



# Town of Watson Lake

## Official Community Plan

Bylaw 21-10  
September 3, 2021

## Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction.....	1
2.0	Community Profile.....	3
3.0	Vision and Goals .....	7
4.0	Future Development Concept .....	8
5.0	Housing.....	11
6.0	Beautification.....	12
7.0	Heritage and Culture.....	13
8.0	Parks and Recreation .....	14
9.0	Sustainability, Resiliency, and Emergency preparedness.....	15
10.0	Health and Social Services .....	16
11.0	Open Space and Environmental Protection .....	17
12.0	Economic Development.....	18
13.0	Regional Initiatives and Partnerships .....	19
14.0	Transportation .....	20
15.0	Infrastructure.....	21
16.0	Implementation .....	22
17.0	Listing of all Action Items.....	23



**Watson Lake, Yukon**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 What is an Official Community Plan?**

The Town of Watson Lake's Official Community Plan (OCP) identifies the overall vision for the municipality and provides general direction for the future growth of the community. In addition to guiding Council's decisions, the OCP provides a framework for other municipal planning documents including heritage management plans, trail plans, transportation master plans, pedestrian network plans, area development schemes and other development-related policies.

Whereas the OCP sets out broad land use guidelines for the municipality, the Zoning Bylaw is the main tool for implementing the OCP and prescribes specific land uses and regulations for each parcel.

In compliance with Section 279 of the *Yukon Municipal Act* all future planning and land use decisions made by Council should be consistent with the goals and policies outlined in this OCP and should address at a minimum:

- The future development and use of land in the municipality;
- The provision of municipal services and facilities;
- Environmental matters in the municipality;
- The development of utility and transportation systems; and
- Provisions for the review of the OCP and Zoning Bylaw within a reasonable period.

The OCP is a tool to guide community growth and future land use and can be revised by Council as needed to reflect changing circumstances such as population growth, housing demand, new infrastructure requirements and the public interest.

This 2020 OCP is replacing the previous plan, which was adopted in 2010.

## 1.2 How was the Plan developed?

The process to update Watson Lake’s OCP began in October 2019, when Stantec was hired to lead the planning and public engagement for both the OCP and the Zoning Bylaw. The project was kicked-off with a community dinner and discussion in February 2020 and an online survey which was completed by 120 residents. Both the meeting and the survey introduced the project and gathered feedback from residents about the overall vision for the community, challenges and opportunities, areas for residential development, recreation and tourism services and any other topics of interest to community members. A focus group, made up of eight residents appointed by Council, was charged with helping to guide the development of a draft plan.

In March 2019, a background report was prepared to bring together the information needed to update the OCP and summarize the input gathered to date. A week of engagement planned for April 2020 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over spring and summer, COVID-19 regulations limited in-person engagement; however, the focus group met virtually five times to work through the various sections of the draft plan.

In October 2020, Stantec visited Watson Lake to gather feedback on the draft versions of the Official Community Plan and Zoning Bylaw. The draft documents were reviewed, and input was gathered from Mayor and Council and the focus group. The draft OCP and Zoning Bylaw were then updated based on this feedback.

In August 2021, once COVID-19 regulations in the Yukon had been eased, Stantec returned to Watson Lake to seek public input on the draft OCP and Zoning Bylaw. Stantec held several public events including open houses and, a presentation and question and answer period at the Rec Centre. An online survey was also posted to the Town’s website and was completed by 25 residents. Finally, changes were made to reflect input received and in September 2021, a final OCP and Zoning Bylaw were completed.



**Community Open House, August 2021**



Sign Post Forest

## 2.0 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Located in the rolling hills of southeast Yukon, Watson Lake has just over 1,500 residents, is home to the famous Sign Post Forest, and provides incredible access to the surrounding wilderness. As the “Gateway to the Yukon”, Watson Lake is situated at kilometre 1016.8 (mile 635) on the Alaska Highway at the junction with the Robert Campbell Highway and it is the first community north of the 60th parallel as you enter the Yukon. The junction of the Stewart Cassiar Highway with the Alaska Highway is 26 kilometres west of the community.

Watson Lake is the major transportation hub, and the only major supply centre in the region for hundreds of kilometres, especially for resource extraction and tourism related industries. A number of local businesses, and larger company branches in Watson Lake provide goods and services to companies, governments, and individuals operating in the eastern Yukon and northern BC. As a transportation centre, it has the Watson Lake airport which is an important heritage site and is a major airport that can support scheduled service. Watson Lake is in the traditional territory of the Kaska Dena and is home to the Liard First Nation.

More information about the community is available in a separate Background Report. This can be found as a separate report.

### 2.1 First Nations History and Culture

The Kaska Dena people have lived in the area around Watson Lake since time immemorial and are related to the Tahltan and Tagish Athabaskan, once known collectively as the Nahani. The Kaska Dena (often referred to as Kaska) are Dene-speaking people who have lived in the southeast Yukon and northwestern BC for thousands of years. Kaska is the name of the language spoken by the people and refers to the cultural group of First Nations peoples who have inhabited the region between the coastal and rocky mountain ranges of northern BC and the southeastern Yukon. Kaska Dena Traditional Territory extends across 240,000 square kilometres in the southeast Yukon, southern NWT, and northwestern BC.

This was a rich area with an abundance of food and furs and the Kaska Dena lived a nomadic life, moving from camp to camp in small family parties. Everything was packed on their backs or by dog team and rivers

and lakes were crossed using rafts. The lakes around Watson Lake were important fishing and harvesting sites for the Kaska Dena. Key travel and trading routes also passed through this region. As the community now known as Watson Lake grows, the Kaska Dena continue to live, travel and hunt in the region.

The Liard First Nation is one of four Kaska Dena First Nations - two of which are in Yukon and two in British Columbia. The Liard First Nation and its citizens inhabit a broad area in the southeastern Yukon and northern BC and live predominantly in and around the present-day town of Watson Lake and in Lower Post, BC.

Continuous contact with Europeans is thought to have begun in the 1820s when a Hudson's Bay post was set up on the Liard River. When European traders reached the area during the Cassiar Gold Rush in 1865, the Kaska Dena had already established a non-traditional economy based on trading with their neighbours. By 1876, the trading camp at Lower Post was set up, with other posts added at Frances Lake and McDame.

The Liard First Nation has a current population of approximately 1,400 members, with its main administration and executive offices located in Watson Lake. Liard First Nations citizen are active community members, business-people and leaders. Many also continue to practice traditional activities such as hunting, trapping, fishing and berry picking in the area around Watson Lake.

## **2.2 Town History**

In the 1940s the Watson Lake airfield was improved in order to services planes destined for Alaska. The airport grew into an important stop on the Northwest Staging Route and was also a US military air base. The construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942 had a big impact on the community. Built as part of the war effort, the Highway ran from Dawson Creek BC to Fairbanks Alaska, and was pushed through forest wilderness and five mountain ranges in eight months.

The original town site was near the airport, but later a settlement grew up around the intersection of the Alaska Highway and road to the airport and became known as the "Wye". The Wye grew into what is now the community of Watson Lake. The Robert Campbell Highway, developed in the 1960s to serve mining development, intersects with the Alaska Highway at Watson Lake. Watson Lake became the first Local Improvement District in Yukon on August 1, 1966 and assumed control of municipal services, water, sewer, fire, street maintenance and lighting, in 1967. Watson Lake assumed town status in 1984.



**American fighter planes at the airport in 1948 enroute to Alaska (Donna Davis/ Town of Watson Lake)**

## 2.3 The Natural Environment

Watson Lake is in the Boreal Forest region of the Liard Basin at an elevation of 695 meters. This area is characterized by low hills separated by broad plains, surrounded by mountains and plateaus. The Simpson Range of the Pelly Mountains lies just to the north. This part of the Yukon has been subjected to several glaciations and the soils of the Liard Basin have formed on level to undulating landscapes of primarily morainal, glaciofluvial, and lacustrine parent materials. Permafrost is sporadic through this ecoregion and is rarely found during excavations for municipal or highway construction.

The Liard Basin is one of the most biologically productive ecoregions in the Yukon and the abundance of wildlife is one of the reasons that people choose to live in this area. Moose, black bear, caribou, wolverine, marten, and lynx are all found here. The area supports healthy beaver numbers, especially in the Liard River drainage. Mule deer and small numbers of white-tailed deer are at their northern limit here. There are several caribou herds in the regions and although the key caribou winter range is not within the municipal boundary, caribou are occasionally seen within the municipal boundary. The Liard Valley is part of the southern Tintina Trench and is a migration corridor for many raptors and other birds including Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, geese, ducks, and Sandhill Cranes.



Watson Lake and surrounding mountains

## 2.4 Population and Demographics

Successful planning should be reflective of the local community; as such, the OCP should provide an understanding of Watson Lake's demographic profile. As of March 2020, the Yukon government estimated the population of Watson Lake to be 1,515. This estimate includes Two-and-A-Half Mile Village, Two-Mile Village, and Upper Liard.

Watson Lake's demographic profile is generally similar to that in the rest of the Yukon. However, Watson Lake is notably missing residents age 25 to 40. This age range generally represents the time when young adults are seeking employment after post-secondary education and starting families. The current population of Liard First Nation is approximately 1,400, with an estimated 570 members living in the area. According to the 2016 Statistics Canada census, 38% of Watson Lake's census subdivision area identifies as Indigenous. According to Statistics Canada (2016), there are a total of 360 occupied private dwellings in Watson Lake which would equate to an average household size of: 2.2 persons per dwelling.

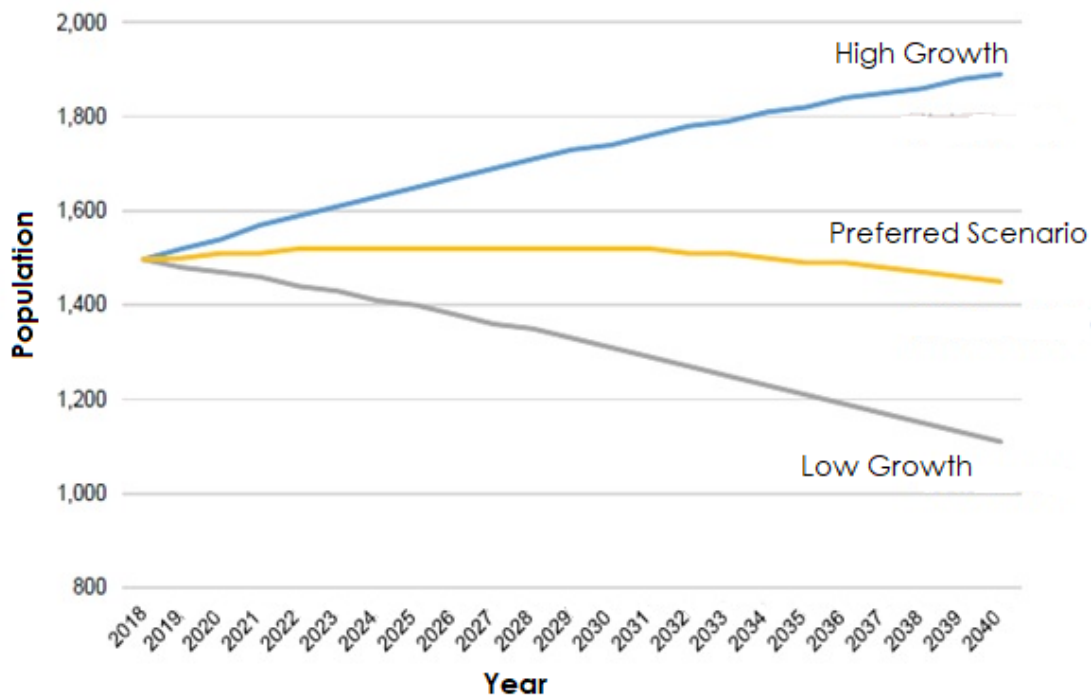
Two key factors are shaping population change in Watson Lake. First, like most Canadian communities, Watson Lake has an aging population. Nationally, the largest proportion in our population are Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1966, who accounted for 27.2% of all Canadians and 32.9% of Watson Lake residents according to the 2016 Census.

The second factor influencing growth in Watson Lake is migration. Like most rural and remote communities, Watson Lake has experienced significant out-migration. More critically, and again like many similar rural communities, the bulk of out-migration is by individuals in their twenties and thirties who are the most likely members of the population to have children and contribute to natural increase in the population.

The two influences combined are likely to reinforce the established downward trend in Watson Lake with drops in population numbers for 5 to 10% from census-to-census. The rate of decline will potentially deepen in each successive period, with the numbers of young people also expected to fall significantly. With an increasing population over 50, the number of births in the community will inevitably decline. Eventually the town’s residents will move into older age groups in which survival rates decline. Figure 3.1 provides population projections as calculated by Yukon government Bureau of Statistics.

Population projections can change and in Watson Lake, changes related to local economic opportunities, mining and mineral exploration, available housing, and amenities and services for families can influence the future demographics.

**Figure 2.1 Population projection for Watson Lake regional service area, prepared by Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2018**





### 3.0 VISION AND GOALS

#### 3.1 Vision

The following vision describes the sort of community that residents want Watson Lake to be:

*“Watson Lake is a welcoming, inclusive community with a thriving, diversified economy – a regional centre that showcases local culture and is a peaceful and healthy place to live, work, and visit.”*

Watson Lake will:

- Be a safe, attractive, and welcoming community that unifies residents throughout the region;
- Be a regional service centre for the southeast Yukon and northern British Columbia (the Alaska Highway and Highway 37 corridors);
- Have a stable and diversified economic base;
- Strive to be a good land steward and protect the environment and wildlife;
- Support orderly development while maintaining our small-town atmosphere; and
- Showcase local First Nations cultural and the history of our town.

#### 3.2 Values

Residents had several opportunities to provide input into this plan. People that participated in the planning process said that they love the community and living in Watson Lake. They feel that the following values contribute to the quality of life:

- Small town atmosphere
- Healthy people
- Beautiful, quaint, and peaceful
- Flowers, and beautiful parks including Wye Lake Park
- Positive outlook and community involvement
- People care about their neighbours
- Range of recreational activities



**Figure 3.1** Word cloud made from online survey asking respondents to describe Watson Lake

## 4.0 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

It is important that Watson Lake be ready for growth. The municipality wants to support growth and development that is orderly, efficient, and cost-effective. It is also important that land be used for its highest and best use and that local infrastructure is sustainable and well maintained.

### Long-term development goals

- A range of lands are available to support residential, commercial, institutional and industrial land uses and a diversified local economy.
- Land uses are compatible with surrounding lands, with a focus on community safety.
- The Downtown is developed as a higher-density, mixed use, community hub.

### General development guidelines

- 4.1 The Town shall direct future developments to the appropriate areas shown on the Land Use Designation Maps (Maps 1 and 2) that accompany this plan.
- 4.2 The Town may initiate or consider subdivision, extension of municipal services, or amendments to the Zoning Bylaw where the applicant can demonstrate that such actions are consistent with orderly development or redevelopment; respond to a demonstrated public need; and are not inconsistent with the goals of this plan.
- 4.3 The Town may require developers enter into a Development Agreement to ensure that the terms and conditions of the proposal requiring land subdivision, lot consolidation, and/or rezoning are followed through. The Development Agreement may require the developer to cover the cost for any upgrade, extension and installation costs related to the connection of the new development to municipal services and roads.
- 4.4 An Area Development Scheme shall be required for larger development and shall include the following information, as deemed necessary by the Development Officer:
  - Location, conditions and topography;
  - identification of environmentally significant areas;
  - policy context and proposed land use in relation to the OCP and Zoning Bylaw;
  - proposed development concept, proposed density and phasing;
  - access, municipal servicing and stormwater drainage; and
  - any other items as requested by the Development Officer or Council.
- 4.5 For new development, require a minimum development setback of 30 m from the natural high-water line of all water bodies (i.e. lakes, ponds, wetlands, rivers, streams) within municipal boundaries.
- 4.6 Prioritize redevelopment and discourage sprawl to increase infrastructure efficiency and preserve habitat and wilderness areas.
- 4.7 Encourage lot consolidation if it will facilitate infill.
- 4.8 Encourage development of under-used properties through the consideration of development incentives or disincentives.
- 4.9 Discourage the continuation of non-conforming land uses and limit spot rezoning or further disposition of Crown Land where sufficient vacant or under-utilized private land already exists for the intended use.

- 4.10 Consider service area capacities, and sewer and water service extension possibilities when selecting new areas for development.
- 4.11 Maintain an inventory of both serviced and unserved lots to support residential growth for five years. Maintain an inventory of serviced, partially serviced, and un-served industrial lots sufficient for five years of growth to accommodate industrial expansion and new business establishment.
- 4.12 Develop and adopt a land development policy that allows the private sector to undertake the extension of municipal services at their initiative and cost, where such service extensions are consistent with orderly development and built to the same standard as municipal services.
- 4.13 Establish a minimum lot size for country residential and un-served commercial or industrial development based upon adequate soil testing for groundwater depth, adequate soil percolation rates, and professional design of the septic tank and tile field system.
- 4.14 Require a minimum land dedication of 10% of the land in new residential subdivisions for to provision of a public park/ playground.

### Land Use Designations

The OCP is implemented through a set of generalized Land Use Designations. The long-term land use concept for the lands within the Town’s municipal boundary is shown on **Map 1 and Map 2**.

The land use designations identified are based on the main type of use in that area. Boundaries shown are intended to be general in nature; more specific boundaries and information on the precise land uses are provided in the Zoning Bylaw. Similarly, other items shown on the map, such as the location of trails will be refined as more detailed planning is undertaken.

Liard First Nation Interim Protected lands are shown as an overlay on the maps. The boundaries, size, configuration and intended land use of these parcels may change as the discussion around Aboriginal rights and title evolves and Liard First Nation negotiates their land claim.

Land Use Designation	Description
<b>Serviced Residential</b>	<b>Intended to be mainly residential uses connected to piped water and sewer.</b> While residential uses such as detached homes and multi-attached dwellings will be the main use, small scale commercial, institutional uses such as schools and places of worship, and parks are also appropriate in these areas.
<b>Unserviced Residential</b>	<b>Intended to be mainly country residential uses, with onsite services.</b> While residential uses such as detached homes and other dwellings will be the main type of use, small scale commercial, institutional uses such as schools and places of worship, guest cabins, agricultural uses are also appropriate in these areas.
<b>Downtown</b>	<b>Intended to be a mix of residential, commercial, and community uses that support a highly walkable environment that provides a range of amenities to residents and visitors.</b> Community uses such as: schools, health care facilities, places of worship, offices, government services, museums, cultural centres, recreation facilities, retail shops, restaurants, financial institutions, tourist destinations and services, higher density housing and professional services should be encouraged to locate in this area.
<b>Highway Mixed Use</b>	<b>Intended to be a mix of commercial, industrial, residential and community uses that support convenient access by the travelling public within a highly visible transportation corridor along the Alaska Highway frontage roads.</b>

Land Use Designation	Description
	This area represents the Town’s first impression visually to residents and visitors. Over time improvements should be made to the streetscape, landscaping, building facades and overall look of properties in this area. Encourage infill of underused lots before making new lots available. Single detached homes are also permitted.
<b>Industrial</b>	<p><b>Intended to be both light and heavy industrial and related uses. Residential uses are also allowed; but should be secondary to the industrial uses.</b></p> <p>Minimize potentially negatively impacts of industrial uses on surrounding areas by considering noise, particulate emissions, smells, lights, vibration, traffic, and outdoor storage. Encourage the location of uses that commonly create odour, noise, dust, or other forms of emissions near the municipal sewage lagoons.</p>
<b>Airport</b>	<b>Intended to protect lands associated with the safe use of the Watson Lake Airport.</b>
<b>Parks and Recreation</b>	<p><b>Intended to accommodate existing and proposed areas that make up the major elements of Town’s overall open space system including both parks and natural spaces.</b></p> <p>Trail connections within these areas are not shown but should be identified in more detailed plans.</p>
<b>Environmental Protection</b>	<p><b>Intended to protect environmentally-sensitive areas such as those located around water bodies.</b></p> <p>These areas are generally considered not suitable for future development.</p>
<b>Holding</b>	<b>Intended to represent undeveloped areas which are not currently considered for future development.</b>

## 5.0 HOUSING

Improving the quality of the housing stock and ensuring there are a range of housing types available in Watson Lake is very important to residents. Appropriate and safe housing is vital to community growth and high-quality housing will help to attract and retain individuals and families.

### Long-term goals

- There are a range of affordable, adaptive and energy efficient housing options in Watson Lake that suit resident's needs.
- Housing is constructed using energy-efficient designs and technology to enhance sustainability.
- Housing styles accommodate the community's diverse residents and the changing needs of the population.
- The real estate market is stable and healthy.
- Residents of Watson Lake are, and have, good neighbours.
- Substandard housing is replaced.
- Higher density housing options are located Downtown.

### Housing action items

- Action 1.** Work with Liard First Nation as they develop their lands for housing.
- Action 2.** Work with the Yukon government, Liard First Nation, Yukon Housing Corporation and the private sector to provide a range of affordable housing options consistent with local and regional needs.
- Action 3.** Work with Yukon government to identify future residential areas. New lot locations should be selected based on public input, land suitability and efficient servicing. Provide guidance to the Government of Yukon on the timing, appropriate zoning, and development restrictions that should be applied prior to land sales. Use sale agreements to discourage the prolonged holding of undeveloped residential land.
- Action 4.** Enhance communications about the residential development processes and incentives through creating a page on the Town's website, an informational YouTube video, holding sessions to teach residents about the process –could be held bi-annually, or other methods.
- Action 5.** Consider a bylaw to address the potentially negative implications of short-term rentals (i.e. less than 30 days) on surrounding properties. This bylaw may require short-term rental operators to possess a business license and submit an application to the Town prior to renting their property.



**Aurora (Ed Lantz/ Town of Watson Lake)**

## **6.0 BEAUTIFICATION**

Beautifying the community, especially in the Downtown and along the Alaska Highway, is important to many Watson Lake residents. Improving landscaping, building facades, streetscaping and pedestrian connections will build community pride and strengthen the tourism market.

### **Long-term goals**

- Enhance Watson Lake’s overall sense of place by undertaking beautification projects that are authentic to Watson Lake and work for all four seasons.
- Improve the community’s aesthetics to enhance resident and visitor experience.
- Create convenient and walkable tourist and community node based in the Downtown core.

### **Beautification action items**

- Action 6.** Work with the Yukon government and Liard First Nation to build on the Sign Post Forest, visitor centre, and Northern Lights Centre to develop a comprehensive tourist and community node that provides a range of services. This area should be pedestrian friendly, planned comprehensively and reflect the local First Nations culture and history of Watson Lake.
- Action 7.** Undertake a streetscape beautification project in the Downtown. This should focus on improvements to pedestrian infrastructure, connecting key destinations, stormwater management, and better defining parking areas and roads.
- Action 8.** Work with property owners and the Watson Lake Chamber of Commerce to identify small-scale beautification programs such as the adoption of flower planters, storefront window murals, or hanging of holiday lights.
- Action 9.** Develop a municipal program to support beautification along the community gateways, specifically along the Alaska Highway and Campbell Highway. This could include grants for façade improvements, property tax breaks for property owners who improve their properties to a certain standard or property tax increases on vacant or underused lots.



**Bud Marchand at Trading Post (Town of Watson Lake)**

## **7.0 HERITAGE AND CULTURE**

Watson Lake has a rich and interesting history. The Liard First Nation, one of four Kaska Dena First Nations, is based in the Watson Lake area. The Kaska Dena had established village sites along the northern shores of Watson Lake. The surrounding lakes have been important fishing and harvesting sites for the Kaska Dena since time immemorial and are still important to the Liard First Nation citizens who continue to live, travel and hunt in the region. There are many opportunities to showcase the Kaska Dena culture, as well as the history of the Watson Lake airport, the building of the Alaska Highway.

### **Long-term goals**

- Conserve, protect, celebrate, and share the unique culture and history of Watson Lake.
- Find ways to showcase the local Kaska Dena language, heritage and culture to residents and visitors.

### **Heritage and culture action items**

- Action 10.** Incorporate local history and Kaska Dena heritage, culture and language into public art, community spaces and the naming of future community facilities or roads.
- Action 11.** Work with the Liard First Nation to develop a cultural centre Downtown to showcase Kaska Dena culture, language, traditional activities and arts.
- Action 12.** Consider developing a municipal heritage program that would include plans and policies to identify, protect, and celebrate the community's culture and heritage.



**2014 Outdoor Curling Bonspiel (Kathy Dyck/ Town of Watson Lake)**

## **8.0 PARKS AND RECREATION**

For its size, Watson Lake offers a broad range of recreation services and opportunities. The community Recreation Centre has an ice rink, bowling alley, curling rink, community hall, and other types of gathering spaces. There is also a seasonal swimming pool, a public library located in the Town Administration building, and a system of playgrounds and trails. The Town’s recreation staff provide a range of programming for all ages.

### **Long-term goals**

- There are a range of programs and facilities that meet the recreation needs of Watson Lakes residents including kids, youth, families, adults, and seniors.
- Residents and visitors of all ages have access to a range of year-round, accessible outdoor spaces suitable for passive and active recreation.
- Indoor recreation spaces are flexible and can be used for a variety of activities as needs change.
- There is a comprehensive community trail network provides continuous and safe pedestrian connectivity throughout Watson Lake.
- Parks and playgrounds are located throughout the community, so each neighbourhood has easy access.

### **Parks and Recreation action items**

- Action 13.** Complete a Parks and Recreation Master Plan including:
- Open space management including consideration of habitat protection and wildfire management;
  - A trail plan that connects key destinations;
  - Public access to waterbodies and the needed improvements to parks, boat launches, picnic facilities and parking; and
  - A plan for the future development of recreation facilities.

**Action 14.** Develop signs for the trail network including maps where appropriate.

**Action 15.** Work with the Government of Yukon to develop a public use recreation area on surplus lands at the Watson Lake airport.



## 9.0 SUSTAINABILITY, RESILIENCY, AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Watson Lake wants to be a resilient community that operates in a sustainable way and is ready to deal with a wide range of emergency situations. Of particular importance is protecting the community from the risk associated with wildfires. A new municipal services and fire hall building is being built near the Northern Lights Centre.

### Long-term goals

- Improve the community's sustainability and self-reliance.
- Provide residents with a safe and secure living environment through the effective provision of protective and emergency services.
- Support the local growth and production of food.
- Prioritize emergency preparedness as a means of protecting residents' safety.
- Consider the impacts of climate change when planning for future.
- Reduce the community's reliance on fossil fuels by focusing on more sustainable, affordable energy sources.
- Protect the community's drinking water supply.
- Improve waste management by encouraging waste reduction, reuse, and recycling.

### Sustainability, Resilience, and Emergency Preparedness action items

- Action 16.** Continue implementing the community Fire Smart program to reduce wildfire risk, maintain a firebreak, and educate residents on good fire risk management practices. Coordinate fire smart planning with timber harvest initiatives when appropriate. Require all new subdivisions incorporate Fire Smart planning as part of the design and construction process with any necessary fuel reduction measures initiated prior to lot sale.
- Action 17.** Partner with Government of Yukon, Liard First Nation and the private sector to review and update the community's emergency measures plan to identify and address risks associated with wildfires, accidents, toxic spills, impacts on drinking water supply, loss of power and communication, impacts of climate change, and any other emergency events. Identify priorities for action to update infrastructure.
- Action 18.** Work with the Government of Yukon and Liard First Nation on Community Wildfire Protection Planning.
- Action 19.** Support local agriculture and food security initiatives.
- Action 20.** Support energy conservation by adopting best practices for energy management in public buildings, and promoting resident and business awareness of energy conservation opportunities



**Watson Lake Hospital (Kobayishi and Zedda)**

## **10.0 HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

Improving the quality of life for all is important to Watson Lake residents. Watson Lake has a new hospital and access to many social and health-related services. Residents feel that it is important that the Town of Watson Lake work with other governments and organizations to ensure residents have access to the support services they need.

### **Long-term goals**

- All residents have a high quality of life and a healthy lifestyle.
- The community is safe and accessible.
- There are a range of social, educational, and recreational opportunities for residents consistent with the community's size, resources, cultural diversity, and health and wellness priorities.
- A range of health, social, mental health and addictions services are available to support residents through each stage of life.
- Community facilities are shared to encourage efficiency of operation and economies of scale consistent with the size and capabilities of the community.
- Governments and social organizations are working together to address specific issues such as housing affordability, improved availability of health care services, and the provision of facilities/ programming to accommodate the specialized needs of aging residents or those living with disabilities.

### **Health and Social Services action items**

- Action 21.** Require the construction or redevelopment of public buildings/ spaces to follow universal accessibility standards.
- Action 22.** Continue to work with the RCMP to ensure that the residents are safe and use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles to enhance safety in public areas.



**Wye Lake (Kathy Dyck/ Town of Watson Lake)**

## **11.0 OPEN SPACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

The area surrounding Watson Lake is one of the most biologically productive ecoregions in Yukon and the abundance of wildlife is one of the reasons that people choose to live in this area. Residents value the easy access to the wilderness, and to the area's many lakes and rivers

### **Long-term goals**

- Protect environmentally-sensitive lands, important habitat areas, surface water and groundwater.
- Minimize air, land, light, and water pollution.
- Manage open space cautiously so that current land uses do not degrade the landscapes and ecosystems of the area.
- Air quality issues from woodsmoke emissions and seasonal air inversions have been minimized.

### **Open Space and Environmental Protection action items**

**Action 23.** Work with the Government of Yukon and Liard First Nation to ensure compliance with Environmental Health standards for the protection of groundwater and lakeshore in both the Belleview, Wye Lake and Watson Lake shoreline subdivisions.

**Action 24.** Investigate options to reduce wood smoke pollution in those areas of the community most susceptible to air inversions.

## 12.0 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Watson Lake is a key gateway to the Yukon, is a major transportation hub, and a regional centre for businesses related to both tourism and mineral exploration and extraction. Despite this, economic and population growth in recent years have been slow. Scheduled air service depends on mining activity and is not always available. Watson Lake has an active Chamber of Commerce and the community continues to work together to find innovative solutions.

### Long-term goals

- Maintain a stable and diversified economic base, including government, forestry, tourism, mining, oil and gas, agriculture, and big-game outfitting.
- Enhance employment opportunities, support local businesses and continue to build local skills, trades and education options.
- Strengthen the regional economy of communities between Lower Post and Upper Liard.
- Attract multi-day and year-round tourism.
- Regional government services are located in Watson Lake to increase population and enhance community economic stability.

### Economic Development action items

- Action 25.** Identify and preserve potential points of interest, viewpoints, and related interpretive site opportunities within community boundaries to support tourism growth. Improve signage in the community to enhance resident and visitor navigation.
- Action 26.** Identify forest harvest options for lands within municipal boundaries by considering areas required for future land development and forest fire risk abatement.
- Action 27.** Review and update the regional tourism plan and tourism marketing material.
- Action 28.** Work with the Government of Yukon to identify opportunities to keep the cost of living in the region competitive and remove barriers that result in economic leakage.

## 13.0 REGIONAL INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Both Watson Lake residents, and the leadership and staff of the Town of Watson Lake understand the importance of Identifying opportunities for, and participating in, innovative partnerships. It is especially important for the Town of Watson Lake, the Liard First Nation and Yukon government to work together.

### Long-term goals

- Collaborate with various partners to achieve goals and objectives that will benefit residents and businesses in the entire region.
- Ensure services available are in Watson Lake support its role as a regional service centre.

### Regional initiatives and partnership action items

**Action 29.** The Town of Watson Lake will engage in regular, joint meeting with the Liard First Nation to coordinate community planning, economic development and capital plan implementation to achieve cost and service efficiencies.

**Action 30.** The Town of Watson Lake should work with partners such as the Government of Yukon, Liard First Nation, Government of British Columbia, Lower Post, Upper Liard, local and national service providers, the Watson Lake Chamber of Commerce, and/ or industry representatives where appropriate to:

- Complete the upgrading and hard surfacing of the Stewart Cassiar and Campbell Highways;
- Extend broadcast transmitter and cell phone coverage boundaries; and
- Restore scheduled air service to Watson Lake and promote further development at the airport.

## 14.0 TRANSPORTATION

Watson Lake is located at the intersection of the Alaska Highway and the Robert Campbell Highway. Roads within the community are generally Bituminous Surface Treatment (BST) and gravel. The Watson Lake Airport is a community asset and the terminal is a designated historic site. The runway is long and can accommodate scheduled passenger service, although scheduled service is not currently being offered. The airport is adjacent to Watson Lake and has beautiful views and the potential to be developed into more of a community asset.

### Long-term goals

- Develop and maintain a safe, convenient, and integrated transportation network that considers the needs of drivers, cyclists, and walkers and the movement of goods to and through the community.
- Support the Watson Lake Airport for its essential role as a gateway to southeast Yukon, air tourism, a forest fire tanker base, and weather-based alternative to Whitehorse for jet traffic.
- Pedestrian safety and connectivity are increased downtown, near key community destinations, at busy intersections and along the highway. Use a combination of sidewalks and trails to develop a pedestrian network that is safe, convenient and all-season.
- New development includes adequate parking and safe pedestrian connections.
- The Robert Campbell and Stewart Cassiar highways are upgraded to facilitate regional economic development and lower transportation costs.

### Transportation action items

- Action 31.** Prepare a transportation master plan to:
- Establish a hierarchy of standards for construction and maintenance of roadways to reflect the traffic volumes, priority, and purpose of each roadway;
  - Assess the improvements needed to accommodate increased regional activity in the transportation, mining, forestry and oil and gas sector;
  - Identify road resurfacing priorities consistent with road hierarchy and maintenance history;
  - Identify priorities for land acquisition needed to improve the transportation network;
  - Identify and protect possible future rail alignment through the community; and
  - Identify the appropriate pedestrian infrastructure to increase connectivity and safety.
- Action 32.** Finalize a route and schedule the realignment of the Robert Campbell Highway in the vicinity of the high school to improve safety and access to adjacent industrial properties.
- Action 33.** Enhance the Downtown's transportation network through completing a series of implementable projects including more clearly identifying driving lanes, improving sidewalk connections, improve the appearance of streets, and identifying oversized parking areas for highway trucks or recreational vehicles.
- Action 34.** Work with the Government of Yukon to complete an airport master plan to address
- Lands surplus to airport needs;
  - Formalizing the public access and recreation options at the airport;
  - The float base needs; and
  - Support for year-round scheduled air service.

## 15.0 INFRASTRUCTURE

Municipal infrastructure includes the municipal water system, sanitary sewer system, storm drainage systems, solid waste systems, and energy system. These services are essential for the day to day health, safety, and convenience of residents. Maintaining, operating, replacing, and expanding this infrastructure is costly, must be considered as a long-term investment and needs to be well planned.

### Long-term goals

- Maintain and operate municipal utilities in a safe, efficient, and cost-effective manner.
- Meet the long-term energy needs of residents and industry.
- Meet the long-term solid waste collection and disposal needs of the region, while enhancing sustainability and environmental protection.

### Infrastructure action items

- Action 35.** Continue to develop efficient and sustainable infrastructure following the recommendations shown in the *Town of Watson Lake Overall Infrastructure Assessment*, completed in 2021.
- Action 36.** The Town shall work with the Government of Yukon and Liard First Nation examine alternative energy supply options such as cogeneration, natural gas, hydro development, wind, solar, and geothermal.
- Action 37.** Implement the Source Water Assessment and Protection Plan for the Watson Lake Aquifer.
- Annually review the groundwater quality data;
  - Install monitoring program to detect near by sewer system leaks;
  - Improve wellhead security; and
  - Provide public awareness and education on the Source Water Protection Plan.

## 16.0 IMPLEMENTATION

Strategies must be in place to ensure that this OCP is implemented in a fair, transparent and efficient manner.

### Long-term goals

- All municipal plans, policies, and bylaws are consistent with the OCP.
- The OCP is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it accurately reflects the existing and anticipated conditions in Watson Lake.
- Enforcement of municipal bylaws is fair and transparent.
- All municipal plans, policies, bylaws, and program documents prepared subsequent to the adoption of this plan, shall include an “OCP Context Statement” that references the objectives and policies of this plan and generally describes how adoption of the plan, policy, bylaw, or program will further the goals of this plan.
- The appropriate municipal Development Permits are obtained before development is undertaken.

### Implementation actions

**Action 38.** Review and update all forms. Make the forms and the OCP, Zoning Bylaw and any other plans are available online.

**Action 39.** Adopt a bylaw enforcement procedure that sets out the steps and timelines to be taken by the Development Officer to enforce the provisions of the OCP and Zoning Bylaw.



## 17.0 LIST OF ALL ACTION ITEMS

<b>Housing Actions</b>			
<b>Action 1.</b>	Work with Liard First Nation as they develop their lands for housing.	High Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 2.</b>	Work with Yukon government, Liard First Nation, Yukon Housing Corporation and the private sector to provide a range of affordable housing options consistent with local and regional needs.	High Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 3.</b>	Work with Yukon government to identify future residential areas. New lot locations should be selected based on public input, land suitability and efficient servicing. Provide guidance to the Government of Yukon on the timing, appropriate zoning, and development restrictions that should be applied prior to land sales. Use sale agreements to discourage the prolonged holding of undeveloped residential land.	High Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 4.</b>	Enhance communications about the residential development processes and incentives through creating a page on the Town's website, an informational YouTube video, holding sessions to teach residents about the process –could be held bi-annually, or other methods.	Medium Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 5.</b>	Consider a bylaw to address the potentially negative implications of short-term rentals (i.e. less than 30 days) on surrounding properties. This bylaw may require short-term rental operators to possess a business license and submit an application to the Town prior to renting their property.	Low Priority	Medium Term
<b>Beautification Actions</b>			
<b>Action 6.</b>	Work with Yukon government and Liard First Nation to build on the Sign Post Forest, visitor centre, and Northern Lights Centre to develop a comprehensive tourist node that provides a range of tourist services. This area should be pedestrian friendly, planned comprehensively and reflect the local culture and history of Watson Lake.	High Priority	Long Term
<b>Action 7.</b>	Undertake a streetscape beautification project in the Downtown. This should focus on improvements to pedestrian infrastructure, connecting key destinations, stormwater management, and better defining parking areas and roads.	High Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 8.</b>	Work with property owners and the Watson Lake Chamber of Commerce to identify small-scale beautification programs such as the adoption of flower planters, storefront window murals, or hanging of holiday lights.	Medium Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 9.</b>	Develop a municipal program to support beautification along the community gateways, specifically along the Alaska Highway and Campbell Highway. This could include grants for façade improvements, property tax breaks for property	Medium Priority	Short Term

	owners who improve the appearance of their property, grants and matching programs for property owners who improve their building premises (excluding building footprint).		
<b>Heritage and Culture Actions</b>			
<b>Action 10.</b>	Incorporate local history and Kaska Dena heritage, culture and language into public art, community spaces and the naming of future community facilities or roadways.	High Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 11.</b>	Work with the Liard First Nation to develop a cultural centre Downtown to showcase Kaska Dena culture, language, traditional activities and arts.	High Priority	Long Term
<b>Action 12.</b>	Consider developing a municipal heritage program that would include plans and policies to identify, protect, and celebrate the community's culture and heritage.	Low Priority	Medium Term
<b>Parks and Recreation Actions</b>			
<b>Action 13.</b>	Complete a Parks and Recreation Master Plan including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open space management including consideration of habitat protection and wildfire management;</li> <li>• A trail plan that connects key destinations;</li> <li>• Public access to waterbodies and the needed improvements to parks, boat launches, picnic facilities and parking;</li> <li>• A plan for the future development of recreation facilities.</li> </ul>	Medium Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 14.</b>	Develop signs for the trail network including maps where appropriate.	Medium Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 15.</b>	Work with the Government of Yukon to develop a public use recreation area on surplus lands at the Watson Lake airport.	Low Priority	Long Term
<b>Sustainability, Resilience, and Emergency Preparedness Actions</b>			
<b>Action 16.</b>	Partner with the Government of Yukon, Liard First Nation and the private sector to review and update the community's emergency measures plan to identify and address risks associated with wildfires, accidents, toxic spills, loss of power and communication, impacts of climate change, and any other emergency events. Identify priorities for action to update infrastructure.	High Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 17.</b>	Continue implementing the community Fire Smart program to reduce wildfire risk, maintain a firebreak, and educate residents on good fire risk management practices. Coordinate fire smart planning with timber harvest initiatives when appropriate. Require all new subdivisions incorporate Fire Smart planning as part of the design and construction process with any necessary fuel reduction measures initiated prior to lot sale.	High priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 18.</b>	Work with Government of Yukon and Liard First Nation on Community Wildfire Protection Planning.	High Priority	Short Term

<b>Action 19.</b>	Support local agriculture and food security initiative	Medium Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 20.</b>	Support energy conservation by adopting best practices for energy management in public buildings, and promoting resident and business awareness of energy conservation opportunities	Medium Priority	Medium Term
<b>Health and Social Services</b>			
<b>Action 21.</b>	Require the construction or redevelopment of public buildings/ spaces to follow universal accessibility standards.	Medium Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 22.</b>	Continue to work with the RCMP to ensure that the residents are safe and use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles to enhance safety in public areas.	Medium Priority	Medium Term
<b>Open Space and Environmental Protection Actions</b>			
<b>Action 23.</b>	Work with the Government of Yukon and Liard First Nation to ensure compliance with Environmental Health standards for the protection of groundwater and lakeshore in both the Belleview, Wye Lake and Watson Lake shoreline subdivisions.	High Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 24.</b>	Investigate options to reduce wood smoke pollution in those areas of the community most susceptible to air inversions.	Low Priority	Medium Term
<b>Economic Development Actions</b>			
<b>Action 25.</b>	Identify and preserve potential points of interest, viewpoints, and related interpretive site opportunities within community boundaries to support tourism growth. Improve signage in the community to enhance resident and visitor navigation.	High Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 26.</b>	Identify forest harvest options for lands within municipal boundaries by considering areas required for future land development and forest fire risk abatement.	High Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 27.</b>	Review and update the regional tourism plan and tourism marketing material.	Medium Priority	Medium Term
<b>Action 28.</b>	Work with the Government of Yukon to identify opportunities to keep the cost of living in the region competitive and remove barriers that result in economic leakage.	Medium Priority	Long Term
<b>Regional Initiatives and Partnership Actions</b>			
<b>Action 29.</b>	The Town of Watson Lake will engage in regular, joint meeting with the Liard First Nation to coordinate community planning, economic development and capital plan implementation to achieve cost and service efficiencies.	High Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 30.</b>	The Town of Watson Lake should work with partners such as the Government of Yukon, Liard First Nation, Government of British Columbia, Lower Post, Upper Liard, local and national service providers, the Watson Lake Chamber of Commerce, and/ or industry representatives where appropriate to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the upgrading and hard surfacing of the Stewart Cassiar and Campbell Highways;</li> </ul>	Medium Priority	Long Term

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extend broadcast transmitter and cell phone coverage boundaries; and</li> <li>• Restore scheduled air service to Watson Lake and promote further development at the airport.</li> </ul>		
<b>Transportation Actions</b>			
<b>Action 31.</b>	<p>Prepare a transportation master plan to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a hierarchy of standards for construction and maintenance of roadways to reflect the traffic volumes, priority, and purpose of each roadway;</li> <li>• Assess of the improvements needed to accommodate increased regional activity in the transportation, mining, forestry and oil and gas sector;</li> <li>• Identify road resurfacing priorities consistent with road hierarchy and maintenance history;</li> <li>• Identify priorities for land acquisition needed to improve the transportation network;</li> <li>• Identify and protect possible future rail alignment through the community; and</li> <li>• Identify the appropriate pedestrian infrastructure to increase connectivity and safety.</li> </ul>	High Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 32.</b>	Finalize a route and schedule the realignment of the Robert Campbell Highway in the vicinity of the high school to improve safety and access to adjacent industrial properties.	Medium Priority	Long Term
<b>Action 33.</b>	Enhance the Downtown’s transportation network through completing a series of implemental projects including more clearly identifying driving lanes, improving sidewalk connections, improve the appearance of streets, and identifying oversized parking areas for highway trucks or recreational vehicles.	Medium Priority	Long Term
<b>Action 34.</b>	<p>Work with the Government of Yukon to complete an airport master plan to address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lands surplus to airport needs;</li> <li>• formalizing the public access and recreation options at the airport;</li> <li>• the float base needs; and</li> <li>• support for year-round scheduled air service.</li> </ul>	Low Priority	Long Term
<b>Infrastructure Actions</b>			
<b>Action 35.</b>	Continue to develop efficient and sustainable infrastructure following the recommendations shown in the Town of Watson Lake Overall Infrastructure Assessment, completed in 2021.	High Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 36.</b>	The Town shall work with the Government of Yukon and Liard First Nation examine alternative energy supply options such as cogeneration, natural gas, hydro development, wind, solar, and geothermal.	High Priority	Short Term

<b>Action 37.</b>	<p>Implement the Source Water Assessment and Protection Plan for the Watson Lake Aquifer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annually review the groundwater quality data;</li> <li>• Install monitoring program to detect nearby sewer system leaks;</li> <li>• Improve wellhead security; and</li> <li>• Provide public awareness and education on the Source Water Protection Plan.</li> </ul>	High Priority	Short Term
<b>Implementation Actions</b>			
<b>Action 38.</b>	Review and update all forms. Make the forms and the OCP, Zoning Bylaw and any other plans are available online.	High Priority	Short Term
<b>Action 39.</b>	Adopt a bylaw enforcement procedure that sets out the steps and timelines to be taken by the Development Officer to enforce the provisions of the OCP and Zoning Bylaw.	Medium Priority	Medium Term