

A-1 DEMOGRAPHICS

Since 1976, the population of the entire Sunshine Coast Regional District has more than doubled, with an annual growth rate more than twice that of other Regional Districts within British Columbia. Gibsons has experienced similar levels of expansion, as working-aged adults have become commuters into the Metropolitan Vancouver area, families have begun to relocate in order to experience a lifestyle more conducive to the raising of children, and older generations have sought a place to retire.

A-1.1 Age And Gender

Census statistics released in 1999 indicate that Gibsons has a relatively even gender distribution, with the notable exception of the 65 and over category, in which there were 135 more females than males. It may also be noted that the smallest population distribution lies within the 0-24 years threshold, which indicates a generally aging population. Conventionally, population charts tended to be in pyramid form, however, that of the Sunshine coast epitomizes (perhaps to an exaggerated degree) a trend that is prevalent in many areas of the modern world, with the bulk of the population moving towards the upper middle of the chart.

Each stage in the human life cycle is dependant upon contact with other stages. An aging population, with decreasing numbers of children/young people is problematic as it fails to provide a healthy balance of community.

A-1.2 Family Characteristics

One- and two-person households are most common in the Gibsons area, with larger families comprising only 30% of the total family population. Of the people aged 65 years and over, 30% live alone and 63% within a family unit. Traditional husband-wife families are most common in Gibsons with over 860 of such family-types within the community. Single parent families account for 225 units, with the mother being the caregiver in 87% of the cases. In both cases, families with one child are most prevalent. Multiple families living within one home are exceptionally rare.

A-1.3 Dwelling Types

Dwelling types may be classified into two general categories: "ground oriented and apartment units"¹, wherein ground units are seen to be single detached houses with front and back access, duplexes, row houses or mobile homes. Ironically, older residents whom one would assume would also be inclined to favour apartment living, are ten times as likely to live in a single ground oriented dwelling in Gibsons. Most recent census statistics report that in 1996, there were 1,670 dwellings, of which only 390 were apartments.² Seventy percent of these dwellings were owned rather than rented and average dwelling value was \$197,882, which is somewhat below the BC average. Ownership is largely a function of age and increases over the age of 30.



¹ The Urban Futures Institute, *Housing the Sunshine Coast Regional District's Future Population: Demographics and Demand, 1996 to 2026*, (August 1998) 11.

² BC Stats, Community Profile – Sunshine Coast Regional District. (Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, 1999).

What We Found**A-1.4 Ethnicity**

Over ninety percent of Gibsons residents report English as their first language. Of the remaining percentages, German and Chinese held the next largest populations. Ethnic origin is thus primarily English, Canadian, Scottish and Irish, with drastically smaller populations with German, French and Chinese backgrounds. Gibsons, including its outlying areas, has a total of approximately 150 members of visible minority groups of which 120 are of Asian origin.

A-1.5 Education Levels/Fields of Knowledge

In 1996, 9.4% of the population had university education with a Bachelor's degree or higher and over 20% reported some university education, either with or without certificate or diploma earned. These percentages are somewhat less than the BC averages of 14 and 25.5% respectively. The figures are, however, in stark contrast to those observed on Bowen Island. Bowen reports 30.2% of the population to have a complete university degree, which would seem to indicate that there has been opportunity for those with university education to apply their skills within the framework of the community. Major fields of study for males with post secondary education are engineering, applied science & technology, business management and educational, recreational and counseling services. For females with post secondary education, most common fields of knowledge are business management, health professions and education, recreational and counseling services. These are indicative of BC norms, however it is interesting to note that Fine and Applied Arts claim a relatively small portion of the population considering the perceived importance that artists have within their town.

A-1.6 Labour Force / employment

From 1991 to 1996, the only industries which grew in terms of employed labour were retail trade, finance/insurance/real estate, business and government service and accommodations/food and beverage (which experienced the greatest growth by employing an additional seventy-five people). Although manufacturing industry appears to have decreased in size during the five years in question, it still comprises the largest segment of the labour force, closely followed by retail trade. Discussions with locals have often revealed a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the current emphasis on expansion of tourist trades. It appears that there is a certain degree of angst regarding the fact that Gibsons is becoming too reliant upon one revenue generator (namely retail businesses catering to tourists). Desire for multiple local industry to be developed and broadened clearly exists as does a longing to form an identity outside the accommodation of tourists. Of the total male labourforce aged 15 and over, only 7% worked at home, while of the total female labourforce aged 15 and over, nearly 15% worked in their homes.³ Vacancy rates for home for hotel rooms in the range of between 65% to 70%.

What We See

Although a small percentage of employed persons currently work at home, we must consider whether there is opportunity for more of this to be realized in the future. Home based industry is less dependant upon the ferry schedules and would ideally suit those seeking a slower paced lifestyle.

The increasing trend that we observed towards retail trade as a primary means of support in Gibsons, is reflected in its demographic information: residents are far more likely to be from a trade or commerce background as from one which deals with arts, social sciences, sciences or humanities.

High vacancy rates of hotels help us to understand the patterns of tourism in the area of Gibsons. It seems to be a day-trippers paradise, but it fails to attract tourists for extended periods of time. This opens the door to exploration; how can a community develop facilities and points of interest which encourages longer stays and are still sustainable for a community wanting to remain detached from commercialism?

³ Statistics Canada. *Profile of Census Divisions and Subdivisions*. Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1999. 1996 Census. Catalogue number 95-191-XPB. 637.

What We Found

A-1.7 Income Levels

Average incomes of males and females differed greatly in Gibsons, with the average male (over 15) income being \$32,183 and average female (over 15) income being \$17,254.⁴ The incidence of low income families out of a sample of 1,095 "economic families" was 200.⁵

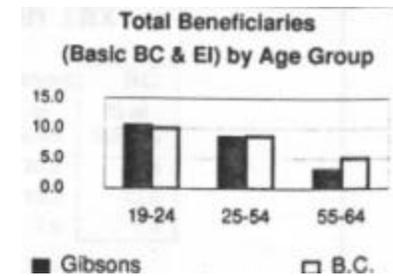
One reason for the somewhat lower income levels may be the reality of employment type. In both male and female cases, part-year or part-time work was more common than full-year or full-time work. Seasonal employment patterns of this nature are not uncommon to tourist-industry reliant areas.

From the graph at right, one may note that dependence upon social funding is higher than the BC average for those within the 19-24 category.⁶ This seems to reinforce public commentary that few work-related opportunities exist for younger people starting their careers. This may be seen as an area which needs to be addressed.

A-1.8 Transportation

Overwhelmingly, working residents choose to drive a car, truck or van to work or be a passenger in such. Public transit proved to be the least popular (or perhaps least feasible) method of transportation although those who did use it seemed satisfied with the quality of service. Women showed a greater propensity to walk to work. Commuters now number approximately 400, which indicates a radical increase in the number of residents who work in Greater Vancouver.

What We See



Increased numbers of commuters may indicate a growing desire to reside in Gibsons, but it also threatens to lessen the amount of local money left within the community. Retailers seem anxious that they are surviving primarily upon tourist dollars, and have unstable local buying networks, simply because it may be more convenient to shop in Vancouver.

⁴ Statistics Canada. 639.

⁵ Statistics Canada. 641.

⁶ BC Stats, 2.