

**Item No. 8.1**

**Halifax Regional Council**  
**January 20, 2009**  
**February 3, 2009**

**TO:** Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council



**SUBMITTED BY:**

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Dan English, Chief Administrative Officer



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Wayne Anstey, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer - Operations

**DATE:** December 18, 2008

**SUBJECT:** Feasibility of the Former Dartmouth City Hall as Central Museum

**ORIGIN**

February 26, 2008 - Regional Council requests that, should the former Dartmouth City Hall building on Alderney Drive become vacant, priority be given to allowing the Dartmouth Heritage Museum Society (DHMS) first option to use the facility for museum purposes and that the Dartmouth Heritage Museum Society be given permission to conduct a feasibility study and due diligence on the property.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Regional Council:

1. accept the findings of the Feasibility Study, as described in the body of the report, which indicate it is not advisable to reuse the former Dartmouth City Hall for the purpose of a museum; and
2. direct staff to initiate a review of HRM's social heritage program and to develop options for Council's consideration;
3. approve the withdrawal of \$20,000 from the Cultural Development Reserve (Q312) to carry out the review.

## **BACKGROUND**

HRM's social heritage program consists mostly of a large collection and several buildings inherited from the City of Dartmouth (40,000 works and 3 buildings). This large collection comprises an unbalanced representation of regional history. HRM also inherited a small collection from Halifax and the Scott Manor House from the Town of Bedford. Each building is a Registered Heritage property maintained primarily because of its architectural or historic interest, not because of their suitability for collection management and interpretation. While HRM is fortunate to have these buildings, a central museum building is not among these.

At the time of amalgamation, the largest of the City of Dartmouth's museum facilities was the former Dartmouth library building located at 100 Wyse Road. This facility housed the primary museum collection and administrative offices. In 2002, due to environmental conditions, the facility was deemed no longer suitable for the museum. The building was eventually closed and demolished. Since then, the Evergreen and Quaker Houses, two Registered Heritage properties, have housed the administrative offices and exhibition space.

HRM's museum system is heavily dependent upon volunteers, and a few professional staff. The Dartmouth Heritage Museum Society (DHMS) is one such volunteer lead organization. The Society was established in 1999 to manage the former City of Dartmouth's heritage collection. The DHMS entered into a service agreement with HRM in 2002 that includes an annual grant of \$50,000 in exchange for "*managing, promoting, developing, operating and administering the Museum complex.*"

### **The Dartmouth Heritage Museum Society Proposal:**

The DHMS has indicated Evergreen House is no longer suitable for accommodating the display and interpretation needs of the collection nor the administration requirements of the museum. Moreover, the Society is concerned about the Joe Zatzman Drive facility and its suitability for storing the collection. The Society suggests that maintaining the status quo is not an option without consequences including:

- emerging difficulties in conserving the collection
- overuse of some aspects of the collection
- incremental small-scale losses of the quality of the assets
- failure to generate high levels of community participation

For these reasons, the Society has expressed an interest in using the former Dartmouth City Hall building for the purpose of a central museum and storage.

## **DISCUSSION**

In consideration of the DHMS's request, this discussion assumes Council values its collection and wants to care for it over the long term. In fact, because HRM has willingly accepted each piece of the collection, there is both a legal and moral obligation to care for and preserve the collection. Beyond this level of commitment however, staff do not presume that Council supports the concept of a central museum, as suggested by DHMS, nor the social heritage program as it currently exists.

### **A) Reuse of the former Dartmouth City Hall**

Mr. Siegfried Rempel of the Canadian Conservation Institute(CCI), a collection conservation consultant, was requested by the DHMS to assess the feasibility of using the former Dartmouth City Hall as a museum. Mr. Rempel spent a day touring the facility and submitted to the Dartmouth Heritage Museum Society a brief outlining his findings. The written brief was prepared for the Society and not intended for public consumption. As a result, staff have incorporated the findings in the following discussion.

Mr. Rempel confirmed the Society's suspicions that new storage, display and administrative spaces are needed, however, he suggests that adapting the former Dartmouth City Hall for this purpose is not ideal nor feasible. While the building has some advantages - location, accessibility, and a flexible internal space for conversion - Mr. Rempel found the disadvantages to be greater. The very fact that the proposal entails an adaptive reuse of a non-purpose built building immediately places it at an immediate disadvantage. Much of the building's space such as the round council chamber on the ground floor cannot be easily converted for the purpose of a museum. The building does not have a freight elevator which is essential for accommodating larger items in the collections. The lack of a loading dock at the ground floor level prevents ease of materials and collections transport, and would require a loading bay be added at the upper street level of the building.

Mr. Rempel also suggests that the building is limited in terms of expansion. The existing square footage of the building only accommodates the current collection and is not adequate for collection growth and program development. Finally, the report concludes that the building envelope would need extensive upgrading to accommodate the operating conditions required of the museum.

Furthermore, since Mr. Rempel's report was completed, staff have learned that the School Board will not be in a position to vacate the Dartmouth City Hall this year as originally planned by them, and that they will soon be approaching HRM Council to extend the lease for a few more years.

### **B) Review of HRM Social Heritage Program**

Mr. Rempel's visit to HRM also provided an opportunity for a high level assessment of HRM's existing collection management, interpretation and storage program. Mr. Rempel spent a day touring HRM's facilities and viewing the collections. A short brief was provided outlining his findings which have been incorporated as background information in the body of this discussion.

#### **1. Collections Storage**

It is a fact of museum life that most of the collections remain in storage at any one time, and that to realize the potential of a museum collection, it must be in good condition, safely stored, and accessible. Clearly, the usefulness of HRM's collection is limited if the care and maintenance are of low standards.

Mr. Rempel found that the Joe Zatzman Drive storage facility is placing the collection at risk and is unacceptable as a collection storage space. At a minimum, a museum storage facility needs to

be climate controlled, and well protected from exposure to harsh chemicals or other environmental conditions. Additionally, it should be secure and contain purpose-built storage equipment, and space to separate the collection that is free and unencumbered.

Unfortunately, the Joe Zatzman Drive facility has had problems with chemicals leaking from neighbouring tenants. Although the risk of a potentially damaging interaction was addressed, this was only a stop gap measure, and the risk of future interactions exists. Environmental control has also been an issue. Although dehumidifiers have been provided to limit high relative humidity conditions, they are exhausted directly to the exterior exposing the collection to extreme environmental elements.. Finally, dust has become an issue, and has been found on various horizontal surfaces within the storage space.

The physical security at the site poses a challenge. The cinder block walls separating adjacent commercial activities on each side of the storage facility are not continuous to the roof, and could easily be breached from the adjacent spaces without activating an alarm.

## **2. Collection Display**

Currently, the DHMS employs two curatorial staff who administer and interpret the collection from within Evergreen House. Mr. Rempel found that new administration and display spaces are needed to provide more access to a large portion of the collection which is not part of the period interpretation of the houses.

The report also notes that staff should undertake a review of the collection with the intent to resolve registration issues related to the collections. Mr. Rempel indicates that culling the collection of materials for deaccessioning is an important step to reduce the on-going operational demands within the museum. It is suggested that this important step, as well as the development of a focused collection and interpretation mandate, should begin prior to relocating to a central museum space.

## **C) Conclusion**

The current infrastructure supporting HRM's social heritage program is constrained, and new facilities are required to display and preserve the collections. The potential re-use of the former Dartmouth City Hall has been shown to be unsatisfactory for HRM. Ideally, a purpose-built facility for both storage and interpretation should be considered.

However, prior to pursuing new facilities, the focus, purpose, scope and direction of the Region's social heritage program needs to be determined. It is also important that this strategic planning process consider the full range of social heritage programming in HRM. This includes community museums and the provincial/federal museum and historic sites programs outlined in the following table.

<b>Community Museums</b>	<b>Provincial Museums</b>	<b>Federal Museums</b>
Acadian House Army Museum	Fisherman's Life Museum Museum of Natural History	Halifax Citadel Maritime Command Museum

<b>Community Museums</b>	<b>Provincial Museums</b>	<b>Federal Museums</b>
Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum Black Cultural Centre for NS Cole Harbour Heritage Farm Dartmouth Heritage Museum Fultz House Halifax Police Museum MacPhee House Memory Lane Heritage Village Moose River Gold Mines Musquodoboit Railway N S Sport Hall of Fame #31 Royal Cnd. Legion Military Scott Manor House Shearwater Aviation Thomas McCulloch Waverley Heritage	Maritime Museum of the Atlantic	Pier 21 National Historic Site Prince of Wales Martello Tower York Redoubt

While HRM is obliged to care for its collection, it does not have specific plans or policy respecting collections management, display and interpretation. Therefore, as an important next step, a comprehensive review of HRM’s social heritage program should be undertaken to identify gaps in the existing program, and define HRM’s specific niche and museum model. The work completed by Mr. Rempel to date confirms the importance of reviewing HRM’s existing approach to social heritage programming and provides a sound basis from which staff can begin to assess and plan.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

A review of HRM’s social heritage program will require \$20,000. This will be funded through the Cultural Development Reserve (Q312). The availability of funds has been confirmed by Financial Services.

**Budget Summary: Cultural Development Reserve (Q312)**

Cumulative unspent budget	\$ 120,000
Less: Cost to review Social Heritage program	<u>\$ 20,000</u>
Balance	\$ 100,000

**FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN**

This report complies with the Municipality’s Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation. The above will result in a withdrawal from reserves.

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**ALTERNATIVES**

1. Council accept the recommendations contained within this report.
2. Council may not accept the recommendations contained within this report

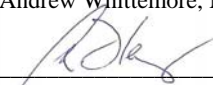
**ATTACHMENTS**

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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