

Tumbler Ridge Mayor's Task Force on Seniors' Needs: Key Summary Findings

Tumbler Ridge's Aging Population

- There were approximately 280 people (11.5% of total population) over the age of 65 in 2006 (Statistics Canada, Census).
- The proportion of the older workforce (aged 45 and older) has grown from 10.7% in 1986 to 46.7% in 2006 (Statistics Canada, Census).

Purpose of Study

- To examine the following seniors' needs: infrastructure / planning, housing, health care, social support services, transportation networking, physical environment, and education.

Who Responded to the Survey

- 524 surveys were completed for a response rate of 59.5%.
- The profile of survey respondents was very similar to socio-economic characteristics of the population found in recent Census data. Most respondents were:
 - married,
 - newcomers to the community (since 2000),
 - home owners,
 - middle-income households.
- The age profile of respondents shows a large proportion in the 'near retirement' age group (nearly 2/3 of respondents). As a result, responses indicate a growing desire to address seniors' issues.

Housing

- Current housing stock has too many stairs and limited wheelchair accessibility.
- Housing renovation is going to be a key local issue. Mobility inside of peoples' homes is going to require considerable retrofitting. This will include ramps, wider internal doorways, bathroom and kitchen grab bars, etc.
- Concern for addressing seniors' housing needs is very high and will build upon lots of local support.

Seniors' Housing

- Approximately 86% (very high) of respondents support the development of a seniors' housing complex.
- High levels of support for housing with modest levels of assistance or for multi-level care housing facilities.
- Housing facility should include a common activity room that is accessible by other older residents living in the community for day recreation, socializing, meals, and activities.

- Preferred location is within the downtown core, close to the medical centre, the community centre, shopping, and recreation.
- There is also considerable support (especially amongst the soon the retire crowd) for respite care for those providing support to seniors.
- The demand for seniors' accommodation at this point is quite low, and thus construction of a seniors' facility should probably start with the recreation/socializing facilities and add levels of housing services as the population ages.

Health Care

- A dentist is needed to fill in key health care gaps.
- Greater flexibility in the delivery of home care services.

Community Services

- There is support for municipal maintenance of roads and sidewalks, but there is also clear support for better attention to winter snow and ice clearing on roads and sidewalks. In addition, handicap parking and existing wheelchair ramps need expansion and, in some cases, relocation.
- When asked which services are needed, home care received the highest levels of support amongst survey respondents.
- Transportation services are needed to improve access to health care and other services (transportation to doctor's appointments, assistance with out-of-town medical trips, Meals on Wheels, and delivery of goods and services).
- Services are needed to help with the physical maintenance of seniors' homes (home repair, house cleaning, yard work).
- Most of the identified services fit with those identified in other northern BC communities. Three actions may be necessary. The first includes advocacy on behalf of local seniors with the Northern Health Authority. The second includes support by the District for voluntary groups providing assistance to seniors. The third includes supporting economic development initiatives that will bring private sector services to the community to take advantage of an emerging seniors market.
- A key challenge for local seniors has to do with family and friends. Increasingly, care for seniors involves the participation of these informal caregivers. Less than half of respondents reported having family in town, while almost all reported having close friends in town. While friends can provide many levels of support (yard work, transportation to shopping), they are not able to meet many of the more personal care needs. In addition, many of these close friends will also be aging and may only be able to provide limited family/friends support. This highlights the critical need to increase formal health care services (private or public).

Social, Recreational, and Educational Programs

- Develop a seniors' drop-in centre. This centre could be part of a seniors' housing facility.
- The questions on recreational programs for older residents suggest a number of areas where existing facilities can grow usage by adjusting what they offer. Very important are socializing activities such as card games, low impact exercise and swimming programs, and general fitness supports such as indoor walking opportunities in the winter.
- In addition to an active body, healthy aging includes supporting an active mind. There are opportunities to work with the College and High School to provide educational programs. Particularly important are those that allow seniors to become more comfortable on the internet. If a seniors' centre is created, computer stations will probably be popular.
- Health and wellness programs to cope with aging.
- How-to workshops for home improvements.

Information Needs

- One-stop shop for information on services and programs is needed.
- Information centre should have staff available to assist seniors with government forms.
- Information centre could coordinate volunteers with service providers to meet seniors' needs.

Transportation

- Develop a shuttle bus / van service to meet local and non-local transportation needs.
- Wheelchair accessible van for medical transportation.

Physical Environment

- Key barriers to mobility include weather, snow, and icy sidewalks.
- Improved snow removal from sidewalks is needed.

Informal Care Networks

- Many older residents have limited or no access to family, so informal care networks through friends and neighbours are important.

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