



CHINATOWN COMMUNITY WORKSHOP



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1 INTRODUCTION



Background Summary

This report details the Community Workshop process and results that took place on September 22 and 23, 2012. The Community Workshop considered the area from Jasper Avenue to 107 A Avenue, between 95 Street and 101 Street. The consultation was to examine and study the following challenges within this area:

- The incorporation of the Southeast to West Light Rail Transit (LRT) line along 102 Avenue;
- Reconstruction or relocation of the Harbin Gate on 102 Avenue due to the LRT; and
- Connection of Chinatown North (also referred to as Commercial Chinatown) and South (also referred to as Historic Chinatown).

To address the challenges regarding incorporation of the Southeast to West LRT line along 102 Avenue, the City of Edmonton Transportation Services was directed by Edmonton City Council to consult with the Chinese and Boyle Street Community (LRT Working Group) regarding:

- Streetscaping, planning and the design of the LRT portal and station (including egress and access issues);
- Construction/moving/relocating the Harbin Gate and other related issues with respect to LRT development in the area; and
- That Administration review the opportunity to create an additional site specific experience for a community gathering place.

Introduction

As a result of this ongoing consultation, on June 26, 2012, the LRT Working Group representing the Edmonton Chinese Cultural community, the Boyle Street community and the Riverdale community submitted a discussion paper entitled Community Consultation, Downtown LRT Concept Plan, Southeast-to-West LRT Community Response in response to the LRT design proposals.

By this letter, the community expressed a desire for a unified planning process involving a wide representation of stakeholders in order to address elements of neighbourhood experience and cultural space. Although the need for community workshops may have stemmed from anticipated changes associated with the construction of the LRT, it was suggested that planning and consultation be carried out with a focus on restoring and enhancing neighbourhood balance.

Following the community's recommendation and Council's mandate, the City of Edmonton Sustainable Development - Urban Renewal Section led a two day workshop to discuss ways to address impacts associated with the LRT alignment, while coordinating and leveraging a number of planning initiatives intended to enhance the Chinatown community.

2 AGENDA

The following Agenda was used to guide the Chinese Community Workshop, September 22-23, 2012:

Day 1 Saturday, September 22, 2012

- 9:00 AM Welcome and introductory remarks - Mary Ann Debrinski (Director, Urban Renewal, Housing and Economic Sustainability, City of Edmonton Sustainable Development)/ Councillor Jane Batty
- 9:30 AM Knowledge sharing presentations
- 11:00 AM Coffee break
- 11:15 AM Explanation of the workshop process - Antonio Gómez-Palacio (DIALOG)
- 11:30 AM Question 1 – break out session/ reporting back to group
- 12:30 PM Lunch break
- 1:00 PM Question 2 – break out session/ reporting back to group
- 2:00 PM Question 3 – break out session/ reporting back to group
- 3:00 PM Nourishment break
- 3:15 PM Question 4 – break out session/ reporting back to group
- 4:15 PM Debrief: Wrap up and next steps

Day 2 Sunday, September 23, 2012

- 9:00 AM Welcome and introductory remarks - Walter Trocenko (Branch Manager, Housing and Economic Sustainability, City of Edmonton Sustainable Development)/ Councillor Jane Batty
- 9:30 AM Presentation to group (review of previous sessions and expectations of second day)
- 10:30 AM Coffee break
- 10:45 AM Question 1 – break out session/ reporting back to group
- 12:30 PM Lunch break
- 1:15 PM Question 2 – break out session/ reporting back to group
- 2:30 PM Question 3 – break out session/ reporting back to group
- 4:00 PM Workshop conclusion and wrap up

3 FORMAT



The two day workshop was held Saturday September 22 and Sunday, September 23, 2012 at the Delta Centre Suite Hotel and Conference Centre.

Day 1 kicked off with a series of knowledge sharing presentations to establish a collective baseline level of information. Key representatives spoke on the following topics:

- Background on Edmonton's Chinese Community (Mei Hung);
- The Quarters (Mary Ann Debrinski);
- Possible Repurposing of the Remand Centre (Mary Ann Debrinski);
- Development of a Performing Arts Centre (Duncan Fraser);
- Development of the Royal Alberta Museum (Duncan Fraser);
- Downtown Catalyst Projects (Duncan Fraser);
- Civic Precinct Master Plan (Duncan Fraser);
- McCauley Revitalization Strategy (Jane Molstad);
- Possible modification, replacement or removal of the 97 Street bridge (Zanette Frost);
- Potential designation of Church Street (David Holdsworth);
- LRT Updates (Nat Alampi); and
- Development of the Armature (Kevin Dieterman).

After the knowledge sharing presentations, participants were divided into five groups to workshop the following four questions related to enhancing the Chinese community within the Quarters area:

1. The Chinese Community is losing their celebration space along 102 Avenue. How should this be replaced?
2. What should be the design of the LRT and the LRT Portal?
3. How should historic and commercial Chinatowns be linked?
4. What should be done to the Harbin Gate?

At the conclusion of each working session, one participant provided a 'report back' to the larger group, highlighting the key ideas and points of discussion.

City staff and facilitators categorized and summarized the emergent themes and ideas from the first of the workshop, and generated four new questions (and two accompanying maps - see Appendix A/B) that warranted further discussion and refinement the following day.



Day 2 started off with a present-back to the larger group recapping the ideas from the previous day, and framing of the second day of workshopping. The format followed that of the first day with participants breaking out into five groups to tackle three questions:

1. How can these spaces best accommodate community celebrations? Are there opportunities for large and small events?
(Identified on map - Appendix A)
2. How can these corridors be designed to draw people between Chinatown North and Chinatown South? How would each of these potential Harbin Gate locations function best?
(Identified on map - Appendix B)
3. Are there other considerations or ideas that you would like to discuss that may inform future work in the Quarters?

4 PARTICIPANTS



More than 40 individuals participated in the workshops, with representation from both the North and South Chinatowns. Additionally, city staff from Sustainable Development and Transportation Services assisted with workshop facilitation.

5 OUTCOMES



The following section provides a summary of the key themes, ideas, and discussions that emerged over the course of the two day workshop.

Day 1 – September 22, 2012

Question # 1

The Chinese Community is losing their celebration space along 102 Avenue. How should this be replaced?

The groups identified many potential areas to replace the former celebration space along 102 Avenue. Four of the potential areas generated broader support and interest:

1. The proposed Armature (96 Street) that is to be developed as part of The Quarters Urban Design Plan;
2. 102A Avenue between 95 and 96 Street;
3. A triangular parcel of land along 102 Avenue; west of 95 Street; and
4. The east west portion of laneway between 102 and 102A Avenue from 95 to 96 Street.

A fifth option which was supported by two of the groups included a promenade space on top of the track/portal with a recognition of challenges regarding expense and structural support.

In order to determine the preferred option, participants outlined key requirements for the replacement space. The space needed to be safe and comfortable, easily accessible and within close proximity to community members (especially seniors), highly walkable, and allow for a variety of programming events at different scales. Also, participants expressed the need for washroom facilities, adequate parking, storage, and additional provisions for indoor space in the case of poor weather.

For the vast majority of participants, the forthcoming development of the Armature located along 96 Street from Jasper Avenue to 103A Avenue represented the best alternative to the existing space. The Armature which will include space for a wide variety of formal and informal activities is located immediately adjacent to the Chinese Cultural Centre, providing an accessible location that is convenient and walkable. Key proposed features include:

- A winter skating rink;
- Open area for sports and events;
- Themed gardens;



- Promenade;
- Public Squares;
- Fountain;
- Urban balcony; and
- Unique streetscape elements (paving, lighting, street furniture, etc.).

Additionally, given that the Armature project is still in the early phases of design, opportunities exist for design input and discussions around amenities (such as street furniture, aesthetic treatments, and washrooms). It was noted that the Armature would allow the North and South Chinatowns to coordinate celebration activities.

The other options identified provided valuable insight to the area but posed challenges. For example, the triangular parcel of land was viewed as too small to adequately fulfill the requirements of the current celebration space. Some participants thought the laneway behind the Chinese Cultural Centre might be appropriate for smaller events, but further discussion revealed several key challenges, including a constrained space with little visibility, no direct frontages, and having inadequate exposure to sunlight.

Some groups felt that 102A Avenue was a viable option, particularly in the interim as the Armature project is under construction. It was noted that capital investments for celebration space along 102A Avenue should be minimal, with resources being directed towards the preferred option along 96 Street.

Question# 2

What design do you envision for the LRT portal to enhance its integration into the Quarters area?

While admittedly changing the look and feel of 102 Avenue, the introduction of the LRT portal structure was viewed as an opportunity to introduce another 'bold landmark' for Chinatown, which 'draws on neighbourhood architecture' and provides a 'life-enhancing forum for artwork'. The groups indicated a preference for a sloped, open and transparent design for the LRT portal structure. There were a number of ideas generated to enhance and improve the integration of the LRT portal into the Quarters area, including:

- Prioritize designs that are light, open, high quality and transparent, with a minimalist presence on the streetscape;
- Reduce overhead visual pollution of wires;



- Look at spacing structural elements further apart to reduce the visual impact;
- Use of traditional Chinese colours for the LRT portal structure elements. Specifically, it was suggested to use red for the pillars (which signifies happiness and prosperity) and green or yellow for the roof;
- Draw on existing architecture (Chinese Cultural Centre, Harbin Gate etc.) for design cues. This might include the continuation of the Harbin Gate Chinese roof lines across part of the LRT portal structure;
- Balance traditional Chinese elements with more contemporary features;
- Incorporate glass between girders as a transparent element, with opportunities for etched symbolic artwork, zodiac signs, or poetry;
- Enhance and recognize 102 Avenue as Harbin Road by continuing and incorporating the design theme of the Harbin Gate and Chinese Cultural Centre into the LRT portal structure;
- Provide a fluid shape (possibly with arched struts) to the LRT portal structure, rather than a static object;
- Ensure the LRT portal structure is visually interesting from all angles, including from overhead where residents of the Chinese Cultural Centre will have a view;
- The portal structure should act as a gallery for local artwork, with opportunities to view artwork from the street and inside the LRT vehicle;
- Incorporate light fixtures and illumination;
- Ensure the safety side wall structure is of a high-quality design that is integrated into the existing street fabric;
- Incorporate seating surfaces into safety side wall structure;
- Provide a continuous design theme from the LRT portal structure through to the neighbourhood LRT stop; and
- Address safety of seniors and connectivity across 102 Avenue.

Question # 3

How should historic and commercial Chinatowns be linked?

Edmonton's Chinatown is currently located in two distinct areas - one is within the Boyle Street Community and the second is in the McCauley Community. They are referred to as Chinatown South and Chinatown North. While they are relatively near one another, they are physically separated and are therefore appear disconnected.



One of the participants indicated that it would be more accurate to refer to 'historic' and 'commercial' Chinatowns as Chinatown South and Chinatown North, and this was adopted throughout the rest of the workshop. All of the participants agreed that it was important to strengthen connections between Chinatown North and Chinatown South for a variety of cultural and economic reasons.

The groups identified three primary connections between Chinatown North and Chinatown South:

1. Along 97 Street between 107A Avenue and Jasper Avenue;
2. Along 96 Street North towards 103A Avenue and west towards 97 Street; and
3. Along 95 Street North towards 103A Avenue and west towards 97 Street.

Of these, strengthening connections along 97 Street between 107A Avenue and Jasper Avenue seemed to be the preferred option. There were many ideas on how to accomplish this, including:

- Provide a continuous streetscape with continuity across all design elements, lighting, and street furniture;
- Develop and incorporate signage, branding, and wayfinding elements;

- Incorporate bilingual signage;
- Link the Heritage Trail with the Chinatown Trail;
- Extend connections South of Jasper Avenue towards the Chinese Garden;
- Create a series of pockets or nodes to re-inforce the linkage;
- Rename 97 Street as Harbin Road;
- Retention of Historic buildings;
- Coordinate celebrations, festivals, and events between the two Chinatowns;
- Develop Chinatown specific design guidelines; and
- Provide spaces for artwork along 97 Street.

There was also considerable discussion around what to do with the 97 Street bridge South of 105 Avenue. The City has expressed interest in retaining the bridge as it is an important east west pedestrian and bicycle connection. There were concerns in terms of the visual obstacle it presents for linking the two Chinatowns. Other concerns included safety and security. Workshop participants discussed redesigning the underpass to create a plaza or removal of the bridge - which was the general preference.



Question # 4

What should be done to the Harbin Gate?

The Harbin Gate will be disassembled during LRT construction and reassembled once the construction is complete. The City has indicated they will strive to re-erect the Harbin Gate where realistically feasible, in accordance with the community's wishes.

Four potential locations for the Harbin Gate emerged out of the workshop discussions:

1. The existing location;
2. Spanning 97 Street at the North side of Jasper Avenue to mark the original entrance to Chinatown with a potential to bookend the gate on 107A Avenue.;
3. Spanning 97 Street at the South side of 102 Avenue to strengthen the connection between the North and South Chinatowns; and
4. At the corner of Jasper Avenue and 95 Street angled towards the Southeast to provide an eastern Chinatown anchor to the Quarters Area.

Participants were aware that siting the Harbin Gate anywhere other than the existing location may require modification to the original structure.

Preferences for the future location of the Harbin Gate were mixed on the first day of the workshop, warranting further discussion on **Day 2**.

Day 2 – September 23, 2012

Day 2 provided participants with an opportunity for additional exploration and refinement of the concepts and ideas introduced the previous day.

Question # 1

How can these spaces best accommodate community celebrations? Are there opportunities for large and small events?

(Identified on map - Appendix A)

The four areas identified by participants during **Day 1** were revisited to refine and nuance ideas around the potential design of the spaces.

The Armature was reiterated as the preferred option by participants given its proximity and access to residents and services. Once built, the Armature is expected to accommodate a variety of events of different size and nature. Some participants indicated that a semi-permanent stage and/or outdoor amphitheatre structure would be an asset for performances or exhibits such as Chinese Opera concerts, Tai Chi demonstrations and winter ice sculptures. Future



development can be synergetic and should enhance the character of Chinatown through design treatments. It was generally agreed that the flexibility of the Armature will provide space for both large formal gatherings and smaller spontaneous events. As the design of the Armature evolves, the participants expressed a desire to provide input.

Some of the participants thought the laneway behind the Chinese Cultural Centre might be appropriate to accommodate smaller events, however other participants questioned the practicality of this option. Ideally the space would be partially covered to provide shelter. While the laneway is accessible for seniors, it lacks visibility and still needs to function as an access point for businesses and servicing.

It was clear that 102A Avenue was not ideal or preferred as a celebration space, but could potentially be used temporarily while the Armature is being developed.

Question # 2

How can these corridors be designed to draw people between Chinatown North and Chinatown South? How would each of these potential Harbin Gate locations function best? (Identified on map - Appendix B)

Workshop participants agreed that all of the streets connecting the North and South Chinatowns require a coordinated approach to wayfinding, lighting, streetscaping, plantings, and furnishings. Signage, banners, and branding should be used to strengthen the Chinatown identity. If the 97 Street bridge remains, it could be refurbished as a landmark feature to link the North and South Chinatowns.

97 Street was identified as the primary connecting street with a clear concentration of opportunities. Some suggested that 97 Street be renamed Harbin Road as a way to link the Chinatown North and South. Rather than relocating the Harbin Gate, some groups suggested providing new signage at the intersection of Jasper Avenue and 97 Street directing people North.

Currently, 97 Street lacks activity and primarily serves as a North-South route for vehicles. Transit options should be explored including shuttles, rickshaws, or tour buses. New retail, pedestrian oriented frontages, and destinations (a permanent food court was suggested) would inject some vibrancy. New developments including the Royal Alberta Museum and repurposing of the Remand Centre should give consideration to frontages on 97 Street. Redevelopment efforts along 96 Street (the Armature) will provide a better pedestrian connection.



Currently, the bridge creates a bottleneck of traffic along 97 Street and is perceived as a place for undesirable activities. Some participants maintained that the bridge should be removed, but conceded that if the 97 Street bridge remains, it could be refurbished as a landmark feature to link Chinatown North and South. If a new bridge is constructed, it should have a 'light and airy' design. Regardless of whether the 97 Street bridge is refurbished, replaced, or removed, it was agreed that the pedestrian environment needs to improve.

Question # 3

Are there other considerations or ideas that you would like to discuss that may inform future work in the Quarters?

Workshop participants used the last session of the day as an open forum to discuss any other considerations that may inform future work in the Quarters, and generated the following ideas and suggestions:

- Explore opportunities to 'tell the story of the place'. This could include artwork, statues, and inscriptions throughout the neighbourhood. The Quarters should have a unique identity.
- More consultation is required for around the future of the 97 Street bridge.
- Improve safety for seniors.

- Enhance connections between the Chinatowns and the River Valley. Perhaps provide an outdoor escalator to improve access.
- Continue the Armature further North and potentially connect it with Church Street.
- More schools are needed in the area to attract families.
- Cleanliness, safety, and lighting are all elements that could be improved upon.
- The community would benefit from additional amenities. It was noted that at present, Chinatown is missing a park within the neighbourhood.
- Incorporate more trees, enhance the neighbourhood urban canopy, and explore opportunities for urban farming.
- 'The Quarters' name is not liked by all. It was suggested by some participants to rename the area to be more representative of the community.
- Explore needs of homeless and transient population.
- Look into addressing social problems of the area - with compassion and inclusiveness.
- Look into urban agriculture opportunities.
- Increase police presence within the area.
- Need for innovative community garden space.
- Promote development to incorporate housing for a range of incomes.

Workshop participants expressed a desire to engage in future design processes and for additional consultation sessions to discuss challenges and opportunities.

6 ADDITIONAL INFO.



For more information, please contact:

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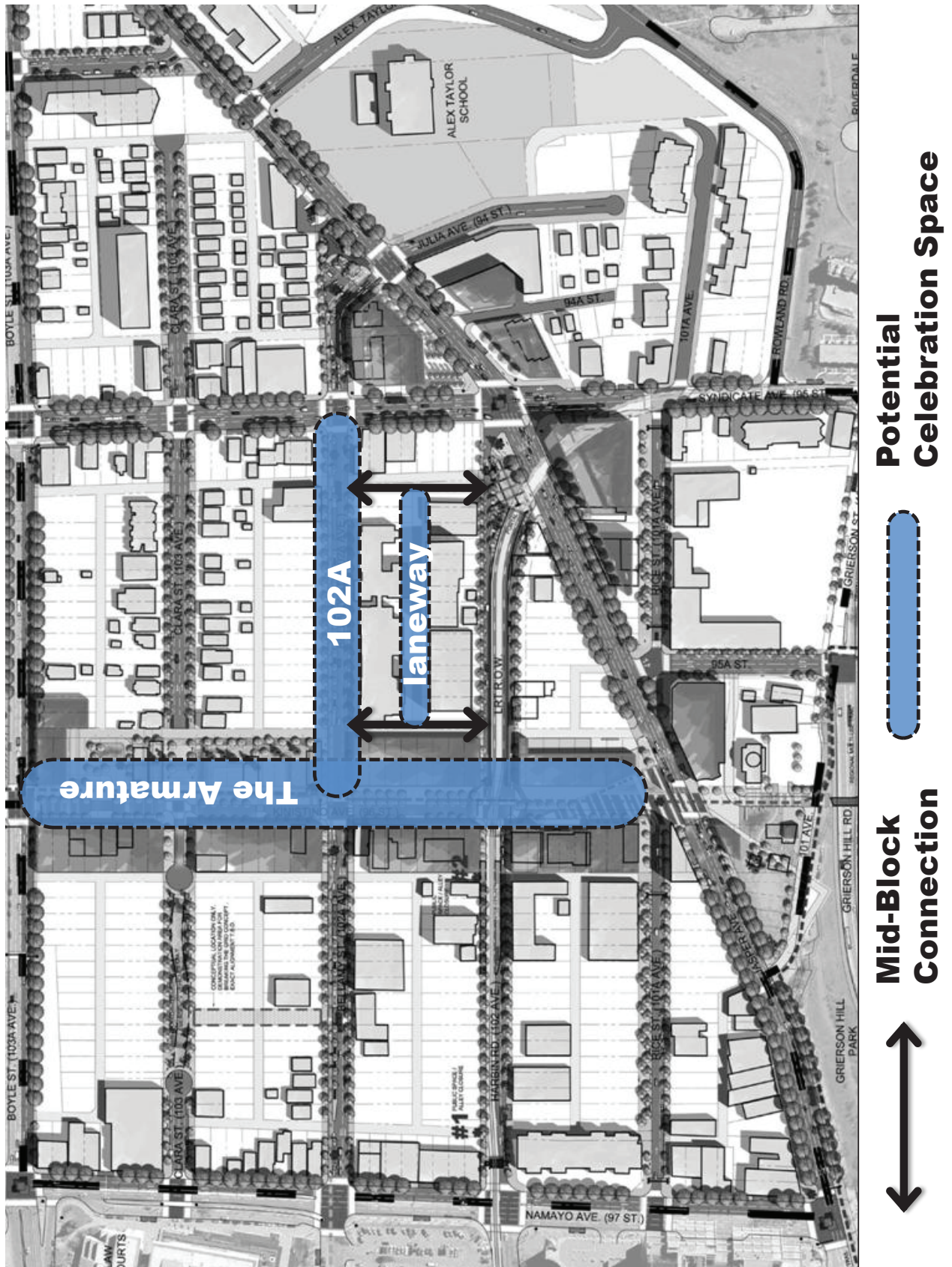
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APPENDIX A





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CHINATOWN
COMMUNITY
WORKSHOP

SUMMARY
REPORT

SEPTEMBER 22-23, 2012

Prepared by: **DIALOG®**