

The following is an extract from the Beach Canal Lighthouse Business Plan report prepared for the BCLG by Canadian Cultural Resource Consultants and Goldsmith Borgal & Company Architects and delivered in June 2009.

Although “Beach Canal Lighthouse” is the local name for the site, the formal (federal) designation for the buildings is the “Burlington Canal Light Station”. For the purpose of local clarity (and contractual consistency) the consultants have used the local name throughout the report.

Executive Summary

General Comment

This report provides an analysis of a number of possible scenarios that the Beach Canal Lighthouse Group could consider in moving forward into a business plan. Four scenarios were developed (some with two iterations). From those scenarios, we have determined two options, which, in our opinion, would be the most appropriate given the complex issues of site, costs, long-term sustainability, and resources. The two options, which can be implemented in sequence, include capital costs and revenue/expense projections.

Approach to the Project

In this report, the options described are based on the assumption that all proposed interventions and materials for the restoration of the existing buildings – the Lighthouse and Keeper’s Cottage – would be considered as elements of a complete system and in accordance with current international policies related to the conservation of historic sites. In accordance with the same policies, all interventions should be reversible - as far as is practicable and technically feasible – so that the original elements of the buildings can be reconstituted if new information or methods of restoration become known in future.

Due to the importance of this site and the complexity of the conservation issues, we would recommend that, in moving forward, a consulting team be assembled with a well-established record of competence in industrial heritage conservation work of this type.

Options

After looking at several different scenarios (as outlined in section 3 of this report), we ultimately developed two options for consideration. Option One is a low-key site-specific restoration and interpretive site with a focus on the structures and features of the immediate site. Option Two is a more ambitious program with focus on both the immediate site and the broader cultural interests of the City of Hamilton and communities surrounding it. It will be up to the community to determine which response is best in terms of Options One or Two.

Option One

In Option One the Beach Canal Lighthouse site would be operated as a year-round operation within the existing buildings with a number of paid staff. This should be the minimum objective for the development of the site. It ensures restoration and use/occupancy of both structures and provides an interpretive function to illuminate this important heritage site to the immediate community and to passing visitors.

As discussed in this report, Option One is limited and will have little incremental beneficial effects for the City of Hamilton at large beyond adding the needed interpretation of a key part of the history of the city. However, it is a reasonable and responsible response to this important heritage resource and should be supported if Option Two cannot be funded.

Option Two

Option Two represents a much more sizeable commitment both in terms of initial capital cost and annual operating costs. In Option Two the Beach Canal Lighthouse site would be operated as a year-round operation with the introduction of a separate purpose-built building for an interpretive centre. The benefits to the community will be much higher than Option One in its ability to better showcase the themes of the industrial site, act as a gateway to attractions in the City of Hamilton and surroundings, and create a heritage/cultural function in an incredibly important heritage zone in Ontario. This site has been progressively by-passed and over-passed by incremental additions and changes to the transportation networks that intersect here. While these transportation changes have virtually concealed the Lighthouse and Keeper's Cottage from the view and consciousness of passers-by, they also represent the biggest opportunity for the site and for tourism in Hamilton due to the high volume of traffic passing by. If only a small proportion of the tourist traffic was captured (and the pattern of roads and ramps lend themselves to easy access to both tourists coming from Niagara and to tourists from Toronto going to Niagara Falls), the site should be more than viable and – as a guidepost to other attractions in Hamilton – it would make other attractions in the City more viable as well. While the contribution to the operations of the business case in Option Two would be larger than for Option One, the benefits would far exceed the additional costs. In other words, there would be considerably more “bang for the buck” were this option to be implemented.

Capital and Operating Costs

We have included preliminary capital costs for each development. While the costs for each may seem daunting for a small organization, the key to success is the marketing of the “idea”. Capital costs, in reality, represent only a very small proportion of the long-term operational costs of any heritage site and therefore it is vital that the “package” that is developed be both viable and a revenue generator over the long term. Communities as small as both the counties of Huron and of Bruce have seen the importance of presenting their history through their county museums and, despite populations each of approximately 60,000, have put several millions of dollars into their sites to showcase their history to visitors and to their own populations.

We have provided budgets for each option and based revenue streams on projected attendance levels, which are conservative given the volume of potential visitors passing near the site. With appropriate marketing activities, as we have outlined, these visitation levels should be achievable. Creative management of the site, and the provision of facilities that can be used by a wide variety of interest groups for many types of programming activities will reinforce the vitality of the resource and allow for reinterpretation of its functions and offerings into the future.

Ownership

The most logical owner of the land and buildings is the City of Hamilton or another public-sector body. This would be contingent on arrangements being made to transfer some of the lands at this location to the City. Another land-use scenario would be a long-term lease from the agencies in control of the property on which the site is located. In either scenario, the land sold or leased should be of sufficient size for the full scope of the selected development option for the site that we have recommended at 65,000 square feet. This would include the required lands for other facilities such as parking and other structures as recommended for the selected development option.

Recommendations

Throughout the report we have provided a number of recommendations – some are related specifically to the two options and these are summarized in Section 7 of this report, while others, of a more general nature, are summarized here:

- *The most logical owner of the land and buildings is the City of Hamilton or another public-sector body. It is recommended that negotiations be commenced as soon as possible between the City of Hamilton, the various elements within the federal government, and the Hamilton Port Authority in order to secure a clear title to the Beach Canal Lighthouse and the Keeper's Cottage including all access and parking for the facility, and, if the ultimate decision is to develop an Interpretive Centre on site (Option 2) that the negotiations referred to above include sufficient space to provide for the establishment of an Interpretive Center of approximately 20,000 square feet total area and such parking as will be deemed to be necessary in accordance with the attendance projections offered in this study. Total recommended area for the site should be 65,000 square feet.*
- *It is recommended that a 'business map' that charts the operation's course over the next 5 years be developed. This dynamic plan could, of course, be updated as customer trends and heritage markets evolve. (The document could well lead to previously unexplored 'idea development' steps.)*
- *It is recommended that the Beach Canal Lighthouse Group call or write local MPs, Senators and Mayors and tell them that the National Lighthouse Protection Act should be rigorously used to help keep the 'Lights On'.*

Overall Benefits

Many heritage sites that are developed in a modest manner will fail once the originators of the site move on, pass away or lose interest. That is a key reason for this site to be operated by the City of Hamilton or another public-sector body from the outset. It is also a reason to think on a larger scale to ensure that the site does not remain a "backwater" but becomes a vital centre of attraction for heritage-related interests and a key component of the landscape of sites throughout the City.

Indeed, the site can be viewed as the key component for the following reason – the entrance across the bar was the original entrance to Hamilton – it was Hamilton's front door. The industrial story ranges from the early development of the shipping industry to the creation of a major industrial centre in North America. Museums and historic sites should not be seen as stand-alone facilities, but viewed as part of the quality of life components that are so vital for a dynamic community wishing to provide its residents and visitors with a "value added" experience within the municipal boundaries. Of interest are some of the comments received in a review of an earlier draft of this report which suggested that the interpretation of industrial development should be included even though, in some quarters, such enterprise carries a level of stigmatization that may be at odds with the natural environment found at this site. Certainly the contrast is great, but so too is the opportunity to discuss man and the environment, the creation of stable economic activities, and the co-existence of industry and nature.

As proposed in Option Two, by using the site to showcase this heritage and the environment at an interpretive centre at this location, this historic entrance to Hamilton can again become the front door to Hamilton. This new facility can re-establish and re-define this entry point making this the orientation point for potentially hundreds of thousands of visitors into the future.