

Greater Sudbury Museums Review

Presented To:	City Council
Meeting Date:	December 14, 2021
Type:	Managers' Reports
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Recommended by:	Chief Administrative Officer

Report Summary

This report provides recommendations and responds to the direction emanating from Council's 2021 Budget deliberations, where staff were directed to provide options for the future of the Museums Section. The report summarizes the current state and recommends a direction.

Resolutions

Resolution 1:

THAT a budget amendment be considered during the Finance and Administration Committee's review of the 2022 Budget which:

- a) provides up to \$210,000 in one-time funding from the Capital General Holding Account Reserve for the purpose of developing a Museums Revitalization Business Plan for consideration as part of the 2023 Budget;
- b) Maintains the suspension of Greater Sudbury Museum services throughout 2022 so staff can focus on developing the plan recommended in part a), organize existing collections and secure existing facilities;
- c) Notwithstanding the continued suspension of regular operations recommended in b), staff provide full support throughout 2022 for special events at museum sites as well as the onsite activities of community partner organizations; and

Resolution 2:

THAT current, approved plans for the Flour Mill Museum project be amended as follows: a. Permanent fencing be installed at the Flour Mill Museum; and
b. Suspend plans for the construction of a storage and administration building at the Flour Mill Museum and the funds instead be considered as a funding source for implementing recommendations anticipated from the forthcoming Museums Revitalization Business Plan.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report refers to the goals identified in the City of Greater Sudbury Strategic Plan 2019-2027 under and "Asset Management and Service Excellence." There are no direct connections to the Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

Financial Implications

If Motion 1 is approved as presented, up to \$210,000 in one-time funding will be funded from the Capital General Holding Account Reserve. If Motion 2 is approved as presented, the cost to complete the permanent fencing (approximately \$90,000) would be funded by the Flour Mill Relocation Project Capital Account and the remaining balance, approximately \$410,000, would be held in contemplation of funding future capital requirements anticipated from the forthcoming Museums Revitalization Business Plan.

Introduction

The City of Greater Sudbury Museums Section is at a crossroads. Since amalgamation, museum services and their associated municipal funding have remained essentially unchanged. There have been known challenges identified regarding governance, facility renewal and infrastructure needs, artifact conservation and program resources. Council's direction to present options for the future of museum services prompted staff to conduct an in-depth review of the section that not only involved staff time, but also included the assistance of outside heritage expertise.

Letourneau Heritage Consultants (LHC) were originally retained in 2020 to provide an assessment of the CGS museum system intended to assist staff in determining the final configuration of the relocated Flour Mill Museum at O'Connor Park. As a result of Council's direction to review overall museum operations during 2021, LHC was reengaged to expand on their earlier work and provide a more detailed analysis of potential future operations for Greater Sudbury Museums. This included describing a process to wind down museum operations, if that was the selected direction.

The LHC Report "Greater Sudbury Museums High-Level Review of Operations", attached as Appendix A, describes some of the challenges identified above recommends immediate and long-term actions. This expert report also clarifies the heritage industry standards for acquiring, cataloguing, storing and disposing of museum artifacts. Finally, the report outlines a process to end museum operations in an appropriate manner, should Council decide to do so.

Staff generally support the experts' conclusion that, despite the current challenges, the City of Greater Sudbury Museums Section has the potential to provide an effective level of service that provides significant community value. However, this requires an increased investment based on a clear vision for the service's intended outcomes, guided by a community advisory body. Staff recommends that Council approve additional one-time funding for 2022 to allow for the development, with public input, of a strategy for the future of museums. If approved, recommendations would be considered as part of the 2023 budget.

If, instead, there is a decision to wind down museum operations, one-time funding will still be required to ensure adequate staff and other resources are available to assess and dispose of museum artifacts in a manner consistent with the CGS' obligations as a steward of community heritage. This alternate direction would require a resolution generally like the one described later in this report instead of the recommended motions.

Background

The level of resources provided to the Museums Section for its operations has remained essentially unchanged since amalgamation. Based on the service provided by predecessor municipalities at four sites, Greater Sudbury Museums operates with one permanent staff position and a number of seasonal student positions with a relatively small budget for programming and promotion. Over the past two decades, the structural challenges for these heritage sites have increased significantly, as have the community's expectations for relevant programming and the demands to stay current with industry best practices.

In 2019, two initiatives drew additional attention to the service that prompted staff to re-evaluate the current service level. The first initiative was the relocation of the Flour Mill Museum from the Charles Street location

to O'Connor Park. The museum's Charles Street property was required to allow for the expansion and redevelopment of a sewage lift station. The move to O'Connor Park, while generally seen as positive in terms of increased exposure and improved facility access, nonetheless prompted a significant amount of work and expense in a context where, in hindsight, the strategic benefits and overall goals were not clearly identified or described.

The second initiative in 2019 was the CGS Auditor General's governance review of the Greater Sudbury Public Library (GSPL). The Auditor General found that:

The City does not recruit and appoint separate members to an Advisory Panel to oversee the City's museums in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act and applicable governance standards for community museums.

The Auditor General recommended that, following the next municipal election, the CGS recruit and appoint members to a Museums Advisory Panel to meet the requirements of the Ontario Heritage Act and the governance standards for community museums.

In 2020, in response to these events, staff initiated a review of museum operations, service levels and resource allocations. There was a specific focus on determining if, from an overall systems perspective, a new storage and administration building should be constructed at the Flour Mill Museum. This work was delayed by the City's pandemic response and challenges with obtaining the required third party expertise. Nonetheless, LHC was engaged in September 2020 and it completed a technical assessment and report. Staff anticipated bringing a report to Council in Q1 2021 recommending additional work to develop the museum services' strategic direction and clarify the City's role.

At this same time, Council was reviewing options for budget reductions associated with a COVID-19 response and in preparation for the 2021 Budget process. As part of this exercise, staff was directed to remove the salaries and program budget from the Museums Section. This reduction was included in the draft budget that was presented to Council in February of this year. On March 3, 2021, during the final budget deliberations, Council reinstated the salaries and program budget for 2021 on a one-time basis as follows:

Resolution FA 2021-24-A-1

THAT staff be directed to reinstate the budget for Museums in the amount of \$152,518 of one-time funding in the 2021 draft budget to maintain existing service levels to be funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve,

AND THAT staff return with a report to Council by Q3 of 2021 outlining the future of Museum Services and alternatives for Council's consideration.

As indicated, LHC was re-engaged to expand on the work undertaken in 2020 and complete a high-level review of the CGS Museums Section, its current status and future potential. In addition, considering Council's original decision to remove salaries and program funding, LHC was asked to describe the process required to cease museum operations and dispose of artifacts in accordance with the generally accepted practices and protocols for community museums in Ontario. The resulting report was just recently completed.

Discussion of Current Situation and Recommended Direction

There are five main concerns identified in LHC's review that should be addressed in any future scenario for museums operations: Governance and Structure, Vision and Strategy, Sites and Facilities, Artifact Conservation and Storage, and Staff Resources. These are examined in some detail in the LHC Report but are summarized here for discussion purposes.

Governance and Structure – As identified by the Auditor General, there is no longer a dedicated advisory body for Greater Sudbury Museums and this situation should be rectified. This advisory role has been filled by the GSPL Board for several years and it is not clear that this arrangement has significantly benefitted either party. Similarly, management of the Museums Section, and it's one permanent employee, has been the responsibility of GSPL staff.

Given the GSPL's recent governance changes and the evolution it is making to fulfill its own strategic outcomes, it is appropriate to re-examine both of these approaches. In keeping with the Auditor General's and LHC's recommendations, subject to Council's direction, staff will develop recommendations regarding draft terms of reference and implementation plan for a new Greater Sudbury Museums Advisory Panel.

Management of the Museums Section in future will be a subject for discussion as the GSPL finalizes a new operating agreement with the CGS. Although the GSPL Board has not adopted a position on the matter, the Auditor General's report draws a clear distinction between the requirements of the Ontario Heritage Act for museum operations and those of the Public Libraries Act. LHC indicates that most municipally operated museums in Ontario are linked with Recreational or Tourism services within the municipal structure.

Subject to Council's direction, staff will review these relationships, as well as a potential formal relationship with CGS Archives Section, and make recommendations to Council in 2022.

Vision and Strategy – This review emphasizes the need for Greater Sudbury Museums to have a clear, Council-supported vision for the role it plays within the community. This would assist in determining an appropriate focus for programming and artifact collections and would help shape a future strategic plan.

The process to develop a renewed vision will be undertaken once an advisory body is in place and will include community consultation as well as consultation with existing volunteers and stakeholder groups. This public process will also allow the community to help to define the role of the museums in relation to Indigenous peoples within our region and to public education in relation to truth and reconciliation. The resulting strategy will then be available to guide staff and Council on decisions related to capital investment and programming.

Sites and Facilities – The Museums Section operates four sites across the CGS at Anderson Farm in Lively, the Copper Cliff Museum, the Flour Mill Museum and the Rayside Balfour Museum in Azilda. All of these sites were in place prior to amalgamation and are not the result of a specific, coordinated strategy. With the exception of Rayside Balfour, the sites are in heritage structures that have significant maintenance and asset renewal requirements. Many of these issues are detailed in the LHC report. Similarly, museum artifacts are also stored at the former Falconbridge Arena, a cemetery storage building in Lively and the GSPL Main Branch.

Over the past ten years, the City of Greater Sudbury has allocated approximately \$2 million towards facility capital renewal, including the budget for the Flour Mill Museum relocation. Subject to Council's direction from this report, additional capital requirements remain, particularly the need for secure storage that meets industry standards for climate control and building load capacity. These needs could be specifically defined once a renewed vision and strategy exists to guide decisions about what is required and how it is best delivered.

The original concept for the Flour Mill Museum relocation included a new building for site administration and storage. This was put on hold in the fall of 2020 until a clearer strategy was developed for the museums as a network, with identified needs for storage and administration space. For now, staff recommend that permanent fencing be installed around the relocated buildings at O'Connor Park and the balance of the remaining capital funds for the overall project, approximately \$410,000, be held in reserve pending additional recommendations which will come forward in the proposed business plan.

Artifact Conservation and Storage – As discussed above and outlined in detail in the LHC report, the Museums Section is challenged by the number of artifacts that it is responsible for. The challenges relate to both maintaining standards regarding curation and conservation, as well as providing appropriate and sufficient storage. The closure of museums to the public since the beginning of the pandemic allowed staff to devote additional time to cataloguing and conserving materials. This provides an improved foundation for decisions regarding appropriate retention and use of artifacts in museum programming.

Artifacts need to move out of inadequate storage locations into more appropriate facilities and continued work is required on cataloguing and sorting the collection to ensure it aligns with a clear strategy for the service. Staff will immediately freeze further acquisitions until this process is complete and a clear collections

acquisition policy is in place. Staff also recommend that regular museum operations remain suspended for 2022 to allow this focused work to continue. Subject to Council's direction, access to sites and support for partnerships, online programming and special events, such as those staged by the Anderson Farm Museum and Historical Society, would be supported as long as public health measures permit.

Staff Resources – it is clear that the current Museums Section staff complement of one permanent position is inadequate. Should Council accept the staff recommendation to develop a Museums Revitalization Business Plan in 2022, determining the appropriate service level for ongoing museum operations and evaluating the need for appropriate human resource requirements will be an important aspect of this work. At the same time, the use of summer students could potentially be reduced in favour of more consistent support staffing and more focused programming at the museum sites. A full analysis of these options would be provided by staff as part of the business plan.

Winding Down Museum Operations

If, instead, Council would prefer to wind down museum operations as it originally contemplated in the Draft 2021 Municipal Budget, an alternate motion would be appropriate. This alternate motion reflects LHC's advice that staff resources are required to implement a closure plan and manage the disposition of the museum collections.

It is important to note that, as discussed during 2021 budget deliberations, the elimination of the salaries and program budget from the Museums Section would result in the cessation of museum operations but would not impact the use of museum sites by community partner and volunteer organizations. Staff would work with these groups and make alternate arrangements to ensure facility usage agreements and special event support will continue.

An alternate resolution that puts this direction into effect could be as follows:

That the City of Greater Sudbury direct staff to develop and implement a plan to end the heritage operations and associated programming of the Greater Sudbury Museums by December 31, 2022, and

That staff is directed to establish alternate approaches to ensure continued access to museum sites and support for special events for community groups with existing relationships, and

That \$236,000 in one-time funding from the Capital General Holding Account Reserve be provided to continue Museums Section operations for 2022 to permit the orderly implementation of the directed plan.

Conclusion

Based on the internal review initiated in 2020 and the attached LHC report, staff agree that a museum and heritage conservation service at the City of Greater Sudbury is valuable. However, resources need to be increased to match service expectations, and those need to be established once a clear strategy exists that describes the outcomes the community wants from museums. Therefore, staff recommend the one-time restoration of the Museum Section salaries and program budget, initiated for 2021, be extended for an additional year.

Appendices

Appendix A – *Final Report: Greater Sudbury Museums High-Level Review of Operations*, LHC Heritage Planning and Archaeology, November 9, 2021

Resources Cited

Governance Audit of the Greater Sudbury Public Library – CGS Audit Committee, December 3, 2019
<https://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=feed&action=file&attachment=28150.pdf>