

A CULTURAL PLAN *for* ATIKOKAN, ONTARIO



Final Report January, 2012
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 For the Corporation of the Town of Atikokan



Funding by: The Government of Ontario



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:



This is the first Municipal Cultural Plan (MCP or Cultural Plan) for Atikokan. It is a five year plan and is part of the Atikokan Creative Communities Project that is supported by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture’s “Creative Communities Prosperity Fund”. The project includes a Municipal Cultural Inventory and Mapping Guidelines that will be completed by March 31, 2012 as a report separate from this MCP.

Atikokan is on the road to economic recovery after some devastating downturns in the forestry and mining industries, and changes in the power generation industry. The emerging opportunities position the town to take exciting new steps forward in its rejuvenation but it will take firm leadership, new thinking and bold vision to achieve economic and cultural renewal.

This Cultural Plan is another tool for the Town Council to use as it makes important decisions on the future of Atikokan, and how to build a prosperous, diverse and vibrant community. The Cultural Plan fits with local economic development strategies, land use and planning concepts and the challenges to diversify the town’s economy through culture, tourism and adapting new technologies.

The Atikokan definition of culture is different from many other communities. It is based upon a long tradition of outdoor recreation and enjoying the surrounding wilderness and natural environment. That drives much of the life and life-style of residents.

**The plan identifies four major cultural opportunities
that are emerging for the Town:**

- a) *How to prepare Atikokan to take maximum advantage of new economic activity with potential mining/natural resource development by making the community a more attractive place for families to live and work.*
- b) *How to broaden Atikokan's economic base by supporting/expanding cultural and tourism opportunities and new CRINK economy jobs.*
- c) *How to re-design and enhance the physical realm and public places and spaces of Atikokan, including re-connecting with the Atikokan River and beautifying the downtown.*
- d) *How to develop a greater focus on and support for emerging arts, heritage and cultural opportunities to make the town more appealing and diverse.*

This plan offers four 'big ideas' for the community to consider:

- a) *Expand the proposed Recreation complex with a new library facility and a greater focus on cultural amenities, urban design, creative arts facilities for people of all ages, and a health/wellness centre.*
- b) *An expansion and redesign of the Historical Park district, including a new Regional Parks office, expanded museum facility, new town dock and new public park amenities.*
- c) *A commitment to making Atikokan truly the 'Gateway to Quetico and Turtle River Provincial Parks'.*
- d) *Declare Atikokan a 'world class' outdoor recreation destination, and begin to build the necessary infrastructure, marketing and regional partnerships to support that vision.*

Achieving these four big ideas will require some new ways of thinking in Atikokan, including a greater commitment to regional partnerships, more assertive and focused promotion/marketing themes, taking maximum advantage of the natural physical realm that surrounds the community, and a commitment to becoming a supportive arts community.

To sustain these 'big ideas' and to also offer many other ideas, this cultural plan presents five main themes that support the emerging cultural opportunities. There are 33 specific recommendations as well as a number of comments and suggestions that should be considered by the community and Council over the next five years as it progresses. Many of the recommendations are cross-sectoral in nature and will require investments by public and private sector partners. There is a summary of the recommendations and a suggested time line presented in Appendix 3.

Outdoor Recreation:

The Atikokan definition of culture is different from many other communities. It is based upon a long tradition of outdoor recreation and enjoying the surrounding wilderness and natural environment. That drives much of the life and life-style of residents. It also presents an interesting opportunity to aspire to become an internationally-recognized destination for many forms of out-

door recreation. To achieve that will require infrastructure improvements, a regional marketing approach and developing new public and private sector partnerships.

It will also require a renewed commitment to the community's Vision statement: *"The Canoeing Capital of Canada is a safe, healthy community with a diverse economy, strong ties to the wilderness and a creative spirit."*

Arts and Culture:

Adding to the local definition of culture through arts and the full range of cultural expression and experiences is becoming more important to the community. It is not a matter of replacing the outdoor recreation focus, but rather broadening and enhancing cultural opportunities to create a community that also respects and embraces these new cultural statements. Becoming a more appealing place to live for young families (who are likely involved in the mining industry or other resource extraction industries) will help to strengthen the community, its assessment base and its quality of life. The Town must become a stronger supporter of the arts (especially for children), heritage and the broad cultural spectrum.

Economic Development and Prosperity:

Only a strong community with a solid economic base which offers good jobs can compete with national and international municipalities for the talent and technology that will shape the future. The emerging Hammond Reef mine presents an enormous economic opportunity for Atikokan. There will be new secondary and tertiary business opportunities because of this project. Mining and other natural resource sectors will remain the key economic foundation.

To strengthen the local economy and continue the efforts towards a more diversified economy, a stronger sense of entrepreneurship must emerge. Developing a community that features the outdoor recreational lifestyle, combined with an interest in the arts, results in a more attractive and appealing town that can provide a special quality of life to potential residents. This is an advantage that can be marketed.

Developing a more diverse economic base through CRINK Economy jobs (Creative, Innovative, Knowledge-based) will appeal to younger people and over time may help to attract/retain younger residents. Creating an 'Emerging Leaders' focus will assist in this key area. Utilizing technology to create new job opportunities is important. The result will be a community that nurtures and welcomes the creative economy, as well as supports the traditional natural resource-based Atikokan economy.

Re-shaping the Community:

There is an opportunity emerging to reshape the public physical realm of Atikokan through a new Recreation, Cultural and Wellness Centre at the west end of the downtown, and a reinvigorated and expanded Civic Square district around the Museum and the Historical Park at the east end. These projects will demand strong civic leadership and an engaged community.

These two new anchors would provide a natural conduit along Main Street, which will add foot traffic and will encourage more stores and businesses to open.

There is a need locally to provide affordable housing for young families, and to provide more rental accommodation and seniors' housing to develop an improved and more active cycle in the housing market. These steps will help to provide a solid foundation for the broader business and cultural opportunities and family activities by increasing the population and keeping/attracting younger families in town.

Tourism and the New Economy:

Diversifying the town's traditional economic base will not be easy, but there are many benefits to doing it. Regional tourism and linking with private and public partners will provide the town with new opportunities; however it will take a determined commitment by the Town Council, AEDC and the local business community to accomplish that.

There must be a change of attitude locally and a greater focus on building the tourism infrastructure, services and marketing. The town must refocus on natural partners such as Quetico Provincial Park, the Regional Tourism Organization and providing amenities for visitors that presently aren't available in town. An example of a community that has done this successfully is Ely, Minnesota which offers a true gateway to their park and offers a themed cultural experience to its many tourists. The future possibilities for an expanded tourism economy are as wide open as the pristine lakes and wilderness that surrounds Atikokan.

Conclusion:

All of these five themes are explored in this report, and there are strong links between and amongst all of these elements. The ultimate objective is to reposition Atikokan as a dynamic community with a solid, diverse economic foundation that offers a vibrant and special place to live, work, raise a family and eventually retire in comfort and safety. That is why the four emerging cultural objectives build the foundation for action as recommended in this plan. That is also why the "Spirit of Atikokan" should be confirmed as a Council committee and be directed to oversee the implementation of this cultural plan.

This Cultural Plan is a starting point for the town's next stage of progress, not an end point. Atikokan has accomplished much and is obviously a rugged survivor of the natural resource extraction industry. The key now is to build upon that heritage and foundation while understanding the new needs and wants of younger families, reshape the community for the next generations, and continue to provide that unique quality of life that makes Atikokan so appealing to many.

Atikokan must confront some serious questions about its future. The four 'Big Ideas' provide a platform for community discussion and advancement.

The future is beckoning. It will not be an easy road. Vision, courage and determination will be needed, as well as some fresh thinking and innovative ideas. The Council, business community and citizens at large need to refocus on the potential. Atikokan has this unique window of opportunity now to shape its cultural, social, economic and environmental future.

I. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION:

A. ATIKOKAN AND THE CULTURAL PLAN'S PARAMETERS

Atikokan is a very resilient community.

Like virtually all Canadian northern communities that depend upon natural resource extraction for their primary economic spine, Atikokan has experienced the 'boom and bust' cycles of economic activity. Yet it continues to survive, despite severe economic challenges.

Almost by definition, such towns and cities are going to be on a prosperity roller-coaster as world-wide demand and prices for commodities rise and fall. This cyclical nature of the local economy creates particular challenges for local town councils and the broader community, as these cycles tend to be unpredictable and (from a local government standpoint) quite uncontrollable.

It is a credit to the strength and commitment of local families and their community spirit and commitment, and to the Town Council and administration, that Atikokan is again doing better after surviving some severe economic blows in recent years. There is an emerging hope and confidence that once again Atikokan will prosper with new mining opportunities and a more diversified economic base.

Northern Ontario communities in this situation—and there are many of them—operate under significantly different conditions and realities than towns and cities in southern Ontario. There is, in fact, a considerable divide between the two regions, ranging from lifestyle to culture to the economic base.

Most people in southern Ontario don't understand these issues and the challenges, joys

and hardships which they bring. From a harsh winter climate to higher prices for food, gasoline and other necessities, from the vast distances between communities to the pleasures of clean air and a vibrant lifestyle, northern Ontario communities face unique challenges and great opportunities.

Southern Ontario is more focused on New York, Michigan and Ohio; northwestern Ontario is focused on Manitoba, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Southern Ontario's economy is more focused on manufacturing, financial services, cultural and creative industries (what some refer to as the CRINK Economy: CReative, INnovative, Knowledge-based); northern Ontario is more focused on mining, forestry, natural resources industries and emerging economic opportunities that offer a more diversified economic base.

Southern Ontario's culture is more focused on the traditional forms—art, music, opera, ballet, dance, and so on. Northern Ontario's culture is more focused on recreation, outdoor lifestyle, hunting and fishing, and so on. Now, obviously lots of people from southern Ontario enjoy snowmobiling and boating, and lots of people in northern Ontario enjoy music, art, theatre, etc.; this is simply to make the point that climate, lifestyle, history and opportunity have all combined to create two quite different societies that are not as fully understood by each other as they might.

Because of that, considerable care has been taken in the preparation of this report to make it reflect the people, spirit and community of Atikokan. Definitions of culture, ideas for

the town and the identification of both challenges and opportunities in this report are unique to Atikokan, although perhaps on a broader scale also generally applicable to other northern Ontario towns.

But this report is all about Atikokan. It is a great tribute to the community and its municipal leadership that Atikokan was chosen during a highly competitive process to receive funding from the Ministry of Tourism and Culture's "Creative Communities Prosperity Fund".

Ministry regional rep Natasha Lovenuk-Markham provided strong leadership and support throughout this process, and has been an integral part of the planning and development of this Cultural Plan.

There were three major components of the Town's application:

- a) Research and preparation of a Cultural Plan for Atikokan
- b) Information and preparation for a future Cultural Mapping project
- c) Training and internship of a local resident to enhance community capacity

This report contains a variety of recommendations and suggestions to assist Atikokan Council in continuing to move forward the local economic prosperity and cultural vitality of the town. The plan builds local capacity, sustainability and the opportunity for greater community participation and engagement. This Cultural Plan for Atikokan completes the first element of the project.

Atikokan is planning now for a future GIS project and implementation; as a result, the data-gathering done as part of this plan has been made available to the town for use once their GIS project is completed and in place. This information will be easily inputted and will provide important and useful data for three elements:

- a) The Town of Atikokan's GIS system
- b) A future Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture regional cultural mapping project
- c) Opportunities for Atikokan to link with existing GIS programs (eg. Quetico Provincial Park) to develop new tourism, cultural and economic opportunities.

This data-gathering provides the town with sufficient data to proceed with its GIS system at a time to be determined by Council. This fulfils the second major component of the project.

The hiring of Zach Williams in the summer of 2011 as the Cultural Development Assistant on this project provided a valuable asset in the research and development of this plan. This position provided training and development that will enhance the capacity in the town. When his work experience is completed in March, 2012 he will have had considerable training in this field.

This will complete the third and final major component of the project.

B. ATIKOKAN AND CULTURAL PLANNING:

Preparing a cultural plan provides a unique opportunity for a community to explore itself, its vision, its opportunities and to help chart its future. It is also an opportunity to think big, to contemplate bold ideas and to dream a bit about what might be. The community has enthusiastically embraced this opportunity to contribute, and many people in town became actively involved with this process.

To the Mayor, members of Council, town administrators, business community and the general population who contributed and participated, THANK YOU for your interest, ideas, honest comments and very engaged sharing of beliefs, concepts, criticisms, visions, the community future and ways to improve the town.

Catherine Reilly, the Curator/Manager of the Atikokan Centennial Museum, was the project leader. Her passion and personal commitment to making this succeed is a tribute to her own leadership abilities, her management integrity, and to her marvelous belief in making Atikokan a better place for families to live, work and play.

The Spirit of Atikokan group provided constant support for this project as the steering group. Being able to consult and discuss issues with this community organization was very beneficial, and their assistance and cooperation was most appreciated.

One of the most fascinating findings of the research was the fact that the people who like living in Atikokan like it a lot!

This community support and affection provides a solid foundation upon which to grow Atikokan and get ready for a new era of optimism and prosperity. There are difficult decisions ahead, and certainly the road is not guaranteed, but this Cultural Plan will offer

Council and the community another tool in shaping and encouraging the progress of Atikokan.

Future Growth Possibilities

The report offers a clear-eyed view of the community today, and where it can go in the future. Not everyone may agree with every point or comment in this report, and that's fine. What is critical is to have Council and the community understand clearly the situation today, the opportunities that wait in the future, and then make the best decisions in the interests of the town.

Throughout this cultural planning process, attention was paid to the fact that the town has also embarked upon its Official Plan (OP) review. There may be some elements of recommendations that make their way into the OP, but that will be a Council decision. Doing the two plans in parallel is a responsible Council strategy.

Atikokan has already completed several important studies that will assist the community in its economic development. The reports have all been studied as part of the research and background for this Cultural Plan. These include:

- a) McSweeney & Associates report on Industrial Land opportunities
- b) Atikokan Labour Market survey
- c) Strategic Thinking for the Town of Atikokan
- d) Various committees, task forces and mayor's special committees to research and report on selected topics of local importance and interest.

- e) AEDC committees and reports on various aspects of economic development plans and strategies.

There also have been three important reports done concerning tourism opportunities. They are the Quadra Report – Atikokan Strategic Community and Economic Development Plan (Quadra Consulting Group); the Economic Development Opportunities for the Township of Atikokan (Patrick Reid and Associates); and the Northwoods Adventure Country Management Plan (Werner Schwar Landscape Architect).

Each of them offered ideas for improving tourism opportunities for Atikokan and the region. While this Cultural Plan is not a Tourism study, there are certainly strong links between attracting tourists, building the local/regional economy and providing a culturally vibrant and appealing destination.

There are a few similarities between the recommendations in those reports and the recommendations of this report, even though the research and conclusions were arrived at independently. The fact is that there has been insufficient movement forward on the recommendations in those reports, particularly in the ‘soft’ outdoor forms of recreation, and the arts-related ideas.

If the Town of Atikokan is to step forward boldly and broaden its economic base through tourism, then those reports should be reviewed in detail and a comprehensive collective strategy and priority list should emerge. Taking those key recommendations and merging them with those in this report will result in a strong action plan for improving the tourist amenities, opportunities and economic benefits.

To quote from the Reid Report, “The residents of Atikokan must undergo somewhat of a cultural change since many do not recog-

nize the town as being a tourist destination or the benefits of tourism to the economy.”

The research for this report has identified a growing understanding by some of the importance of continuing efforts to diversify the local economy, and tourism is one of the key opportunities, but the quote from the Reid Report remains a provocative challenge to Atikokanites.

Cultural Assets and Governance:

There is no one at the municipality with full responsibility for the ‘cultural file’. As Atikokan focuses more on the benefits of a broader cultural identity and experience in the years ahead, it will be necessary to update the responsibilities and lines of communication for culture. The community is not ready yet for a full-time municipal staff member responsible for that area, but that will evolve.

There will also be a need in the future for clearer guidelines for the arts, heritage and cultural investments, and the strategies and policies that the municipality will require as it becomes more invested and involved with culture. The policies in place now are adequate for the municipality’s needs for the immediate future.

The more urgent focus should be on the encouragement and development of local arts, supporting the broader cultural base, encouraging community support for a greater role and understanding of the benefits of the cultural agenda, and continuing to diversify and enhance the local economy.

The Municipality has several good assets already to support developing a stronger cultural base. These include the Atikokan Public Library, the Atikokan Centennial Museum and a strong recreation program. There are no governance issues with these important sectors of Atikokan’s cultural diaspora.

The private sector also supports the local arts scene, although in a more limited way, with retail stores and tourist attractions. There are also small pockets of professionals offering private lessons for music, art, etc. and, there are a number of artists and artisans who are deeply engaged in the arts sector. They receive very limited assistance from the municipality.

There are also some great success stories to celebrate for Atikokan artists and cultural leaders. One example is renowned local artist Kristy Cameron, who did the illustrations for the book “Seven Sacred Teachings”, printed in English and Ojibwe. The book presents the seven sacred teachings of White Buffalo Calf Woman, which are brilliantly illustrated by this Atikokan artist.

Other local examples of success include internationally recognized visual artists Jennifer Garrett and Alana Marohnic; John Pringle, who has been published in the Northwestern Ontario Writers Workshop; and Sunday wilde who has produced several CDs and also won the Independent Music Award Voter’s Choice Best Blues Song.

Artists and their commercial success simply prove one of the key points of this report—that with technology today, and a larger opportunity and platform, Atikokan residents can compete in a global cultural marketplace. Technology has democratized business and the arts. But their success will be enhanced by a greater understanding and support from the local community of arts programs and cultural achievements.

There will need to be an ample commitment from the Town in the future for a larger role helping to support and encourage artistic and economic partnerships and opportunities. This will be a building process over the next several years.

Cultural Plan Flexibility

A cultural plan should be a living, breathing document—not something static that sits on a dusty shelf. It should always be updated, changed, improved...community groups will often embrace one or two of the recommendations and claim ownership, and take command of implementing a particular recommendation or idea. This community-based development is a strong indication of a thriving, committed community that wants to move forward.

The four emerging major cultural opportunities identified in the Executive Summary are a thread that goes throughout this report. As the Town Council prioritizes the recommendations from this report and extends them through their own Strategic Plan, they will result in a sharper focus for investment and the commitment of municipal resources.

This report creates a new base line upon which Atikokan can grow and prosper. That foundation, however, will continue to develop in interesting new ways, not all of which can be foreseen. By nurturing this stronger cultural foundation, the Town of Atikokan is making an important new statement to its residents and to the community.

C. ATIKOKAN AND COMMUNITY VALUES

This cultural plan offers a holistic view of the current situation and the future opportunities for the town. It may seem unusual for such a plan to offer comments on things like housing and downtown streets (and it is), but a strong case is made in this report that these things also contribute to the cultural, social, environmental and economic policies that govern sustainability and prosperity for Atikokan.

As a smaller community of about 3,500 people, Atikokan has very realistic limitations as to the financial capacity, infrastructure opportunities and human resources that are available. These are typical of small northern Ontario communities. “Volunteer burn-out” is a very real concern.

The municipal tax base is limited, and tax rates are always a concern to local residents. The Atikokan Economic Development Corporation (AEDC) is charged with the economic development of Atikokan and the surrounding region. The Town contributes financially to the organization, and there is strong relationship between AEDC and the Town Council.

There is an emerging sense of optimism in the community, fueled by the potential of the new Hammond Reef mine opening in a couple of years. While Osisko correctly stresses it is still in the exploratory phase, it is proceeding with its environmental assessments and other federal and provincial requirements. To its credit the company has been exemplary in its relations with the town and with surrounding First Nations communities, and in pursuing the environmental studies required for such a project.

Economic opportunities and development are vital to also supporting a creative, healthy community. There are strong links between culture, tourism and economic prosperity, and

these links and opportunities have been developed as part of this Cultural Plan.

Atikokan has identified previously in its strategic thinking these three over-arching values:

a) *Harmony with the land:*

Historically, the overall health of Atikokan has been dependent on the extraction of natural resources. It is in the best interest of the community to make long term decisions based on sustainability in balance with economic viability.

b) *Friendliness and generosity:*

Our spirit, attitude and ability to help each other are vital to the fabric of this community. We have many volunteer groups working to contribute to the overall success of the community. Our friendly nature will help to support our tourism interests as well.

c) *Healthy and Nurturing Lifestyles:*

Physical health in this community is supported through recreational services and our outdoor lifestyle.

These values have helped to guide the development of this cultural plan. These values are respected by the community and are embraced as part of this document. It is important for the community to more actively support and promote the principles of living in harmony with the surrounding land, lakes and wilderness.

Decisions at Council and in the community need to be guided by these established community values.

Living in such an area offers both a unique lifestyle and a great responsibility. Future

generations will look back on how well Atikokan and its residents were good stewards of the land. Town policies and the actions of its residents are important contributors to preserving, protecting and enhancing the environmental and natural resources that make up so much of the town and its culture. A creative community is also a healthy community.

It is useful for the Town Council and all Atikokan residents to contemplate its three over-arching guiding principles and values in both action and policy.



D. RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

A fundamental tenet of this Cultural Plan has been to engage the people of Atikokan fully, and to offer a number of opportunities for them to participate in the process. The best cultural plans are ‘ground up’, not ‘top down’. This report is for the community and it is proper that the citizens be fully engaged and contribute both to its development and to its eventual implementation.

A number of ways of participating in this research and community outreach were developed. These included:

a) Web-based questionnaire:

Through the cooperation of the administration, a link dealing with Cultural Planning was added to the Town’s web site in July. This explained the Cultural Planning process, and also asked respondents to give us their thoughts on five questions dealing with the town and its cultural assets and opportunities. This link remained operational until October. (see Appendix 1)

b) Printed questionnaire:

The same five questions were printed on a hand-out sheet, and distributed throughout the town, including the town hall, museum, library, downtown mall and other sites. Respondents could then reply in writing or through the web site.

c) Newspaper advertisement:

On September 19, an advertisement was run in the Atikokan Progress. This widely-distributed paper featured a box ad, again running the five questions and inviting people to participate. The questions featured open-ended responses, meaning people had the chance to use their own words.

d) Focus groups:

Two focus groups were held, one with seniors at the Pioneer Seniors Centre, and one with students at Atikokan High School. These sessions provided the opportunity to do in-depth discussions and probe attitudes and opinions about community and cultural topics.

e) Stakeholder interviews:

Private, confidential in-depth interviews were held with 16 community leaders representing a variety of key business, social, community and cultural organizations. These interviews offered candid views on a variety of issues critically important to this report and to the community and its opportunities. (see Appendix 2)

f) On the Street interviews:

Several surprise interviews with Atikokanites were held. These sessions offered ‘on the street’ responses that were often candid and interesting.

g) “If I had a million dollars...”:

As a fun way of involving residents in the cultural planning process, people were given a million Atikokan dollars and then had to ‘vote’ by depositing their money, or a portion of it, in ten different community venues (or opportunities), or an eleventh bag with their own ideas.

While obviously any straw poll should be taken with a grain of salt, the process served two purposes—it made people think about choices and helped them to understand how difficult it is for Council to do budgets and set priorities; and it provided a broad community response and participation in the cultural planning process.

These seven research methods resulted in an extensive community outreach. Residents of Atikokan had ample opportunity to participate and respond, and in fact the participation was very good. There were nearly 400 responses to our various questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, which provides a broad-based community flavor. This was an extremely strong response.

Survey Analysis:

The detailed survey results are found in Appendix 1. *In summary:*

- 1 The favorite places to take visitors were:
 - a) Little Falls, for picnics, recreation, etc
 - b) Atikokan Centennial Museum, for tours and information about our history
 - c) Quetico Provincial Park for outdoor canoeing, camping, hiking, etc
 - d) The former Steep Rock Iron Mines site
 - e) Charleson Recreation Area, to enjoy the outdoor activities
- 2 In response to the opportunity to change one thing about Atikokan, respondents were most focused on improving the roads and sidewalks. Other important civic issues identified were improving the gateway on MacKenzie, improving employment, a greener downtown and more shopping opportunities.
- 3 In responding to how they would describe the life style/culture in Atikokan, respondents were focused on the outdoor lifestyle. There was also considerable response that the town was friendly, laid-back, and comfortable.
- 4 The question of what can be done to make Atikokan a more interesting town drew a number of responses, the key ones being more stores and shopping, better employment opportunities, improving local signage, fixing the streets and sidewalks, beautification of the downtown and the community and a variety of ideas for more arts, community events and public festivals.
- 5 When asked what the future holds for Atikokan, there was a positive response to the anticipation that the gold mine and other industries will proceed. There was a generally positive belief that things are getting better and there is new opportunity for the town. There was some support for tourism growth and development. There were also concerns expressed about the aging of the population, the town's ability to conclude projects and concern about the number of local businesses (shops).
- 6 The leading "If I had a million dollars" vote was overwhelmingly in support of a new Recreation and Wellness complex. (Note: the title used in that survey was for the Recreation and Wellness complex...this report expands that opportunity by including Culture in the proposed new name/facility). There was also support for keeping and maintaining existing recreation facilities (arena and swimming pool), the Charleson Recreation Area, Little Falls recreation centre, and enhancing trails and canoe access to Atikokan River. There was a surprising amount of support for beautifying the town, and we are presuming that is focused on the downtown core. There was also good support for other key municipal facilities including the Museum, Library, preserving local history and the Pioneer Centre. The respondents at Atikokan High School hugely supported a new skateboard park, which would not be a surprise from this demographic.

Overall the research showed clearly that the town is focused and supportive of outdoor recreation events and facilities. There is a more positive attitude about the future which is focused on the opening of the gold mine. Respondents care very much about their town, and want to see further improvements to local roads and sidewalks, beautification and continued improvement to the downtown. There is solid support for a new Recreation and Wellness multi-purpose facility.

Moving Ahead, Looking Back

This is the first Cultural Plan for Atikokan. It should be clearly understood that this is the starting point, not the end point. The community is really building a foundation for a stronger cultural base, community participation and future economic opportunities.

A key outcome of this report is to add community capacity, particularly in the cultural sector, and to encourage a fresh look at municipal decision-making through a cultural lens.

Another outcome is a greater awareness of how private/public ventures must be linked to municipal planning and decision-making. One example is the former Intergenerational Centre for Arts and Alternatives, later re-named the Atikokan Arts Centre.

As the community learned through its sad demise, ideas must have a solid business plan and strategy, and can't depend upon never-ending grants from outside agencies. At the same time, the Municipality and its citizens need to reflect on whether this unique facility could have been saved with a restructuring and some financial support.

The community base of support for this particular facility was too small to survive, and certainly there were internal and external issues, but the vision to provide such a facility to the community was remarkable and its ten years of operation added cultural experiences to the town. Its demise was regrettable.

Each of the following sections is both stand-alone and inter-related. The 33 recommendations are included throughout these sections, and are also summarized for easy reference in Appendix 3. There is also a suggested timeline, but that will ultimately be Council's determination as part of the implementation strategy.

E. A VISION OF CULTURE FOR ATIKOKAN:

The vision for Atikokan, as identified in the Town's Strategic Thinking document, states:

"The Canoeing Capital of Canada is a safe, healthy community with a diverse economy, strong ties to the wilderness and a creative spirit."

The history of Atikokan is more than a century long, and many people have worked in or gone through the town over those decades.

The physical location of the town reflects the relatively dry, flat land that the railroad required. The town emerged as a stopping point and centre for mining and forestry along the northern fringes of Lake Superior and west towards the international border. There are no communities of size nearby; the closest community neighbours are a couple of hours drive.

Sadly, and unlike many northern Ontario towns, Atikokan was not built on a harbour or near a lake. There are no distinguishing physical features or attractions, although obviously the proximity to Quetico Provincial Park is an appealing advantage.

There is not a very diverse population in the town. Relations with Métis and First Nations are positive. The town's population is aging, as is Canada's, and many young people are leaving the community for education and job opportunities elsewhere; those are normal trends.

Mining was the main driver of Atikokan's economy from 1945-1980. With the closing of the Steep Rock Iron Mine, the forestry sector and the Atikokan Generating Station became the dominant forces in the economy. Now with the downturn in forestry and the uncertain future of the Atikokan Generating

Station, the economic outlook is less certain. There is renewed hope that the Atikokan Generating Station will have a secure future with the introduction of bio-fuels. There are also promising indications that mining will once again be a major force in Atikokan's economy.

The residents of Atikokan define culture in their own terms. They define their culture as canoeing, boating, fishing, hunting, ATVs and RVs, swimming, cottages, sports, enjoying social life with friends, family dinners and attending community events.

While efforts have been made to diversify the local economy, it remains focused on natural resource extraction, and that will continue to be the primary job generator. Tourism revenue has been quite limited but is certainly an opportunity for the future if new tourism attractions and infrastructure can be developed. A recently refurbished Main Street offers a pleasant shopping district but needs more retail outlets and a commitment to beautification.

There are many positive elements to the community. Good schools, a fine hospital, library, museum, arena, swimming pool, amateur sports facilities and other civic parks and amenities. In the eyes of many residents, one of the most appealing attractions of the town is the proximity to their cottages on surrounding lakes, and the easy ability to get boats, canoes, snowmobiles and ATVs into the wilderness.

It is important to understand this physical and historic perspective, because they are helping to shape the community today.

There is no strong heritage of a 19th century opera house, an art gallery, performing arts centre or theatre. There is no longer a movie theatre. The town couldn't support them, and the focus of the population for some decades has been more on the outdoor recreation opportunities than on more 'traditional' arts-oriented activities.

To a significant extent the physical environment has shaped the community today. If you don't enjoy physical outdoor recreation, the chances are you're not going to live in Atikokan for long. As a result, the definition of culture in Atikokan is much different from that of an urban centre.

The residents of Atikokan define culture in their own terms. They define their culture as canoeing, boating, fishing, hunting, ATVs and RVs, swimming, cottages, sports, enjoying social life with friends, family dinners and attending community events.

Yes many local people also enjoy music, art, dance, reading and so on, and there are many small pockets of art, artisans and heritage, but ***the predominant Atikokan culture today is that of outdoor recreation.***

That is the shared identity, and the values and sense of place and people that defines culture in Atikokan. The natural wilderness areas surrounding the town are the heritage of the community and have helped to shape generations of local residents. Culture and the wilderness are linked inextricably, and the recreation opportunities and lifestyles that have emerged from the proximity to the physical environment have become the local definition of culture.

And that is just fine.

It is not the traditional or more generally understood definition of culture or cultural values, nor will everyone understand this, but it is the reality for Atikokan. The differing values (outdoor recreation and arts/culture) are not incompatible.

It is vital that this fundamental truth be acknowledged. It will help to drive many of the following recommendations that may not be considered traditional in a cultural plan.

It is also important to understand that there are two segments under the outdoor recreation umbrella. One is people who prefer motorized activities (snowmobiles, ATVs, etc). The second segment is people who prefer self-propelled activities (canoeing, cross-country skiing, etc). Both are of equal importance and significance. What is particularly crucial to understand is that they share many values such as protecting the wilderness, enjoying the open spaces, family-oriented activities, respecting the lands and lakes, and living in harmony with the local environment.

There is also cross-over between these two segments that further enhances their shared values, such as driving into wilderness areas and then hiking, camping and fishing. Neither is more important, they are just a bit different, and it is important to acknowledge this reality.

Appealing to these two segments means a different approach for marketing and communications. The broad messages of protecting the wilderness and the ecological pressures on the lands and lakes and the enjoyment they can deliver is a shared value.

To reach local residents and visitors who are primarily interested in one or the other means focused, compelling messages need to be developed and utilized. Many of the messages Atikokan sends out now are not consistent. There are a variety of logos, colours, styles

and themes being used by various parts of the community. The canoe theme is often not predominant. There does not seem to be a coordinated marketing effort. Every public communication/sign/ad/logo/theme is a chance to influence the public and improve the community's image. There must be stronger, more coordinated messaging from Atikokan.

Taking advantage of the outdoors and outdoor living offers residents and visitors a unique cultural experience. This can also translate into new, interesting and unique opportunities for visitors.

As art reflects local culture, and if culture is how people make sense of their lives and environment, then artistic expression and opportunity should become a greater part of life in Atikokan.

From the magnificent paintings of the Group of Seven to the unique 'music' of the wind in the trees, from the heritage of paddlers creating the first highway across the continent to the respect for the land that our First Nations taught us, there is a rhythm and beauty to the north that is quite special.

Sometimes visitors in a hurry don't appreciate that. Gently guiding them and helping visitors to understand that there are very special cultural encounters that await them throughout the natural environment that they are visiting is a responsibility for local residents and businesses.

There are unique and special opportunities for visitors—the first glimpse of a pristine wilderness area, a chance to paint or sketch the landscape, a first canoe paddle, experiencing local food, hearing about the heritage of our nation—that are utterly unique to the region.

This is where art blends with tourism, where culture meets awe-struck children, where our

heritage combines with the land and people. Atikokan can be a leader in presenting these experiences to visitors. There are important reasons for the town to have and to offer a greater interest in these cultural experiences for both local residents and for tourists and visitors.

The community simply cannot support, nor at this moment in time does it have a strong desire, to focus on the traditional arts. However, there should be a stronger community understanding and recognition of three key factors that do support gradually expanding the local arts sector.

First, children. As one respondent stated clearly, "The kids here aren't being exposed to art, music, culture...they need to learn that there's more to life."

The key to that will be to gradually develop interest in music, art, dance, drama, theatre, reading, writing and so on among children and young families, and to offer community support to those that have talent and ability. Much of this inspiration will come from the landscape of northwestern Ontario and the environment and lifestyle that it offers, and creating the links between culture and quality of life.

It is also important to recognize and utilize our more contemporary tools of cultural experiences—computers and all their programs, web based research, computer design, multi-media, portable mobile technology, graphics, computer gaming and so much more. Artists and artisan often use technology in their creations today. Young people today communicate in much different ways than even a few years ago...society need to catch up. Encouraging a greater awareness of and commitment to art (as it is broadly defined in this report) is a long-term strategy. It is, however, both fair and reasonable to expose

children to such opportunities and to encourage interest and affection for these activities in addition to outdoor recreation. That provides a better learning environment, produces well-rounded young people, and offers a better future quality of life. That also solidifies the links between the land and the people.

In the vast majority of families in Atikokan, however, cultural activities and support right now are focused on the outdoors and the recreational lifestyle and opportunities for both family and individual participation.

Second, a greater commitment to developing and supporting the local arts scene also means continuing to enhance and develop Atikokan as a more appealing place to live, work and raise a family. For example, seniors retiring want certain amenities, and an active, creative community is one of their priorities.

To make the town more attractive to potential new residents and families when they are considering moving to Atikokan to work (perhaps in the mining industry), cultural attractions are important. They help to develop a more rounded and attractive community that would also be more appealing to tourists and visitors.

There are long-term benefits to the community, but the arts are not going to be a major economic driver for Atikokan at this stage of its development. They are, however, an important adjunct and support for the more diversified economic base that is desired.

Third, the natural environment. This is a significant part of Atikokan's heritage, culture and lifestyle. This respect for and connection to the wilderness and the land and lakes that compose so much of the physical realm around Atikokan both impact and shape residents. There is an appreciation of nature and a recognition of the aesthetic beauty of the

region that is a shared cultural value for many Atikokan residents.

This 'environmental ethic' is a philosophy that must be encouraged and even further developed in Atikokan. As our society understands the greater demands and needs for environmental sustainability, Atikokan and its sister communities in northern Ontario are uniquely positioned to be leaders in the sustainability and better understanding of our natural environment. Both individuals and municipalities have a strong obligation. This can be a strong leadership position for Atikokan.

Unique community programs such as the Atikokan High School's credit course and program known as "Outers" are tremendously important and offer a very special life experience.

The key point is that art and appreciation for natural beauty is part of the inherent Atikokan culture because of the respect and fondness for the surrounding wilderness. Indeed much of art is inspired by an experience of the outdoors.

That appreciation should start at the earliest possible age. The local residents need to acknowledge this part of their lives and understand that art also includes admiring, celebrating and protecting the beauty of trees, lakes, natural features and the animal kingdom.

The Atikokan culture includes respect for and use of the surrounding natural heritage and environment. This is a point of differentiation from urban living and is highly appealing to a segment of the Canadian population. It is also appealing to professionals and families who are considering moving to Atikokan. There is a much greater appreciation for art and heritage—in other words, the natural environment that surrounds the town--than

many people believe, but it has not been acknowledged very much.

It is not about recreation versus arts—rather, it is about how these two strong spires can both be enhanced and supported to grow the town. The ultimate objective is to end up with a stronger, more vibrant community that offers a superior quality of life for local families, is more appealing to new residents and is attractive to tourists and investors.

It is not one or the other. It is about, over time, broadening and diversifying the local definition of culture, not changing it. As the town grows it is natural that the focus on recreation and the arts will broaden, develop, be enhanced and be more broadly supported. This is part of the natural evolution of the community. By understanding this progression the Council and the community can shape and develop culture in Atikokan for years to come. The expanded cultural focus—that is, outdoor recreation plus arts—has important economic advantages for the town.

This is key to understanding the recommendations throughout this Cultural Plan, and that they all support the four major cultural opportunities that have been identified.

The definition of culture today in Atikokan is focused on outdoor recreation; that definition in the future will remain, but will be broadened as the community grows and develops and as arts and recreation blend harmoniously together to offer a very special quality of life in the Canoeing Capital of Canada.

In a town the size of Atikokan all of the elements are intertwined. Economic development, social issues and environmental con-

cerns combine with cultural vitality to form a contemporary, sustainable and more prosperous future for smart communities. As a result, this report addresses many issues and opportunities where culture is or can become a strategic partner for Atikokan's future growth and prosperity.

Through our community interviews, research and focus groups, a number of concerns, issues, ideas and opportunities were identified. There was considerable interest in this cultural plan and its process, and many in the community have become quite engaged. This community spirit and the desire to see Atikokan grow and become an even more interesting and family-friendly community was apparent.

This plan reflects those views and vision, and the thanks of the consultants and local steering group members to the community must be expressed in the warmest of terms. To the community, thank you for caring, for believing, for having the passion and concern to get involved and help shape the future for Atikokan. Sustainability of the community in all of its facets is vital.

Outdoor living for work, recreation, family, culture and lifestyle is what makes Atikokan unique and appealing.



II. RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

VIEWING ATIKOKAN THROUGH A CULTURAL LENS

Culture is a much broader definition and concept than the arts. Culture reflects the people, the heritage, the shared values and beliefs, the search for who and why we are, where we are, the enjoyment of the work of artists and artisans, our lifestyle, kid's sports and community festivals, the local foods, the joys of our family and friends, the traditions and history of our community, and the sharing of diverse cultural experiences and lifestyles.

A strong cultural heritage and commitment results in a creative community that is engaged and engaging; offers a variety of experiences and opportunities to its youth; respects and supports seniors; and offers workplace and business opportunities that are varied and contemporary.

As technology has changed the workplace, it is now also changing the home environment, how we communicate, the social aspects of our lives and the ability of people to shape their own home/business/life, how artists create, as well as broader community social experiences.

It is in this larger context that the recommendations, ideas, suggestions and comments from the community contained in this report should be understood. With the strong community participation in the research and the interviews and focus groups, a clear picture emerged of a community beginning a transition. The citizens are engaged and they also understand the need for change and the benefits from a more diverse economy and community.

But change is never easy or comfortable. That is when the community's leadership—

Mayor and Council, Town administration, the business community and the social and cultural leaders--must step forward and drive the change agenda. It takes courage to make big decisions today that will shape and impact the community in the future.

Leading Atikokan towards this broader understanding and acceptance of culture and its benefits for economic prosperity, social interaction and environmental sustainability will be important roles for the Council and the town administration.

Big needs require big decisions to result in big changes. The community will have to have a comfort level that the results over time will justify the costs and the upheavals that will occur.

Community attitudes need to be broadened. Successful communities across Canada are realizing that the status quo is not acceptable, that doing nothing results in a community slipping back, and that it is better to plan and lead change than react to it. The information and education that will be part of this change process will create some healthy community discussion, and that also is a good part of these steps and recommendations.

Beginning to look at local decisions through a cultural lens is a strong, powerful new tool for municipalities.

This means every municipal department must consider the cultural implications and opportunities, just as they presently consider the environmental impact. For example, when building new public facilities, consideration should be given to landscaping, lighting, pub-

lic art and the design elements of each building and public space.

Atikokan has many assets, some of which are not being developed or utilized fully. An example would be the town's relationship with Quetico Provincial Park; another would be the limited shopping experiences for visitors.

In a fiercely competitive environment for international tourism dollars, it is really important to differentiate this community from many others. ***Atikokan needs to become more aggressive in its marketing and development opportunities.***

In 2006, a major Canadian and US survey was done to determine what cultural and entertainment activities visitors and tourists pursued while on a pleasure trip to northern Ontario. The top ten cultural reasons were:

- Shopping at bookstores, music stores...
- Strolling around a community observing its heritage and buildings
- Shopping at arts/cultural crafts and studios
- Visiting historic sites, monuments or buildings
- Visiting well known 'natural wonders'
- Visiting movies, theatre, cinema...
- Visiting museums, heritage sites
- Live theatre
- Art galleries
- Free outdoor performances

(Source: Canadian and US Travel and Motivations Survey 2006)

The top non-cultural activities (as defined in the survey) were:

- Dining at restaurants offering local ingredients and recipes
- Shopping/browsing

- Swimming in lakes
- Sunbathing; enjoying the beach
- Visiting local outdoor cafes
- Going to a casino
- Fresh water fishing
- Visiting a provincial or natural park
- Visiting a Farmer's Market or country fair/event

The results are very clear—***people on vacation visiting northern Ontario are looking for some unique, local and different experiences.*** Communities that will thrive in an expanding tourism market are those that will contribute to these unique, positive experiences.

The municipality and the local business community must step up to meet these needs. This is a highly competitive business, and tourists today have many opportunities and destinations from which to choose.

Culture, heritage, the arts, local artists and artisans, festivals and events, local foods and recipes, and other local activities, all combine to provide these special experiences for visitors.

A stronger arts and cultural base, and a greater commitment by Atikokan and its local businesses and cultural community to provide those unique experiences, can in turn provide a more livable, interesting and attractive community. There are no overnight solutions—this will take a steady commitment and a firm direction by Council and the business community.

Fortunately, Atikokan has a number of assets and opportunities that it can develop further as it expands its traditional base into a broader, more interesting and more appealing town without losing its identity and traditional focus on outdoor recreation.

But the world is changing. Technology is offering new opportunities. Communities must

offer a broader appeal and a better lifestyle to attract young families and the creative sector. There is competition amongst northern Ontario towns for talent, tourists and trades.

Understanding the assets and overcoming the weaknesses are a big part of community strategic planning. This Cultural Plan gives the Council and the community a fresh look and direction for building the future.

The five main themes of this report that follow provide specific recommendations (bold type) and more general ideas, observations and thought-starts for future community discussion and action.

While the responsibility for implementing the recommendations which Town Council approves will also be directed by them, generally there will be a number of people involved, from existing community groups and organizations to added staff responsibilities. The Spirit of Atikokan group will likely be assigned overall responsibility for many of the recommendations and for monitoring and reporting to Council on the progress.

It is important for the community to take ownership of this cultural development process as well, and it is expected that leadership will emerge to support and develop key aspects of these recommendations. The private sector also has responsibilities to step forward.

At the end of the day, this is about changing Atikokan and having the community want to advance and develop its cultural, economic and social benefits.



A. OUTDOOR RECREATION

Developing the primary cultural identity as outdoor recreation, and understanding the community focus on this, helps to direct the municipality in building and developing new opportunities for business, tourism and prosperity.

There are also a number of opportunities for cross-sectoral advancement by utilizing arts, heritage, cultural and culinary tourism and other ideas that are developed in this report. It is obvious that the appeal of the outdoors has impacted strongly on families. This provides a solid foundation for the next stages of growth, and interesting new concepts for attracting new residents by broadening that base.

1. Natural Environment:

The natural environment of the region in and around Atikokan has shaped much of the community today. The people, businesses, activities and cultural events have all been focused on the natural resources and the physical realm of the region.

The respect and affection of Atikokanites for their natural environment has also shaped their own family activities and focus. The highly successful “Outers” program, developed and run by Atikokan High School for many years, where high school students go on canoeing trips with colleagues for a few days, is an absolutely unique local program. It is considered almost a ‘rite of passage’ for many families.

A substantial percentage of local residents own a cottage in the region, and many spend summer weekends and a lot of other times at their cottages. (One respondent in the research said, “My house in town is where I sleep and change clothes for work; my cottage is where I live.”)

Many local residents also own motor boats, RVs, ATVs, snowmobiles and other recreational equipment.

Other residents are more focused on canoeing, hiking, cross-country skiing, horse riding and other recreational activities.

While these two recreational life style preferences (self-propelled or motorized) are not causing difficulties in town, they do provide a distinct point of differentiation.

To accommodate these activities the community has done a remarkable job of building, supporting and promoting things like hiking trails, skiing pathways, snowmobile trails and so on. These range from Quetico Provincial Park to the Charleson Recreation Area trails.

Collectively these natural resources offer a very unique attribute for the community that has been appreciated by local residents but not promoted sufficiently to the larger population. This is a potential tourism opportunity and a chance to broaden the community’s image as more than just a great place for canoeing.

The community has to become more marketing-driven and aggressive with its promotion. Most of that will be web-based information and promotion. It may be best done with partners such as Quetico Provincial Park, the new Regional Tourism Organization (RTO13), and with the private sector. There needs to be a much more cooperative and effective use of the internet to promote the community and its outdoor assets.

Recommendation #1:

Work with tourism and recreational experts to develop a stronger web presence and information base to promote Atikokan as a year-round home and destination of world-class outdoor recreation.

2. Natural Built Environment:

The walking paths inside the town are recognized by many local residents as an important part of the community; however there is concern about the flooding and lack of maintenance for many paths.

This kind of enhanced recreational and community activity is absolutely compatible with the overall Atikokan theme of outdoor recreation being the main cultural driver. Perhaps instinctively, the Council and the community have invested in a number of resources to develop, enhance and support this key local quality of life issue.

The Charleson Recreation Area is a fairly recent addition to the town's resources. It provides a variety of old roads, trails and single-track mountain bike trails for horseback riders and mountain bikers, ponds for fishing, horse facilities and many other recreational activities.

It is the home for the "MudFling", now considered the town's largest community and tourist event. This shows that the community can support equitably both the natural and the motorized activities of its residents.

The Charleson Recreation Area is the base for other trails, including Pal Lake, Steep Rock Loop Trail and the Airport Trails.

The Beaten Path Nordic Trails is a system of over 30kms of cross-country ski trails. The system is very popular and, remarkably, is maintained entirely by volunteers.

In fact, many volunteers have worked extremely hard to develop trails and other activities for general benefit. All of these activities support the Town's values—harmony with the land, friendliness and generosity, and a healthy and nurturing lifestyle. These also reflect the local culture.

3. Atikokan River:

The Atikokan River meanders through town in a winding, usually languid manner. It is also an untapped resource for the community.

There is not much activity on the river, and few community events focused on using the river. It is almost as if the town has turned its back on the river.

The Canada Day Canoe Parade and the Canada Day Splash race are good tools upon which to rebuild an attraction to the river. This is a great opportunity to support the town's claim as the "Canoeing Capital of Canada" by reconnecting with the river, and utilizing this asset in a positive manner.

With a modest investment the town could develop a couple of canoe-launching sites/docks to encourage locals and visitors to drift along the river. It could also become a training ground for young canoe enthusiasts, and teaching kids about water safety. Perhaps a summer student project or young entrepreneur could make a bit of money renting canoes and running a concession stand.

There is also the opportunity to develop an interesting annual local event. In Palm Desert, California, for example, there is annual parade of decorated golf carts. Could Atikokan develop an annual parade of decorated canoes drifting down the river? It could become a popular and fun local event, encouraging enjoyable, light-hearted competition between local schools, churches, service clubs, even Town Councillors!

In the winter, as long as the ice is safe, there could be skating, pond hockey, and lots of other activities on the river. Safety is obviously a prime concern both winter and summer. Canoeing experts have indicated that while the water from O'Brien Street downtown for 5 kms is not challenging for the beginner, there are a few other sections of fast-moving water. Proper alerts and warnings will have to be prominent for more river usage.

While walking paths along the river were once enjoyed by many, the lack of maintenance has made these paths unusable for many local residents. It would be a strong responsive decision by the Town Council to have these repaired and improved, and to ensure maintenance of them is continued so that they can be used by the community.

The Atikokan River is an available resource that can be much better utilized. Water levels can be controlled to some extent, and certainly in the spring and summer water levels are high. It would be smart to clean up the river and its banks where necessary—this might become a student-driven project—and make sure people don't use it as a dumping ground. Canoeing experts can be called upon to develop plans and programs.

The impending designation of the Trans Canada Trail canoe route will include a portion of the Atikokan River, which provides further impetus for the community reconnecting with the river.

Recommendation #2:

Develop a comprehensive plan to reconnect the town with the Atikokan River.

4. Quetico Provincial Park (QPP):

The relationship between the Town of Atikokan and Quetico Provincial Park is complex. One leading member of the community described it as “resigned coexistence”, and indicated there was no effort by either to embrace or push opportunities.

Another member of the business community indicated there was no relationship between the two, stating that “If you can't mine it or log it, nobody in Atikokan cares”. Further, there is a belief that people who go to Quetico go to get away from people and don't want a ‘typical’ tourist experience with crowded beaches or line-ups for ski lifts.

The business relationship is further complicated by the fact that paddlers don't necessarily spend a lot of money. If they come self-contained with a canoe and their own camping equipment, there is a limited need to visit Atikokan. In fact, anecdotally, many visitors to the park feel there are very limited attractions in the town. While certainly some guests spend a couple of nights in local hotels and eat in local restaurants and are outfitted by local suppliers, the overall economic impact on the local community is not as high as it could be.

In recent years the relationship between QPP and Atikokan has improved, but there is need for continued dialogue and cooperation. The opportunity remains for a better connection between the park and the town.

This lack of connectivity appears to be a missed opportunity for both organizations. QPP is, particularly during the summer months, one of the largest employers of young Atikokan residents. Atikokan calls itself “The Gateway to Quetico Provincial Park”, although there are in fact several entrances to the park and none of them are very close to the town.

QPP and the outdoor recreation experience are the primary tourist attractions in the region. Few tourists visit Atikokan just to visit the town. It is the Park, the natural attractions and the outdoor recreation in the area that appeal to tourists.

“The Canoeing Capital of Canada”

Quetico Provincial Park is well known and respected, and was recently ranked among the Top Ten in the world for a great boating adventure by The Lonely Planet guide. It was the only canoeing destination listed.

The park is a provincial park, not a national park, and is adjacent to Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness across the US border.

Ely, Minnesota has assumed the gateway role for the US side of the park. The town is slightly larger than Atikokan, but has a vastly better developed presence as a gateway to the park. Its business community offers large numbers of outfitters, suppliers, tourist facilities, local crafts, businesses focused on the natural environment and so on. The park is a major driving force for the local economy in Ely.

Atikokan proclaims itself to be “The Canoeing Capital of Canada”, but that claim’s validity is in some question. Peterborough, Ontario is the home to Canada’s Canoe Museum and bills itself as the “Canoe Capital of Canada”. Temagami, Ontario has been referred to as “Canada’s Canoeing Capital”. La Ronge, Saskatchewan is known in some circles as the “Canoe Capital of Canada”. Communities in the US claim various canoeing crowns as well, including Ely, Minnesota as “The Canoeing Capital of the World”.

If this claim for Atikokan is to be validated in the minds of Canadians and park visitors, there must be a significantly greater effort by the local community to extend and develop

that positioning statement, and to more effectively promote the community and that title.

In marketing terms, that is the brand for Atikokan but it does not necessarily stand up to intense scrutiny. It is not a brand that has penetrated enough Canadian minds and hearts.

There is benefit to more vigorously asserting this brand for Atikokan. The canoe is certainly an iconic Canadian symbol and an important part of our heritage. It is a logical positioning statement and a very promotable identity for the town.

Is it time for the Town to invite Rick Mercer of the CBC to have a canoeing experience in Atikokan/QPP? Should the area host travel writers? What regional trips and canoe adventures can be packaged and promoted? What links with other canoe capitals can be exploited?

Atikokan needs to step up its marketing game to compete better in the canoeing race for tourists.

Atikokan and the Regional Provincial Parks

Part of the challenging relationship between the town and the park may stem from a decision years ago to ban motorized boats, etc from the park. As many Atikokanites enjoy their power boats and other recreational vehicles, they have turned away from QPP in favour of other regional lakes and recreational trails, of which there is an ample number.

It is time for Atikokan to decide if it wants to develop a stronger, closer and more beneficial relationship with the park.

There is also the strong relationship between cottages and homes in the town. A number of people feel that in fact their cottages are their real homes. QPP does not allow cottages. There is some evidence that many local town residents do not regularly visit Quetico Provincial Park.

Tourism reports have been done before for QPP and Atikokan and a number of ideas have been outlined in them. The recommendations have not always been acted upon. If Atikokan is to develop the business opportunities associated with the Park, then proactive steps need to be taken.

While there have been well-intentioned meetings or committees in the past, there has not been much constructive action coming out of these. There must be a greater sense of urgency.

It is time for Atikokan to decide if it wants to develop a stronger, closer and more beneficial relationship with the park. If it is comfortable with the current distant relationship, then things should continue as they have been and the relationship will continue to flounder along. If QPP is seen as a part of a renewed business, cultural and tourism strategy for Atikokan, then the relationship must change.

There are several opportunities to do so. One starting point would be urging the provincial government to build a new road into the park (with appropriate signage) at the site of the town's Tourist Booth at the intersection with Highway 11. This would present a much more logical claim to being the gateway to non-motorized outdoor recreation, including ski trails.

If Atikokan is to become a more appealing destination for park visitors, then there need to be incentives for them to come to town. The new entrance/road/trail in turn would give tourists more of a reason to visit the

town for shopping, outfitting or visits. The development of this part of Atikokan needs to be a long-term strategy that should be part of the Official Plan review going on presently to consider ideas to better develop the town and Crown lands in this area.

This area presents an interesting opportunity for the town to support its economic progress while at the same time protecting the environment and encouraging a sustainable ecological development. The town needs to show leadership for this opportunity. World-class tourism opportunities are founded in the protection and careful development of the natural environment.

Perhaps the starting point for a future road connection is by developing a network of trails between Highway 11 and the park boundary. These would be ski and hiking trails and would establish that connection between Atikokan and the Gateway to QPP. Over time, the next step would be development of a road/entrance way into the park from the Tourist Booth, which would confirm Atikokan's 'gateway' designation in a way that currently is not supported strongly.

Another emerging opportunity is the White Otter/Turtle River Park. This would be a more active park allowing boats and motors, and would be appealing to many who prefer that kind of recreation. Atikokan needs to push the province for it to be developed as a destination.

Turtle River/White Otter Park offers a significant potential for adjacent development and servicing of the Crown lands that edge the park compared to QPP. It would be a 'waterway' park as opposed to a wilderness park, meaning the park would be open to a wider variety of uses.

The Town Council must become a more active participant in the consultation process for

proposed improvements and enhancements to public lands in the area. Having the municipality indicate support strengthens the case for the investment of provincial dollars into this park and similar opportunities. Atikokan needs to make the case.

For example, as Atikokan is mid-point between these two large provincial parks, the town could then justifiably push the government to become the headquarters for regional parks. This would mean more local jobs, and a greater tourism business opportunity.

If the QPP relationship develops, then Atikokan could work on becoming a winter base camp for dog-sledding, skiing and wilderness winter recreation. Expanding the tourist economy to outside the traditional summer months is an important new source of dollars for the local economy.

Heart of the Continent

Other opportunities would be to partner with Ely, Minnesota and other communities around the circumference of Quetico Provincial Park. This could evolve into joint promotion and marketing opportunities, sharing strategies and successes, and ‘building a larger pie’ knowing that local businesses would get a share of that success.

It was this kind of thinking that led to the International Community Congress in Thunder Bay in October, 2011. The Gateway Communities Initiative brought together representatives from municipalities, businesses, public land managers and other interested parties from both sides of the international border.

There were three key agreements coming out of the conference:

- 1 Support for using the term “Heart of the Continent” as the overarching brand for the communities that span the interna-

tional border and share the common links to adjacent public conservation areas.

- 2 Strong support for better developing a shared regional identity for the towns in this region, and joint opportunities in support of activities such as historic trails, regional maps, digital travel guides, park openings and sister city projects.
- 3 A three-day bus tour of the region to promote/educate/explore the communities, parks, sites and attractions in each town/conservation area/park. Atikokan will take the lead in organizing this important event next spring. It will certainly give communities the opportunity to put their best foot forward by improving and promoting local assets.

All of these agreements present a positive opportunity for Atikokan to move forward with enhancing its own tourist attractions. It also presents an exciting chance to link and partner with other towns throughout the Heart of the Continent, the most obvious of which is Ely, MN. This could open doors for joint promotion opportunities, learning about how that town has so successfully developed its tourist/gateway position, and how Ely has developed such a strong community college program focused on outdoor recreation.

Green technology and opportunity

Another opportunity to develop with the parks is green energy and technology. The province of Ontario is currently keenly supporting green energy initiatives. Ideas like solar energy for cottages provide interesting new research and development initiatives.

Partnering with provincial technology and resources and Atikokan entrepreneurs may create new jobs locally as technology offer alternatives to provide power for remote cabins or campsites, for example. The provincial parks themselves continue to seek green technology savings and innovation, and links should be

sought with the local business community whenever possible.

If the town chooses to explore these ideas and opportunities, then it would make sense to establish a new, multi-discipline task force to develop an Action Plan. Representatives would come from the town, the park management, AEDC, Chamber of Commerce, provincial ministry(s) and other key players.

Recognizing as we have that outdoor recreation currently defines the local cultural identity, this kind of initiative does in fact fit into this Cultural Plan. But it will take a strong, determined effort by the Council and the community to change and improve the relationship between Atikokan and Quetico Provincial Park.

Recommendations:

#3 Establish a joint working task force to report on business and tourism opportunities for Atikokan and regional provincial parks, to report back by October, 2012.

#4 Support and implement the Heart of the Continent initiatives.

#5 Establish partnering relationships with Ely, Minnesota and other gateway communities.

#6 Explore green technology and energy opportunities with parks a

#7 Request that the consultants for the Official Plan review consider the lands around the Tourist Booth be developed, including for a trail system, with a future view of the province developing a road/gateway into QPP.

5. Atikokan as a world-class outdoor recreation destination:

It is good to think big sometimes, and Atikokan needs to stretch itself as a community. If

it adopted a long-term objective of becoming a world-class outdoor recreation destination, then that would give the community a clear goal and incentive. It would also be compatible with the direction of this Cultural Plan, the definition of culture and the town's economic diversity.

There will need to be a number of improvements to the community to achieve this, and a number of them are included in later sections of this report. This recommendation is simply to identify a big goal as a community, and start the planning and investments necessary to achieve it in the next five-ten years.

There will be partners needed, both private and public sector. They are available. It would be worthwhile to bring together key business, tourism, cultural and government leaders to design a strategy to accomplish this goal. It will involve everything from addressing the tourism infrastructure deficit to an international marketing concept.

The most intriguing potential partner at this moment could be the "Heart of the Continent" initiative that is coming forward. This identifies the region as a destination, rather than a drive-through part of the continent. The new Regional Tourism Organization may also offer partnership opportunities, particularly for marketing and promotion.

This 'stretch goal' for the Town would provide an overall objective that is exciting and achievable--but not without work and investment. The physical and natural environment elements are obviously in place; the key now is how Atikokan can better take advantage of those resources and build new economic opportunities.

It will be important for leading local businesses to step up. This is an opportunity for them to extend the public-private partnerships in exciting new directions. It will also be im-

portant for the broader community to be part of the process and progress over the next years, as the Town develops its national and international reputation as a destination.

Recommendation #8

Encourage and promote Atikokan/Quetico/Boundary Waters Canoe Area as a world-class outdoor recreation destination.



B. CULTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

While there are many reasons to support a culturally vibrant community, one of the most important is the link to economic development and a prosperous town or city.

For example, it seems apparent that mining will be the key employer for residents of Atikokan, assuming that Hammond Reef mine opens. That will trigger many changes and opportunities for Atikokan, such as:

- developing supply industries and a new supply chain for the mine
- young people now in the service economy locally may prefer mining employment
- housing issues will become more urgent
- there will be a need to fill new and available service economy jobs
- new retail opportunities and needs
- dealing with a transient employment and population base
- new social pressures and needs

It is important for Atikokan to manage this scenario.

Atikokan wants to attract young families to live in town instead of the poor town planning that has been seen in some other northern Ontario mining communities. That has resulted in the “fly in, work in mine, live in bunkhouse, vigorously celebrate the single life, leave town” lifestyle that does little to benefit the local community, and in fact often results in social problems.

If Atikokan wants to broaden its appeal then it has to deliver an attractive, modern community that offers a wide range of social and cultural amenities, offers affordable and attractive housing options, good schools, good health care accessibility...and more. The

‘more’ is what provides the quality of life appeal—library, recreational facilities and events, accessibility to arts and cultural opportunities for kids, a healthy social life, a fully wired community and so on.

The second major reason why culture and economic development are so closely linked is that one spouse may work in the mine, but the other spouse may well be more interested in other job opportunities—computer graphics, design or many other careers. Having contemporary technology available is absolutely critical to attracting these people. Atikokan must have the latest broadband and hi-speed internet connections.

People can work from long distances today, through the web. Technology is and will continue to change our lives in ways we can only imagine. Providing a very contemporary technology infrastructure is vital to Atikokan’s economic and cultural future.

Companies aren’t just hiring a worker; smart organizations are trying to appeal to the entire family. Atikokan must be a partner in that.

These realities are why Atikokan must plan for its future—now.

AEDC does a very good job for Atikokan, and the town contributes financially to that organization. There is a very solid working relationship now between the two as well as a strong community connection. Thoughts and ideas offered in this section of the report are intended to provide some thought-starters. They are meant simply to supplement and assist the direction of AEDC and the town, and to provide the cultural links and support for continuing to develop this renewed economic base.

1. University/College Link:

One of the key ways for communities to enhance their appeal, especially to young people, is to create a satellite campus facility with an established college or university.

Quetico presently does on-site research and training with Confederation College and Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. Atikokan offers the on-line university training opportunity.

With Atikokan's background in open-pit mining, the possibility of the town becoming the north-western Ontario site for NORCAT [the Northern Centre for Advanced Technology] headquartered in Sudbury has been raised in community discussions. It is associated with Cambrian College, and offers training for miners-to-be. It also offers the Common Core certification and other important training and assistance.

If Atikokan could develop the training/certification for trades to service the mines throughout northwestern Ontario, it would provide a key point of differentiation between Atikokan and other northern mining towns.

It would also be the spur for more hotel/motel facilities, restaurants and other retail shops. If staff were to live in Atikokan, they would be well-paid, professional people that would also contribute to the community.

The idea of becoming a regional adult training centre for the mining and forestry industries is highly appealing. There would be substantial government funding available for such an initiative. It would support diversifying the local economic base, and visitors and those attending would help to bring life to the cultural, tourism and hospitality industries.

Cities such as Brantford, Cambridge and Kitchener have seen significant progress in their downtowns by linking with outside universities.

The second significant opportunity with education is the outdoor recreation focus. Just as Ely, MN has developed a substantial community college program where they make great use of the surrounding public lands—and many of their students find employment there after they graduate—so can Atikokan work to expand the existing relationships with Confederation College and Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, perhaps even develop outdoor classrooms.

There are already established links and programs, mainly through Quetico Provincial Park, but providing training and education facilities, opportunities and work experience/internship programs provides another solid economic foundation for Atikokan.

It also provides positive reinforcement for young people in the area who wish to remain, but are also looking for good jobs in the outdoor sector of the economy.

Recommendations

#9 Atikokan and the AEDC pursue a formal opportunity for a satellite facility of some kind with NORCAT in Sudbury to become the regional partner for training and certifying mining workers.

#10 Atikokan and partners seek to expand the outdoor recreation education experience into a stronger, more defined college/university program, based in the area.

2. Airline Connections:

Not having any direct commercial airline connections limits Atikokan's ability to attract performers, entertainers, speakers and other cultural leaders. If the Hammond Reef Mine proceeds, that could be a trigger to negotiate with Bearskin or other airlines to provide a daily flight to Atikokan. That would elevate the community's status considerably, and make visiting Atikokan more appealing to visitors as well as much easier.

3. MOM's Way:

The "Manitoba-Ontario-Minnesota" highway alternative is an interesting idea, but it is poorly promoted and not clearly identified as an alternative route for travelers. Atikokan needs to do more to promote itself as part of this, and improve the signage on area highways to get people to visit the town.

The opportunity to encourage cycling and motorcycle tours on this alternate, less-traveled highway is appealing.

4. Attracting and Retaining Young People:

For many generations, young people have left their home towns in search of their education, jobs and social experiences. It is a part of the life process and there is a natural flow to that.

The key issue for Atikokan is how to attract/retain more of these bright young minds. Few would argue with the need to get a higher education and to seek jobs—what becomes a more urgent point is, can the town develop in the years ahead so that more of them will consider staying or returning at some point in their lives? Talks with young people resulted in a very clear statement: most of them are looking to get out of town because they don't think they can get a great job in Atikokan.

Northern Ontario communities have a built-in advantage in that the young people growing

up in the region are very comfortable with the outdoor attractions and lifestyle they've known since childhood. As some communities have found, a number of people will return to their hometown at some point, often to care for an aging parent or as a safer place to raise their families.

To compete for this talent means the community must offer contemporary amenities—a wired, connected community; the opportunity for good employment; an interesting social scene; offering their children creative opportunities; teaching and exposing them to everything from hunting and fishing to music and fine food, from art to the environment, from dance to mud flings; affordable housing; a healthy environment, and more.

There are things Atikokan can do to help this, but it is a long game. For example, develop a plan with the high school to 'track' graduating students and send them an annual report (electronically is very inexpensive) on the town and its progress. The town can help to celebrate reunions and homecomings. Class anniversaries should also have a civic presence. Grads need to feel that the town cares about them, is a viable place to live, work and raise their families, and Atikokan is progressing and is providing a modern infrastructure.

Right now, many of the best and brightest young residents of Atikokan don't think they have a future in town and are hell-bent on getting out of town. Over time, this attitude needs to be modified.

5. Entrepreneurial Spirit:

The research repeatedly indicated that there is not much of an entrepreneurial spirit in Atikokan (and indeed in many northern Ontario communities). This needs to be changed, and the town needs to support new, young and innovative entrepreneurial ideas and businesses.

In the same way that the Town now honors contributors to arts, culture, heritage and so on, the Town should continue to work with the Chamber of Commerce and AEDC to support the annual business and entrepreneurial awards. Such recognition is important and is rarely offered. Business people need to feel that the town cares about them, understand their problems and is supportive of their initiatives.

There should be an effort to identify and pursue innovative local opportunities in mining, forestry and tourism. Often there are government grants and funding available for interesting ideas and new business start-ups.

Discussions should be held with Osisko to explore secondary and tertiary opportunities for local businesses. Can their supply chain run through Atikokan? What will they need to keep the mine running smoothly, and how can the local community service them? The town needs to start thinking now about these economic opportunities and encourage entrepreneurs.

Recommendation #11

Support and foster a more entrepreneurial spirit in the community, particularly with young people and start-up businesses.

6. Immigration and Diversity:

Atikokan, like many northern communities, has not had a history of much population diversity. While miners, forestry workers and others came from overseas, they have tended to be European in background and the towns reflect that today.

Canada needs more immigration to meet its future employment and development needs, yet only about 4% of immigrants end up in rural areas. This is a systemic problem that the senior orders of government need to address.

Atikokan does not have the resources to go out to the world by itself, but it can work with government ministries and regional economic councils to try to attract a more diverse population. When that starts to happen, the town will have to reach out to new residents and ensure they are comfortable, welcomed and safe. This will also mean a broadening of the town's cultural thinking.

7. Green Energy ,Technology and Youth

Without question the world is moving towards more green energy sources and technology. The Mayor's Ad-Hoc Energy Committee has been addressing issues such as the Sapawe plant and converting the OPG facility to wood pellets, and these are valuable initiatives.

Much of this exploration and development of green technologies and energy will be led by young people, which is another reason that Atikokan needs to continue to build its quality of life and its cultural assets. The town must have the courage to look ahead and start to construct the foundation of the next generation's sense of community, and it will be different from today.

That is also why providing broadband services, for example, is so crucial. Having a full-service library is an enormous asset to the town. Offering a diverse, fun and active social scene is important. Providing job opportunities, mentoring and apprentice programs, and support for young entrepreneurs is vital. A dynamic cultural scene helps to tie these things together, and that is one of the future benefits of implementing this Cultural plan. These are fundamental needs for a growing community in the future.

C. ARTS AND CULTURE

A vibrant arts community, a town that respects and preserves its heritage, a community that is supportive of cultural initiatives and creative ideas are all key aspects of a well-rounded town that is pleasant to live in, offers a great quality of life to its residents, is aware of the new technologies and supportive of innovative ideas, and is interested in growing and prospering in all facets of its economic, social, cultural and environmental spheres.

This broader cultural focus offers some fascinating new opportunities for Atikokan to pursue. Developing a stronger cultural base means a more appealing community that becomes more attractive to professionals, young families and new residents.

As the town grows, new retail and business opportunities will emerge. Artists and artisans will be part of that growth, and part of that diverse economy. Sometimes people don't appreciate sufficiently that artists, designers, writers, performers, artisans and the many others who make up the artistic/creative community are also small business operators who must survive in a very tough climate. They also contribute to a community's economic prosperity.

1. Local/Regional Food:

There is not much of a history or tradition of local food in the region. Partly this is because of a limited growing season, part is poor soil, part of it is government regulation (handling of fish and game) and part has been a lack of interest from the community.

This is unfortunate, as local food is an important part of the tourism experience. It can also be a contributor to the local economy and culture.

Fresh fish on the menu, to Atikokan restaurants, means frozen sent from Manitoba. Fresh fruits and vegetables are grown in backyards sometimes, but there is no regular local Farmer's Market. Most produce is trucked in to the community.

With the limited growing season and soil, it may be useful to redefine this as a Regional Food strategy, not local. That would broaden the scope and resources.

A weekly Farmer's Market during the summer and fall could be a lively addition to Atikokan as long as regional producers would commit to visiting regularly. Farmer's Markets are highly popular these days, and provide both a social and a cultural opportunity for the town, as well as identifying unique local products (smoked cheese, for example).

The effort by the Northwest Health Unit to bring in a "Food Box" of fresh vegetables is encouraging. The Youth Centre has begun a pilot project for a weekly market. All in all, there appears to be growing interest in local/regional fresh food, and this initiative should be supported.

There is a small community garden in the Atikokan Centennial Museum's Historical Park. Community gardens are a wonderful local amenity that should be supported. While previous efforts in this regard had a limited take-up, the concept still makes sense. Discussions with schools, seniors and church groups should be held and municipal land offered to groups willing to support community gardens. Surplus produce can be offered to the local food bank (the Native Friendship Centre now offers such a program).

Some residents have expressed interest in building a large greenhouse for the community that would help to provide fresh produce

to local households. This would likely require government funding and support, but could be an interesting renewable energy project.

Another local suggestion is a composting project for the municipality. This is worth further consideration, possibly in conjunction with the greenhouse idea. The concept certainly is supportive of the town's values, and could also be useful to encourage/support gardening.

Local food was described as 'moose, blueberries and garlic' in the research for this report. Food is an important part of local celebrations, and is also recognized as a contributor to the community's health. It is also a major appeal to visitors and tourists.

Developing a local favourite food to interest visitors and get local restaurants and foodies involved would be another element of developing Atikokan as an interesting destination. It would also support the town's Vision as a healthy community. Childhood obesity and the dietary habits of an aging population are real concerns to municipalities today, as is the terribly high rate of type 2 diabetes in the native population.

Recommendation # 12:

Work with a community group such as the regional Health Unit to develop a sustainable food strategy for Atikokan, and develop regional food thinking.

2. Public Art:

Atikokan has no formal Public Art policy or plan. This is not untypical for smaller communities. There have been occasional forays into public art, such as the sculptures in the mini-parkettes along Main Street. These are welcome additions to the town's ambience.

The murals about mining around town are an interesting example of good public art. They need to be maintained, however, and that requires some public money. Some of the murals are in poor shape. Council needs to make a decision on repainting/repairing them, replacing them or removing them.

Public art helps to create a positive, interesting and connected 'buzz' about a community. It enhances the public realm. It sometimes is a catalyst for private sector contributions, or for original art work by local artists and artisans. It can also reinforce a community's image and public persona.

Quetico Provincial Park is in its 6th year of its "Artist in Residence" program. It also offers a studio cabin work space for visiting artists, and from time to time hosts workshops and seminars. This could be a connection for Atikokan to encourage/support local artists and visiting experts.

A public art policy would formalize the town's responsibilities and opportunities to support public art. It would include sections on designing and installing public art; maintaining and protecting public art; decommissioning public art; and financial responsibilities. (Cities such as Winnipeg and London have very fine policies that can be easily adapted for Atikokan's purposes).

It is strongly recommended that a citizen's committee of interested, knowledgeable people be responsible for public art. Get the decisions on public art out of the town hall. Public art should not be a matter of politics or political decision-making. As there is at the present time no local Arts Council, the Spirit of Atikokan group could serve in this capacity.

The second significant new element is for Council to consider a 1% policy—that is, allocating 1% of all major, above-ground pub-

lic works into a new Public Art Reserve Fund. This fund would pay for public art installations and maintenance. Members of the public who wish to contribute could do so, including businesses and developers looking to make a public contribution to helping enhance Atikokan or receive bonusing for a development project.

Such a fund would also provide some badly-needed support for the upkeep of public art such as the murals that are painted in the town. These are deteriorating, as outdoor art often will, and must be kept fresh.

Recommendations

#13 Ask the Spirit of Atikokan committee to research and recommend a Public Art policy for Atikokan.

#14 Town Council establishes a new Public Art Reserve Fund, with contributions coming from a new 1% allocation from major, above-ground public projects, donations and private sector housing commitments.

#15 Town Council to develop a plan to repair/repaint, replace or let the murals go. They should not simply be left to deteriorate.

3. Children and the Arts:

It is unfortunate in Ontario, and indeed in Canada, that school curricula have de-emphasized art, music and other such activities. Study after study has proven that children exposed to arts programming and creative opportunities end up with a better education:

*“In a global research compendium on the impact of the arts in education, “The WOW Factor” stated
Quality arts education programs lead to improvements in academic achievement*

*Literacy is significantly enhanced through arts education
Arts-rich education enhances performance in language learning
71% of quality arts programming had led to direct improvements in academic achievement”
“The WOW Factor”, Anne Bamford ,
2006, pg 107 (3)”*

To be fair in the case of Atikokan, chats with school officials have indicated that their options are limited because of minimal participation by students in band, for example...perhaps this is because the artistic climate in the town has not been as supported and promoted as it might be.

There has to be a municipal commitment to children and the arts; it is not just a school issue.

There is no question that there are talented children and adults in Atikokan. Developing and encouraging this talent is good for the community as well as the individual. That is also why providing multi-purpose facilities in the proposed new Recreation, Cultural and Wellness Centre would be an important statement by the town.

Currently there are small pockets of (mostly) private sector activity—individual piano lessons by a private teacher, or art classes, for example--but developing a long-term plan to expand and enhance arts activities by and for children simply makes good sense.

Perhaps the Town can link with QPP for summer art camps. Getting children involved with and exposed to the arts at a young age is important. Using technology and computers for design/art/music and other artistic activities can open doors for bright young minds. Engaging young people in the arts and enter-

tainment business can also open career doors for them.

Encouraging links with other communities throughout the region for support of children's arts opportunities is something that Atikokan could lead—and again, there may be provincial grant money available for such an initiative. This also fits well into the Heart of the Continent concept—there is no reason that local kids can't get exposed to what's going on in International Falls, Grand Portage and other communities. This cross-fertilization of ideas and collaboration can spark dormant young artistic talent.

If each community threw in a small amount of money, there could be bursaries granted to area children to support their burgeoning arts career and education. Schools throughout the region have an important role to play in this.

There is a very tangible reason why this is important to Atikokan: to attract professional couples to the town there also needs to be a solid base of arts/cultural opportunities and activities.

Developing a multi-disciplinary arts base is an important foundational aspect of building a more diversified economy in Atikokan. It makes the town more appealing to professional people and more attractive to young families with children.

The Children for the Arts program in Canada has been a strong advocate for developing community programs and linking local resources. Preliminary discussions have been held with this organization, and there is interest in renewing a past relationship with Atikokan and to see if funding opportunities are available, but there needs to be a municipal commitment to this concept as well.

Arts generally, and certainly for children, helps to provide a more livable community for everyone. Arts and cultural activities are not intended to replace the outdoor recreational activities, but rather to enhance both the quality of life offered by Atikokan, and the appeal to people in the creative industries and professions that will certainly help to diversify the local economic base.

A final point—studies have consistently shown that having community arts programs and opportunities for kids reduces crime and other social issues in a municipality. There are net financial benefits to a town or city by investing in the children's arts programs, as well as cultural and community benefits.

Recommendation #16

Thee Spirit of Atikokan group be asked to spear-head a summit with Linda Albright, Director of the Children for the Arts national program, to include school and community representatives, to develop a strategic plan for more and better opportunities and support for children's arts and creative opportunities.

4. Awards and Grants:

Atikokan currently celebrates the Mayor's Awards for cultural achievement, which after only two years has become very popular and respected.

The first year the awards focused on artistic achievement; the second year the awards focused on community sports and contributions. The awards ceremony in 2011 was extremely well attended and the community is obviously on side.

The Town makes no particular monetary awards or bursaries for arts and cultural achievements. Tangible support for arts and cultural programs is equally minimal. That is understandable, as there is no local driving

force (such as an Arts Council) to support and encourage such investments.

At some point, perhaps in the near future, Council will want to consider establishing a formal program of arts bursaries, scholarships and awards to recognize and support local artistic achievement. That moment is not right now, however. It is more likely in the next few years as this Cultural Plan and a rejuvenated community move forward together.

The Town will also have to begin budgeting modest amounts for arts and cultural programs, just as it does today to support sports and recreation. Obviously the amounts will be much smaller, but having a municipal commitment will also open the door to receive other government funding and grants to build local arts programs and events.

The Mayor's Awards should be confirmed as an annual program. They are well done and are achieving an important role in the town.

5. Cultural Web Hub:

There is no central information hub for the broad arts, cultural, heritage community. Making it very simple for residents and visitors alike to access dates, data, buy tickets or get information on upcoming events is important. And it makes the most sense to have one web hub, to which all community organizations can contribute.

This will be best accomplished by coordinating through the town's web site. Several cities have created the technology to do this, and once the program is set up it becomes a matter of the local organizations looking after their own information. There should be a 'monitor' to supervise the site, but responsible groups and artists can certainly input their own updated information on events, shows, etc.

Recommendation #17

The Museum Curator, Chief Librarian and Town Clerk be asked to develop a web hub for the cultural community of Atikokan housed on the town's website.

6. Performing Circuits:

Atikokan is not high on the list of most performers, simply because there is no large performance venue and the community is difficult to get to, especially with a trailer of stage production equipment. There are some modest stage/auditorium facilities, notably in St. Patrick's school.

What may make sense is to include Atikokan in a traveling circuit of performances, both for children and for adults. The Children's Entertainment Series and the Atikokan Entertainment Series are both important additions to the cultural life of the town. There are several performances each year at the school auditorium and that is a wonderful program...this concept is intended to broaden that existing base.

There may be interest by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture in a pilot program to create a larger northern Ontario cultural tour by performers and entertainers. This could range from children's performers to orchestras, from entertainers to interesting speakers offering provocative topics.

The concept would be to create perhaps a week-long circuit—Thunder Bay, Atikokan, Dryden, Kenora, Fort Frances, for example—that would be more economical for a performer, save expensive travel costs for local impresarios, and bring a high level of performance art to these northern communities that may not be able to afford them separately.

From a community stand-point, getting access to these quality performers, speakers and en-

ertainers would also provide special opportunities—perhaps in-school events, downtown promotions, teaching young people, etc. The Town will have to lead this project and make the links with the impresarios and management of performers.

The key for this is to approach the Ministry of Tourism and Culture’s “Cultural Strategic Investment Fund”. Atikokan should take the lead on this application process. The concept is simply to expose the Northern Ontario community, in particular children, to more arts and cultural events.

Recommendation #18

The Town of Atikokan lead discussions with the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture for an expanded project of northern Ontario communities being visited by an enhanced annual circuit of children’s performers, guest speakers, artists, performers and entertainers through the ministry’s ‘Cultural Strategic Investment Fund’.

7. Support for Local Artists and Artisans:

It would be great to have local festivals and events work with the local artists, artisans and other members of the cultural community to encourage the display and sale of local artistic achievements. Having local musicians and performers display and sell their creations at community events should also be encouraged.

Anytime local artisans, creators and artisans can link to local cultural and community activities is simply a strong, smart thing for Atikokan. There is not a lot of opportunity for many of these local artisans to display and sell their creations, and providing them with space for sales and performing is an easy thing to do.

The demise of the Atikokan Arts Centre has left a void in the community. Many artists

and artisans feel there is a lack of support for their creative efforts.

It will be useful to develop, over the next few years, more support and initiatives for artists and artisans, and to display their work and provide showcases for them. This can happen in a number of ways—for example, a monthly showcase at the Town Hall, a brief recognition at the start of a monthly Council meeting of artistic achievement (ranging from a school choir singing to displaying a work of art from a local artist or artisan) to featuring local art in the library or new Recreation complex, as well as other municipal facilities.

This support could be developed as part of the job responsibilities for the new Marketing Manager proposed later in this report.



D. CULTURE AND THE PHYSICAL REALM

Part of developing a stronger cultural presence and a creative, diversified local economy is to improve the public realm—in other words, public places and spaces.

These physical assets help to connect with the local population, provide public meeting and gathering places, create an environment for social interaction, commemorate the community's heritage, support artistic creativity and celebrate local performers and artists.

The shape, design and image of the community also send an important message to visitors and potential residents. There is a 'feel' to a community that people almost instinctively get. That vibe is an important asset, and Atikokan needs to work on improving that vibe.

Atikokan has no particular public square. There is no regularly-used band shell, no stage, and no natural gathering place for residents.

The town has done a fine job of investing in recreational facilities such as the Charleson Recreation Area and the Little Falls Community Centre.

More consideration needs to be given now to design elements, public art opportunities, the town's physical presence and other key planning concepts. Without a full-time town planner this responsibility ultimately falls to Council.

1. Recreation, Cultural and Wellness Centre:

One of the most exciting ideas for Atikokan's future growth is a new multi-purpose facility. A feasibility study has been completed. The concept is to replace the aging Arena, upgrade the swimming pool and add various community amenities.

This is a superb concept. It fully supports the town's Vision, and could be highly appealing to young families that may be attracted to work at the proposed new Hammond Reef mine. Osisko has been clear that it doesn't want workers living at the mine site, so this is a huge opportunity for Atikokan to grow by attracting new, young families.

A new multi-purpose centre would be an enormous attraction to both mine workers and their families, presumably many of whom would have young children. If the town is going to attract these families to live in the community, instead of being a temporary launch site for 'fly in, drive out' commuters returning to their home province every couple of weeks, then Atikokan needs to convince these young families of a significant reason to move/live here. A well-planned multipurpose facility would be a highly appealing community resource and help to attract these new families.

The proposed facility is potentially a game-changer for the town. There are very few amenities for tourists right now (eg. hotels with swimming pools or fitness centres), and it would be useful to develop a 'day pass' concept for tourists and visitors to allow them to enjoy the facility. The idea of being able to visit an indoor pool, hot tub, and sauna (whatever amenities are ultimately included), use a fitness centre and meet with friends is highly attractive to visitors and residents alike. In addition, Atikokan could then host swim meets, hockey tournaments, etc for regional competition, attracting new dollars to the local economy.

The general concept is fully compatible with Atikokan's mission statement. In fact, the research done for this report would suggest that the residents are ahead of council for this pro-

ject. There is considerable support and enthusiasm for it.

This recommendation should be coupled with the following section titled “Reshaping the Core with a Cultural Flair”. The reason is because this report is suggesting that a larger vision for this project be considered that would impact much more of the downtown and provide some exciting new opportunities for development.

This vision includes the Atikokan Library, the Atikokan Centennial Museum, the river, local parks and Main Street, and is explained in detail in #20. These local facilities are a key part of Atikokan’s cultural assets and can play a very important role in the town’s future development.

The key, however, is the initial commitment by the Town Council to the proposed Recreation, Cultural and Wellness Centre. If it does not proceed, then the other ideas and opportunities outlined in #20 are diminished.

There are two critical issues for the proposed new complex—the design and concept for the facility, and the funding for it.

This complex would almost certainly become the new heart of Atikokan. While there may be some thought about doing the project in phases, the reality is that doing it once, doing it big, and doing it right is likely a better option for the community.

There are some segments of the community that do not feel they have had input into the concept and design. It would be worthwhile to reach out to the community and ask for its ideas, and then keep the community informed about the progress. Involving seniors, students and other key groups is important to the process and the community participation.

This report is also urging that the concept for the complex be expanded to consider and include important elements of art and culture.

For example, designing multi-purpose rooms will enable many parts of the community to utilize the facility and further their training, performances and enjoyment:

- design a wood-floor room that can be used for aerobics, yoga, etc but also for dance
- make the community rooms flexible so dividers could be opened to create a larger facility to show movies or provide a modest stage facility for local entertainment and performances
- consider design elements in the external and internal building to honor the local heritage and culture of the Métis and First Nations
- utilize walls and lobbies for rotating local art shows and displays
- include public art in the design and decoration
- support children’s art, music and reading/writing programs
- a kitchen for cooking lessons and supporting local food programs
- pre-natal classes and support, including music therapy and so on...

In recent years, many communities have understood that multi-purpose facilities offer the best bang for the local tax dollar. Similar concepts in other communities have often included YMCAs, libraries, neighbourhood meeting rooms and so on.

Kenora has a lovely Recreation Centre that offers indoor and outdoor recreation and community facilities, including swimming pool, meeting rooms, child care, skateboard park, senior’s centre, and many other amenities.

Terrace Bay has moved its library into their new Cultural Centre (a renovated school) that also features a Seniors Centre and community hall.

Middlesex Centre has just opened a new \$24 million complex offering a twin pad arena, fabulous new library, community meeting rooms, fitness centre and other amenities.

Atikokan has the opportunity to develop really innovative new concepts in environmental design with this facility. It could become a model for northern communities.

The Cardel Centre in Calgary has done a brilliant job in reclaiming heat and cooling, grey water, thermal units, solar panels and so on. Atikokan's complex could draw upon modern expertise to become a gold LEEDs facility that could set a new standard for other northern communities. Special funding would likely be available from government programs to support innovation and green technologies such as vertical green walls, solar energy and eco-friendly design.

Financing the new centre is a matter of concern--understandably. Ontario municipalities don't have the resources to build many new facilities while also fixing old infrastructure. As a result the financing will have to be as innovative as the design.

If the Town Council chooses to commit to this project, then it will want to consider a wide variety of financial partners and opportunities. A Public-Private Partnership with a contractor, or a design/build concept, are both worth considering.

It would be useful to start developing financial planning strategies now, which could include:

- surplus money from the town's annual operations dedicated to a new Reserve Fund
- annual allocations of money from the tax base to the Reserve Fund
- be prepared for a new round of Infrastructure programs from senior governments
- private sector fund-raising from corporations
- sell naming rights to the building, various rooms, etc...
- donations from individuals
- contributions from service clubs and community organizations
- provincial government funding
- special funding from senior orders of government for innovative environmental design and initiatives
- development charges, if applicable
- FedNor funding
- other sources...

The window of opportunity for this project to advance appears to be moving rapidly. If the full operation of the proposed mine is a couple of years away, then families will need to start making their own lifestyle decisions in the next 18-24 months. That, coupled with the reality of the state of the existing arena, means the decision timeline is moving now.

This concept is a huge opportunity for Atikokan.

Recommendation #19:

- a) The Town Council consider committing to develop this multi-purpose facility to include recreation, arts and culture, and wellness/health facilities as a priority;
- b) A Mayor's Task Force be appointed, to report back to Town Council by June 30/12, to:
- (i) consult with the community on design elements for the proposed facility
 - (ii) consider funding options, sources and alternatives and with the Town CAO develop a financial plan for the capital and operating funding.

2. Reshaping the Core with a Cultural Flair:

It is also exciting to think about a really big project to help re-shape the core. This certainly requires visionary thinking and some bold concepts, but this may spark a larger opportunity in town about improving the physical design of the community and how it can be rejuvenated and re-developed.

The following steps are a multi-stage concept which needs to be refined and gain community input and advice. As a starting point, however, this is how it could roll out:

- 1 A community library is an enormous asset for any thriving town, and Atikokan has a good one. However its physical design is becoming problematic and would require expensive renovations to make it fully functional.
It may make a lot of sense to move the library into the proposed new Recreation, Cultural and Wellness Centre. It could operate on one floor, would help to attract people throughout the day to the centre, and provide a springboard for a variety of community, cultural, health and wellness clinics, seminars and events. The library could then better utilize its resources to serve the community.
- 2 If the Atikokan Public Library building was freed-up, it would then create an opportunity to take the entire "Civic Centre" district in a new direction.
- 3 This could become the town's dock/canoe launch area near the bridge, using the park land. There is then opportunity to expand Historical Park and make it more of an attraction. It could become a town gathering point for concerts in the park, festivals, picnics, etc.
- 4 There could be an outdoor café/patio designed and opened in the area, perhaps utilizing the Pioneer Club as a base. The Pioneer Club is a charming building with great character that has considerable potential for expanded use by the community while respecting the senior's usage.
- 5 The Museum could then take over (at least one floor of) the old library to expand its growing collection and better protect its artifacts.
- 6 A new interpretative centre for canoeing could be developed on one of the floors in the old library building.
- 7 The management of Quetico Provincial Park could be invited to establish an office/information/entry station, again perhaps using one floor of the former library, and linking with the proposed new interpretive centre.
The proposed Trans Canada Trail water route would then have a logical home/destination in downtown Atikokan.
- 8 The outdoor area around the district could also be expanded with new trails, an enlarged community garden, better use of the green space for picnicking and family events, a band shell for concerts and entertaining, a children's play area, public art and so on.

These steps all tie together in a very exciting new way to re-shape Atikokan in a manner that would enhance and legitimize the town's claim as the "Canoeing Capital of Canada" in a very bold, visionary way. These changes would present a fresh and exciting new face for local cultural assets and help build the tourism base of the town.

The result is that suddenly Atikokan would have two strong public space anchors on each end of its downtown, both within easy walking distance of one another. This physical design would encourage people to walk down Main Street which has added benefits to local businesses. More feet on the street mean more action in the town.

Reshaping the town results in a modern, strong and exciting new design that will be appealing to new families deciding if they want to live in town. There is the potential for more retail stores opening, Main Street filling in, beautification of the Main Street, and new attractions for people throughout the region coming to Atikokan and for visitors to enjoy more amenities and therefore new reasons to stay/visit/spend money in town.

This is a big idea with a number of implications, yet the dollar outlay doesn't necessarily have to be huge. There would be the opportunity for private sector funding, donations, service club and community participation, and the sale of naming rights and sponsorships.

It would present a fresh, exciting new face to Atikokan, appeal to both tourists and locals, put more energy into the downtown, be appealing to potential new residents and consolidate cultural and tourism opportunities in what is now underutilized civic space.

Recommendation #20

Council direct that public consultations take place and a new master plan be developed for the Historical Park and Civic Centre area, including the Museum, Library and new community facilities.

3. New Public Square:

If the new Recreation, Culture and Wellness Centre is to proceed, consideration early in the design process should be given to including a new public square or meeting place as part of the complex. This could provide a natural base for things like public concerts and a home for a weekly visiting Farmer's Market.

The present July 1 celebrations at the Historical Park featuring corn on the cob cooked in a big canoe-shaped tub over an open fire proves that there is a community desire for gathering and celebrating important occasions. Providing a new public gathering place at the west end of the downtown offers the community another social and cultural amenity.

Recommendation #21:

Consider designing a new Town Square into the planning for the proposed Recreation, Culture and Wellness centre.

4. Signage and Gateways:

Signage coming into Atikokan, and even in the town itself, is inadequate.

There are virtually no billboards or promotional signs on Highway 11 to help visitors or tourists.

There are no electronic signs or static displays in the Thunder Bay airport.

There are no signs or billboards for the town on Highway 622.

The ‘gateway’ to Atikokan off Highway 11 is non-existent. Particularly with the tourist booth on the other side of the highway, and it only open during the summer months, travelers are suddenly confronted with a poorly-signed turnoff on the highway. Since the town is actually a couple of kilometers away, there is no reinforcement that this is the way to Atikokan—and that the town is very happy to have you visit.

Visitors coming in this entrance are soon confronted by MacKenzie Avenue. This is not an appealing or welcoming introduction to the community. Work needs to be done with the businesses to make that stretch of road much more attractive. Things like berms (large dirt mounds that can be planted, treed, landscaped and used to disguise the sight-lines of the property behind), landscaping, lighting, better signage and cleaning-up properties will be most helpful.

Visitors coming from 622 pass the town dump/landfill. Again welcoming signs are non-existent, internal signage is poor, and street lighting is minimal.

There is no particular theme for the town. Visitors receive no sense of history or tradition. There are not many planning guidelines for properties and buildings, so there is no cohesion or pattern to them.

There has been an effort over the past decade to support more of the ‘canoe’ theme through canoe planters downtown and so on. However, the community is also sending a bit of a mixed message with the mining murals. At the same time, recognizing that “Outdoor Recreation” is the predominant culture in the community, perhaps it is time to confront these anomalies and develop a fresh new look.

The recommendation is to develop a new theme, celebrating “Outdoor Living”, as the

new over-arching creative concept for Atikokan. This will allow the celebration of the heritage in mining and forestry, but also now include outdoor recreation in all of its aspects, the Canoeing Capital of Canada, and the pristine wilderness that is so much a part of the culture and heritage of Atikokan. It also provides a general theme for other promotional opportunities.

Recommendations

#22 Direct the consultants for the Official Plan review to take into consideration the gateways and entrances to Atikokan, and opportunities to develop them.

#23 Invite the Chamber of Commerce and the AEDC to form a task force to review and recommend ways to work with local businesses to improve the gateways and entrances to Atikokan, and report back to Council by November, 2012.

#24 Develop a consistent theme to the town’s promotion, public art and community celebrations centred on the “Outdoor Living” theme.

5. Heritage Properties:

The town currently has no official policies regarding heritage properties and spaces. There do not appear to be many properties that would be considered architecturally significant or of great heritage value in the community.

However, heritage properties and spaces once lost are gone forever. It would be useful to ask the Museum Director to begin a roster of buildings that still exist in town that are, perhaps, more than 75 years old or any that have a particularly unique design or features. This would enable Council at the next Official Plan review in 2016 to include, if deemed necessary, a section on heritage properties

and spaces and if policies are required by the Town to help protect/preserve them.

Recommendation #25

Direct the Museum Curator to begin a roster of heritage properties and spaces, and identify Atikokan heritage assets.

6. Downtown/Main Street:

Downtowns are important to any thriving community. Many people believe they represent the heart and soul of the town, and they are generally the main shopping/business/social location for the broader community.

Atikokan's recently repaved/designed Main Street downtown presents a clean, wide street that offers much potential. Unfortunately it is also a rather sterile stretch of road. There isn't much action on the streets or sidewalks. There is much potential, however.

Main Street needs a significant beautification program. To its credit the Town has invested in some small parkettes along Main Street and some have a piece of public art. But the street needs more energy, more excitement, more people, and more action.

Hanging banners, flags, signs promoting local events, more flower pots in season, lights, signposts and other street presence items should be allowed to help bring more life to the street. In the non-winter months, central planters down the middle of the road could bring colour and life with trees, shrubs and flowers.

Getting closed, darkened building reopened is crucial—they give a very negative impression of a block. Shoppers and visitors hate them.

Allowing street sales, sidewalk sales, outdoor patios and little cafes along the sidewalk would also bring more life to the town.

Live music on a Saturday, or noon hour public events, would also liven up the core. People are usually very supportive of events and activities in their downtown, and merchants always welcome attractions. The thrust is to bring more energy, excitement and fun to the downtown.

The volunteer group, Atikokan Renewal Committee (ARC) has been working with the Town, making recommendations and guiding beautification to date. This group is undertaking an important function on behalf of the Town. Additional support and focus on downtown beautification will benefit the entire municipality.

Recommendation #26

Town Council allocates at least \$2,500/year, in additional spending, beginning with the 2012 budget, to support public events, activities and beautification in the downtown core.

7. Housing:

Housing is both a private-sector and a municipal issue. The municipality controls the zoning and servicing issues, but it is generally the private sector that drives the timing and investments for new sub-divisions and housing.

In Atikokan, however, there are broader policy and development issues to be considered, and this is where the Cultural Plan touches housing.

If the Hammond Reef mine comes into production, then the town needs to aggressively become the home base to the families of the miners. This would increase the population, support the schools, increase the assessment base, broaden the interest in culture (both outdoor recreation and the arts) and make Atikokan a more prosperous and vibrant community.

It will be of interest to the Council that in our research housing issues came up on a regular basis. The concern is this: there is a lack of rental accommodation and affordable housing turnover.

The town is getting older, young people are leaving, and work and lifestyle are part of that reason. In other words, young people want an education, a good job and a satisfying social/family life.

Many will leave to pursue those goals, but some will return at some point in their lives. Atikokan wants to make it attractive for them to return, and for new residents like the families of miners to move into town. Good housing at an affordable price is one of the most important triggers for families deciding where to live.

There is a lack of senior's care facilities. This means many seniors stay in their homes. That means young people are having trouble getting into the housing market. There are very few apartment buildings or rental accommodations available. It is a difficult spiral in which the town is caught.

The Town needs to develop a comprehensive housing strategy and plan for the next five-ten years. There is some urgency in the early phases of this strategy because of the imminent mining development.

Recommendation #27

Town Council develop a Housing Strategy for the next 5 years to encourage new residential, support younger families getting into the housing market, and providing appropriate facilities, housing options and care for the senior's population.



E. CULTURE AND TOURISM:

Tourism is potentially a strong new spire of Atikokan's future economic renewal. It is not an economic savior and will never have the economic impact of a large mine. But tourists bring good new money to town, provide employment opportunities for young people, and broaden the town's image and reputation.

Tourism is a highly competitive industry today. There are lots of towns in northern Ontario and the northern US fighting for travel and tourism dollars.

The tourism industry is also going through upheaval. The Canadian-American dollar around par means US tourists don't have the economic advantage they once enjoyed in Canada. Security issues along the border and the surprising number of Americans who don't have a passport have made US travel to Canada more challenging.

The aging population has seen a shift in tourist destinations and why people want to get away.

Conversely, there has also been an increase in emerging new segments of the tourism market—many travelers now want to experience something, learn something, touch and taste something different, participate in local activities and culture, study local heritage or genealogy, or actively participate in local arts and crafts.

In other words, passive tours of galleries and historic sites are not the attraction they once were. Many travelers want to experience something new, and the destination has to deliver that great experience.

Atikokan has a good foundation of public interest facilities. The Atikokan Centennial Museum and the Atikokan Public Library are both important local assets for tourists. Visi-

tors instinctively know that both facilities can provide much important information and assistance.

The Tourist Booth on the highway is open a few weeks a year, and offers tourists a pleasant experience and helpful information. The Town Hall provides a variety of information and advisories to visitors.

The staff in all of these civic facilities is extremely friendly, cooperative and helpful. Perhaps even more significantly, the community generally displays an openness and warmth to visitors that is not always common in many other communities. This spirit and helpfulness should not be underestimated as a valued asset for Atikokan.

The town has other important assets as well, including the most fundamental one of location--the natural wilderness area and all of the potential that that implies. Outdoor recreation activities in so many forms are a treasured opportunity for many people, and Atikokan can become a base for many tourists and visitors to help them experience that adventure.

To help grow the cultural tourism segment of the market in the future means that we must have an open and realistic review of the situation today. There are a number of important issues that must be confronted and resolved before Atikokan's potential as a regional tourist destination can be achieved.

All of these issues are connected, but in summary they are:

- *Cultural/tourism governance*
- *Infrastructure*
- *Marketing and promotion*
- *Attractions, Festivals and events*

1. Cultural/tourism governance:

There is no one in charge of tourism in Atikokan. There is also no one responsible for municipal art or cultural development.

The Town provides a small annual stipend to the Chamber of Commerce to support running the tourist booth for a few months each year.

AEDC supports tourism as part of its economic development mandate but it is not focused on that spire, nor should it be.

The Town tries to support tourism activities but it is not a primary mandate. Town staff members are very busy with their own responsibilities.

This uncertainty is now being compounded by the provincial government's creation of Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs). These 13 operations across the province are intended to bring together regional municipalities and tourism operations and supporters. There is a substantial amount of money being tossed into the pot to help set up these structures.

Atikokan has been designated as part of RTO 13. This vast territory has been further subdivided into a, b and c districts. The North-Western Ontario region, of which Atikokan is a part, has been designated 13c and the interim administration is out of Sault Ste Marie.

There is considerable data and research available on tourism from the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, and no need to replicate it in this report. It makes solid economic sense to consider tourism as a regional attraction, not a local issue. The Atikokan issue then becomes, if we can increase visitors to the region, then how do we attract them to Atikokan?

RTOs are becoming quite active in several parts of the province. It will be important to

protect Atikokan's interests by having someone representing this region on that board.

There is presently some uncertainty as to the future of the NOSTA and Sunset County organizations, which have been the traditional regional groups supporting tourism in the district. Atikokan is at the extreme east and west ends of these organizations and therefore struggles to find attention within them.

If Atikokan is to achieve a goal of building a world-class outdoor recreation destination reputation, it will need substantial assistance to advertise and promote the region. The town simply does not have the financial resources to do a global marketing campaign. That is why promoting the region, with Atikokan as a base, will have to become an RTO responsibility, and another reason why Atikokan must have a voice and vote on the new RTO board.

Recommendation #28

The Town of Atikokan should have a representative elected/appointed to the RTO13 board of directors.

Tourism certainly can become a more important part of the town's economy in the future. At the same time it is difficult to promote and expand this segment of the local economy without a greater emphasis on it.

Coupling tourism with the cultural growth opportunities presents an interesting new idea. The Town has recognized that it needs to further develop its communication and marketing efforts. This is quite proper—communicating effectively with local rate-payers is more and more difficult for municipalities.

As a result, there appears to be an emerging need for the Town. Therefore to support the increased push for culture, arts, tourism, communications and marketing opportunities,

and to more aggressively promote and market the community, this report is recommending that Council consider a new professional management position to encompass these varied but related responsibilities.

Duties would include everything from updating and improving the Town's web site and presence and how local residents can do business better on-line with the Town, to inter-relating with community groups and organizations to support cultural, artistic, festivals, tourism and other community-based opportunities. Developing 'sister city' links and supporting the implementation of the main recommendations from the "Heart of the Continent" congress would also be part of the person's duties. The new manager would assume responsibility for implementing a number of the recommendations in this report.

The new manager would also coordinate with other northern Ontario communities for regional performances by touring entertainment, linking with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture for grants, developing regional projects and marketing opportunities and supporting cultural and tourism initiatives. Coordinating advertising and promotion may save a few dollars by getting better rates. Selling the brand of Atikokan would also be a key responsibility.

The idea is to grow the town's capacity, expand its appeal and broaden its tourist, cultural and economic opportunities. It would provide for the first time someone responsible for these opportunities. The position would support the on-going efforts of AEDC, the Chamber of Commerce, Museum, Recreation Department, Library and community and tourism organizations.

Because of the diverse and multi-faceted aspects of the position, it is recommended that the job should report to the CAO. The suggested title is Marketing Manager, but some-

thing like Communication Manager would be just as appropriate.

Recommendation #29

In the 2013 budget process, Council considers the hiring of a new Marketing Manager for Atikokan.

2. Tourism Infrastructure:

The town's tourism infrastructure is weak. There are a limited number of hotel/motels, restaurants, tourist attractions and interesting ret

The truth is that few people see Atikokan as a tourist destination. They may be coming to Quetico, or to enjoy regional camping, boating or other activities, but few people are coming to Atikokan as a specific tourist destination.

The town has no commercial plane or train services, and a very limited bus schedule from Thunder Bay. Almost everyone arriving is driving, and at times of the year that can be interesting.

Atikokan is trapped in the classic chicken-and-egg scenario: it desperately needs more tourism infrastructure to get the tourists, but it needs the tourists to support that investment in infrastructure.

It will take many steps, both separately and together, to improve this scenario. There are close ties between culture and tourism and the town's economic progress. There are previous reports dealing specifically with tourism for Quetico Provincial Park and other reports in the past. The Town could make an interesting case to the RTO13 board for a separate updated study of tourism infrastructure needs and opportunities.

Recommendation #30

The AEDC be asked to develop a strategy for new tourism infrastructure investment and development in Atikokan, and to seek grant and investment partners to encourage local entrepreneurs to upgrade and enlarge their facilities.

3. Marketing and Promotion:

While “The Canoeing Capital of Canada” certainly resonates in the region, there is some question whether it stands up to scrutiny or strong identification in other parts of the country. Atikokan needs to be more aggressive with its promotion and marketing efforts if it is going to broaden its economic, tourism and culture base.

The Town needs to develop a contemporary, comprehensive marketing and promotion strategy to support the Atikokan’s development as well as the tourism potential.

In particular, there needs to be a new emphasis on the web for informing, educating and promoting Atikokan and regional tourism. There needs to be a simple, clear, dynamic guide to the outdoor recreation opportunities in the area.

Whether people want to bring canoes or boats, do hiking or relax on a beach, camp or enjoy a comfortable cabin, do snowmobiling or cross-country skiing, the benefits of visiting the region have to be clear and simple.

The point is, the outdoor recreation/living experience in the wilderness—for whatever experiences the visitor wants—is available in the Atikokan-Quetico district.

Maps and guides must be added to the web site, and also available in printed form from local retailers. The concept is to make the visit as easy and comfortable as possible, because visitors have lots of other choices.

Package deals and regional opportunities need to be highlighted.

When Atikokan’s new GIS project is completed it will become a new resource for information and promotion. The Cultural Inventory and Mapping Guidelines, being developed as part of this MCP process, will provide valuable information to the GIS. That in turn will allow Atikokan to participate more fully in the regional initiative being proposed to host a site in Dryden. Atikokan has been invited to add its data to this site for a one year pilot project. After assessing the results of the pilot project, the Town may wish to seek a longer term commitment with this or other host sites.

Close liaison with Quetico Provincial Park, which already has an international reputation, will be vital. The other major partners will be the provincial and federal tourist bureaus and the new RTO. This is a major undertaking for the community and the region, but there are potentially substantial economic benefits to the community and the region.

Recommendation #31

Develop a comprehensive, contemporary web presence and guides to vacationing in the Atikokan region, emphasizing the world-class outdoor recreation destination opportunities and experiences, jointly with QPP and government tourism organizations.

4. Events, Festivals and Attractions:

The largest and most popular festivals and events in Atikokan today are:

- The MudFling
- The Atikokan Bass Classic
- Sno-Ho

Festivals and events like these are tremendously important to a community. They bring

the town together, they attract outside visitors (and their dollars!), they provide important support for local businesses and they help local employment.

There are certainly opportunities to expand such programs, including adding more winter events ranging from broomball tournaments to skiing, curling, hockey, dog sledding and more. Winter events would also boost the local tourist economy. There is also an opportunity to develop closer links with Quetico Provincial Park for winter tourism development.

However, in smaller communities there is the risk of ‘volunteer burnout’ and there are signs of this happening today in Atikokan. The Town should be conscious of this and try to encourage younger people to get involved and broaden the volunteer base. This is a common problem in communities, as service clubs are discovering. It will take some innovative local thinking to build this base, but it is necessary.

One idea is to actively seek out young people in the community, who bring great energy and enthusiasm to tasks, and invite them to join the proposed Atikokan Emerging Leaders group. There are lots of bright young people in Atikokan; by harnessing that energy today it may make it more appealing for them to return at some point.

The idea of an “Emerging Leaders” group could be interesting. Bring together smart high school students with young entrepreneurs and community leaders, do mentoring with them, and in return tap into their creativity and passion to benefit the community. This could even lead to summer jobs or internship programs with businesses in the region.

This may be an initiative that the new Atikokan Youth Initiatives could lead. The Youth

Centre on Main Street provides a facility for young people to gather, socialize, learn and share.

Festivals and events are a key part of broadening the cultural and tourism base for the town. When the Recreation, Culture and Wellness Centre is constructed it will provide an exciting new home for activities and events for the town. It will also provide tourists with a highly attractive new amenity in town—indoor pool, skating rink, fitness centre, etc. Depending on the design details it could also become a regional tourist attraction—water slides for kids, etc.

Again, Council members can see the linkages between the physical design and assets of the community with its cultural, tourism, social and economic growth.

Recommendation #32

Town Council, the Atikokan Youth Initiatives and the AEDC design an Emerging Leaders group to recognize young community leaders, get them involved in community events and provide business mentoring for them.

5. Path of the Voyageur:

The regional initiative to develop a ‘Path of the Voyageur’ is an excellent idea. It draws upon the heritage of the region and the connections to northern Ontario’s waterways. It ties nicely with the canoeing theme in Atikokan. It would provide a strong brand for canoeing and outdoor enthusiasts, and provides a strong connection with heritage sites, waterways and outdoor recreation.

6. Ideas for Tourism Growth:

Community ideas for helping to grow tourism and the local economy came through the research process. Here are just some to be considered:

a) Northwestern Ontario Golf Trail:

Many regions have developed ‘golf trails’, where enthusiasts travel from course to course and town to town. This could be an interesting idea for communities within a couple of hours drive.

b) Mine Tours:

Few people have ever seen a mine (working or abandoned) and these could be a unique local attraction. It would be interesting to explore whether safe visits to Steep Rock mine, now closed, or the new Hammond Reef gold mine, when opened, could be arranged. One of the elements that distinguish Atikokan from many other communities is the open-pit mining. While there are certainly safety concerns to be overcome the Town of Atikokan could approach the Ministry of Natural Resources to have the Steep Rock mine designated an historical site and developed as a tourist attraction, including interpretive signs, etc as a provincial tourism development project.

c) Welcome Back:

Atikokan has hosted many workers for many decades. It would be fun to have a ‘Welcome Back’ event to coincide with some appropriate historic occasion. This could result in some national publicity and a higher profile for the town and region.

d) Wilderness adventures:

The hiking/camping/fishing/dog sledding/etc opportunities to experience and enjoy the wilderness and the wonders of nature are an obvious attraction for Atikokan. There are several outfitters and cabins throughout the region for people who want a wilderness experience. It is useful for all of these to work together to promote the area for visitors. By making the pie larger, each piece becomes bigger.

e) River experience:

It would be nice to encourage an entrepreneur to build a little tea house or café on the river, link it with a town dock, canoe rentals, etc. Perhaps a public square could be developed with music and entertainers, and a meeting place for social interaction.

f) Cycling:

More and more Canadians are cycling as part of their fitness routine. It is also becoming a more popular summer vacation plan. The MOM highway would be an ideal route as it has much less truck travel than other highways. If the town could persuade the province to improve the paved shoulders on the highway and provide cycle-friendly signage and facilities such as bike racks and camping spots, the gently rolling country side around Atikokan could become a highly appealing cycling destination. Cycling is also an opportunity for the Heart of the Continent activities. There are beautiful natural routes throughout the region. Some work on developing and promoting cycling has already done, such as in Duluth which has dedicated cycle routes that wind through the forest, and the Ski Club in Atikokan which has hosted the Quetico 100 for the past six years.

g) Heart of the Continent:

There appears to be an emerging opportunity for the town to become part of the ‘circle tour’ through the Heart of the Continent actions. This effort seeks to create this region (Canada and US) as a tourist destination. As the importance of Atikokan becoming a destination/stop as part of this larger concept become more urgent, and the links between an interesting, creative community that offers art, heritage, culture, attractions, food, amenities and so on become even more enticing, then Atikokan will become a more preferred destination.

III. CONCLUSIONS:

As the opening sentence of this report observed, Atikokan is a resilient community. The emerging economic opportunities, however, seem to be aligning so that the town is poised for a new era of growth. This provides a unique window of opportunity which the town can exploit to recharge, restructure, renew and reshape.

This Cultural Plan offers an overview of the community and identifies a number of specific opportunities, recommendations and suggestions to be explored and developed further. The strong links between culture, tourism, economic development and the town's physical realm have all been addressed.

These all support the four major cultural opportunities that are emerging for Atikokan: the economic opportunities from new mining and resource extraction; expanding the economic base through culture and tourism; re-designing the public realm; and a greater focus on art and cultural opportunities.

Culture is an important and meaningful contributor to Atikokan's quality of life and its local economy, but there is much room to expand this sector. The potential for growth, especially in the tourism and cultural fields, is significant.

The traditional mind-set of Atikokanites needs to be broadened so that they understand better the benefits of a culturally vibrant community. It is not just about arts and traditional cultural activities—rather, it is about the community wanting to build these elements into the already strong and established local culture of outdoor recreation. Culture adds to a community's sense of itself, its cohesion and its self-image. A strong cultural presence in a community supports social interaction and community participation.

This growth in the view of culture and creativity and its importance to Atikokan will be accomplished in several ways. First, the leadership must start with the Mayor and Council. Second, the Municipality must adopt a process to look at decisions through a culture lens. Third, the community must be informed and educated about this process and its benefits. That will be an on-going process. And fourth, the community must at some point embrace the concepts and make them part of their local and family culture.

It is not a case of either/or. No one has to give up anything. Creating a more culturally-aware community is a building process that grows and expands the definition of culture in and for Atikokan. It is about a way to work harmoniously in broadening the support for culture in all of its definitions, from the traditional Atikokan definition of outdoor recreation to support for the arts.

At the same time, the town has some very special assets in which the community rightly takes pride—the environment, the wilderness, the lifestyle and the outdoor recreational opportunities. People who live in Atikokan and like those assets very much like living in the community. The quality of life available is appealing to many, and the clean air and ecological benefits are a great contributor to that quality of life.

The four 'big ideas' that are offered for consideration provide the community with a fresh look at itself and its future, and what Atikokan can look like in five, ten, twenty years from now.

Developing new business opportunities, likely focused on the mining sector, is the obvious economic growth opportunity. How the town responds to the challenges of housing, servicing, downtown improvements and offering family-oriented amenities will be a crucial part of the road ahead.

Growing the tourism sector as part of a regional economic strategy is a sensible approach. It will take a coordinated effort and investment from the private sector working with various government agencies.

The opportunity to build a new Recreation, Cultural and Wellness Centre is a very important decision for the Town Council. It would provide a huge boost to the community, and would add important benefits to help build the tourism sector.

Such an investment could also trigger another development at the Historical Park area that would result in two strong, dynamic civic anchors for Main Street. That would provide a fresh, vibrant face for the community and provide Atikokan with a wonderful repositioning strategy.

This Cultural Plan is a starting point, not a conclusion for Atikokan. The recommendations and suggestions should be digested, discussed, enhanced and developed. The people of Atikokan are the key players in all of this, and it will be important for them to take ownership of these concepts and strategies.

It is important to have a person/body assigned the responsibility for shepherding a report's conclusions, recommendations and to deal with the new ideas that will inevitably come forward.

The Mayor and Council, together with the civic administration, are uniquely positioned to lead this new civic thrust. The economic benefits, the community advancements and the cultural opportunities are all combining to offer the next step forward for Atikokan.

It should be an exciting and community-oriented venture.

The Spirit of Atikokan:

The final recommendation of this report is simply to suggest that the Spirit of Atikokan be confirmed as a permanent committee of Council, and be given the responsibility to oversee the implementation of this report and the recommendations approved by Town Council.

It is important to have a person/body assigned the responsibility for shepherding a report's conclusions, recommendations and to deal with the new ideas that will inevitably come forward.

The committee has functioned well, it represents a broad cross-section of the community, and it has the knowledge to continue the implantation strategy. It is also important to refresh the committee from time to time, adding new, different and young voices as well.

It would be useful to more formally understand the responsibilities of various components involved in the ideas coming from this cultural plan—the Signage Committee, for example, doesn't seem to be consulted much.

The arts community locally needs to be re-engaged and re-energized. There is not sufficient support or girth for an Atikokan Arts Council at this time, but in the future that could emerge as an articulate organization to support and promote the development and management of the arts realm.

An annual or semi-annual report to Council from the Spirit of Atikokan committee would provide the public oversight and updates that are also important for the implementation of this report. It would also provide a snap-shot of the cultural development in the community, and provide a base-line for future growth and measuring progress.

Recommendation #33

Town Council confirm the Spirit of Atikokan as a standing committee with responsibility to oversee the implementation of the Council-approved recommendations, to encourage further community input and ideas, and report back to Council at least annually on the progress.



APPENDIX 1: The Community Questions and a Summary of the Responses:

Survey Question

Total Received 63

Question 1: If a friend was visiting you, what three things would you show them about our community, or have them experience?

Theme	Sept 20	Oct. 4	Total
Little Falls (?) Facility or Picnic **	5	20	25
Museum	4	13	17
Quetico	5	10	15
Mine Site	7	7	14
Charleston	8	3	11
Little Falls Rec Centre **	4	4	8
Lakes / Forests		8	8
Downtown		7	7
Pictograph gallery/ Local Art Galleries		7	7
Fishing / Hunting		5	5
Pioneer Centre		4	4
Town Hall		4	4
Hockey/Swimming	3	1	4
Walking / River Trails		4	4
Little Falls Picnic **	1	2	3
Restaurant		3	3
Canoeing		2	2
Library		2	2
Fish Hatchery		2	2
Youth Centre	1	1	2

Note ** Many respondents indicated Little Falls. However it was unclear as to whether they meant the picnic area or the Recreation Centre. Where in doubt, we placed the response in Little Falls (?) facility or Picnic.

Question 2: If you could change one things about Atikokan, what would it be?

Theme	Sept 20	Oct. 4	Total
Roads and Sidewalks	8	11	19
Gateway: Unattractive on McKenzie	2	4	6
Employment	1	3	4
Greener Downtown	1	2	3
More Shopping/ Drug Store	2	1	3
More Public Support (social services)	2		2
More children's activities	1	1	2

Question 3: How would you describe the life style or culture in Atikokan?

Theme	Date Sept 20	Oct. 4	Total
Outdoorsy	4	14	18
Laid Back	2	13	15
Friendly	2	5	7
Good	1	4	5
Fairly	1	2	3
Comfortable	2		2
Mixed		2	2

Question 4: What can be done to make Atikokan a more exciting and interesting town?

Theme	Sept 20	Oct. 4	Total
More Stores	2	7	9
Work/Employment	1	5	6
Signage	1	4	5
Fix existing trails, sidewalks, etc	1	4	5
NA	4		5
Beautification	1	2	3
?	3		3
Re-elect Council New Mayor	2		2
Fast Food	2		2
Theatre/culture/arts	2		2

Question 5: What do you think the future holds for Atikokan?

Theme	Sept 20	Oct. 4	Total
Good if Mine and other industries Go ahead	4	8	12
Promising/ Small Hope	3	2	5
Positive Great Things/ Population opportunities	3	2	5
NA	2	1	3
Tourism Growth if Charleson recreation Area is improved		3	3
Retirement Town (regretfully)	1	1	2
Not Good Bleak	2		2

If I Had A Million Dollars Straw Poll Results

This poll consisted of a game where participants were offered \$1,000,000 in tax payer money distributed in a packet of 5 \$200,000 bills. The participants were invited to choose amongst the categories listed in Table A OR if they wished, they could put their money in Other/Table B with a written request on the back of their “money”. This event was held in several venues.

Total responses – 1719 divide by 5= 343 participants.

The Culture Awards had an audience of people whose primary interest was sports and recreation. The Post Office events attracted primarily adults and seniors. The Voyageur Mall event attracted primarily senior citizens. The AHS (Atikokan High School) attracted youth grades 7-12. The Pioneer Centre is a venue with mainly senior citizens.

After conducting the polls, we realized that there was some variation in the interpretation of “New Recreation & Wellness Centre”, with some people thinking it would be more like a physiotherapy and occupational therapy clinic rather than a facility that includes an arena and swimming pool.

TABLE A

* Note: The theme of Pioneer Centre was not included as a separate theme until the September 25 Post Office Event.

Event / Date	Keep & Maintain Existing Arena	Keep & Maintain Existing Swimming Pool	New Recreation & Wellness Centre	Children's Arts & Culture Programmes	Charleson Recreation Area	Enhance Trails & Canoe Access to Atikokan river	Town Beautification	Youth Centre	Little Falls Recreation Centre	Preserving Local History	The Library	Pioneer Centre *	TOTALS
Culture Awards	13	12	110	5	26	8	27	14	35	9	15	0	274
Post Office	37	25	65	33	19	22	49	39	21	16	25	0	351
Post Office	4	6	11	6	2	4	4	3	3	1	7	0	51
AHS	145	15	42	3	83	12	20	25	12	11	12	0	380
Voyager Mall	13	23	40	19	14	23	17	22	32	24	12	18	257
Pioneer Centre	6	7	33	4	1	1	17	3	7	5	8	12	104
Totals	218	88	301	70	145	70	134	106	110	66	79	30	1417

TABLE B “OTHERS” THEMES SUMMARY - This table is a summary of themes in the Others category for which there was more than one response.

Event / Date	Skate Board Park	Fix Roads	Long term Care & Housing	Handi-van	X-country Trails Facilities	Ski Hill	Movie Theatre	Recreation programmes	Children's Playgrounds	Lower Hydro Costs	The Arts	Town Beautification	Baseball diamond	Tennis courts	TOTALS
Culture Awards	0	0	0	0	5	2	0	2	7	0	2	0	2	2	22
Post Office	0	7	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	0	17
Post Office	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	5
AHS	185	10	0	1	2	29	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	234
Voyager Mall	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	7
Pioneer Centre	0	20	23	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	54
Totals	186	37	24	19	8	31	9	2	7	4	5	3	2	2	339

TABLE C “OTHERS” This table shows all of the comments received in the “Others” category

Date/Event	General theme of OTHER
Culture Awards Sept 13	Playground 7 / 2.5%, Ball park- new / resurface 2 / 1%, Trail Improvement, xc ski, xc ski club house, connection to TC trail 5 / 2% Tennis court 2 / 1%, Trail improvement, snowmobile and ATV -1 / .5%, Rec programs (xc ski, mtn bike, horseback riding) 2 / 1%, theatre 2 / 1%, high school bus 1 / .5%
Post Office Sept 19	No comment, - Lower Hydro Cost 4 / 1%, fix our streets 7 – 2%, Handi van 3- 1%, Dog Park 1 - .5%, Literacy and poverty issue 1-.5%, More Long term care beds/Facility 1-.5%, 1-.5% Clean up/tear down main st/ Obrien/ McKenzie defunct buildings, Landscape and less grass at town hall 1-.5%.
Post Office Sept 26	All 1, Handi van 3 - 5%, Performing arts 2 - 3.5%.
AHS Sept 27	No commen 26t, skate park 185, Ski hill 29, New roads 10, New Arena 14, Movie Theatre 7 , Handi van 1, Beaten Path Nordic Trails 2, Make the river area wheelchair accessible 1,
Voyageur Mall Sept 28	No comment 4, skate park 1 / .5%, Movie Theatre 2 / .5%, Handi van 1 / .5%, Dancing Events for the public (all ages) 1 / .5%, Planting Trees @ 622 junkie and up McKenzie 1 / .5 %, Bowling 1 / .5%, Snow shoe trails 1 / .5%, Special Olympics Headquarters 1 / .5 %, Listen to music ADADs Leisure program 1 / .5%, Recreation addition to existing pool and stage / studio area 1 / .5%, All other sports 1 / 5%
Pioneer Centre Oct 3	No comment, roads 20 / 12.5 %, Handi van 11 / 7 %, Apartments 10 / 6 %, Condo 5 / 3 %, Apartments 5 / 3 %, Apartments suitable for seniors 1 / .5 %, Hospital (Ex Care) 2 / 1 %, Hospital 1 / .5 %

APPENDIX 2 Alphabetical list of special interviews:

Dennis Brown	Mayor, Town of Atikokan
Jim Clark	Canoe Canada
Marlene Davidson	Councillor, Métis Centre
Valerie Fraser	Atikokan-Quetico Trading Post
Vivian Gilmour	Atikokan cultural proponent
Nicole Halasz	Town of Atikokan
Gord Martin	Tramin Mining Group
Garry MacKinnon	Atikokan Economic Development Corporation
Mike McKinnon	Atikokan Progress
André Morin	CAO, Town of Atikokan
Robin Reilly	Quetico Provincial Park
Keith and Arlene Robinson	Souris River Canoes
Angie Sponchia	Atikokan Youth Initiatives
Jim Turner	Community Living Atikokan
Dolores Veran	Atikokan Native Friendship Centre
Special Focus Groups:	Atikokan High School
	The Pioneer Club

APPENDIX 3: Summary of recommendations and suggested time lines:

- #1: Work with tourism and recreational experts to develop a stronger web presence and information base to promote Atikokan as a year-round home and destination of world-class outdoor recreation. (2012-13)
- #2: Develop a comprehensive plan to reconnect the town with the Atikokan River. (2013-15)
- #3: Establish a joint working task force to report on business and Tourism opportunities for Atikokan and regional provincial parks, to report back by October, 2012. (2012)
- #4: Support and implement the Heart of the Continent initiatives. (2012-15)
- #5: Establish partnering relationships with Ely, Minnesota and other gateway communities. (2012-15)
- #6: Explore green technology and energy opportunities with parks and outdoor living. (2013-14)
- #7: Request that the consultants for the Official Plan review consider the lands around the Tourist Booth be developed, including for a trail system, with a future view of the province developing a road/gateway into QPP. (2012)
- #8: Encourage and promote Atikokan/Quetico/Boundary Waters Canoe Area as a world-class outdoor recreation destination. (2015...)
- #9: Atikokan and the AEDC pursue a formal opportunity for a satellite facility of some kind with NORCAT in Sudbury to become the regional partner for training and certifying mining workers. (2012-14)
- #10: Atikokan and partners seek to expand the outdoor recreation education experience into a stronger, more defined college/university program, based in the area. (2013-16)
- #11: Support and foster a more entrepreneurial spirit in the community, particularly with young people and start-up businesses. (2013...)
- # 12: Work with the regional Health Unit to develop a sustainable food strategy for Atikokan and develop regional food thinking. (2013-14)
- #13: Ask the Spirit of Atikokan committee to research and recommend a Public Art policy for Atikokan. (2013)
- #14: Town Council establishes a new Public Art Reserve Fund, with contributions coming from a new 1% allocation from major, above-ground public projects, donations and private sector bonusing commitments. (2013)

- #15 Town Council to develop a plan to repair/repaint, replace or let the murals go. (2012-13)
 - #16 The Spirit of Atikokan group be asked to spear-head a summit with Linda Albright, Director of the Children for the Arts national program, to include school and community representatives, to develop a strategic plan for more and better opportunities and support for children's arts and creative opportunities. (2012-13)
 - #17 The Museum Curator, Chief Librarian and Town Clerk be asked to develop a web hub for the cultural community of Atikokan housed on the town's website. (2012-13)
 - #18 The Town of Atikokan lead discussions with the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture for an expanded project of northern Ontario communities being visited by an enhanced annual circuit of children's performers, guest speakers, artists, performers and entertainers through the ministry's 'Cultural Strategic Investment Fund'. (2014)
 - #19: The Town Council consider committing to develop this multi-purpose facility to include recreation, arts and culture, and wellness/health facilities as a priority;
- A Mayor's Task Force be appointed, to report back to Town Council by June 30/12, to:
- (i) consult with the community on design elements for the proposed facility
 - (ii) consider funding options, sources and alternatives and with the Town CAO develop a financial plan for the capital and operating funding. (2012-15)
- #20 Council direct that public consultations take place and a new master plan be developed for the Historical Park and Civic Centre area, including the Museum, Library and new community facilities. (2012-16)
 - #21: Consider designing a new Town Square into the planning for the proposed Recreation, Culture and Wellness centre. (2013-15)
 - #22 Direct the consultants for the Official Plan review to take into consideration the gateways and entrances to Atikokan, and opportunities to develop them. (2012)
 - #23 Invite the Chamber of Commerce and the AEDC to form a task force to review and recommend ways to work with local businesses to improve the gateways and entrances to Atikokan, and report back to Council by November, 2012. (2012-15)
 - #24 Develop a consistent theme to the town's promotion, public art and community celebrations centred on the "Outdoor Living" theme. (2013-16)
 - #25 Direct the Museum Curator to begin a roster of heritage properties and spaces, and identify Atikokan heritage assets. (2012-13)

- #26 Town Council allocates at least \$2,500/year, in additional spending, beginning with the 2012 budget, to support public events, activities and beautification in the downtown core. (2013-16)
- #27 Town Council develop a Housing Strategy for the next 5 years to encourage new residential, support younger families getting into the housing market, and providing appropriate facilities and care for the seniors population. (2012-13)
- #28 The Town of Atikokan should have a representative elected/appointed to the RT013 board of directors. (2012)
- #29 In the 2013 budget process, Council considers the hiring of a new Marketing Manager for Atikokan. (2013)
- #30 The AEDC be asked to develop a strategy for new tourism infrastructure investment and development in Atikokan, and to seek grant and investment partners to encourage local entrepreneurs to upgrade and enlarge their facilities. (2013)
- #31 Develop a comprehensive, contemporary web presence and guides to vacationing in the Atikokan region, emphasizing the world-class outdoor recreation destination opportunities and experiences, jointly with QPP and government tourism organizations. (2013-14)
- #32 Town Council, the Atikokan Youth Initiatives and the AEDC design an Emerging Leaders group to recognize young community leaders, get them involved in community events and provide business mentoring for them. (2012-13)
- #33 Town Council confirm the Spirit of Atikokan as a standing committee with responsibility to oversee the implementation of the Council-approved recommendations in this Cultural Plan, to encourage further community input and ideas, and report back to Council at least annually on the progress. (2012)

APPENDIX 4 Chronology of recommendations

2012 PROJECT START DATE:

1. Develop better web information/tourism promo
3. Task Force re tourism opportunities with Parks
4. Endorse Heart of the Continent strategy
7. Consider developing area around Tourist booth in OP
9. NORCAT/university satellite campus/program
15. Council determine future of mining murals
16. Children and the arts summit
17. Develop cultural web hub
19. New Recreation, Cultural, Wellness Centre
20. Expanded Historical Park district
21. New Town Square plan
22. Official Plan amendments re culture
25. Heritage property roster
26. Downtown beautification
27. Develop new Housing strategy
28. Get Atikokan rep on new RTO board
32. Emerging leaders program
33. Confirm Spirit of Atikokan as standing committee

2013 PROJECT START DATE:

2. Reconnect with Atikokan River
5. Partnership with Ely, Minn. and others
6. Green technology for outdoors plan
10. Move towards formal outdoor education college program
11. Better entrepreneurial spirit
13. Develop public art policy
14. Establish public art reserve fund
23. Improve Gateways
24. Adopt “Outdoor Living” as theme

29. Hire new Marketing Manager
30. AEDC re tourism infrastructure strategy
31. Regional tourism destination information

2014 PROJECT START DATE:

12. Develop sustainable food plan
18. Work with MTC re N. Ont. cultural 'circuit' funding proposal

2015 and on PROJECT START DATE:

8. Encourage Atikokan as world-class destination

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