Fernie Wellness Stations | Advisory Group Meeting Notes (AG#1)

Kim Unger opened the meeting.

Mark Rowlands presented on the three related projects – the overlap that exists between them and what the priorities for this group should be:

- Project 1: Annex Dike (Primary / Big Project) – a structural upgrade to improve flood protection (1:500 Years) and including drainage improvements.

- Project 2: Ferne Valley Pathway Project – bike/walking trail along the highway to the provincial park (will eventually connect to the ski hill) and will tie to the Annex Dike trail.

- Project 3: Active Transportation Annex & Attack Dike Trail Pavement & Fernie Wellness Stations – This advisory committee focuses on the wellness stations to increase active transportation and creating an experience along the active transportation project. Focus: wellness, reducing climate change, community inclusion, universal design, and increasing the number of users.

- Mark noted that the organizational representation of AG members is intended to represent the broader interests of the community due to their expertise and focus via their interest groups despite removing their organization hat in favour of a greater community representation and effort (Similar to the requirements of Directors through the Societies Act).

Kim provided a high-level note on what we've heard so far:

- Primary themes that are starting to come out of the group's preliminary work (see word cloud at the end of document).

- Concept of looking at the project from multiple perspectives – asking the community to contemplate other roles as they start to consider the concept of wellness.

- Kim shared a broader definition of wellness that accounted for spiritual and mental health.

The AG members then responded to two prompts that explored elements that aligned most with their definition of wellness. The intent of this exercise was to have the group move towards a definition of what wellness might look like on this project.

The exercise was approached from two perspectives – first from the position of an assigned role (newcomer to town, a child, a shift worker, somebody with mobility constraints, etc) and next from their own perspective.

As the discussion progressed, AG members started to formulate ideas for how wellness might be expressed.

The matrix below contains a count of selections. It should be noted that as the discussion went on, cross-over between several of the categories was noted (culture, history, storytelling, and Indigenous culture for example). Working with the counts below, a consolidated list of wellness elements will be brought forward to the next meeting.

Reflection of Wellness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Tally
Demographically Inclusive			x	x		x		x		x	x	x	**7**
Education		x	x									x	**3**
Celebratory ie. events and people				x					x	x	x	x	**5**
Culture												x	**1**
Storytelling			x										**1**
Ecology/Restoration	x								x		x		**3**
History	x	x							x				**3**
Seasonality			x			x							**2**
Indigenous Culture	x	x											**2**
Physical Activity			x	x	x			x					**4**
Spirituality	x				x	x					x		**4**
Mental Health		x		x	x	x					x		**5**
Wayfinding (Ease of Getting Around)		x					x						**2**
Safety (Visibility)			x	x	x	x	x						**5**

The bullets below reflect highlights of the AG member discussion – these have been summarised and AG identifiers have been removed:

- When it comes to sharing history, its important to recognise that there is a deep and rich Indigenous story that should be included within the project. There was recognition that our group cannot speak on behalf of these people, but a deep desire to have their stories shared within the wellness stations (perhaps stories that speak to ecology, culture, or the river).
- Many AG members spoke to improved wayfinding along the path and integrated into the wellness stations. As Fernie is a tourist destination, signage should include notes with regards to branch-off and access points. It was felt that this would have a positive impact on economic development within the town.

- Embracing a child's inherent curiosity and natural love of learning should be reflected in the wellness stations. For children, these stations should be fun, interactive, and inclusive. Ideas such as scavenger hunts, natural parkour, games, and interactive educational prompts were noted here.
- Safety along the pathway was mentioned by several participants via opportunities to improve lighting and visibility. There was discussion with regards to integrating creative lighting within the stations – something that lights up and adds liveliness to the long winter nights, without adding to light pollution.
- Many members of the AG spoke to the pathway as a space to unwind and de-stress – "a beautiful stretch to find peace". As physical health is already built into the trail, wellness elements that bring in elements of spirituality, mental health, and connection to the natural world were identified as being essential. A labyrinth was highlighted as an idea that could promote mental health.
- The AG members felt that the wellness stations provide an opportunity to educate and share stories – stories that speak to the need to raise the dike (climate change), ecology, history/culture, and the river were highlighted.
- A demographically inclusive trail was noted as being a "must have" by all AG members – separation of users, seasonal maintenance of pathway, accessible design, and stations that incorporate elements that allow everybody to participate are key here. Exploration of sensory elements and the hosting of inclusive events was further noted here.
- While technically outside of the scope of this project, bathrooms were flagged as an essential addition to the pathway by many members. There is only one washroom along the current pathway and accessibility to it is a challenge. An opportunity to disguise a washroom within the stations was discussed ("is there a way to hide a bathroom in something that is beautiful?"). Access to potable water along the pathway was also noted.
- With regards to physical exercise equipment, an opportunity to re-utilize the equipment at the Aquatic Centre was raised. This would be an economical solution that would open up the equipment to a broader group of users. Further exploration with regards to whether the equipment is being utilized at the current location is required.
- Connection to neighbours and community was desired by all AG members (especially as the community feels the impact of isolation during COVID-19). The wellness stations should be welcoming and provide opportunities for all generations of the community to gather. It should be note that there are already some groups who regularly meet along the pathway – birdwatchers, art group, etc. It was felt that wellness stations that include picnic spots, games (chess, checkers, lawn bowling), tables/benches, and "conversation stations" would further promote gathering. These gathering stations should be located close to a parking lot to encourage seniors and families to utilize. A stage or a gazebo for concerts or events was identified but this was noted as already underway within another project.

- While specific locations were not discussed at this meeting, locations should align with the natural beauty that exists within and surrounds the town.

Following the discussion, Kim spoke to where the group was going next (deeper into the concept of wellness, locations, and physical expression). Homework related to locations will be distributed to the group prior to the next meeting.

While not noted at the meeting, a more refined “Big Ideas” board will be brought to the next AG meeting for discussion. This refinement will be based upon the group’s work to date.