

**Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Regional Economic Development Plan
Phase 3 Community Based Research
*Keeping it Real***

DRAFT SUMMARY REPORT

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This Summary provides an overview of the research and results. The detailed description of the methodology and results is in the full report and appendices.

Background

The objectives for the research were to develop:

- guiding values for future economic development in Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Traditional Territory;
- community objectives for future economic development in Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Traditional Territory;
- Issues and concerns with the concept of economic development and potential impacts.

Delays required ongoing modifications to the methodology with the focus being meeting the original objectives as closely as possible.

The research team was formed on February 26, 2009 consisting of the lead researcher and three residents of Dawson City who did the interviewing and data input. Each interviewer brought a unique background and experience in Dawson City and was involved in the compilation and analysis of all data. Without their dedication and participation in refining the data from raw comments into points and forming the summarization and consolidation of the results, this project could not have been completed in the compressed four week timeframe.

Overview of Results

Respondents were asked to respond to a series of descriptive value statements about what people value about living in Dawson City and then asked about the three areas of economic development identified during Phase 1 and 2 of the project.

This summary provides a revised statement of values and the overview of the impact, concerns and criteria to be used in assessing particular initiatives. The detailed presentation also includes suggestions made by respondents.

Values

The following is the revised statement of what people value about Dawson City and, in turn, would like to maintain in response to the value statements used to initiate discussion.

-I feel a strong sense of belonging. My friends, family and ancestors are here. When I go about, I can sense the strength of my ancestors and I receive strength and hope. I hope to inherit that strength. I feel a sense of pride.

Many people in the community have extensive ancestral roots here. Some of the gold rush era miners fell under the spell of the Yukon and their kin exist as current day families of Dawson. Many have made the decision to come and stay and have become part of our colourful past and present. These long standing ties to the land provide Dawson City residents with a sense of pride, belonging, knowledge and history.

-You can live the lifestyle of an independent miner or trapper up here.

-The color of Dawson City is the reason people come. It draws creative people because of the open space and freedom.

Dawson City attracts people of many nationalities and boasts a population that represents a complete cross section of Canadian society. From tourist to adventurer or job seeker, the region attracts those who want to experience life and culture in the North.

The frigid temperatures, the midnight sun, the long hours of darkness and the isolation are extremes that draw people here and keep them coming back. These extremes bring out the qualities of self-sufficiency, generosity and adaptability in order to survive. Hands on skills are useful in this active society.

Many believe that people come here to move on from the past, creating a new lifestyle that is less frantic and more grounded. Dawson City attracts people of many walks of life and diverse backgrounds and its share of eccentrics.

There are many residents who can proudly claim themselves part of the colourful five percent.

-Dishwasher or millionaire – Who can tell?

-This is the only town that I have lived in that I wanted to be a part of because they do not discriminate.

Many of Dawson's residents were once tourists or employment seekers that fell in love with the region. The variety of interests in Dawson City allows for newcomers to fit in with ease. Although there are many social groups in Dawson, these groups cross over and integrate with little to no difficulty. This occurs particularly when there is a

perception that Dawson's safety and reputation needs protection and to put on community events.

Individualism is celebrated. Underlying class structure seems nonexistent and peer pressure is not a concern. There is room for a wide range of self-expression in an atmosphere of relaxed acceptance for people who live their values.

Although residents may have a lack of anonymity it is also not an easy place for people to slip through the cracks, people band together to support community members in need.

Residents may be leery to develop relationships with *cheechakos*. A demonstrated commitment to live in the community is a major factor in order to be accepted. It is expected that newcomers learn the ways and language of Dawson City and not impose their ways on its culture. As a Sourdough one can then enjoy the advantages of a generous and tolerant community.

-The transient aspect of Dawson City pains me.

Dawson City is a town where population turn-over is a matter of fact. Well respected members uproot themselves and leave Dawson City to access options not seen as available here. Many residents think this transient nature is avoidable if there is a stronger economy.

The contrast between the busy summer and the quiet winter is a cause for economic concern but is welcomed socially by many people. People, who live here year round, even if their business is seasonal, are much more valued than those who run seasonal businesses and leave with the wealth at summers end.

-There is no other small community in Canada where there is so much going on. Dawson City is so small but so big.

-I have the feeling I have more of an impact here because of the size. I can pack my days full here.

Dawson City is unique for the large number of events and cultural offerings. Impressive facilities and institutions, coupled with the imagination of the people, make this possible. The large volunteer base and sense of commitment to the community makes many events a reality.

In many ways the community is self-sufficient in terms of cultural diversity. There are many talented residents who pursue their passions in the arts, sports and recreation. Access to a wide variety of local, national and international performers and artists is highly supported and valued.

-Dawson City is a great place to raise a little one. Everybody cares – a child is never lost because people know each other.

Being an inclusive community, with little divide among its inhabitants; a feeling of safety prevails in Dawson City but there is concern.

The community responds quickly in times of need. Whether it is death, fire or injury, there is the knowledge that the town is behind you and will help you through your difficulties. This aspect of Dawson City is prevalent and is a source of pride for many residents.

-Our town is a fragile piece of infrastructure. The reason we call this home may change if we grow too much.

Since its inception, Dawson City has survived many booms and busts and some welcome the excitement brought on by fluctuations in population and economic activity.

However, the underlying sense is that the community is apprehensive about growing too fast and the changes that will result to the existing culture. The potential for upsetting its distinct qualities underlies this apprehension.

The level of services is seen to be impressive for a community of Dawson's size but there are also gaps. Some have specifically questioned gaps with regard to childbirth, accessibility for disabled persons and care for the elderly.

It is also evident that residents feel the need for a strong and vibrant economy to end the decline they see. The resulting increase in educational, recreational and economic opportunities is hoped to retain families and young people who feel the need to excel elsewhere.

-There is room for everybody and their dream of work.

-There is an unfulfilled potential here that intrigues me. It is not played out like other places.

People have the option of balancing lifestyle and income to fit their values and aspirations. Many believe that there is a good deal of opportunity in Dawson. The town has a sizable central Yukon population, a distinct economy, Government structure and many services. But, the extent of dependency on government funding is of concern.

Dawsonites recognize that options may be limited, yet opportunities within those options exist. One resident summed it up when she said “There is imagination here.” It is possible to pursue an idea and develop a niche within the economy.

People feel they can make things happen here. Dawson City is seen as a place where you can stage an event, raise a team of sled dogs, or become an amateur radio DJ.

-It reminds me of my home town. Everybody knows you so you have to run your business correctly.

-Yukon wide – you have access to the people who make the decisions.

Small businesses are highly valued by residents for their personal touch. Good service is seen as being equally important as good relationships.

One business owner claimed the “businesses are responsive to requests because you reap what you sow”. The opportunity to gain respect and make a name for yourself is available.

To receive good advice or service, residents have the advantage of knowing the strengths and limitations of individuals.

There is some concern that we undervalue what we have in Dawson. The majority of residents see the importance of supporting services that are offered by our business owners.

Tourism, mining and trapping go together. We use the same land for a different purpose

A lot of things wouldn't exist if it wasn't for mining.

Residents value their colourful past. It has helped to create a town that is visually appealing and as a basis for tourism.

Placer mining has been and is essential to the economy of Dawson. It complements and adds to our gold rush tourism draw.

As long as placer mining and prospecting is done responsibly, people see it as essential to its economy, appeal and culture. Family run operations, dedicated to the town, are highly respected.

Economic Areas

The following provides a summary of the impacts, concerns and criteria by each economic development area. This summary cannot replace the detail presented later but provides a sense of the data collected. Each area is presented by the description used in the interview followed by the summary of results. The full report also includes suggestions made for the tourism and knowledge areas and have not been summarized as their value is in the detail.

Expanding the Tourist Base Through Rebranding New Product Offerings

Dawson City could complement its current high-volume, low-spending tourist base with high-end bigger spenders. This can be accomplished by taking advantage of a World Heritage Site status (seen by some as a high probability) and rebranding Dawson City as a pristine wilderness adventure destination with a unique dual historical/cultural backdrop – both Gold rush and Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in.

The rebranding will need to be accompanied by not only a new marketing strategy but also the development of the trail and support infrastructure needed to meet this market and to target market-appropriate products. Becoming linked with existing hiking/wilderness adventure tour networks would help make Dawson City a highly prized destination particularly when coupled with the World Heritage Site designation and Tombstone Park.

Dawson’s remoteness and the region’s low population density are positive factors for this focus. Drawbacks include the functional limitations of the airport (which affects travel connections) and the need to invest locally in the infrastructure required to exploit this opportunity.

Impact Overview

Broadly speaking there was strong support for the development of a trail system providing it was kept both natural and accessible to all users and had adequate maintenance. While this was linked to support for wilderness eco-tourism there was concern that these are not necessarily big spenders and the term ‘high-end’ provoked negative connotations. However, the response to the World Heritage Site designation

provoked both positive and negative reactions. On one hand it was seen as a tremendous marketing draw and on the other concerns about the potential for increased restrictions on people's lives and business options in Dawson. There was also some confusion as to what the World Heritage Site was and what it would actually mean.

It is important to emphasize that most wanted to preserve the existing Gold Rush history as a tourism draw. It was also suggested to integrate First Nation culture and history into any expansion or development of hiking/wilderness adventure offerings.

While there was general agreement that something has to be done to refresh tourism in Dawson City and target new markets rebranding via slogans was not supported. The emphasis was on keeping it real by building on what we have and by using and expanding what else already exists here.

How it is done is almost as important as what is done. There was a strong preference for small business development of new tourism options and services consistent with the look and feel of Dawson. In fact, the impact on the social life and appearance of Dawson, as-well-as the environment, are major factors to be considered in any development.

There was recognition that high volume leaves a larger environmental footprint than low volume tourism. Many would like to reduce environmental impact by lowering the volume but increasing the spending per person through longer stays and increased offerings.

Concerns Overview

The most common concerns were how developments will impact people's life in Dawson City in terms of quality of life and specifically maintaining the culture, look and feel of Dawson City along with current access to the wilderness. Linked to this were concerns about the impact on culturally sensitive areas and existing trapping and mining claims of an expanded trail system.

The infrastructure capacity to handle the demand and the real economic benefits that will accrue were also of concern. Some questioned the feasibility of this type of development and how it will be funded.

There were a number of dimensions to environmental concerns. One aspect is that the tourists need to understand bush etiquette both in terms of respecting the land and wildlife but also in terms of leaving no trace. Another aspect was that as more people use the wilderness it will lose its exclusivity, wildlife patterns may be affected, and the bush will be more susceptible to fire and other human caused damage. The World

Heritage designation status would be negatively impacted by paving Front Street and other changes

Criteria Overview

Any related development connected with the designation of World Heritage Site status or development of a trail system must be consistent with Dawson's natural, historical and cultural setting. Dawson's strengths and innate qualities should be built upon. Gold rush history, First Nation culture and untouched natural beauty should be highlighted, not overlooked, nor overshadowed by other potential attractions. Current trails and structures of significance to the region should be refurbished and improved upon.

Development should not impose unfair regulations upon the residents of the region of Dawson. The trail system must not alter, but enhance public access to trails, and allow for access of various modes of transportation.

Training and education of locals should be available. Local contractors and residents should have first refusal concerning contracts and employment, assuming they possess the adequate skills and resources. The residents are opposed to corporate control and wish to see small business turn the profits.

The feasibility of any development must be studied. A trail system must generate enough income to warrant the time, energy and cost of its planning, construction and maintenance. The magnitude and tourist appeal of the trail system, combined with appropriate marketing, should maximize profit, and minimize environmental impact. The economy of seasonal versus year round trails, and the availability of manpower required for its operation are other factors in need of study.

Successful planning of a trail system is dependent upon close consultation and consent of miners, trappers, First Nations people and other community members. The impact on historical sites and sensitive ecosystems must be weighed.

A conscious effort toward building 'green' facilities, proper waste management and trail user education and awareness must be made. The preservation of the environment and the feel of untouched wilderness are paramount. Trail systems must be in place to provide guiding, safety, adequate mapping or direction and the prevention of excessive trail use.

Establishing a Knowledge Economy

Dawson City could build on its arts and culture successes (e.g., KIAC and SOVA), expanding its existing offerings. It could also branch into other specialty fields and developing world-class institutions in Climate Change Research, First Nations Heritage

and Cultural Studies, Palaeontology Research, Northern Social Policy and Governance research institute as examples.

It will be necessary to invest in expertise to bring research and academic institutions to Dawson City and relocating the Beringia Centre to Dawson City could start the process. There is a natural linkage between expanding the current offerings and partnering with tourism product providers to develop packages to focus on specialty course offerings or that incorporate a mix of unique experiences of local arts and culture, wilderness experiences, and educational opportunities.

Impact Overview

Generally people were supportive of this type of development in particular research based on local interests but also to take advantage of current research activities that are not co-ordinated for maximum economic and information return to Dawson.

There was a lot of interest in building on what is here and what fits in with the Dawson City culture including the arts but also people mentioned mining related training and education as building on what is already here.

On one hand there was an appeal in that the youth would have options for further education and on the other, the concern was that people who were stationed here would not fit into the Dawson City culture and could have a disquieting impact.

Concerns Overview

There were concerns about how Dawson City as a whole will benefit and whether this type of development is sustainable. Consistent with other areas are concerns about the impact on mining and availability of housing.

If initiatives are highly specialized there is concern that people working there will all have to come from outside and may form their own social group and not be part of the community. What employment may be created will need technical training in order to participate and whether that will be available. This technical orientation also raises the question as to how accessible the information being generated will be to Dawson City as a whole.

Criteria Overview

Any development must be accessible to Dawsonites, and add value to the community. The focus of an educational or research institution should have relevance to the region. Scientific, cultural or habitat studies pertinent to the area will garner enthusiasm amongst residents and set a foundation for community involvement and contribution.

An appropriate focus of study will likely draw people to Dawson City that have similar interests to those that reside here. It may also promote higher education and eventual employment of residents.

Current institutions in Dawson City have the potential for expansion in terms of offerings and enrolment. The young but promising arts program in Dawson City is seen as a natural area of expansion. The initiation, continuance and enhancement of training programs in the mining, tourism or economically related areas of the region are viewed as an ongoing priority.

Affordable housing, rental units and enhanced accessibility to the region are criterion for an establishment of a knowledge economy.

Long term demand and dedicated funding are essential and must be assessed to ensure economic viability. Government funding is essential but residents are apprehensive over reliance on public funding, or an increase in taxes in order to fund institutions and related infrastructure.

In terms of wilderness adventure education, residents would prefer privately run businesses to have control. The marketing of such ventures must balance the availability of adventure education attractions and the volume of students and tourists that travel to make use of them.

Manage mining and oil & gas exploration/development

In the event that non-renewable resource development occurs need to be flexible to incorporate and manage rather than attempt to control. Too many national and global factors are at play for complete control to be achieved. Instead, it will be more effective to try and maximize the benefits to Dawson City through all aspects of the process from exploration to reclamation of the sites as they arise.

Whether economic development occurs through locals developing prospecting skills, investing in exploration equipment for contract work, or focusing on supply and services to exploration and mining companies, all of these opportunities will need to be recognized and exploited by the people and businesses in Dawson.

Impact Overview

A distinction needs to be made between family operated placer mining operations and other mining activity. Placer mining is seen as integral to the economy, history and tourism appeal of Dawson. Generally speaking, there is broad support in the

community and what few concerns there were with placer mining were around environmental impact of operations.

Mining is viewed as having both a 'boom' and a 'bust' cycle and the associated social and economic impacts that go with each. It is seen as a source of well paying stable jobs and as a means to acquire skills and training with a positive spin-off impacting for services and economic viability.

It is also seen as an activity that fits into the culture of Dawson City and gives a feeling of excitement. At the same time the impact of many new or large mines at one time could overwhelm Dawson City and change it from what it is into a boomtown with all the associated social problems.

The environmental impact of mining, both in terms of visual as-well-as ecological impact, is seen as the single biggest area of impact. Some are concerned that it will negatively impact tourism and the visual appeal of Dawson City. In addition, the damage to the land will be large and long lasting and with access roads being built, the wilderness will be at risk.

Concerns Overview

The major concern is about not making the same mistakes that other communities have made in the environmental area. Specifically, there is a concern that reclamation be required and not at the expense of the community. Concern about air, water and ground pollution, impact on wildlife and the wilderness with the need to adhere to legislation with effective monitoring and oversight was identified. There is also concern about legislating mining so heavily it cannot survive – specifically placer mining.

There is a concern around the extent to which Dawson City could become primarily dependent on the mining industry to survive. This would result in changing the character of Dawson City and a loss of self-determination and identity. At the same time there is concern that people will focus only on the negative aspects and not recognize the benefits.

There is a concern that large mining ventures will largely be self-contained, both in terms of supplies and staff, resulting in little employment and economic benefits to Dawson City while the increased traffic and impact on roads has to be dealt with. There is concern about where developments will be located, particularly in terms of culturally sensitive areas.

There is real ambivalence. On one hand placer mining is seen as integral to tourism while other types of mining are seen as potentially harmful. Large mines are seen as providing the most potential opportunities for employment and training while smaller

family type operations are seen as consistent with the character and feel of Dawson. There is broad support for mining but also many concerns.

There is real concern about the boom-bust cycle and the impact on housing prices and local goods and services. While the oil and gas component did not attract many concerns the temporary impact of activity is related and as this area builds networks of roads for exploration there is concern that the wilderness and wildlife will be negatively impacted.

Criteria Overview

Strict adherence to environmental regulations is vital. There must be guarantee that monies be reserved for reclamation, with preference given to performing reclamation and mining concurrently. Excessive use of processing chemicals should be avoided.

The location of any mine should not within offensive visual or auditory range of resident dwellings. The inclination of residents is toward a manageable amount of small to medium scale operations with long mining lives. It is felt that this will alleviate many of the social concerns and impacts, specifically the potential for the overwhelming of Dawson's social dynamic. Adverse impact on the tourism appeal or other potential economic avenues is not acceptable.

Residents and businesses must be notified well in advance in order to benefit from the development in areas such as supply and service. It will be advantageous to lobby for upgrades or creation of infrastructure and facilities that are economically manageable and useful to residents during pre and post mining activity. The institution of training and employment initiatives by the employer is vital to ensuring that residents gain expertise and well paying positions.

Summary Question:

After weighing the pros and cons of each area what area(s) should be the focus for the next five years? *Please rank the areas where 1 = primary focus; 2 = secondary focus; and 3 = would be nice but others are higher priority.*

Not all respondents responded to this question and the interesting finding is that there is no clear cut first priority. By combining the top two priority categories it appears that Expanding the Tourist Base has the greatest interest but there is no clear cut division which suggests that all areas are seen as having strong potential.

Priority	Manage mining and oil & gas exploration/development	Establishing a Knowledge Economy	Expanding the Tourist Base
1	26	28	28
2	20	23	32
3	29	25	15
Total	75	76	75