

District of Hudson's Hope Seniors' Needs Dialogue

SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared by:

Greg Halseth, Laura Ryser, and Don Manson

Community Development Institute
University of Northern B.C.

May 2008

SUMMARY REPORT

---- Executive Summary ----

District of Hudson's Hope Seniors' Needs Dialogue

Introduction

Many small places in northern BC were established and designed to attract young families. Since the 1980s, the population in these places has been aging. In Hudson's Hope, there were approximately 135 people (12.9% of the total population) over the age of 65 in 2006 (Statistics Canada, Census). At the same time, the proportion of the older workforce (aged 45 and older) has grown from 22.6% in 1971 to 47.1% in 2006. As a result, there is increased local interest in how the community, local services, and available housing options will meet the needs of a growing seniors' population. The purpose of the District of Hudson's Hope Seniors' Needs Dialogue is to explore the following seniors' needs: infrastructure and planning, housing, health care, social support services, transportation, networking, barriers to mobility, information, and education.

Key Findings

Access to Health Care

Access to the kinds of health care services needed by older people is a critical issue for local seniors and efforts to address their needs was prominent in the dialogue sessions.

- Transportation to appointments, specialists, and services that are out-of-town.
- Expanded use of 'tele-health' to enhance local access to care providers without the need for travel.
- Expanded, and coordinated, delivery of visiting service providers and specialists who come to Hudson's Hope on a routine basis.

FIRST STEPS: The District will collect information and explore options to enhance available transportation options to meet medical and hospital/care visitation needs by contacting TR Cares in Tumbler Ridge and liaising with local groups (including BC Hydro and clubs).

Seniors' Housing

There is a need for more seniors' housing and a need to renovate existing housing to help people stay in their homes longer.

- Land is available between the Health Centre and Silver Willows.
- Any new seniors' complex investments should include:
 - Social meeting spaces to address the crucial need for overcoming isolation and loneliness.
 - Kitchen for internal use, for visitors, and for providing meals to shut-ins.
 - Graduated, mixed-level housing options.
- Housing renovation information is needed, including information on assistance with the costs of such renovations.

FIRST STEPS: The District, and a couple of members from the community, will attend a meeting in Fort St. John on June 17, 2008 to meet representatives from the non-profit housing sector and learn about options for pursuing seniors' housing.

Town Hall

There is a need to get additional community information for seniors, and to make it available on a routine basis.

- Information centre / seniors' bulletin board.
- Seniors' section of the community bulletin.

There is a need to make sure it is safe to walk around the community.

- Gravel and gravel clean-up procedures need attention.
- Snow and ice removal procedures need attention from the District and the retail business areas.

FIRST STEPS: The community bulletin will have a separate section devoted to seniors' information needs. The District will ensure that bulletins are collected together in a binder, and that these binders are deposited at several locations in the community so that people can refer to current and past bulletins for information.

Volunteer Coordinator Program

There are a lot of positive things happening for seniors, but there is a need for greater coordination to avoid duplication and volunteer burnout.

- Options for a paid coordinator include via a municipal position / social development officer.
- Coordinate volunteer groups and school participation.
- Coordinate information about community groups and activities, and increase awareness of these groups and activities.
- Enhance awareness of the hours of operation for various community services and facilities (and put this information onto a fridge magnet so people can easily refer to it). Increasing knowledge and awareness about local activities is one way to connect seniors and to start to address issues of loneliness.

FIRST STEPS: The District will bring together the Social Events Coordinator and the local librarian to help plan and produce a calendar of seniors' events/activities over the year for the community.

Supporting a Healthy Body and Mind

There is a need for more year-round recreation opportunities.

- Multi-use curling facility.
 - Indoor walking programs.
 - Social events on a routine basis.
- More sidewalks and pathways.
- More benches / shade in parks.

There is also a need to access lifelong learning opportunities.

- Access to NLCC courses and facilities.
 - Internet and e-mail lessons as part of computer literacy.
- More general education/information programs for seniors.
- Partner to grow the local collection of oral histories on specific as well as general information.
- Links between seniors and the local school.

FIRST STEPS: Exploration of the level of community interest in developing an indoor walking and socializing program at the curling rink will be followed up by the District (through the bulletin), by Silver Willow Court, and by the New Horizons group.

SUMMARY REPORT

District of Hudson's Hope Seniors' Needs Dialogue

The aging population in Hudson's Hope

- There were approximately 135 people (12.9% 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 22.6% in 1971 to 47.1% in 2006 (Statistics Canada, Census).

Purpose of the study

- The Community Development Institute at UNBC facilitated a community dialogue to examine housing, service, and support needs for older residents in the District of Hudson's Hope and to provide a summary of the dialogue for use by the District.
- The Seniors' Needs Dialogue was held on April 29, 2008 and a follow-up meeting with this same group was held on May 26, 2008.

Who attended the seniors' needs dialogue?

Dora Cumming
Terry Peressini
Harv Armitage
Guy Armitage
Pat Townsley
Elaine and Bud Ferguson
Pastor Thomas and Rosemary Belcher
Carolyn Bonnick
Susan Worrall
Janis and Dick Storey
Ida and Gerry Sarauer
Gwen Johansson
Lenore Harwood

Migration/Mobility

Advantages to retiring in the area

- Positive attributes of small town living include the slow pace of living, little traffic, safety, and ease of getting around a small town.
- Environmental and recreational assets include clean air, the close proximity to nature, and the breadth of seniors' activities for those who wish to participate.
- Hudson's Hope has a very supportive community. Good support networks include friends and neighbours.

- Reasonable housing costs and low taxes offer an affordable cost of living.
- Useful services that enhance retirement living in Hudson's Hope include good snow removal operations. Public works staff even clear seniors' driveways of snow.
- Health care staff are always good and helpful.
- Maintenance of all patient medical records in the health centre is a very supportive part of local care for older residents.
- While there are concerns about a lack of services, local seniors remain independent longer.

Disadvantages to retiring in the area

- Challenges with housing include too many stairs and lack of railings. There are no housing options that allow older residents to downsize. Older homes were also poorly built for cold climates, resulting in costly renovation needs for seniors.
- Concerns about limited access to services focused on health care providers, trade professionals, and the seniors' drop-in centre.
- The lack of consistency and availability of health care services suited to older people is a significant concern for local seniors. Lack of availability means that people have to travel too often to access needed care. In many cases, this may mean that people do not seek help when needed and small problems can become larger. Consistency concerns focus especially on the ability to keep doctors in the community so that they get to know the patients and the patients feel comfortable with the doctors.
- Residents must travel to distant regional centres to access specialized health care services. Residents are frustrated by extra travel costs incurred by requirements to arrive two days ahead of surgery to fill out forms that they feel could be handled over the phone, the Internet, or by local clinical staff. There are also difficulties accessing services to help older residents stay in their homes longer.
- It is difficult for older residents to access and pay for travel time for trades workers who must come from distant centres.
- Hudson's Hope has a seniors' centre. However, New Horizons is only open once per week. Regular hours and volunteer staff are needed to ensure seniors always have a place to go.
- There is no formal structural framework of support to assist seniors who have no family in Hudson's Hope.
- There is a rising cost of living associated with high fuel costs and heating homes. Unfortunately, if seniors cannot afford to make energy-efficient retrofits to their homes, they will pay high costs for heating.
- Rising energy costs are impacting the volunteer sector as volunteers can no longer afford to drive other people.
- Actions, such as idling cars and wood burning stoves, have led to poor air quality.
- Isolation is a disadvantage, particularly for those who live in the outlying areas of town. There is a lack of support to connect with seniors in outlying areas to ensure their safety and needs are being met.
- Icy roads during the winter months impacts safety and mobility.

Healthy and happy in their homes

Participants were asked to identify services, activities, or other changes needed to keep older residents healthy and happy in their own homes. In response, participants identified a range of short-term, medium-term, and long-term needs and strategies that will enhance independent living for older residents. In addition to health and safety matters, keeping people ‘healthy and happy’ in their own home also means supporting and connecting people so as to address the challenges of isolation and loneliness.

Short-term

- Address infrastructure needs by increasing the number of sidewalks (including by widening the paved surface) throughout town.
- More efficient use of existing infrastructure to improve recreational opportunities. Participants recommended using the curling building to accommodate a winter walking program. This would provide a central place to exercise throughout the year. The curling centre is equipped with an elevator for wheelchair accessibility.
- Affordable exercise programs are needed for seniors. Fitness programs could also be delivered by seniors to encourage participation.
- Networks need to be formalized through telephone trees to improve safety and communication. Current networking is sporadic and unpredictable. A formal help line would be helpful.
- There is a need to expand and support the volunteer base. An incentive program could be developed to retain and recruit volunteers. Some organizations in other places offer \$0.35 tickets that are distributed to volunteers for every half hour of volunteer work completed. These tickets are redeemable in the cafeteria. Currently, Hudson’s Hope has an annual volunteer recognition award. Nominations are submitted by the organization. The winner receives \$1,000 that is donated towards their organization. However, it was felt that more needs to be done to recognize a broader spectrum of volunteers.

Medium-term

- Address equipment needs through a bulk purchase of rakes, easy push lawn mowers, winter shoe cleats, and equipment to shovel snow. This can be linked to an ‘equipment loan’ program.
- Acquire a low shuttle vehicle to transport people from outlying areas and around the community to access services. The van currently used is too high for many older residents.
- Improve ventilation in senior housing facilities to minimize the impact of smoking.
- Policy changes are needed to mitigate impacts of woodstoves on air quality, particularly during inversion events.
- Home makers are needed to maintain people in their homes. Home makers would fulfill maintenance duties, such as cleaning windows, the fridge, and the stove.
- Improve or increase home care services.
- Recruit seniors to help other seniors with minor home repairs.
- One-stop information about available services.

Long-term

- Address infrastructure needs including assisted living housing units and automatic doors on public buildings and commercial buildings.
- Use smaller gravel aggregates for sanding roads during the winter. Gravel causes a safety concern for seniors when they walk during the winter.
- Add a taxi service
- Need a coordinator for volunteer driver services.
- Address information and communication needs by developing a one-stop information source.
- Provide educational opportunities to increase technology use by seniors and to broaden awareness about financial assistance programs for retrofitting homes.

Housing

Participants were asked to discuss problems or positive attributes of current housing for older residents.

Silver Willow Court (letter submitted to the dialogue group)

- With a waiting list of ten people, Silver Willow Court needs to be expanded.
- Consists of ten subsidized, independent living units.
- Two units are wheelchair accessible. However, access to the basement is a challenge.
- Although the complex is equipped with kitchen facilities, participants felt that kitchen services need to be expanded to include assistance with meal preparation.

Abbeyfield in Fort St. John

- When reflecting on future housing needs, some participants talked about the design and operations of the Abbeyfield housing units in Fort St. John.
- These units were built on Styrofoam block construction.
- With no facility use in the basement, some felt this space could be used more effectively.
- The upper floor has twelve small units equipped with toilets and a sink, as well as room for a small fridge, toaster, or microwave. There is also a communal dining area and three communal showers. Food is set out for residents to have breakfast.
- A 3 bedroom apartment on the top floor is allocated for the manager.
- The manager is required to be on-call 24 hours a day as the care-taker.
- While some residents may have diabetes, they are not allowed to have any major health complications. They must be able to perform daily functions, such as making their beds and cleaning their laundry.
- The facility draws upon a geothermal heating system.

Housing needs

- Challenges with housing include too many stairs and lack of railings. There are no housing options that allow older residents to downsize. Older homes are poorly built for cold climates, resulting in costly renovations for seniors.
- An ‘information’ person or centre needs to be established that will collect information about housing renovation options, processes, and funding assistance programs so that seniors can get the most accurate and comprehensive information at ‘one stop’.
- Bring in an expert to do a workshop on ‘how to install’ facilities and equipment for older residents.
- Participants discussed a range of housing needs. These included single-level dwellings, independent housing options, such as apartments and condos, assisted living units, and affordable housing. Condominiums would benefit residents who no longer wish to own their own homes, but would like to remain in town. This would allow them to feel comfortable to lock up their condominium and spend the winter in a southern community.
- Adequate planning should ensure future housing facilities incorporate energy-efficient designs in order to minimize operational costs. Alternative forms of energy, such as geothermal energy, and more efficient wood burning stoves should also be considered.
- While some inquired about mixed generational housing options in Coquitlam, some identified difficulties between seniors and youth interacting in a respectful manner.
- Interior design improvements should include wider doors, door handles instead of knobs, grab bars and railings in bathrooms and tubs, a main level storage area, lined drapes to keep rooms warm during the winter and cool during the summer, and lower windows in the bedrooms to enable those in wheelchairs to view the outside.
- Exterior design improvements should include wider doors, automatic doors with sensible opening periods, and temporary rental ramps for residents experiencing temporary disability. Some recommended that ramp building days could be organized with local volunteers. The Measuring Up the North Committee in Hudson’s Hope is looking at acquiring two ramps for rental. The committee is currently assessing buildings that need accessibility improvements.
- A high school incentive program could be developed to assist seniors with home repairs, maintenance, and house cleaning.
- Services at assisted living facilities should begin with meal services and move gradually to provide additional services. It was recommended to contract a local restaurant to bring in a certain number of meals for seniors. A venue could be created where residents from around the community could go to receive a \$5 meal and then return home.
- Policies and funding programs need to recognize ongoing operational needs. It is often easy to obtain funding to build facilities or to install elevators, but there is no funding to maintain facilities.
- Options for exploring alternative ways to provide a seniors centre that includes housing need to be pursued. There is, for example, an upcoming meeting in Fort St. John in June that will provide information about non-profit housing options to the region.

Services

Participants were asked to describe useful services in Hudson's Hope, as well as needed services that currently are not provided.

Current services

- New Horizons Club.
- Craft Club.
- Monthly dinners and card games.
- Seniors Games.
- Check-ups for pacemakers.
- Good civic infrastructure (including the curling rink).
- Seniors' bus.
- Crafts programs.
- There was strong support for finding ways to help current services stay sustainable as they meet many specific needs as well as some general needs such as addressing isolation and loneliness.

Needed services

- Improved information and communication mechanisms are needed to increase awareness about service supports. This could include hiring an information coordinator. Events, such as senior dinners, could be used to hold information nights. The Wise Owl program is useful to inform seniors about scams. Information is required regarding when the seniors' bus departs town, the range of services available, the hours of operation, key contact personnel, etc. Other communication mechanisms may include a seniors' bulletin board or space within the community bulletin. Copies of bulletin newsletters could be put into the library to allow seniors to access information about services and issues when needed. Information and communication mechanisms should become normal and ongoing.
- It is difficult for older residents to access and pay for travel time for trades workers who must come from distant centres.
- A program could be developed to link high school kids with seniors each spring to do yard maintenance or spring cleaning activities.
- The New Horizons building is limited in size. A larger facility to accommodate seniors' activities is needed. The new facility should have regular daily hours. It should be equipped with a billiard table, games, shuffleboard, card tables, and a small workshop area.
- Existing infrastructure should be used better to expand recreational opportunities and to meet service needs for seniors throughout the year. The curling club could become a hub for addressing seniors' needs. The curling club could also provide a year round place for people to walk. If the curling club is used as a hub for communication, transportation, and activities, it should have regular hours.
- To improve affordable access to health and social support services, participants advocated for more visiting specialists or improved transportation to regional centres.

- A regular commuting schedule for the community bus should be advertised amongst health care providers in regional centres so that medical appointments could be coordinated to fit travel dates.
- Explore utilizing part-time ambulance attendants who are not attending an emergency to address other needs, such as coordinating medical appointments.
- Develop a Meals on Wheels program 2 to 3 times per week. Meals could be delivered by a local restaurant or the Ladies Club.
- Expand and maintain the volunteer base. Organizations and individuals have had difficulty finding volunteers and professionals to do work. They need to understand what makes people volunteer or not volunteer. Some volunteers are willing to give their time, but they do not wish to be out of pocket for expenses. Since foster parents receive discounts for their work, participants recommended exploring business discounts to support volunteers. For example, through volunteer work, kids could collect stamps to receive free video rentals. Others recommended developing a fee for service to cover volunteer gas costs.
- A volunteer coordinator could be hired to relieve the burden of volunteers receiving phone calls for support. Instead, a volunteer could arrive at an office and obtain a list of people needing rides for that day.
- Participants cautioned raising expectations that are difficult to maintain over time. All initiatives must be sustainable.

Informal and Formal Care Networks

Participants were asked to discuss informal and formal care networks that are available to older residents if their family and friends are not available to provide assistance.

- Better support is needed to enhance volunteer work. Foremost, volunteers should be reimbursed for costs incurred during volunteer activities.
- Funding is needed to support a part-time seniors' coordinator.
- Develop a support group for informal care givers. To accomplish this, respite care needs to be expanded to enable care givers to attend the group.
- Clarify insurance expectations for volunteer drivers.
- Develop a more formalized structure for informal volunteer drivers.
- Improve coordination amongst informal care networks. In some cases, volunteer efforts need to be consolidated.
- Coordinate a car pool to provide transportation to Fort St. John.
- Examine the Tumbler Ridge Cares model for providing medical transportation to Fort St. John. If the medical van has extra seats, enable residents to use them to go shopping.
- Since many residents do not use e-mail, ensure that there are multiple methods to communicate formal and informal services.
- Develop a local radio station for public service announcements and a buy and sell. The radio station could be operated by volunteers such as high school students.
- Develop a telephone tree to call seniors daily to check on them and to avoid feelings of loneliness. This could be coordinated by Community Care.

- Formal care needs include mental health care providers, geriatric care, physiotherapy, and a respiratory technician.
- To alleviate patient financial pressures, technicians should travel to outlying communities.
- Develop a seniors' council consisting of two or three seniors.

Health Care

Participants were asked to identify the most useful health care services and the most critical health care service needs.

- Outlying hospitals are good at contacting home care and notifying them about who needs assistance.
- It was again noted that there is a lack of consistency and availability with respect to health care services suited to older people. This is a significant concern as more people have to travel out-of-town for care and that 'rotating' doctors never really achieve a good knowledge of their patients.
- The community must play a bigger role in attracting medical staff. The town has a past track record of experience and successes with this recruitment. It was also felt that attracting medical staff who enjoy the quality of life of a small town will lead to better retention.
- During the heart and stroke activity day, 450 people completed stress testing.
- Hudson's Hope now has access to video conferencing. This equipment could be set up to enable access to specialized health care providers.
- Specialized health care services needed include a dentist, psychiatrist, chiropractor, occupational therapist, diagnostic services, geriatric care, physiotherapy, and a respiratory technician.
- Develop a pre-operative program at the local clinic to minimize the time residents spend in regional centres.
- General health care services needed include general practitioners, locums, nurse practitioners, a pharmacist, and ambulance attendants. Hudson's Hope has signed up to participate in practicum programs with UNBC's Northern Medical Program. They have hosted a registered nurse in the community for a weekend.
- Additional training for ambulance drivers is required to enable them to give an IV to patients en route to Fort St. John.
- Additional training programs must be better suited to the circumstances of rural and small town places. For example, more training needs to be delivered 'locally'. There needs to be an understanding that not only do training costs need to be funded but also that lost work time and wages also need to be compensated for, and that any training must fit with work and other local schedules. If there are no other options than making people go out-of-town for training purposes, then relief service providers need to be brought in to cover the service provision.
- Develop fall prevention programs, exercise programs, pace maker checks, and educational programs. Education programs could cover topics such as safety, using the

RCMP or Wise Owl program, nutrition, conflicts between herbal medicine and prescription medicine, and addressing joint problems.

Transportation

Participants were asked to explore key transportation needs for inside the community and to travel out-of-town.

Local transportation needs

- Purchase a low, easy access vehicle to transport seniors to the grocery store, post office, library, hardware store, clinic, and recreational opportunities. The van currently used is too high.

Out-of-town transportation needs

- Use the Lions' van or school bus to take seniors to the movie theatre in Fort St. John or Chetwynd once or twice a month.
- Organize a monthly trip to Chetwynd. Currently, the Lion's van takes residents to Fort St. John once per month.
- Organize sight seeing tours to area attractions to shake off cabin fever.
- A critical health care aspect to out-of-town transportation involves making provision to bring people on a regular basis to Fort St. John to visit family and spouses who are in hospital or in long term care homes.

Physical Environment

Participants were asked to identify physical barriers that prohibit seniors from walking around the community.

Sidewalks and roads

- Sidewalks should radiate from the health centre.
- More sidewalks should be developed around the library.
- More sidewalks are needed around Silver Willows.
- Install sidewalks behind the grocery store that lead to Silver Willows.
- Expand paving program to create walking lanes throughout the community.
- Improve dust control on rural roads, particularly on Prairie Road.

Ramps

- The front door at Silver Willows only has stairs.
- Ramps need to be installed at the Silver Willow Court and the Shop Easy grocery store.

Parks

- Install benches around town.
- Install a water fountain at Beattie Park.
- More picnic tables are needed in local parks.
- Install year round public washrooms at Beattie Park.
- Install shaded pavilions in local parks.
- Plant more trees in local parks to develop more shade.
- Create space in local parks for lawn bowling and bocce ball.

Institutional buildings

- Install benches in front of the post office.
- Upgrade the parking areas at the post office so that access for older drivers is easier. This includes attention to the ditches, removal of the tree at the driveway entrance, and installing a drive-through circle that passes out behind the post office now that access across the adjoining property is blocked by fencing.
- Install automatic doors in the basement of the municipal hall. Currently, there is a steep ramp and a sudden stop leading to the new council chambers.
- Install automatic doors at the library, municipal office, and Silver Willow Court.
- Improve the parking lot at the post office by cutting down the tree or withdrawing the fence.

Retail buildings

- Encourage retail businesses, such as the liquor store and the Shop Easy grocery store, to install automatic doors.

Policy changes

- Adding to earlier notes about the need for an ‘information’ person or centre, there needs to be better ‘one stop’ access to information about wood stove and chimney replacement and maintenance, including rebate programs and the like.
- Mobility can be impacted by poor air quality caused by inversions, wood burning, and car idling. Participants recommended creating an idling by-law to improve air quality. Current initiatives include installing signs throughout the community.
- Create a by-law to avoid lawn burning in town.
- Develop programs to ensure homes have proper, efficient wood burning stoves and chimneys.
- Develop educational programs to ensure people burn dry and not damp wood.

Quality of Life

Participants were asked to discuss community activities and programs that should be provided to help seniors maintain their health and independence.

Educational programs

- Expand library programs. Develop oral history programs in cooperation with the historical society to record what attracted seniors to the area and what kept them in the community. Recorded oral histories can be played at the library. It was pointed out that defining the content for these oral histories can be made quite broad so that it includes not only local histories but also general historical information about life and activities from people with varied experiences and backgrounds.
- Convert older tapes of oral histories with newer technology before the information is lost.
- Acquire more tape recorders for the library to play audio / book tapes. These tape recorders could be distributed to seniors' homes.
- Develop a book club.
- Acquire large print books and books on tape for the library.
- Develop a reading buddies program with high school kids.
- Expand hours of operation for the library.
- Provide access to college computers for general use and computer training programs.
- Assess courses seniors would be interested in taking at the college (i.e. philosophy).
- Expand seniors' access to classes and learning spaces at the NLC campus in Hudson's Hope. Increase band width for video conferencing. Use video conferencing to provide opportunities to take college and university courses in other places.
- Offer free courses for seniors at the college.
- Incorporate seniors into history classes.

Recreation and social programs

- A range of suggestions were raised that use the expertise and knowledge of seniors and that also help meet local needs such as with addressing isolation and loneliness.
- Organize movie discussion groups.
- Organize presentations at the annual fall supper about oral histories of local families, early exploration trips, and the botanical characteristics of the region.
- Develop programs with guides and outfitters to obtain their perspective on the area.
- Develop outdoor programs, such as hiking.
- Acquire metal detectors for hiking programs.
- Lower curling fees for seniors.
- Make the "dinosaur tracks" path wheelchair accessible. Clear a small parking lot area and create a wooden walkway to the tracks.
- Organize community trips to local points of interest, old mine sites, fossil areas, fishing areas, movie theatres, plays, and musicals.
- Use seniors to meet and greet tourists.

- Post proper signage at Alexander Mackenzie Buffs where the underground fire was discovered by Mackenzie.

Support Services

- Hire a grants application specialist.
-

For further information about project results, contact Greg Halseth, Acting Director of UNBC's Community Development Institute:

Greg Halseth, Geography Program
University of Northern BC
3333 University Way, Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

Tel: 250-960-5826
E-mail: halseth@unbc.ca
<http://www.unbc.ca/cdi>