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Quality of Life
CHALLENGE

PEOPLE RATE QUALITY OF LIFE IN BC'S CAPITAL REGION

REPORT OF REGIONAL SURVEY

SEPTEMBER 2005

IMAGINE ...

a sustainable quality of life for everyone in British Columbia's Capital Region.

Many of us take it for granted.
Some of us struggle to achieve it.
Each of us has a stake in it.

Quality of life is dynamically linked with the health of our community,
and the sustainability of the economy and the environment.

When people are informed about the quality of life in their community,
they can make better decisions to preserve and enhance it – for everyone.

REGIONAL SURVEY

In May 2005, the Community Council, through the Quality of Life CHALLENGE, conducted a telephone survey to determine base-line information about how people in British Columbia's Capital Region rated their quality of life, and to measure their satisfaction with a selection of recognized factors that contribute to quality of life. The differences in the way people rated their quality of life were analysed by demographic groups: age, gender, income level, housing tenure and where they lived within the region. It is intended that changes in these indicators of quality of life will be monitored over time.

This report is based on the results of that survey. The Vancouver Foundation and the Government of Canada invested funds and R.A. Malatest & Associates provided in-kind support to make this report possible.

While the regional survey provided some important new information about quality of life issues, this data should be seen as complementary to other information that we have about this region. In particular, it complements the quality of life indicators report published by the Community Council in June, *Quality of Life in BC's Capital Region 2005*.

For the survey a random sample was drawn from of the general residential population in BC's Capital Regional District (CRD). 1,140 people completed the survey. The results are statistically reliable by the three sub-regions of the Capital Regional District at the 95% confidence level, $\pm 5\%$.

The CRD extends from Port Renfrew to the Gulf Islands and is made up of 13 incorporated municipalities and three large unincorporated electoral areas (Juan de Fuca, Southern Gulf Islands and Saltspring Island). There is much diversity among the settled areas of the region. There are densely populated urban environments; smaller towns and neighbourhoods; and

rural districts with large tracts of agriculture or forested land and small populations. Whereas each municipality is distinct, they are often clustered into three subregions.

- The Peninsula includes Sidney, Central Saanich and North Saanich.
- The Westshore includes Colwood, Langford, Metchosin, View Royal, the Highlands and Sooke.
- The Core includes Victoria, Saanich, Esquimalt and Oak Bay.

There were limitations to the survey.

- Analysis by subregion does not allow for the variations within the subregions. For example, in the Westshore, the Highlands has a population of 1,675 people and has limited its growth through large lot zoning, no bus service and limited sewer connections. Langford with a population of 18,840, is a rapidly changing municipality attracting businesses and families.
- The data that was gathered was quantitative – the answers could be counted; therefore, the results do not capture the reasoning and feelings of the respondents which are difficult to measure.
- Although children and youth make up 8% of the population of the region, they were not included in the sample; therefore, their opinions were not included.
- Telephone surveys are limited to the people who have home phones, thereby excluding from the sample people with hearing impairments or those living on low incomes who are much less likely to have residential telephones, particularly people receiving income assistance. As a result, the percentage of survey participants who were living on low incomes was lower than the percentage of people in the region living on low incomes. Most survey participants with low incomes were from the Core municipalities.

MOST PEOPLE SAY QUALITY OF LIFE IS GOOD OR VERY GOOD

	Subregion			Gender		Total
	Peninsula	Core	Westshore	Women	Men	
Very good	52.9%	42.5%	36.7%	45.7%	40.8%	44.0%
Good	37.6%	38.8%	44.4%	38.1%	44.8%	40.2%
Fair	7.7%	15.7%	15.2%	13.5%	11.4%	12.9%
Poor	1.3%	2.1%	3.1%	2.2%	2.1%	2.2%
Very Poor	0.3%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%

Most people in BC’s Capital Region have a great quality of life. More than four out of five people rated their quality of life as good or very good.

Less than 3% rated their quality of life as poor or very poor, representing approximately 8,500 people in the region.

People were slightly more likely to describe their quality of life as poor or very poor if they were:

- 45 to 54 years old
- living on the Westshore
- living on low to moderate incomes
- renters
- more likely to consider housing an important factor in their quality of life
- dissatisfied with their level of social activity

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO PEOPLE'S QUALITY OF LIFE?

Hundreds of factors impact quality of life. The survey results show significant similarity in what people say adds most to their quality of life. Regardless of income level, age and gender, the same two or three issues were reported.

When asked to name the three most important things which add to quality of life, the most frequently named were:

Relationship with family	19.0%
Health	15.8%
Financial security or income	12.1%

More than twenty other things were named by a smaller percentage of the survey participants as contributing to their quality of life. While the top three things were listed consistently across income level, gender and subregion, there was some variation in the other answers.

- Housing issues were reported more frequently by lower and moderate income respondents, by women and by respondents living on the Westshore.
- Environmental issues were reported more frequently by higher income respondents and by people living in the Core municipalities.
- Education was reported more frequently by the lowest income respondents.
- Work / career enjoyment was reported more frequently by higher income respondents and by men. (Male respondents were not significantly more likely to be employed than female respondents).

Survey participants named personal issues as being most important. The order in which issues were reported tends to move out from personal, such as relationship with family and health, to income and work, to neighbourhood and housing, to climate and environment.

There were no issues which were reported solely by one demographic group. While some issues were less frequently reported by certain demographic groups, that does not suggest that people in these groups are not concerned about these issues. However, other issues were seen as more pressing. For example, lower and moderate income people may be just

as concerned about environmental issues, but see housing as a more urgent issue impacting their quality of life given the lack of affordable housing in their income bracket.

WHAT TAKES AWAY FROM PEOPLE’S QUALITY OF LIFE?

When asked to name the three most important things which take away from quality of life, the top two listed were consistent across all demographic groups

Health 20.2%
 Financial security or income 17.6%

Other things that took away from quality of life were named, but were less consistent across all demographic groups.

- Financial security was more frequently reported by people living on low incomes.
- Crime was less frequently named by people living on the Westshore, women, people under 24 and people between the ages of 55 to 64.
- Time and relationship with family were most frequently reported by women.
- Transportation issues were slightly more important for people on the Westshore or the Peninsula than in the Core municipalities.

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

People were asked to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of quality of life. For example, their satisfaction with their neighbourhood as a place to live, their financial security, how they are treated by others, their level of social activity and feeling part of their community.

Your neighbourhood as a place to live

	Core	Peninsula	Westshore	CRD
Very dissatisfied	2.9%	0.8%	0.3%	1.3%
Somewhat dissatisfied	3.7%	0.8%	4.2%	2.9%
About evenly balanced	10.8%	6.1%	10.0%	9.0%
Somewhat satisfied	31.0%	26.5%	36.5%	31.3%
Very satisfied	51.7%	65.9%	49.1%	55.5%

People on the Peninsula were most satisfied with their neighbourhoods, where 65.9% said they were very satisfied. This was followed by people in the Core municipalities, where 51.7% said they were very satisfied, and the Westshore where 49.1% were very satisfied.

One of the foundation pieces of the Regional Growth Strategy is that each municipality will work toward establishing liveable, walkable neighbourhoods so that people have ready access to grocery stores, schools and public space.

Feeling part of your community

	Core	Peninsula	Westshore	CRD
Very dissatisfied	1.6%	1.3%	1.3%	1.4%
Somewhat dissatisfied	6.3%	4.2%	8.7%	6.4%
About evenly balanced	23.9%	15.6%	24.7%	21.4%
Somewhat satisfied	34.6%	36.0%	32.3%	34.3%
Very satisfied	32.5%	42.3%	32.0%	35.6%

People were asked to rate their satisfaction with feeling part of their community. Again, respondents on the Peninsula were most satisfied, with 42.3% saying very satisfied, compared to 32.5% in the Core and 32.0% in the Westshore. Slightly more people in the Westshore than in the Core and Peninsula expressed dissatisfaction with their sense of being part of the community.

Community events and traditions build a community. People identify with public places such as schools, parks, libraries and recreation centres. Interactive events and activities encourage people to get to know each other in ways that are more intentional than spectator events.

Level of social activity

	Core	Peninsula	Westshore	CRD
Very dissatisfied	4.5%	2.4%	4.2%	3.7%
Somewhat dissatisfied	7.9%	6.1%	8.9%	7.6%
About evenly balanced	17.1%	14.6%	23.1%	18.2%
Somewhat satisfied	36.7%	36.0%	33.6%	35.4%
Very satisfied	33.6%	41.0%	30.2%	34.9%

A similar pattern of subregional differences appears in the way people rated their satisfaction with their level of social activity/getting out. The Peninsula rated highest.

Factors which affect level of social activity include affordability and access to public transportation, recreation programs and facilities, and supportive services for people with physical limitations or who are disadvantaged by poverty or stress.

Financial security and future security

How satisfied are you with your financial security and future security? The answers to these questions did not show the substantial differences by subregion as the previous questions. With financial security, the same trends occurred through the subregions: more people on the Peninsula were very satisfied (28.6%), followed by the Core (23.6%) and the Westshore (22.3%). With future security, the Peninsula still had the highest percent of respondents rating high satisfaction. Slightly more respondents from the Westshore were satisfied with their future security than the respondents from the Core.

Future security is directly related to income. The lower people's income, the more likely respondents were to be dissatisfied with their future security. Though people living on low income live in all three subregions, more are concentrated in the Core municipalities. This was reflected in the survey, with more survey respondents living on low income in the Core than in the other two subregions.

Age was also a factor in people's satisfaction with their future security. People aged between 35 and 54 were most concerned about their future security.

SUSTAINING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR EVERYONE

Summary

The findings of the regional survey give cause for celebration. But they could also lead to complacency.

Overall a high percentage of people in BC's Capital Region rated their quality of life as good or very good. For more than 15% of the population quality of life is only fair – or worse. That represents close to 50,000 people. Their voices of concern and dissatisfaction are to be heeded.

The people who live in BC's Capital Region have named the things that are important to their quality of life, and those things that take away from it. The same two or three factors were named as being the most important: family relationships, health and financial security.

In 1993 the Capital Regional District conducted a study of "Values, Goals and Priorities" of people in the region. Comparing these two studies, there are similarities in many of the things that were identified as important to quality of life. However, there have been changes. Safety and security, cleanliness, environmental quality and natural setting were rated as most important in the public survey for the CRD study over a decade ago. At this time, employment opportunities, housing affordability, and sense of community were rated higher.

Some significant differences appeared in the answers to the survey questions from each of the three subregions. These differences were most apparent in the way people rated their level of satisfaction with the following indicators of quality of life: their neighbourhood as a place to live, feeling part of their community, their level of social activity, and their financial and future security. In each of these, survey respondents from the Peninsula were most satisfied, followed by respondents from the Core and then the Westshore.

Some facts may help to explain the regional differences¹.

- Median households incomes are higher on the Peninsula and the Westshore than in the Core.
- There is a higher percentage of families with children on the Westshore where there is rapid growth and development – change.
- There is a higher percentage of people living in rental housing in the Core municipalities than in the other subregions.
- Despite the commercial and housing development in the Westshore, close to three quarters of businesses in the region are located in the Core, requiring the workforce to commute from the Peninsula and the Westshore.

Conclusions

Quality of life is woven from many threads of many shades. The strength and beauty of the social fabric helps to determine the ability of each person to achieve his or her full potential; the future health and development of the community's children and the resilience of a community in the face of disaster.

These survey findings call for dialogue – in council chambers and board rooms, in classrooms and sitting rooms – about the named concerns, about solutions and about who should be involved. A community is a network of relationships – among people, organizations and sectors. Everyone has some responsibility to make sure that no individual or group is excluded from the high quality of life, nor from the dialogue to sustain it.

¹ For details see *Quality of Life in BC's Capital Region 2005* by the Community Council. Data on quality of life and the social determinants of health are also available from the CRD Regional Planning Services and the Vancouver Island Health Authority.

These findings call for action. Intentional actions flow from comprehensive planning that integrates the wide array of quality of life issues, and that consistently asks, “What is the impact of this decision and action upon quality of life, particularly on vulnerable populations?”

These findings call for collaboration. In order to sustain an inclusive and socially cohesive community, the public sector – all levels of government, the health authority, school districts and public institutions – works respectfully alongside community organizations, the private sector and engaged citizens. This requires investment in social planning and development – alongside physical and economic planning and development.

We are all stakeholders in our future. All levels of government, but also each person, business, institution and community organization, can influence quality of life - especially if we work together. There is work to do to ensure that the quality of life is vibrant and sustainable for everyone in every part of BC’s Capital Region.



Community Council

1144 Fort Street, Victoria BC V8V 3K8
Tel: (250) 383-6166 Fax: (250) 385-6712
Email: info@qolchallenge.ca
Website: www.qolchallenge.ca

**Bringing people together
to create solutions in the areas of homes,
paid work and community connections
in BC's Capital Region.**