Initial draft of Work Plan for Comhairle na Gaidhlig, April 2012

The Consultation Process

As a platform for planning what activities we would focus our efforts on in the coming years, we sought to get a clear idea of priorities throughout the community regarding growing the Gaelic speech community. We undertook three initial focus group discussions, built interviews from this information, which we collected from twenty four people representing students, teachers, resource people, native speakers, government and community organizers. We then used interview responses to create a survey which 111 people filled out. This summary presents the outcomes of this consultation process.

The full report, along with a review of past planning work, and of the St. Andrew's Céilidh House Report from Fall of 2008, formed the basis for the development of a draft Work Plan for Comhairle na Gàidhlig.

The outcomes of the consultation process suggest that throughout the Gaelic community, there are few tasks which are favoured far more than others, and there are few tasks that are identified as unimportant. Also, for any one topic, there is typically a wide range of opinion as to its importance.

These outcomes reflect that Comhairle na Gàidhlig has a challenging job representing a community of individuals with diverging experience and opinion, yet all with a great passion for Gaelic. 'So many important things to do in order to grow the Gaelic speech community, and many opinions on what our role and priorities should be.' The data reflects our own sense that there are many important jobs that are urgent. Presented here are some of the strong themes that came forward in the process of reviewing the material.

Outcomes:

- **Advocacy:** This consultation identifies the role of advocating for Gaelic as the niche that the Comhairle best fills, although all other levels of the community should have a part. Much of the current advocacy work that we do is in raising awareness.

- **Partnerships:** Feedback reflects that the community, as a whole, believes that all levels of organization (individuals, parents, groups, the Comhairle and Gaelic Affairs) should be involved, to some degree, in all activities to support Gaelic. So trying to identify areas that the Comhairle can carve out a unique role is not easy. People acknowledge troubles with partnerships, and there is some ambivalence toward them, but most endorse them as necessary to get the work done. Comhailre should be an organization that works easily with other organizations and individuals, and has processes and policy in place to accommodate all sorts of collaboration, and we need to help make it easy for people from all corners to talk together and work together.

- **Children:** The community identifies children's programs as a critical need in terms of assuring a continuity of the Gaelic speech communities. If we hope to see a significant growth into the future in the speech community, we clearly need more children learning and speaking, and for their Gaelic to be supported in homes and communities where Gaelic is spoken. Individuals, parents, community groups, the Comhairle and Gaelic Affairs should

explore every potential for children's programs, activities and social opportunities. Programming needs to be community-specific and community-based.

- **Native Speakers:** The sense of urgency expressed by many relates to the small number of native speakers in our communities. The richness of the language is fully expressed by those who have spoken Gaelic for decades, and we hope to secure as much of this richness as we can for future generations. We therefore should find effective ways to involve native speakers in our community's growth that appeal to and meet the needs of the native speakers.

- **Communities:** There are regions that do not have ready access to native speakers, so their activities may rest on different models. In fact, each major region of activity – Halifax Regional Municipality, Antigonish, Pictou, Cape Breton - both rural and urban, has a unique set of challenges from depopulation to urban isolation, cost of services, to availability of instructors and learners, and so on. So there is no one model for all communities. Communities themselves have to examine their assets, and express their needs, so that the broader community can collectively address them. Institutions must provide meaningful support for community efforts.

- **Fund-raising:** Many see one of our roles as raising funds to support learning throughout the community. Funding exists for a whole variety of projects that we might undertake to support language learning. We have to undertake fundraising from sponsors and individuals to support our society's on-going administration, as programs typically don't fund that work. Fortunately, there are lots of options yet to be explored.

- **Guiding principles:** Just about every task has a fair amount of support from those surveyed, along with a number of people who identify it as unimportant or ineffective. The Comhairle has to identify the principles that will guide us, and hold our own course in pursuit of these principles, while not becoming complacent in the idea that we 'always know best'.

- **Diversity:** In terms of the 'barriers' considered in surveys, some of the issues that are considered as critical by those who have been involved in Gaelic development over the long term, are notably unimportant to a majority of people surveyed. This reflects the degree to which opinion varies within the community, the need for respect for diversity, and the importance of providing opportunities for dialogue around policy development, so that there is informed opinion on the many strategies used throughout the community.

- **Unity:** Many comments reflect misunderstanding or misconception, rather than opposed opinion. These disconnects feed frustration and can serve to diffuse effort rather than build on effort. People perceive that an 'us versus them' mentality is a important barrier to be overcome in Gaelic development. The provincial unity that the Comhairle represents appeals on this basis. Comhairle can serve as a mediator on many issues that simply need open dialogue.

The Draft Work Plan

Through a series of workshops hosted over a 2012 spring weekend, the Comhairle Board of Directors discussed the basic values that the organization should be upholding, the ideal role that the Council should be taking in Gaelic Development, and strategies to attain that goal, addressing a number of issues presented by the community.

The full value of the planning work is difficult to appreciate when looking at the outcomes on paper, however, the time that participants spent translating their values into tangible outcomes allowed these people from across the province to get to know each other and substantially strengthened the Board as a 'team'.

These are the projects developed, and we look forward the feedback on this draft work.

RAISING AWARENESS / ADVOCACY:

1. Honouring Our Elders

Collecting stories from elders around the question of why the language was not passed on to younger generations; stories from when people started school in English. Through a series of drama workshops, Gaelic learners create a play of the stories which would be presented, holding discussions after the play where people share their experiences and learning.

How does this project respond to an identified need within the Gaelic community?

- Breaks isolation of Gaelic speakers and former Gaelic speakers.
- Build awareness of why the language has struggled to survive among Gaels, and other cultures will learn about struggles as well.
- Connects youth with elders
- Honours our elders, and promotes healing throughout the community by acknowledging the experience.

2. Gaelic Awareness Month Campaign: "You May be a Gael if ..."

Compile a list of 'Gaelic' characteristics to be circulated throughout the community and to the press for May 2012, including at An Là Mór.

How does this project respond to an identified need within the Gaelic community?

- Creates awareness using humour about commonalities, a realization of a shared, whether perceived or not, connection to Gaelic culture

PROVIDING LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES:

3. Board Language Development

- Regional tutors work with Gaelic Affairs to deliver monthly instruction on meeting vocabulary, ad well as build general language skills.

How does this project respond to an identified need within the Gaelic community?

- The Comhairle recognizes that a concerted effort is needed to introduce and normalize the use of Gaelic in our business.

4. Workshopping

Comhairle-sponsored immersion training to support teaching capacity.

How does this project respond to an identified need within the Gaelic community?

- Language workshops provide an opportunity to increase the number of Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia by developing our teaching capacity.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVE:

5. Asset Mapping

Asset mapping of the Gaelic Community in Nova Scotia includes, statistics on numbers of speakers and levels of proficiency in speech community; participation in cultural expression, i.e. what kinds, frequency of participation, professional acumen, etc.; individual economic impact through language and cultural pursuits and participation; institutional and organizational programs and services and economic impacts.

Working with Gaelic Affairs and the province's Community Counts program, Comhairle na Gàihdlig would focus on working with communities to identify the built, natural and cultural resources that community group already access, or could access. We

How does this project respond to an identified need within the Gaelic community?

While many have a broad knowledge of what is available in terms of resources and services, many do not, and there is no real inventory available. Compiling a directory of resources has benefit, however, the process of mapping out the assets within a community inevitably turns up unrecognized assets and opportunities for collaboration. This is an opportunity for local communities to look inward, examine their opportunities and realize our strengths.

PARTNERSHIPS / RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:

6. Unified Business Plan

Evaluate the efforts of the organizations, and explore co-ordination of responsibilities and potential synergies. Potential partners would be Comhairle na Gàidhlig, Gaelic Affairs, Highland Village, Gaelic College, Celtic Music Centre, Universities, Community/Other institutions/organizations

How does this project respond to an identified need within the Gaelic community?

Exploring how co-ordination of the business plans and projects amongst the primary Gaelic organizations and institutions in Nova Scotia may assist in making more efficient use of resources at hand, and encourage collaborative planning.

ESTABLISHED PROGRAMMING

The following are activities already defined as part of the Comhairle Work Plan:
- **Senior's project**: community-led visits to and among native Gaelic speakers, facilitated by fluent speakers and accompanied and assisted by Gaelic learners
- **Inventory of Gaelic speakers**: On-going research on Gaelic speaking capacity in Nova Scotia, in conjunction with the Asset Mapping project.
- **Fundraising**: exploring substantial fund-raising activities.
- **Asset-Based Community Development Workshop**: Supporting Asset Mapping project