5
Less than Grade 9	6.6	4.8

Source: BC Stats, 2001.

* Total population of 20 years and over: 40,565 in the Comox Valley.

Literacy

Research on adult literacy, family literacy, and work place literacy is in its infancy stage: therefore, it is difficult to estimate the percentage of individual with poor literacy skills in the province and in the Comox Valley. Literacy BC, a nonprofit organization base in Vancouver, is preparing to make information on literacy more readily available by developing research standards and studies in BC.

The Comox Valley Adult Learning Centre offers programs for adults and their families. Services are available at no cost. Clients have one-on-one tutoring. Adults are paired with a tutor to assist in improving literacy levels. Also, the Adult Learning Centre offers programming and resources to encourage parents to help their children become readers and learners. At the time of publication, no statistics were available from the Adult Learning Centre on participant numbers in their programs for 2004.

There are two organizations with English as a Second Language (ESL) program: the Comox Valley International College, and North Island College. In 2003, the Comox Valley International College had an average 120 students, an age range from 16 years to 72 years, average length of stay of three months, average age of 24 years and 60% females. They also offer the High School Preparation Program for students. Classes last approximately two months. In 2003 they had 17 students participate in the High School Preparation program.

North Island College offers ESL programs ranging from beginner to advanced levels, and a college preparatory course. However, at the time of publication, no statistics were available on participant rates.

Public Library Usage

Public libraries have long advocated free access to information. They are valuable community resources providing learning programs, Internet access, and research assistance. As of 2003, the Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) system contains 4,616,218 items. All are available to members of the VIRL anywhere on the Island. Residents also have access to the Vancouver Public Library holdings through interlibrary loan. Libraries keep thorough statistics on their holdings, circulation, reference assistance, and program attendances.

The Comox Valley has five library branches, one each in Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland, Hornby Island, and Union Bay. The total circulation for 2002 in the Comox Valley was 684,780; total reference questions, 32,936; and total program attendance, 2,953. Each branch's collection has grown since 2000. The VIRL's total collection increased from 1,161,300 as reported in the 2002 report to 1,315,721 (VIRL 2002 Annual Report, p. 6).

Table 15: Public Library Comox Valley Branch Collections:
2000 and 2002

Branch	2000	2002
Courtenay	62,533	97,502
Comox	34,290	32,963
Cumberland	22,406	22,952
Hornby Island	12,001	12,379
Union Bay	6,462	7,322

Source: Vancouver Island Regional Library 2002 Annual Report, p. 7

There has been a steady decrease in registered borrowers throughout the VIRL since 1999. Numbers have dropped from 216,824 in 1999 to 185,790 in 2002 (VIRL 2002 Annual Report, p. 4).

Assets and Resources

- Vancouver Island Regional Library at <http://www.virl.bc.ca/>.
- Comox Valley School District 71 at <http://sd71.bc.ca/>. The Board office is located at 607 Cumberland Road in Courtenay. Phone: (250) 334-5500.
- BC Ministry of Education at http://www.gov.bc.ca/bvprd/bc/channel.do?action=ministry&channelID=-8382&navId=NAV_ID_province.
- Comox Valley Adult Learning Centre provides free tutoring services. Phone: 338-9906.
- North Island College. Phone: 334-5000. Website address is <http://www.nic.bc.ca/>

Arts, Culture, and Recreation

Arts, Culture and Recreation Indicators

- Arts and Culture
- Parks and Public Spaces
- Recreational Usage



Importance of Culture and Recreation

There are numerous arts and cultural groups and organizations in the Comox Valley, including 10 recreational facilities and a wide range of other activities to choose from in the community. Arts and culture encourage diversity, preserve heritage, provide a unique sense of place, attract tourists, and enhance the economic and social environments of a community. Recreational facilities promote healthy lifestyles by providing opportunities to relax, play, socialize, and participate in various activities. Parks and public spaces conserve green spaces in urban settings, and give people opportunities to appreciate nature.

Arts and Culture

Many Quality of Life reports give arts and culture cursory mention. Generally, the reports look at the number of venues, the number of seats or size of the venues, and the “wealth” of entertainment available in their communities. The rest of the arts and culture scene remains invisible. No mention is ever made about the number of volunteers working in smaller venues, nor of the number of volunteer hours that go into making a vibrant, creative community. Few reports mention the amount of funding a municipality spends on arts and culture, generally because it is inadequate.

The direct impact of the culture sector in Canada, as measured by its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), was estimated at \$26 billion in 2001, with total direct employment reaching an estimated 740,000 jobs.

Statistics Canada

A few Quality of Life reports look at the economic impact of a specific venue. Others quote the number of jobs and the amount of revenue generated.

For 2000, Canadian cultural goods exports were valued at \$2.88 billion, an increase of \$1.117 billion or 69% since 1996.

Canadian Heritage

Another traditional approach is to measure the attendance at specific venues. The implication is that high attendance rates portray an image of success. However, these indicators do not measure the true impact of arts and culture on the local economy. For example, the number of artists in the Comox Valley is unknown. Many work at jobs outside of the arts in order to supplement their

income. Many are hobbyists who create for enjoyment and stress release while earning a little extra “mad money.” It is not known what percentage of income these individuals generate.

Conventional indicators do not account for the number of people who enjoy access to public art, or to free events. Nor do they account for organizations outside of the arts that use arts for healing, education, and spiritual growth, as the Comox Valley Nursing Centre does. Their annual art show is a popular event in the Valley.

The truth is that it is very difficult to measure the value of arts and culture, for it is difficult to define the indicators of a healthy arts and culture scene. Even if there was a list of appropriate indicators, many small organizations and groups rarely keep statistics on the work they do, the number of people who attend their events, or the benefits generated by their work. To convey the real benefits of arts and culture, it is first necessary to define the meaning of arts and culture. Definitions work as long as all those involved can agree on them, but conflicting agendas and personal objects often interfere.

The Comox Art Gallery reports that over a five-year period, government grant support went from 63% of operations to under 40%. In 2003, provincial and local government support represented about 27% of their current budget. Government funding continues to drop. In 2005, the Comox Valley Community Arts Council will receive no funding support from local government.
CVCAC and CVAG
April and June 2004

The reality for many arts and culture groups is that funding from all levels of government is rapidly shrinking, and many groups are struggling to justify their existence in a consumer-based society. The smaller the groups, the more vulnerable they are. As funding dwindles to an all time low, both in the community and in the schools, the impact of the loss cannot be measured.

Adequate and stable municipal funding is the key to leveraging investment from other sources. Records indicate that the federal and provincial government, along with private donors, sponsors and foundations, use the municipal funding for any given art organization as an indicator of how much they should invest. This means that poor investment from the local government puts any group at a serious disadvantage in leveraging funds from other sources. According to the Canadian Park/Recreation Association, compared to other levels of government, municipalities have the most influence on the development of the arts at the local level.

ProArt Alliance, 2002

Despite the limitations, one cannot help but sense just how vibrant arts and culture are in the Valley. Everywhere one turns, there is evidence of a diverse community that loves music, dance, theatre, and heritage. Small groups, like the Nova Voce Choral Society, not only hold events in the community, but also participate in events all over Canada. In 2003, in addition to four local concerts, two caroling events, and free concerts for schools, various groups from Nova Voce sang at 4 special events, two of which were fundraisers, and one for the Canadian Mental Health Association. On the 8th of November 2003, the Nova Voce Children and Youth Choirs were special guests at the Vancouver Opera.⁷⁰ Such programs give their members incredible opportunities to learn new skills, and to enrich their quality of life as well as the rest of the community. Another example of an active

⁷⁰ Kim Stubblefield, Nova Voce Choral Society 2004/2005 Events. 5 March 2004.

arts and culture group in the Valley is the World Community Development Education Society. The Society holds the popular annual World Community Film Festival. Attendance at the festival was approximately 850 in 2004, and at two other film shows, 590. Although they have anywhere from 150 to 180 paying members, they rely on 80 to 120 volunteers to pitch in at various events.⁷¹ These are the types of organizations that are overlooked in quality of life reports, because there are no systems in place to help them keep track of their statistics, or to promote their value to the community.

Consider that most of the volunteer hours go unreported, as do the enormous rewards the volunteers get out of their work, and the equally huge rewards the community receives from that same unpaid work. The Comox Valley Art Gallery has five to six paid staff, all part-time positions, and 30 to 35 volunteers who work on various committees and events. They do not currently keep track of the volunteer hours, but, as a board member noted, “We should.”⁷² Volunteer hours are kept at the Comox Valley Community Arts Council, but many of the records were lost during an office turnover. One volunteer log reports that 21 volunteers worked a total of 866 hours in 2002, and from January to August of 2003, the volunteer hours were 835.75.⁷³ Clearly, without community support and volunteerism, arts and culture would not thrive in the Valley.

Many balk at the notion of measuring the health of arts and culture based on statistical analysis of numbers. They believe that when arts and culture becomes a commodity that is exploited, its value is eroded in the community. Although people relate easily to monetary benefits, rather than less tangible benefits like community innovation and vision, research is convincing more people of the value of a healthy arts and culture scene in their communities. People involved in the arts tend to be better educated, and they are often involved in other activities such as environmental preservation, youth programs, and advocacy groups. This appears to be especially true of the Comox Valley art community.

82% of Canada’s cultural sector workers (eg: creators, artists, distributors, professionals and technicians) are highly educated, part of the emergent knowledge-based economy.

Canadian Heritage

Despite the challenges, there are people and organizations deciding how best to measure the health of arts and culture in a community. In the meantime, the Valley risks the loss of something quite tangible, the vision to maintain the health of its community.

Parks and Public Spaces

The Comox Valley is fortunate to have a combination of Provincial, Regional, and Municipal parks. There are 66 Municipal parks (29 serviced and 37 unserved) in Comox, Courtenay and Cumberland, 33 Regional parks and 10 Provincial parks.⁷⁴

I chose to live in the Comox Valley due to its proximity not just to nature but to wilderness, Strathcona Park in particular.

Member of the Comox Valley Naturalist Society

⁷¹ Wayne Bradley, World Community Development Education Society. Email document 12 May 2004.

⁷² Evelyn Gillespie, Comox Valley Art Gallery. Email document 7 June 2004.

⁷³ Sharon Niscak, Comox Valley Community Arts Council. Conversation on 19 March 2004.

⁷⁴ Comox Valley Statistical Profile, Comox Valley Economic Development Society. January 2004. Courtenay, BC and Regional District of Comox-Strathcona. Parks Department Online: <http://www.rdc.bc.ca/Parks/index.html>. Retrieved 18 June 2004.

Recreational Usage

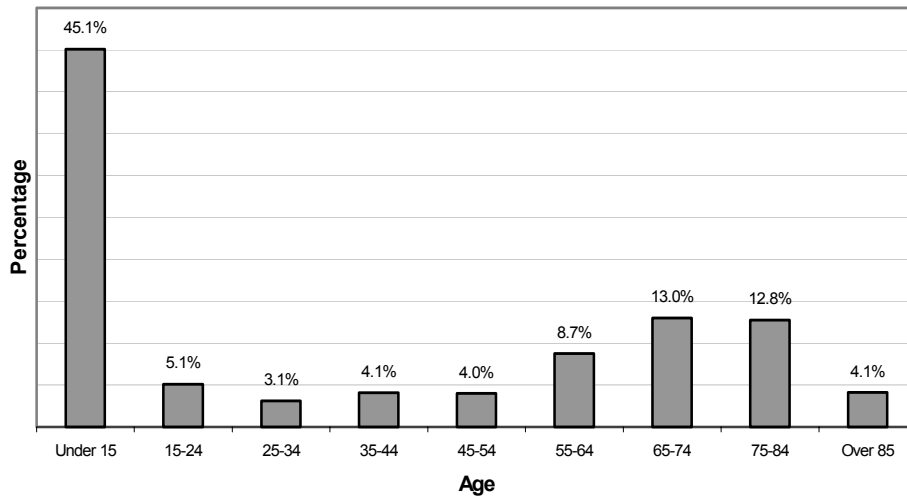
Carrying the title of *Recreational Capital of Canada*, the Comox Valley has 10 recreational organizations offering diverse programming for a wide range of ages. Additionally, the Canadian Forces Base, 19 Wing offers recreational opportunities for its members.

At the time of this report, a Comox Valley-wide recreation participation rate was not feasible. Each centre uses different tracking systems and measures different indicators. The following section describes participation rates for Courtenay, the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona (RDC-S), and CFB 19 Wing. Comox and Cumberland were unable to provide statistics for this report. However, a quick synopsis of the Comox Recreation Commission survey in November 2003 is provided.

Courtenay Recreation

The total number of recreation users in Courtenay for 2003 was 15,372. Of those users, 32.8% were male and 67.2% were females. 4.6% of all users were from Courtenay with 20.3% from Comox. The remaining 25.1% of users were from Cumberland, Areas A, B, C and K. Children and seniors appear to be the bulk of users at 45.1% and 29.9%, respectively. Figure 13 shows the age breakdown of Courtenay Recreation users for 2003.

Figure 13: Age of Courtenay Recreation Users



Source: Courtenay Recreation Association, statistics 2003, emailed 16 June 2004

Comox Recreation

The Comox Recreation Commission was unable to provide overall participation rates for 2003. However, Comox Recreation completed a survey to determine the effectiveness of their recreational activities, as well as identify needs and preferences of Comox residents. Of 209 respondents, 72% had participated in programming by Comox Recreation. 43.7% of all survey participants using the Comox Recreation programs were between 36-50 years. 16.6% were between the ages of 1-19 years, 21.8% were 20-35 years and 17.9% were 51 years and over.

An overwhelming number of survey participants indicated a need for swimming facilities in Comox, more multi-use fields for soccer, baseball, etc, tennis courts, play structures for young children, a skateboard park and lawn bowling greens.⁷⁵

Regional District of Comox-Strathcona

In 2003, it is estimated that 194,000 individuals used the Aquatic Centre and 30,000 at the Sports Centre. Approximately 500,000 participants used the Arena in 2003. It is difficult to compare participation rates to 2001 as tracking methods have changed over the past two years.

FS & R 19 Wing Comox – Fitness and Community Centre Usage

The 19 Wing Comox Fitness and Community Centre includes a wide variety of facilities including indoor gymnasium, fitness studios, weight rooms, squash courts, an arena and a 25-metre pool. They also offer outdoor basketball and tennis courts, a track, a baseball diamond and a skateboard park. In 2003 there were seven 19 Wing Clubs with a total of 246 members. Activities range from auto hobby to Shotokan martial arts. The arena is well used. On a weekly basis, 1900 participants make use of the facility. Approximately 100 military members use the fitness facilities during the week with an average of 50 users on the weekends. Almost 40 teens and pre-teens use the teen centre on a weekly basis. The teen centre also offers dances, special events, family event evenings, craft clubs, and softball in the summer months. Seasonal activities include recreational tours and ski days.⁷⁶

Reduced Rates for Recreational Users

Equal access to recreational opportunities is dependent on disposable income. Courtenay Recreation, Comox Recreation Commission, and the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona all offer programs at reduced rates for individuals on low-income.

In 2003 Courtenay Recreation Association provided 396 “Access Passes” to low-income residents living in Courtenay.⁷⁷ This number is up slightly from 386 in 2001. Passes are for the use of children and adults. The coupon books or passes offer up to 75% off most programs listed in the seasonal recreation guide. Some programs are free.

The Comox Recreation Commission offers free and discounted programs at the Comox Recreation Centre. Their programs are not limited to Comox residents and are available to children and adults.

The Regional District of Comox-Strathcona offers a PLAY pass for the Wave Pool and Sports Centre for low income residents of Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland and Areas A, B, C and K. Each individual receives 25 free Sports or Aquatic Centre admissions, 25 at 75% off, and one free program registration. In 2003, the RDC-S provided 823 PLAY passes of which 38.3% were for adults and 33.3% for children. The remaining 28.4% were distributed among seniors, teens, and persons with a disability⁷⁸.

Summary of Recreation Focus Group

A Recreation Focus group was held at the Comox Recreation Centre on 2 March 2004. The purpose of the gathering was to determine how statistical information on recreation users is collected in the

⁷⁵ Comox Recreation Commission, Survey Report, November 6, 2003. Coty Marketing, Courtenay, BC.

⁷⁶ FS & R 19 Wing Comox, Fitness and Community Centre, statistics 2003, emailed May 2004.

⁷⁷ Courtenay Recreation Association, statistics 2003, emailed 16 June 2004.

⁷⁸ Regional District of Comox-Strathcona, statistics 2003, emailed 17 June 2004.

Valley and how best to amalgamate the data for the Quality of Life 2004 report. Representatives from Courtenay, Comox, the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona, Canadian Forces Base 19 Wing, and BC Parks attended.

Recreation providers felt that the recreational opportunities in the Valley were well suited to its diverse population. They believed that it is better for citizens to have a good understanding of what is available in the Comox Valley rather than in any one of its areas. Perceived barriers to participation included cost, transportation, and accessibility. They also agreed that councils in each area need to be aware of the benefits of recreation, what is currently available in the Valley, and what the future demands and needs of their citizens will be.

Focus group participants thought that a Valley-wide recreation needs assessment, as a collective undertaking, would be a great benefit to the management of recreational facilities. A needs assessment would help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the current programs, and would also identify needs and preferences of users.

Assets and Resources

- Comox Valley Community Arts Council at <http://www.island.net/~cvcac/>.
- Comox Valley Art Gallery at <http://mars.ark.com/~cvag/>.
- World Community Development Education Society raises awareness of local and global development issues and fair trade. Their annual film festival is a favorite in the Valley. Website address is <http://www.worldcommunity.ca/>.
- Canadian Culture Online is part of the Department of Canadian Heritage's strategy to encourage a uniquely Canadian presence on the Internet. Website address is http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pcce-ccop/index_e.cfm.

Community Involvement

Community Involvement Indicators

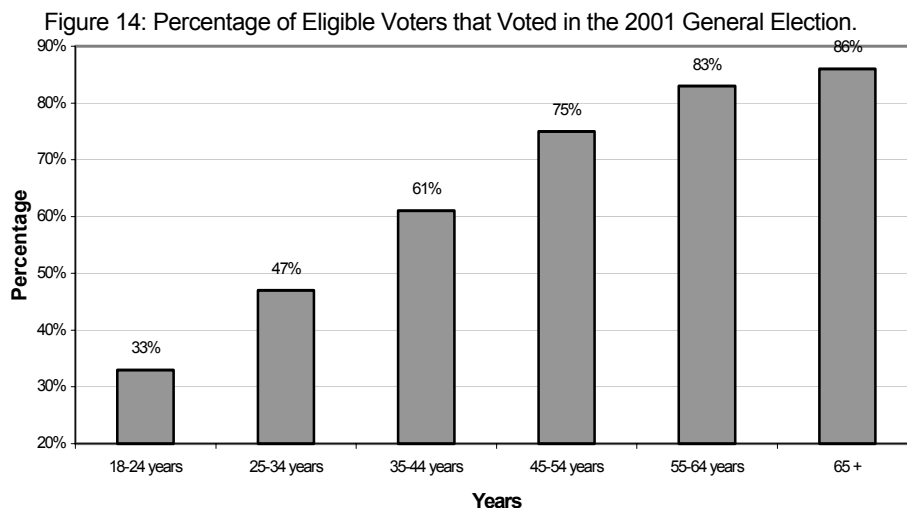
- Municipal Voting
- Charitable Donations
- Volunteerism
- Non-Profit Organizations

Importance of Community Involvement

A healthy and vibrant community life relies on the involvement of its citizens. People who participate in their communities help shape the future. They provide direction to development, planning, accessibility, and many other areas of life. “The more involved individuals become in their community, the more they are likely to connect with, and value, their community” (Fraser Basin Council, p.8).

Municipal Voting

Voting is the most basic way for residents to participate in decision-making, particularly at a municipal level. Communities with high voter participation rates believe this is directly related to the convenience of voter polls, to clear and accessible information, and to a perceived trust in political candidates.



Source: Elections BC. Election Results and Statistics, 16 May 2001 Provincial Election.

In the Comox Valley, 68% of all eligible voters casted their votes in the 2001 general election. In comparison, the 2001 general election average for BC was 78%⁷⁹. As seen in Figure 14, there is a relationship between age and voting: the older individuals become, the more likely they are to vote.

Charitable Donations

For many British Columbians, making charitable gifts improves the quality of life in their communities, whether they give money to a non-profit organization, help an individual on the street, or give away food or clothing. The charitable giving rate is defined as individuals, 18 years and over, who give money or provide goods and/or services to a charity and/or non-profit organization over the course of one year. In a 2002 *BC Ipsos-Reid Express poll*, 74% of BC residents over the age of 18 have made at least one donation to a charitable or non-profit organization in 2001. The average total amount contributed was \$791.⁸⁰

With no central volunteer organization in the Comox Valley, measuring charitable donations is challenging. Charities and non-profit organizations use different donor tracking methods, adding to the difficulty of determining a total figure for charitable donations. However, the United Way does track its charitable donations and provides a partial view of the current status in the Comox Valley. In 2003, \$139,967 was given to the United Way Comox Valley; a 6% increase from 2002.⁸¹

Volunteerism

For many of us, it is just as important to give as it is to receive social support. We demonstrate our care for the communities we live in by volunteering time and donating money. The volunteer rate, defined as the percentage of population who performed a service without pay in the last 12 months preceding the survey, was 26% for BC. This is a decrease of 4% from the last survey conducted in 1997. Total volunteer hours have also dropped from 169 to 143 million hours. The rest of the country is experiencing the same trend.⁸²

845,000 BC residents (26%) volunteered an average of 169 hours each, according to the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (NSGVP). British Columbians aged 45 to 64 were the most likely to volunteer (29% volunteered in 2000) followed closely by those aged 30 to 44 (28%). Although volunteers, aged 65 and older account for only 9% of volunteers, they contributed 18% of all volunteer hours, a disproportionately large percentage of the total volunteer hours. Also of interest is the fact that women are more likely to volunteer than men (29% women compared to 23% men). Women also account for a higher percentage of the total hours volunteered (58% versus 42%). BC is the only province where female volunteers contributed more hours, on average, than did male volunteers.⁸³

At present, the total number of Comox Valley volunteers and volunteer hours is not available, due largely to the fact that many groups and organizations do not keep track of the total volunteer hours in a consistent



⁷⁹ Voter Participation BC. Available online at <http://www.elections.bc.ca/eac/eacvotingstats1.pdf>

⁸⁰ Charitable Giving in BC. 2002. Ipsos-Reid Express Poll. Retrieved 23 June 2004. Available at <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=1534&content=full>.

⁸¹ United Way Canada. Campaign Results 2003. Retrieved 23 June 2004. Available at http://www.unitedway.ca/english/docs/Campaign_Results_2003.pdf.

⁸² Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report 2002, p. 42.

⁸³ National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000. p. 31-3.

manner. Until recently, there was no central volunteer organization in the Valley. Islands Communities Network started such a service in 2004. Organizations can list their volunteer requirements at the Comox Valley Volunteer Investment Program (CVVIP), and volunteers may register online to connect with organizations requiring their specific fields of interest, skills, and abilities. They also act as an online resource directory.

Non-Profit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations in the Comox Valley include hospitals, colleges, social service organizations, shelters for the homeless, arts councils, food banks, charitable foundations, self-help groups, bodies that provide recreation, places of worship, social clubs, and advocacy groups. Although widely contrasting in their mandates, these organizations share a common space between the state and the market. They represent a collective action to improve quality of life in their community. Although difficult to determine the exact number of nonprofits in the Comox Valley, there are over 90 non-profit organizations listed in the 2003 Comox Valley Community Service Directory.⁸⁴

Assets and Resources

- Comox Valley Volunteer Investment Program connects the volunteer community online. Phone: (250) 334-8063. Website address is <http://www.islands-communities.net/icvvc.html>.
- For more facts or information on volunteering in Canada, visit <http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca>
- Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform: an independent, non-partisan group reviewing the way British Columbians elect their provincial political representatives. Phone: 1-966-667-1232. Website address is <http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/>.

⁸⁴ Crossroads Crisis Centre Society. *Comox Valley Community Services Directory 2003*. Courtenay, BC.

Environment

Environment Indicators

- Impervious Surfaces
- Water Quality
- Air Quality
- Recycling
- E-waste Recycling
- Invasive Species
- Endangered Species

In the past, I felt that my quality of life was directly related to people. But in parting the urban landscapes, I now sense that living with quality is itself every respectful moment one shares in listening to this planet and its needs.

Vivian Dean
*Journeys: The Way of
Planetary Citizens*

Importance of the Environment

When land is developed, whether for subdivisions, transportation, agriculture or forestry, there is an inevitable change to the balance found in natural systems. Drainage patterns are changed, trees are cut down, soil is moved and habitat is lost.

When these changes are small, natural systems can often absorb the impacts, and normal ecological functions can continue. As the size and rate of development accelerates, the ability of natural systems to accommodate change diminishes and the evidence of damage becomes more widespread.

Stewardship Centre for BC, 2004

Impervious Surfaces

Impervious or impermeable surfaces are directly connected to land use. As a community grows in population and area, its effect on the surrounding natural environment can be devastating. Development can occur in ways to minimize damage and protect the wild and rural area. Although there are new technologies available to ease the impact of conventional impervious surfaces, many communities do not make use of them.

Less than 1% of rainwater flows as surface runoff and into streams in the forests. Development increases impervious surfaces, resulting in higher runoffs. In urban areas, traditional stormwater management directs runoff to waterways through pipes and ditches. The combination of increased impervious surfaces and of “pipe and ditch” storm water management, results in flooding and erosion of stream banks; lower water quality as runoff collects pollutants from parking lots; streets or chemically treated grounds; lower groundwater levels; and loss of natural habitats as the

vegetation and spawning areas are washed away. Research suggests that a total impervious surface (TIS: the percentage of an area covered by impervious surfaces) of 10%, damage to stream habitat has already occurred (Through the Cracks, p.1).

The Millard/Piercy Watershed Stewards keep track of changes in and around the Millard/Piercy Watershed. In 1999, they began an intensive study of the area, looking at various characteristics that impact the ecological health of the waters and aquatic habitats. They used Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to create a base map in combination with colour air photographs to create a land use map. Results were published in their 2002 report that states:

Of most concern is the total impervious surface in the watershed. Between 1999-2002, the percentage of paved and roofed surfaces increased from 7.2% to 8.7% per cent of the total area — due mainly to the new South Courtenay Connector. Total impervious surfaces in the Piercy Basin are up from 8.3% to 9.3% — a value very close to the 10% maximum at which healthy populations of salmonids can survive. The Millard basin is not far behind at 6.9%. Future development in the Watershed will have to incorporate innovative stormwater technologies and sensitive habitat (e.g. wetlands) protection to ensure that the hydrological regime of the watershed is appropriate for salmon.

Fleenor, p. 5.

Table 16. Total Impervious Areas in hectares and as a per-basin percentage in the M/PW ca. 1999

Basin	Total Area	Millard Watershed	Piercy Watershed
Total Basin Area	1306.2 ha	367 ha	938 ha
Imp. Surface (ha/basin%) 1999	93.8ha/7.2%	15.8ha/ 4.3 %	78ha / 8.3%
Imp. Surface (ha/basin%) 2002	113.7ha/8.7%	25.3ha/6.9%	87.5/9.3%

Source: Millard/Piercy Watershed Stewards, Assessment and Monitoring Program, December 2002, p. 4.

The Millard/Piercy Watershed report looks at a small part of the Comox Valley, but it is not the most densely populated part. If a similar study were done in Courtenay and Comox, the results would be quite different.

Water Quality

Water quality in this report does not refer to drinking water; rather, it looks at the quality of water in various watersheds and streams. Water quality is intimately connected to land use. Health of the water reflects the health of its surrounding environment. Urban and suburban development, commercial and industrial development, poor stormwater management, and pollution cause habitat damage. Agricultural, mining and forestry practices also contribute to pollution of waterways. The Comox Valley is home to many beautiful waterways that support a large variety of wildlife. They also have a recreational and economic impact that contributes to the community's quality of life.

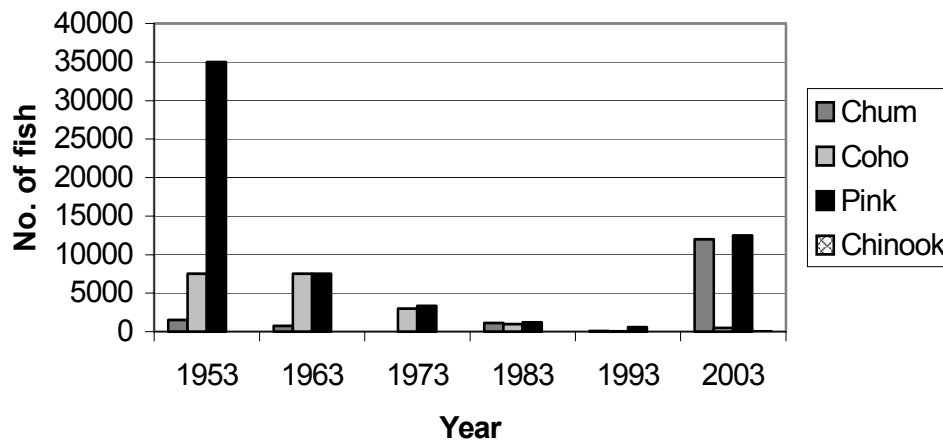
I have come to realize that a human being is made up of over 70% water and we require the water we store in our bodies to be clean and fresh. I now understand that if humans are to survive on this planet then the fish will tell me when the water is fresh and plentiful by coming back to spawn in historical numbers.

Jack Minard
Tsolum River Restoration Society

There are 22 water quality monitoring sites set up in the Millard/Piercy Watershed. Two were identified as “hotspots” because they “exceeded the maximum allowable criteria for the protection of aquatic life for dissolved aluminum, copper and zinc” (Sellentin, p. 42) in all three sampling events.

The Tsolum River Restoration Society has been measuring copper levels (mg/L) in the Tsolum River since 1989. Copper has been leaching into the river from a defunct mine, and causing havoc in the aquatic habitat of the river. In 2000 their readings were below the target level (less than 0.01 mg/L) 32% of the total readings (227). By 2002 the percentage increased to 38% of the readings below the target. Two readings were off the scale, over 0.04 mg/L. Usually, in the spring months, the copper levels are highest. None of the readings in May and June were below the target. The good news is that the copper levels are continually decreasing, and the fish count is rising every year.⁸⁵

Figure 15: Five Decades of Fish Numbers in the Tsolum River.



Source: Tsolum River Restoration Society, 2004.

Air Quality

Air pollution does not recognize boundaries and borders. Although air quality is not yet measured in the Comox Valley, we are not immune to what is happening in the rest of the world concerning global warming from greenhouse gas emissions and climate changes (by way of example, refer to the text box at the left about the volcanic eruption of Krakatoa in 1883). There are many models that the Valley can look to concerning the usual changes a community experiences in time: population growth means more automobiles, more garbage, more greenhouse gas emissions, and more pollution. Higher levels of air pollutants are associated with higher levels of health problems, like

The eruption that had sent out flame and ash and tidal waves and an incredible explosive sound had also sent an invisible, inaudible shock wave that passed cleanly through the atmosphere . . . When the traces were examined more closely and compared with other barograph traces from more distant cities around Europe and then around the world, it appeared that the shock wave from Krakatoa’s final cataclysmic explosion had traveled around the earth not once but *seven times*.

Winchester, p. 267

⁸⁵ Jack Minard. Tsolum River Restoration Society. Email document 10 May 2004.

respiratory and cardiac diseases, and with increasing damage to vegetation, agricultural land, and forests (Fraser Basin Council, p. 11). There are government initiatives for reducing vehicle and landfill emissions. Citizens of numerous communities are also taking action. They use the public transit more often, walk or bicycle to where they need to go, or they car share.

Between 1990 and 2000 greenhouse gas emissions increased by 25% in BC. Over 80% of total GHG emissions are related to energy production and use. Transportation accounts for 40% of the previous figure (Fraser Basin Council, p. 21). Campbell River, a community of similar size and characteristics as the Comox Valley, monitors PM10 (particulate matter under 10 microns). Although particulate matter concentration in 2000 was a low 12.4 µg/m³ (BC Progress Board, p. 30), in 1.6 % of the monitoring time, numbers exceeded 25µg/m³, down from 2.5% in 1999 (BC Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, 2001). PM10 that is greater than 25µg/m³ is considered the level at which “there is statistical evidence that health risks begin to occur” (BC Ministry of Water, Land, and Air Protection, 2001).

Recycling

Why does recycling matter? Garbage has to go somewhere. Today, the bulk of our garbage still goes to landfills. Trash sits in giant mounds on designated land, slowly moldering, or not. Some material will still be around by the time the sun goes supernova. As their name implies, the landfills fill up. When they reach capacity, another piece of land must be found to take the ever-increasing amount of garbage. Based on the forecast made by the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona, the Pidgeon Lake Landfill is expected to reach capacity in 2032 (Solid Waste Management Plan 2003, p. 10-3).⁸⁶ Where will Comox Valley’s garbage go then?

The truth is that the average household does not manage personal waste very well. However, the picture in the Comox Valley has some bright stars in the recycling game. In 1990, nothing was recycled in the Valley. Everything went to the regional landfills. Through the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) programs of the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona (Table 17 below), 10.5% of all the waste generated in 1994 did not reach the landfills. In 2000 that figure increased to 34.4%. That represents a “decline from 53,260 tonnes in 1994 to 45,894 tonnes in 2000” (SWMP 2003, p. 2-16). The recycling rates for the Comox Valley are similar to the whole of the Regional District, although Denman and Hornby Islands have rates of 47% for 2000. In fact, the Hornby Island Recycling Depot received a merit award from the Recycling Council of BC in June 2001 for their waste reduction efforts (SWMP 2003, p. 2-10). Per-capita, recycling in the District was 0.07 tonnes in 1990 versus 0.23 tonnes in 2000. However, the per-capita waste generation has increased from 0.62 tonnes in 1990 to 0.67 tonnes per-capita in 2000 (SWMP 2003, p. 2-16). So, there may be more people recycling their waste, but they are buying and using more products that generate more waste.

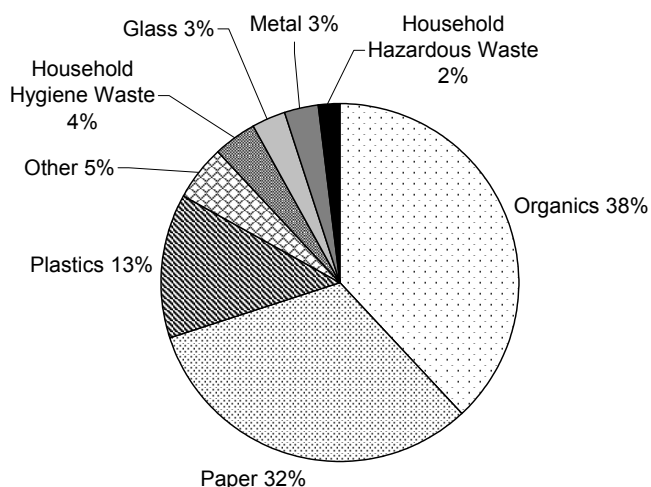
⁸⁶ The acronym SWMP 2003 will refer to the Regional District’s Solid Waste Management Plan 2003.

Table 17: District 71 Solid Waste Summary Statistics for 1994 and 2000

Year	Denman Island	Hornby Island	Other Comox Valley	Total
Generation (Tonnes)				
1994	200	246	33,425	33,871
2000	345	449	34,715	35,508
Reduction, Reuse, Recycling (Tonnes)				
1994	15	88	4,372	4,475
2000	161	210	11,832	12,203
Disposal (Tonnes)				
1994	185	158	29,053	29,396
2000	183	239	22,883	23,305
3Rs Percent of Generation				
1994	8%	36%	13%	13%
2000	47%	47%	34%	34%

Source: Regional District of Comox-Strathcona, Solid Waste Management Plan 2003, Table 2-2, p. 2-17.

Figure 16: Solid Waste Percentage Breakdown in Regional District of Comox-Strathcona



Source: RDC-S. Available at <http://www.rdcs.bc.ca/SolidWaste/index.html>.

Although there are a number of recycling options for citizens of the Comox Valley, many do not use these options, and many are unaware of their options. Success of recycling programs depends on the efforts of individuals to make use of these options, and to change some of their behaviours to reduce the waste stream overall. Ideally, we should decrease the amount of garbage we recycle as well as the waste that ends up in the landfills. Using canvas bags for shopping, composting organic waste, which accounts for 40 to 50 per cent of household waste (EnviroZine, 1 May 2001), are just some of the ways that individuals can make a huge difference in solid waste management. The RDC-S also sold backyard composters for a number of years. They estimate that by June 2000, more than 7,000

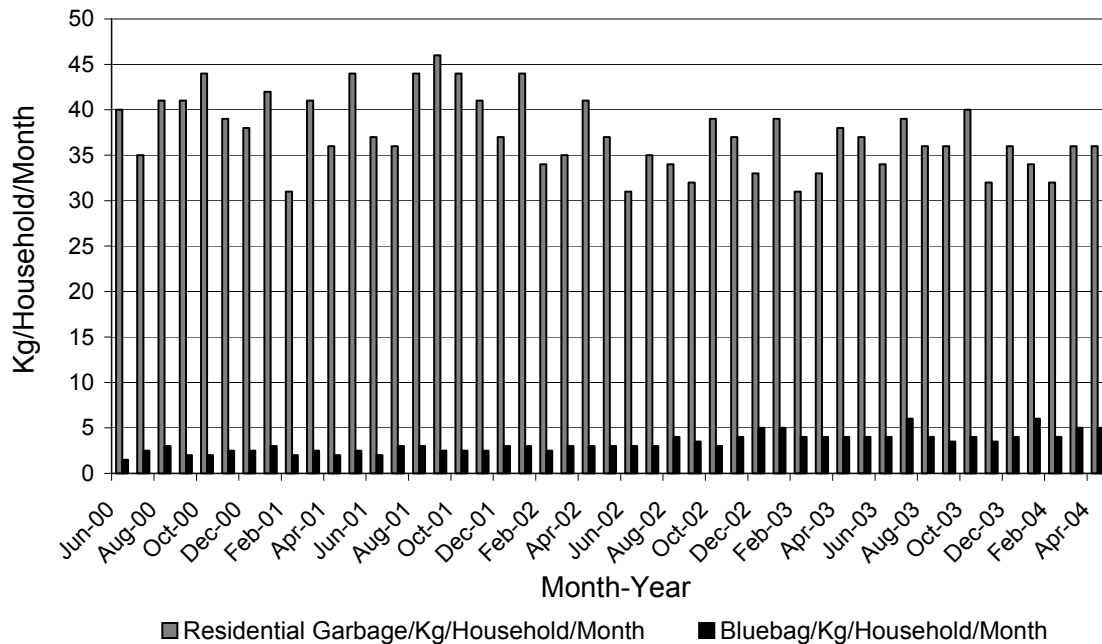
backyard composters were distributed, which represents more than 17% of households in the District (SWMP, p. 7-2). The number of households with backyard composters on Hornby Island represents an impressive rate of 90% (SWMP, p. 2-10). Why does composting matter? Composting makes a significant impact on landfill capacity, and reduces municipal collection costs” (EnviroZine, Issue 7:2).

Another recycling initiative of RDC-S is the Multi-Material Drop-off Depots. There are 10 MMDDs in the Comox Valley that accept newspaper, magazines, mixed paper, glass, metal food containers, plastic, cardboard and boxboard. In 2000, the program collected 2,890 tonnes of material which is equivalent to 74 kg. per household in the District (SWMP, p.5-5 to 6). Courtenay began its curbside blue bag recycling program in June 2000.

The decomposition of waste in landfills produces a gas which is composed primarily of methane which is a greenhouse gas contributing to climate change. The emission of this gas from our landfills accounts for 25 % of the man-made methane emissions from Canada. Estimates have shown that over 25 Megatonnes (Mt) of CO2 equivalent are being generated annually from Canadian landfills. This is the equivalent to approximately 5.5 million cars on the road.

Environment Canada
21 February 2003

Figure 17: Residential Garbage and Blue Bag Recycling



Source: City Engineer, Blue Bag Program, Courtenay. June 11, 2004.

As the chart above shows, most of the residential garbage goes elsewhere. In 2001, 6,069 households per month used the service and in 2003, 6,902. Although the number of households using the Blue Bag curbside service is growing, many still do not participate.

Other recycling options are available through local private firms like the Journey Program that picks up office paper from businesses, schools, and government organizations. In 2000, the program

collected 86 tonnes of paper. A further 54 tonnes have been collected from January to July of 2001 (SWMP, p. 5-7).

Household Hazardous Waste continues to be an issue in the Comox Valley. A survey commissioned by RDC-S in 2000, reveals that over 60% of people did not know where to dispose of hazardous wastes (SWMP, p. 8-5). Nor were they clear on what constituted a hazardous waste. They identified liquid chemicals as hazardous, but did not consider products such as tires, used automotive oil, paint or used car batteries as hazardous waste. Although many people know where to dispose of these materials safely (at the appropriate depots), most had no idea of where to dispose of liquid chemicals such as pesticides, solvents, and flammable liquids. The survey found that only 21 percent of people surveyed took hazardous wastes to the appropriate recycling centres.

In fact it is somewhat disconcerting that liquid chemicals tend to be disposed of via inappropriate means (garbage, drains, driveways, etc.).

Waste Management Survey 2001, p.21.

The Regional District of Comox – Strathcona, along with CompuCycle, held a Hazardous Household Waste Drop-off event on 22 April 2001. They collected batteries, gasoline, pesticides, paint, flammable liquids, old computers and computer products. The event collected enough material to fill a 53-foot trailer. However, according to the Waste Management Coordinator, most of the items were not hazardous materials.⁸⁷ People just cleared out their closets and garages of all old containers, creating additional work for event personnel who had to sift through the items, and dispose of them in the usual way (phone conversation, 8 June 2004). Cost to hold the event was between \$5,000 and \$7,000, with about \$3,000 spent on advertising and educational packages (p. 8-3). Other events held in 2002 and 2003 had similar results. Recycling events, despite their limitations, do generate awareness about the safe disposal of hazardous household waste.

E-Waste Recycling

More than 140,000 tonnes of computer equipment, phones, televisions, stereos, and small home appliances accumulate in Canadian landfills each year. That's equivalent to the weight of about 28,000 adult African elephants or enough uncrushed electronic waste to fill up the Toronto Skydome every 15 years.

An estimated 4,750 tonnes of lead is contained in personal computers and televisions disposed each year in Canada.

By 2005, yearly disposal figures for personal computers alone will contain an estimated 4.5 tonnes of cadmium and 1.1 tonnes of mercury.

Exposure to high levels of lead, cadmium and mercury in the environment has been linked to adverse effects on human health and wildlife. This includes subtle neurobehavioural effects for lead, chronic kidney damage for cadmium, and sensory or neurological impairments for mercury.

Electronics contain valuable resources like ferrous metals, aluminum, and copper, however, most electronics are currently sent to landfill. In 1999, it is estimated that disposed personal computers alone contained 4,400 tonnes of ferrous metal, 3,050 tonnes of aluminum and 1,500 tonnes of copper.

Environment Canada, 26 June 2003

⁸⁷ Echo Heibert, Waste Management Coordinator. Regional District of Comox-Strathcona. Telephone conversation May 31, 2004.

Computers and their peripherals are not diverted from the landfill in the Comox Valley, except when the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona (RDC-S) holds a recycling event dealing with e-waste (electronic waste). Information is not widely available to citizens on how to dispose of these materials safely. Most computers and other e-waste end up at regional landfills. Starting in October 2003, CompuCycle, began an e-waste recycling project. The project objective is to recycle, refurbish and reuse e-waste, thus preventing toxic materials from entering the landfill, and the surrounding ground water.

CompuCycle has held several computer drop-off events in the Comox Valley and in Nanaimo. RDC-S and CompuCycle received approximately 4 tonnes of computers in their collection event in 2001. The amount of e-waste collected by CompuCycle from October 2003 to May 2004, an eight-month period, is just over 40 metric tonnes.⁸⁸ The calculated weight is based on monitors averaged at 27 lbs, computer towers at 24 lbs, and printers at 12 lbs. At present, the warehouse inventory of stock and materials not yet processed is just over 18.5 tonnes.

Although collection of e-waste began in October 2003, disassembly of the materials began in mid-January 2004. In their first five months of business (January to May 2004), CompuCycle sold for scrap and recycled about 19.2 tonnes of e-waste. Materials included 6,400 lbs of steel, 67 lbs of copper, 190 lbs of aluminum, and 7,806 lbs of plastic. Monitors sent for recycling accounted for another 12,152 lbs of the total weight. The money generated from the sale of these materials amounted to a mere \$4,612. If this seems low, consider that revenue from scrap and other recyclables for RDC-S in 2003 was \$7,500 (SWMP 2003, p. vi, Table 1).

Despite the low revenues generated by recycling e-waste, the cost of not recycling is far more sinister. Each computer monitor or television contains an average of four to eight pounds of lead (Toxic TVs, p. 11). Lead, cadmium and mercury are some of the toxic materials found in computers. This means that the 40 tonnes of e-waste collected by CompuCycle has diverted the following away from regional landfills: 18,402 pounds of plastic, 16,385 pounds of ferrous materials, 11,344 pounds of aluminum, 5,543 pounds of copper, 7.52 pounds of cadmium, 1.76 pounds of mercury, and 5,039 pounds of lead (calculations based on figures in Toxic TVs, p. 14).

About 70% of the heavy metals (including mercury and cadmium) found in landfills comes from electronic equipment discards. These heavy metals and other hazardous substances found in electronics can contaminate groundwater and pose environmental and public health risks.

Poison PCs and Toxic TVs, p. 16

The other way to recycle is to reuse items. People either stuff their older, working computers in the garage or put them out with the garbage. Many computers are regularly replaced in larger offices, and still quite functional. There are programs in many Canadian cities that donate used computers to those who cannot afford to buy them. From January to May 2004, CompuCycle refurbished about 50

⁸⁸ Richard Drake, CompuCycle Manager. CompuCycle document June 2004.

monitors, 120 machines and five printers, some of which were donated to 24 local individuals and non-profit organizations in need.⁸⁹

Invasive Species

The BC Species and Ecosystem Explorer database lists 45 introduced animals in the province. “Also know as exotic, alien or non-native, these are species that humans transported to an area previously outside of that species' geographic range”.⁹⁰ They list another 682 introduced plants. Introduced species can threaten the local ecology and biodiversity of a region. The Comox Valley has its share of introduced species: purple loosestrife and scotch broom are just two of the many plants originating in foreign lands. A number of local organizations work diligently to remove foreign species, and reintroduce native ones.

The Comox Valley Naturalist Society reports that in the Courtenay River Estuary, volunteers removed 10,200 kg of yellow flag iris and 2,080 kg of Japanese knotweed in the 2002/03 field seasons. “Purple loosestrife numbers have declined from a high of 24,520 in 1999 to 6,931 in 2003” (Sellentin, p.5). Other invasive plants they target are Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus discolor*).

Endangered Species

Wild animals are good indicators of the health of the surrounding environment because they cover a wide range of habitats. Populations that are declining, or near extinction are signs of habitat damage usually caused directly or indirectly by human actions. There are a number of organizations in the Comox Valley that preserve animals at risk and their habitats.

A search on the BC Species and Ecosystem Explorer reveals that there are 16 animals in the Forest Region District of Campbell River, which includes the Comox Valley, that are on the red list, and 34 on the blue. The animals include mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, and reptiles. The BC Conservation Status defines species on the red list as extirpated, endangered, or threatened. Those on the blue list are of special concern. In November 2003 the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) designated the sand-verbena moth (*Copablepheron fuscum*) as endangered (Species at Risk, November 2003, p. ii). There are 367 plants on the red list and 620 on the blue list for the Campbell River Forest Region District.

Related Indicators: Parks and Public Spaces in the Culture and Recreation section.

Assets and Resources

- Comox Valley Watershed Assembly (CVWA) is a public forum open to anyone with a watershed concern/issue. The group works to resolve water-related problems to sustain the water, watersheds and affected marine areas of the Comox Valley. Email: tsolumr@mars.ark.com.
- The Youth and Ecological Restoration Project works with nature to restore the environmental health of Comox Valley watersheds. It engages youths in ecological restoration activities such as salmon enhancement, stream restoration, habitat assessment and monitoring, and community

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ BC Conservation Status definition online at <http://srmapps.gov.bc.ca/apps/eswp>.

environmental education. For more information contact Wendy Kotilla at 336-8487.

- Comox Valley Project Watershed Society is a non-profit organization that focuses on Sensitive Habitat Stewardship, Baynes Sound Stewardship, and Streamkeepers. Website address is <http://www.projectwatershed.bc.ca/>.
- Tsolum River Restoration Society website at <http://www.tsolumriver.org/>.
- Air Quality Primer for BC is available at <http://www.pyr.ec.gc.ca/EN/index.shtml>
- Silicon Valley Toxic Coalition, a comprehensive site about high-tech impacts on communities, workers and environmental health at <http://www.svtc.org/>
- EnviroZine: Environment Canada's online newsmagazine at <http://www.ec.gc.ca/envirozine/>
- World Wildlife Fund Canada's 2003 report The Nature Audit: view the report online, or an interactive flash presentation at <http://www.wwf.ca/AboutWWF/WhatWeDo/TheNatureAudit/TheNatureAudit.asp?page=0.1&IGNOREcart=>.
- Project Watershed . New project is working on the preservation of the Morrison Creek Lamprey. Email projectwatershed@shaw.ca.
- NatureServe provides reliable information on species and ecosystems for use in conservation and land use planning. Website address is <http://www.natureserve.org/>.
- Comox Strathcona Regional District: for information on planning, water management, waste management and parks at <http://www.rdc.bc.ca/> or phone toll free 1-800-331-6007. For information on recycling in your community go to <http://www.rdc.bc.ca/Recycling/index.html>.
- Hornby Island recycling programs available online at <http://www.hornbyisland.com/Recycle/>.
- Recycling Council of BC is a provincial information referral service. Their toll free hotline is 1-800-667-4321.
- The Stewardship Centre for BC provides access to publications about for landowners, developers, volunteers, professionals, local governments and agencies. Website address is http://www.stewardshipcentre.bc.ca/sc_bc/main/index.asp?sProv=bc#.

-
- CompuCycle recycles, refurbishes and reuses computers, printers, and other computer equipment. Phone for drop off times and sales events at 334-8136. Website address is <http://www.valleylinks.net/ewaste>.
 - Islands-communities.net provides public access to the Internet in and around the north Island. Website address is <http://www.iscn.ca>. or phone IsCN at 334-8063.
 - Comox Valley Links Community Network provides free access to community information online. Phone Valleylinks at 334-8063 or visit their website at <http://www.valleylinks.net>.

Employment and Economy

Employment and Economic Indicators

- Employment by Sector
- Unemployment Rates
- Income Levels
- Income Security
- Low Income Cut Off (LICO)
- Bankruptcy and Incorporation Rates

Importance of Employment and Economy

A strong economy and good employment opportunities are vital issues in the health of a community. The economic environment influences the work conditions that individuals engage in, and the benefits they gain from economic activity. Measures of employment and the economy include, but are not limited to: unemployment and employment rates; average income, Low Income Cut Off (LICO) rates, and bankruptcy rates. Having access to sustainable income, perceived job security, and a community rich in economic activity are all key components in the quality of life.

Employment by Sector

Employment in the resource-based industries of fishing, forestry, and mining continues to weaken in the Comox Valley. Tourism is growing. The new airport is experiencing ever-increasing passenger counts. The Kingfisher Resort's new destination Spa is drawing more clients. Mount Washington is setting new record in skier visits, resulting in an expanded summer/fall season. Crown Isle Golf Course and the surrounding development are rapidly building to meet demand.

The retail market is strong with the recent openings of Home Depot, Sport Mart, Starbucks, and with the current construction of London Drugs and of a larger Radio Shack. The residential construction boom continues to roll on with record setting sales figures.

BC Stats uses the North American Industrial Classification System in their annual updates and projections to identify industries by sector. In December 2003, BC Stats reported that the Comox Valley's primary industry rate (resource-based industries including forestry, fishing and agriculture) is 12.5%, more than double the BC rate of 5.4%.

The secondary rate for the Comox Valley is 16%, similar to 16.2% for BC. Secondary rates include construction, utilities, and manufacturing. The tertiary industry rate includes all government and non-government services. That rate for the Comox Valley is 71.5% and 77.9% for BC.

At 13.4%, the retail trade sector is the single largest sector next to the combined agriculture, forestry, and fishing at 12.2%. This is likely to be the case for some time given the demographic and migration patterns in the Comox Valley.

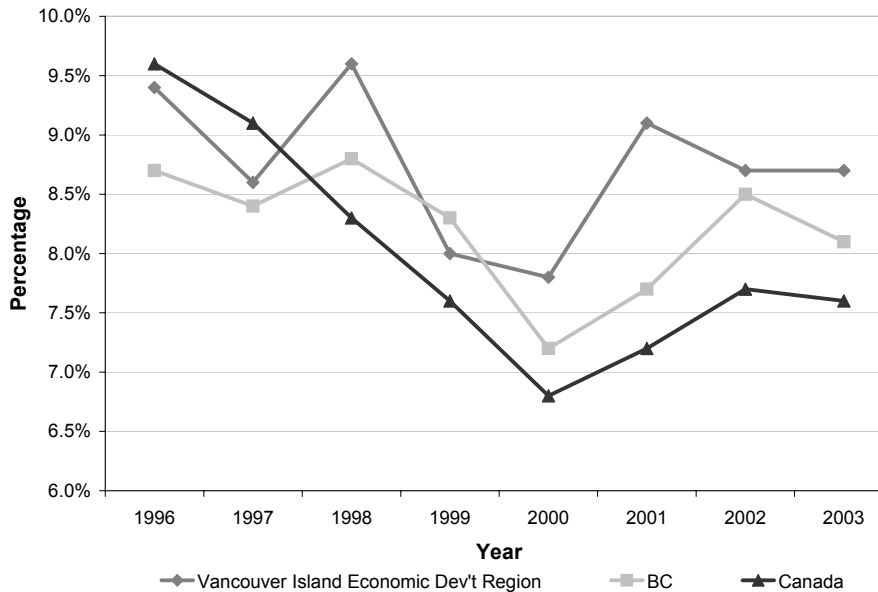
The Largest employers in the Valley continue to be:

Canadian Forces Base Comox 19 Wing	1219 personnel 901 Regular forces 122 Reserve 196 civilian employees
School District# 71	954 employees
St. Josephs Hospital (March/04)	842 employees
Mt. Washington Resort	680 employees

Unemployment Rates

The unemployment rates look at the number of unemployed as a percentage of the total population over age 15. Those who are looking for work are counted as unemployed, and they are included in the labour force. When the number of jobs declines, many who are not working often become discouraged and stop actively seeking work. As soon as they stop seeking work, they are no longer considered unemployed and, therefore, are no longer considered a part of the labour force. Figure 18 depicts the Labour Force Activity Unemployment Rate over eight years. BC Stats breaks the province into economic development regions, and the Comox Valley is included in the Vancouver Island Coast Development Region 910.

Figure 18: Labour Force Activity Unemployment Rate, 1996 – 2003



Source: BC Stats. January 2004 - Labour Force Survey. Release date, Feb. 6, 2004. Ministry of Management Services.

The Valley's inclusion into the regional statistics makes it difficult to state a local unemployment rate. In the 2001 Census data, the unemployment rate for the Comox Valley is 11.1% and 8.5% for BC as a whole. The data components for the population over 15 years of age are taken from the following numbers: labour force at 27,530, employed at 24,450, and unemployed at 3,045.

The May 2004 three-month average (unadjusted) unemployment rate for the Vancouver Island Development Region (910) is 8.8%. Nanaimo's average is 9.8% and BC, 7.9%. Nanaimo is part of

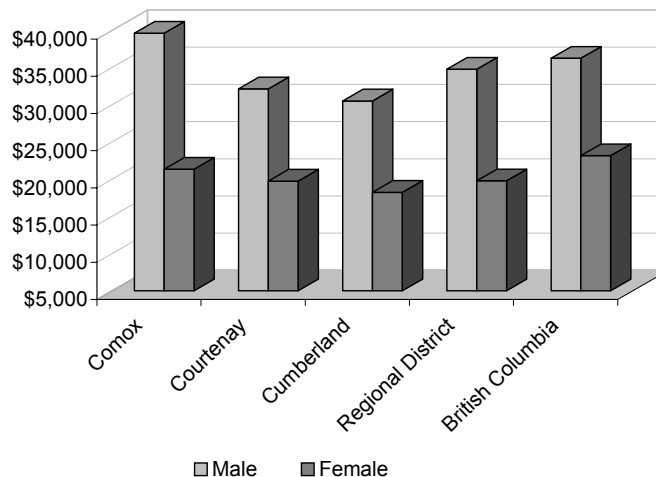
the Vancouver Island Development Region and its close proximity to the Comox Valley allows for some comparison.

Income Levels

The 2000 average family income in the Comox Valley was \$49,482, far behind the BC average of \$57,593. This figure is based on the average income of all family members 15 years of age and older. There continues to be a large gender differential evident in the 2001 census. In the Valley, the average income for males was \$33,879, for females, \$20,237. Women earn 60% of the male income. The BC average income for males is \$36,258 and females, \$23,154 (64% of the male income).

The gender gap is the greatest in the town of Comox, with the female average income at only 53% of the male average income in 2000.

Figure 19: Comox Valley Average Income 2000



Source: BC Stats, 2001.

Income Security

Access to an adequate level of income is a critical part of what it means to enjoy income security. Traditionally tied with level of income, income security takes on a wide-ranging spectrum that not only affects low-income persons. Although, adequate levels of income are essential for those who currently lack it, “the broader significance of income security flows from the fact that it speaks to the kind of society in which we want to live”.⁹¹ Individuals who are faced with lower incomes often face challenges finding adequate housing and enough food to last throughout the month. They generally experience a diminished quality of life.

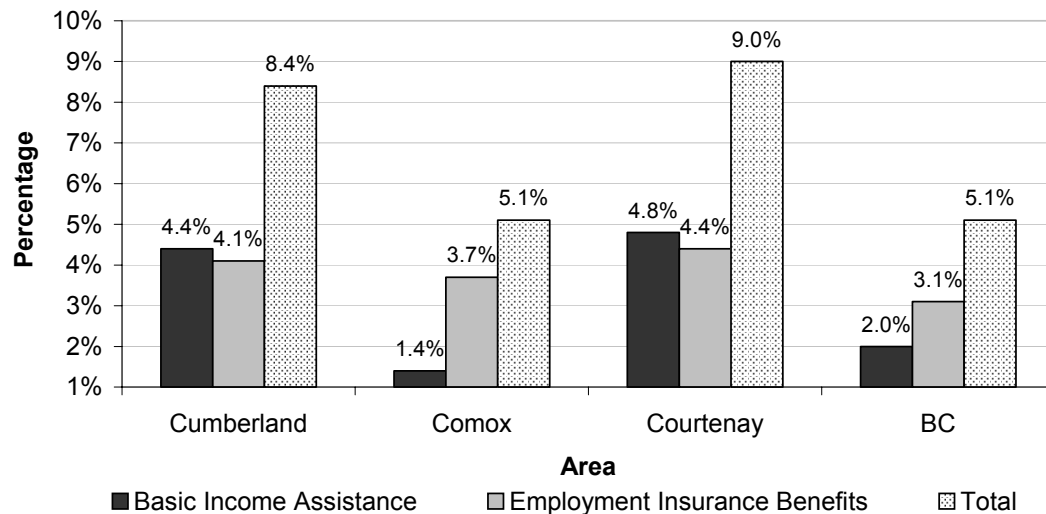
⁹¹ Long, A. (2004). The Importance of Income Security. SPARC BC, Vancouver. Winter Edition, p. 9.

Percentage of Persons Receiving Basic Income Assistance or Employment Insurance⁹²

In September 2003, in the Comox Valley (defined as the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona), 6.7% of all persons between the ages 19-64 were receiving basic income assistance or employment insurance.⁹³ This figure is down from 7.6% in September 2001.

Figure 20 shows the percentage of population receiving benefits in September 2003 in Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland, and BC. Of the three areas, Courtenay has the highest percentage of persons receiving both basic income assistance and employment insurance at 9%. Comox is the lowest at 5.1%, on par with BC's average.

Figure 20: Percentage of Population Receiving Benefits, Sept. 2003



Source: Comox Valley Statistical Profile. June 2004. Comox Valley Economic Development Society. P. 15.

Related indicators: Non-Market Housing, Food Security. Section

Low Income Cut Off (LICO)

Low Income Cut Off is a measure used by Statistics Canada to mark the poverty line in Canada. LICOs are based on the proportion of annual household income spent on the basics of food,

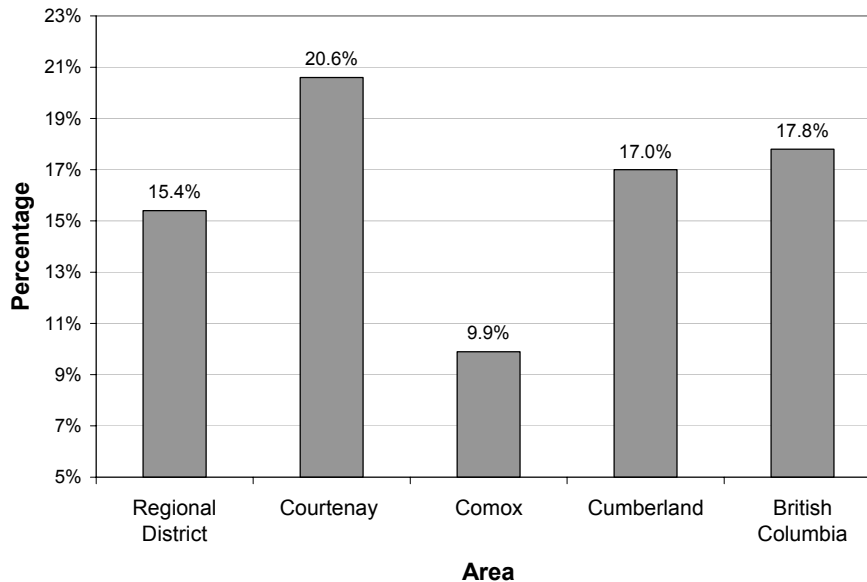
⁹² Figures include only a subset of people receiving income assistance including those on temporary assistance. People on continuous assistance (disabled or with persistent multiple barriers to employment) are excluded, as are children in the home of a relative and OAS/Seniors. A recipient is defined as each person living in a family, or living alone, that is receiving basic income assistance. Data does not include aboriginal people living on a reserve. As of 2002, the program is now called BC Employment and Assistance, but the definition above is the same to previously published material in BC Stats.

⁹³ BC Stats. Ministry of Management Services. May 25, 2004.

clothing, and shelter. The LICOs are set using complex parameters that include 35-low income thresholds, including size of family household and community size.

Figure 21 depicts the incidence of the population living below the Low Income Cut Off. Both Courtenay and Cumberland are higher than the BC percentage, while Comox is lower.

Figure 21: Percentage of Private Households with Low Income, Comox Valley, 2001



Source: BCStats

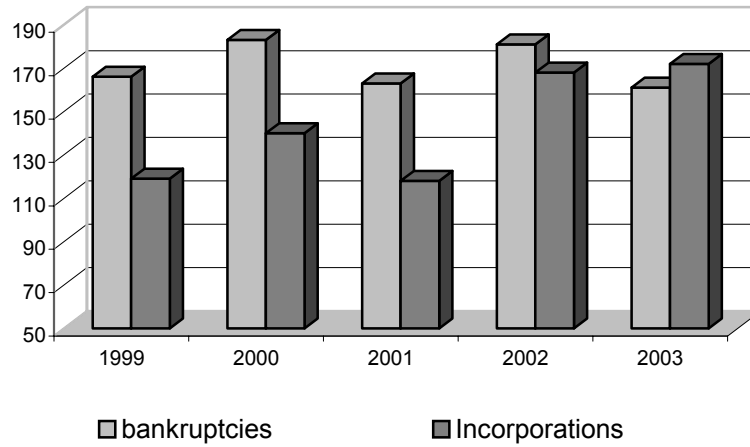
A household family consists of 2 or more persons who live in the same dwelling that are related by blood, marriage or common law, and adoption. The Courtenay percentage represents 835 families living below the Low Income Cut Off.

Bankruptcy and Incorporation Rates

The value in examining bankruptcy rates is that they indicate whether further study is needed if the numbers alter significantly from one year to the next. In 2003 there were 161 bankruptcies in the Comox Valley, close to the 163 reported in 2001. Although the bankruptcy rates are tracked by BC Stats, caution should be used when looking at these numbers. "Bankruptcy is not a good measure of business failure. Most companies that fail wind down operations and withdraw from active business".⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy, Government of Canada.

Figure 22: Number of Bankruptcies and Incorporations



Source: Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy, Government of Canada.

Tracking new incorporations is a good indication of the growing economy. Over the last five years, the number of new incorporations is increasing from 119 in 1999 to 172 in 2003.

Assets and Resources

- Strategis Canada: Economic Analysis and Statistics at http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc_ecnmy/engdoc/homepage.html.
- I-Map: an interactive map of the Comox Strathcona Regional District at <http://www.imap.rdc.bc.ca/imap/onpoint>.
- Industry Canada's Strategis, a business and consumer website at <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/engdoc/main.html>

Appendices

Methodology

As Confucius once said, “By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.”

The above axiom best reflects our team’s journey in developing the project methodology to capture a “snapshot” of the quality of life in the Comox Valley. It applies equally to the limits of our findings.

We reviewed the 2002 report card and had the pleasure of meeting with one of the researchers, Norah McLean. The Quality of Life team subsequently met with the Advisory Committee to augment our understanding of the project goals and objectives. Collaboratively, the team gained insight into the strengths and challenges of the 2002 report. Additional indicators were added to expand the 2004 report. Through the “reflection stage,” the Quality of Life team developed a flow chart of goals and objectives, and a timeline for project milestones and completion.

With our mission and time frame in hand, phase two of our methodology involved reviewing the indicators from the 2002 report; researching literature on the Quality of Life provincially and nationally; and making difficult decisions on what to measure, how, and when. With the help of the Advisory Committee, the Quality of Life team developed the final list of indicators, including those from the 2002 indicators. Additional indicators were added to the list based on changes to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities literature, as well as discussions with individuals of varying expertise in the community.

Collecting data for the 2004 report involved both primary and secondary research. With the latter, the current report incorporates 2001 Census data into all sections of the original report, and uses the new information as a basis for analysis. Primary research involved the Quality of Life team conducting interviews, focus groups and surveys. The purpose of these events was to gain data for our research, to raise awareness of the project, and to collect anecdotal or qualitative information.

Armed with our data and the Nanaimo Quality of Life report as a guide, the team set forth to conduct a comparative analysis and write the various sections of the 2004 report. When various sections were complete, members of the Advisory Committee reviewed the document and provided insights and suggestions for change. Editing services were donated in kind by Robert H. Jones, and proof reading by Vera Jones. The final report was completed at the end of June.

Limitations of This Report

As with any research methodology, there are limits and challenges. Through our experience, we discovered the following:

1. Despite our intentions to glean the best statistics from the labyrinth of available Census 2001 data, we knew in advance the improbability of attaining this goal. Depending on the year, there may be a discrepancy in how Census data is measured. Changes in electoral and geographic boundaries used by Statistics Canada must also be considered. Furthermore, when BC Stats extracts data from Census 2001, there is

often a percentage of variance in the results. When combined, the above challenges make it difficult to compare “apples to apples,” thereby limiting the application and generalization of our report findings. Please note that whenever comparing areas within the Comox Valley, take into account the actual numbers as well as percentages in order to obtain a meaningful analysis.

2. Locally, the team faced challenges with the inconsistency of data collection between agencies, and/or the non-availability of information. For example, recreation providers in the Comox Valley use different indicators to measure effectiveness of program delivery. Consequently, it became increasingly difficult to provide an overview of recreation in the Valley without set standardized tools with which to measure specific indicators. Furthermore, the nonprofit sector is more often than not stressed in resources and time; thus, some data and information was not available in time for the report. Therefore, the information in the 2004 report is limited in its ability to show a comprehensive “snapshot” of the Comox Valley.
3. With a strong focus on quantitative data, the “human side” of the quality of life is often lost. While the 2004 report gives a respected holistic view of the Valley and changes since 2002, the focus is primarily on the numbers. However, the passions and invaluable work of our local nonprofit organizations and businesses should not be dismissed. Focusing solely on numbers limits the scope of any research, especially when dealing with quality of life issues.

How to Use This Report

Research is not undertaken to “prove” something. More often than not, it raises more questions than answers. The 2004 Quality of Life report is a tool to help people and organizations make decisions, decide future directions, and identify strategies. This report is the messenger, not the message.

When reading through this report, whether it be one section or the entire document, ask the following questions:

- *What can I do personally? What can I do in my community?* You can use the information in this report to educate family and friends. You can decide to recycle more of your household waste, or to become more involved in the community by volunteering. When more citizens work toward a better quality of life, the whole community benefits.
- *What can government and business do? How can local organizations and agencies help?* Invite the Comox Valley Social Planning Society to give a presentation on the report findings. Consider donating funds to support further research and/or explore avenues to fill gaps in services and resources in the Comox Valley.
- *What are the future information needs? Where can I get more information?* The 2004 Quality of Life report is meant to provide a snapshot in time of the Comox Valley. While this view is informative, it remains somewhat limited.

Having the ability to research and measure Quality of Life over a 10-year span would provide longitudinal data on changes in the Comox Valley, and identify community needs and preferences.

Most importantly, as you read the report, take time to reflect on the positive, and to understand the challenges in the Valley. Consider what they mean to you personally and what you can do to make a difference. One person **can** make a difference.

Quality of Life Telephone Survey

A telephone survey was designed to explicitly measure each of the identified quality of life indicators, with the exception of population. Respondents were given the choice of agree, disagree, or don't know/not applicable to each of forty-two statements in order to elicit opinions and levels of satisfaction with quality of life issues in the Comox Valley. The survey was administered to a random sample of 222 residents of the Comox Valley. Forty-seven residents consented and completed the questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 21%. The survey was administered from April 26 to 30, 2004 during various times of the day by four volunteers of the Quality of Life Project. Most surveys took less than ten minutes to complete. SPSS was employed in the analysis.

Limitations

Due to the intrinsic nature of telephone surveys, this study's validity is limited by: having a listed phone number; answering the phone and consenting to complete the survey, and time constraints of some of the volunteers, i.e., ability to repeatedly call numbers that were busy or not initially answered.

Results

The vast majority of respondents live in Courtenay (n=20) or Comox (n=11), with the remaining spread out from Black Creek to Hornby Island to Cumberland. Over 70% have lived in the Valley for over 10 years with nearly that number living on their own or with a partner only. 83% of the respondents were over the age of 40, with 38.3% over the age of sixty, which may explain the majority of adult-only households. The main reason cited for moving to the Valley (or staying if they were born here) was to be with family. Climate or beauty and recreation or outdoor activities followed closely behind.

The majority of the respondents were satisfied with their physical health and the health services in the Valley. 40% described their stress level as high, however nearly 90% spend "plenty of time with friends and family".

60% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of elementary and secondary schooling. 36.2% of the respondents believe the Valley needs more post-secondary or training institutions. Nearly 13% said they were looking for work with the rest employed or retired. Of those working, most enjoy their job and feel secure in their position. 19.1%, however, did not feel they had enough household income to live comfortably. Many are concerned about housing in the Valley with the rising prices, lack of low-income housing, and homelessness.

Many of the respondents are involved with their community by volunteering, attending organized activities, voting regularly, and believing recreational, arts, and cultural activities are affordable and accessible. There is some concern about the cost and availability of public transportation.

The vast majority of respondents feel safe in both their homes and neighborhoods, despite a general feeling of an increasing crime rate. At least 80% of those surveyed are satisfied with air quality, the safety of home drinking water, their septic system or city sewer, and are active participants in recycling. There was a fairly even split between believing the Valley needs more green space and whether the Valley is growing too fast. Two-thirds are concerned with how land is being used and nearly 20% are concerned about the Valley's natural water systems.

Acknowledgements

Whenever people take on a project as large as this one, they realize very quickly that their success is directly related to the generosity and support of the larger community to which they belong. This project is no exception. Our community partners and volunteers have been very important to the Quality of Life project. They provided valuable support through resources and in-kind services. To all those who listened to our presentations, sent us their statistics, and spoke to us about their concerns and their passions, thank you.

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Chart of the Indicators

Quality of Life Indicators: Assessment of Progress since 2001/02 Baseline (based on information available up to May 2004).

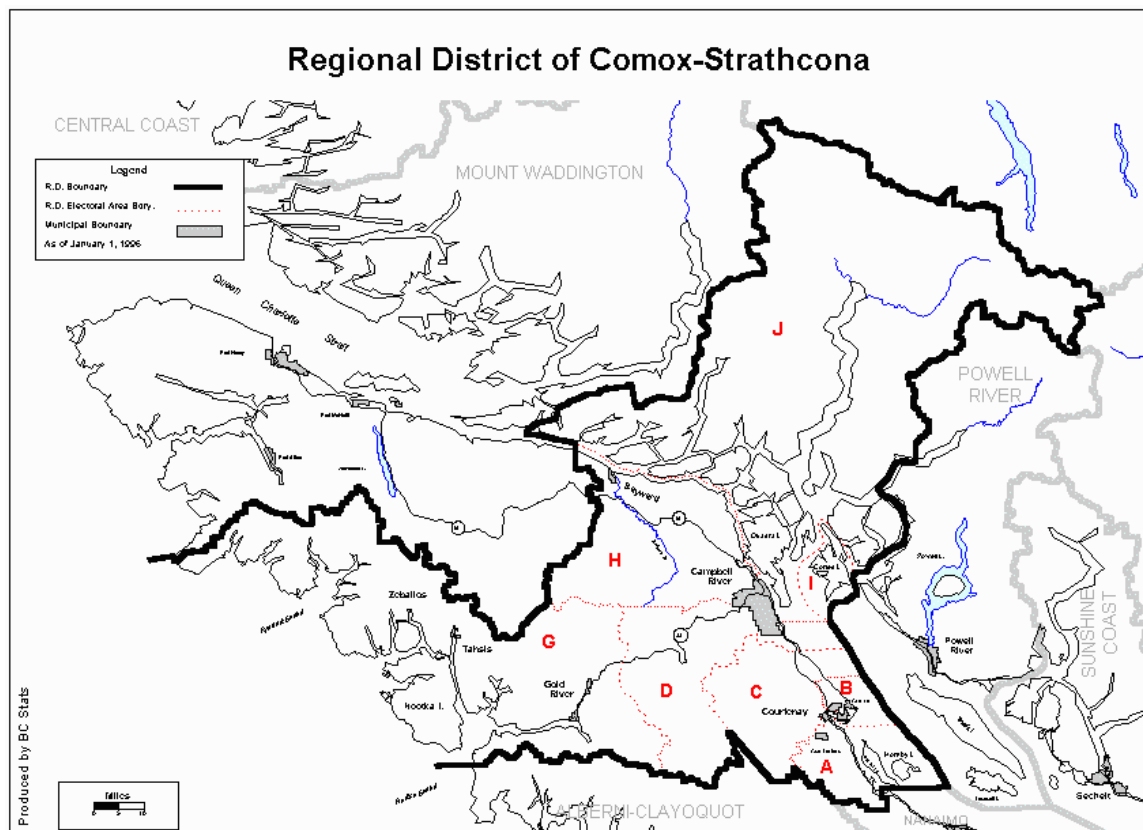
Indicators	New Indicator for 2004 Report	Change since Last Reported Stats
POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS		
Population Growth		↑
Lone Parent Families		↑
Number of Families		↑
Marital Status	✓	↓
The Aging Population	✓	↑
Aboriginals	✓	⊖
HOUSING		
Housing Tenure	✓	⊖
Housing Costs	✓	↑
Housing Starts	✓	↑
Vacancy Rates and Rents	✓	↓ and ↑ respectively
Non-Market Housing		≈
Homelessness & Emergency Shelter Usage		↑
TRANSPORTATION		
Public Transit Usage	✓	↑
Accessible Services	✓	⊖
HandyDART Usage		⊖
Mobility Impairment Permit Holders		⊖
Comox Valley Airport Usage	✓	↑
FOOD SECURITY		
Food Bank Usage		≈
Community Meal Programs		↑
School Lunch Programs		↑
Cost of Food for a Family of Four		↑
HEALTH		
Live Births to Teenage Mothers (19 & under)		⊖

Indicators	New Indicator for 2004 Report	Change since Last Reported Stats
Low Birth Rates		↓
Infant Deaths	✓	⊖
Breast-feeding Rates	✓	⊖
Crisis Line Usage		↓
Mental Health Programs	✓	⊖
Addiction Services for Adults & Youth	✓	⊖
Suicides		↓
Premature Mortality Rates	✓	⊖
Obesity	✓	⊖
Immunization Rates	✓	⊖
Sexually Transmitted Disease Rates	✓	⊖
Number of Health Professionals		↓
Dentists Accepting Clients on Social Assist.		↑
Number of Doctors Accepting New Patients		≈
Number of Walk-In Clinics	✓	⊖
EDUCATION		
Student/Educator Ratios		↑
High School Graduation Rates		↓
Education Level Attained		⊖
Literacy		⊖
Public Library Usage		↓
ARTS, CULTURE, AND RECREATION		
Arts and Culture	✓	⊖
Parks and Public Spaces		≈
Recreational Usage		⊖
PUBLIC SAFETY		
Police Call Volume	✓	≈
Crime Prevention Programs		⊖
Violent Crime	✓	↑
Property Crime	✓	↓
Youth Crime	✓	≈
Restorative Justice	✓	⊖

Indicators	New Indicator for 2004 Report	Change since Last Reported Stats
Sexual Assaults	✓	↑
Spousal Assaults		↑
ENVIRONMENT		
Impervious Surfaces	✓	⊖
Water Quality	✓	⊖
Air Quality	✓	⊖
Recycling	✓	↑
E-Waste Recycling	✓	⊖
Invasive Species	✓	⊖
Endangered Species		⊖
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT		
Municipal Voting		⊖
Charitable Donations		⊖
Volunteerism		⊖
Non-Profit Organizations		⊖
EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMY		
Employment by Sector		↑
Unemployment Rates		⊖
Income Levels		≈
Income Security		↓
Low Income Cut Off (LICO)		↓
Bankruptcy and Incorporation Rates		≈
KEY		
Significant change in a positive direction, or an increase		↑
No significant change		≈
Significant change in a negative direction, or a decrease		↓
Insufficient or no comparable data available		⊖

Map

BC Regional District Electoral Area



Source: Regional District of Comox-Strathcona. Date: January 1, 1996. Available at <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/pop/maps/rdeamap.htm>. Accessed May 20, 2004.

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