



# Smithers Fairground - Project Update

Report to Council – September 24, 2013

YATES, THORN &  
ASSOCIATES  
CONSULTING SERVICES



## Project Remit

- Business and Land Use Plan to include:
  - Governance Plan
  - Facility and Land Use Plan
  - Programming Plan
  - Financial and Business Plan
  - Marketing Plan

YATES, THORN &  
ASSOCIATES  
CONSULTING SERVICES

## Process to Date



- Site Visit
- Stakeholder Interviews (including Council and FFMC)
- Background Document Review
- On-line Survey
- Profiles of Other Fairgrounds
- Review of Financial data
- General related issues/questions


YATES, THORN &  
ASSOCIATES  
CONSULTING SERVICES

## What We Heard




- What Stakeholders Told Us:
  - History is important - BVAIA regard themselves as the stewards of the Fairgrounds, with their license and history giving them virtual ownership
  - This doesn't sit well with other groups which have often invested heavily in the facilities
  - While summer use is significant, the site should be usable year round
  - There needs to be a more open approach to management of the 'community' fairgrounds
  - The Fall Fair and managing the Fairgrounds should be separate activities

YATES, THORN &  
ASSOCIATES  
CONSULTING SERVICES



- Floodplain and servicing are long term issues that need to be addressed
- There are lots of ideas for additional uses and users for the Fairgrounds – most are complimentary to current uses



## What Background Reports Told Us



- Opportunities and Issues from Background Reports:
  - The second arena will add capacity for dry floor events as well as ice events
  - The OCP does not give much consideration to the Fairgrounds
  - Potential for linking the Fairgrounds to the Downtown
  - Ensuring complimentary activities such as the Farmer’s Market and Agricultural heritage

- New Arena Planning reports
- Town of Smithers Annual Reports
- Official Community Plan
- Downtown Plan
- Accessible Pathways and Trails Plan
- Community Economic Development Study - From Boomtown to Sustainable Town.
- Recreation and Culture Master Plan
- Needs Assessment and Site Search – Soccer Fields and Ball Parks
- Smithers Outdoor Recreation Master Plan





- Events hosted at the Fairgrounds could have a significant community economic benefit
- Is there still a need for soccer fields and ball parks in Smithers? Could the Fairgrounds contribute to meeting this need?
- Are there higher and better uses for part or all of the Fairground site and could better use be made of the site outside of its peak use season?
- Town Annual Report notes washroom upgrading at Fairgrounds is needed
- The Fairgrounds can be seen to link to OCP goals such as Building a healthy and resilient economy and Supporting health and wellness through community services and facilities

YATES, THORN &  
ASSOCIATES  
CONSULTING SERVICES


## What about Other Fairgrounds?



- Profile of Other Fairgrounds:
  - Long history – generally relocated out of downtowns
  - Mainly still focused on agricultural/equine activities, but also municipal recreation facilities
  - Mostly municipal ownership, but arms-length management, with one or several not-for-profit groups
  - Municipalities use leases – 5 to 20 years
  - Free use of site for Fall Fair – but other services charged for
  - Capital costs were municipally led, with some contributions from other parties

*Prince George  
Williams Lake  
Burns Lake  
Terrace  
Chilliwack  
Saanich  
Armstrong*


YATES, THORN &  
ASSOCIATES  
CONSULTING SERVICES



- Normal range of groups involved- where broader recreation on site, these groups were also involved in management
- Not a strong focus on event economic impact – only Chilliwack and Burns Lake
- Lease holders required to report annually
- Only in one case, did the organization who ran the fair also manage the fairgrounds year-round. In this case, that organization was the owner of the land, and the municipality was in no way involved, except in receiving the land taxes applicable to the site

YATES, THORN &  
 ASSOCIATES  
 CONSULTING SERVICES


## What the Online Survey Told Us?



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facility upgrading required:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Washrooms</li> <li>• Main stage area</li> <li>• Riding/equine facilities</li> <li>• Parking and roadways</li> <li>• General TLC</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain as is</li> <li>• Add quality/upgrade/TLC</li> <li>• More events/operate year-round</li> <li>• Add compatible facilities/amenities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
---	--

Survey responses  
 117 responses – 50/50 Town/BVRD – 60% only visited for Fall Fair – Northern Saddle Club members main regular users

YATES, THORN &  
 ASSOCIATES  
 CONSULTING SERVICES



## Financial Situation

- All groups break even – very little surplus revenue
- BVAIA
  - Different scale from other groups
  - Substantial revenues from Fair, but matched with expenditures
  - Staffing allows year round operation
  - Set fees to break even, but weather dependent
  - Share revenues with groups through commission
- Capital planning from previous savings
- BVFMS – run Mid-summer Festival on no staff
- Community groups work together toward community goals

*The volunteer model of fair operation, as with other volunteer-run groups/activities, is struggling in an age of reduced volunteers and higher public and public agency expectations.*

YATES, THORN &  
 ASSOCIATES  
 CONSULTING SERVICES



## Our Learning

- There is a strong commitment to the Fall Fair and the Fairgrounds – their existence and the various events grounds us in who we are as a community
- But the current model is struggling
- Capital upgrading is required – and this will require public funding
- A renewed sense of collaboration is also required – they are the Community Fairgrounds, not the Fall Fairground
- The status quo is one option...as is major change...but neither will build the right long term community collaboration that is essential for a healthy future.

YATES, THORN &  
 ASSOCIATES  
 CONSULTING SERVICES

## Next Steps



- More complete inventory of the Fairground buildings
- Review engineering report re floodplain
- Meet with stakeholders (Wednesday at 4.30pm)
- Draft report (late October)
- Open House and Council presentation (November)
- Finalize report (Nov 30)