

WELLBEING IN TIETON: A REPORT ON COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

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College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Community & Natural Resources Institute
Utah State University.



S.J. & Jessie E. Quinney
College of Natural Resources
Utah State University



INTERMOUNTAIN WEST
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NETWORK
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This report is from an NSF-funded project called the Intermountain West Transformation Network (TN) that focuses on community resilience in the Intermountain West. Researchers from Utah State University conducted interviews in Kittitas and Yakima Counties to understand factors affecting community wellbeing. Local leaders from government, business, and civic sectors were interviewed, with a total of 11 interviews conducted in Tieton and Yakima County. The report that follows summarizes themes and perspectives gathered during the Tieton interviews.

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO WELLBEING IN TIETON?

SAFE COMMUNITY

People in Tieton feel that their small, tight-knit, and safe community is important to facilitating a high-quality of life.

"You know, there are very few tensions in this town. And it's such a small town, and because of the way it's constructed, there's a park in the middle of town, and four blocks around the park. There aren't highways going through it. It's really kind of a little Mayberry."

"It's small, close knit. A lot of people are related to other people and you know, everybody knows everybody, or so and so works with so and so's Aunt."



YOUTH SUPPORT

Tieton was frequently discussed as a good place to raise kids, and people referenced the importance of the Highland School District and investment in youth programs as contributors to wellbeing.

"I'd say first and foremost that it's probably the safest community in the Valley. And because of that, parents can keep working during the days and you often see school buses showing up and little kids jumping off. If they're in junior high school or high school, they could just run home, they can get their soccer balls or basketballs and run to the play field and they can play. And for the most part, they can play safely without adult supervision."

"I feel like the district overall was pretty involved and tries to make sure that things are available, resources are available and accessible to the community. For example, we are in partnership with the Highland Community Coalition. So they put on educational seminars and series for our families, things on how to talk to your teenager, things about drug and alcohol awareness, substance abuse, trying to help keep our kids safe. And so I think that that is something that is a benefit for the community, that partnership and that outreach from the district and the coalition. I know that there are groups who have been working to try to incorporate art and things into the community and make that available. We have a building that was redone and they call it the Tieton Fueling Station now, I think it's Tieton Arts and Humanities. They do a thing called creARTE and they do like summer programs ... We do have our little local library, a little branch of the Yakima Valley Library System."

AGRICULTURE

Tieton's relationship with agriculture was also discussed as important for community life. People associate Tieton with agriculture, and believe that the relationship between farming and the community is important for the local economy and for local culture.

"We're a big agricultural community. And so I think the jobs definitely contribute to wellbeing. We do have a lot of families that commute out of Tieton for job purposes. At the same time, we also have a fair share that stay in the Highland area, in Tieton for work. So we do have work where we live, we do have job opportunities, so that definitely contributes to the wellbeing."

"The transitions that were going on in the fruit industry back in that time have, to a large extent, resolved themselves, you know, resolved themselves or have evolved enough that the fruit industry has regained its economic power and influence in the area. Which means that there are more jobs and there is more money washing through the local economy. Fruit is bigger than it's ever been around here. And much more efficient plantings, more diversity of the fruit offerings, the varieties of apples and pears and apricots and cherries and things. In a way climate change might be putting us at a little advantage because of the warming that's going on. Water isn't so much of an issue in this part of the valley because we're the closest to its source."



IN TIETON, WHAT ARE PEOPLE CONCERNED ABOUT?

The lack of affordable housing frequently came up as a concern for people we talked to. People are concerned that some who want to live in the community will be priced out as property values and rent continue to rise.

“And I think affordable housing, I think that's probably at the top of everyone's list as the community grows, like just keeping up with affordable housing and making sure that it's available.”

“Nothing is affordable in our economy right now. Everything, all of the prices, everything is outrageous, but when people start talking about having houses built or little housing developments or things like that there always seems to be such a push for like higher end, bigger houses and these kinds of things ... But not all of our families can afford that and it would be nice if everybody could have an opportunity to have their own home, with a yard and a garden and a place for the kids to play and those kinds of things. You know, we have families that live two or three families to a single residence because they don't have any choice and they're not able to afford a 3 or \$400,000 home. So if that's all that's being built and offered in the area, we're missing a large section of our community that could need that too.”

People in Tieton are concerned about ensuring access to affordable, healthy foods. Participants discussed the difficulties some in the community face accessing a full suite of affordable grocery options.

“But to really be able to go to a store that has good variety, good selection and competitive pricing you're looking at like half an hour drive to get there. So, I know places are much worse, but I would say that there is a bit of, what is the term they use, food desert, something like that where it's just not readily available to people, you have to get in a car and drive. So like I said, we do have the grocery store over there. But, most of what you get there is much more expensive than if you were to drive into Yakima to get it. So then you have to weigh the cost of fuel and time. So it's not as accessible as I think it could be. It'd be lovely to have an actual grocery store in Tieton as well.”

“Yeah, you have a fair population of senior citizens. And I do think that there is a population that they're not able to access some of these resources as well. Especially if you're needing to commute into town to get to like Fred Myers. It's probably something that has to be planned for, or you know, like, seek out some more assistance, like it's not just a I'm gonna go whenever I want kind of thing.”

Reliable internet access is a concern for some in Tieton, who feel that enhanced technological infrastructure could improve wellbeing. While recent developments in internet availability have improved access and lowered costs, some still believe there is room for improvement.

“One of the things that does bother me a lot is that we don't have affordable internet. We don't. My current internet does not meet the current standard for broadband. It's on the minimum end of the range that is defined as broadband and it's the best I can get right now.”

“Not that fiber optic is commonly available to the households here, but internet speed has been gradually improving. When we first got here, it was only DSL but now it's, you know, I wouldn't call it nearly as robust as fiber optic, but it's adequate for most people. Although everybody is eager for the expansion, more expansion and improvement in fiber and availability of fiber optic.”

Some are concerned about the lack of sidewalks and safe pedestrian infrastructure in the community, and feel that improvements in this area could make Tieton an even safer place for kids.

“I think that it would be nice to have ways to connect the little parts and pieces of Highland better. People have talked for years about having a walking or bicycle path that goes between Tieton and Cowiche. And unfortunately, we've had some really great minds work on this and opportunities were missed many years ago. And so I don't even know that that's ever going to be a feasible thing. But I think it would be beneficial if we had more areas to walk and ride bikes. I mean, that is physical wellbeing, that is mental wellbeing, there's so much involved with just being able to get out and go for a walk somewhere or ride your bike somewhere. And like the kids, I'm sure that they would ride their bikes to school. You know, it's two miles from here to the school. Or their parents would let them if they didn't have to ride on the shoulder, so that that's a big concern of mine.”



HOW IS TIETON CONNECTED TO OTHER COMMUNITIES IN THE REGION?

Given that the broader scope of this project is regional, we asked people how they think Tieton is connected to other communities in the region. The perspectives shared illustrate important regional connections to Yakima and the Seattle metropolitan area.

Tieton's **proximity to Yakima enables commuting** for work in both directions and Tieton **residents rely on Yakima** for all but basic groceries and anything beyond the health clinic for medical needs.

"Lots of the people who live in Tieton might work in Yakima. And conversely, people who work in Tieton but don't live here might live in Yakima. Yakima is definitely the primary economic center of the valley and over the county. Yakima is a quarter of a mission, so even though we're just a little town, the county itself is not remote. It's not isolated."

Tieton has seen **newcomers from the Seattle** area moving in over the years. Additionally, **visitors often come from Seattle** and **Tieton residents travel to the west side** for shopping, culture, and commuting for work.

"We get daytrippers and we get weekenders." ... "A lot of Seattle people come out for events."

Global trade and international relations are also influential on the apply industry that is important to Tieton and residents also have **family connections that are often international** (particularly to Michoacán, Mexico) or to other states in the US.



LOOKING TO TIETON'S FUTURE, WHAT ARE PEOPLE EXCITED ABOUT?

FRESH LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES

In Tieton, some are excited about the fresh perspectives in city leadership, and believe that wellbeing could improve if leadership demographics better represent the general population.

"I think the thing that's most exciting to me is the increased diversity on like the Tieton City Council, and increase in conversations about equity and inclusiveness in our community. I think that it's been slow to get to the table maybe. But now that there are more people in the right places to start having those conversations, things are starting to happen in ways that are going to be beneficial."



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Some are also excited about continued local business development, and the cultural and economic opportunities this could present to the community.

"I mean, there's just a lot of incubating stuff. We had a very small space for a restaurant that was kind of a part time restaurant. It's had many stages in evolution, but that one now has been so successful. The latest iteration occupies a larger building kitty corner across the square and is a nice restaurant. I've eaten at a lot of very nice restaurants in Seattle, because I work for a food entity. And it's, it's as good or better than 99% of them... It has no peers in the Yakima Valley. It's just stunning."

"And they bought another one and turned it into artisan businesses, which is where the mosaic workshop is and they have some letterpress printing machines, they use the building a lot now for events, weddings and public events. They put on a big Dia de los Muertos event in the fall. But that has really grown ... and then because that generates more traffic in town, we've also had a small gallery open that initially was this marvelous project. Another one I was pretty involved in. That was a gallery that exhibited local artists and had shows that were of a finite length. Open only on Saturdays, 100% volunteer, and all the proceeds after the bills were paid, went to the food bank."

It has been a pleasure to get to know Tieton through this project. Additional details on the project methods or anything else can be obtained by contacting **Dr. Courtney Flint at Utah State University (435-797-8635 or courtney.flint@usu.edu)**.

Authors: Alex Theophilus, McKayle Law, Emma Epperson, Dr. Jessica Ulrich-Schad, Rebecca Gustine, Dr. Claudia Méndez Wright, Madison Fjeldsted Thompson, and Dr. Courtney Flint.