



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: January 16, 2025
To: Mayor and City Councillors
From: Joan Thomson, CAO
Report Number: COU25-007
Attachments: Heritage Designation By-law 2-2002

Title: Public Meeting – Consideration of Intent to Declare as Surplus – 270 Water Street

Objective: To hear comments from the public and receive correspondence regarding the potential sale of the Discovery Centre [former Teachers' College, former Stratford Normal School] building and property at 270 Water Street, excluding the eastern balance of the property.

Background:

- Former Stratford Normal School constructed 1907/1908 by the Province to train new teachers;
- The Province shifted teacher education to newer facilities and placed the property for sale in the late 1990s early 2000s;
- City of Stratford purchased the property from the Province in 2001;
- Community groups came together at the time with a plan to repurpose the former Stratford Normal School to a discovery centre for arts, museum, gallery, some retail space, community space and space for the Festival Theatre;
- The Management Board for the Discovery Centre leased the building from the City and were to raise funds for renovations and upkeep of the building;
- When the arrangement was ended, the City then leased the entire building to the Stratford Shakespearean Festival of Canada;
- The Festival has leased the entire building since 2009 for theatre uses such as rehearsal space, costume making, prop production and offices for Theatre staff;
- City of Stratford has not identified a need for municipal space in this location and is considering selling the building;

The City notified the Festival Theatre, the Parks Board and Heritage Stratford that the City is considering disposal of the Discovery Centre building.

Notice of Intent to Consider the disposal of 270 Water Street, excluding the eastern balance of the property, was provided by the Clerk's Office, in accordance with City Policy P.3.1.

Site Description

The 270 Water Street subject lands are located at the corner of Water Street and Queen Street. The subject lands are approximately 1.79 hectares in area with approximately 220 metres of frontage on Water Street and approximately 125 metres of frontage on Queen Street.

There is one building on the subject lands, being a 3.5 storey brick building circa 1907/1908 which is currently referred to as the Discovery Centre at the Normal School. The Discovery Centre is accessed from a horse-shoe shaped driveway which connects to Water Street in two locations. This driveway is the designated fire route for the building and is used for some parking by the Festival Theatre employees.

Parking for the site is provided at the rear of the building and is accessed from a neighbouring property.

There are mature trees present along Queen Street frontage which buffers the Discovery Centre from Queen Street. Other mature trees are located throughout the property, with another tree line extending through the eastern portion of the site.

Neighbourhood

The subject lands are located in a neighbourhood bounded by the Avon River to the north, Romeo Street South to the east, Ontario Street to the south and Front Street to the west. The neighbourhood is a mix of open space, parks, recreational uses, low rise residential uses and some commercial uses. The Stratford Festival Theatre and Upper Queen's Park are adjacent to the subject lands.

The Festival Theatre has scheduled performances from April to October each year. For over 70 years, the Theatre has drawn thousands of visitors to the City. The Theatre now operates four Theatres, two of which are located in the City's park system.

Official Plan designation

The subject lands are split designated Residential and Parks and Open Space. These designations have differing goals and objectives.

The Residential designation aims to maintain the quiet and private nature of the existing neighbourhoods, ensure intensification and development in the neighbourhood is compatible, provide a mix of housing types, maintain a sense of identity and provide parks where appropriate.

The Parks and Open Space designation has goals and objectives of ensuring adequate supply and distribution of parks, open space, and recreation facilities, developing an interconnected parks and open space system using the Avon Rive as a key component, ensuring parkland is readily accessible to all residents and responding to changes in Stratford's recreation needs.

Zoning designation

The subject lands are designated Parks in the City's Zoning By-law. This zoning permits a range of uses such as auditorium, cemetery, conservation use, golf course, park, private club, recreational park and theatre [performing arts]. There are no buildings or structures permitted in this zone unless they are accessory to a public use in accordance with Section 12.3.2.1 of the Zoning By-law.

Heritage Designation

The subject lands were designated in 2002 under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. A copy of the Heritage Designation By-law is provided with this Report. The Heritage Designation By-law is registered on title to the subject property and would remain in effect should the property ownership change in the future, unless repealed by Council.

By-law 2-2002 provides that the subject lands have design / physical value, historical / associate value and contextual value in terms of O.Reg. 9/06. The site's design / physical value comes from the architecture of the building and describes the following attributes of cultural heritage value or interest: the building plan, original brickwork, central bay windows, stone window voussoirs with decorative keystones, entranceway and stone portico, iron railing, brick pilasters, stone capitals and columns, copper dome and stained glass windows. Specific facades identified as attributes include, the front south façade including the copper dome, masonry column and precast detailing, the front entrance portico including the wood and precast trim and the round top stained glass window on the south staircase.

There are significant heritage attributes of the building's interior design also included in the By-law: the pressed tin ceilings, two main interior staircases, oak trim and fir trim. The By-law also states that the Auditorium and Library should be carefully considered during any potential redesign of the building.

The historical / associative value of the site results from the architect and landscape architect who designed the building and surrounding landscape. The contextual value of the site comes from its physical, visual and historical linkages to the surrounding landscape which was designed to accommodate the building.

Any alterations or renovations to a designated property requires a Heritage Alteration Permit and are evaluated by the City based on the list of attributes identified in the designating by-law. Due to the extensive list of heritage attributes on the exterior of the building, significant alterations or renovations to the exterior of the building would require a high degree of consideration towards the heritage attributes, including an evaluation of the impact of any proposed renovations or alterations to the building.

Building

The building was originally constructed circa 1907 / 1908. The gross floor area of the building on the subject property is approximately 35,200 square feet over 4 floors.

The building layout and interior finishes are largely unchanged from the original construction with exceptions such as a modern elevator, HVAC, plumbing and electrical systems.

Original wooden doors, windows, casings and baseboards, tin ceilings and hardwood flooring remain as functional elements for the current tenant. Considering the multiple building uses over the last 115 years, there has been relatively little damage to the original woodwork by painting or replacement with modern materials. Also, the large open and high-ceiling classroom spaces remain largely intact.

The most recent capital works were completed at the front elevation.

In a subsequent report and not the subject of this Public Meeting, City Council will be considering the request of the Festival Theatre to extend the current lease for the building at 270 Water Street and the municipal parking lot at Queen Street and Lakeside Drive, to the end of December 2025 while the City is considering intent to dispose of the Discovery Centre building.

Analysis: The Discovery Centre at the Normal School is located next to the Festival Theatre and the City's Upper Queen's Park. It is a significant building of approximately 35,000 square feet that could be repurposed.

The City has not identified a need for municipal space in this location. The Stratford Public Library during their recent space needs analysis, did not identify the Discovery Centre as a preferred location for an expanded library.

A different use of the Discovery Centre building may require the submission of planning applications to the City to expand permitted uses on the property. These planning applications would be subject to City review and Council approval based on Provincial Planning Policies, the City's Official Plan and Zoning By-law. There are limited parking opportunities for any possible expanded use of the subject property. Further, the building will require capital investment to both the interior and exterior of the building, subject to the heritage designations in place.

Comments received at this Public meeting and correspondence received after this meeting, will be considered at a future Council meeting along with a staff report.

Financial Implications: There are financial implications for the City related to capital projects to maintain the building on the subject property as well as needed upgrades to the building systems. These implications continue to drive the need to determine the best and sustainable uses of the Discovery Centre building.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Not applicable: This report does not align with the Strategic Priorities as the intent is to receive public comments to consider the possible disposal of the Discovery Centre property at 270 Water Street, excluding the eastern balance of the property.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Not applicable: This report does not align with One Planet Principles as the intent is to receive public comments to consider the possible disposal of the Discovery Centre property at 270 Water Street, excluding the eastern balance of the property.

Staff Recommendation: THAT Council hear from the public and receive correspondence regarding consideration of possible disposal of the Discovery Centre property at 270 Water Street.

Prepared by: Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer

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