

Introduction

In 1992 a group of Cowichan residents met to talk about what they valued about living in the Cowichan Region, and what they would like to see preserved for future generations. That conversation resulted in the work “Visions 2020”, led by FutureCorp Cowichan. “After considerable consultation with community members, a global vision statement and six sector specific statements were written and ratified by residents of the Cowichan Region at a public forum held on March 16, 2006. The forum ended with the formal ‘passing’ over of the Visions 2020 initiative to Social Planning Cowichan”¹

Social Planning Cowichan is an independent non-partisan organization dedicated to building community well-being. The goals of Social Planning Cowichan are to promote broader and deeper understanding on social issues that affect quality of community life and to advise on social impacts related to current trends and needs in the community.

In 2006 Social Planning Cowichan published the first Status of the Community report. This report built on the six sector specific statements of the Visions 2020 process by adding four additional sectors and 65 indicators of social health. The report was aimed at giving Cowichan citizens a better understanding of the current social issues by measuring how the Region was performing in terms of meeting its goals. Following the principles of the Earth Charter, the report made recommendations based on Anielski’s Genuine Wealth model. The report identified trends in each of the indicators, and also identified gaps, current initiatives and priorities.

The principles of the Earth Charter² include:

- Respect and Care for Community Life
- Ecological Integrity
- Social and Economic Justice
- Democracy, Non-Violence, and Peace

In addition to the Earth Charter, other important models create a lens through which to view the data in this report. These lenses are Social Determinants of Health, the “triple bottom line” and community resilience. To make these relationships more visible, icons are used throughout the report to denote where one indicator links to another.

The social determinants of health have been used by the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) and Health Canada to examine how “the big picture of health” is affected by factors both inside and outside the health care system.

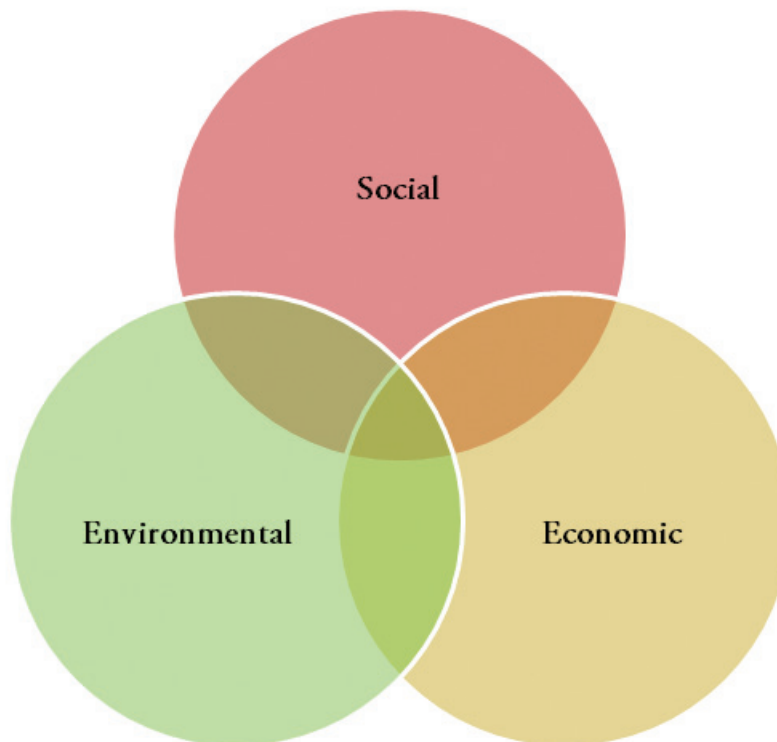
“At every stage of life, health is determined by complex interactions between social and economic factors, the physical environment and individual behavior. These factors are referred to as ‘determinants of health’. They do not exist in isolation from each other. It is the combined influence of the determinants of health that determines health status.”

Chapter 6 provides a list of these determinants. All of the indicators throughout this report are factors that impact the health of our population.

¹ “Final Report – Achieving the Vision” <http://visions2020.cowichan.net/>

² Taken from Earth Charter Cowichan on February 12, 2010, <http://www.members.shaw.ca/earthcharter/>

Social well-being, environmental health, and economic sustainability are the functions considered in the “triple bottom line.” Each of these area is important in itself and each interacts synergistically with the other two. For example, the environmental function of a healthy watershed is important to achieving the social function of clean drinking water and the economic function of a healthy fishery. The triple bottom line expresses community well-being by giving equal weight to social, economic, and environmental realities.



The Canadian Centre for Community Renewal (CCCR) has expanded the concept of community well-being to include community resiliency. CCCR studies the factors that have helped rural communities survive extreme changes in resource industries such as forestry and fisheries. From observing rural areas that have adapted to change, CCCR has developed a listing of characteristics of a resilient community. These characteristics can be linked with indicators as a way to measure how well communities can be expected to adapt to sudden changes in economic, social, and environmental pressures.³ While a few of these indicators are included in this report, the Cowichan Region may benefit from a closer study of resiliency factors. See Appendix A for a listing of CCCR’s Characteristics of a Resilient Community.




³ Canadian Centre for Community Renewal, Revitalizing Communities accessed February 2, 2010 from <http://www.cedworks.com/revitalizingcommunities.html>

Organization of the Report

The indicators in the report are organized into 11 broad areas of inquiry:

- Demographics
- Arts, Culture, and Recreation
- Community Involvement
- Economy and Employment
- Education
- Food Security
- Health and Human Services
- Housing
- Environment
- Public Safety
- Transportation

Each chapter contains a brief summary, a discussion of each indicator, and the data. The indicator is rated according to whether it:

- Trends towards community well-being 
- Trends away from community well-being 
- Shows no discernable trend 

Icons are used to show connections between indicators in different chapters. In the online version of this report, clicking on the icon will take the reader to the related indicator.



Ch 1 - Arts Culture & Recreation



Ch 2 - Community Involvement



Ch 3 - Economy & Employment



Ch 4 - Education



Ch 5 - Food Security



Ch 6 - Health, Community & Social Services



Ch 7 - Housing & the Built Environment



Ch 8 - Natural Environment



Ch 9 - Public Safety



Ch 10 - Transportation

A list of resources and assets relevant to each area are located in “Appendix B: Listing of Local and Regional Resources by Chapter” on page 133.

The New Indicators

Indicators that are new to this report include:

- The number of faith based organizations
- Cross cultural organizations
- Employment rates
- Low income rates
- Early Childhood Indicator (EDI) results
- Percentage of women breastfeeding their infants
- Number of community gardens and Community Supported Agriculture
- Local food security initiatives
- Housing in need of repair
- Water use
- Local green initiatives
- Number of children in foster care
- Planning tools for public safety
- Local crime prevention programs
- Number of fire departments and call rates
- Information on local Search and Rescue and Auxiliary Coast Guard services
- Ferry usage
- Greyhound bus usage
- Taxi services
- Traffic safety

Research Methods

Most of the quantitative data for this report was gathered from secondary sources. The statistics were collected from local, provincial, and federal governments and from local non-profit organizations. The most recent data available is used. However much of the data is from the 2006 Census and, as a result, lacks currency. For example, major changes in the global and Regional economy have occurred since 2007 and are not adequately reflected in this report. The other concern with secondary data sources is their reliability in reporting on First Nations circumstances. For that reason, this report does not present the data specifically for First Nations peoples. This is a significant area of omission. A report created within local First Nations communities would be valuable.

Some information such as wait lists for non-profit housing units was collected through telephone surveys of service providers. This data was current at the time of the phone survey and may have changed since then. Other specific issues with data collection will be discussed within the relevant chapter of the report.

Qualitative data and background information for the report was gathered through interviews with members of local governments, other researchers, health care providers, non-profit service providers, and community members. Researchers attended many sessions of local government councils, interagency meetings, and community roundtables on a variety of topics across the Region.

In a series of informal community poster sessions conducted from November 2009 through January 2010, the researchers brought most of the data in their report out into the community. The poster sessions were held at town hall meetings, one health fair, one family resource centre, one official

community plan forum, two joint forums with other non-profit organizations, and two local high school classes. The poster sessions had two purposes. The first purpose was to inform community members about the information gathered for the report. The second was to gather additional information and community reaction to the data.

Community feedback from the 2006 Status of the Community report called for information specific to each area within the Region. In response, this report presents information by local electoral or health area wherever possible. Every attempt was made to present information for the entire Cowichan Valley Regional District.

Data Sources

The major sources of data for the report are as follows:

- Statistics Canada
- BC Stats
- BC Vital Statistics
- The Cowichan Valley Regional District
- Municipality of North Cowichan
- BC Ministry of Education
- School District 68
- School District 79
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
- BC Housing
- BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
- BC Ministry of the Environment

Current Context

At the time we wrote this report our world was – and is - facing enormous global shifts and changes. This includes climate change, the social impact that comes with massive migration patterns, a steadily ageing population and unemployment trends that are disturbing.

Here in the Cowichan Region, we are experiencing our own challenges. For example, growth and land development continues without a strategy to address such things as transportation, fresh water sustainability and land use. While we know that social, economic and environmental influences are intricately linked, much of our planning at local and provincial levels happens without this understanding.

As is happening throughout Canada, changes to our economy translates to insufficient government funding for such things as affordable housing, public day care and non-profit community service agencies. Indeed, Provincial plans for health care, education and social services lag behind the needs of the Cowichan Region.

Another complicating issue is the structure of our local government. Four municipalities and nine electoral districts makes collaboration and planning - in the best interests of Cowichan Region residents - challenging.

In compiling this report we have interviewed a wide swath of people representing the broadest cross section of the community. This includes students, volunteers, seniors, government representatives, firefighters, RCMP, child care workers, economic development workers, provincial government representatives, employees, recent immigrants, First Nations community leaders, health care workers and parents.

As a result of this report we are aware of how fortunate we are to live in the Cowichan Region. We are living in communities filled with interested and involved people. We believe there is a significant Cowichan collective social conscience. While the talent and commitment is certainly evident, the challenge is to work collaboratively so we are working together pooling our energy and resources – particularly in these challenging economic times.

Our Cowichan Region communities are blessed with such diversity. We can learn so much from our First Nations neighbours, particularly about the importance of valuing relationships and working together in the spirit of companionship and support.

People continue to move to the Cowichan Region from all over Canada and from other countries as well. They bring with them different perspectives and experience – a rich forum for learning. Indeed, we have much to learn from the descendants of our pioneer families, First Nations communities and the men and women who work in our resource based industries – fishing, agriculture and forestry. We are all living together in one of the most beautiful places in the world. By understanding each other and working together we can forge a strong, resilient community. And in doing so, we are better able to face the shifts and changes of time.