

# **Wascana Centre Authority**

## **A Journal of the Development of a Strategic Plan**

**2006**

# **A STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS JOURNAL** **WASCANA CENTRE AUTHORITY**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This article has been compiled and presented as a result of a strategic partnership between Wascana Centre Authority and the Communities of Tomorrow Partners for Sustainability Inc. The Communities of Tomorrow have an interest in the development of local capacity in the use of consultative strategic planning tools, such as the '*modified charrette*' process, and have provided funding for that purpose. The Wascana Centre Authority Board agreed to utilize this planning process to assist in "building capacity" with our broader community.

As part of the overall Strategic Planning process, a key element is the documentation of the processes used in the formation and creation of the plan. Throughout the project, the consulting team members documented the process and have evaluated the results.

This Article will look at the requirement for planning, Management decisions, Board decisions, need for outside consultants, consultant's actions and completion of the plan. Clearly, as the strategic plan developed through this process has not yet had sufficient time to be implemented, we cannot comment in this article upon the success (or lack thereof) of the strategy itself; all we can do is describe the methodology used to create the plan.

### ***Background & Context***

The Wascana Centre Authority came into being on April 2, 1962, with the passing of the Wascana Centre Act. The Wascana Centre Act, created a constituted body called the Wascana Centre Authority which operates under the influence of five key mandated areas of focus with equal importance:

Seat of Government,  
Recreation,  
Education,  
Environment,  
Culture and The Arts.

The 11 person Wascana Centre Authority Board of Directors consists of (5) representatives of the Government of Saskatchewan appointed by an Order in Council of the Lieutenant Governor, (3) representatives of the City of Regina, and (3) representatives of the University of Regina.

### ***Minoru Yamasaki: Architect-Planner 1961-1962***

*The Leader-Post* ran a large headline after an interview with Mr. Yamaski in September 1961 –

***"Yamasaki claims Wascana Centre's future unequalled."***

*He was also quoted as saying the*

***"Wascana is going to make Regina one of the greatest cities in the world";***  
*and again,*

***"There won't be a centre equal to this in the world."***

More recent context to the review and updating of the strategic plan was the rejuvenation of the Wascana Lake, (January, 2004-March 2004) which became known as the “Big Dig”. The project, a major dredging of the lake and the creation of new land area with the resulting fill, has stimulated a revitalization of the lake, the creation of new land forms, other land forms being restored and updated, which ultimately will enhance the usability of the Centre. The “Big Dig” generated a tremendous number of visitors to the Centre during construction and that interest remains with the external stakeholders following the completion of the project. The excitement and energy for Wascana Centre stimulated by the “Big Dig” reinforced the potential value from direct engagement of stakeholders in the strategic planning process. It also created optimism that many stakeholders would be willing to commit their time and energy to participate in a constructive involvement process.

The challenge for management will always be the preservation of this fantastic natural resource in the centre of the city and at the seat of the Provincial Government. Due to its location, it is under constant scrutiny of the resident public as well as the visiting public from all over the world. Securing sufficient operational funding has been an ongoing challenge for the Authority. Finding the resources for appropriate expansion and development will also continue to be a major strategic thrust.

### ***Decision to Proceed***

The first ‘Master Plan’ (essentially a land use plan and not a strategic plan per se) for the Centre was created by the commissioned architect, Minoru Yamasaki of Birmingham, Michigan. Since that time the ‘Master Plan’ has been reviewed and updated several times with the last review being in 1999. The Board agreed that a forward thinking Strategic Plan would be instrumental to the overall ‘2006 Master Plan Review’ process. A guiding principle for the Board was that Form would be influenced by Function.

#### ***Van Isman WCA Executive Director:***

*“When I was being interviewed for my present position I discussed openly with the Board the need to involve our stakeholders in the future development of the Wascana Centre. As a principle of design, ‘form’ should follow ‘function’ and therefore: the form of our future will be determined by the functions that are being planned. In conjunction with this future direction, we must have a solid plan to attract qualified and dedicated staff for the future. This stakeholder involvement will create a challenge for growth and development as well as to preserving the uniqueness of Wascana Centre.”*

Our Board clearly stated that they wanted a process where the ‘function’ would influence the ‘form’. We saw that through strategic planning we would be able to identify the functions that would further animate our core mandate areas of:

- development of the seat of government
- the enlargement of educational, research, and development opportunities
- the advancement of the cultural arts
- the development and improvement to the recreational facilities
- further conservation of the environment

With the resulting strategic context, the review of the Master Plan will conceptualize the land use, facility and landscapes required to enable these desired functions.

Management championed the opportunity to get community input into the future directions for Wascana Centre. It was clear to our management group that outside assistance would be

necessary to provide objectivity and sufficient capacity to undertake such a significant strategic planning process.

### ***Board Decision***

Our Board agreed that it was of utmost importance that the community stakeholders have a strong voice in the use and development of the Centre for the future. By integrating the strategic planning process with the Master Planning process the Board was seeking a way to 'animate' the hopes, aspirations, and expectations of stakeholders under the umbrella of the primary focus of the five mandated areas. Therefore our Board appointed a Strategic Planning Committee to begin the process for an update and review by 2006.

Our Board then supported the proposal of our Strategic Planning Committee that impartial professional resources would be required to assist in gathering the needed information for a strategic plan that would incorporate stakeholder input into its foundation.

### ***Bid proposal for Professional Consultants***

In response to the Board decision to have input from stakeholders and a planning session prior to adjusting the 'Master Plan', a call for an outside resource to facilitate the gathering of information that would be the core of a 'Strategic Plan' was placed with a closing date of June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Following interviews with applicants, Strategic Futures Group was selected as the consulting team and they were engaged August 14<sup>th</sup> with direction to have their work completed by January, 2006.

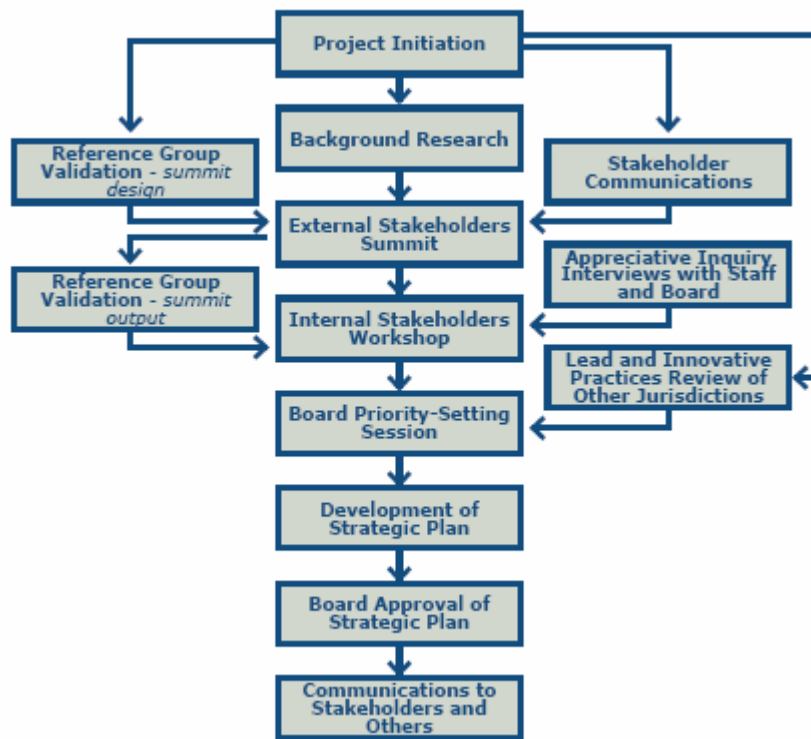
Our Board was committed to engaging our community and consider their needs as options to the 'Master Plan'. We considered the need to have individual interest groups meet and share ideas, and settled on the summit of stakeholders in a multi-day forum as the most appropriate method to achieve this objective.

### ***Reid Pattison Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee of the Board***

*"We chose an outside resource group on the credentials of the team and their comprehension of our objectives. The team had local knowledge as well as national involvement. A major and key component of their proposal was the proposed Summit Process utilizing a modified charrette protocol."*

Our Board of Directors reviewed the following proposed "Strategic Planning" flow chart and provided the outside consultants approval of the process. They also viewed the outline of the objectives and processes of the Summit explanation that follows the flow chart.

The plan clearly involved outside and inside stakeholders with active opportunity to have input into the strategic development of Wascana Centre well into the future.



## **2. ENGAGING EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS**

### ***The Summit Process***

The Summit was organized to provide external stakeholders of this unique land resource with an opportunity to comment upon its strategic direction. The goal was to obtain input during a multi day session which would provide sufficient time for representatives of different groups to listen to one another and formulate their own thoughts in-depth.

### ***10 Keys to a Successful Summit***

1. Broad range of interests represented by the participants - everyone is equal, despite levels of authority in an organization. Maximum mix of stakeholders with different perspectives provides a tremendous opportunity for learning.
2. Participants to have a clear understanding of the agenda and background information on the subject.
3. Summit is conducted in a large bright room with walls to pin up material, or space for free standing panels, space for refreshments and meals, space for a variety of table groups, plenary and one-on-one activities.
4. Round tables work best to encourage conversation
5. Groups of no more than 12 people – 8 preferred
6. Availability of note takers to record the full conversation from every table group.

7. Full orientation for recorders and facilitators in advance of the summit.
8. Careful design of the agenda to include a variety of table group activities and plenary sessions
9. Participants will have clear instructions describing the purpose of each activity, roles of the discussion leader, timekeeper, recorder and reporter, timing and output.
10. With clear instructions for each activity, each table group discussion can more readily be self managed enabling the total participant group to be any size.

### ***Gaining Stakeholders' Commitment to Participate***

#### ***Van Isman WCA Executive Director:***

*"There is a strong anticipation for the future of the Centre as a result of the enhancement of the Lake and residual land forms created from the project."*

Following the confirmation of the objectives of the plan and formalization of the planning teams, our consultant's first step was to identify Stakeholders who would have an interest in the future development and use of lands managed by the Wascana Centre Authority.

A list of external stakeholders was compiled from the files of the Wascana Centre. The criteria for this list was: event planners, Director's or President's of community organizations that use the facilities on an ongoing basis, educational representatives, environmental representatives, representatives of culture and arts, City and Provincial Government Management, and representatives of health facilities on the property. Also to keep the process in touch with the community, all community associations in the entire City were invited to send a representative. Also included were representatives of First Nations and Métis organizations.

### ***Selection of External Stakeholders***

#### ***By September 8, 2005***

Over 150 potential Stakeholders were identified and listed for contact. Where possible, addresses, contact phone numbers and email were researched and compiled. This was accomplished with the cooperation of our Authority Management and staff along with input from the Consulting Team.

### ***First Contact of Stakeholders***

#### ***September 09 to 31, 2005***

The Consulting Team created a contact letter and worked closely with the WCA Marketing department in completing a mailing to the Stakeholders on September 9<sup>th</sup>. The Consulting Team personally followed up by telephone, fax or email, each potential Stakeholder for their commitment of active participation in the Summit Meeting. From this contact process, 87 positive responses were received. Achieving this number of confirmed participants was deemed to be a highly successful response from Wascana Centre stakeholders. The majority of the respondents made a commitment to participate for the full duration of the Summit (two

hours Thursday evening, full day Friday, and full day Saturday), with only a few committing to less time due to personal commitments. The importance of full, continuous participation was reinforced by the consulting team in their conversations with stakeholders. For about one-half dozen prospective participants the required time commitment was identified explicitly as the reason for their non-participation.

### ***Selection of Reference Group Members***

The consulting team selected a group of stakeholders to form a Reference Group. The objective of the Reference Group was to provide grounding for and feedback to the consulting team in the pre and post Summit plans.

Twelve prospects were contacted, ten of whom agreed to participate as Reference Group members.

#### September 8 to November 10, 2005

Wascana Centre staff identified, from the larger group of stakeholders, potential participants who they felt would be a good sounding board and provide direct feedback. They were contacted by the consulting team leader and their roles were discussed with the first meeting date of September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005 agreed to.

It was identified that the reference group would have basically four additional meetings:

Meeting #1 – Meet to review the Summit design and provide input (September 30)

Meeting #2 – Participate in Summit (October 20 – 22)

Meeting #3 – Meet at end of Day 2 of Summit to reflect, evaluate and discuss adjustments to the final day's agenda (October 21, for ½ hour after other participants had vacated the Summit)

Meeting #4 – Meet to review output of the Summit and validate its appropriateness as input for WCA strategic planning (November 10)

Following the September 30<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder Reference Group meeting, the Summit design was adjusted and finalized for presentation to the Board's Strategic Planning Committee.

### ***Summit Information and Organization***

#### October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005

The WCA Strategic Planning Committee and the consulting team met to finalize details for the final agenda of the summit and to review the response of the stakeholders regarding their participation. Other materials for the participants were reviewed and suggested changes were incorporated.

#### October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005

A third official contact with the external stakeholders was their first look at the "Summit Agenda". This was circulated, by email to the confirmed participating stakeholders only.

#### October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005

Summit pre-read material developed by the Consulting Team, with input from and reviewed by WCA management and staff was circulated in hard copy with the intention that the material would be brought to the Summit. This was the fourth contact with the Stakeholders, and reinforced the dates of the Summit as well as facility, meal and parking logistics.

It is important to note that the organization of facility, support materials and session infrastructure as well as catering arrangements took a dedicated effort, over a period of weeks, by members of the facilitation team, supported by Wascana Centre Authority staff.

### **The Summit Activities**

#### October 20 – 22, 2005

The summit was organized into four time blocks: First, Thursday evening focused on an introduction to the Wascana Centre Authority and ensuring a common base of understanding within the varied stakeholder group; Second, Friday involved a discovery of stakeholders' perceptions of the Strengths, Opportunities and Aspirations for Wascana Centre; third, Saturday morning focused on key strategic topics that emerged from Friday's work as well as consideration of and dialogue about cross mandate synergies, interdependencies and conflicts. Finally, prior to the Summit closing, participants reconvened within mandate area groupings to identify indicators of success.

The summit agenda was based on the SOAR framework:

Strategic Inquiry with Appreciative Intent...

### Inspiration to SOAR!!

Strategic Inquiry	Strengths <i>What are our greatest assets?</i>	Opportunities <i>What are the best possible market opportunities?</i>
Appreciative Intent	Aspirations <i>What is our preferred future?</i>	Results <i>What are the measurable results?</i>

(Stavros, Cooperrider, and Kelley, 2003)

The SOAR framework has been developed through the application of Appreciative Inquiry principles to the strategic planning process (Stavros, Cooperrider and Kelly (2003).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a vision-based approach of open dialogue that is designed to help organizations and their partners create a shared vision for the future and a mission to operate in the present (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990). Numerous organizations have used AI, including private and public nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, and government and international agencies worldwide. AI has allowed hundreds of organizations to discover and grow the best practices of capacity building for their organizations as well as their value chain partner organizations.

The AI approach to strategic planning involves identifying and building on existing strengths and profitable opportunities rather than dwelling on problems, deficiencies, weaknesses, and threats. AI allows and in fact encourages all stakeholders to have a voice in the planning dialogue, leading to full participation in an organization's future, resulting in stakeholder ownership of the strategic plan throughout the organization.

The Summit agenda, to a large extent, was structured to address each cell of the SOAR matrix illustrated above.

### **Activity #1**

#### **Welcome and WCA Overview**

The summit began with a presentation by Wascana Centre Authority Executive Director, Van Isman. Mr. Isman provided participants with a 'snap shot' of Wascana Centre and the Wascana Centre Authority in a twenty-five minute presentation to ensure there was a common and shared understanding of the current state of the Authority and the Centre.

Following this presentation by our Executive Director, participants were engaged in a table group discussion to clarify:

- what was heard
- reactions to the presentation
- questions of understanding to be asked of Mr. Isman

Each table group was then provided with an opportunity to ask its top question for clarification of Mr. Isman. The facilitation team and Mr. Isman prepared brief written responses to all the remaining questions that were not able to be dealt with due to time restrictions. These responses were distributed to the participants the next day.

On Friday, participants were asked to work with others whose stakeholder interest is aligned to the same Wascana Centre Authority mandate area as theirs:

- seat of government,
- education,
- recreation,
- arts & culture,
- environment.

#### ***Greg Fieger Summit Leader Strategic Future Group***

*In this case, for much of the SUMMIT, we had people organized into 'like interest areas'. Key is to ensure the interaction is generative, contributing to learning of all participants – the environment must feel 'safe' and create opportunities for all voices to be heard, minimizing the risk of 'group think' and maximizing opportunities for creativity and innovation...*

Participants were organized into table groups of no more than 10. Some mandate areas had more than one table group.

### **Activity #2**

#### ***Discovering the Positive Core – Wascana Centre at its Best***

Participants were engaged in a one-on-one interview which served to ground the Summit work in participants' personal, professional and organizational experiences of Wascana Centre. The questions they were asked to respond to were purposefully crafted in an 'unconditional positive' manner. They were also questions that provoked the telling of stories. As participants listened to each other's stories, and considered the learning that emerged from them, the Summit began to generate a base of information.

Back in the table groups, participants were asked to share their interview partners stories of Wascana Centre 'at its best'. Once everyone had shared their stories, stakeholders were instructed to brainstorm to identify a list of life-giving factors, (themes / conditions that are

present when we experience 'Wascana Centre at its best'...) attributes that are most compelling, inspiring, or distinctive! They were then asked to review their 'brainstorm list' and consolidate their group's words / phrases into approximately 5 life-giving factors, which capture for their group, the 'positive core' of Wascana Centre. The 5 attributes were written on colour coded paper according to the mandate area. The colour coded sheets were used to construct a mosaic of positive core attributes.

Each table group then posted these positive core attributes on a panel that was entitled: Wascana Centre Positive Core Mosaic. Themes emerged by clustering 'like' attributes together on the panel. The overall result of this whole group activity was verbally debriefed so that all were aware of the emergent positive core themes.

### **Activity #3**

#### **Strategic Opportunities and Vision**

Once a shared sense for the strength foundation that Wascana Centre is working from was established, the conversation shifted to sharing hopes and aspirations for Wascana Centre – images of a preferred future that participants', as citizens and stakeholders, held for Wascana Centre.

#### **IMAGE INSPIRES ACTION**

*Human systems move in the direction of their images of the future...*

*The more positive and hopeful the image of the future,  
the more positive the present-day action...*

Table groups worked to define strategic opportunities within their mandate areas. They started by again sharing their stories from the paired interview, describing their images of opportunities and wishes for Wascana Centre's future. Once all Table Group members' stories were shared, they brainstormed, using the flip chart to list strategic opportunities that, if pursued, would represent the advancement of their Wascana Centre Authority mandate area.

Each table group chose up to five opportunities they believed had the greatest, positive impact on their particular Wascana Centre Authority Mandate area. Where mandate areas had multiple table groups, they convened to develop an "Opportunity Map" for their Mandate area. (An opportunity map is a visual representation of the opportunities associated with a topic of inquiry, including illustrations of the relationships between opportunities.)

They began by listing the opportunities that mandate area participants considered to be most strategic in the next five years. New opportunities got a new line radiating out from the centre. If an opportunity identified was related to one already on the map, it got a line attached to the existing 'related opportunity' line illustrating this connection.

Once all strategic opportunities had been added onto the Opportunity Map, each participant was provided with 3 colored dots. They were invited to allocate their dots to the strategic opportunities that they believed were most crucial to the advancement of their Wascana Centre Authority Mandate area.

#### **From Opportunities to Bold Dreams**

Once the whole array of opportunities were 'mapped' by the participants, they returned to their table group to write a Vision Statement - a 'word picture' - one that provides a rich description of participants' preferred future experience of Wascana Centre within their assigned mandate

area. Table group Vision Statements were posted, along with their mandate area Opportunity Map for others to review and comment upon.

At this point, participants' were invited to review the work of other Mandate Areas. This review was conducted like a 'Gallery Walk'. During this segment of the agenda, participants moved from mandate area to mandate area. They reviewed the Opportunity Map and the Vision Statements that were posted. They were invited to leave a comment or idea for the other mandate areas. (This agenda segment, like the others, is a direct tie back into the modified charrette process that was desired for this project.)

#### **Activity #4**

##### ***Cross-Mandate Synergy, Inter-dependency and Conflict***

Importantly, during the Gallery Walk participants' were absorbing the opportunities and dreams of the participants from the other mandate areas. As participants considered the Opportunities & Vision Statements, they watched for potential synergy, inter-dependency, or opportunities / aspirations that appear to be in conflict with some others.

All the ideas regarding potential synergy, inter-dependency and conflict were considered, along with the opportunity maps, into topics for discussion on Saturday morning. The facilitation team identified and documented about 40 topics for discussion and prepared these for Summit Saturday.

#### **Activity #5**

##### ***Cross-Mandate Topic Discussion***

On Saturday participants were invited to join a discussion group to work on topics that they were most interested in, wanted to contribute to, or wanted to learn more about. There were three 'rounds' (each round being approximately 1 hour) of topic conversations. Through the three rounds, participants were able to participate with others in several topic areas of interest or importance to them. The work from these rounds was posted for all to review.

#### **Topic Dialogue Task**

- a. Clearly define the scope of your Topic.
  - i. Ensure everyone agrees that this is what they have come to discuss.
    - ii. Document the Topic definition on a flip chart
- b. Share assumptions about this Topic and why it is important to the future of Wascana Centre.
  - i. Document these assumptions on a flip chart
- c. Define participants 'desired outcome(s)' for this Topic
  - i. Document this desired outcome (s) on a F/C
- d. Discuss and recommend strategies to achieve the 'desired outcome (s)' for this Topic.
  - i. Document the recommended strategies on a F/C

## **Activity #6**

### **Whole Group Reflections**

Participants were then invited to take time to reflect on all the work completed to this point of the Summit. Individuals engaged in conversation with each other, identifying and considering themes that were important to advancing Wascana Centre Authority's strategic direction and priorities. This was a short whole group forum, moderated by the facilitator and aided by the use of hand-held microphones.

## **Activity #7**

### **Indicators of Success**

In Saturday's final segment, participants returned to their mandate area table groups, to provide some ideas regarding indicators of success. They were asked to revisit the thinking on their Opportunities Map and Mandate Area Vision Statement to answer the question: How will we know when we arrive? What indicators will tell us that Wascana Centre Authority is on the right path? Participants' were invited to share their work with the whole room as a 'Headline' or a 'Sound-byte'.

The proceeds from the Wascana Centre Stakeholders Summit were documented and re-distributed to all participants after the Wascana Centre Authority management, staff and Board dialogue activities had been completed.

## **3. ENGAGING THE INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS**

Our Board and in particular our Executive Director, believed it was critical that our staff, who not only have a long history with the Centre but also have a keen interest in the direction that it can take, would be involved in the process from the beginning. Their involvement was agreed to be voluntary and two alternate dates were selected for their participation. While not 100 % involvement was realized, a large number of management as well as office and field personnel took a very active part in the process. It must be noted that many of our Directors, during the process, were actively engaged with the external stakeholders and the staff of the Wascana Centre. This involvement of decision makers with those who are affected by those decisions brings clarity to future direction.

The 'Appreciative Interview Process' (described under separate heading) was the first step in the internal stakeholder involvement. The participants were paired with individuals that they normally would not know or work closely with. With a prepared interview guide, they interviewed one another and recorded stories/responses that they heard. Stories/responses were then compiled and used as input for the November 15<sup>th</sup> Internal Stakeholder Dialogue.

The participation of the staff was extremely high. At the October 25<sup>th</sup> session there were 28 staff present and at the November 4<sup>th</sup> session there were 19 staff.

November 15<sup>th</sup>, was scheduled as a day for strategic dialogue among internal stakeholders. Input to this session included the summary from the External Stakeholder Summit as well as the summary of themes that emerged from stories/responses from the Appreciative Interviews. 7 Board representatives, 6 management and 24 staff participated in the dialogue. They were organized into table groups with individuals they do not normally work with. Each table had at least one Board and one Management person. Using the input from the appreciative interviews and the input from the External Stakeholder Summit as a base line, participants engaged in dialogue about the strengths of Wascana Centre Authority as well as sharing their own sense of opportunities and aspirations. They then worked to identify

strategies that they believed would build from the strengths of today and advance WCA toward the opportunities aspired for.

The contribution of this experienced group of internal stakeholders was fundamental for the consulting team in the preparation of the draft 'Strategic Plan' to be reviewed by the Wascana Centre Authority Board.

### ***Appreciative Interview Process***

*"The most important thing we do as consultants is inquiry. We try to read situations, we do organizational analysis and diagnosis. It all starts with inquiry. The key point is that the way we know is fateful. The questions we ask, the things that we choose to focus on, the topics that we choose determine what we find. What we find becomes the data and the story out of which we dialogue about and envision the future. And so, the seeds of change are implicit in the very first questions we ask"*

**- David Cooperrider, Case Western Reserve University**

An AI Discovery Interview Protocol consists of a series of questions aimed at exploring the following:

1. High point successes
2. What is valued most—in yourself, your work, your community or organization
3. Images of the future

The questions are always focused on two or more (typically less than 5) relevant topics for inquiry. Participants are encouraged to listen carefully and to inquire deeply into each other's responses. The inquiry begins with one-on-one interviews so that the base of information that emerges and informs the strategic dialogue is grounded in the experience, wisdom, values, and aspirations of each participant. The appreciative interview experience provides a personal connection to the work that flows from it and the ultimate result of that work, in this case, the strategic plan for Wascana Centre Authority.

After the interviews were completed, the team needed a mechanism for *locating the themes that appeared in the stories*. *Locating the themes* includes the work of "mining" the data by looking for themes of life-giving forces in the interview data. In this case the consulting team 'themed' the stories / responses from the Appreciative Interviews conducted by employees, management and board and compiled these themes as input for the November 15<sup>th</sup> planning session. This approach (i.e. having the consulting team identify themes prior to the November 15<sup>th</sup> session) reflected the limitations of time available for engaging the internal stakeholders and, by creating multiple points for involvement, (i.e., two appreciative interview sessions and the November 15<sup>th</sup> strategic dialogue session), it was hoped that a maximum number of internal stakeholders could be involved through participation in at least one of the sessions.

During the November 15<sup>th</sup> session participants were instructed to review the 'themed' information that emerged with the objective of absorbing and digesting the learning from the appreciative interviews conducted by their colleagues in the organization. (Notice that we do not say, "analyze the data.") The search here is not for the norm, the most mentioned idea, even the best idea. The process of absorbing and digesting data is one that allows people to take it all in and to react to the messages and meaning in ways that move the organization in the direction of the combined positive energy of the members. It is more about creating synergy than about consensus.

The output from November 15<sup>th</sup> day long planning session was summarized and provided to all participants and to the Wascana Centre Authority Board as input to their December 6<sup>th</sup> innovation strategy discussion.

#### **4. LEAD AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES**

This task was devoted to identifying and reviewing leading and innovative practices from other urban parks and related jurisdictions. The purpose of this was to ensure that any such interesting or 'leading edge' activities being pursued by these organizations were at least considered in the development of the strategic plan for the Wascana Centre Authority.

Leading organizations in this regard were identified through a combination of the consultants' familiarity with other similar operations and a review of web site information (e.g. from the US-based Project for Public Spaces). As well, some organizations were included on the list as they had some special significance or relevance to WCA (e.g. Meewasin Valley Authority was included as they are another major land-based agency funded by the Government of Saskatchewan; other provincial capital commissions were reviewed as it was known early on that becoming a provincial capital commission was one potential objective of WCA). In total, 11 organizations were profiled. These were:

- National Capital Commission, *Ottawa / Gatineau*
- BC Capital Commission, *Victoria*
- PEI Capital Commission, *Charlottetown*
- Meewasin Valley Authority, *Saskatoon*
- Assiniboine Park Enterprise, *Winnipeg*
- Niagara Parks Commission, *Niagara Falls*
- Toronto Region Conservation Authority
- Downsview Park, *Toronto*
- Central Park, *New York*
- Balboa Park, *San Diego*

It should be noted that not all organizations reviewed were exactly comparable to the WCA in terms of their mandates or activities. For example, the Meewasin Valley Authority and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority are essentially conservation authorities with a watershed orientation, which is a quite different mandate from that of the WCA. Nonetheless, because they are both organizations responsible for large parks areas and are offering recreational and educational programs to their users, there are some things that they are doing that can be considered by the WCA in the development of its own plan.

The information collected from each organization through a combination of literature review, web-site review and personal interviews, related to:

- date of establishment of the organization
- overview of its land base and facilities
- governance structure (including composition of the Board, advisory committees, etc.)
- strategic plan (vision, mission, goals, objectives, action areas)
- staffing and organization structure
- operating budget
- revenue generation
- attendance and utilization
- activities and recent projects
- web site reference
- citing of documents reviewed
- distillation of lead practices identified

The information collected from each organization through a combination of the last item on this list, the distillation of lead or innovative practices identified, was clearly the essential

purpose of the overall exercise. 'Leading' and 'innovative' practices were identified largely on a judgment basis: they represented activities or strategic directions that in the opinion of the consultants had the potential to differentiate and position the organization, in a compelling and positive way. While many lead practices identified related to the strategic direction or mandate of the organization, others reflected innovation in terms of organization structure, resource procurement, as well a number of minor areas were identified. All such innovative strategies and practices were identified as 'grist for the mill' in the strategic planning process.

The output of the Lead and Innovative Practices review was provided to the Wascana Centre Authority Board prior to their December 6<sup>th</sup> innovation strategies discussion.

## **5. INNOVATION STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT, SEQUENCING & PRIORITIZATION**

### ***Board Review of Potential Strategies***

December 9<sup>th</sup>, a meeting was held with the Board members and the Consulting Team to review the draft strategic plan information that emerged from the external and internal stakeholder involvement processes. The focus for discussion was on potential innovation strategies for each of the Wascana Centre Authority core mandate areas. This discussion served to inform the whole Board of key strategies that had emerged, and created an opportunity for them to hear each others perspectives on these potential strategies. As one can imagine there was a lot of enthusiasm and passion evident in this discussion. At the conclusion of this meeting the Board agreed that the Strategic Planning Committee was to further evolve the strategic plan and then re-engage the Board for final review and approval.

### ***Priority Setting and Implementation Planning***

December 16<sup>th</sup>, following the December 9<sup>th</sup> meeting with the Board, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee and the Consulting Team met to continue the review of potential strategies that had emerged from the strategic planning process. The consulting team prepared an approach to prioritization and sequencing of the potential strategies to guide this next level of work by the combined team. A subsequent meeting was scheduled for January 5<sup>th</sup> to finalize this prioritization and sequencing. In addition, the Steering Committee asked the consulting team to spend time in specific areas that they felt the Board would need additional elaboration. The consulting team and Wascana Centre Authority Executive Director met two additional times to further the work and prepare for the January 5<sup>th</sup> meeting. A final review meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee was convened on January 25<sup>th</sup> during which they affirmed the final work deliverables and prepared to present the strategic priorities to the whole Board at the February, 2006 Board meeting.

## **6. SUMMARY / EVALUATION**

Participant feedback was captured in two ways:

- Summit reflections at the end of day SUMMIT Saturday; and
- Internet survey to all participants when the SUMMIT summary report was provided to them in PDF format on email.

Anecdotal comments report very positive experiences among both external and internal stakeholders of WCA. Having in excess of eighty – very busy – influential citizens participate in the two day SUMMIT is viewed as a success indicator. Of those who participated, 35 provided written feedback before leaving SUMMIT Saturday. Here are a few of excerpts from the participants, reflecting their immediate reaction to the SUMMIT experience:

### **SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT SUMMIT REFLECTIONS:**

#### **Appreciating Being Involved:**

- A great deal of receptiveness from all participants for different ideas and threads. I will acknowledge that the process did work despite concerns. I was skeptical on having all user groups present but it really worked as people moved past their positions. A valuable experience.

#### **Learning About Others and WCA:**

- The recognition and consideration of the rest of the community and the impact future development will have in other areas was recognized.
- Personally gained much insight and valuable networking.
- Gained a better appreciation of WCA and the diverse groups using the Park.
- Outstanding opportunity to bring community experience & knowledge together. There is an apparent need to increase funding.
- Although the different groups had different agendas, all have one common thing, they all require money. Funding is the thing that is the most needed.

#### **Enhanced Awareness of WCA Opportunities and Challenges:**

- Seems to be interest to have a regular role for a public advisory group to WCA.
- Hopefully the opportunity for a Regina Floral Conservatory in WCA takes flight and is in place by the next summit.
- I was most surprised like many others about Wascana's funding challenges i.e. the budget now as compared to 20 years ago. Obviously we need to look at long-term funding that involves more than just government.
- Accessibility to WC by all citizens (both physical and economically handicapped) needs to be verified and corrected where possible.
- Very concerned that the results will be integrated into changes for WCA, hopefully red herrings like a spa are given full vetting before anything is done.

#### **Valued the SUMMIT Approach:**

- Thoughtful process.
- Good process, however, while the focus on 'positives' is a good approach there is an opportunity to learn from the 'negatives', perhaps some time could have been dedicated to that angle.
- The paired interview process was an excellent way to begin the process, as it encouraged people to think above the Park, in what seemed to be generally a positive manner.
- Great spirit of cooperation.
- I would like to congratulate Wascana Centre Authority in inviting many interest groups to participate as one voice.
- The many stakeholders in the 5 mandate areas showed great respect for each other.
- The thought of the time commitment was daunting. Now that I've attended for the entire summit I feel refreshed in knowing that there are so many interested partners to WC forward.

- I am disappointed 'YOUTH' was not a topic. As we look to the future we need to incorporate YOUTH in every aspect from top-down for it will be the yoke upon their shoulders to continue/strengthen what we have started.

## LEARNING FROM THE WEB-SITE SURVEY –

22 participants responded to the web-based survey administered in mid-December 2005 through early January 2006.

**(N= 20 respondents or more to each question)**

- 90% report that they feel their participation in the Stakeholder Summit provided them with a moderate to great opportunity for meaningful input;
- 90 % report that their participation in the Stakeholder Summit enhanced their understanding of Wascana Centre to a moderate or great extent;
- 85% report that their participation in the Stakeholder Summit enhanced their understanding of Wascana Centre Authority to a moderate or great extent;
- 95% report that they feel their participation in the Stakeholder Summit gave them greater insight to the value others derive from Wascana Centre to a moderate or great extent;
- 100% report that their participation in the Stakeholder Summit gave them greater insight into the hopes and visions others have for the future of Wascana Centre to a moderate or great extent;
- 100% report that their participation in the Stakeholder Summit broadened their personal perception of the value Wascana Centre provides to our community to a moderate or great extent
- 90 % of respondents reported that they have reported on and / or shared their Stakeholder Summit experience with others in the group or organization that they represented;
- 50% of the respondents reported that their participation in the Stakeholder Summit, combined with their sharing or reporting on their experience, enhanced the level of commitment their organization has toward future collaboration with Wascana Centre Authority;
- Attributes of the SUMMIT that were perceived to be VERY IMPORTANT to overall SUMMIT success as reported by more than 50% of survey respondents included:
  - Organization of the facilitation and support team to keep the flow of the Summit moving.
  - Overall skill of the facilitation team to keep participants engaged, focused and enthusiastic about the Summit process.
  - Sharing of stories at Table Groups to generate WC Positive Core Mosaic
- 85% of respondents reported that, in their view, stakeholder summit's, are an effective approach to engaging community stakeholders;

The Wascana Centre Authority Strategic Planning process was designed to be a high-involvement process with the intended outcome of generating quality innovation strategies, grounded in external and stakeholder perspectives. The approach to engaging stakeholders has been reported as effective in both the Summit Reflections feedback and by the 22 participants who completed the on-line survey. The innovation strategies generated have been approved by the WCA Board. This document has chronicled this experience with the goal of assisting other Urban Parks or Community Groups as they consider how best to engage stakeholders in the development of strategy or implementation of strategic initiatives important to their organizations.

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