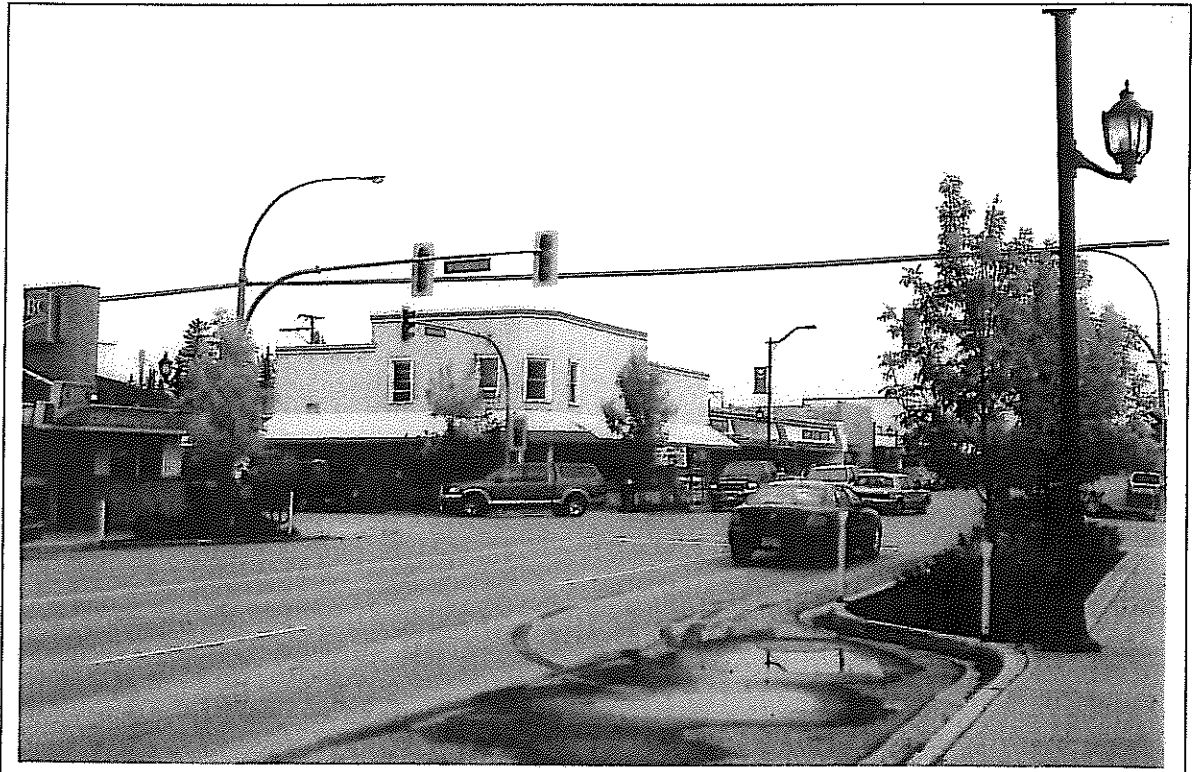


**District of Vanderhoof  
Downtown Revitalization Project Evaluation**



**For:  
District of Vanderhoof  
Vanderhoof, British Columbia**

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**July 2006**

## Executive Summary

Resident/business and tourist surveys were conducted in 2005 to determine the effectiveness of Downtown Vanderhoof Revitalization on improving the quality of life and increasing retail expenditures in downtown businesses. The tourist survey consisted of seven questions and the resident/business survey consisted of thirty seven questions, many of them complex with multiple answer sections. The resident/business questionnaire became far more complex than originally envisioned due to the difficulty of obtaining the most valuable information on resident and business person attitudes on downtown improvements. A total of 120 interviews were conducted: 20 tourists and 100 Vanderhoof residents/businesspersons. Close to 12,000 data entries were made during the interview process, again substantially more than originally envisioned. The findings are, thus, far more complex and interesting telling a very positive story of the impacts of revitalization efforts in Vanderhoof.

The downtown revitalization efforts have not changed the shopping patterns of the people interviewed. Vanderhoof and surrounding residents continue to shop outside of the community (mainly in Prince George) once every month to two months with an average of 9.2 shopping trips per year to communities other than Vanderhoof. Half of the 28 business people interviewed have experienced an increase in sales since the completion of the revitalization efforts and, of these 14 business people, eight felt that their sales had increased due to downtown revitalization improvements. Three of the business people had hired additional employees resulting in four part-time and one full-time positions being created. Five of the 28 business people had started or expanded businesses in the downtown since the beginning of the revitalization efforts but none based their decision to start or expand a business on downtown improvements. Two professional recruiters were interviewed but their views were mixed with one responding yes and one responding no to the question asking if the downtown improvements had assisted in recruiting professionals to their place of business. In a final question focused on the future, questionnaire respondents were asked if the investments would encourage them to make more purchases from downtown businesses. Slightly over one third indicated that they would make more purchase in the downtown, while slightly over one third said that they already support downtown businesses, and slightly less than one third indicated the downtown revitalization would not result in increased purchases from the downtown business community.

Virtually all people interviewed (91%) felt that the downtown revitalization project had improved the community while three quarters felt the improvements had resulted in an increase in community pride. A visual preference survey was undertaken to determine the positive and negative impacts of revitalization improvements. Survey respondents were shown photographs of downtown Vanderhoof street scenes before the revitalization efforts and after completion of the downtown improvements and were asked if construction activities had improved the quality of the downtown as a place to shop? In the eight sets of photos reviewed, respondents viewed the improvements as positive to very positive in from 60 to 90% of the cases. A total of 1104 positive comments (88.4% of total comments) and only 145 negative comments were made about downtown

improvements. The most frequent positive comments were for vegetation/landscaping (236 comments), sidewalks (173), lamp posts/lighting (95), planters (68), building improvements (65), and the bench/sitting area at the corner of Burrard Avenue and Stewart Street (59). The most frequent negative comments were sidewalks (45 comments), the bulb-outs at the intersections (38), the poor intersection at the corner of Highway 16 and Burrard Avenue (7), and the loss of parking in the downtown (6). During the initial development of the questionnaire sidewalks were identified as a common problem so a specific question was dedicated to the issue. The requirement to maintain clean sidewalks in winter, particularly for seniors and handicapped was noted as was the need to reset sidewalks in certain areas due to unevenness. Senior citizens encountered difficulties with the brick as they have to shuffle rather than walk to feel safe and women with high heels had to be particularly careful while walking. The gray sidewalk strips were acknowledged as being particularly slippery.

In the tourist survey the five best features identified in Vanderhoof were the natural surroundings including beautiful nature and river and little pollution, good services and shopping, the friendliness of the people, camping facilities, and downtown improvements. The features that need improvement from a tourist perspective included updating the facades of businesses, sidewalks on Highway 16, work on the roads including the side roads, and more restaurants with longer hours of operation. The limited sample of tourists indicated that the downtown revitalization project had a positive impact with almost three quarters of the tourists interviewed stating that they stopped in the downtown and shopped in the downtown due to revitalization improvements while one half of the tourists noted that they stayed in Vanderhoof longer than planned due to downtown revitalization improvements.

The lessons learned from this downtown revitalization project are that the community overwhelmingly support the project and feel that community pride has increased as a result of the downtown revitalization efforts. More directed results in the form of increased business activities in the downtown and increased employment in downtown businesses, although desirable, were not realized when the surveys were conducted. These economic effects tend to take longer to achieve but significant positive improvements have been put in place to improve Vanderhoof's downtown as a place to stop, shop and enjoy a small town shopping experience. Possibly an advertising campaign promoting Vanderhoof as northern BC's most beautiful small town downtown could attract more tourists to the community.

Valuable lessons can be learned for negative comments which centre around operational problems in the winter months, particularly related to sidewalks and the bulb-outs. More thought is required during the planning and design stage to ensure that any streetscape improvements will function well in all seasons, particularly during the winter months. With the rectification over time of the minor negative elements of the downtown revitalization improvements, Vanderhoof will have one of the most beautiful and functional downtowns in small town British Columbia.