

Methods

As you begin reading this report you will see right away how important Statistics Canada is to us. We mention it at length in the introduction and it is the backbone of our data collection efforts. That's because a great deal of the information contained in this report is gleaned from Statistics Canada census profiles and the National Housing Survey. The 2006 Census of Canada required some Canadians to fill out the 'long form.' Canadians are always required to fill out a 'short form' questionnaire but a certain percentage of Canadians in 2006 were required to provide a lot more information to Statistics Canada using a much more detailed questionnaire. In the summer of 2010, the federal government announced that it would abolish the long form census questionnaire citing privacy concerns. As part of the Conservative government's omnibus Bill C-38, the long form census questionnaire was abolished and would not be a part of the 2011 Census. This was and still is a highly controversial decision. (Grant, 2013) As a result, the data from the 2011 Canadian Census' National Housing Survey, the voluntary survey that replaced the mandatory long form, are not strictly comparable to the 2006 data. And not all people fill out the questionnaire. The 'non-response' rate runs as high as 37% in Cumberland and as low as 21% in other parts of the Comox Valley for specific responses. We still have confidence in the reported numbers because they are in a range of expectation given earlier census data. That said, we have taxfiler information which is highly accurate and data from other sources such as BC government ministries and local organizations, so that Stats Can data can sometimes be confirmed by reference to statistics gathered from other sources.

As noted above, much of the information gathered for this report comes from Statistics Canada, a number of federal government ministries, BC Stats and some provincial ministries, local governments, organizations and individuals. The information from government sources is supplemented by data gathered from the annual reports of a number of organizations, interviews with key members of the community and local newspapers. Many people have contributed to this report as you can see from the Acknowledgments page. We spoke to dozens of people in preparing this report, some casually, some more formally. Everybody was interested in, and had opinions about, what we were doing.

Means, Medians and Modes

Just to be clear, in this report we use 3 ways to summarize numbers in a series or distribution (population, for example): mean, median and mode. The **mean** (or average) is calculated by adding up all the numbers in a distribution (1,2,3,4,5,6,6,6,10,12,13) and dividing the total (113) by the number of units in the distribution (11) to get 10.27 as the average of the numbers in the distribution. The median is the point in the distribution where half the units are below and half above. For the distribution above the mean is 6. The middle 6 to be precise. If the distribution has an even number of units, the middle two numbers are located then the mid-point between those two numbers is the median. The **mode** is the number (or range of numbers - age group, for example) that occurs most frequently in a distribution. In the above distribution it's also 6.

1. Population

People. We come in all shapes and sizes, male and female, young and old. We live alone, we live together, mostly in families and often with children, albeit nowhere near as many children as in the past. We live in villages, towns, cities, and in the countryside. We speak various languages although as Table 1.6 notes, the Comox Valley like many other communities on Vancouver Island is predominantly English speaking. We think that a population with diversity enhances the quality of life for all. We feel that the vitality and quality of life in a community are not necessarily predicated on population growth. A stable population can be just as dynamic as a growing population through natural increase (births) but immigrants to a community can enrich it as well.

1.1 Population Growth (+/-)

From the census years of 2006 to 2011, the population growth in the Comox Valley of 6.8% was slightly less than the provincial growth rate of 7.0%. It was, however, significantly more growth than similar, neighbouring communities such as Campbell River (4.0% growth) and the Cowichan Valley (4.4% growth). This trend has continued into 2012. Although Table 1 below shows population differences between 2006 and 2011, the period between the two last censuses), in 2011 and 2012 the Comox Valley population grew by 0.3%, almost entirely in Courtenay and Cumberland. For the same period, population growth in BC was 1.0%. (Source: BC Stats, 2012 Sub-Provincial Population Estimates)

Table 1: Population Change in the Comox Valley and in BC

Location	2006	2011	% Change
Comox	12,136	13,627	10.0%
Comox I.R.	272	251	-7.7%
Courtenay	22,021	24,099	9.4%
Cumberland	2,762	3,398	23.0%
Reg. Dist. A	6,973	6,899	-1.1%
Reg. Dist. B	6,970	6,939	-0.4%
Reg. Dist. C	8,099	8,325	2.8%
Comox Valley	59,482	63,538	6.8%
BC	4,113,487	4,400,057	7.0%

Source: 2011 Census of Canada: Census Profiles

Significantly, a review of the above table will show that the growth was almost entirely within the municipal boundaries of Cumberland (23%), Comox (10%) and Courtenay (9.4%). Most of the Regional District electoral areas showed small population declines. This seems to be a trend that is reflected throughout not only Canada but also worldwide, as shown in **Table 1.1**, but we need to be cautious about that observation. As a 'developed' country, Canada is already well ahead of the world in terms of the proportion of people living in its cities at 81%. In 1951 only 51% of the Canadian population lived in urban areas¹. (Stats Can, 2011a) Canada has seen a steady population movement from rural to urban areas. In the Comox Valley in 2011, 65% of the population lived in Courtenay, Comox and Cumberland, our 'population centres'. Residents of the rural areas in the Comox Valley may move into population centres for different reasons than people do elsewhere in the world. For instance they may not be moving 'into town' for work or because their land was flooded to make way for a dam. They are more likely to move into town because they want to be closer to their doctors and medical facilities. Transportation is not as much of an issue here as it is in India, for

1 As of the 2011 Census of Canada, urban areas are now referred to as population centres.

example. Driving from Merville to Courtenay takes 15 minutes. So here rural and urban areas tend to blend into each other. We don't know if people will continue to leave the rural areas. Time will tell.

BC Stats projects a slowing of population growth starting in 2022 and a projected average yearly increase of .7%. (BC Stats, 2013). Based on those projections we estimate that the population of the Valley will be around 75,864 in 2025. Earlier estimates by the provincial government projected even higher population growth. It strikes us that an estimate of over 81,000 residents for 2025 is unreasonable given the declining rate of increase. (BC Stats, 2013a) We conclude that population projections for the Valley are unduly optimistic.

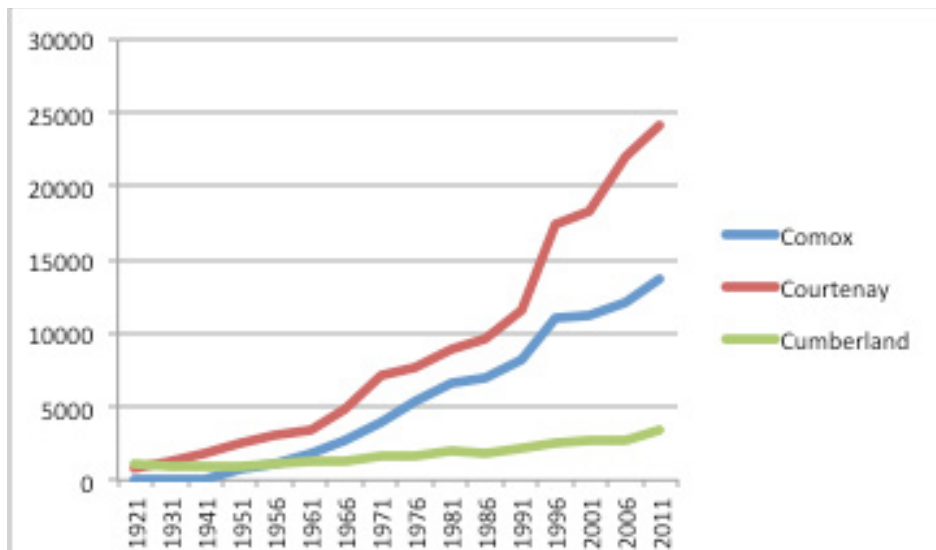
Table 1.1: Proportion of World Population Living in Cities

Year	% in Cities
1800	3%
1900	14%
2010	50%
2050	75% est.

Source: (The Economist, 2013)

Cumberland is the fastest growing jurisdiction in the Valley as young people come in search of less expensive housing than can be found in the rest of the Valley and its proximity to mountain biking trails and Mount Washington. However, looking back even further we know that Cumberland's population was well over 10,000 when the coal mines and logging were in full swing prior to 1920. **Figure 1** makes it look as though the populations of our three population centres are growing at a high rate. However, the average annual rate of increase in the population of Courtenay from 1921 until 2011 is 1.1%. Is there any reason to think this growth rate will slow down? BC Stats thinks so. (BC Stats, 2013a)

Figure 1: Population Growth in Comox, Courtenay and Cumberland, 1921 to 2011



Source: (BC Stats, 2013)

Varying trends in population change are likely to continue and will have significant impact on land-use planning, transportation, the delivery of municipal services and the size and location of health, educational and recreational facilities. In considering population growth, we need to think about natural increase (the birth rate minus the death rate) and growth in employment possibilities. Many young people leave the Valley because there are no job opportunities here for the work they've been trained or educated to do. These are considerations for other sections of this report.

1.2 Marital Status (-slowly)

The marital status of the population aged 15 and over in the Comox Valley is roughly similar to that of the Province as a whole with about 60% of the population married or living in a common law relationship. That hasn't changed much over the past 20 years. In 2009 we reported that 62.2% of residents over the age of 15 were married or living common law. That's not much different than the 61.1% we report below in Table 1.3. Still, the trend we see going back to 1996 is for slowly declining numbers of people getting legally married.

Table 1.3: Marital Status, by Sex and Location

	Comox Valley			Province of BC		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total Pop. age 15+	54,455 100%	26,055 48%	28,400 52%	3,722,695 100%	1,809,045 48.6%	1,913,650 51.4%
Married/ Common Law	33,285 61.1%	16,575 49.8%	16,710 50.2%	2,154,575 57.9%	1,074,965 49.9%	1,079,610 50.1%
Not Married	21,170 38.9%	9,485 44.8%	11,690 55.2%	1,568,120 42.1%	734,075 46.8%	834,040 53.2%

Source: 2011 Census of Canada: Census Profiles.

1.3 The Aging Population (+)

The age profile of the Comox Valley population is significantly different from that of the province as a whole. Both the Province and the Valley have about 85% of their populations over age 15 (Table 1.3); however, for the Province, the population is relatively evenly distributed between the ages of 25 and 60. **Figure 2** below provides a comparison between the Comox Valley and BC in relation to the distribution of age and sex.

Table 1.3: Age and Sex of the Comox Valley and BC Residents Compared

	Comox Valley			Province of BC		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Population	63,540 100%	30,700 48.3%	32,835 51.7%	4,400,055 100%	2,156,600 49.1%	2,243,455 50.9%
% over 15	85.7%	84.9%	86.5%	84.6%	83.9%	85.3%
Median Age	48.3 yrs	47.7 yrs	48.8 yrs	41.9 yrs	41.1 yrs	42.7 yrs

Source: 2011 Census of Canada: Census Profiles.

In the Valley there is a population bulge between the ages of 45 and 65, representing post-war 'baby boomers'. **Figure 2** shows graphically how pronounced the bulge is for baby boomers in the Valley, essentially people born between 1946 and 1960. There is a bulge for the province as a whole, but nowhere near as pronounced as it is for the Valley. There are proportionately fewer young people in the Valley than in the province as a whole. This isn't entirely surprising. The population is aging meaning that the median² age is rising and young people often need to leave the Valley for work leaving a 'dip' in the graph. There is no such dip in the population as a whole, but as we well know, most people in the province live in larger urban areas where many young will find themselves.

A similar bulge exists in both Campbell River and the Cowichan Valley. One only has to look at the median age of the Comox Valley population at 48.3 years, compared to 41.9 years for the Province, to see the difference (see Table 1.3). Comparable figures for Campbell River (median age 45.8 yrs) and the Cowichan Valley (median age 47.2 yrs) show that all three Vancouver Island communities have older populations than

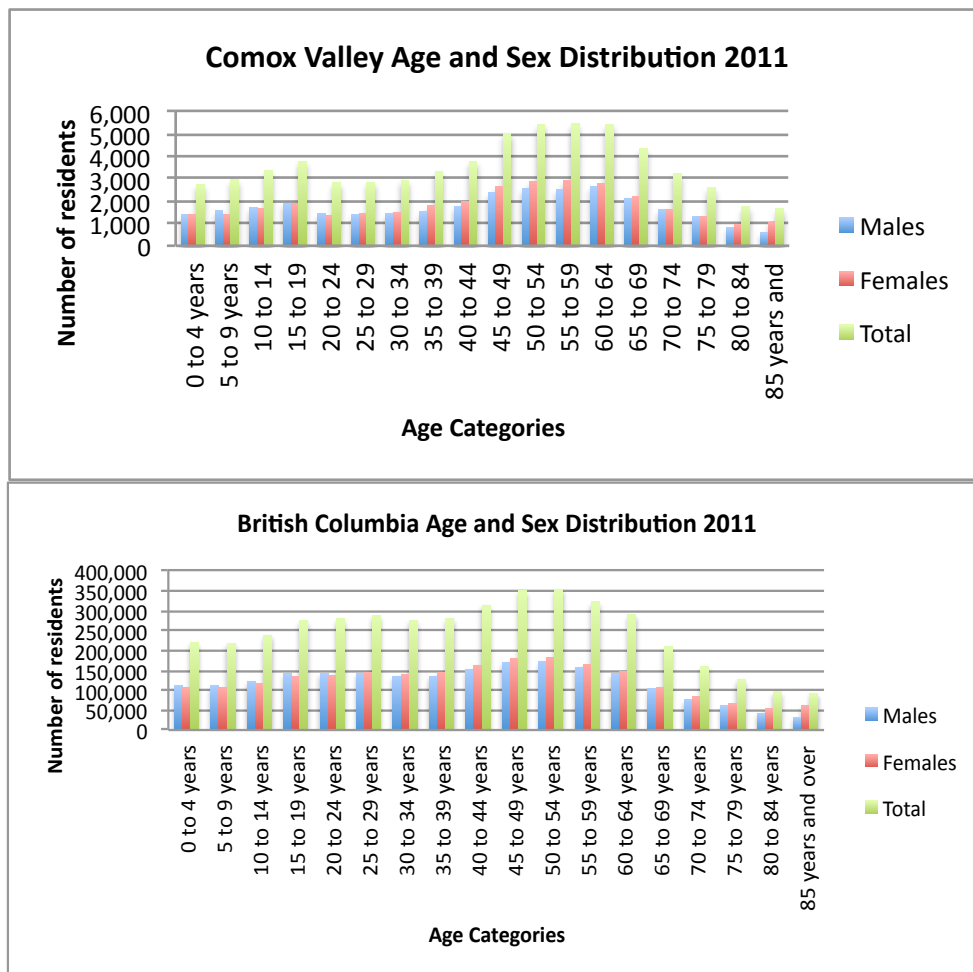
2 See the explanation of mean, median and mode in the Methods section of this report.

the provincial average and proportionately fewer young people. That said, the population of Cumberland has a median age of 38.2, 10 years lower than Comox’s median age and 3 years or so lower than BC’s median age. (Stats Can, 2012)

We noted in 2009 that there were 15,270 children in the Valley based on the 2006 census. (CVSPS, 2009, p. 3) That number includes all children regardless of age who live with their parent(s) in a household. For this report we think that looking at children under 15 years of age is more meaningful a measure of the changing age distribution. Using this measure we find that the number of children under 15 declined by 1% in the Valley from 9,915 in 2006 to 9,830 in 2011. That’s while the population of the Valley increased overall by 6.8%. That’s 525 fewer children in 2011 than in 2006. That’s a dramatic change that needs to be considered in conjunction with the rise of two person families during the same period of time, as we note below, of 18.4%. The family landscape is rapidly changing in the Valley along with the age distribution. (Stats Can, 2012a) We should not be surprised then to read that there is a projected drop of 240 students in the district for the 2014 fall school year and a drop in staff too. (Andor R. , 2014a)

In 2009 we included a table in our report that listed the population over the age of 65 in the Comox Valley including projections to 2021. We note elsewhere in this report that BC government population projections are generally optimistic. Well, in 2006, there were 10,665 residents over the age of 65 in the Valley. We projected a population in this age group of 11,754 for 2011, 13,832 for 2016 and 16,318 for 2021 based on BC Stats projections. (CVSPS, 2009, p. 5) In fact, the actual population in this age group was already 13,585 in 2011. (Stats Can, 2012a) That’s a 13.5% increase between the 2006 to 2011 census years. Part of this

Figure 2: Comox Valley and British Columbia Population by Age and Sex, 2011



growth in the over 65 age group must be from migration, but natural population aging is likely the most important factor.

Related Indicators:
health, affordable housing, education

Source: Compiled from 2011 Census of Canada: Census Profiles (Stats Can, 2012a)

1.4 Number of Families (+ slightly) and Children (-)

The majority of families in the Comox Valley are two person families although governments reckon families in different ways. A census family refers to a married couple (with or without children), a common-law couple (with or without children) or a lone parent family. The census dictionary provides a more complex definition. (Stats Can, 2012). From Table 1.4 it's clear that most residents of the Valley live in a two-person family. What we used to consider the family norm in Canada, mom and dad with 2 children, now accounts for only 14.1% of families in the Valley, 19.3% of families in BC.

Table 1.4: Census Families in the Comox Valley and British Columbia

Family Type	Comox Valley		Province of BC	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Total Census Families	19,145	100%	1,238,155	100%
2 person families	11,915	62.2%	645,245	52.1%
3 person families	3,470	18.1%	263,910	21.3%
4 person families	2,705	14.1%	238,525	19.3%
5+ person family	1,055	5.5%	90,470	7.3%
Census Family Persons	50,695	79.8% of total population	3,516,850	79.9% of total population
Total Not In Census Families	11,765	18.5% of total population	807,660	18.4% of total population

Source: 2011 Census of Canada: Census Profiles.

The 2006 Census counted 51% of two person families. The 2011 Census saw that percentage rise to 62.2%. This may partially be because of the higher numbers of retired people living here with no children living at home. There is approximately the same percentage of census families in the Comox Valley as in BC as a whole. Lone parent families account for 39% of families that have children (calculated using the data in Table 1.5). In 2009 that number was 29%. So it seems that the number of single parent families is on the rise by about 25.7% over the 5 years between the last two censuses.

Table 1.5: Comox Valley Families by Family Structure and Number of Children

Family Structure	Married Parents	Common Law	Lone Parent
No children	8,330	1,815	n/a
1 Child	2,110	565	1,765
2 Children	2,145	360	790
3+ Children	835	165	255
Total Families	13,430	2,905	2,815

Source: 2011 Census of Canada: Census Profiles.

Related Indicators: housing, food security, incomes, education

1.5 Diversity and Language (id)

As can be seen from Table 1.6, 91.6% of Comox Valley residents, like the residents in neighbouring Vancouver Island communities, claim English as their primary language. For the Province as a whole, only 71.6% of residents indicate English as their primary language. The difference is accounted for by a preponderance of new Canadians from Southeast Asia moving to BC and settling in the Lower Mainland.

Table 1.6: Language Profiles of Selected BC Communities % of Total Population (Top 5 Indicated)

Language Spoken	BC	Comox Valley	Campbell River	Cowichan Valley
English	71.6%	91.6%	92.5%	92.2%
French	1.3%	2.3%	1.5%	1.3%
German	1.7%	1.8%	1.4%	1.4%
Dutch		0.6%	0.5%	0.9%
Punjabi	4.3%		0.5%	0.8%
Chinese/Mandarin/ Cantonese	8.1%			

The Immigrant Welcome Centre opened its doors in Courtenay in 2011. It is affiliated with the Immigrant Welcome Centre in Campbell River and as the Multicultural Society has roots that go back in that community to the 1990s. It provides services, contacts and courses for immigrants from all over the world. The Welcome

Source: 2011 Census of Canada: Census Profiles.

Centre worked with 330 new immigrants from 62 different countries in the Courtenay office last year and helped 150 others here on work visas, international students or residents interested in sponsoring immigrants. Immigrants have varied experiences when they come to the Valley. Most hope to settle here but some leave in search of work. (Blaney, 2014) The Immigrant Welcome Centre's website is: <http://www.immigrantwelcome.ca/>

1.6. First Nations Identity and Aboriginal Ancestry (-/+?)

For two reasons we are unable to compare the numbers of First Nations residents or residents of aboriginal ancestry with earlier data. For one, the Long Form census questionnaire was replaced in 2011 with the National Housing Survey. It has a 22% global non-response rate making the data on this indicator less reliable. The second reason is that the Comox-Strathcona Regional District was split in 2008 making it difficult to compare 2011 numbers with 2006 numbers. In 2009 we reported that the aboriginal population of the Comox-Strathcona Regional District was 7.2% of the total population. In 2011, in the Comox Valley Regional District Statistics Canada reported an aboriginal population of 2,910 or 4.6% of the entire Valley population if identity is considered and 4,010 or 6.4% when residents are asked about their ancestry rather than their identity. (Stats Can, 2011b) There are many aboriginal people living here who originate in places as far away as the Maritime provinces with many originally from the prairie provinces.

In 2006, the population of the Comox 1 reserve was determined by Statistics Canada to be 272. The 2011 Census reports that there are 251 reserve residents. (Stats Can, 2012a) The K'òmoks band office reports that there are 118 reserve residents and 324 band members meaning that 36% of band members live on reserve. (K'òmoks, 2014) We trust the band to know what the real numbers are. In 2009, BC Stats produced a series of reports called the Aboriginal Community Data Initiative (ACDI). There is a fairly detailed analysis in the K'òmoks band based on the 2006 census. At that time the median age of the band members was 39.1, closer to the median age of the residents of Cumberland than of Comox (48 years of age). (Stats Can, 2009) The ACDI reports on a wide range of indicators and compares the population of the reserve (Comox 1) with all other reserves in BC. The K'òmoks band is unlike other bands in that the population is older, better educated and has a much higher employment participation rate. We don't have a similar study based on the 2011 census, but we surmise that the band retains the same population profile now as it did in 2006. According to Statistics Canada, in 2006 the aboriginal population of BC was 4.8% of the population, up from 4.4% in 2001. In 2011 it was 5.4% for another significant increase. The aboriginal population is increasing at a more rapid pace than the Canadian and BC populations as a whole. The way Statistics Canada categories work, the First Nations population is a sub-category of people with aboriginal identity. In BC there were 155,020 First Nations members, 112,400 with registered status with 44.2% living on reserve and 55.8% living off reserve. In the Comox Valley, there is a much higher percentage of First Nations people living off reserve than on. (Stats Can, 2011b)

Related indicators: Food Security, education, employment