

Meeting Needs and Realizing Goals: A Community Need Assessment of Thorne Bay



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I. Overview of the Needs Assessment and the Project Partners Involved

Collaboration between the Alaska State Library and the Corporation for National and Community Service created the Libraries Build Communities Project in 2015. In May of that year, the project partnered with the Thorne Bay Public Library to enhance the educational and economic opportunities of that community. In order to understand how to best serve this community, I conducted a community needs assessment. The assessment focused on finding what were the causes and effects of un- and underemployment in Thorne Bay and what programming this may suggest.

Project partners included Southeast Island School District, the City of Thorne Bay, USFS Thorne Bay Ranger District, Community Connections, and the Alaska Division of Public Assistance.

II. Brief Economic History of Thorne Bay

Thorne Bay is a Second Class City of approximately 471 people on the eastern side of Prince of Wales Island. The bay was named in the late 1891 after Frank Manley Thron, Superintendent of the US Coast Geodetic Survey. The name became misspelled in later years and the final 'e' became a permanent fixture.¹

In the early 1950s Federal and Alaska territorial legislatures gave favorable tax incentives to pulp companies and encouraged their creation in Southeast Alaska. The Ketchikan Pulp Company (KPC) opened their mill in 1954. The Forest Service signed a 50-year contract with KPC with a pricing and regulative structure designed to keep their operations competitive.²

¹ Orth, Donald J., "Dictionary of Alaska place names". US Government Print Office, Professional Paper 567. 1971.

² Mackovjak, James. "Tongass Timber: A History of Logging and Timber Utilization in Southeast Alaska". Durham: Forest History Society. 2010. 232

In 1960, the Ketchikan Pulp Company (KPC) established a floating camp in Thorne Bay. In 1962, KPC moved its main camp from Hollis, a town further south on the island, to Thorne Bay and skidded the entire floating camp onto land. From 1962 through 1982 the community of Thorne Bay existed as a logging camp operating under the authority of KPC. Throughout this time KPC was harvesting around 500 million board feet/year of old growth timber.³

Figure 1: Overhead view of Thorne Bay 1987⁴



Meanwhile, several changes in legislature occurred. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971 saw the return of high-value timberland from federal to Alaska Native control. Additionally, the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) in 1976 became the primary law governing national forest management.⁵ While KPC's timber contract was grandfathered into compliance, it became clear there would be no

³ Beire, Colin M. "Influence of Political Opposition and Compromise on Conservation Outcomes in the Tongass National Forest, Alaska". *Conservation Biology* Vol. 22, No 6 (2008) 1487

⁴ This date remains questionable. However, one thing to notice from the photograph is the timber floating in the bay.

⁵ Mackovjak, 261

renewal of it. At the same time, federal and state legislations passed new environmental legislation and regulatory bodies became increasingly focused on bringing logging operations into compliance. Both of these developments made profitable operation increasingly difficult for KPC.

In 1982 the community of Thorne Bay incorporated into a second-class city. In 1990, Congress passed the Tongass Timber Reform Act forcing KPC to scale back timber operations.⁶ In 1999, KPC ended their 50-year contract with the Forest Service marking the end of large-scale industry logging operations on the island. Since this time, smaller Forest Service, Seaalaska, and State contracts have kept the timber industry active in the area but at a greatly reduced level.

III. Demographics of Thorne Bay

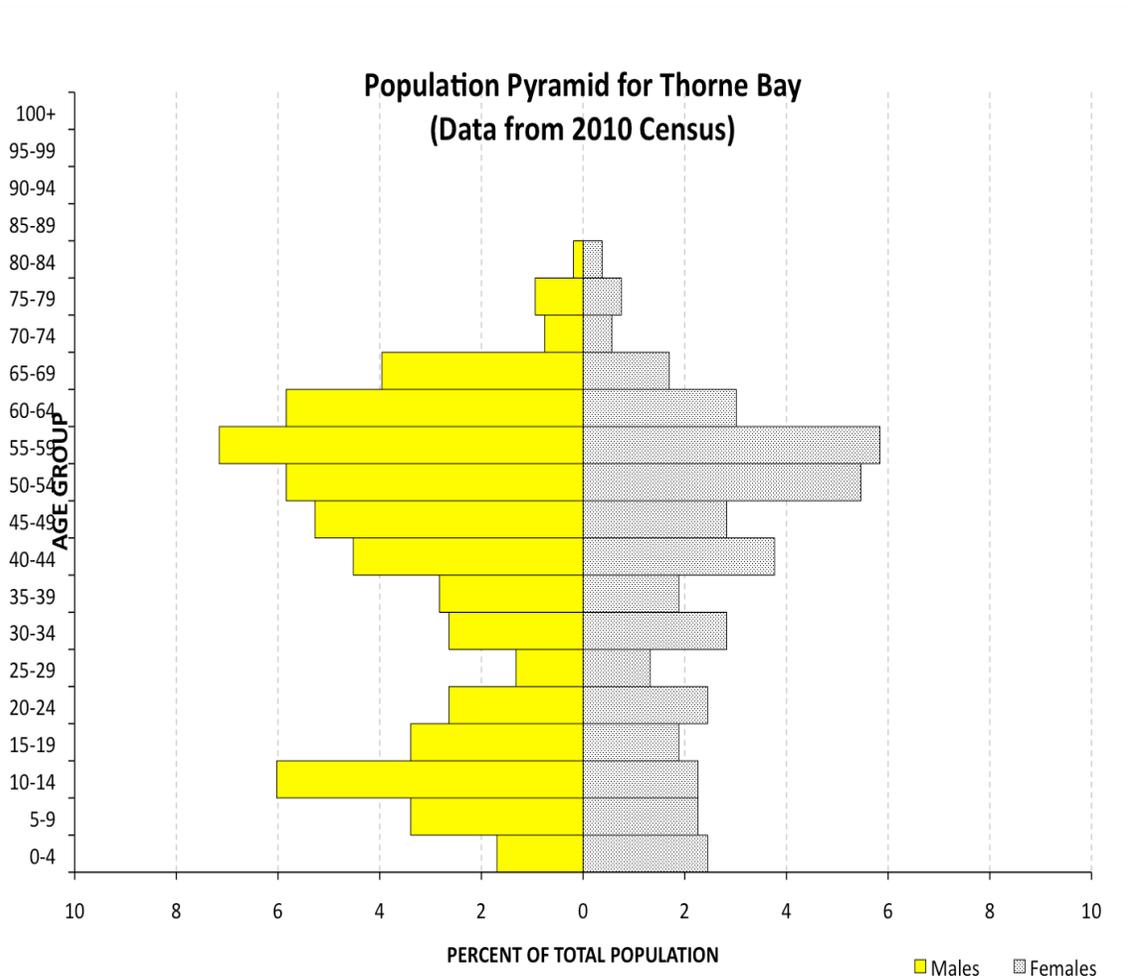
From its logging camp days populated with young male laborers, Thorne Bay's population has diversified and aged. According to the 2010 census, the median age remains 44.4 years old. The population age and sex demographics can be viewed in Figure 2.

Due to the small population, this data has a large margin of error. However, when graphed in this manner one gets a general picture of the community. As one can see, most of the population remains under 25 or over 40 with a predominantly male population throughout all but the youngest age group. The population is predominantly white with this group comprising 91.9%.⁷

⁶ Dabbyn, Paula. "Transition for Tongass". *American Forests*, Vol. 118, Issue 2. (Summer, 2012) pg16-23.

⁷ US Census Bureau. "General Population and Housing Characteristics." census.gov. (2010) accessed February, 2015.

Figure 2: Population Pyramid for Thorne Bay



While the 2010-2014 American Community Survey (ACS) lists estimates about unemployment rates and income levels in Thorne Bay, due to the small sample size I find these figures less helpful than island or census-area wide data. The Prince of Wales-Outer Ketchikan Census Area reported an unemployment rate of 20.3% as of February 2010. In 2009, the average annual wage was \$25,981, significantly lower than the Southeast Alaska average of \$33,184.⁸

⁸ US Census Bureau. "2010-2014 American Community Survey." census.gov. (2014) Accessed February, 2015.

The Forest Service reports employing 37 people year-round and another 30 seasonal workers every summer. Thorne Bay is the headquarters of Southeast Island School District, one of the four on the island. The School District reports having 100 people on their payroll. However, this also covers four smaller outlying schools. Additionally, many of these people work part-time and some full-time employees commute from other communities on the island. The city reports having 10 full-time employees.

According to the 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, there is a population of 249 employed civilians over 16-years-old. Of these, 55 report working within “Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining”. However, this category also includes hunting and fishing tourism, an increasingly important industry in Thorne Bay.

Thorne Bay contains one of the two trans-shipment facilities on the island allowing it to receiving goods from the barges that pass through. This also allows Thorne Bay to hold one of the few grocery stores on the island. People from around the island come to Thorne Bay store over the ones in Craig and Klawock to take advantage of its cheaper prices.

Unlike other towns in Southeast Alaska, commercial fishing is not a large part of the Thorne Bay economy, though many residents’ fish and hunt for subsistence.⁹

Several residents operate small bed and breakfasts or guesthouses during the summer to accommodate the growing seasonal tourist population. Along with the grocery store, the four other retail businesses in the community (a convenience and local goods market, hardware store, a tackle shop, and liquor store) make a larger portion of their profits during this time.

Thorne Bay holds a growing retirement community. Though hard to measure exactly, in the 2000 Census, 142 residents reported not being in the labor force. The 2010-2014

⁹ Southeast Conference & the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. “Southeast Alaska Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy: 2010 Update”. (June, 2010)

American Community Survey estimated 146 residents not in the labor force though the number of retirees within this group remains unknown. Anecdotally, many residents report knowing many retirees living in the community and this appears to be a growing population.

IV. Methods

The assessment combined secondary data analysis with primary data gathered through semi-structured interviews with eighteen community members. These community members were selected through a structured sampling technique. I attempted to select respondents to proportionally represent four different segments of the wider community: i.e., the Thorne Bay School, the Forest Service, City-side Thorne Bay, and South-side Thorne Bay.

In interviewing, I both recorded the conversations and took notes during them, correcting the notes later based on the recordings. These corrected notes were then compiled and sorted by theme. Each theme got marked based on how many respondents mentioned it.

I gathered secondary data about Thorne Bay from the US Census, the American Community Survey, the City of Thorne Bay Overall Economic Development Plan, the Southeast Conference Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, and the Division of Public Assistance.

V. Results

The results are divided into four sections: Community Strengths; Challenges in the Community and Barriers to Employment; Attributes of Poverty in Thorne Bay; and, Suggested Programs, Services, and Resources.

Community Strengths

I asked participants to list the best things about the community. Responses were then sorted by theme. Figure 3 shows all of the themes identified by at least one participant.

Figure 3: Number of times theme cited

Themed Responses	Number of Times Cited
Community pulls together in times of need	6
Sense of community	6
Remote	6
Safety	4
Subsistence resources	4
People are friendly	4
Everyone know everyone	3
Great place to raise kids	3
People are open	3
People are interesting	2
Slow pace	2

As can be seen from the above table, respondents identified the community itself as one of its greatest assets. They appreciated the community's willingness to help members through times of need (e.g. financial, medical, etc.). Many also identified the personal attributes (e.g. friendly, open, interesting) of community members as particularly beneficial.

Many respondents also cited Thorne Bay's remote location surrounded by the natural environment as one of its best features. One respondent said the outdoors is "five minutes

from your front door. Fishing, hunting, hiking: its all right here. You can slide it in an afternoon after work, or before work.” Several other residents expressed a similar sentiment in appreciating the sporting and subsistence resources being close at hand Community members also listed other reasons they enjoy Thorne Bay’s remote location including the beautiful landscapes and peaceful atmosphere,

Economically, Thorne Bay’s economy has diversified from its logging days to include other industries. The City of Thorne Bay’s “FY2008 Overall Economic Development Plan”, states, “employment is primarily in barge and freight services, several sawmills, Southeast Island School District, State and local government, the US Forest Service, some commercial fishing, and tourism. To supplement incomes, residents fish and trap.”¹⁰ When asked to name community assets apart from the character of the community, residents gave a very similar list particularly emphasizing the School District (by 5 residents), the Forest Service (3), the grocery store supplied by the barge (3), and the city (3).

Overall, these results match the outcome of a 2015 survey in Thorne Bay by the Prince of Wales Wellness Coalition.¹¹

Community Challenges and Barriers to Employment:

Respondents were asked to name the biggest challenges to the community and the biggest barriers for people trying to improve their employment status and their responses were sorted by theme.

Figure 4: Reported community challenges

- lack of community growth
- “nobody wants to do anything”

¹⁰ Thorne Bay Overall Economic Development Committee “FY2008 Thorne Bay, Alaska Overall Economic Development Plan”. (2008) Passed and approved January 15, 2008

¹¹ Einspruch, Eric Ph.D. “Prince of Wales Coalition Needs Assessment Survey and Community Readiness Assessment: Thorne Bay Result.” 2015

- getting people to stay engaged
- lack of opportunity (2)
- low paying jobs
- barriers to higher education
- problems with city government (2)
- road conditions (2)
- lack of full time jobs
- not much for kids or anybody to do
- seasonal population
- lack of money
- no cohesive sense of community
- small population can't support businesses (2)
- project logistic (i.e. shipping and travel costs)

They were then asked to list barriers for those trying to change or improve their employment status.

Figure 5: Reported barriers for people trying to change or improve employment status

Lack of opportunity	10
Lack of training and training opportunities	4
Lack of full time work	4
Regulatory restrictions	4
High risk to starting own business	3
Lack of housing	2
Current jobs require mobility	2
Cost of shipping	2
Substance abuse	1

Lack of Opportunity:

As can be seen from the above data, many residents report lack of opportunity as one of the biggest barriers people face. Respondents explained the lack of opportunity in a number of ways. Two residents spoke about how state and federal regulations impact rural residents ability to start their own businesses.

RESIDENT 1: Design, engineering, and permitting is another big issue. There was, there was some folks that wanted to open up/

RESIDENT 2: . /a smokery/

RESIDENT 1: /a smokery/

RESIDENT 2: /a little smokery/

RESIDENT 1: where the old airline office used to be cause we lost an airline...They ran into some problem with design, engineering, permitting from the state that basically threw them so far off they gave up.

As Figure 5 shows, four residents mentioned regulatory restrictions as a major obstacle to employment in Thorne Bay. In this view, both federal and state regulations inhibit economic activity in the community from small business ventures to larger logging operations.

Two people mentioned that the low population of the area prevents a number of businesses from being successful. One resident gave the example of the restaurant the school opened, “The school opened the restaurant and there wasn’t enough business to keep it open. And, you would have thought it wouldn’t have been hard to keep it open because the school doesn’t have to make a profit on it...they have to meet their expenses, basically.”

Two residents had a particularly interesting exchange speaking about this point. When one resident mentioned community acceptance of public assistance, it prompted this dialogue:

RESIDENT 1: So maybe its just a little more economically depressed here than--

RESIDENT 2: Yeah--

RESIDENT 1: So then other places — But, then you go to a place like Hoonah, they're not hard up, or, they're not — people aren't rolling in dough there, but they still have a bakery, a restaurant —

RESIDENT 2: That's a native community. I'm just — I just don't know — if there's native money that helps the infrastructure

RESIDENT 1: Right, but still — you still gotta be able to afford to go there.

This exchange highlights the attempt of the residents to understand why more businesses can't seem to succeed in Thorne Bay *as compared to other Southeast Alaskan communities*.

Seasonal Population:

Respondents cited both the seasonal population in the community and seasonal work as barriers to employment. Residents report that full time work remains hard to find. In the words of one resident:

“[The work] Is all part-time, if there's any at all...there's no full time. And if you're wanting full time you have to pay for gas and everything to get to the other side of the island...And most of the jobs around here are seasonal. So you're working during the summer and in the winter you're not.”

The above quote expressing a concern of many residents: most of the full time work remains in the larger town of Craig on the western side of the island. In turn, the need to travel creates other barriers: e.g. higher expenses due to gas prices; longer day care costs; and day care closing before the parent has time to return to this side of the island after work. Compounding this problem is the fact that 70% of seasonal workers in Southeast Alaska come from outside the area.¹² When I asked employers about why they employed people from outside the area they cited training and work ethic as the main reasons.

¹² Southeast Conference FY2008 Overall Economic Development Plan

Finally, several respondents mentioned that higher shipping and energy costs make starting one's own business harder. In turn, this increases the opportunity costs for any economic endeavor thereby heightening the risks involved. I talked to one local business owner who spoke about this problem at length:

“There are lots of opportunities here but one of the biggest barriers is the cost of shipping. We have resources, lots of wood and all that, but you need to make a product, a higher end product to get the full value out of it and then — you kinda get shot down because, better knock [the product] down into something flat and lots of pieces, and one — otherwise the shipping — If you were to build cabinets here, try to ship them out — you just can't compete — because there's people build cabinets other places that don't have to ship.”

Several residents spoke about the increased difficulty of projects and business in Thorne Bay due to its remote location. While there may be residents able to make amazing products they cannot *necessarily* make a product marketable off the island because of the increased production costs.

Poverty in Thorne Bay

The US census lists the poverty rate for Thorne Bay at 17%. I asked residents if this sounded high, low, or about right. Of eighteen respondents ten claimed it was low while four claimed it was about right, with four residents not responding to that question. According to Southeast Island School District, 58% of children qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. This would seem to suggest that either 1) the US census has substantially under estimated the poverty rate in Thorne Bay, or 2) a higher percentage of families with children fall below the poverty level.

Respondents were then asked to list the main attributes of poverty in Thorne Bay, and their their answers were sorted by theme as can be seen in the table below. For this report, I defined “lack of basic services” as *either* lack of running water, electricity, or

sewage.

Figure 6: Reported attributes of poverty in Thorne Bay

Inadequate housing	7
Lack of basic services	6
Public assistance use	4
Substance abuse	4
Subsistence	3
Inadequate medical care	3
Under the table work	3

Note that respondents reported inadequate housing and lack of basic services as the main attributes of poverty in Thorne Bay.

Inadequate Housing and Lack of Basic Services

According to residents, problems of both the quality and quantity of housing impact Thorne Bay. The difficulty finding housing is mentioned often as a major problem for this community's growth. Several employers spoke about prospective employees wanting to move here but being unable to due to the lack of available housing. One respondent also pointed out that many of the houses that have been built remain unoccupied the majority of the year, saying, "we have at least forty properties sitting in Thorne Bay staring at the air and no one does anything about them." This lack of housing in turn drives up the prices necessitating shared housing for low-income residents.

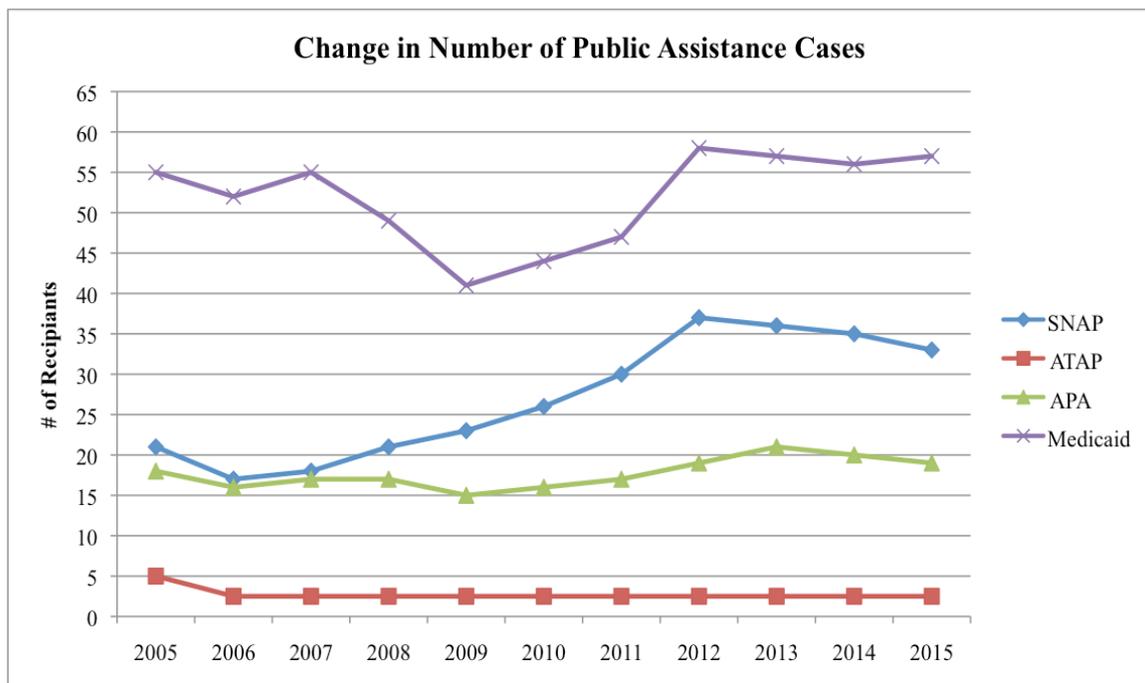
In addition, many respondents reported that those with low income live in lower quality housing marked by poor insulation, caving in roofs, and mold. In some cases, houses were not connected to any sewer or septic system with residents utilizing a pit toilet. Some respondents reported electrical shutoffs. Additionally, low-income residents may not have running water. On city-side Thorne Bay, this may have been due to a lack of sufficient funds to afford the city service. In South Thorne Bay many houses cannot

receive city-services and some residents were not be able to afford building their own water system.

Public Assistance

Many respondents mentioned the use perceived widespread use of public assistance in Thorne Bay. In order to investigate this issue further, I contacted the Alaska Division of Public Assistance (DPA) and requested data on the usage of public assistance in Thorne Bay for the past ten years, which I graphed by the change in average monthly cases by program over time (See Figure 7 below). Note that one case may cover multiple recipients.

Figure 7: Change in Number of Public Assistance Cases



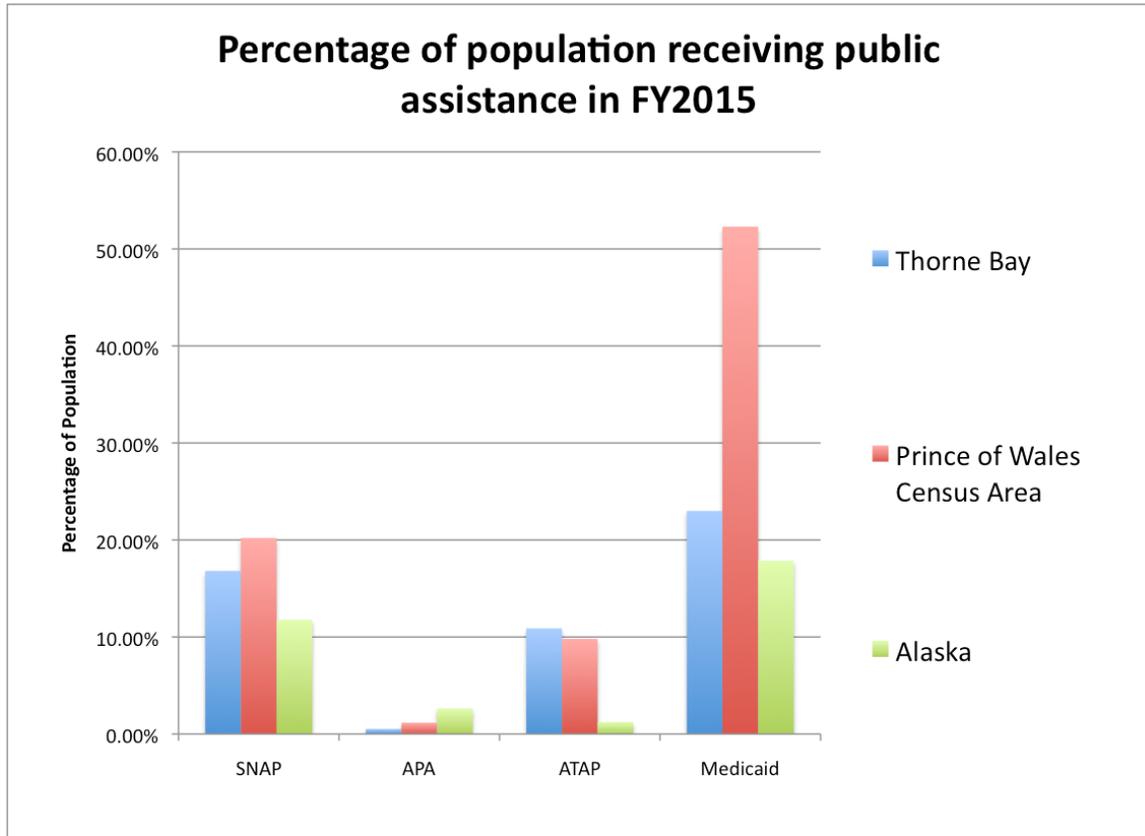
As can be seen from this graph, Medicaid was the most utilized form of public assistance through the then year period. In addition, the number of SNAP cases increased until 2012, and then began a slight downward trajectory. That the Adult Public Assistance Program and the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program remained low and somewhat

constant is unsurprising given the limited scope of these programs. Given the Medicaid expansion that made 5,184 more people in Southeast Alaska eligible for benefit, I expect a sharp increase in cases starting FY2016.¹³

In order to compare this data to the regional and state averages, I needed to know the number of recipients per case. The DPA FY2015 Statewide Profile provides the number of recipients for program statewide as well as the average number of recipients per case per program. Therefore, I multiplied the number of cases by the average state case size in order to estimate the average case size by program, using US Census figures to determine overall population. Finally, I divided the overall percentage by the number of public assistance recipients to determine the local percentage. Though this obscures any differences between the types of household receiving public assistance, I found it provided the best measure of the regional percentages of public assistance recipients. Figure 8 displays this data:

¹³ Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. “The Healthy Alaska Plan: A Catalyst for Reform” (February, 2015) accessed at: http://dhss.alaska.gov/HealthyAlaska/Documents/Healthy_Alaska_Plan_FINAL.pdf. pg 3

Figure 8: Percentage of population receiving public assistance in FY2015



Here, the vertical axis represents the percentage of the overall population while the horizontal axis is divided by program type. Noticed that, at 52.3%, Prince of Wales Island (POW) had a far higher percentage of the population receiving Medicaid at 52.3% than Thorne Bay did at 23%, and than the state average at 17.9%. Thorne Bay also had a higher percentage receiving aid for every program except the Adult Public Assistance program. Given that POW's older or disabled residents have tended to move away for better medical care, this makes sense. The far larger percentage that received Temporary Assistance surprised me. However, this would support the hypothesis that a large percentage of the low-income families on POW and in Thorne Bay have children.¹⁴

¹⁴ "The Alaska Temporary Assistance Program (ATAP) provides cash assistance and work services to low-income families with children to help them with basic needs while they work toward becoming self-sufficient. This program is provided under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant." from the Alaska Department of Public Assistance Website: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/atap/default.aspx>

Substance Abuse

Four respondents cited substance abuse as both a potential cause and effect of poverty in Thorne Bay. According to a behavioral health study on POW, from 2001-2005, 23% of all deaths in the POW-Outer Ketchikan area were associated with substance abuse.¹⁵ Additionally, in a 2014 survey taken in Thorne Bay by the POW Wellness Coalition 90% of respondents thought there were alcohol and other drug-related problems in the community. For an in-depth look at this problem, refer to the *Prince of Wales Behavioral Health System Needs Assessment Report* conducted in March 2011, and the previously mentioned *POW Wellness Coalition Readiness Report*.

Subsistence

Three respondents identified use of subsistence resources as an attribute of poverty in Thorne Bay. While many residents fish and hunt, one respondent claimed that low-income residents have a higher likelihood of practicing a “strong subsistence lifestyle”, defining this as “getting the majority of their food through subsistence practices”. This may also include trapping and selling furs.

Inadequate medical care

Three respondents cited access to medical care as a problem affecting low income residents. Ambulance transport gets provided to Thorne Bay residents at no cost through the city’s Fire/EMS service. However, not all residents can afford care once at a clinic. Additionally, due to the limited medical care on the island, any complex procedure or tests require travel to Ketchikan or Seattle adding the additional costs of travel and housing to healthcare expenses

Suggested Programs, Services, Resources

¹⁵ Agnew::Beck “Prince of Wales Behavioral Health System: Needs Assessment Report” Agnew::Beck Consulting. (March 2011) pg. 18

When asked what programs, services, and resources would benefit the community but currently are not available respondents replied with a wide range of suggestion which are listed below with the number of duplicate responses shows in parentheses

- High speed internet (4)
- Better on-island medical services (3)
- Better road maintenance (3)
- More activities for children (3)
- More housing (2)
- Better emergency medical services (2)
- Small business development program (2)
- Public transportation to Craig and Klawock (2)
- Town meeting place (2)
- Better off-island transportation
- Connection to electrical grid
- GED certification program
- Advertising of community to draw retirees
- Retirement home
- Job service center
- Adult literacy programming
- Financial management classes
- Public assistance outreach and coordination
- Higher education outreach and supportive service
- Food preparation classes
- Second hand store
- Activities for senior citizens
- Community calendar
- Community garden
- Community theatre
- Better sports program
- Annual event to bring outside money in
- Tuition assistance for schooling
- Vocational skill training
- Health information
- Local industry
- Local property tax
- Phone service on south side
- More community events
- Community parks
- Environmental protection of bay to protect natural resources

Note that high speed internet, better road maintenance, and better on-island medical service were most commonly mentioned as the most needed community resources.

High Speed Internet

Respondents gave a variety of reasons for needing better internet service. Mostly, respondents said that faster internet would allow current residents to get more training and remote working opportunities here, which would in turn encourage more people to move to Thorne Bay.

One resident spoke about how the slow internet inhibited residents' educational opportunities, saying, "our technical capabilities are really, really hindered here. I mean there's out there, we just can't connect to them because the infrastructure isn't in place. And if it were, it would increase opportunities for kids to go to college — because of distance learning. For people that have educations [sic] that have to maintain continuing education units, they're able to do that without spending thousands of dollars just getting to an educational site, they can do it online." Higher internet speed would make distance learning opportunities far more available.

The slow internet speeds in Thorne Bay make remote working very difficult. This may lead people to move away or, in some cases, not move here at all. One employer spoke about how internet speed has inhibited his ability to keep employees, saying, "internet speed, ya know. Our internet speed is pretty slow, relatively speaking and I've lost people that had a...partner that needed high internet speed, to do their job or whatever — and we just don't have it here." Another resident said, "My husband in real-estate he gets calls all the time: 'what's the internet service like?' And people are looking at that when they're looking for communities to use to."

Road Maintenance

All of those who mentioned the need for better road maintenance indicated that there were significant problems with the roads connecting to and within the South Thorne Bay subdivision. One resident suggested that road improvements would be necessary to draw new residents to the subdivision saying, “if you want people from down south to move in up here you gonna have to deal with those roads because they’re not gonna have anything to do with it.” In turn, the lack of road maintenance has impacted housing. The land and space available for housing in Thorne Bay lies in the South Thorne Bay subdivision. As one resident mentioned, paving the roads into city-side Thorne Bay from other areas of the island allowed residents to begin working in Craig and Klawock by cutting down on traveling times. One would expect that paving roads in the South Thorne Bay subdivision would provide similar benefits.

Better On-Island Medical Care

Quite a few respondents mentioned the lack of medical care on the island but only three suggested that improving local medical care would benefit the community. However, many residents did mention people who had had to move away because of the lack of medical services on the island. One respondent spoke about how at times they had to leave for medical care, saying, “It’s an extreme...you can’t be here because its too health risk [sic], its too remote.” Those with chronic illnesses or disabilities have born an even greater burden because, should something happen, they would be at least several hours away from adequate medical care an issue exacerbated for low-income residents by the costs of medical transport.

IV. Discussion

The above presents a kaleidoscope view of community strengths, challenges, trends, and hope. Through our discussion we will analyze this data with reference to its limitations, overall implications, and what programming it may suggest.

Study Limitations

By far the largest limitation of this assessment is the sample size and demographic make-up of the respondents. While I strove to select respondents from different parts of the community, the majority were long-time residents who were above the median age of the community. These residents provided us amazing information, wonderful stories, and truly insightful bits of wisdom. However, I was unable to speak to many of the low-income residents who would have been best able to describe their unique challenges.

in addition, the lack of accurate demographic information about the community is an issue. Due to the large margins of error in census data, due to the small sample size and the frequent turnover of residents, it is quite difficult to find current, accurate data. For example, both the percentage of children qualifying for free or reduced lunch and the prevalence of public assistance imply a large low-income population living in Thorne Bay but the census reported a much lower rate of 17%.

Overall Implications

When one studies poverty, what does one study? A lack of income, or a lack of capital? A way of living, or barriers to a type of lifestyle? A lack of opportunity, or the level of opportunity costs? What we must avoid is condemning choices of lifestyle and focus on making more choices possible.

When asking about poverty, unemployment and underemployment in Thorne Bay many residents mentioned how many people who may fall under the poverty line would hardly call themselves impoverished. I had the following exchange:

RESIDENT: But there are a lot of folks in this community that are struggling I would say, and some by choice, you know, its just a chosen lifestyle.

INTERVIEWER: What does — What do you mean that?

RESIDENT: By a chosen lifestyle?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

RESIDENT: I think there's less people subsisting these days then there used to be, but that's a

part of, that's part of being in Alaska: you're going to subsist. Not so many folks live off the grid anymore 'cause we're all plugged in — but it was a lifestyle choice: to be self-sufficient and to live off the land. So of course, yeah, in terms of economics, with that dollar amount and that poverty level, you may be there but in other way you may have a quality life you're satisfied with.

This indicates that people may choose a lifestyle that involves low-income and struggle and be satisfied, and that this lifestyle is part of the reason people choose to live here. Another resident referred to these people as “the Dreamers”: the people who come up here with everything they own to live in a way that is no longer available in much of the country.

INTERVIEWER: So then, what does poverty mean here?

RESIDENT: Well — I guess there's the dollars and cents, that's one definition of it. But its just, can people meet their basic needs, I'd say, and then beyond that, realize some of their goals for themselves and their children

From these residents words I believe we hit upon the heart of the matter: can a person meet their basic needs and realize their goals for themselves and their children? This leads us to a far better metric for understanding poverty on Prince of Wales Island. Therefore, my analysis will focus on these two aspects: meeting basic needs, including food, shelter, health, and education, and realizing goals.

As the survey shows, respondents reported that there were some residents living in inadequate housing without basic services. Furthermore, I learned about the difficulty involved with receiving proper medical attention on the island. I learned that this has especially impacted low-income residents. With the Medicaid expansion, previously uninsured residents will become eligible for public assistance, which may alleviate some of these problems.

I've shown that 57% children qualify for the free or reduced lunch program, which operates throughout the year. However, we do not know if the parents are adequately fed

as well. The gap between the 57% of children receiving food and the estimated 16.8% of residents receiving SNAP benefits may indicate the existence of an underserved population. Alternatively, this gap could also support the hypothesis that the majority of families in poverty have children.

Finally, while childhood education was outside the scope of this assessment, I learned that adult residents do not currently have the ability to complete GED locally. While opportunities are available through distance learning, it is difficult for residents to take advantage of them due to the slow internet speed. One resident reported that maintaining his professional certification was very expensive because of his need to travel for continuing education. There may be additional distance learning challenges as well.

Despite these challenges, two respondents mentioned that they had successfully taken advantage of online learning opportunities. While they did experience difficulty due to slow internet speeds, this was not insurmountable. One respondent did mention that the absence of learning peers or face-to-face interaction could be a major challenge for distance learning.

We learned that regulative restrictions inhibit people from starting their own businesses. Other challenges to business include, the high cost of shipping, the lack of local access to supplies and general logistical difficulties due to the area's isolation. For residents with less capital, this cost could be very prohibitive. In addition, businesses that rely on local sales must account for the low customer base.

As mentioned, many residents must cobble together multiple part time positions in order to find adequate work. Finding full-time work may require a degree of mobility unavailable to some residents, e.g. parents. I showed that many seasonal jobs go to people from outside the area, as local residents reportedly do not have adequate levels of technical or job readiness training. For some residents, under-the-table or piecemeal work may help offset this difficulty finding full-time jobs.

Suggested programming

While implementing organizations have their own goals and resources, this report focuses on program suggested by the survey respondents. Twenty-one of these suggestions are programs that could be implemented with very little funding so even organizations with extremely limited resources could begin fulfilling some of these reported needs. We selected out these programs and highlight them below

- More activities for children
- Small business development program
- GED certification program
- Advertising of community to draw retirees
- Job service center
- Adult literacy programming
- Financial management classes
- Public assistance outreach and coordination
- Higher education outreach and supportive service
- Food preparation classes
- Activities for senior citizens
- Community calendar
- Community garden
- Community theatre
- Better sports program
- Annual event to bring outside money in
- Vocational skill training
- Health information and outreach
- More community events

These programs were selected based on the following criteria: 1) they were not reliant on extensive funding, 2) an organization or resident could pursue them independently, and 3) they would not require legal or governmental action so that implementation could begin immediately.

We believe that this list provides and excellent starting point for any organization wanting to pursue programs to benefit Thorne Bay. By editing to those programs that directly helping people meet their basic needs and realize their goals as covered in the above analysis we end up with the following programming suggestions:

- Small business development program
- GED certification program
- Job service center
- Adult literacy programming
- Financial management classes
- Public assistance outreach and coordination
- Higher education outreach and supportive service
- Food preparation classes
- Annual event to bring outside money in
- Vocational skill training
- Health information and outreach

This list is NOT exhaustive. Nor do we claim that it covers all the goals residents may have. Rather, this list contains programs suggested by community members that we selected based on our analysis of reported community challenges and the *immediate feasibility* of the program.

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