



Arts and Culture

Current Status

Arts and Culture in the Comox Valley are strongly participated in, highly valued, and an iconic part of the region's identity. With over 5,000 identifying as 'cultural workers' in the region, arts and culture are important economic drivers. Despite this, a significant offering of the arts and culture programming is delivered by non-profits, relying on volunteer efforts.

While there is enthusiasm by volunteers to continue partnering to deliver arts and cultural services, critical resourcing and infrastructure needs have been identified by the community to ensure arts and culture continue to form a cherished part of Courtenay, and the region's identity.

Some key issues and opportunities include:

Arts and Culture play a critical role in "place-making", a foundational planning and community development principle. Place-making is the reflection of a community's identity in its public realm and the activation of its public spaces, allowing for expression and celebration of unique local character, values and pride.

Two investment priorities for the City of Courtenay, as identified by the Comox Valley Arts Council, includes a) a Public Art program and b) an Arts Hub facility in order to increase the visibility of the arts in our community, at the municipal and regional levels, while fostering publicly funded initiatives and public private collaborations of varying artistic scales.

The cost of living, and particularly housing, is identified as a threat to the economic viability of the local Arts and Culture industry.

Arts and Culture are identified as playing important roles in the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action 2015 report.

Arts and Culture provide creative mediums to reflecting and challenging societal norms, thus creating opportunities to engage at the personal level, evoke emotion and solicit response. Engaging, evoking and inspiring response on climate action are critically needed to activate critical mass efforts towards climate friendly planning, and other important community issues.

In the fall 2019 Cultural Services Report, a role for the City of Courtenay has been identified in terms of becoming a stronger partner and collaborator, convener and facilitator, owner and custodian, funder, programmer and promoter and advocate.

With the OCP update, there is an opportunity to embed into community vision an "Arts First Thinking". This would help ensure that Arts and Culture is first to the table and not last.



CITY OF
COURTENAY





Business Community

Current Status

Business Community's broad interests are represented by the Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce, and the Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association for the downtown. The Comox Valley Economic Development Society closely works with the Business Community in the development of economic development priorities, programs and support. The Chamber of Commerce estimates that the region is home to over 1,500 businesses, many of which locate here because of the general desirability of the region.

The majority of businesses in the Comox Valley are SMEs (1 – 6 employee sized businesses). A recent MNP Business Leaders Survey provides valuable insights into how businesses are feeling about their future.

Some key issues and opportunities include:

A skills shortage and various staffing issues are the most pressing top-of-mind concerns for local businesses in 2020.

About half of businesses reported doing better financially now compared to 12 months ago, while 15% said their business is doing worse. Three in 10 businesses hired additional employees last year while one in 10 reduced their number of employees.

More than half of businesses said housing affordability and availability is a challenge to attracting and retaining employees. Access to affordable childcare also poses a challenge for three in 10 businesses.

Opportunity to invest in and specialize in retirement living oriented businesses given the increase in this demographic within the planning horizon.

The Chamber recently celebrated its Centennial and has a wealth of interesting information on past business trends in the Comox Valley at: www.comoxvalleychamber.com/news

Identified sustainability-oriented economic opportunities include tech sector recruitment, renewable energy development, value added agriculture products.

Increased community amenities (parks, transit, walking and cycling infrastructure) could help attract more tech and internet-based business as these initiatives have been shown to increase quality of life.

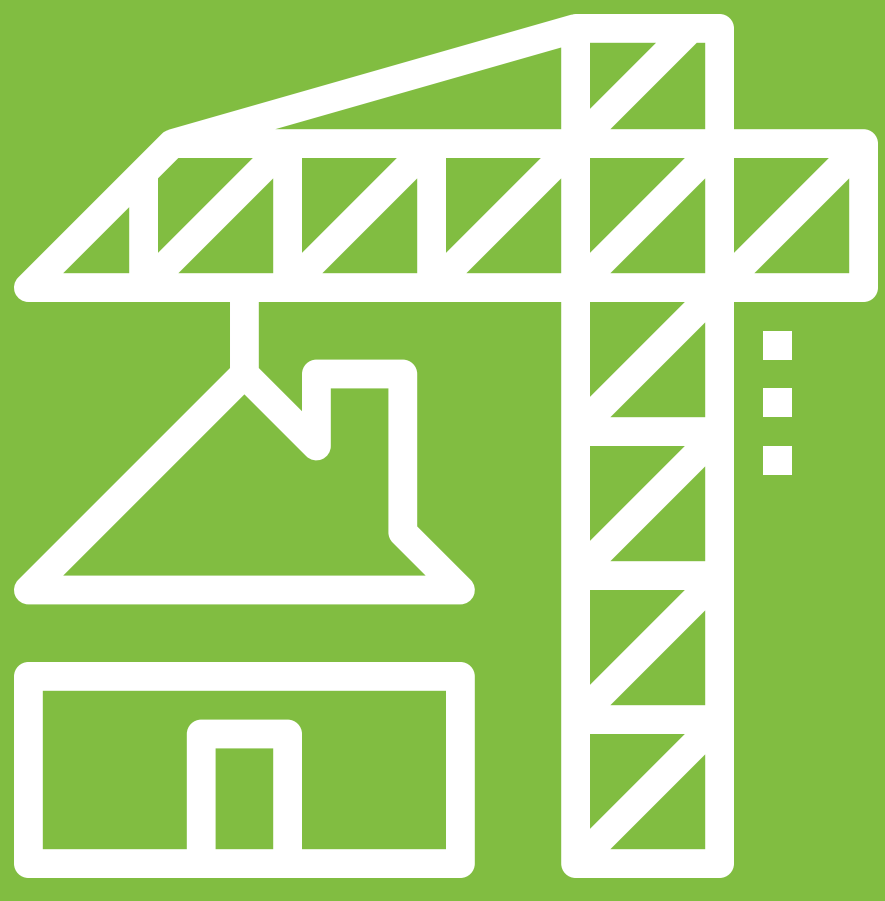
Coordinated and effective buy-local campaigns could help raise public awareness of the community benefits of locally circulating money, and combat the trend in online shopping.

Tourism development is occurring due to the year round natural environment recreational opportunities and regional infrastructure (snow sports, hiking, mountain biking, rivers and ocean). With this comes opportunities (business growth) and challenges (pressure on rental housing and local services).



CITY OF
COURTENAY





Development Industry

Current Status

With community growth comes a need for new development to accommodate new residents. Active, engaged and innovative private sector investment channeled through the local Development Industry, including construction trades, consultants and professionals, is critically important to meeting community housing, commercial, industrial and institutional needs. New developments represent a strategic opportunity for water and energy efficiency, land use efficiency, and servicing in such a way as to promote community health, environmental protection and public asset

fiscal responsibility (i.e. property taxation). To significantly lower Courtenay's carbon footprint, existing building stock will also require energy efficiency retrofits. Clear community land use priorities identified in the OCP will assist in directing investment to ensure that developments are achieving community goals, such as infill, affordable housing, efficient servicing, equity, character, livability and environmental protection. The City can support new development by providing a clear land use and construction regulatory system and approving development that delivers on community identified development priorities.

Some key issues and opportunities include:

Compact, mixed use, active travel forms of urban development are desirable for a range of reasons: environmental, affordable housing, public health, more efficient servicing and lower taxes, as compared to lower density sprawling development. However, there is still a market for the lower density traditional forms. Stimulating market interest in more urban forms of development goes hand in hand with motivating developers to supply.

There are plenty of infill opportunities around Courtenay that can support a range of housing types from secondary dwellings on single family properties, to low rise apartments, condos and microunits. That new development fits within these existing areas, retains identified community character elements, and does not create servicing problems are critical community planning considerations for infill.

There is a wide range of professional skills available locally to support development, however sometimes there are labor shortages.

Inefficient development application processes, unclear regulatory frameworks, and City capacity can delay development timelines. The City has continuously been striving for more efficient development and building permit processes to support development that is in line with the community's vision.

The BC Energy Step Code is a performance-based building code regulation that requires that enhanced energy efficiency standards be met over time. By 2032 all new construction in BC will be required to be Net Zero Ready. Local Governments have the opportunity to require a particular step of efficiency at any time, but must not fall below the provincial minimum. The forthcoming revised Courtenay Building Bylaw (expected by the spring) will require that new buildings in Courtenay be a minimum of 20% more efficient than previous BC Building Code. Builders can voluntarily exceed the minimum requirements at any time. New construction is an ideal time to consider energy performance.

A clearer and more nuanced understanding of the local GDP that is derived from the development community would be valuable to understand its role in the overall economic drivers for Courtenay and the Comox Valley.



CITY OF
COURTENAY





Economic Development

Current Status

The Comox Valley Economic Development Society has recently drafted a community Economic Development Master Plan – Innovate 2030. It identifies the changing nature of businesses as follows: *The owners of businesses that are driving today's economy – and will increasingly drive it tomorrow – are globally oriented, clustered together with peers, look for creative people to bring ideas to life, value a non-traditional business structure and workforce, and know their firms operate on much shorter life-cycles than previous generations.*

The Plan identifies opportunities for aerospace and defense; agrifood, seafood and beverage; construction and materials; professional services and research; technology and innovation; and tourism, arts and culture.

Some key issues and opportunities include:

The Comox Valley has enviable work/life balance opportunities, with the potential to attract the entrepreneurial 'creative class'.

Small scale tourism is desired on agricultural zoned land.

Home based businesses provide positive outcomes associated with employment distributed throughout the community, however do not contribute to the commercial tax base.

Construction sector opportunities include leadership in green construction; sustainable materials development; and more prefabrication.

Availability of a wider range of housing types is needed to attract and retain talent.

Healthy and vibrant downtowns and town centres are critical to tourism, arts, culture economic development and community livability

A need for more industrial and professional office land uses within the 5 year horizon are identified despite healthy vacancy rates. Better understanding the specific demands for these uses will help inform the OCP and subsequent Zoning Bylaw update.



CITY OF
COURTENAY





Environmental Stewardship

Current Status

The Comox Valley has a reputation for numerous grassroots volunteer Environmental Stewardship efforts, raising significant nature protection and restoration funds and profile of the importance of valuing nature within our communities and beyond. Recognizing that nature is without borders, the stewardship sector provides insight into community growth decisions across jurisdictional lines, with emphasis on watershed scales (“thinking like a watershed”). Under the umbrella of the Comox Valley Land Trust, the Environmental

Stewardship sector organized under the title of the Comox Valley Conservation Partnership to provide more coordination to their work, particularly regarding advocacy and public education. Despite these strong and sustained efforts, community growth is continuing to have a negative impact on the environment, notably loss of habitat and hydrological alteration to our urban watersheds. Only fragments of natural systems remain intact within the City of Courtenay. Fortunately, new approaches to community planning that design with nature are emerging around the world.

Some key issues and opportunities include:

There is strong public value for a healthy environment, including newcomers. All growth plans within the Comox Valley place environmentally sensitive development as a top priority. Implementing this goal however will take more work.

Positive and effective partnerships between the City, Environmental Stewardship organizations and the Development Community are critical to implementing cost-effective approaches to constructing new development with nature in mind.

There is a growing trend in municipal practices in general to incorporate ecological services into community and financial planning. “Eco-Assets” are increasingly being viewed as part of the suite of assets (alongside roads, pipes and public facilities) collectively held by a community in order to provide desired services. The City is adopting this approach in work regarding floodplain mitigation, the Kus-kus-sum restoration project, Integrated Rainwater Management Plan and the Comox Lake drinking watershed.

Healthy ecosystems are critical to adapting to and mitigating climate change. They are large sponges and sinks of carbon, moderate changing hydrological patterns, and can help species adapt to changing conditions. The UN has declared 2021-2030 to be the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, recognizing that the restoration of ecosystems is a major nature-based solution towards meeting a wide range of global development goals and national priorities. Actions are encouraged from local to global scales.



CITY OF
COURTENAY





Youth and Young Adults

Current Status

Recent rising movements of young people around the world demanding action on climate action is creating opportunities for all generations to work together on this and other pressing social issues. Youth representation in community decisions is being held as a public value in Courtenay, with increasing consideration on how to design public processes to support people who are new to engaging in civic life. The younger population has a greater stake in the decisions about the future, given their long life ahead of them. In

the Comox Valley more broadly, the School District 71 supports youth participation in climate action demonstration marches (“Fridays for the Future”) and recently hosted an entirely youth-led Youth Climate Action Conference “Empowerment for Impact”. Various trends suggest that youth have unique planning considerations as well. Finding ways to incorporate multi-generational views into the public decision-making process is a challenge, but also an opportunity that can be explored through the development of the OCP.

Some key issues and opportunities include:

Many youth and young adults have energy and passion and are eager to understand how to best direct their energies. Mentorship opportunities abound.

Viewing individual and community health as connected to environmental health is a logical fit for many young people who are seeking actions that can achieve both.

Engagement in democratic processes at a young age is a strong predictor for lifetime civic engagement, therefore pro-democracy movements and processes are working to raise youth awareness of democratic participation opportunities on wider issues. The youth representation on the OCP Advisory Committee opens an avenue of dialogue between the City and younger citizens which has the potential to deepen and grow over time.

Youth and young adults may have different ideas of what constitutes high quality of life, with less emphasis on single-family homeownership, and more value on high quality social and recreation experiences, active travel modes and urban amenities and form, thus suggesting a shift in demands of what municipal services may be expected from these people as they age.

Improving walkability, cycling, transit, recreational services and access to nature are all local government services that could immediately serve youth as well as other demographics.

65% of the jobs that will be available to the most recent generation do not yet exist, suggesting the fast pace of change and high degree of adaptability required of younger generations.



CITY OF
COURTENAY





Health and Social Services including Housing

Current Status

Planning for Health, Social Services and Housing fall under a more general lens of 'social planning' which includes incorporating considerations of accessibility and inclusion, poverty, child care, seniors, crime, substance use and food security into wider community planning. There are a wide range of organizations working on social issues locally with a number of them organizing as the Comox Valley Social Planning Society, the Comox Valley Community Health Network, the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness

Some key issues and opportunities include:

Increasing a diversity of housing infill opportunities such as secondary suites, tiny homes, secondary dwellings, townhomes, and low rise apartments and condos are critical to providing more affordable housing options to the wide range of housing needs. Infill is also consistent with efficient, cost effective and climate friendly planning.

Fewer than 1 in 5 families in the Comox Valley are able to secure licensed child care, 1 in 7 are able to secure infant/toddler care and only 1 in 9 families are able to find adequate before and after school care. A coordinated approach to lobbying and providing daycare is recommended to achieve targets identified in the 2019 Comox Valley Child Care Action Plan. The question of whether the older population could be matched to this childcare need is often raised.

School District 71 catchment boundaries review and adjustment are currently underway, highlighting the need to consider housing needs in tandem with schools.

Air quality is a regional concern, with regional efforts underway to improve this health threat.

and the newly formed Comox Valley Food Policy Council. The Island Health Authority and health and social service providers play critical government funded roles on specific dimensions of social and health. The Comox Valley Social Planning Society has been advocating for many years for the formal inclusion of social planning into core local government services for better integration and impact.

In 2018, School District 71 adopted a Community Education policy endorsing the development of community schools as publicly held lifelong learning centres that can be stewarded to respond to identified community learning needs. That year, Lake Trail Middle and Courtenay Elementary became community schools and provide opportunities for individuals and organizations to form partnerships to meet neighbourhood needs.

Sustainable approaches to food security are viewed not only as the single strongest lever to optimize human health and environmental sustainability on Earth, as identified by the medical Lancet Commission, they also have the potential to serve as 'gateway actions' towards other climate friendly behaviours. Local governments should continue to make an effort to protect agricultural land and strong support for urban agriculture and processing facilities as well as a range of other actions as identified in the Kwantlen Institute for Sustainable Food Systems Local Government Policy Database.

"Asset-Based Community Development" is critical to supporting community health and resiliency. The ABCD approach builds on the local strengths, connections, citizen leadership and individual talents to tackle complex community problems such as poverty, equity and community safety and well-being. This approach at the neighbourhood level is invaluable in the context of short emergencies as well as long range emergency planning, such as climate change.

Volunteerism is critical to sustaining the efforts of the social services work in Courtenay and the wider region. Unfortunately volunteerism is on the decline and most groups continuously struggle to ensure adequate funds to fulfill their objectives.



CITY OF
COURTENAY





Seniors and Older Adults

Current Status

It is commonly known that the Comox Valley is attractive to seniors and older adults, and that these demographics are expected to grow in the coming decades, more so than the expected BC average. In particular, the population of people 75+ is expected to double in the next decade, representing the fastest growing regional age group. The population of people 65+ is expected to quadruple in the next 20 years. Courtenay is the central hub for the location of services in the Comox Valley therefore age-friendly planning will

help all seniors across the region. Seniors and older adults bring tremendous talents and experience, participating in civic life, providing child care, mentorship, and taking leadership roles in community priorities including climate change. In the 2018 federal general election, the Courtenay-Alberni electoral riding had the 4th highest voter participation rate of 65+ in all of Canada. Seniors and older adults also have unique needs regarding affordable, accessible and appropriate housing, mobility, healthy foods and opportunities for social engagements.

Some key issues and opportunities include:

Many services are offered, but they are not all well coordinated, or are intimidating to navigate and access. The City has recently applied for an Age-Friendly Planning grant in order to understand better the seniors-specific servicing needs and opportunities.

Results from the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness 2018 Point in Time Count found a 12% increase in seniors (aged 55+) without a home since 2016.

Gender inequities can result in increased poverty to older women, reducing agency and independence, quality of life, and increasing health issues.

Senior householders are smaller than family households, representing a need for more housing options.

As women have longer life expectancies, their longer life presents particular planning considerations, from infrastructure, to programming, to business needs and preferences.

Many older adults have pets, which provide added incentives for neighborly socializing and physical activity, as for the rest of the population. Community planning considerations for pets, such as dog parks and pet memorial parks are unique park programming opportunities.

Transportation demand management practices could be explored to help shift local senior travel and transaction times to lower traffic volume periods throughout the day to alleviate pressure on the transportation system.

Safe, comfortable and convenient walking paths and parks, complemented with sufficient benches, can help seniors and older adults engage in neighbourhood activities that support physical health and social interaction.

Isolation – social, physical and cultural – is a serious issue for seniors regardless of their income level.



CITY OF
COURTENAY

