

10. Community Involvement

10.1 Voting behaviour (-)

In the 2013 provincial general election, there were 50,456 eligible voters in the Comox Valley. When all was said and done, 32,285 residents chose to vote giving a 64% turnout. That's lower than the 69.8% turnout for the 2005 general election, but higher than the 2009 election turnout, which was 58.77% of the eligible voters. (Elections BC, 2013) Finding a way to vote on election day is not terribly difficult but it seems that 36% of eligible voters couldn't quite do it. Voter turnouts continue to decline across the board in the Comox Valley.

Municipal elections, it turns out, seem to be of even less interest to voters than provincial elections. During the last municipal elections, the three electoral area directors, Bruce Jolliffe (Area A, Jim Gillis (Area B) and Edwin Grieve (Area C) were all elected by acclamation. In Courtenay there was just a little over 28% turnout with Larry Jangula winning the mayor's chair by 79 votes. The situation in Campbell River was not much different with a 31.5% turnout and the mayor, Walter Jakeway, being elected with a margin of 39 votes over his nearest rival candidate. In Cumberland, there was a 41% turnout with the mayor, Leslie Baird, elected by acclamation. In the Town of Comox, voter turnout was also 41%. (UBCM, 2012)

A study conducted by the provincial government in January of 2010 just after the 2009 provincial election found that voter turnout is affected by a number of factors and changes over time. Most voters cite personal circumstances and engagement as reasons they failed to vote. (BC Stats, 2010)

10.2 Charitable Donations (+?)

People in British Columbia donated on average \$543 to a charitable or non-profit organization in 2010. (Stats Can, 2013d) In Canada the average donation in 2010 was \$446. In 2009 we reported that the average donation in BC in 2007 was \$507 and in 2004 it was \$467. (CVSPS, 2009, p. 99) This indicates that donations have been going up over the years. However this is misleading. The median donation went from \$125 in 2007 to \$123 in 2010. This means that in 2010 half the donors gave less than \$125 and half gave more. Still, in 2007 total donations in BC were \$1,462,000,000 while in 2010 it was \$1,687,000,000. (Stats Can, 2013e) That's an increase of 13%. Given that there was a recession in that time period this is impressive.

It's very difficult to get figures on donations specific to the Comox Valley without donating money to Statistics Canada, so instead of doing that we'll make some assumptions and do some creative figuring. The population of BC in 2010 was 4,400,057. The population of the Comox Valley Regional District was 63,538, which is 1.44% of the provincial population. If we take the \$1,687,000,000 British Columbians donated to charities in 2010 and if we assume that residents of the Comox Valley donate at the same rate as people in the rest of the province, we find that the residents of the Valley donated \$24,292,800 to charitable organizations in 2010. That's a believable figure in our estimation. It doesn't hurt the bottom line either when \$1 million bequests come to organizations in the Valley. In January of 2014 the Woodrow family announced a donation totaling \$1,000,000 to The Hospice Society (\$500,000), the Mountaineer Avian Rescue Society (\$300,000) and to a local animal welfare society (\$200,000) from the estate of Michele Woodrow who died in June 2013. (Comox Valley Record, 2014) That level of kindness is appreciated by all.

In 2009 we reported that online donations increased from 6 to 32% in 2009. (CVSPS, 2009, p. 101) That's not surprising, but there is no indication that donations are going to different organizations than previously. Online donations are more convenient for many people and likely encourage giving.

10.3 Volunteerism (+?)

Volunteer Comox Valley (VCV)⁴⁷ supports volunteers and volunteer organizations in the Valley by providing community information resources, services and programs. Member organizations can post their volunteer opportunities at VCV where people can access and connect with agencies in need of their skills and talents. In addition, volunteers can meet staff and receive support in finding a compatible volunteer opportunity.

VCV supports 133 member organizations within the voluntary sector, down from the 184 we reported in 2009. (CVSPS, 2009, p. 102) Services include the Volunteer referral program, training and education on volunteer management, a resource library, and promotion of members: special events, fundraisers, services, programs and volunteer needs. VCV also holds annual volunteer recruitment events and provides professional development opportunities.



“Volunteer involvement is fundamental to a healthy and democratic society in Canada”. (Volunteer Canada, 2012)

Volunteerism promotes community engagement, fundamentally shaping the society in which we live. Volunteer involvement can be personally tailored to your interests: promoting a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Volunteering can improve your lifestyle, enhance your skills, and encourage connectedness.

Volunteer Comox Valley has assisted approximately 297 individuals in finding volunteer positions during 2013 or, approximately 1.14 volunteers per working day. It is noteworthy to mention that these statistics do not include the Volunteer Connector Column sponsored by the Comox Valley Record, which prints 572,000 copies of the column each year. In 2010, Statistics Canada reported an increase of 3% of the population engaged in volunteerism in British Columbia since 2007. Fifty percent of the population in British Columbia is reported to be engaged in volunteerism. (Stats Can, 2013e) In the Comox Valley, it is reported that the most common activities are fundraising, and organizing events; 27% of non-profit organizations in the valley directly support seniors, and an estimated 75% support seniors indirectly. Hundreds of people volunteer on the boards of non-profit societies, the hospital, airport commission, North Island College and many other organizations. Every year the City of Courtenay hosts a volunteer appreciation dinner at the Filberg Centre.

10.4 Non-profits (+?)

There is an estimated 170,000 non-profit organizations in Canada (Imagine Canada, 2014) including colleges, universities, foundations, art galleries, museums, sports and recreation, community social work, environment, health, law and advocacy, aboriginal, animal rescue and care, immigrant, religious and service organizations of all kinds. Thrive, an Initiative of the BC Non-Profit Sector Labour Market Partnership Project reports on its website that:

BC’s non-profit sector (NPS) comprises approximately 29,000 organizations, 66,000 full-time employees, 48,000 part-time employees and 1.5 million volunteers. The NPS is integrated into the province’s social fabric, delivering programs, services and outreach that contribute to connecting citizens, strengthening communities and shaping public policy. Grassroots reach and expertise make non-profit organizations trusted partners for the BC government in building and developing the province. The NPS delivers vital programs, services and support with the assistance of \$6.1 billion in annual public funding. (thrive, 2014)

47 http://www.valleylinks.net/volunteer_directory/index.php?r=site/index

We reported in 2009 that in 2003 there were 20,000 non-profits in BC. We've increased that 33% in the intervening years. If thrive's numbers are correct the BC Non Profit sector represents 17% of the Canadian total. Thrive notes that the NPS accounts for 6.9% of BC's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

We can't list all the non-profits in the Comox Valley, as it would require another full report. However, we will mention some so that you can get a sense of their scope and importance in the community. Suffice it to say that they are a very important part of the local economy and serve large sections of the population. Virtually every resident of the Valley is served by a non-profit organization several times a year if not daily. Some are big, North Island College, St. Joseph's Hospital, along with their respective foundations and unions, others are small like the Comox Valley Social Planning Society. They dominate the arts and culture scene: Comox Valley Art Gallery, Courtenay and Cumberland Museums, The Sid Williams Theatre, the Vancouver Island Music Fest and others. They serve the emergency social needs of the community, for example, the Food Bank, Salvation Army, Transition Society, Comox Valley Family Services Association, Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness Society, the Care-A-Van and AIDS Vancouver Island. They tend to a number of health related needs of Valley residents as in Y.A.N.A. (You Are Not Alone) Society, The Comox Valley Hospice Society, Comox Valley Child Development Association and others like LUSH Valley and the Food Bank. Organized sports activities would grind to a halt in the Valley without the NPS. Service clubs provide a myriad of community support functions including housing, amenities and social activities. Have we mentioned animal rescue and care as in the SPCA and MARS? What about environmental organizations like Project Watershed, Comox Valley Land Trust, Cumberland Community Forest Society? There are literally hundreds of them. Some are finding it difficult to recruit good, reliable volunteers. Find one today. Volunteer and make your life all the richer for it.

It seems we are a Valley of givers and volunteers but we don't vote like we used to.