

7. Arts, Culture, Sports and Recreation

In our 2009 Quality of Life report we did not include sports as a quality of life indicator. We could use physical activity in this section as an indicator or in the health section and that might be even more appropriate but difficult to measure. We do peek into the physical activity of kindergarten children in the Education domain under the EDI indicator. However we think about it or classify it, it's really important for a good quality of life.

We believe that a rich variety of arts, cultural, sports and recreational activities happen in the Valley all the time and that our facilities are excellent with some exceptions. For instance, the Curling Club would like a new facility because the existing one is old and structurally inadequate. Still, local governments have worked hard to provide recreational and sports facilities for everyone and their programming is striving to be inclusive.

7.1 Arts and Culture (=)

In our 2009 report we published a one-off report by Hill Strategies Research (2009) tabulating the number of artists in BC and their average earnings. Those data were taken from the 2006 census. They found that there were 25,890 artists in BC in 2006 with average annual earnings of \$21,069. We cannot update those numbers. However, we can report, based on the 2011 National Housing Survey that there were 78,568 people occupied in the arts, culture, sports and recreation in BC in 2011, that's 3.2% of the labour force. At 1,085 individuals, that's 3.5% of the labour force in the Comox Valley. (Stats Can, 2011b)

In terms of organizations and facilities, things have not changed much since our last report. It's inevitable that non-profit organizations in the arts come and go, but in the Valley they seem to hang on with a few exceptions.

We have five museums in the Valley, the Courtenay & District Museum and Paleontology Centre with its famous elasmosaurus exhibit, the Comox Air Force Museum and Heritage Park, the Cumberland Museum and Archives, the Comox Archives and Museum and the Nim-Nim Interpretive Centre close to the Condensory Bridge on the Puntledge River.

The Comox Valley Community Arts Council promotes and supports arts in the Valley and for years operated the Muir Gallery on Anderton Avenue in Courtenay. Over the years many wonderful (juried) shows have taken place at the Muir featuring many local artists and North Island College art students have often exhibited their work there. The Muir Gallery is no more, but there is optimism that a new home will be found for the Arts Council.

The Comox Valley Centre for the Arts is a city owned property. It rose from the reconstructed old fire hall on Duncan Avenue in Courtenay in 2005. The main floor houses the Comox Valley Art Gallery with its three exhibition spaces and the shop. The 'basement' of the Gallery houses the new video and audio production facility where the Youth Media Project is located. A number of community organizations have offices on the second floor. The Comox Valley Economic Development Society is the latest tenant to occupy the building.

Other visual arts exhibition venues include the Pearl Ellis Gallery in Comox, the Corre Alice Gallery in Cumberland and Art Alchemy in Courtenay. Potters have their own retail outlet on the corner of Cliffe Avenue and Fifth Street called the Potters Place Gallery Shop and the I-hos Gallery on Comox Road in Comox has a great selection of contemporary native art.



The Sid Williams Theatre as the anchor for the performing arts in the Valley is operated by a non-profit society but is owned by the City of Courtenay. Every year the North Island Festival of the Performing Arts is held at 'The Sid' and the Old Church Theatre, another popular live production venue in Courtenay. A number of performing arts organizations make their home in the Comox Valley. The Courtenay Little Theatre, Cantiamo Chamber Ensemble, Co-Val Choristers, The North Island Choral Society and others we may have missed. There are also dance studios in the Valley such as Pantuso Dance, Laurie Tinkler School of Dance, Valley Dance Centre and Triple Heat Dance Academy of Performing Arts (formerly Gemini Dance Studio).

North Island College also offers a performance space in its 200 seat Stanley B. Hagen Theatre. All of these organizations have either websites, blogs or Facebook pages that can be accessed by 'googling' them on any internet browser.

Aside from the live theatre venues in the Valley there is the Rialto with 4 different theatres. Aside from the regular fare of Hollywood movies, every year the Comox Valley Art Gallery (CVAG) holds its Toronto International Film Festival series of films, films that would not otherwise be available in the Valley. The CVAG offers season's passes to the 6 films in the winter series.

A number of cultural events dot the calendar in any given year in the Valley. The most prominent ones are the Vancouver Island Music Fest which attracts thousands of people to the Valley in July of every year, the Filberg Festival in Comox in August is a big draw as is the World Community Film Festival usually held in February. The Taiwanese Lantern Festival is held in February during the Chinese New Year celebrations and for the third year now, Elevate the Arts has brought new life to downtown Courtenay with a series of performances, shows and other activities in June. We cannot forget the always-popular Fall Fair, Nautical Days, Heritage Fair, Cumberland Empire Days and the National Aboriginal Day celebrations. Add to that all the live music offered in many venues in the Valley like the Waverly and Cumberland Hotels in Cumberland, the Flying Canoe, and the Whistle Stop Pub and you'll know there's never a dull moment in the Valley.

Local governments, particularly the City of Courtenay and the Comox Valley Regional District are making concerted efforts to stabilize funding for many arts and culture organizations in the Valley. The BC Arts Council has also been active in funding organizations and programs in the Valley. The federal government is also involved to some extent. It's never easy to run an arts and culture non-profit organization, but we, in the Valley, are doing as well or better than most other communities in BC of a similar size.

7.2 Sports and Recreation (id)

Both the Lewis Centre in Courtenay and the Comox Recreation Centre have seen major renovations in the last two or three years. Squash courts, gyms and fitness centres in both facilities are excellent as is the range of programs offered. Playing fields, tennis courts, outdoor fitness areas and lots of urban walking opportunities make this Valley a great place to stay fit. It's true that not all facilities are affordable for low-income people, but enough are. It may be that for some people, a good pair of walking shoes or hiking boots is all that they need to get into more physical activity. That said, the City of Courtenay offers Recreation Access coupon books for residents who fall below Statistics Canada's low-income threshold. The CVRD has a similar program. There are recreation programs designed specifically for people with special needs. There's even an indoor skate park at the Linc Centre opposite the Lewis Centre in Courtenay with very affordable usage rates. The Evergreen Club provides all kinds of programs and services for elders in



our community. Many organizations are involved in organized sports in the Valley using many playing fields for baseball, soccer (and other field-based sports), hockey rinks, swimming pools, the curling rink and recreation centres. CFB Comox has its own recreational facilities (19 Wing Comox Fitness and Community Centre) including an arena, a pool, gyms and fitness centre.

Every year more and more information is available on the Internet about all the various sports and recreation facilities and programs in the Valley, and yet most of the information is also still available in print. Copies of the Comox Valley Recreation Reporter are available at recreation centres in the valley and elsewhere too. They're making it easier and easier to access information.³¹ Of course we would be remiss if we failed to mention the great skiing in the Valley (most years) along with the growing interest in mountain biking in Cumberland. Sailing has long been a summer activity in the Valley and there's always a beach to lounge on if it's relaxation you're looking for.

7.3 Parks and Public Spaces (+)

The Comox Valley Regional District adopted the Parks and Greenways Strategic Plan 2011-2030. (CVRD, 2013) As part of the strategic plan, the CVRD proposed to purchase a 27.8 hectare ribbon of land along the old Wellington Collieries rail bed to establish a trail linking Cumberland to Royston just south of (and paralleling) Royston Road. That trail is now secured and available for the public to enjoy. The CVRD also has a great map available online of all the parks³² in the district. A very important park in the regional district is Seal Bay Park.

Courtenay also has a great interactive map of its parks and greenways.³³ The Courtenay Riverway is the city's most popular greenway and a major attraction for walkers, joggers, runners, cyclists and wheelchair or 'scooter' bound residents. Lewis Park is a major sports facility and Simms Millenium Park across the street invites people to stroll and gather for special events, like the recent Idle No More rallies and Winter Bites Festival. The Rotary Clubs in the Valley have been busy. They funded and built the Sky Park on the Courtenay Riverway for kids as well as a new children's playground in the Cumberland Village Park (which also has an off leash dog park, by the way). A great advantage of the Sky Park is that it's accessible to wheelchairs and scooters. Rotary has also built a great walking/cycling trail beside the railroad tracks in Courtenay going from 5th Street to 21st Street with a planned extension to the Courtenay Parkway over the next few years and they have built public amenities in Simms Park and in Comox, the Waterfront Walkway and the Breakwater Walkway. The Courtenay Official Community Plan (OCP) updated and passed by Council in January 2014, reports that:

The City has a significant role in the provision of parks and recreational services for the entire Comox Valley. The City has direct ownership of 112.8 hectares of parkland including 62 parks and 12 greenways. This amounts to 5.6 hectares of parkland per 1000 people as compared to 1.97 hectares per 1000 in 1994. (Courtenay, 2014, p. 42)

There are plans in the Courtenay OCP for parkland and greenway expansion.

31 See especially: Courtenay: <http://www.courtenay.ca/recreation.aspx>, Comox: <http://comox.ca/recreation/rec-programs> <http://comox.ca/recreation/facilities> and Cumberland: <http://www.cumberlandri.org/Parksandrec.htm>

32 http://www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/assets/Community/Documents/ActiveParks_11x17.pdf

33 <http://www.courtenay.ca/parks/index.html>

Cumberland also has a parks and greenways master plan.³⁴ It's worth noting here that the Cumberland Community Forest Society has already purchased 71 hectares of forest from the logging company that owned it to preserve it as parkland in perpetuity. It's now in the process of accumulating money to buy a further 50 hectares of forest in imminent danger of being logged. (Cumberland Forest Society, 2014) The Cumberland OCP, finalized in April 2014, has plans for park and greenway expansion with suggested ratios of park and greenway space to 1000 residents. (Village of Cumberland, 2014)

The Town of Comox is well endowed with parks and green spaces. It also has a parks and greenways strategy. It currently has 9.9 hectares of open space per 1000 residents:

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recommends 4 hectares of parkland be provided per 1,000 people. Based upon the current population of 13,444 (2009 BC Stats), the existing 133.5 hectares of designated park works out to approximately 9.9 hectares of open space per 1,000 people. The Town of Comox is expected to grow by 4,400 to 5,600 persons over the next 20 years to reach a total of approximately 19,000 by 2031. Based on the projected population growth by 2031, this ratio would be 7 hectares of open space per 1,000 people if no additional parkland is acquired. (Town of Comox, 2013, p. 47)

The Comox Valley is home to 10 provincial parks. Hornby Island is the home of 3 provincial parks including the beautiful Helliwell, Tribune Bay and Mount Geoffrey Escarpment parks. Denman has Fillongley and Boyle Point parks while on the 'big' island there is Kin Beach, Miracle Beach and Rosewall Creek Provincial parks. The Comox Valley is also gateway to Strathcona Provincial Park, BC's oldest provincial park.

The Comox Valley can be truly proud of its arts and cultural facilities and programs, organized sports, parks and public spaces. Not only are there great facilities and programs, but sports and recreation organizations are quite good at getting the news out about their programs and activities. (see footnote #40)

34 <https://cumberland.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Bylaw-923-Map-Parks-Greenways-Master-Plan-Map.pdf>