

REQUEST FOR DECISION

Subject: 2018 Banff Community Social Assessment – Final Draft

Presented to: Council

Date: February 25, 2019

Submitted by: Alison Gerrits, Director, Community Services, Jill Harrison & Ruth Pryor, Community Development Coordinators

Agenda #: 8.2



RECOMMENDATION

That council accept the final draft of the 2018 Banff Community Social Assessment and adopt it as a guide for municipal social planning and program development.

BACKGROUND

Reason for Report

The compilation of the 2018 Community Social Assessment has been close to a year-long project. It was identified as a priority in the 2018 Town of Banff Service Review in the Community Services Administration and Community Social Development service areas. This is the third iteration of the Assessment, with the first being published in late 2006 and the second in 2014. These past two documents have helped to guide decisions related to policy, programs and services in the municipality, and community at large, and have also created a baseline on which to analyze change in the community over time.

Summary of Issue

In order to support community wellbeing, it is crucial to have a detailed understanding of the social picture of one's community. A community social assessment helps us to do just that. By gathering information and input from residents, organizations, and from data sources, we can assess our strengths, as well as our challenges. Unlike previous reports, this assessment has not included a long, detailed list of specific tactics, rather it has highlighted focus areas with some examples of initiatives that could be pursued. The reason for this stems from learnings from the last two assessments. Rather than creating a five year tactics list in one document, this approach allows individuals working in these fields, to continue to learn and adopt new approaches and best practices and to incorporate them on an annual basis. Plans of action can be developed either annually or by topic and can be adopted by various organizations, groups, and members of the business community. This approach allows us to build off successes, and acknowledges that the thinking tied to some of the proposed solutions can evolve over time.

The approach taken for this project was phased and was intentional about keeping the community informed regarding the stages of the project by providing ongoing feedback related to “what we heard”. The four phases of the project included:

- **Phase 1: Assessment Design and Launch – March to May 2018**
 - This phase included the project planning, creation of the methodology for community consultation, development and production of the “Conversation Kit”, development of marketing materials, and web presence
- **Phase 2: Community Conversations – May/June 2018**
 - This phase saw the majority of qualitative data gathered from residents who used the conversation kits to host discussions in their homes. Town staff facilitated additional conversations for those who wanted to attend one in the community. Over 700 people participated in 54 conversations.
- **Phase 3: Developing themes from what was learned, and checking back in with the community – July to September 2018**
 - This phase included a significant amount of staff time reviewing thousands of comments from the conversations and creating common themes and proposed areas of focus. These themes were shared back with the community through the form of a survey and engagement boards to seek feedback as to whether the findings reflected the thoughts of the community. Approximately 230 people participated in this process (50% through the survey, and 50%

through the engagement boards) where the overwhelming majority agreed with the themes and findings and helped to prioritize them in order of importance.

- **Phase 4: Statistical document analysis and report writing – October to January 2019**
 - A full quantitative data review and analysis was conducted using Statistics Canada data from the 2016 Census, and tax filer data obtained through the Town’s membership with the Community Data Program. Analysis also included comparisons to other resort communities and looked back over a longer period of time (20 years in some cases) to identify trends. Local community statistics regarding organizational and program use was conducted, as well as a document review of other recent community surveys to look for similarities or differences to what was heard. Finally, information was sought from other resort communities (through documents and phone interviews) across Western Canada to learn what these communities see as their strengths and challenges.

The Community Social Assessment process has been committed to exploring both strengths and challenges. Often, when these types of reports are produced for communities, they are referred to as “Needs Assessments”. While needs identification is an important element of community assessment, it is just as important to have a good understanding of what residents value in order to build upon strengths and understand what is working well.

The top five strength/asset themes in the report that were identified, listed in order of priority, as identified by residents include:

1. **Small Town Community Feel** - This asset is consistent from previous social assessments and was identified again in 2018. Residents appreciate what they describe as a “small town community feel”. Many assets such as optimism, positive energy, people caring about each other, recognizing and knowing people and the friendliness of everyone were all mentioned. There is high level of appreciation for the following, all of which were attributed to maintaining a “small town feeling”:
 - walkability and bike-ability throughout the town site;
 - access to what many describe as “big city amenities and services” albeit in a small setting;
 - feeling safe;
 - the National Park eligibility residency requirements and;
 - limited building development

2. **Appreciation of Nature and Environmental Stewardship** - This theme resonated with every age and all community sectors. The community cherishes the outdoors, fresh air, access to trails, ability to lead a healthy lifestyle, environmental stewardship and being surrounded by like-minded people who respect our responsibilities within a National Park. There is an appreciation for the environmental programs and services currently in place, along with an expectation that as a Town within the National Park we demonstrate leadership and always strive to do more.

3. **Quality and Variety of Services, Amenities and Programs** - People value and appreciate the variety of services and facilities available in such a small town. Of note, the following services and programs were cited most frequently as community assets:
 - Transit, which has increased to include Regional Transit since the last assessment
 - Medical services such as the hospital and doctors
 - Recreation facilities both indoor and outdoor
 - The trail system
 - Town of Banff classes and programs
 - Gathering places such as the dog park, playgrounds and community meals

- Banff Public Library, which is frequently cited as a haven/quiet space away from the hustle and bustle of the town site
 - Museums
 - Schools and daycare
 - Indoor recreation and gathering places for children (such as Parent Link)
 - The Banff Centre
 - Low income supports for food, kids programs and Town of Banff Access Program
 - Effective social media channels that enable better self-organizing, access to goods, services and community information
4. **Abundant Work Availability** - This was cited by the immigrant and young adult populations as a main reason behind why people are here and why they stay. There is a confidence that there is always work “even if individuals have to work two or three jobs to afford to live here.” It was noted that people outside of Banff also recognize the work opportunities here with some citing that people will commute from as far as Cochrane for job opportunities.
 5. **Population Diversity** - Diversity was identified by almost every community conversation group as a unique asset in Banff. While the main attention was on the diversity of such a wide range of nationalities and cultures, there was also reference to a diverse range of life experiences which has resulted in a broad range of interests, skills and knowledge throughout the community.

The top five challenges were grouped into the following challenge themes listed below, in order of priority:

1. **Cost of Living** - The most prevalent theme that emerged throughout this assessment were the challenges identified related to the costs of living in Banff. Resident feedback on this topic, coupled with the extensive array of quantitative data that depicts the challenges Banff faces regarding lower wages and higher housing costs are the reason that this theme emerged as the most significant social challenge Banff faces. Although significant work was done in the area of affordability between 2014 and 2018, it is clear that additional initiatives are still warranted and is the reason that council incorporated Cost of Living as a strategic area of focus during its planning for the 2019 to 2022 time frame.
2. **Living Where the World Visits** - It is clear from listening to residents that there is a level of frustration related to living in a town where over four million visitors a year vacation. There is an obvious concern for issues such as wildlife safety, traffic, and the general “busy-ness” of the town. It also appears that there is a general sense of resentment growing on the part of some residents who are frustrated with how busy the town is and how they see this impacting their quality of life. Many residents cited a need to feel more appreciated, and to have decisions and events focus more on the local resident. It was also apparent that there is a significant misunderstanding on the part of many residents surrounding Banff’s Incorporation Agreement, and the fact that the town’s very existence is to provide services to visitors. It is more than likely that many of the themes and feelings from this subject area will surface at the upcoming Banff Community Plan discussions.
3. **Community Wellness** - A number of findings emerged that were grouped into the theme category of “Community Wellness”. A sense of stress and anxiety was palpable among many residents during the consultation period, which was described as being caused by a number of factors. And while a certain degree of stress and anxiety is a part of life, it’s important to acknowledge that some of the reasons behind this are compounded due to some of Banff’s unique challenges. Concerns related to housing cost and availability, low wages, difficulty finding childcare, lack of family time together because people are working so many hours, concerns about wildfire, wildlife health, and busy traffic during peak visitor times were all cited by multiple participants.

Another area impacting wellness was tied to individuals who are not as likely to connect socially in the community. Although significant emphasis has been made over the last five years to create opportunities for people to gather and connect (mostly tied to food), it was learned that for some, these types of gatherings can be intimidating. In particular, men noted the challenges on connecting this way, especially when sports is not an interest or a possibility. In addition, there was a distinct desire predominantly from those over 35 years of age for more intellectual learning opportunities to be made available in the community related to (for example) heritage, culture, history, and other special interest topics.

4. **Places and Spaces for Socialization and Recreation** - Residents want places to gather. Banff residents know there are limited places where this can happen, so there is a keen interest in exploring ways that existing places can be used differently. Indoor and outdoor “community hubs” are what people want and there is a desire for these hubs to be easily accessible in terms of routes to get there, as well as hours of operation. Building off of the success of the community hub that has been created at 101 Bear Street, other opportunities exist to create these gathering places throughout the town site, both indoors and out. An emerging trend is the desire on the part of residents in our community for more indoor areas in which to gather and recreate.
5. **Shared Understanding** - In the age of abundant information and varying ways to learn and engage about a host of topics, residents are looking for some simplicity. There is a desire for more plain language (less “government-speak”) to be used when providing information from the municipality. There is also a desire for that information to be easier to find. Residents want to have a better understanding of the ways they can contribute their perspectives related to municipal projects. Residents also want the opportunity to participate in difficult conversations. There is an acknowledgement that it isn’t always easy to talk about things that make people uneasy. Residents however are wanting to talk about topics such as how much tourism the community and the National Park can handle. And while diversity is seen as an asset for the community, some are feeling we need to do a better job in learning how to foster more connections between longer term residents and newcomers to create stronger social connections throughout the community.

In addition to the themes identified above, a significant part of the report provides demographic, economic, and other community information. Comparisons to other resort communities in western Canada are made, as well as historical comparisons going back ten to twenty years. This helps to provide context and to understand how Banff has changed, and in some cases, stayed the same.

Next Steps

Within each of the challenge themes identified in the report, while the report has provided some high level areas of focus, further recommendations and specific approaches and plans of action can be developed either annually or by topic and can be adopted by various organizations, groups, and members of the business community as well. There are many positive things happening in Banff on which to leverage. It is expected that the strengths that were identified by residents will continue to be fostered and supported through the array of existing programs, services, supports delivered by the Town, and numerous local organizations and partners.

As with the previous assessment, time will be spent sharing the findings of the report with community groups and organizations and an executive summary document highlighting the primary findings will be produced and distributed to a wider audience than perhaps the document itself would be. Previous years reports have acted as a catalyst for a series of actions that have benefited the community, and it is anticipated that this report will function in the same manner. It is the hope of the authors of this report that positive changes will occur in the community as a result.

The next federal census will be conducted in 2021, with the expectation that most data would be released by the fall of 2023. It is suggested that the next iteration of the Banff Social Assessment be conducted to once again, coincide with the release of this data. The proposed completion date for the next community social assessment would be during the first quarter of 2024, five years from now.

IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

Budget

There are no immediate budget implications to adopting the findings of this report or by suggesting it be used as a guide for future decision making. Should additional funds be required related to future policy decisions, or new services for example, council would have the opportunity to review or decide on those investments using the information contained in this report as supporting information.

Internal Resources

This entire project (coordination, community consultation, document review, quantitative data acquisition and analysis, and report preparation) has been undertaken in house by Town of Banff administration. While it did occupy a significant amount of time in the latter half of 2018, it was planned for well in advance and therefore incorporated into work plans in 2018 as per the guidance from the 2018 service review.

Council Strategic Priorities

Council is currently in the process of adopting a new four year strategic priority document 2019-2022. The most prevalent challenge theme of cost of living and a range of actions associated with it, has been incorporated into council's strategic priority draft document. It is expected that this document will be adopted by council sometime before the end of Q1.

ATTACHMENTS

1) Draft – 2018 Community Social Assessment

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