

"Community Vitality - How Do We Measure Progress?"

October 8th, 2015 8:30am to 3:30pm | Dze'l Kant Friendship Centre Hall

Register Online [Event Bright Web Page](#)

What do we want to measure?

Community Vitality measures the strength, activity and inclusiveness of relationships between residents, private sector, public sector and civil society organizations that fosters individual and collective wellbeing.

How do we measure community vitality?

Communities around the world are working to improve the quality of life of their residents. The right indicators measure what the community cares about and tracks whether a community is moving in the right direction. Indicators provide essential guidance, the milestones for action and key tools for designing and supporting healthy community growth.

Together, these indicators create a more comprehensive look at how communities are faring in key quality-of-life areas.

Imagine this: you are walking down the main street in your community and run into one of your neighbours.

"I'm getting worried about this town," he says. "My son just lost his job and we've had three stores close in the past six months. It feels like it's just not as busy as it was when I was a kid."

You walk a little further and bump into a co-worker who is just heading back to the office after her lunch break.

"Did you hear about the big event coming to town?" she asks. "And now they're thinking about building a new hotel on Third Avenue. With all the new people moving to town it seems like there's a real buzz in the air. I love it!"

How are we doing as a community? The answer, as the fictional example illustrates, depends on whom you ask and what they value.

Currently, the Town measures only a few indicators of community success: things such as building permits, business licenses, and changes in our tax base. And while those are important measurements, they don't tell the whole story when it comes to the vitality of our community.

What if we had a common language to talk about how our town is doing, based on a measuring stick that kept track of the things that contribute to our quality of life, from crime rates and air quality to business success and employment rates? Working from a common information source would build a shared sense of reality, and it would also help us work together to achieve the future we all desire for our families and ourselves.

The Town of Smithers, Northern Health, and the Bulkley Valley Social Planning Society have established a *Partnering for Healthier Communities* committee and are working to explore and define a set of community vitality indicators for Smithers.



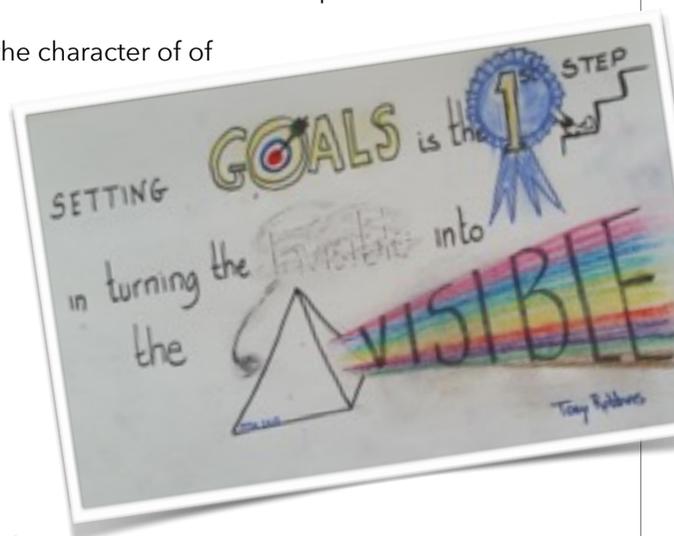


The Community Vitality Project will seek to create a list of indicators, specific to Smithers, that will comprehensively describe the health of our community, including social, environmental and economic dimensions and could form the basis of an annual community well-being report card that will aid Smithers in moving forward.

Why do we need community indicators?

Just as the strength of a person's pulse provides information about the person's overall health, community indicators provide information about the well-being of a community. They show the progress the community is making towards its vision of a becoming a more vibrant and healthy place to live. Projects to develop community indicators have many positive results and work to build local capacities. They can:

- bring people together to talk about what is important
- raise awareness of the character of of the community
- identify key community issues
- spark new community initiatives
- guide community leaders and decision-makers



What are community indicators?

Community Indicators measure changes in the status of social, economic and/or environmental systems, especially over time. Examples include: the number of smog days per year, literacy rate and library use, or waiting lists for affordable housing. (See below, under Domains, for more specific examples of community indicators)

Indicators should be:

1. simple
2. easy to measure and reliable
3. relevant to policy in Smithers
4. reflective of community values that matter to Smithers
5. inexpensive and easy to collect
6. adaptable to change and trends
7. comparable to other years and other places
8. drawn from data that local organizations/groups collect

How do we select community indicators?

There is no standard, one-size-fits-all, set of indicators. They are entirely dependent on the unique nature of each community, its citizens and what the purpose of the indicators is. Community indicators must make sense for each community. While they are all unique, there are some things to keep in mind when establishing indicators.

Why have a forum?

On October 8th, our objective is to create a list of potential indicators from information that is currently being collected. This information would provide a more comprehensive and complex vision of the vitality of the community of Smithers. Information will be collected using a clearly defined process so that partners can provide input into the process and scope. The information collected will then be processed to establish, measure and report annually on a set of indicators that will accurately reflect trends in the vitality and wellbeing of the community in all of its dimensions, while providing a tool decision makers can use in the future.



Where do we start?

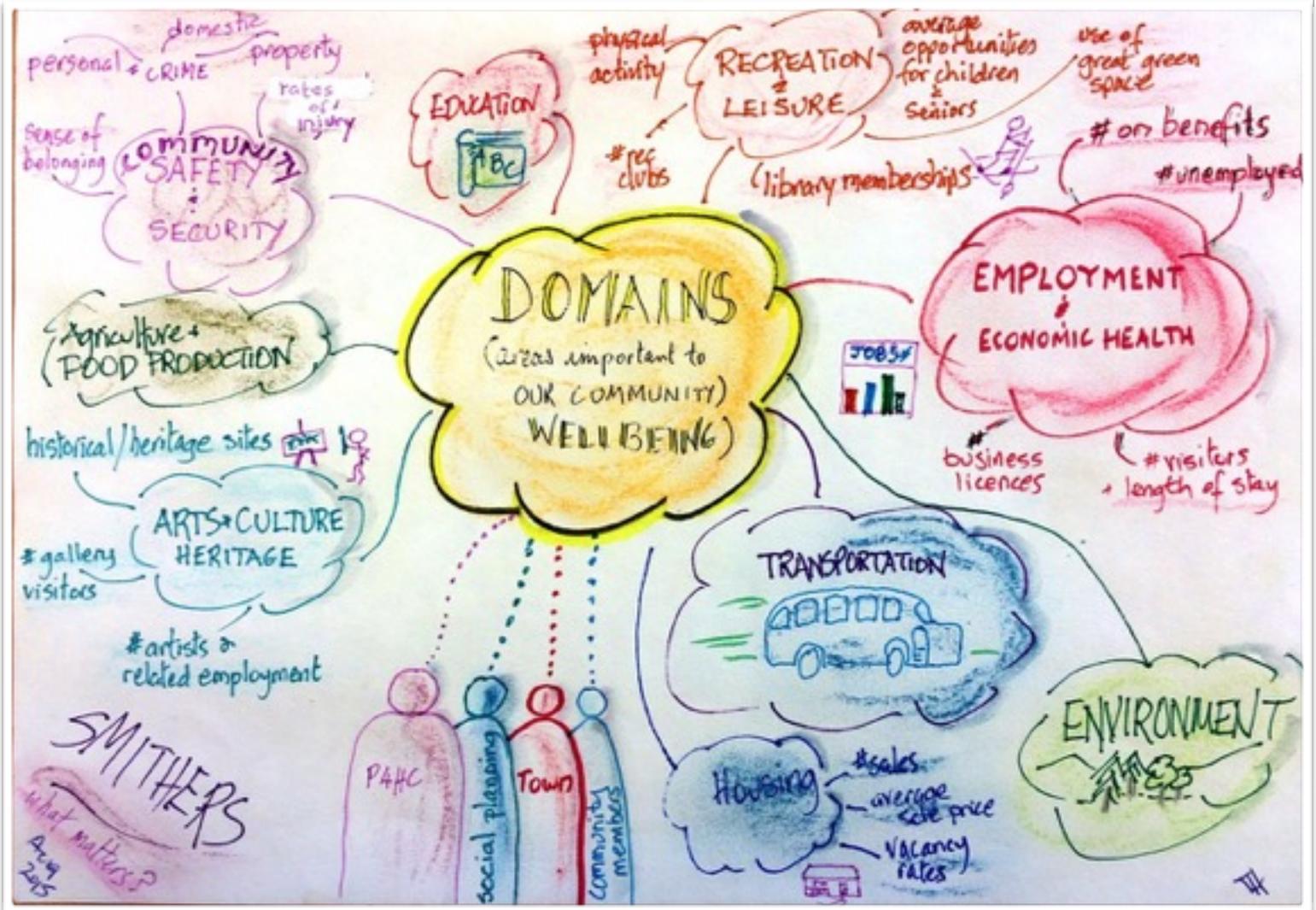
The Town of Smithers, Northern Health's Partnering for Healthier Communities Initiative and the Bulkley Valley Social Planning Society (BVSPS) have reviewed the Town's Official Community Plan, Northern Health Community Health Profile Smithers (2013), and a number of community documents including other BC Communities' [Vital Signs Reports](#) to create a short list of broad categories (domains) that together could describe our community. Within each domain there are numerous indicators that could be measured annually to construct a long-term holistic view of our community.

Domains

Community indicators fall within a set of overarching subjects (domains) that allow for us to group indicators within related subject areas. Examples of some of the re-emerging subject areas in Smithers appear in the graphic representation that can be seen below:

Where do you fit in?

Members of the public, groups and organizations that each hold a key piece of measurable information have been called upon to participate and share specific knowledge and information to help build a more complete picture of the vitality of our community.



For October 8th - please think about information that your organization gathers that may be useful in populating our community vitality report card.