

What we heard in Watson Lake

Community	Watson Lake
Date	Tuesday, March 13, 2018
Time	7 p.m.
Location	Curling Rink Lounge
Facilitator	Sandy Legge
Note taker	Carleen Kerr Elise Pendlebury – Economic Development
Participants	6 participants

Thinking Ahead: Round 1

In regards to sustainably growing tourism in Yukon, and regardless of whose responsibility it is:

What is already working well?

- Catering opportunities due to meetings
- Friendliness – Yukoners are friendly
- Amazing VICs – maybe not the buildings themselves, but the staff and the information they have are great
- VIC staff understand the history of the Yukon
- Good roads
- Clean environment for the most part – garbage doesn't litter our roads
- Our rest areas are relatively clean
- Air North has Yukoners in their heart
- We want Air North to come here
- Air North is a local industry that is doing a good job
- Sense of pride in Air North
- Air North puts back into the communities a lot
- Air North pays back
- Department provided a package of vacation planners, maps, pamphlets and banners for us to bring to Texas – shared Yukon's story and how great it is with over 130 people
- Department should do more of that – for the cost of postage and time, we reached out to a ton of people
- We should be our biggest promoters when we travel

- The Air North magazine is a great promotional tool
- Have the only water slide in the Yukon
- The riding association facility is working well
- We have an amazing trail system

What can tourism partners build on/do more of?

- The Vitamin D campaign and new logo got world wide coverage – but we could do a better job for the reasons why we get world wide coverage
- It would be nice to show more of the Yukon in our advertisements
- Consider showing a map of the Yukon in the advertisements
- One idea would be to link to a website so that interested people can see more footage or learn the story of the communities featured in the advertisement
- We need to get Watson Lake in front of the Sign Post Forest – no one knows where it is
- Locally we need to do a better job explaining that the Sign Post Forest is here
- Could look at some older local campaigns and see how to reinvigorate them
- The Passport program is working well but could use a bit of a boost to encourage more people to use it
- Each community should buy into this so it isn't just the Yukon Government who is in charge of promoting it

What opportunities do you see?

- Watson Lake is unique as we only get road traffic
- When people fly into Whitehorse, they don't hear of Watson Lake
- Whitehorse doesn't promote us
- Whitehorse is too focused on Skagway, Dawson City and Carcross
- We have great history here
- The only reason Yukon is the Yukon is because of the Highway
- Watson Lake is history in the making
- We could really build on our history
- There are still people who remember when the only way to travel was by dog sled or remember when the highway wasn't paved
- Opportunity to share our history about the highway and Watson Lake

- Opportunity for more positive stories in Yukon News – the only paper the communities get
- Consider advertising in a trucker magazine – know of a few who will walk the Wye Lake which leaves them feeling refreshed
- Opportunity to educate other communities about neighbouring communities
- We need to challenge Yukon
- Instead of picking Whitehorse for all conferences and meetings, there are great facilities in the communities
- Decentralization is an opportunity to challenge Yukon to learn more about itself
- Challenge Yukoners and businesses to be tourists in Yukon and experience the communities
- Watson Lake needs to start doing some advertising like Dawson
- We have amazing lakes and cheap permits and camping
- When you are on a vacation here, you are really on vacation and can unplug
- Opportunity to capitalize on what we have – come and unplug!
- Embrace the things that make Yukon unique
- Other jurisdictions may find it a bit scary to have no cell service
- We are a cheap holiday to nearby destinations
- Cheap camping
- Cheap fishing
- A lot of Yukoners take advantage of the White Pass train
- Why can't one year be a challenge for Yukoners to explore our Yukon
- Yukoners need to learn about what the other communities are really about
- Opportunity to beautify the highway to entice more people to stop
- New advertising idea to embrace the negative perception but also that when people come they love it – Watson Lake – take a fresh look!
- New PR campaign?
- Someone who knows what they are doing could develop a Yukon app that explains and shares a lot of information about Yukon
- Opportunity to have a place to sell artwork
- The Watson Lake Visitor Centre is past its prime – staff are great but need new facility
- Opportunity to sell local artwork at the Visitor Centre
- One place to put an informational kiosk or kiosks would be behind the Northern Lights Centre
- That space was originally set aside for a new VIC

- Not sure if YG has consulted with the City and LFN about the space
- Opportunity to further promote skiing here
- Many people don't know that we have a ski hill here
- New promotional campaign being considered to promote the riding association
- Opportunity to encourage people who travel through here to ride the trails
- The more there is to do, the longer people stay in Watson Lake

Thinking Ahead: Round 2

In regards to sustainably growing tourism in Yukon, and regardless of whose responsibility it is:

What could be improved?

- Frantic Follies – used to encourage everyone to go see it
- Would have been nice to have something replace it
- Succession planning is really important
- One of the reasons people don't want to take over is the cost of doing business and the red tape and regulations that impact the job
- The money just isn't in private business anymore – the cost is just too high
- With the amount of paperwork there is to do, it's pretty much one person's job
- Taxes on small businesses are just too high
- There is a challenge to succession planning because there just aren't enough people who will want to take over
- Staffing is really hard – to run a business, you almost need family to run a business, its just too hard to hire people
- Yukoners need to be knowledgeable and positive about the communities and share that information
- Campbell Highway is getting better now but needs additional improvements so that people can do the Faro loop
- The last two years up the highway have been terrible
- The Government only gives a short contract and they can't start until mid-may so that makes it difficult
- Need services: pull outs, improved roads, widening and clearing the ditches
- Looking at the demographics when making decisions

- People who drive the highways are already out of their comfort zone driving in the mountains, they want cleared paths to see if an animal or another car is coming up
- The Dempster Highway and the Top of the World Highway signage is a problem and needs to be improved
- If we are going to advertise the Yukon, we need to be proud of what we are showing
- The road to the campground is just terrible
- Why can't highways and parks work together and get it done?
- It just needs to be maintained
- Would be good to have an agreement that it will just be maintained consistently
- Responsibility needs to be taken in YG to get it done
- The trails from Lucky Lake to the Liard needs to be maintained
- Need to have a place for RVs to dump and get potable water in town, current system just doesn't work

What are the roadblocks and barriers of sustainably developing tourism?

- Negative perception of Watson Lake
- Yukoners negative perception of Watson Lake is a barrier
- We have a lot of great ideas here, but we are all wearing a number of hats
- We don't have the time to think these things through
- We don't even have time to update our websites with photograph of the great events we put on to share with others
- Increased taxation and regulations are a barrier to small business
- We are missing a whole generation of people who need to understand that small business is what makes Canada, Canada
- All students hear about now is government jobs: YG, Federal, First Nations, etc.
- The work ethic just isn't being instilled in our youth
- Need to get businesses and chambers into the school to talk up businesses and the importance
- Reality is that you can't come and go as you please
- We are not teaching our youth about the importance of small business
- We are afraid of offending people
- Yukoners can't get out of our own way
- It is so easy to get on social assistance

- Often people would prefer to be on assistance to working
- Capacity is an issue
- The people who are interested are the ones that are working so hard to keep their businesses going and don't have the capacity

Thinking Ahead: Round 3

Think about yourself as well as your neighbours, colleagues or industry partners. With those perspectives in mind:

What do you think are the 5 most important things that need to be considered to sustainably grow tourism?

- Make sure we are considering rural Yukon
- Communities should work together
- Decentralize so that everything isn't always about Whitehorse
- Yukoners need to know what Yukon is
- Less government red tape for small businesses, non-profits, or anyone who wants to do anything here
- Make sure you actually listen to people
- You've called us out to provide our feedback, make sure you actually do something with it
- Travel – accessibility is key
- Keep our highways maintained, keep air access to Europe
- Air North is great
- Consider some picnic tables at the outhouses so cyclists and motorcyclists can stop and rest and have some lunch
- Maintenance is key as well to these amenities
- We should promote the uniqueness of the Yukon and expand on that
- Check on overseas Canada Houses and promotional places to ensure they are actually promoting Yukon
- Sometimes they focus too much on other places
- All advertising, no matter how it is done, needs to continue
- Needs to be social, use new technology

What advice would you give to decision-makers (Yukon Government, Yukon First Nation Governments, municipalities, organizations, individual businesses etc.) to consider as we collectively develop the strategy for growing tourism sustainably in Yukon?

- Listen to us
- Need to work together - all levels of government
- Break down silos
- Focus on the Yukon – not just Whitehorse
- Make sure to talk to the users of the land
- Talk to the people who are actually impacted by the decisions and on the ground
- Then actually listen to them
- Ask them for their advice
- Make decisions from bottom up instead of top down
- We have the choice to live wherever we want – and we choose to live here
- I am proud to brag about Watson Lake