



Hamilton

**CITY OF HAMILTON**

**PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**  
**Tourism and Culture Division**

<b>TO:</b> Mayor and Members General Issues Committee	<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b> WARD 3
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b> September 18, 2013	
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b> Future of Hamilton Children's Museum (PED13152) (Ward 3)	
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b> Tim McCabe General Manager Planning and Economic Development Department	<b>PREPARED BY:</b> Ian Kerr-Wilson (905) 546-2424 Ext. 1747
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

**RECOMMENDATION**

That, due to the significant structural issues at the Hamilton Children’s Museum, staff be directed to investigate the feasibility and requirements to re-locate the museum, from its current location, to a new facility within the City and to report back to Council with recommendations.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As part of on-going strategic maintenance planning for City heritage building assets, Tourism and Culture staff contracted Ojdrovic Engineering Inc. in July of 2013 to investigate and report on the structural condition of the Hamilton Children’s Museum. The Hamilton Children’s Museum is located at 1072 Main Street and situated in Gage Park.

On July 22 Ojdrovic Engineering reported that the building was not structurally sound and recommended that no one (staff or public) use the building until appropriate remediation had taken place.

In response to that report, the site was closed immediately. Council was informed through an Information Update on July 23, 2013 and the museum has remained closed since. Staff periodically inspect the building and conduct some limited planning and administrative work from a modern addition to the building.

In subsequent discussions with the consultants and in consideration of other similar projects undertaken within the Division, a tentative estimate for the repair is approximately \$400,000. Staff and consultants agree that the work would take approximately six months to complete.

When completed, the building would be capable of supporting a high impact public assembly use, such as the Hamilton Children's Museum.

The museum was opened in 1978 in a two-storey red-brick farmhouse in Gage Park. Including a small modern extension, the effective public space is 2015 sq.ft. In this small space, the museum provides exhibit, public programmes and workshops to approximately 30,000 visitors per year. On a typical Saturday, over 200 visitors will pass through the museum and 400 visitors are not uncommon. The current facility has outgrown its space. It is too small and poorly laid out for a facility use of this kind as well as being worn out by over-use.

The closure of the building presents an opportunity to transform The Hamilton Children's Museum into an institution which is large enough and well equipped to serve the whole City and beyond. Moving directly to a new facility would avoid spending additional funds on a property which is not well adapted to its current function.

A number of potential sites exist for a children's museum including adaptive re-use opportunities in the downtown and elsewhere in the City. In addition, the Gage Park Master Plan (approved by Council on March 31, 2010) identifies a large children's museum building within the park and adjacent to the greenhouses. As well, there is the possibility of investing in the existing building, post structural repairs, and adding another smaller scale extension.

Any of the options would be more expensive than repairing the existing structure and would require that the museum remain closed for an extended period (2-5 years) but would result in a much more effective facility.

***Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 5***

<b>FINANCIAL / STAFFING / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>
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**Financial:** N/A

**Staffing:** N/A

**Legal:** N/A

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Hamilton Children's Museum is an interactive learning facility. It uses exhibits, special events, workshops and other public programming to inspire younger visitors (and their caregivers) to discover, wonder, learn and create. Whereas other museums are about objects or events, children's museums are about ideas and the inner life of a child.

The museum opened in 1978 and was immediately successful. Over the last three decades, 25-35,000 visitors have passed through the doors every year. Daily visitation on a typical Saturday ranges between 200 and 400 people, mainly in family groups. With a small scale extension (constructed from a school portable), the museum consists of 2015 sq.ft. of usable public space and a similar amount of administrative and storage space.

The museum is located in an 1870s era two-storey, red-brick house. The house was built by the Gage family and was the family home for the farm which became Gage Park. Although there are strong historical and contextual associations with the park, the house has no heritage designation.

When the museum opened in 1978, the facility was understood to be temporary or a 'pilot' site and that a larger, more effectively designed facility would be needed in the future. Over the years, various community initiatives (often led by the former Friends of the Children's Museum) have emerged to develop an expanded permanent home for the museum. An Expansion Plan was completed in 1990 which envisioned either a new space within Gage Park or the adaptive re-use of a downtown building. While not implemented, it did lead eventually to the small 1,000 sq.ft. expansion to the south end of the original structure.

The Gage Park Master Plan approved by Council in 2010 identified a new facility for the Children's Museum in the south end of the park adjacent to the greenhouses.

The Heritage Resource Management Section, Tourism and Culture Division of the Planning and Economic Development Department maintains an on-going schedule of asset inspections. As part of that regimen, changes were noted that were outside the norm for older structures. Staff concluded that there were questions regarding the safety of the building that needed to be resolved. As a direct consequence, staff contracted with Ojdrovic Engineering Inc. to provide an engineering assessment. The consultant reported in July and, as a result of the recommendations, the building was closed to the public and staff.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS/LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

There are no policy implications or legislated requirements associated with the recommendation in Report PED13152.

**RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

Manager, Urban Renewal, Economic Development Division, Planning and Economic Development Department

Museum Advisor, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport

- Ministry staff advise that a short-term closure (under a year) will not impact eligibility for operating grant funding. For longer closure where a concrete re-development plan is in place (and can be reviewed by the Ministry) may lead to a short-term 'hiatus' in grants. That is, the City would lose the grant for the duration of the closure.

Manager, Finance and Administration Section, Corporate Services Department

**ANALYSIS / RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

The consultant's report on the Hamilton Children's Museum building concluded that 90% of the joists supporting the ground floor (the public space) were overloaded. In addition, there are issues with support beams and piers. The structure of the second floor is more complex but the conclusions are similar; the structure cannot safely support any sort of public (including staff) use.

A preliminary remediation design has been developed which will ensure that the building can withstand a high impact public use (such as a children's museum). A preliminary estimate suggests approximately \$400,000 and six months will be required for the work. The design will be respectful of the heritage materials but some significant interventions will be needed. No heritage permit will be required because the building is not designated. This expenditure would allow the museum to re-open in a safe facility in a relatively short time frame.

However, the current location was intended as a temporary facility only. An opportunity exists to pursue a larger, more effective long-term facility.

Over the years, community groups (including the former Friends of the Children's Museum) have expressed concern that the building is inadequate for the purpose for which it is being used. The site is currently exceeding its capacity and cannot grow within its existing space. Since 1978, efforts have been made to investigate alternative locations and/or expand the existing facility, including a 1990 Expansion Plan.

In addition, a new museum facility identified in the Gage Park Master Plan (2010) is specified as a purpose-built structure approximately three times the size of the current facility. Estimated cost of this new purpose-built building is approximately \$7M. Other sites are potentially available in the downtown or elsewhere in the City. These could be converted public facilities (schools, churches, recreation centres) or former private structures (factories or warehouses).

Any new site would be more costly than rehabilitating the existing structure. Crucially, however, any new site/facility would lead to a more effective operation with greatly increased attendance (both resident and tourist) and revenue.

### **ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

#### **Alternative 1 – (a) Move directly to developing new facility within Gage Park as identified in the Gage Park Master Plan, and (b) Open temporary Children's Museum while new facility is under construction.**

The advantage of this alternative is that the site and footprint are already defined in the Master Plan and some preliminary costing (approximately \$7M) and conceptual work is in place. This option integrates well with other Gage Park Master Plan goals. Finally, a modern children's museum in a large urban park can be a very positive cultural force within the community and neighbourhood.

On the other hand, the proposed facility is significantly more expensive and a reasonable time frame to design and build a purpose-built structure and modern interactive exhibits is five years. During the five years the Hamilton Children's Museum would need to re-locate to a temporary location at a cost of approximately \$2M.

#### **Financial (a):**

The development and execution of a new Hamilton Children's Museum would cost approximately \$7M. At this time there is no capital budget allocated for this project.

#### **Financial (b):**

To re-locate the Hamilton Children's Museum to a temporary location during the construction period would cost approximately \$2M. At this time there is no capital budget allocated for this project.

#### **Staffing (a):**

The museum currently has an allocation of 2.4 FTE and a head count of 5. A new expanded facility on the scale envisioned by the Gage Park Master Plan will require a larger staffing allocation. Preliminary estimates suggest an FTE of approximately 6 and a head count of approximately 10.

**Staffing (b):**

Staffing levels would remain the same. The museum currently has an allocation of 2.4 FTE and a head count of 5.

**Legal:**

There are no legal implications associated with Alternative 1(a) or 1(b).

**Policy:**

There are no policy implications associated with Alternative 1(a) or 1(b).

**Alternative 2 - Complete structural repairs to existing facility and re-open.**

This is the least expensive and quickest option. Preliminary estimates suggest that the work can be done in six months at a cost of approximately \$400,000. The resulting facility will be structurally sound for its current public use. On the other hand, the building is known to be too small and limited for current needs and cannot be improved within the existing footprint.

**Financial:**

The cost of structural repairs to the Hamilton Children's Museum are approximately \$400,000 which is not currently funded.

**Staffing:**

Staffing levels will remain the same during the structural repairs to the existing facility. Both the Curator and the front line staff could be effectively utilized to design and fabricate new exhibits for the rehabilitated spaces.

**Legal:**

There are no legal implications associated with Alternative 2.

**Policy:**

There are no policy implications associated with Alternative 2.

**ALIGNMENT TO THE 2012 – 2015 STRATEGIC PLAN:**

**Strategic Priority #1**

A Prosperous & Healthy Community

*WE enhance our image, economy and well-being by demonstrating that Hamilton is a great place to live, work, play and learn.*

**Strategic Objective**

- 1.1 Continue to grow the non-residential tax base.
- 1.2 Continue to prioritize capital infrastructure projects to support managed growth and optimize community benefit.
- 1.3 Promote economic opportunities with a focus on Hamilton's downtown core, all downtown areas and waterfronts.
- 1.5 Support the development and implementation of neighbourhood and City wide strategies that will improve the health and well-being of residents.
- 1.6 Enhance Overall Sustainability (financial, economic, social and environmental).

**Strategic Priority #2**

**Valued & Sustainable Services**

*WE deliver high quality services that meet citizen needs and expectations, in a cost effective and responsible manner.*

**Strategic Objective**

- 2.1 Implement processes to improve services, leverage technology and validate cost effectiveness and efficiencies across the Corporation.
- 2.2 Improve the City's approach to engaging and informing citizens and stakeholders.
- 2.3 Enhance customer service satisfaction.

<b>APPENDICES / SCHEDULES</b>
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N/A

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