

Forth Junction Heritage Society

**Annual General Meeting Nov. 16, 2017**

## **Annual Progress Report 2017**

The past year has been very busy, eventful and exciting in spite of the various ups and downs. I believe we are closer to fulfilling our vision of creating the community heritage park that has evaded us for longer than we had originally anticipated.

The possibility of partnering with Gary Southgate for acquiring his large collection of railway equipment, meeting with several municipal officials on hosting our proposed heritage park, consultations with people of influence, advancing the prospects of acquiring a park site, developing a comprehensive concept plan and working toward a feasibility/destination study and business plan have all been hallmarks of this past year.

The big challenges continue to be selecting and acquiring a site and getting the necessary feasibility study funded.

There have been several meetings, discussions and events since the last AGM.

### **Chronological Progress**

In November, I had a phone conversation with Jack Donald and met with Ken Mandrusiak, manager of the Black Knight Inn, both of whom had been involved in the ill-fated canal proposal for Riverlands. Ken provided me with the contact info for their proposal submission consultant, Kent Stewart at WMC in Calgary. I had a long phone conversation with Kent and he showed considerable interest in our project.

I also met with Mayor Dennis Cooper, CAO Rick Binnendyk, and Economic Development officer Kristina Schmidt at the Town of Penhold, all of whom were excited about the prospect of having our park located there but it would be considerable time before that could happen due to upcoming annexation plans.

During that same month, I met with Red Deer Economic Development managers John Sennema and David Ghoris about our project, also very excited. I met with them again in January concerning the recent acquisition of property in north Red Deer from Melcor. There were several phone conversations with Gary Southgate about the prospect of bringing his major collection to Red Deer.

There were also several meetings and conversations with Red Deer Tourism Executive Director Liz Taylor and former mayor Morris Flewelling who unofficially and loosely became an ad-hoc advisory board assisting us with our vision moving forward in conjunction with the great opportunity of the Southgate collection.

In December, I made first contact with CN Rail Business Development & Real Estate Manager West Region Karen Jensen after several attempts to get a response from CN Rail about the possibility of acquiring the recently-abandoned mile-long spur south of 77 St. The Red Deer Advocate published a major article about the prospect of the Southgate Collection and the proposed site of the railpark in north Red Deer.

We also started working on a comprehensive updated concept/business plan.

In January, Gary Southgate was finally able to visit Red Deer and the possible sites for the railpark and his first look at the abandoned rail spur south of 77 St. He also met with some FJHS members. He also met with GATX manager Jim Dell and Tyler Yates about the possibility of storing his collection on their property.

Liz Taylor made arrangements for the two of us to meet with Alberta Tourism Executive Director Destination Development Yvette Ng and Tourism Development Officer Rebecca Goodenough and Edmonton. The meeting was less productive than anticipated but they showed a willingness to assist once we had more public engagement and a larger membership.

There were also a few phone conversations with people who had had discussions with Gary Southgate about hosting his collection, including former Donalda mayor Bruce Gartside, Battle River Railway, Aspen Crossing, Galt Historic Railway Park.

Lawrie picked up Morse Code equipment from lady in Calgary.

In February, we participated in the Olds Train Show at Olds College which is likely the last at that location. I also met with Lorna Johnson at Red Deer Museum.

In March, I met with Red Deer City CAO Craig Curtis and Director of Planning Services Tara Lodewyk, primarily about the north Red Deer parcel acquired from Melcor. They liked our concept but not the location as council had already determined its use.

I also attended an open house on the proposed Major Area Structure Plan for Springbrook that included adding the Red Deer County-owned land south of Airport Drive to the hamlet. I was able to discuss our park concept with County CAO Curtis Herzberg, Mayor Jim Wood councilor Jean Bota, planner Richard Moje and Long Range Planning Manager Ron Barr. I met again with Lorna at Red Deer Museum followed up by a presentation to the Red Deer & District Museum Board. In attendance was councilor Frank Wong who effectively put the kibosh on any possibility of using the north Red Deer site.

An email received later from Tara Lodewyk indicated that about 20 acres would be available at the north Red Deer site at a serviced industrial rate of \$350,000 per acre. Subsequent, the FJHS board decided to abandon that potential site.

In May, I met again with Melcor Senior Development Manager Red Deer Region Gregg Broks about the Innisfail and alternate north Red Deer site adjacent to Highway 11A.

I also participated in the National Model Railroad Association regional meet at the Black Knight Inn which included tours of the Mintlaw Trestle (arranged by Evan) and Ernie Beskowiney's workshop. I also did two clinics on rail history in Central Alberta and a presentation at the dinner on the Forth Junction vision.

In June, there was a follow-up open house on the Springbrook MASP at which I again discussed our vision with Richard Moje and Ron Barr.

In July, Gary again visited Red Deer and included a visit to GATX and an examination of the long-abandoned rail spur near Olymel.

I also met again with John Sennema and David Ghoris at Red Deer Economic Development regarding the old 'Olymel' track and the alternate Melcor property north of Hwy 11A.

In August, after a suggestion from David More of Benalto, I arranged a meeting with Sylvan Lake officials including economic development officer Vicki Kurz, Director of Public Works Dave Brand, Director of Community Services Ron Lebsack, Director of Planning and Development Ken Kalirai, and Parks Manager Lee Furlotte.

In September, Red Deer County adopted the Springbrook Master Area Structure Plan which included a reference to our proposed vision of a railpark in the area south of Airport Drive. I met with Town of Innisfail Director of Operational Services Frank Colosimo who was very excited about the prospect of bringing the park to that town. He arranged for a presentation to Town Council a week or so later which had a very positive response. Since then, a new mayor and council has been elected and Frank is no longer with the Town. However, the current CAO is interested in pursuing the idea and arranging a new meeting with Council.. I met with Greg Garson in Sylvan Lake who has a property for sale on the west side of the town located adjacent to the CN Rail line and the abandoned CPR/ACR line. He is a keen model railroader and rail historian so I thought he might be open to donating some land for the park. However, that is unlikely.

Brian arranged a meeting with Red Deer Mayor Tara Veer which included Tara Lodewyk. Again, very positive and the Mayor's office sent Brian information on funding.

After a year of trying to find someone at CP Rail who could give information on creating a rail link off the main line, I received info from Industrial Development Manager Chad Gibson who indicated that a direct spur is possible but extending the Niobe spur would be more cost-effective.

In October, I met with Red Deer County Planning Director Dave Dittrick and Planning Manager Ron Barr. Again, a very positive meeting and they suggested we consider the area immediately south of the treed park area rather than the land adjacent to the rail line. They also suggested we contact Marc Jerry at the Donald School of Business to have a student do a feasibility study as a practicum. I contacted Marc and he will set up a meeting in the near future.

### **The Southgate Collection**

One of the most exciting development over the past year has been the prospect of partnering with Gary Southgate, the farmer from Saskatchewan who has the large railway collection of locomotives, passenger cars, other rolling stock and the Unity station. After delaying a visit to the Red Deer area, Gary loved the place once he visited. The abandoned mile-long section of the CN Rail industrial spur along the escarpment in a park-like setting particularly attracted him. He thought that his collection of 30+ pieces of railway equipment could initially be stored there and he would eventually have the ability to run a back-and-forth tourist train. On his first visit, most of the trackage was still intact but over the year, CN Rail gradually took up the rail and eventually moved much of it away for internal use. His negotiations with CN to purchase the land went nowhere and the City was not willing to get involved. Gary also met with GATX on two occasions to request access to that land for a yard expansion to store this collection. The Red Deer managers were excited about the prospect but required a professional business plan to send to GATX headquarters. Gary has been reluctant to pay for such a plan. Gary also looked at another section of long-abandoned trackage farther east of GATX near Olymel to purchase. There was a significant delay in

determining who owned it. The City claimed ownership but didn't know what department would be responsible. As it turned out, CN apparently still owned the track and was unwilling to sell it.

### **Site Selection**

Early in the year, a great deal of energy and time was spent on trying to negotiate with the City of Red Deer to use a 73-acre site in north Red Deer adjacent to Highway 2A between both CP and CN rail lines that they had recently purchased from Melcor. It seemed to be ideal due to its great access, visibility and it being municipally owned. But in the end, it was not to be. The portion of the CN industrial spur still in use that primarily serves the GATX rail serving facility in the Riverside Heavy Industrial Park would have had a much greater potential for direct rail access. It was also north of the abandoned spur south of GATX that Southgate wanted to purchase. After several discussions with officials at City Hall who were originally quite excited about the prospect, we ran into a road block in that council had decided to use the site for a snow dump and fire-fighting training facility and wasn't likely to change their position. The remaining land was insufficient and too costly so the FJHS board decided to abandon the pursuit of the potential site.

Since then, we have been looking at other sites, some new and others on the radar for some time. Two potential sites stand out and two others are acceptable.

### **Springbrook**

Red Deer County has recently adopted the Springbrook Major Area Structure Plan which includes adding almost two quarter sections immediately south of the current hamlet. This area currently includes several acres of forested parkland with trails, the balance being used primarily as farm land. The plan suggests a mixture of light industrial, commercial and municipal use including the possibility of a heritage park. In previous years, we have focused on the area immediately south of Airport Drive adjacent to the CPR tracks. In conversations with County officials, they have suggested using the portion south of the treed parkland which is farther away from the CPR tracks and close to the flight path at the nearby Red Deer Airport. This location, although farther away from our proposed train-viewing pavilion, has poorer current access and limits the height of buildings, is more likely to be accepted by council for a heritage park site and more likely to be more affordable with the possibility of a low-cost lease. It is also the one site that could be developed soon and quickly. County officials seem to be much more receptive to working with us than in previous years. Rail equipment would have to be trucked in although a link to the CP line may be a possibility in the future.

### **Innisfail**

Melcor suggested a site they own immediately north of Discovery Wildlife Park that was purchased for a purpose that is no longer relevant. They have however thought of marketing the site for industrial use if they could get direct rail access. This site has the greatest potential for having a connection to the CPR line by extending the south Niobe elevator spur south. After a year of trying to contact someone at CP Rail that could provide information with no response, Melcor gave up on pursuing a rail link. They indicated that if we could find a contact at CP, they would give us special consideration for purchasing the land or paying

for the rail access. We were finally able to engage CP Rail and received information on providing rail access. Melcor is very excited and can now plan for development. The asking price for the land is \$35,000 per acre (unserviced). Both Town of Innisfail administration and council indicated great enthusiasm about the plan. With a new town council, mayor and changes in administration, a new presentation to council will need to be done.

### **Red Deer north of Highway 11A**

Another parcel owned by Melcor is undeveloped farmland north of Highway 11A adjacent to and west of the CPR line. Melcor had suggested that they would like some kind of park or municipal use as a buffer between the highway, the railway, industrial land and their proposed residential development. This parcel has several natural features including a large treed area and some wetlands. There is still a residence on site. Its biggest advantages are visibility and it conforms to one of our original objectives in that it would attract visitors off the QE2 into Red Deer.

### **Sylvan Lake**

After a suggestion from the folks at Benalto who are restoring the Benalto Station as a result of a consultation with Jack Donald, I met with several officials at Sylvan Lake who were very excited about the prospect of bringing the project to the town. They indicated that they had already obtained the ok to run a spur off the CN line on the east side of town. My preference was the west side of the town in part due to better access, visibility, proximity to the former ACR line, Benalto and the garden railway park of Ernie Beskowiney, all of which could be marketed as a unit. It would only work if land was donated and rail access could be obtained.

Other sites looked at were at Penhold and north of Red Deer near North Junction.

### **The Board**

Several board members were active during the year in pursuing and accomplishing our vision.

Brian has been working on developing a new logo and eventually updating our website. He also arranged to meet with Red Deer Mayor Tara Veer and provided significant input on the concept plan, still a work-in-progress.

Evan, besides taking on the secretarial duties, provided several elevation maps of various possible park sites. He also arranged and hosted a visit to the Mintlaw bridge.

Steve, besides being a great treasurer, has made sure all legal obligations have been met and looked after membership renewals.

Roy completed display boards and an N-scale model railroad display rack.

Lane offered to manage Facebook pages and create an Instagram account.

Others have contributed in other ways including providing input and ideas into developing the park concept.

### **Priorities**

There are three major areas that board members can work toward as our vision progresses:

**Membership** – a larger membership has been identified as being necessary to get major funding and I encourage all current members to find additional members.

**Public Engagement** – this includes a lot of areas. We have display boards constructed by Roy and loaned from Red Deer Tourism but we need photos and graphics to be printed, mounted and laminated in order to provide displays to museums and events. It would be useful to have someone who could contact and arrange for presentations to various organizations and service clubs. Another project that would be useful is a three dimensional model or renderings of our proposed park. Someone who would be willing to edit and put together a periodic newsletter is another need.

**Fundraising** – this has always been the most challenging of our needs. We need people to research and prepare funding proposals to a variety of potential funders including government, corporations and organizations. Several funding deadlines are coming up in the new year. We also need innovative ideas for unique fundraising events or projects.

Much of my work has been in researching, developing, updating and modifying the park concept and promoting the idea to individuals and institutions. That will continue of course, but for the concept to become a reality, others will need to take leadership roles.

Once a site is selected and an acceptable feasibility study is completed, the work will really begin. More studies will likely be required and arrangements made to provide some level of servicing to the parcel. Many volunteers will be needed to promote, engage and build the park. Eventually, a project manager or executive director will need to be hired and, as the park develops, more staff will need to carry on the work.

In spite of discouraging setbacks and, at times, slow progress, much has been accomplished and I am excited for the future of our journey to realize an important dream.

Paul Pettypiece, President