



# ON THE TABLE

2019

# REPORT

# LETTER *from the* CHAIR

## OF THE COLUMBIA VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The mission of the Columbia Valley Community Foundation (CVCF) is to support investment in people, ideas and activities in our community through inspired philanthropy. Over the last year, we have continued to work to engage our community members through forums designed to identify their most pressing needs.

In 2017, the Vancouver Foundation published research that revealed people are feeling disconnected from community life. In 2019, the CVCF organized eleven “On The Table” events, engaging 148 participants from Spillimacheen to Canal Flats, which brought people together through facilitated discussions centred on ten topic areas taken from CVCF’s 2018 Vital Signs report. In addition, the issue of housing was discussed at each event.

The opinions expressed in this report are the opinions expressed by the participants at the On The Table events and do not necessarily reflect the views of the facilitator or the CVCF.

The CVCF wishes to acknowledge the support of the Columbia Basin Trust and the Vancouver Foundation, and to thank our facilitator, Wendy Booth, along with all those who found the time to offer their views, and especially those who hosted the events.

Dean Midyette  
*Chair*



## ABOUT THE COLUMBIA VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The Columbia Valley Community Foundation (“Foundation”) is a collection of endowment funds, totalling more than \$4.1 million, established by donors from all walks of life to enrich life in the Columbia Valley. Funds are pooled and invested, with the income distributed as grants to charitable organizations and students in a broad and inclusive manner that benefits the Columbia Valley between Spillimacheen and Canal Flats. The Foundation, on behalf of its donors, has distributed more than \$880,000 to the community through community grants and student awards. For more information, please see [www.ValleyFoundation.ca](http://www.ValleyFoundation.ca).

# { WHAT'S ON THE TABLE }

Bringing together friends, colleagues and strangers over some good food to talk about what matters most is what On The Table is all about. This B.C.-wide event provides people the opportunity to connect and chat about what is important to them. On the Table encourages individuals or groups — whether it's for a meal, snack or coffee break — to take the time and connect with one another face-to-face.

## { *About On The Table* }

In 2017, the Vancouver Foundation released research that revealed that people are feeling disconnected from community life. Solving social isolation is complicated, but connecting with people can be easy. In that light, we created a unique On the Table program for the Columbia Valley with the aim of creating a sense of welcoming and belonging in our communities.

It's a simple idea; however, a deeply profound one. Through the fall of 2019, there were eleven On the Table events in the Columbia Valley from Canal Flats to Spillimacheen. A host was identified for each event, who provided the venue and invited the guests. These events were held at various times of the day, from morning coffee and muffins to evening desserts. Each event was catered to the preferences of the host; some were at commercial locations while others were in private homes. In total, there were 148 participants in the program. In each case, a facilitated discussion took place, with the topics selected from the priority areas identified in the Columbia Valley Community Foundation's 2018 Vital Signs report. This On The Table report captures the feedback received, and the action items and ideas that community leaders can consider implementing or exploring further. It gives an exciting snapshot of what's on people's minds and their ideas for the Columbia Valley. It was a fun, meaningful opportunity for people to meet, gather and share.



# ENVIRONMENT

*The Environment was rated the highest priority issue area in our community survey.*

The natural environment is something that residents and visitors alike cherish and value. It allows us to be outside, get fresh air, recreate, and it provides the base for our economic values. The number of motorized and non-motorized users on our lakes and rivers has increased over the years. Being home to the headwaters of the Columbia River is a valued community asset. Managing the competing interests for our backcountry between motorized and non-motorized, locals and visitors, continues to be a challenge. However, the ongoing work of stakeholders is seen as positive. We live with wildlife in our communities throughout the Columbia Valley, whether it be skunks, gophers, turkeys, rabbits, bears or deer; ongoing education about how to respect and live with wildlife is fundamental. The level and opportunity for waste management and recycling has increased, although is causing confusion for users. Many residents and visitors use wood burning stoves as a source of heat; however, many wood stoves are inefficient, which can lead to poor air quality.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- Radium Columbia River access
- Communities that have WildSafeBC programs are effective in educating residents and visitors
- The RDEK waste management program has many positive attributes and continues to improve

## VITAL ACTIONS

- Celebrate the headwaters of the Columbia River
- Continue to improve public river and lake access points
- Increased education about living with and respecting wildlife
- Ambassadors at parks to educate on best management practices, bear-resistant garbage bins at trail heads
- Continue to support and educate about recycling options and community bottle returns
- Encourage composting programs
- Implement a wood stove exchange program
- Local campaign to pick up litter in public spaces

**“IN THESE TIMES OF GROWING DIVISION ON SO MANY TOPICS, IT’S IMPORTANT TO KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING. ‘ON THE TABLE’ OFFERS A PLATFORM TO RESPECTFULLY AGREE TO DISAGREE!”**

Tess Bekkering, Edgewater, Participant





# FOREST FIRES

*Our region has experienced extreme fire events in the last two years. In 2017, 31,346 hectares burned in our region. (Highest since 1919)*

The impacts of forest fires on our valley are wide-ranging; however, all agreed that fires have a negative impact on life in the valley. The tourism and business sectors see a loss in business, particularly when Kootenay National Park is closed due to smoke and negative media coverage. Many businesses feel that tourists wait to book their holidays until they know the weather forecast. Many participants feel that tourists are not aware of current fire restrictions and therefore don't respect them. Air quality is a concern for many, as this limits outdoor activities. Forest fires can lead to fear, anxiety and emotional stress, as well as the potential increase in home insurance rates. In recent years, there has been an increased level of knowledge around emergency preparedness and evacuation routes, yet some feel that more communication is necessary. Forest management needs to take a multi-jurisdictional approach, ensuring that logging practices are not leaving fuel and waste products in the forest. The timing of fireworks, campfire bans, and backcountry closures needs to be balanced with the economic and recreational values of residents and visitors. Fires are a natural cycle of the forest, and further education about the forest industry and fuel management would be beneficial.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- RDEK emergency communication
- Emergency preparedness
- Several communities being recognized as FireSmart
- Development permits in place for new property development near Crown land
- Fireworks, campfire and backcountry closures
- Fairmont Airport/Columbia Valley Airport Society is a valued asset for forest fire staging

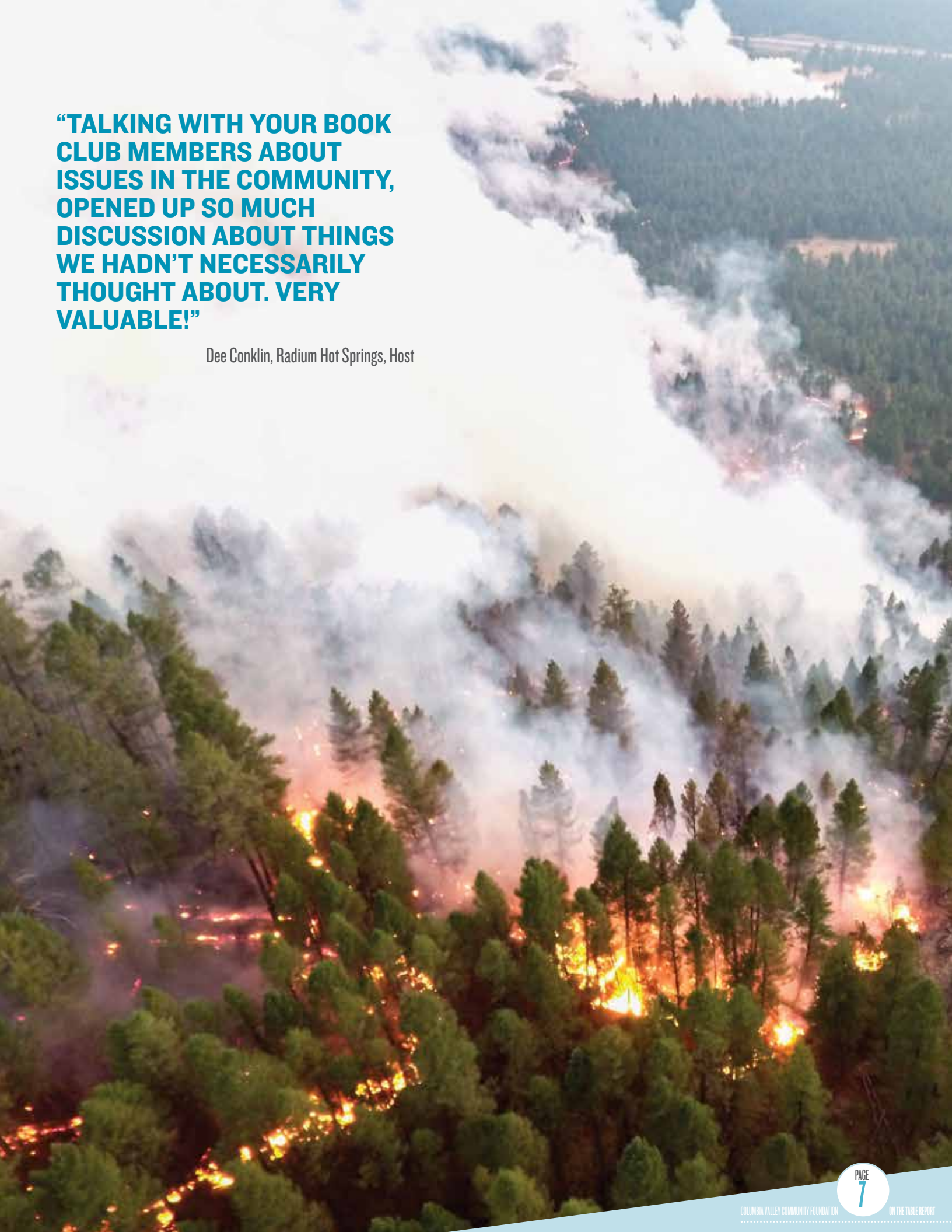
## VITAL ACTIONS

- Community leaders have close relationship with media outlets
- Continue to work with the Chambers and tourism accommodators to communicate the current fire restrictions
- Have local evacuation routes easily available
- Explore the banning of fireworks except for permitted group events
- Encourage a multi-pronged approach to forest management
- Encourage communities to adopt FireSmart principles into new and existing properties
- Allow wood piles in cutblocks to be easily accessed for personal use
- Explore allowing local fire departments to carry out prescribed burns on private property



**“TALKING WITH YOUR BOOK CLUB MEMBERS ABOUT ISSUES IN THE COMMUNITY, OPENED UP SO MUCH DISCUSSION ABOUT THINGS WE HADN’T NECESSARILY THOUGHT ABOUT. VERY VALUABLE!”**

Dee Conklin, Radium Hot Springs, Host



# JOBS, SKILLS & TRAINING

*20% of community survey respondents were not satisfied with the availability of specific job skills and training and business development training in our community.*

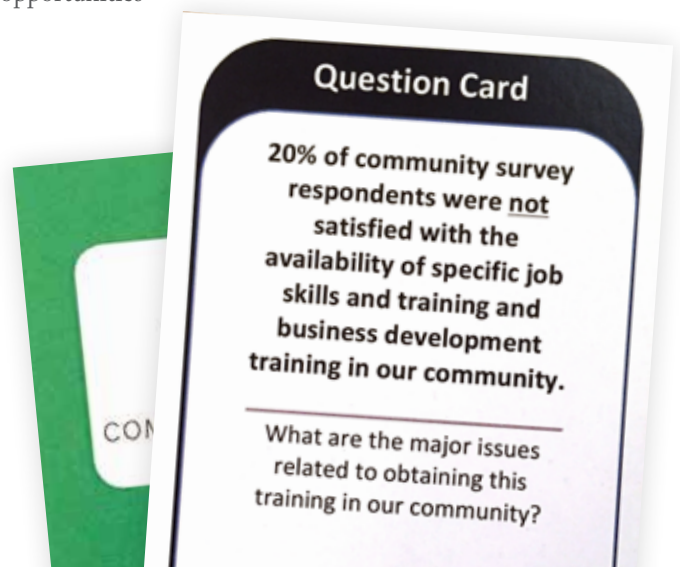
The Columbia Valley offers many and varied training opportunities, but there are people who are not interested in the type of training being offered. Employers should encourage employees to increase their skill set, whether it be online or in person. A review of whether the local college offers courses in response to community identified needs is needed. In some cases, people leave the valley to receive certification, due to restrictive rules in certain trades, resulting in some choosing not to return. There is a perception that there are not enough experienced tradespeople, and that many tradespeople operate on “valley time” in their work ethic and professionalism. The seasonality of the trades workforce combined with the cost of housing and living are contributing factors to an inconsistent trade sector. For those tradespeople who are keen to learn new skills and apply themselves, the opportunity exists. An expansion of the technology sector is seen as an emerging industry.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

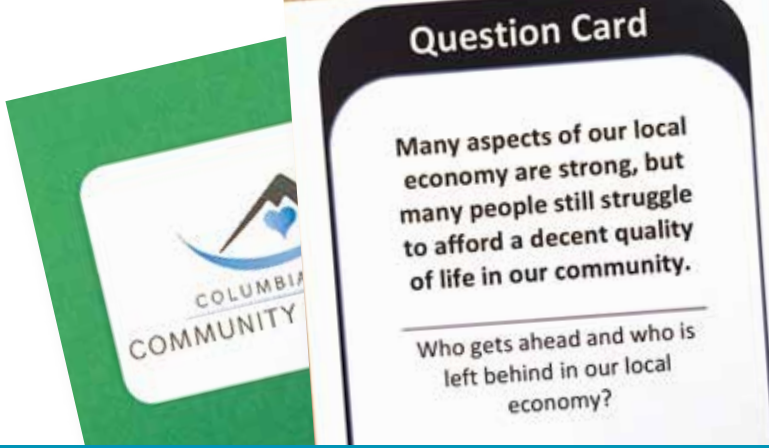
- Mentorship from experienced tradespeople within the valley
- Support for home-based businesses
- Continued relevant course offerings by the college and online

## VITAL ACTIONS

- Identify mentorship opportunities, linking experienced and new business owners
- Encourage the college to support mentorship and guidance for students
- Encourage employers to provide training opportunities for their employees
- Reduce barriers to receive trade certification
- Encourage the college to review whether the courses are meeting the needs of the community
- Identify the long-term skill gaps and design programs to fit that sector
- Train people to have the skills to work remotely
- Encourage the Chambers and economic development organizations to attract and advocate for training opportunities







# ECONOMY

*Many aspects of our local economy are strong, but many people still struggle to afford a decent quality of life in our community.*

The economy, including entrepreneurship, is key to the success of the Columbia Valley. Valley residents are resilient and creative in how they make ends meet. The Columbia Valley has a strong agriculture sector, and while the construction and tourism sectors are key employers, both sectors have challenges with attracting and retaining employees. Small businesses face a number of barriers to success including: public transportation, cost of shipping goods to and from the valley, broadband connectivity, access to childcare, and changing regulations. Many participants feel that single parents, the elderly and those without a vehicle are left behind in the valley, noting that the working poor exists, evidenced by an increase in access to the food bank. It was noted that people will get ahead if they have a skill set for their industry of choice and work ethic to back it up. Many feel that sharing their stories of success and failure through networking opportunities would be beneficial.

**“COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF CANADA’S ‘ON THE TABLE’ DISCUSSION FORMAT PROVIDED THE NECESSARY QUALITATIVE CONTENT TO PAIR WITH QUANTITATIVE DATA FROM VITAL SIGNS. THANKS TO THE LEADERSHIP OF THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, WITH THESE TWO INITIATIVES PAIRED TOGETHER, THE COLUMBIA VALLEY IS MADE STRONGER, SMARTER AND MORE RESILIENT.”**

Ryan Watmough, Invermere, Participant

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- A vibrant and successful entrepreneurship sector
- A spirit of entrepreneurship fostered from a young age; Junior Achievement in schools
- Tourism markets continue to diversify in product development and explore new markets
- Broadband connectivity meets the needs in certain areas of the valley
- Vital Signs Report, Chambers of Commerce and CV Economic Development office are valuable for business development

## VITAL ACTIONS

- Create a co-op business delivery service
- Continue to increase broadband connectivity for the valley
- Encourage childcare facilities in smaller rural communities and after school programs
- Encourage tourism sector to market the valley as one, we are stronger together
- Support mentorship, coaching and networking for small business owners
- Create a one-stop shop for business development and permitting

# TRANSPORTATION

*The majority of our residents use a vehicle to get to work, but over half of our survey respondents said they would make use of alternative transit options.*

The Columbia Valley has a Monday-to-Friday BC Transit service. While the service meets the needs of some residents, many participants noted that it doesn't meet the needs of most. The bus is currently housed in Golden, which doesn't make sense. The bus service has an on-demand service as well as a medical service to Cranbrook. Those who use this service feel it is good value; however, many were not aware of the service. It was recognized that the large geographic area and low population of the Columbia Valley are challenges when looking at additional service delivery. The Columbia Valley Chamber of Commerce had initiated a twice-weekly service to Calgary, but low ridership made it unsuccessful. The Invermere to Panorama winter shuttle service is a successful route. Perhaps a "made in the Columbia Valley" transit system would provide a better level of service than what's currently provided. Within individual communities, people should be encouraged to use alternative modes of transportation, like walking, biking and scooters when weather permits. Trails that link valley communities should be encouraged. Greater directional signage for existing trail systems is encouraged. Linking the valley to outside communities needs to be improved as this would enable the attraction of new residents and visitors. There was uncertainty around the Trans-Canada highway upgrades and the potential impacts to the Columbia Valley.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- On-demand transit service
- Medical services bus to Cranbrook
- Invermere Panorama Shuttle
- Bike/walking trails within some communities
- Continue to support bike racks at local businesses
- Continue to support and encourage bus shelters

## VITAL ACTIONS

- Create a "made in the Columbia Valley" public transit system, including partnering with the resorts
- Encourage a closer relationship between BC Transit and the local community
- Encourage ridesharing
- Create directional signage for biking trails
- Bike/walking trails that link neighbouring communities
- Explore using the existing rail line for passenger traffic
- Ensure adequate and timely communication around highway closures due to upgrades
- Encourage road shoulders to be paved for bike use



Photo by Eric Vanderkruk



*Housing wasn't included in the topic cards; however, participants at each event raised it as a concern.*

The housing market in the valley varies depending on the community; however, all agreed that attainable housing is seen as a key indicator to the health of the valley. In some cases, people feel that if they couldn't find adequate housing, they would have to leave the valley. Many noted the lack of rental properties, particularly those that allow pets, as a challenge. Some landlords who own properties see the provincial Residential Tenancy Act as a deterrent to providing long-term rental housing due to the inequity of rights between landlords and tenants. As a result, property owners opt to provide short-term rental accommodation instead, which leads to a diminished long-term rental pool. It should be noted that vacation rental properties do fill a gap for families travelling together that prefer a home rather than hotel rooms. Employers noted that they struggle to attract employees due to the limited housing stock. Resort operators are challenged with providing staff accommodation for seasonal staff. Many feel there isn't enough affordable seniors housing and that there is a shortage in properties for sale in the \$300,000-\$400,000 price range. Many people feel that the cost of housing has surpassed affordability and people's expectations.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- First Nations housing project completed
- Several resort operators provide adequate seasonal staff accommodation
- Continue to encourage developers to build homes for a smaller family unit, so that they are more affordable

## VITAL ACTIONS

- Encourage Columbia Valley-wide regulations for vacation rentals that balance the interests of all parties
- Advocate for a review of the Residential Tenancy Act to ensure fairness for both landlords and tenants
- Columbia Valley Community Foundation creates an endowment fund for a housing project
- Support the District of Invermere with their housing committee; consider expanding it to the entire Columbia Valley, leading to a Columbia Valley Housing Authority
- Advocate for a reduction in building and ALR regulations, which have contributed to the higher cost of housing, while encouraging energy efficiency and green technology



Photo by Ryan Watmough

### Question Card

**What does housing mean to you?**

**Does the current housing market meet the expectations and needs of the Valley?**

# AGING POPULATION

*The median age of Columbia Valley residents is 47 years of age. The 2016 Census also revealed that residents 65+ years of age account for almost 20% of our population.*

The Columbia Valley is home to many seniors and retirees, many of whom were part-time residents during their working careers. Their knowledge, commitment and passion to the valley is valuable to pass along to our younger generations, whether it be through volunteering or providing mentorship. They are an important demographic. As our population ages, so does the pressure on our health care and senior support. In addition, the valley has seen a decline in medical services provided locally. Travel to medical appointments and treatment outside the valley can be a challenge for many. In some cases, the distance from medical facilities forces our seniors from their homes and requires them to relocate closer to the services they need. An aging population can offer small business owners the opportunity to provide the services they need, and many will work part-time in the tourism sector. During the winter months, senior isolation exists, particularly for men. Several people noted tax implications and health care differences between B.C. and Alberta.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- Celebrate the success and contributions of our seniors
- Provide active seniors programming in many of our communities
- Provide Better at Home programming
- Encourage continued integration of seniors with other generations for mentorship and storytelling

## VITAL ACTIONS

- Columbia Valley Community Foundation creates an endowment fund for senior services
- Advocate for increased medical services provided locally
- Increase senior programming in the winter months such as indoor pickle ball
- Initiate an “Adopt a Grandparent” program, linking seniors with young families
- Encourage end-of-life planning
- Develop a carpooling program
- Explore attracting part-time health care professionals to create a travelling clinic to service rural communities in the valley
- Encourage male interest groups such as movie nights and sporting events



# VISIBLE MINORITY

*Our overall population has increased 6.2% from our last census and the percentage of our population that identifies as a visible minority increased from 1.9% to 3.3%.*

The Columbia Valley has seen an increase in the number of residents from other countries. Many of these groups keep to themselves, which leads to a lack of understanding of their language and culture. Hosting multicultural events involving food would encourage residents to appreciate and understand each others' culture. There is the opportunity to host cultural events in the schools; the result would create a more inclusive community among our youth. Diversity of cultures and backgrounds should be considered our strength, which adds to our community resilience. Visible minorities shouldn't be labelled as such as we are living in the Columbia Valley together. Finding common ground on why we choose to live here could break barriers down.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- Annual cultural events with First Nations
- Continue to encourage multi-cultural events
- Continue to identify shared values of why we live here: lifestyle and natural environment

## VITAL ACTIONS

- Revise Taste of the Valley, encouraging different cultures to participate
- Advocate for the foreign worker program
- Create a "Columbia Valley Life" campaign
- Encourage new Canadians to live in the Columbia Valley

### Question Card

Our overall population has increased 6.2% from our last census and the percentage of our population that identifies as a visible minority increased from 1.9% to 3.3%

Do you think our community is a welcoming community?

How might our community change as more people move here from other places?

**VitalSigns**  
**QUESTIONS**



# DIVIDED OPINIONS

## *How might we approach big issues in our community when opinions are divided?*

Over the years, there have been many issues that divided various sectors of the community. The increased use of social media platforms, such as online cheers and jeers, has increased the divided opinions, personal attacks and negativity. In-person meetings were preferred to online discussions, noting that written opinions are not always based on a complete set of facts. The squeaky wheel tends to have the loudest voice; however, it is important for community leaders to hear all voices. At the conclusion of any community meetings or process, the next steps on action items should be understood and followed up on. Factual and timely communication by community leaders is key to creating trust and credibility.

Establishing a trusted community champion for the project can lead to greater success. Some people feel that local government elected officials are too far-removed from the average person and need to be accountable for their decisions, while other people feel they have a close relationship with their elected officials and appreciate their efforts in communicating on various aspects of their job, recognizing that there is a disconnect when it comes to understanding the role of local government. Many people feel that there is too much time and resources spent on studies and would like a greater focus on action. Not providing childcare for meetings is seen as a barrier to attendance. Engagement from the younger generation is lacking and this is seen as a missed opportunity. Many people feel there are too many local government elected officials, which creates silos and an additional level of regulation and bureaucracy.

### WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- Community meetings are well-attended and accessible
- Local governments are using a variety of online and offline engagement and communication strategies
- Continue to improve media reporting on local government business
- Continue to encourage local government elected officials to be accessible to community members

### VITAL ACTIONS

- Improved social media etiquette
- Create a safe space for people to be heard and respected
- Offer childcare at meetings
- Encourage youth to get involved with local government by having a youth council or mentorship program
- Explore the Columbia Valley as one local government
- Create an Official Community Plan for the Columbia Valley
- Encourage local governments to create a simplified version of their planning documents



# CARING COMMUNITY

*We are a generous and caring community, with high levels of volunteerism and charitable giving.*

The Columbia Valley is known to step up and support community members and groups that are in need, whether it be the business community supporting with goods and services or the numerous volunteers who support our many non-profits. There is a sense of safety and security in the valley for our children and seniors. There are many different ways to be involved in the community depending on your time, commitment and passion. Parents with children may find it easier to get involved due to their child's interests. Community groups are welcoming and inclusive. When volunteer opportunities are linked to a specific timeline or project, the level of commitment increases.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- Celebrate the natural beauty, makes people feel welcome
- Support families that are in need
- Link volunteers to non-profit groups that are looking for volunteers
- Attract donations to the Columbia Valley Community Foundation from both full-time and part-time residents

## VITAL ACTIONS

- Encourage the continued use of the community calendar of events
- Encourage the Columbia Valley Community Foundation to create a fund for kids' sports



# SENSE OF BELONGING

*Overall, our community's sense of belonging increased from our 2016 Vital Signs report.*

The Columbia Valley is a welcoming community and has a strong sense of belonging; however, the time it takes to feel that way varies, depending on the individual and their willingness to get involved. The vast number of social groups, volunteer opportunities and non-profit groups for all ages leads to many opportunities to be involved in the community. Community centres and gathering places along with friendly neighbours with a willingness to help those in need contributes to a greater sense of belonging. Many feel it is tougher to get involved and some feel they lose their sense of belonging in the winter months, primarily due to less recreational opportunities. In many cases, there was a disconnect for part-time (or full-time) residents originally from Alberta breaking into the valley lifestyle. It was noted that the attitude of people shifted when it was discovered where they were from. This is seen as a negative. Those participants who have children have a strong social network revolving around children's activities. A common perspective is: if you want to make friends, you become friendly.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL?

- A large variety of non-profit groups across various sectors and interests
- Supporting those in need
- Continue to be accepting of new residents and visitors regardless of their origin
- An event coordinator in Invermere
- Community Gardens

## VITAL ACTIONS

- Continue to encourage the use of community halls and gathering places
- Support community events in the winter months and evenings
- Re-invent a "welcome wagon" program for new residents
- A welcoming sign at the entrance points to the valley
- Encourage realtors to be aware of the Vital Signs report



Photo by Ryan Watmough







Invermere music-fest  
August 19th & 20th  
www.musicfest.com

Mountain Music Festival  
Festival of Arts

TRAIL  
AMBASSADOR

# THANK YOU

*A sincere thanks to the hosts of the 11 On the Table events.*

DATE	LOCATION	DEMOGRAPHICS	ATTENDANCE
11-Sep	Private home, Radium HS	Ladies Book Club	7
23-Sep	Lions Den, Fairmont HS	Fairmont Lions Club	26
26-Sep	Mountain Hub, Invermere	Entrepreneurs, small business	11
01-Oct	Lions Den, Fairmont HS	Seniors, all female except 1 male	28
02-Oct	Private home, Radium HS	Radium Rotary	16
18-Oct	Private home, Invermere	Women with young children	11
27-Oct	Private home, Brisco	New residents to the valley	5
07-Nov	Bistro Café	Mens coffee club	7
07-Nov	Wilmer Hall	Wilmer community	13
10-Nov	Bristro Café	Wide variety, including First Nations	9
25-Nov	Vibrant Earth Café	Canal Flats	15
			148

**“THE COMMUNITY ENERGY AT OUR ‘ON THE TABLE’ EVENT WAS INCREDIBLE. CONVERSATION WAS LIVELY, PEOPLE OF ALL WALKS OF LIFE WERE ENGAGED, AND I WALKED AWAY FEELING INSPIRED AND MORE CONNECTED TO THE DREAMS IN THIS COMMUNITY. THE COFFEE SHOP WAS A PERFECT VENUE, AS CUSTOMERS JOINED THE CONVERSATION BECAUSE OF THE ENERGY AND THE OPEN INVITATION. HAVING A WELL-RESPECTED FACILITATOR WAS CRITICAL, INSPIRING THOUGHTFUL, HONEST FEEDBACK AND CONVERSATION.”**

Lorri Fehr, Canal Flats, Participant

We are a proud member of our national organization, Community Foundations of Canada:



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA

We sincerely appreciate the contributions and partnerships of the following organizations:

vanouver  
foundation

Columbia  
Basin **trust**

**“OUR FAIRMONT HOT SPRING SENIORS COMMUNITY CLUB WAS PRIVILEGED TO TAKE PART IN AN ‘ON THE TABLE’ EVENT, AND WE WANT TO SINCERELY THANK YOU WENDY FOR INCLUDING US. WE LOOK FORWARD TO READING THE REPORT IN THE NEAR FUTURE. IT WAS GREAT TO HEAR SO MANY UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES.”**

Bobbie Charter, Fairmont Hot Springs, Host



**“RECENTLY THE VILLAGE OF CANAL FLATS PARTICIPATED IN THE ‘ON THE TABLE’ EVENT HOSTED BY WENDY BOOTH. THE EVENT GAVE AN INVALUABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR OUR COUNCIL TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY AND REALLY IMMERSE OURSELVES IN THE THOUGHTS, FEELINGS AND ISSUES IN OUR COMMUNITY. WENDY IS A CONSUMMATE PROFESSIONAL AND MADE THE EVENT SEAMLESSLY UNFOLD. I WOULD RATE THIS AS A COMPLETE SUCCESS.”**

Karl Sterzer, Mayor of Canal Flats, Participant

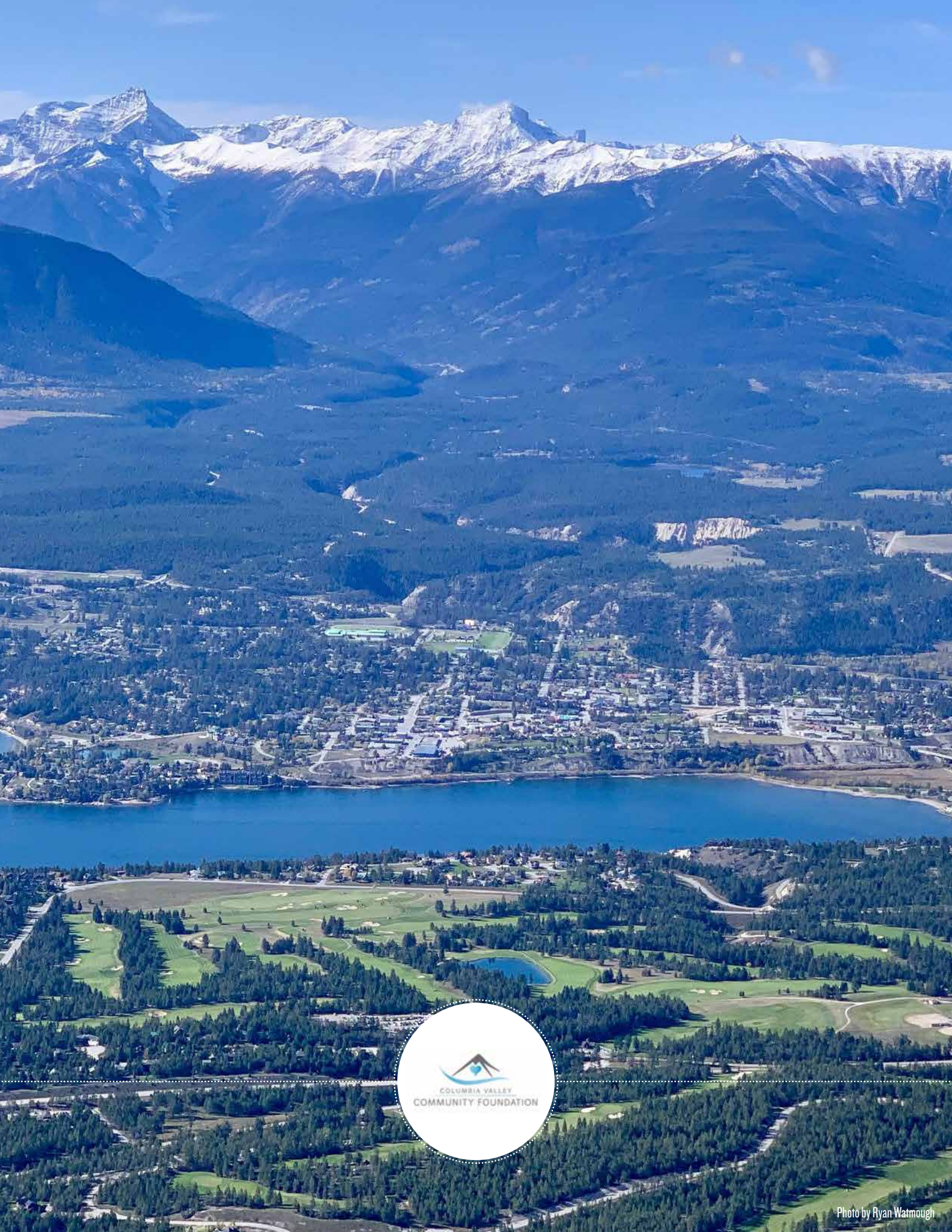


Photo by Ryan Watmough