

Forth Junction Heritage Society

Annual General Meeting Oct. 24, 2019

Annual Progress Report 2019

Another busy, eventful and exciting year has brought us closer to our vision of creating an educational, family-friendly and sustainable regional heritage park.

The completion of the acquisition and storage of the former Calgary & Edmonton Railway Station Museum collection from the Junior League of Edmonton, progress on the realization of our vision of a regional heritage rail park and the adoption of a Collections Management Policy have been the major hallmark accomplishments of the past year.

The C&E Railway Station Museum Collection

In June, several members (Roy, Steve, Evan, Lane and myself) made a trip to Edmonton to acquire the remaining artifacts from the former Calgary & Edmonton Railway Station Museum. These included a large wall clock that was not in the original collection gifted to our Society and a freight wagon that is in dire need of repair. We were also able to borrow the original architectural drawings for constructing the replicated 1891 C&ER station.

We have also been gifted a few artifacts from the recently closed Telephone Historical Centre in Edmonton, some of which were on display at the closed C&ER Station Museum, some not.

This collection remains in storage at StoreSmart in Gasoline Alley. There is a possibility that, in the new year, the Innisfail Historical Village will store and display some of the artifacts until we have our own facility.

We adopted an Artifact Collections Policy at our January meeting. Rick took the lead on this initiative based on a similar policy at the Didsbury Museum with considerable assistance from Morris Flewelling. It was determined that gifted artifacts would fall into one of three categories: Permanent, Archival and Study. These artifacts gifted so far will need to be inspected and re-catalogued before going into the permanent category.

The Pursuit of a Site

For the past couple of years, after exploring several potential sites for the society's vision of a regional family-friendly transportation-themed heritage rail park, the society has been focused on two promising sites – Innisfail and Springbrook.

The Springbrook Option

For several months, the society was more focused on Springbrook. There had been several meetings with Red Deer County officials in 2017 and 2018 that resulted in the board's optimism that the Springbrook site south of the natural area had the greatest potential for early development as it already had road access and was under discussion for future

development. Although it wasn't directly adjacent to the CPR rail line and had little chance of a connection to it, it was the only suitable site that was municipally owned and had the potential for a partnership between the municipality and the society which would theoretically reduce the need to purchase land. Community consultation resulted in considerable support for the project including support from the Springbrook Community Association. The Board adopted the Springbrook Community Heritage Rail Park Master Plan in August 2018 which was submitted to the County for consideration. However, when a response was received early in 2019, there appeared to be no desire on the County's part to partner with us in any way as the County treated the project as a commercial tourism development requiring the purchase of land and all other requirements of a commercial enterprise.

As a result, we modified the overall visionary concept by having the heritage rail park aspect surround a separate but complementary commercial zone. This approach would require less space to develop our core facilities while still providing for the long-term option of a full-size rail loop. Other entities (entrepreneurs, developers or a not-for-profit corporation) would develop the commercial zone, either as the society has envisioned as the ultimate build-out or as the entity determines as the best use of the space.

The Innisfail Option

After the discouraging response from Red Deer County regarding the Springbrook option and renewed interest from Melcor Developments on the potential Innisfail site, the Board determined to shift the focus to the Innisfail site as it is more attractive for several reasons.

We had previously met with Innisfail Town Council in September of 2017 and February of 2018. The response was quite enthusiastic but there were concerns about the cost of access and servicing. I had also met with Doug Bos, a councilor and owner of Discovery Wildlife Park in March of 2018. There had been some discussion about a partnership between the Society and the wildlife park since they were considering purchasing the quarter section north of their facility from Melcor, but that initiative didn't come to fruition.

In early May of this year, I met with Gregg Broks, Melcor Regional Manager Community Development, to discuss how our vision would fit in with Melcor's vision for the quarter section based on our new approach of two zones in creating a visitor destination. Gregg indicated that they were serious about promoting the concept of an industrial rail park to complement the heritage project and would consider developing the commercial zone.

This was followed up with a meeting with Ryan Dodd at the Canada Malting office at Niobe later in May. He was very interested in seeing our vision come to fruition. He indicated that the south elevator spur was owned by Canada Malting and they would be open to allowing for the spur to be extended into the proposed Innisfail site, an approach that would be much less costly than building a spur directly from the main line.

I was also able to meet with Doug Bos again at the Innisfail Wildlife Park. In addition, I had several telephone conversations and a meeting with Anna Lenters, president of the Innisfail & District Historical Society, operators of the Innisfail Historical Village.

In August, a joint meeting was held with Gregg Broks from Melcor and Todd Becker, CAO for the Town of Innisfail. It was determined that once investors and major benefactors come on board for the heritage, commercial and industrial zones of the quarter section, the Town would become more directly involved in the development.

Member Activities and Miscellaneous

The Society decided to participate in Supertrain (the largest model railway show in Canada) at Calgary in April after several years of not participating. It was determined to do several things to prepare including ordering T-shirts (led by Rick), a new banner (designed by Brian), new brochures and a new display. There was considerable interest at the show in our visionary concept and it became apparent that opportunities to acquire artifacts (including full-size railway equipment) will continue to come and go until we have a site to display these artifacts.

We also participated again in the Carstairs Model and Hobby Show in May.

We dabbled in crowdfunding with an account at CanadaHelps but were unable to take full advantage of it due to time restraints to develop a promotional strategy.

I had a discussion with Shaun Teierle, a professional model maker, who is interested in creating models of railway stations that once stood in Central Alberta in the smaller model railway scales. It may be possible to re-sell these models, once developed, as a fund-raiser.

I had a brief discussion with rail equipment collector Gary Southgate early this year and he indicated that much of his collection (including the former Okanagan Wine Train) that was scattered across the country is now located in the Saskatoon and Prince Alberta area. A few of his passenger cars are in active service in tourist railways in Saskatchewan. The large steam locomotive is still in Regina waiting for a location to place it.

The website is continually being updated as circumstances evolve.

Priorities

Priorities haven't really changed over the past year. Going forward, the big challenges continue to be efforts to increase public awareness and buy-in as well as to increase membership and getting corporate and individual commitments for investment and philanthropy. These objectives are necessary in order to move forward with the Innisfail site and to have a home to exhibit the acquired C&E Museum collection.

Membership – a larger membership has been identified as being necessary to get major funding and I suggest we quickly develop strategies to increase membership. I also encourage all current members attempt to find additional members. Some form of reward for becoming a member could include a newsletter, a pin, a shirt, or a free poster.

Public Engagement – this includes a lot of areas. 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.

Fundraising – this has always been the most challenging of our needs. We need to prepare funding proposals to potential investors, benefactors and sponsors. We can also further pursue and promote crowdfunding. We are still open to 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, corporations and municipal officials. That will continue of course, but for the concept to become a reality, I hope that we can find new members that will take on more leadership roles as the project evolves and develops.

Eventually, a project manager or executive director will need to be hired to fund-raise and promote the park.

It's been a very exciting year and much has been accomplished. Our journey to realize an important dream continues to gain momentum.

Paul Pettypiece, President