

CHATS FALLS PARK IN PONTIAC

# Final Report

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Workshop With Residents and Cottagers

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### Mandate

In the spring of 2012, Chats Falls Park in Pontiac Management Committee called upon Simbal to help develop and conduct a public consultation process and more specifically to facilitate a comprehensive public consultation workshop for residents and cottagers on June 9, 2012 in Bristol's community centre.

### Structure of the Report

This report synthesizes the comments collected at the meeting of June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and is presented in three parts:

1. Highlights of the June 9<sup>th</sup> workshop;
2. Participant input from the workshop on June 9<sup>th</sup> – broken down into themes;
3. Participants' expectations of the Chats Falls Park in Pontiac project Management

## 1

## Workshop Highlights

### Overview of the Workshop with cottagers and residents

No fewer than 90 residents and cottagers participated in the workshop last June on the Chats Falls Park in Pontiac project. Upon arrival each participant received an information sheet summarizing the project highlights. The workshop was held in three phases:

1. Project update and question period;
2. Small group workshop discussions;
3. Return to plenary session.

The participants broke into four small groups. Each group was asked to respond to the following questions:

- + "What are the positive elements of the project?"
- + "What are your concerns?"
- + "What would you like to see in the Chats Falls Park project?"
- + "Should the Chats Falls Park in Pontiac project meet additional criteria not mentioned in the reference sheet?"
- + "What could your contribution be to help this project succeed?"
- + "What can be done to maximize project spin-offs for our community?"

### Presentation of main themes for the first three questions discussed in small group workshops

Here are the main themes from the small group workshop discussions among residents and cottagers. The following section of the report (Section 2) details each of the themes as follows:

#### The positive elements of the project revolve around the following main themes:

- + Highlighting the history and culture;
- + Contribution to the economy and to tourism;
- + Improving the quality of life and conservation of nature and biodiversity.

### Concerns expressed by residents and cottagers revolve around the following main themes:

- + Overall Challenges;
- + Project Management and decision-making process;
- + Property owners' rights and the impact on the quality of life of residents and cottagers;
- + Zoning;
- + Road and river traffic.

### Activities suggested that could be carried out in the Park can be grouped around the following main themes:

- + Historical component;
- + Economic and tourism component:
  - o Educational activities
  - o Outdoor activities;
  - o Observation and interpretation centre;
  - o Services;
- + Accommodation.

### General Conclusions

#### Unifying dimensions of the project:

Overall, the regional park project is perceived as being a positive contribution to the three following dimensions:

- Highlighting and promoting Pontiac history
- Economic renewal, regional development and stimulating the tourism industry
- Community quality of life

#### Summary of participant expectations with respect to the regional park project

At the June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012 workshop, the participants' expectations of the Chats Falls Park in Pontiac project Management Committee revolved around the five following main themes:

- + Study and identification of best practices in the management of a regional park;
- + Project Management;
- + Governance;
- + Communication;
- + Citizen participation.

In this section of the report, the comments expressed by participants during the workshop discussions are grouped by theme. They are presented here in the same order as they were discussed at the workshop with residents and cottagers on June 9<sup>th</sup>:

- A. Overall impressions of the project: Positive elements / challenges and concerns.
- B. Suggested activities: What you would like to see in the Chats Falls Park in Pontiac project.
- C. Call for participants to engage in the process: success factors / personal contribution / structuring effects of the project.

## A

**Overall Impressions of the Project**

- “What are the positive elements of the project?”
- “What are your concerns?”

**Positive elements expressed****Promotion of Pontiac history and culture**

- + The preservation, publication and recognition of Pontiac history (Amerindian nations, archaeological sites)
- + A cultural renewal for the region

**Contribution to Pontiac economy and tourism**

- + An innovative hallmark of the project is its capacity for economic renewal in the region. It could promote the great tourism development potential due to its proximity to the national capital area.
- + The opportunity to supply the increasing demand for camping and cycling excursions.
- + The project’s contribution to higher property values.
- + The project’s contribution to slowing rural exodus – it could prompt youth to remain in the area with the creation of stimulating employment.

**Improvement in the quality of life and conservation of nature and biodiversity**

- + The project is inclusive and participative thus encouraging the community to get involved and to develop relationship ties and an attachment to the community (intergenerational).
- + It represents an opportunity to provide more services and activities to local residents and cottagers.
- + Access to the river and to nature will be easier.
- + Nature and biodiversity conservation (plants and wildlife sites) could help reduce the environmental footprint.
- + The project could contribute to promoting the beauty of the Pontiac area and to creating of a sense of belonging among residents and cottagers.

**Concerns expressed and challenges to meet**

Several concerns were expressed by participants and translate into a series of challenges that the Management Committee could be called upon to consider.

## Overall challenges

- + Offer a quality product.
- + Balance and customize the project so that it is neither too small nor too ambitious.
- + Generate a balanced formula to feature tourism development, history and environmental protection
- + Ensure the history of the Pontiac area is accurate and documented.
- + Validate both the capability and the intention of provincial and federal governments to invest in the project rather than finance it by increasing various taxes.
- + Substantiate the project's impact on the environment.
- + Address the population's scepticism with respect to achieving the project.

## Project management and decision-making process

- + Enlist the community in creating and working on the project to involve them in the decision making process (right to be heard). Residents conveyed their wish to be heard and listened to; they want to know that effective, sustained and relevant consultation mechanisms will be put in place.
- + Entrust the park management and overseeing to a party other than the municipality – (there is avowed concern that it might be managed solely by the municipality)

## Rights of property owners and impact on the quality of life of residents and cottagers

- + As a priority, start with the rights of property owners by providing a confirmation that their rights will be protected.
- + Preserve privacy and the present rights such as hunting, river access, ATVs, etc.
- + Explore the possibility of keeping the Grandfather clause.
- + Make a determination on property tax increase.
- + Plan for and organize safety and security officers to enforce any regulations that may come with the creation of a regional park.
- + Preserve older buildings under the umbrella of "Heritage Buildings".

## Zoning

- + Maintain the present property zoning.
- + Orchestrate the NCC (Nature Conservancy Canada) land purchases.
- + Develop high-density zones and others as low-density "sensitive" to protect ecosystems (vulnerable zones).

## Road and river traffic

- + Plan and set up the infrastructure needed to accommodate tourists and therefore avoid overcrowding roads.
- + Review the maintenance of and responsibility for "travelled" (private) roads as well as waste management.
- + Address the challenges of managing river traffic.

→ “What would you like to see in the Chats Falls in Pontiac project?”

### Historical Component

- + Feature the re-enactment of Pontiac history.
  - o For example: the Indian battle at “Indian Point”; the trading post “Interpretation of Trading Post”; native gardens (corn, gourds, beans), and the “Native Medicine Wheel”.
- + Place guards at the bridge as in the past.
- + Develop a bridle path with historical trail; reopen the 1864 Pine Lodge (1930) trail in Quyon.
- + Develop presentations to attract schools; history and nature components (video, walks...); and environmental awareness.

### Economic and Tourist Component

#### Educational Activities

- + Develop recreation and tourism training to entice young people to stay in the area by creating stimulating employment.
- + Develop educational activities for children to attract schools.
- + Offer guided boat tours on the river and land tours through the trails.
- + Heighten public awareness about the various species on the verge of extinction

#### Outdoor Activities

- + A year-round park with diversified seasonal programming. In winter: skiing, snowmobiling, ice fishing, skating rink. In summer: bicycling, ATV, soccer field.
- + Create bicycle paths with crushed rock dust.
- + Create a bridle path along the railway.
- + Include a public beach.
- + Provide a canoe and kayak rental service.
- + Offer a camping option.
- + Identify motor-free zones on the river for canoes and kayaks while respecting shoreline property owners.
- + Identify zones for ATVs, snowmobiles, bicycles and hikers.

#### Interpretation and Observation Centre

- + Set up kiosks for bird watching, nature observation and star gazing for amateur astronomers.
- + Establish an interpretation centre, an ideal location for a museum and artefacts (local archaeological dig...nature, archives, history).

#### Services

- + Develop a hub with peripheral activities; establish the “Centre” in the heart of the park as a hub with each spoke designating a specific type of activity (a star shaped formation).
- + In the Centre, offer:
  - o first aid services;
  - o security officers;
  - o bathrooms, drinking water;
  - o boutiques featuring the works of local artists.

- + Provide for a location appropriately equipped for gatherings and festivals.
- + Build a self-guided trail for users with smartphones.
- + Maintain village roads to help develop the local economy.
- + Promote discreet advertising for such services as bicycle rentals

### Accommodation

- + Build a "Huttopia" style camping facility.
- + Facilitate overnight stays for tourists.
- + Encourage short term stays.
- + Explore the option of providing a form of "Heritage Lodging".

## C

### Other Project Dimensions to Consider

- "Should the Chats Falls in Pontiac project meet other conditions for success beyond those in this reference sheet?"
- "What could your contribution be to the success of the project?"
- "What must be done to maximize the spin-offs of such a project for our communities?"

### Success Factors

- + Management of the park should be in accordance with the mission of NCC (Nature Conservancy Canada)
- + A Management Committee that is accountable, demonstrates transparency and has a clear organisational structure.
- + Nature conservation.
- + Creation of stimulating employment.
- + Controlled visitor access to the park.
- + Continuous dialogue with the community during the entire process and the involvement of residents and cottagers – (maintain an up to date Website, insert any forum and email groups and solicit public opinion).
- + Government (provincial and federal) commitment to contribute to refurbishing infrastructure (increase in traffic)

### Citizen Contributions

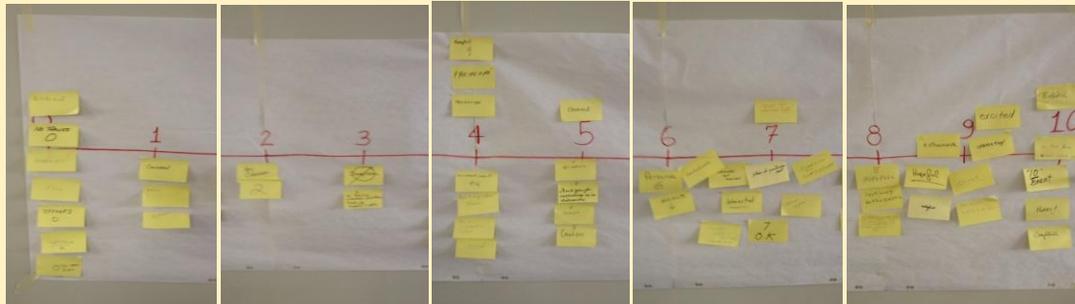
- Become a project ambassador - (promote it and welcome visitors).
- Develop local pride – (call upon the knowledge base of residents and cottagers as much for history as for the environment; use local expertise, even volunteer).
- Involve the population to the maximum so it can buy in to the project and not "suffer the decisions by municipalities".
- Mobilize the aboriginal communities and involve them in the project.
- Engage associations (among others, JP Sylvestre, Aylmer, could help for the Equestrian Association Route verte) and connect to their activities.
- Develop partnerships with the educational community to offer recreation and tourist training.
- Solicit the private sector and developers – for example, approach Hydro-Quebec to become a sponsor and assume its social commitment as a good corporate citizen.

### Suggestions to maximize project spinoffs

- Equipment rentals can be managed by the private sector such as Mountain Equipment Coop (MEC), Trailhead, etc.
- Promote other activities in the region such as the annual Pontiac Artists Tour, restaurants, the Chutes Coulonge, cottage rentals etc.
- Use commuter services to manage the increase in visitors and avoid congestion.

**D****Participant Comfort Level with the Project**

- Prior to the plenary session, each person was asked to write a word on a post-it describing how he or she felt about the project and to then place it according to a scale of 1 to 10 representing his or her degree of comfort with the project.
- A total of 51 individuals took part in the exercise. The distribution of the post-its along the scale illustrates the disparity of the perceptions as expressed by the participants. In spite of a slightly more positive rating, a significant proportion of participants signified discomfort regarding the project.

**3****Participant expectations regarding the Chats Falls Park in Pontiac project**

In light of the concerns, expectations and comments expressed by the residents and cottagers about the design of the regional park project, we recommend that the Management Committee pay particular attention to the following aspects;

**Studies to be done and identification of best practices in the management of a regional park**

1. Carry out an environmental impact study to analyse the overall long-term impact of the project.
2. Carry out a market study to assess the project's financial viability and to identify the potential impact of the Chats Falls Park in Pontiac project on the property tax base and whatever municipal tax increase might ensue.
3. Identify and list best practices in the management of regional, provincial and national parks such as Algonquin, Bon Echo etc.

**Project Management**

4. Learn from the best practices collected.
5. Draft an overall plan including a milestone timeline describing key stages of the project.
6. Pay particular attention to environmental standards to minimize the park's ecological footprint.
7. Early in the planning and development process carefully consider infrastructure required for accommodation
8. Create a central focus during the first phases of the regional park's development by building and staffing the interpretation centre.
9. Use the present infrastructure and build from it.

## **Communication**

10. Reassure and inform the population.
11. Continue the consultations in both languages.
12. Maintain transparency throughout the process.
13. Include a monthly project progress report at the Bristol and Pontiac municipal council meetings.

## **Participation citoyenne**

14. In the short term, set up a Citizens Committee to encourage their commitment and maintain continuous contact throughout the design phase of the regional park.
15. Enter into a partnership with residents and cottagers as well as recruit local expertise soliciting their participation to develop, monitor and facilitate activities in the park.

## **Gouvernance**

16. Provide for the creation of a "Governance Council" that will include a seat for a representative of both municipal councils. This representative will be responsible for making progress reports at municipal council meetings as well as at a meeting of the region's key socio-economic and political players and citizens (including youth).
17. Centralise power within one organisation (one body, even a regional one) to avoid having to deal with both municipalities.