

**Tumbler Ridge
Community Transition Survey 2001
Summary Report**

for:

Tumbler Ridge Employment Development Services Committee
District of Tumbler Ridge
UNBC Northern Land Use Institute
Community Transition Branch of the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's
Services

prepared by:

Greg Halseth
and
Laura Ryser

Geography Program
University of Northern British Columbia

March 20, 2002

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Project Description

The community of Tumbler Ridge is in a state of transition. Rapid changes since the March 2000 announcement of the Quintette mine closure are being undertaken as part of a community revitalization strategy. During this transition, information on the makeup and needs of local residents will be useful to a range of groups, service providers and decision-makers in Tumbler Ridge. This need for timely and relevant information about how the community is changing has been made more urgent as a result of a second round of layoffs involving Quintette's reclamation crew and the success of the Tumbler Ridge Housing Corporation's sale of properties.

Types of information needed during this transition include socio-economic profiles of residents to see how the town is changing, identification of program and activity needs for the recreation centre and for local service providers (especially unmet needs), patterns of housing use, a review of community quality of life issues, and patterns of local participation by residents. People and groups in Tumbler Ridge are interested in this survey because of the information they need to adjust to changing local circumstances.

As a result of pressures associated with community transition, a questionnaire survey of residents and property owners was undertaken in the fall of 2001. The questionnaire process was developed in concert with a number of partners including the District of Tumbler Ridge, the Tumbler Ridge Employment Development Services Committee, the Community Transition Branch in the Local Government Department of the Provincial Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services, and the University of Northern British Columbia's Northern Land Use Institute. The questionnaire was carried out under the direction of Greg Halseth of the Geography Program at the University of Northern British Columbia.

Acknowledgments

In order to complete this research project, a great deal of assistance was required. First and foremost, we would like to thank and recognize all residents and property owners in Tumbler Ridge who took the time to be interviewed or to complete the questionnaire. The response rate to the survey was tremendous, demonstrating a depth of interest in both the town and its transition planning process.

It is important to recognize our partners in this study. These include the District of Tumbler Ridge, the Tumbler Ridge Employment Development Services Committee, the Community Transition Branch in the Local Government Department of the Provincial Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services, and the University of Northern British Columbia's Northern Land Use Institute.

We would like to also acknowledge the financial support of the Tumbler Ridge Employment Development Services Committee, the Community Transition Branch of the Provincial Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services, and the University of Northern British Columbia's Northern Land Use Institute. Fred Banham in Tumbler Ridge and Brent Mueller in Victoria deserve special acknowledgment for their support, advice, and assistance.

Lana Sullivan and Greg Halseth have been working with northern communities, including Tumbler Ridge, for the past 4 years. We would like to thank Lana for her help with local logistics as we set in place the fieldwork for the 2001 Transition Survey.

Finally, we would also like to thank Brian Stauffer who, along with Laura Ryser, formed our research team in Tumbler Ridge. Together, they knocked on every door in town (up to three times if they couldn't get anyone at home) and worked long hours through September and October to complete the survey work. They very much enjoyed the process of getting to know Tumbler Ridge and it now fills a special place in their memories. Laura continued with the project in creating the databases from the survey and assisting with the report preparation.

Greg Halseth and Laura Ryser
Prince George
March 2002

Other Reports

Summary Report

Methodology Report

Report on New 'Tools' for Community Economic Development

Socio-Economic Profile Report

Report on Perceptions of Community, Services, and Programming Needs

Availability

Copies of all reports from the 2001 Tumbler Ridge Community Transition Survey are available in a number of locations. In Tumbler Ridge, copies have been deposited with the District of Tumbler Ridge offices, the Tumbler Ridge Employment Development Services Committee, and the public library. In addition, copies of the reports are available on-line at the District of Tumbler Ridge website (<http://www.district.tumbler-ridge.bc.ca/>). At the University of Northern British Columbia copies have been deposited with the Northern Land Use Institute and the Weller Library.

Tumbler Ridge Community Transition Survey 2001 Summary Report

INTRODUCTION

Tumbler Ridge has experienced considerable change and transition since the announcement of the Quintette mine closure. Some long time residents have left town in search of work while others have purchased homes in Tumbler Ridge and made a commitment to local economic diversification. The very successful housing sale managed by the Tumbler Ridge Housing Corporation has brought many new residents to the town, and introduced many who became out-of-town property owners. The sale of the homes and successful marketing of the community was facilitated, in part, through the provincial government's transition assistance package that put the District into a more solid financial position and also ensured the protection of core public services like education and health through the transition period. In addition to these local population changes, the local government and other organizations have been working on a range of social and economic transition plans. The Tumbler Ridge Revitalization Task Force and the Tumbler Ridge Employment Development Services Committee have been two of many notable efforts. As local groups and decision-makers plan for the future, they need information on how the town is changing. As well, residents and property owners need a forum through which they can communicate their ideas and suggestions for the future of their town. This report uses information from the 2001 Tumbler Ridge Community Transition Survey to cover both these bases. We hope that local decision-makers will find the information they need for sound planning and we hope that our survey respondents see their input recorded and transmitted.

A note of caution is required. The results described in this report are from a household survey. As such, it includes only the responses of those who completed the survey forms. It is not a 100 percent census of the local population. Any extrapolation of these numbers to the Tumbler Ridge population as a whole is based on the assumption that non-respondents (as a group) have the same general socio-economic characteristics as respondents (as a group).

SURVEY PROFILE

Part 1 Respondent / Household Overview

About three quarters of respondents have lived in Tumbler Ridge previous to the survey being conducted. The impact of the recent housing sales program is clear, as over half of these respondents had lived in town only during the recent period of transition and change since Quintette's closing. In contrast, nearly 40 percent of respondents had lived in Tumbler Ridge for 10 or more years. These are long term residents who have lived in town since before the first 1990 restructuring at Quintette. Most out-of-town property owners had never lived in Tumbler Ridge.

Almost all residents and property owners have experience living in a rural or small town setting. For those who have moved to Tumbler Ridge, about one-third had moved directly from another small town while about one-fifth had moved from a large city.

Respondents were asked to evaluate their own relative health and well-being. A person's assessment of their own health and stress levels is a good barometer of how the broader community is reacting to change. Most respondents rated their health about the same or better than others their age. Similarly, most respondents rated their stress levels as similar to or better than others their age. Home owners and new residents reported less stress relative to others their own age. Given recent changes, Tumbler Ridge residents appear quite resilient.

When asked about whether there were any dependents living in the household, approximately half of respondents reported children living in the home. There were very few special needs dependents identified through the survey. These findings have implications for service delivery in Tumbler Ridge. First, there continues to be a need for services to children, youth, and teens. Second, special needs do exist and local service providers must ensure residents know what is available locally.

SURVEY PROFILE

Part 2 Household Characteristics

The population of resource towns in northern BC typically includes many young married households with children. This description certainly fit Tumbler Ridge for most of its first 20 years. For some characteristics, this still holds true. For example, most respondents were either married or living with a partner. Since 2000, however, the local population has been changing. While Tumbler Ridge still has large shares of both children and working age adults, nearly 25 percent of respondents are now over 55 years of age. Tumbler Ridge's age pattern now closely resembles the provincial average. This change in the age profile of residents is a significant departure from the past and from the typical resource community pattern. The age profile shift has a number of implications. Employment opportunities, education needs, and services provision must all adjust to a population with large shares of children, youth, teens, adults, and seniors.

As the age profile has changed, so too has household income levels. Historically, Tumbler Ridge was notable for the high incomes associated with the resource sector. This previous pattern of high incomes has been replaced by a broader distribution. One explanation is that retired households often have lower annual incomes, something which is not necessarily a good measure of their household wealth.

Tumbler Ridge has always been a place where people were able to find employment. This is still the case as about two-thirds of respondents and spouses are employed. Almost half of respondents were working full-time, with the next largest category being people who are retired. For those who were working, most are employed year round.

The most common economic sector for Tumbler Ridge continues to be mining, where about one-quarter of workers participate. The next largest sectors involve health and social services, construction, education services, accommodation, food and beverage services, and tourism services. The survey found that the distribution is quite different from the historic pattern in Tumbler Ridge, where most employment had been connected with the two coal mines. This is a change which could have implications for the advanced training and education courses provided through organizations like Northern Lights College.

HOUSING PROFILE

Part 1 Housing Characteristics

Most of the housing stock in Tumbler Ridge is single detached houses on individual residential properties. The remainder is mainly apartment units and manufactured home sites. This is quite typical of the single-industry towns developed since World War II.

Most respondents to the 2001 Tumbler Ridge Community Transition Survey lived in or owned a single detached house. This is due not only to the Canadian housing preference for single detached houses, but also because many manufactured home sites stood empty and not all of the apartment buildings had been opened up for sale by the time of the survey. When asked whether they own or rent their home, most respondents owned their property. For most owners, this was the first home they had owned in town.

Most property owners purchased their Tumbler Ridge property in the past two years. This coincides with the Tumbler Ridge Housing Corporation sale. An additional group had purchased their houses before 2000. This group was involved either in the early house sales by Bullmoose Operating Corporation or they were manufactured home owners. The long term residents who purchased their property before 2000 were clearly expressing an early desire to make a commitment to the community.

For those who are renting their property in Tumbler Ridge, most are renting from a private property owner. Additionally, some are renting from the District of Tumbler Ridge, from one of the resource companies in or around the Tumbler Ridge area, or are in the Tumbler Ridge Housing Co-op.

The return to home ownership has a number of implications in Tumbler Ridge. These include the need for house and property maintenance services. Home repair and renovation is also going to be a growth area, and there are many residents with skills that could be applied to these tasks. There are also opportunities for businesses catering to these garden and building supply needs. The more these services and sales can be done within town by local companies, the more local jobs will be created.

HOUSING PROFILE

Part 2 Tumbler Ridge Housing Sale

Property sales through the Tumbler Ridge Housing Corporation has been one of the defining characteristics of community transition in Tumbler Ridge. When asked for what purpose they purchased their property, about 60 percent of respondents said they had purchased as a permanent residence. Additional reasons identified were as an investment, seasonal get-away, retirement property, and future retirement property. Most of those who purchased their property as an investment do not live in town.

When asked why they chose to relocate or purchase a home in Tumbler Ridge, the largest response was 'inexpensive housing'. Price was one of the key marketing tools employed by the Tumbler Ridge Housing Corporation. In addition, good retirement location, small community, and availability of outdoor recreation all were cited as important reasons for choosing to relocate or purchase in Tumbler Ridge.

For the people who purchased their property for part-time or seasonal occupancy, most expect to use their Tumbler Ridge houses during July and August, with the May through October period also being quite popular. Summer recreation seems to be the motivation for most seasonal-use purchasers. This seasonal influx of people provides many opportunities to local businesses and activities.

When asked about how they heard about the Tumbler Ridge housing sale, the most popular answer was from a family member or from a friend. The next most popular means was via the television or newspaper media. For those who wanted more information about the Tumbler Ridge housing sale, about 180 people said they used the Tumbler Ridge Housing Corporation's Internet website. Of these, approximately half now live in Tumbler Ridge. Finally, most respondents felt that the quality of service they received from the Tumbler Ridge Housing Corporation was good or excellent.

COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE

Part 1 Local Participation

Community quality of life, and residents' satisfaction with their community, are critical predictors of success in community economic development. One key element of local quality of life is whether residents are active in their community. This activity can include participation in both formal and volunteer groups. More than one-third of those surveyed were already a member of a local club or organization. Many new residents also told us that while they had not yet had time to join a local club, they were planning to do so in the near future.

The most popular local clubs or organizations included sports and recreation groups like the Curling Club, the Golf Club, and the Wolverine Nordic Mountain Society. Popular service organizations included the Legion, Block Watch, the Tumbler Ridge Family Support Society, the Hospital Board, the Library Board, the Shriners, and Tumbler Ridge Recycling. There were also people active with youth or children's scouting and sports teams, as well as people involved with a number of local churches. Membership in seniors' organizations included either the Old Timer's Hockey Club or the 49 Forever Club.

Many people said the highlight of their community participation was with the Grizzly Valley Days Society.

When asked about any clubs or organizations that they would like to see become active in Tumbler Ridge, respondents listed many possibilities. These included bowling, curling, golf, teen groups, music and dance, gardening, arts and theatre, women's organizations, Toastmasters, Lions, Legion, Knights of Columbus, seniors, Al-Anon, Alcoholics Anonymous, Home Support, and Transition houses. It must be pointed out that many of these groups already exist in Tumbler Ridge and publicity may help attract new members.

While some local groups have been in-active in recent years due to membership turnover, it looks like there is a solid foundation for renewal. As well, the considerable range of interests and topics raised by respondents may provide the synergy for new activities or organizations to be developed in Tumbler Ridge.

COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE

Part 2 Quality of Life Perceptions

Residents and property owners are overall very satisfied with the quality of life available in Tumbler Ridge. This positive sense of local quality of life bodes well for Tumbler Ridge and community revitalization work. Of note is that respondent satisfaction with housing, voluntary organizations, community pride, community events, recreation organizations, community safety, recycling, and the clean environment (air quality) is very high. New residents tended to be even more satisfied than long term residents.

Respondents were less satisfied with employment opportunities, opportunities for youth and women, and the availability of shopping in Tumbler Ridge.

Based on these results, Tumbler Ridge has a strong foundation upon which to build. Opportunities for youth, women, and shopping have long been difficult issues in rural and small town Canada. In addition, employment opportunities are a particular issue around which Tumbler Ridge's current economic revitalization efforts are focused. That newly arrived residents tend to be even more satisfied with quality of life issues than long term residents bodes well for their participation in local revitalization.

Respondents were much quicker to identify things they liked about the Tumbler Ridge area than things they disliked. Disliked things included limited shopping options, limited entertainment options, isolation, and the state of the Provincial highways providing access to town. It should be noted that shopping services had been much more vigorous in Tumbler Ridge prior to the 1990 restructuring at Quintette and recent newspaper articles on new businesses starting in town will help broaden shopping opportunities and retail competition. Some other items included dogs, education, housing, medical services, in-town transportation, vandalism, weather, and youth boredom. In some cases, the local government has little control over the situation, but for others they have already started action (such as local bylaw changes).

More than twice as many comments were made about things people liked most about the Tumbler Ridge area. Small town life and the natural environment are overwhelmingly favourites. In addition, the peace and isolation of the townsite, the facilities and opportunities of the Tumbler Ridge Recreation Centre, and community safety were also commented on very often.

LOCAL SERVICES

Part 1 Government Services Satisfaction

All government provided community services identified in the survey received strong votes of satisfaction. There are several questions, including children and family services, public schools, post secondary schools, and counseling services where the number of responses is quite low because people were less familiar with these particular services. One critical part of the Tumbler Ridge Revitalization Task Force recommendations was that funding be provided to ensure that basic community services be maintained over a period of community change and uncertainty. This provision of funding through the provincial government's transition assistance package has clearly been important to maintaining resident quality of life, community satisfaction, and the attractiveness of Tumbler Ridge for those deciding whether to purchase a home and to invest in the future of the town.

About 16 percent of those surveyed reported needing special health services for someone in their household. This level of need was generally the same for owners and renters, long time and new residents, and local residents and out-of-town owners. The most commonly listed special health needs were diabetic services, heart services, and physiotherapy services.

Health care provision is an ongoing and difficult issue across all of rural and small town Canada. Over half of those surveyed gave suggestions to improve health services in Tumbler Ridge. Most of these suggestions were for additional services such as overnight hospital stays and additional staff such as doctors and nurses.

The suggestions confirm the findings of other cross-Canada research into health service conditions in rural and small town places. Pressures on funding, and cutbacks in service provision, has meant that rural and small town places do not have the level or types of specialist services, equipment, or trained staff (including doctors and nurses) to meet local needs. As a result, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of people who must leave their local communities for anything but routine health care needs. For shift workers, this often means a loss of work time, for older residents, it often means finding transportation due to lack of bus services.

LOCAL SERVICES

Part 2 Community Social Services Awareness and Use

About two-thirds of respondents had used or were aware of public health services in Tumbler Ridge. About half of respondents had either used or were aware of the Employment Family Assistance Program, the Tumbler Ridge Assessment and Referral Society, the Tumbler Ridge Counseling Services, and the Tumbler Ridge Family Support Society. Child development services and visiting nurses services were less well known or used.

Knowledge or use of community social services reflected local familiarity. Many new residents in town did not know about or have not used the services we asked about. There is a need in Tumbler Ridge for increased publicity about the services that are available.

RECREATION CENTRE

Part 1 Recreation Centre Services

Respondents were asked about their use of, and satisfaction with, the Tumbler Ridge Recreation Centre. While use did vary between facilities, the overall level of use was quite high. About two-thirds of respondents had used the library, while about one-quarter had used the weight room. About one-third of respondents had used the hockey rink, while about one-quarter had used the curling rink. More than half of respondents had used the swimming pool, while just less than half had used one of the recreation rooms. The restaurant had been used by the largest number of respondents, and the lounge had also been used by more than half of respondents. New residents and out-of-town property owners were less likely to have used Recreation Centre facilities.

Not only did facilities such as the library, swimming pool, and restaurant have some of the highest levels of use, but they also had some of the most frequent use. These facilities were used intensely on both a weekly, or in some cases daily, basis. Some facilities, such as the hockey rink, are of course more suited to seasonal use. Some facilities such as the lounge, curling rink, and weight room are more commonly used on an occasional basis.

Almost all facilities in the Recreation Centre received very high levels of satisfaction from users. For the library, weight room, hockey rink, curling rink, and recreation rooms, nearly all of those who used these facilities report being very satisfied with them. Only the restaurant and lounge differed from this pattern with up to one-quarter of respondents being 'neutral' or dissatisfied. Yet, despite these exceptions the majority were satisfied with the restaurant and lounge. In all, those operating the Tumbler Ridge Recreation Centre can be very pleased with the level of use, and the level of satisfaction by the users, of their facilities.

RECREATION CENTRE

Part 2 Barriers and Suggestions

When asked if there were any barriers to their use of the Recreation Centre or its facilities, only one-quarter of respondents said 'yes'. The most commonly noted barrier was 'hours of operation'. Respondents clearly want more access on weekends and evenings, especially to the heavily used facilities such as the library and pool. The next most commonly noted barrier was 'cost'. Some of these 'hours of operation' and 'cost' topics were especially noted by seniors, families, and shift workers.

A small number of respondents noted 'access' as a barrier, with most referring to the need for easier access between levels for seniors or people who have trouble the stairs. While this is a good topic for the Recreation Centre staff to watch for, there are already some services available to assist with access and these may need to be better advertised.

When asked about recommendations for services or activities at the Recreation Centre, the most popular were a bowling alley, ballet classes, cards and bridge games, craft programs, more adult lap swim times, a movie theatre, and a variety of dance and music programs.

When asked about suggestions to improve Recreation Centre programming, there were three dominant themes:

- Enhancing advertising about activities, facilities and services through websites and an improved outdoor notice-board,
- Longer operating hours and the creation of more evening programs, and
- More age specific activities for 0-5 year olds, teens and youths, mothers, and seniors.

The survey also asked about activities which would be of interest to people. Popular summer activities included hiking, fishing, boating, hunting, and camping in Tumbler Ridge's wilderness setting, golf and swimming in the town's facilities, and biking, walking, and gardening.

Popular winter activities included snowmobiling, cross country skiing, skating, downhill skiing, curling, hockey, ice fishing, swimming, and walking. Most of these activities are well supported either by Tumbler Ridge facilities or are nearby in the region. Other popular activities to do in the community or the Recreation Centre included crafts, birdwatching, choir, bingo, painting, reading, and Tae Kwan Do.

Tumbler Ridge has been an active community. Just like with clubs, there may be a foundation of residents who can come together and help offer some of these activities.

POTENTIAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Part 1 Suggestions

Respondents were asked about any other programs or services they might like to see in Tumbler Ridge. These programs and /or services may or may not be suited to delivery through the Recreation Centre.

In terms of potential services or programs, the most commonly recommended were programs for teens, home support programs including Meals on Wheels, and seniors' visiting programs. In addition, programs for children at the preschool and after school stages were also supported. This suggests a shift in the traditional range of services in Tumbler Ridge, as the transition from a town of mainly young families to one with a more diverse age distribution means that additional services for older residents are now being called for. This does not, however, mean that this should occur to the exclusion of services for households with young children.

Respondents were also asked about a list of potential program areas for Tumbler Ridge. About one quarter indicated they would be interested in women's programs, senior's programs, and topical workshops. Interest in support groups focussed on 'survivor' groups for grief, cancer, and other illnesses.

When asked for their own service suggestions, about half of respondents offered suggestions. For shopping or business services, popular suggestions were clothing stores and a drycleaner or laundromat. Suggestions for health services included the need for chiropractors, home support services, overnight hospital stays, optometrists, and physiotherapists. Suggestions for communication services mostly called for cellular phones and high speed Internet. Cell phone and high speed Internet were also noted by home-based and self-employed businesses as a way to make Tumbler Ridge a better place to operate. High speed communication can make northern towns less remote. Suggestions for improved transportation services focussed on bus service between Tumbler Ridge and either Chetwynd or Dawson Creek. These are important suggestions because 'isolation' was identified by respondents as one of the least liked aspects of living in Tumbler Ridge. Local transportation suggestions involved either buses, shuttle vans, or taxis.

NEW 'TOOLS' FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Part 1 Local Participation / Satisfaction

During periods of intense economic transition, a great deal of grassroots involvement and participation is needed. In Tumbler Ridge, these participation levels are quite high. For example, about 30 percent had attended a meeting of town council or at one of the local schools over the past year, and just over 45 percent had signed a petition about a local issue. Voluntary activity was also very high, as between 20 and 42 percent of respondents volunteered (depending on the activity). The highest level of volunteer participation was focused on sporting groups or local events such as Grizzly Valley Days. All this speaks well to the investment of time people are willing to make as Tumbler Ridge goes through economic revitalization.

Since the March 2000 announcement of the Quintette mine closure, residents and decision-makers in Tumbler Ridge have been pro-active with economic transition and revitalization planning. To date, residents and property owners were generally satisfied with revitalization efforts to date.

When asked about the level of cooperation amongst local community and economic development groups, respondents were satisfied. With respect to the availability of professional and business advice in Tumbler Ridge, respondents were only slightly satisfied. When asked about the level of cooperation between Tumbler Ridge and adjacent towns and regions, those who responded were quite strongly satisfied.

When asked about community efforts to attract more entrepreneurs or businesses to Tumbler Ridge, just about half of respondents reported being satisfied. When asked about the economic and community development leadership provided by the Tumbler Ridge Town Council, more than half of respondents reported that they were satisfied. When asked about the availability of business services including stores, restaurants, and other services, respondents were just about evenly split between those who were satisfied and those who were dissatisfied.

When respondents were asked about efforts to promote economic development while respecting the natural setting and clean environment of Tumbler Ridge, the answers come out strongly satisfied. As noted elsewhere in the survey, the natural setting and clean environment is one of the key attractive features which brought people to Tumbler Ridge in recent years, and which holds long term residents in the community.

NEW 'TOOLS' FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Part 2 Perceptions of Change

One of the characteristics of economic and community transition is that of change. While change is a quite natural and normal part of community life, during periods of uncertainty or transition that pace of change can accelerate. Respondents' perceptions of change are a critical part of the economic revitalization process because it can affect how, or whether, they contribute to local revitalization efforts.

When asked about changes in local services within Tumbler Ridge over the past year, most respondents felt that there had been little or no change. When asked about the degree of change in provincial services offered in Tumbler Ridge over the past year, most of those who answered felt there had been no change. It should be noted that a large share of out-of-town property owners and new residents did not answer these questions as they felt they did not have the experience to comment. The efforts of the Tumbler Ridge Revitalization Task Force to put a services plan in place during the early transition period seems to have been a success. These responses, coupled with earlier noted high levels of satisfaction, bode well for both retaining and attracting residents.

When asked about the future economic prospects of Tumbler Ridge, about two-thirds of respondents felt it would improve. Long term residents were a bit more likely to feel that economic prospects would get worse in the coming years, something which may reflect that many are connected with the Bullmoose mine and are concerned about its future.

People were then asked about their own situation. In terms of their involvement in local events over the past year, most felt their involvement had not changed. In Tumbler Ridge this is significant because there has historically been a very high level of involvement by residents in community events and activities. This finding bodes well for Tumbler Ridge's economic revitalization efforts, as both new and long term residents are investing in community activities and events.

NEW 'TOOLS' FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Part 3 Suggestions for Economic Revitalization

Respondents were asked about ways to improve the local economy and local employment opportunities. With respect to the local economy, over 785 individual suggestions were made. There is something of a split in suggested directions, as many supported enhancing local tourist industries while many supported attracting diversified natural resource industries. Another 100 people suggested re-invigorating the local coal mining industry. In addition, over 100 suggested enhancing the small business sector. This small business sector is crucial as the community economic development literature refers to the important role it plays in the local re-circulation of money; something which helps retain wealth and jobs in the community.

A total of 421 suggestions were made for improvements to local employment opportunities in Tumbler Ridge. The most popular suggestions concerned a diversified resource economy base. Quite a number of respondents simply identified some other resource industry while almost 50 identified the forest industry as an opportunity for Tumbler Ridge. An oil or gas plant, and other mining opportunities, were also suggested. All of these fit well with recent initiatives in Tumbler Ridge associated with discussions with coal, oil and gas, and forestry companies. Again, there was a strong level of support for an expanded small business sector. In this case, more businesses, especially small businesses, would provide a diverse range of employment opportunities. Just over 100 respondents identified an expansion of tourism businesses, with the most popular suggestion being a downhill ski facility.

NEW 'TOOLS' FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Part 4 People and Skills - Tumbler Ridge's New 'Tools'

As noted earlier, community revitalization must now look at the assets and skills which exist within the community. Grassroots community development efforts must draw upon these assets and skills.

Tumbler Ridge respondents are upgrading their skills through a variety of continuing education courses. These included business training such as bookkeeping, financial matters, and accounting, professional courses such as social work, public administration, and real estate certification, technology training focussed on information technology and computer software, and industrial programs such as electrical and power engineering. Many of these educational areas are becoming more important in the changing global economy. Respondents were also enrolled in education programs that focus on teacher training and literacy education.

Respondents were also asked about their potential interest in a wide range of educational areas. Approximately one quarter of those surveyed reported an interest in 'general interest', 'professional development', and 'first aid and safety training' courses. About 15 percent of respondents were interested in university transfer and college level courses.

The skills of local residents have long been important facets of rural and small town communities, but they are becoming an increasingly valuable local resource. There are a remarkable breadth of skills now available through Tumbler Ridge residents and property owners. Business and business support services, construction and home renovation skills, industrial trades, medical services, music and craft skills, and transportation and heavy equipment operators are some of the widely available local skills.

Some of these skills have been developed through work experience. Using job titles, we found a remarkable breadth of occupational experience available through residents and property owners. The trades and retail sectors are two most commonly listed job categories. Also prominent are business, management, education, and health occupations. It is evident that Tumbler Ridge can draw upon a wide set of occupational skills.

HOME-BASED AND SELF-EMPLOYED BUSINESSES

Part 1 Profile

A key aspect of economic revitalization is the entrepreneurial spirit within the community. A total of 52 respondents operated a business out of their home, while an additional 113 operated a self-employed business. Some of these are operated by out-of-town property owners who may later bring this entrepreneurial spirit to town.

If we focus only on Tumbler Ridge residents, there are 33 home-based businesses and 87 self-employed businesses. In both cases, about half of these businesses are being operated by new residents. This level of activity by both new and long term residents suggests a new economic base is developing and bodes well for an entrepreneurial spirit both now and in the future.

Tumbler Ridge's home-based and self-employed businesses market their services or products widely. While many reported that their services or products were sold in Tumbler Ridge, such as the case of Bed and Breakfast facilities, others market across BC, across BC and Alberta, across Canada, and some even market their goods and services outside of Canada.

When asked about the economic sector, and type, of home-based or self-employed business they operated in Tumbler Ridge, a diverse range is included. Home-based or self-employed businesses are active in the retail trades sector, the construction sector, and the accommodation, food, and beverage sector. In terms of business type, the most commonly cited were home maintenance and renovation, janitorial, and people active in the oil and gas industry. There were also a number of business type clusters:

- trades, such as carpentry, construction, flooring, and plumbing,
- businesses services, such as bookkeeping, real estate, and office services,
- personal or retail services, including daycare, hair dressing, cosmetics, nutrition, floral shops, clothing, computer services, and upholstery,
- industrial support businesses such as trucking and equipment operators,
- and tourism businesses such as a tour operations and bed and breakfast operators.

Most of the self-employed and home-based business in Tumbler Ridge are new. This growth bodes well for the community's economic development initiatives, as these local businesses are an important part of capturing economic wealth and maintaining it in the community. The recent influx of new residents has brought into the community a large number of people who have created home-based and self-employed businesses.

HOME-BASED AND SELF-EMPLOYED BUSINESSES

Part 2 Satisfaction / Suggestions

Operators of home-based and self-employed businesses in Tumbler Ridge were quite satisfied with the town as a place to operate a business. For those who answered, about 76 percent of self-employed business operators and 70 percent of home-based business operators reported being satisfied with Tumbler Ridge.

When asked about suggestions on how to improve home-based businesses in Tumbler Ridge, the most common topics included provision of high speed Internet or cellular phone service. This is not particularly surprising given that the Internet is the advertising media of choice in the new information economy and that it has successfully been used in other northern BC towns such as Valemount. Another common suggestion focussed on the District of Tumbler Ridge zoning bylaws, particularly those respecting signs and parking requirements. A number of respondents also suggested increasing local advertising outlets for the town's home-based businesses, including community notice boards and billboards on the main roads or highways. A directory of local businesses is something which would help residents make use of local services. Finally, a number of home-based business operators suggested that mentorship and support would be of assistance. Suggestions in this case included workshops, monthly meetings for local businesses, and a forum by which experienced business people could mentor others. Given that people identified a lack of professional business advice in town, these self-help groups could be of great value.

When asked about ways to improve self-employed businesses in Tumbler Ridge, many suggestions mirrored those noted above including assistance with advertising, changed sign bylaws, and communication technologies such as high-speed Internet and cellular phone service. Transportation improvements were also suggested and included bus service for both passengers and freight. As with the home-based businesses, a number of suggestions also focussed upon the need for a local support network. This included a revitalized Chamber of Commerce, pamphlets on how to establish small businesses in town, and the development of business support services that small operators could collectively use. Several people suggested that a renewed large resource industry would provide niche opportunities for small self-employed firms.

CLOSING COMMENT

Tumbler Ridge has experienced considerable change and transition since the announcement of the Quintette mine closure. Information from the 2001 Transition Survey suggests a solid foundation for revitalization has been established, but that challenges remain.

In terms of a solid foundation for revitalization there is strong local participation in groups and activities, high satisfaction with transition efforts and changes to date, and a very high level of satisfaction with the town and its natural environment. There are also many new skills and talents available through local residents. These skills and talents extend to community development activities such as the organization of clubs or support groups, and to community economic development activities such as the creation of small businesses.

While all small towns in Canada face challenges with respect to community revitalization, Tumbler Ridge faces some specific issues as a result of the speed of recent change. Among these challenges is the need to provide services across a range of age groups. Historically, the town focussed its resources on young and middle age groups whereas the local population now includes a large share of older residents. Against pressures to reduce local government expenditures, it is important that innovative ways be found to continue support for community groups, organizations, and activities. Active community involvement has defined Tumbler Ridge in the past, has played a key role in the town's ability to respond to the Quintette mine closure, and will continue to be important as revitalization efforts proceed. Suggestions for assistance include the 'in kind' donation of the use of space or facilities, the provision of District staff to assist with events such as Grizzly Valley Days, and ongoing promotion of community events through the Tumbler Ridge Recreation Centre.

The most significant challenge facing all resource towns in northern British Columbia is economic diversification. Research has shown that resource industries will continue to be important but that they will experience more frequent and dramatic boom-and-bust fluctuations as a result of globalization. Diversification of resource industries will provide some balance to these fluctuations. The addition of value-added components to resource extractive industries will similarly provide opportunities for diversification. Lastly, there are many opportunities associated with what is often called the 'new economy'. This new economy is based on information technology, services provision, and an interest in quality of life. If the community and environmental assets of Tumbler Ridge can be combined with improved road and electronic communications access, then tourism and the Internet may provide additional opportunities for economic diversification. In many ways, these challenges are an old story in northern B.C. but the 2001 Tumbler Ridge Transition Survey suggests that the town possesses a solid foundation for revitalization.