

Background

The Town of Fort Frances is in the process of developing two unique plans: a land use plan for the redevelopment of the former Shevlin Wood Yard site and a conceptual design for a new compelling gateway at the international border to help draw visitors to Rainy Lake Square, downtown, and other attractions.

This initiative has been prompted by the need to identify opportunities for development that engage and reflect community aspirations as well as maximize economic opportunities for the sites. In doing so, the plans will help guide and direct future investments and implementation that support community well-being and economic prosperity.

A public engagement and communication strategy was developed to support this project. One of the engagement goals is to hear from residents, businesses and organizations to gain a better understanding of the community's values and priorities for renewal and investment.

A Visioning Session was held with key stakeholders with representatives from organizations in health, education, social services, seniors, tourism, business, local governments, and the public. To gain broader public input, an on-line survey was developed that followed closely the topics and questioning presented at the Visioning Session. Over a course of three weeks nearly 700 respondents shared their ideas and priorities for each site. This is a remarkable response rate and a big thank you is extended to all who took time to participate and contribute over 1,400 unique comments. Input from both of these activities will help shape the preliminary design concepts and land uses that will be shared with the public in the next phase of the project.



Photo: Fort Frances Times

Engagement Activities

Date	Activity	Details
February 12, 2020 6:30 - 8:30 PM	Public Visioning Session	Approximately 50 attendees
February 26 - March 16, 2020	Public Survey	698 respondents

Survey: Key Findings

Community Needs

Survey participants were asked about what in general is lacking or missing in Fort Frances that they think the community needs. Responses were cross-referenced against age demographics to identify trends. Generally, participants below 45 years of age (56% of respondents) identified more entertainment and recreation needs along with tourism and small retail/restaurant businesses, while those greater than 45 years of age (44% of respondents) identified a variety of housing needs, tourist amenities, and medical needs as top priorities.

In general, what does Fort Frances need?

Respondents were asked to select their top five community needs.

Splash Pad

39% of respondents said one of their top community needs was a splash pad

“ Fort Frances would benefit from a place for tourists passing through to stop and enjoy... giving tourists a greater incentive to stop and spend more time in our beautiful town. ”

Amusement Facilities

37% of respondents said one of their top community needs was additional amusement facilities

Tourist Amenities

35% of respondents said one of their top community needs was additional tourist amenities

Affordable Rental Housing

30% of respondents said one of their top community needs was affordable rental housing

Seniors' Assisted Housing

33% of respondents said one of their top community needs was additional seniors' assisted housing

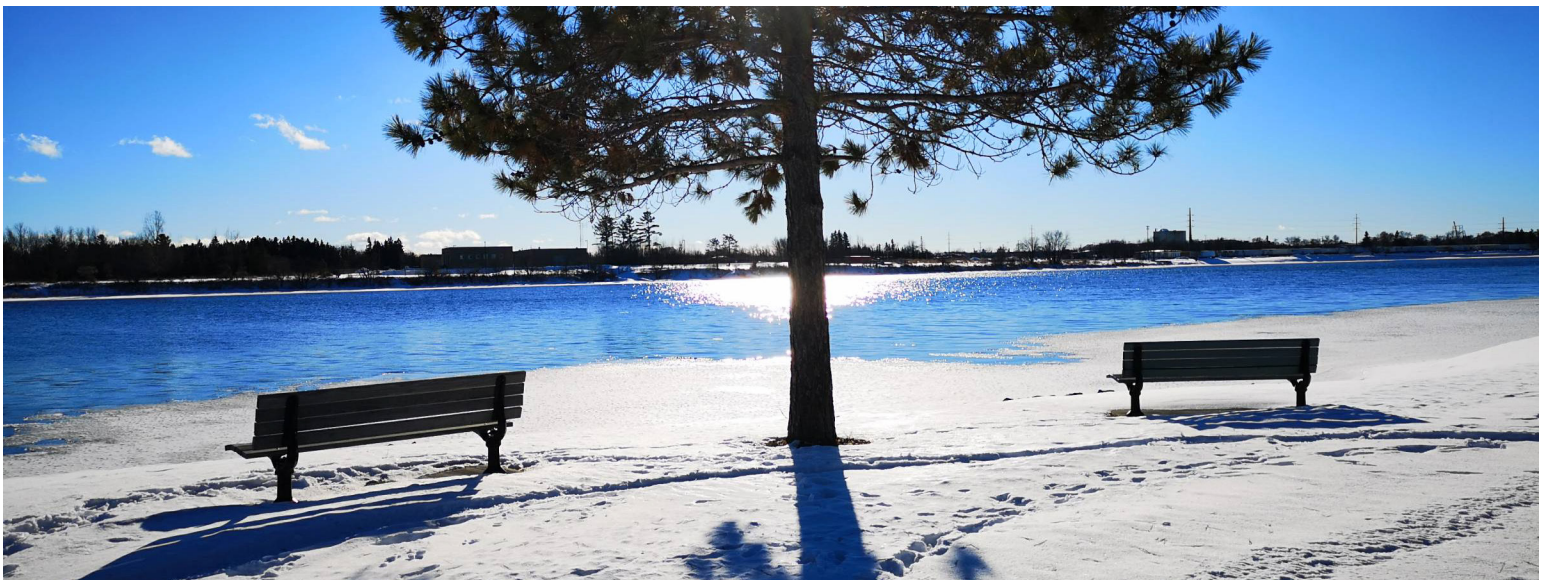


Photo: Fort Frances Times

Survey: Key Findings

Gateway to Rainy Lake Square

Survey participants were asked about the impressions for travellers entering Fort Frances from the United States and ideas for improvements.

Top Opportunities for Fort Frances Gateway

Survey respondents were asked to select their top 3 opportunities to make the Gateway experience into and out of Fort Frances more inviting and helpful for visitors

1

Promotion of tourist attractions and amenities

2

Clearer wayfinding

3

Welcoming signage and branding

Opportunities for Fort Frances Gateway

Survey respondents were asked if they had any ideas to improve the Gateway to Market Square.

“ Need to provide the basics - washrooms, parking, but also need to be inviting and attractive. What can Fort Frances offer to make them want to stop and stay? ”

“ More greenery, local art, and signage can really add to the aesthetic and give a more meaningful first impression. ”

Current Perceptions for Fort Frances Gateway

Survey respondents were asked what impressions they thought travellers entering Fort Frances from the United States have about the Gateway as it is.

There is a strong indication (80% of respondents) that the impression is uninviting. To expand on this, participants were asked to identify from a list and in open comments, some of the best opportunities to make the entire Gateway experience into and out of Fort Frances more pleasant and helpful for visitors.

Many respondents commented that the biggest influence is the mill site, which sets a particular tone for visitors entering town. However, beyond the mill site, other ways to create a better introduction to Fort Frances and what it has to offer included the promotion of tourist attractions and amenities, beautification improvements such as street trees, greenspace, infrastructure improvements to increase parking, vehicle and pedestrian circulation, and visitor comfort and safety.

Survey: Key Findings

Shevlin Wood Yard

To ensure community values are reflected in this planning, participants were asked about what were some of their top objectives in developing the former Shevlin Wood Yard site as well as the types of land uses they thought to be most suitable.

Top Land Uses for Shevlin Woodyard

Respondents were asked to identify their top 3 most suitable types of land uses for the Shevlin Wood Yard site

1

Tourism

2

Green
Space

3

Residential/
Recreational

Top Social Objectives

Respondents were asked to identify their top 3 most important social objectives to consider in the redevelopment of the Shevlin Wood Yard site.

1

Features that
inspire activity
for all ages

2

Inclusive
facilities

3

Features for
both tourists and
local residents

Top Environmental Objectives

Respondents were asked to identify their top 3 most important environmental objectives to consider in the redevelopment of the Shevlin Wood Yard site.

1

Design for
comfort

2

Opportunities for
beautiful views

3

Natural spaces
for biodiversity
and habitat

Top Economic Objectives

Respondents were asked to identify their top 3 most important economic objectives to consider in the redevelopment of the Shevlin Wood Yard site.

1

Attracting
investment

2

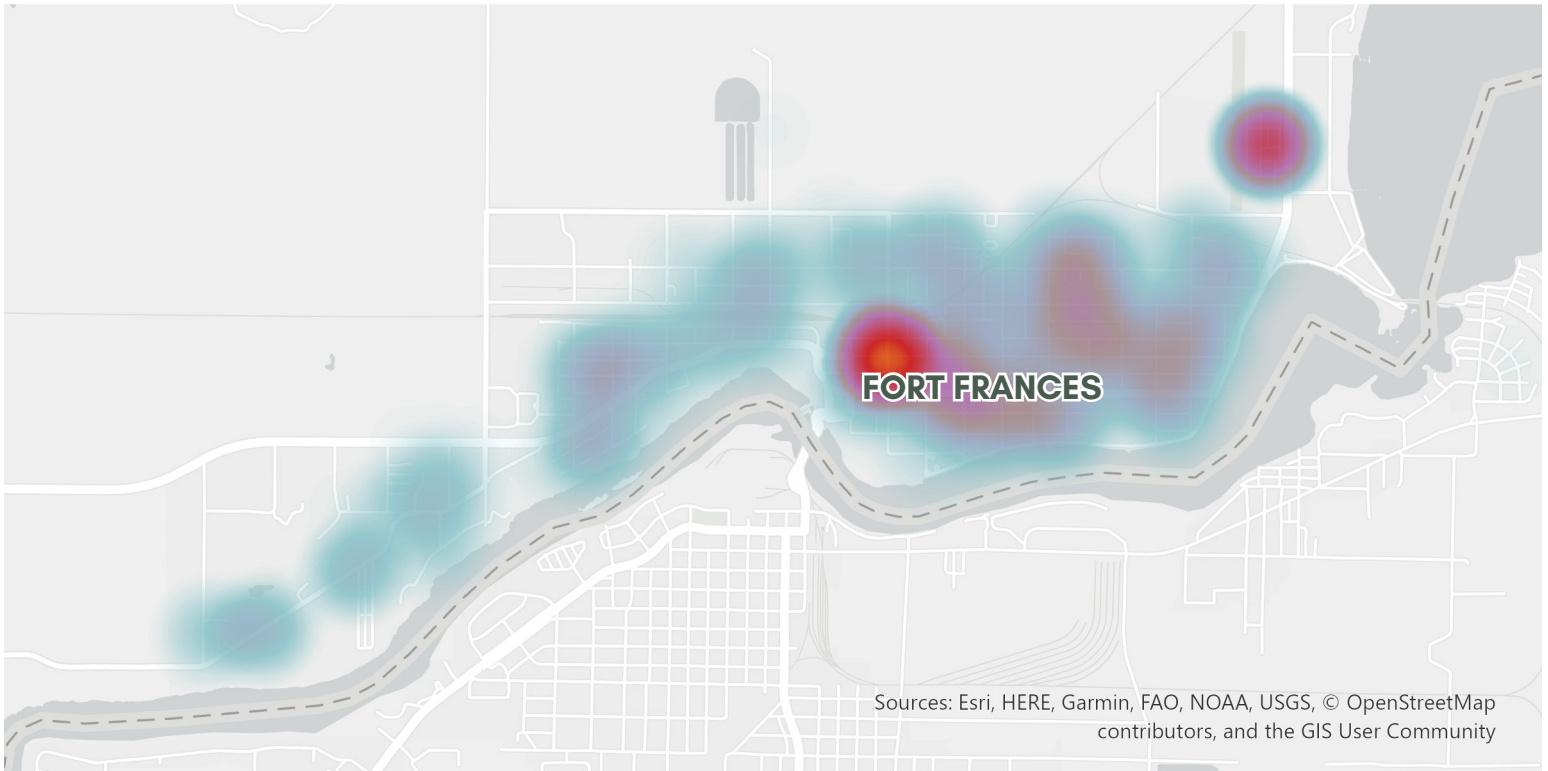
Flexible &
adaptable
infrastructure

3

Engaging
partnerships
with
community
groups

Survey Respondents by area

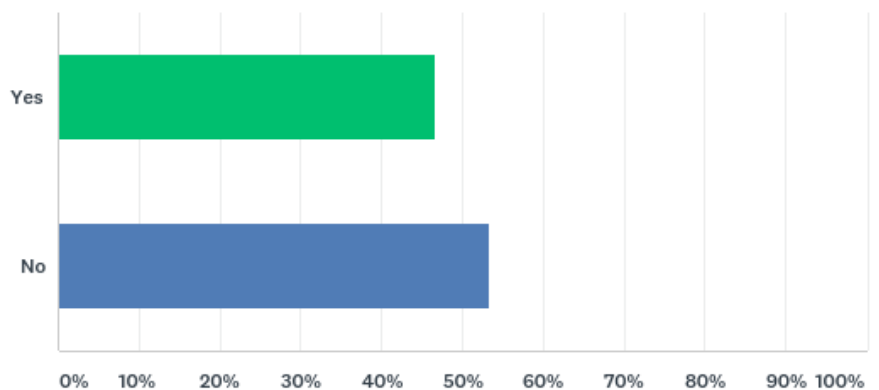
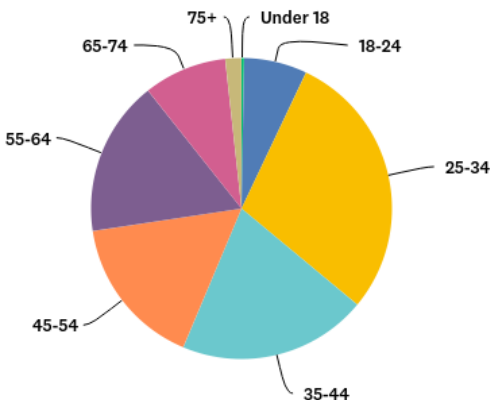
Survey respondents were mapped according to postal codes. Darkest areas represent largest number of survey participants. 54 of 683 survey respondents live in the P9A 3M3 postal code area and are attributed to one postal service location indicated by the dark circle at the top right corner of the map.



Demographics of respondents

Which category best describes your age?

Do you have children at home - or regularly care for children - who are younger than 18 years?



Visioning Session: Key Findings

A Visioning Session offered the opportunity for representatives from community stakeholder groups to share their values and vision for a renewed gateway to Fort Frances and a redeveloped waterfront at the Shevlin Wood Yard site. Participants at the Visioning Session provided input by identifying gaps and needs within the community and discussed how the two redevelopment plans can be an agent for economic development and broader community well-being. The format of the Visioning Session was an introductory presentation on the project sites followed by a series of focused table conversations and mapping of opportunities and challenges.

Stakeholders were asked what would be some indicators of success of a revitalized gateway experience into Fort Frances. Responses included a range of improvements for both tourists and residents such as:

- Improved visitor information and guidance for where to eat & shop
- Attractive and welcoming signage
- Greenspace with trees
- Opportunities for sustainable ways to move around town
- Improved parking especially for larger vehicles with trailers
- A memorable landmark or attraction
- Great events to attract and retain people for more than a day
- Year round vibrancy with pedestrians and street life
- Great technology that assist 'smart' cities for living better while respecting our environment
- Ensure the exit experience at the international border is as good as the entrance experience

Participants were also asked about what would be some indicators of a successful development for the former Shevlin Wood Yard site. Greater emphases on community needs were expressed for this site, mixed with attractions to be enjoyed by both residents and tourists.

- Pathways and pedestrian access to the library and other Town amenities
- Family focus development to draw in families to live here
- Recreation offerings such as a water play pad or modern indoor multi-use facility
- Housing of a mixed income and tenure
- A lifestyle community such as small homes with focus on sustainable living
- Assisted living that offers a full spectrum of living options
- Year-round family attraction with things to do
- Businesses that cater to boaters, marina, boat rentals and tours
- Restaurants, hotel, brewery, and casino
- Economic development with employment opportunities and expanded tax base
- Central attraction and gathering event place for the community and tourists
- A place to celebrate culture and heritage such as logging industry and the river

“ We need a place to gather in Canada after using the river/lake for boating/fishing/snowmobiling that is close and convenient . . . without having to go downtown and fight for parking space . . . casual and comfortable bars and restaurants ”

Next Steps...

At the time of this report writing, the Town of Fort Frances and consultant team are investigating contingency options to provide opportunities for continued stakeholder and public engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. While in-person events may not be possible in the near future we encourage you to please check the Town website and Facebook regularly and sign up to receive project updates.

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Questions or Comments? Contact:

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Photo: Fort Frances Times