Smithers Fairground -
Project Update

Report to Council – September 24, 2013

Project Remit

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

### 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
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

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
• 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

What the Online Survey Told Us?

• Facility upgrading required:
  • Washrooms
  • Main stage area
  • Riding/equine facilities
  • Parking and roadways
  • General TLC
• Vision
  • Maintain as is
  • Add quality/upgrade/TLC
  • More events/operate year-round
  • Add compatible facilities/amenities

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

### 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.
## 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)