



Old Town Hall Committee Minutes

Date: May 13, 2024

Time: 7:00 pm

Old Town Hall - Public Meeting Open House

Council Members Present: Deputy Mayor Taraesa Tellier
Councillor Michelle Navackas

Members Present: Mona Blain, Chair
Noma McPhail

Staff Present: Terri Towstiuc, Clerk/Recording Secretary

Deputy Mayor Tellier and Councillor Navackas presented attendees with a slide show presentation, reviewing the timeline thus far for the Old Town Hall rehabilitation project.

In 2015, an Ad Hoc committee was established, and an engineer's report determined numerous contraventions with the Building Code, requiring significant repairs at a costly amount. Relocation commenced for Service Ontario, Tiny Tots and Rodney Senior's Club. The Public Washrooms closed July 1, 2015.

The building was declared vacant in 2019, with utilities disconnected, which were an annual expense to the Municipality of \$10,000. Staff and Council started exploring funding opportunities, and proposed renovations were presented to Council in fall 2019, with renovations costs at approximately 2.5 million. A grant application for the ICIP: Community, Culture and Recreation Stream - Rehabilitation and Renovation Intake was submitted on November 12, 2019, with the key objective to revitalize the historic community building, enhance services and meet AODA requirements. The grant was approved on July 6, 2021, for \$2,516,250, with the Municipality required to fund only \$671,084 of that amount.

In 2022, plans were created to showcase potential ideas and uses, and what could evolve to meet the future needs of the community. However, COVID-19 created many issues for the project including lack of labour due to "lockdowns" and government restrictions and regulation, halting construction services.

2024 cost has now risen to an estimated amount of \$5,000,000 for the same proposed project, and the project completion deadline for the revitalization is March 27, 2027.

Options were presented at the public meeting, included continuation with the project, or sale of the building. The consensus of the attendees was to keep the building, continue with the proposed project, and continue to keep the building as a community hub. The main floor has a commitment from Elgin Library at a lease amount of \$50,000 to move the main library within the Old Town Hall. Other opportunities for spaces to promote heritage and culture would be available. With a larger space, Janet Given, Library Supervisor, advised they will be able to offer more programming that they currently cannot due to lack of space. The upper hall would have potential for a certified kitchen and community/banquet hall.

Deputy Mayor Tellier advised that a meeting took place with Karen Vecchio, MP's office, who will be seeking confirmation of a potential extension to the grant deadline, and to bring the funds in line with "today's" 2024-dollar amount, to cover the shortfall of approximately \$2.5 million. A request was last submitted to Rob Flack, MPP's office as well for assistance.

The potential for Heritage Designation was discussed, however the designation would take approximately two years to obtain, and places significant restrictions for renovations.

Concerns were raised about the significant cost, and that those funds could be used for more critical areas of the Municipality. Questions were raised about obtaining commitment from other organizations to utilize the building, however many organizations will not provide commitment until the space is available for viewing. Return on investment and increased revenue is critical for this proposal to be successful.

The idea of housing (low income/geared-to-income) was discussed, with some residents expressing concerns with this concept as there are already numerous rentals within the municipality that are vacant, due to the high rental cost and lack of available amenities. This type of housing is also not a revenue driver for municipalities. Residents expressed the need for the upper hall and stage to create cultural experiences and attract visitors for cultural events.

Business owners expressed their concerns regarding public washrooms, and how their businesses have been affected by the removal of the town hall washroom facilities. Business owners are left with expenses from vandalism and cleaning, which have forced some to deny access to their washrooms for public

use. Public washrooms would support public events such as Toonie Tuesdays and market nights, eliminating the cost to service clubs to order port-o-johns.

Other comments and concerns included acknowledging that more funding is required, utilize the grant that has been provided, "build it and they will come", the possibility for a less elaborate plan to reduce the total cost, and the concern for public washroom monitoring/security to prevent future vandalism.

Approximately fifty (50) members from the community attended the public open house.