



Strathroy-Caradoc Multi-use Cultural Centre

**Planning Workshop
February 1, 2005**



Summary of the Discussion

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February 15, 2005

Mr. Tim Hanna

Director of Recreation and Cultural Services
Township of Strathroy-Caradoc
52 Frank Street
Strathroy, Ontario
N7G 2R4

**Re: Planning Workshop
Multi-use Cultural Centre**

Dear Mr. Hanna:

Please find attached our final report for the above noted project.

The report describes the results of a workshop with a number of community representatives connected with the possible development of a Cultural Centre in Strathroy-Caradoc. The proposed Cultural Centre was first identified in the community's recent Cultural Master Plan and is an exciting opportunity with the potential to significantly enhance arts and cultural programming in the community while also contributing to the economic vitality of the downtown. The Workshop identified both the benefits and the challenges associated with pursuing this project. An approach for proceeding to a further investigation of the feasibility of the project was also identified.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you and other members of the community on this most important project. I wish you all the best in your ongoing efforts to make it a reality in Strathroy-Caradoc.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Morgenstern', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Jim Morgenstern, R.P.P. MCIP
Principal

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Appendix A

Introduction

In 2004, the Strathroy District Arts Council in conjunction with a community-based Steering Committee completed a Cultural Master Plan that outlined a long-term strategy for the further development of arts and cultural resources in Strathroy-Caradoc. A key component of this Plan (Chapter 6) had a general finding that there is community support for a Multi-use Cultural Centre. The Cultural Master Plan (Section 6, page 10) includes “Next Steps”, a process that may involve “deciding on activities to take place in the [multi-use cultural centre] facility.” To further explore this concept, a Planning Workshop was organized. Mr. Jim Morgenstern of dmA Planning and Management Services was retained to facilitate the Workshop. The Workshop was attended by a number of community representatives, all of who were active in the community and had participated in the preparation of the Cultural Master Plan. In addition to the Workshop, a number of individuals were interviewed to provide background prior to the Workshop. (See Appendix A for a list of workshop participants and key informants).

The purpose of the Planning Workshop was to better define the Multi-use Cultural Centre that is identified in the Strathroy-Caradoc Cultural Master Plan. A number of key community representatives were brought together for a workshop to discuss:

- The type of Cultural Centre that is desired in Strathroy-Caradoc;
- The possible benefits for the community;
- Who might be involved in its development;
- The challenges associated with implementation; and
- The next steps to proceed with the project.

It was not the purpose of the Workshop to determine if the Multi-use Cultural Centre was feasible or to answer all of the questions associated with its development. It is understood that additional investigation will be required to answer these questions and determine the feasibility of the project.

This report summarizes the results of the Workshop.

Desired Outcomes – The Possible Benefits of the Multi-use Cultural Centre

In large part, the possible benefits of the Multi-use Cultural Centre were described in the Cultural Master Plan (Section 6, page 4). However, as a starting point for the Planning Workshop, we reviewed desired outcomes and possible benefits.

The desired outcomes and benefits associated with the proposed Multi-use Cultural Centre as identified by the participants are noted in Figure One. These can be broadly captured by four goals:

- To improve and expand opportunities for arts and cultural programming events;
- To strengthen local arts and cultural organizations;
- To contribute to the community's economy by supporting and developing local businesses and attracting visitors; and
- To contribute to the development of the downtown.

These four goals were supported by all of the participants and were seen as compatible and complementary. However, if an order of priority was assigned to the goals, community art and cultural development would be most important followed by support for economic development and the downtown, in that order.

These goals are consistent with the Strathroy-Caradoc Cultural Master Plan and the purpose of the proposed Multi-use Cultural Centre.

Figure One – Desired Outcomes and Possible Benefits

- Enhance the community identity and image.
- Contribute to economic and tourism development.
- Retain residents and businesses in Strathroy-Caradoc by providing improved services and amenities that contribute to quality of life.
- Expand the supply of arts and cultural programs available to residents and visitors.
- Contribute to the financial sustainability of arts and cultural organizations with improved facilities.
- Provide a focus for cultural initiatives and community resources at a single location.
- Create a showcase for arts and culture in the downtown.
- Strengthen the links and level of coordination and cooperation among arts and cultural organizations in Strathroy-Caradoc.
- Improve awareness of and participation in arts and cultural activities in Strathroy-Caradoc.
- Establish a better balance between arts and cultural opportunities and sport and recreation in Strathroy-Caradoc.
- Contribute to the beautification, preservation of heritage and character of the downtown through exemplary architectural design in a cultural centre.
- Support new business development and provide a stronger economic base for existing business in Strathroy-Caradoc.
- Bring people to the downtown and support the downtown as a vibrant and economically sound community focus.
- Expand opportunities for new programs and activities that cannot be accommodated in existing facilities (e.g., the Museum).
- Provide expanded and improved services for “high-need” groups, such as youth.
- Building a stronger community in Strathroy-Caradoc by providing appropriate venues for family outings, social interaction and community events.

Preferred Components of the Multi-use Cultural Centre and Possible Priorities

The Cultural Master Plan offered a number of suggestions for possible components of the Multi-use Cultural Centre - including a movie theatre, performance hall, a relocated museum, office space for community groups, a gallery, general program space, etc. (Section 6, page 3). To pursue the project, a better sense of the key components and the priorities will be necessary and the issue was addressed at the Workshop.

The participants were asked to identify the long-list of facility components for the Multi-Use Cultural Centre that would contribute to the goals discussed above. We have organized these components under the following headings:

- Key Program or Activity Areas
- Customer or User Amenities
- Facility Support and Administration Areas

The customer / user amenities and facility support and administration areas were as follows:

Customer or User Amenities

- Food service, bar, cafe
- Reception and information area
- Other commercial or retail uses

Facility Support and Administration Areas

- Office space for arts and cultural organizations
- Storage for Users
- Office for marketing and promotion

The suggested program and activity areas are outlined in Figure Two. Identifying facility components was less difficult than identifying priorities. The participants provided an initial perspective on priorities based on the following considerations:

- Consistency with the identified goals and objectives;
- Perceived community interest or support; and
- Avoiding duplication with existing facilities in the community.

Of course, a primary consideration in setting priorities will be financial viability, and no concrete information was available to determine markets, revenue sources, and financial viability. The relative capital costs of the components and external funding eligibility was also not known. Finally, the ability to accommodate the proposed facility components on perspective sites could not be determined at this time. These are all critical considerations and will require further investigation if the project proceeds to a full feasibility study.

Notwithstanding these critical considerations, the participants identified the preliminary priorities noted in Figure Two. These have been represented as high, medium and low priorities (indicated by H, M and L respectively on Figure Two). We have only discussed the priority for the Key Program and Activity Areas and understand that the customer or user amenities and support services will be required in the Multi-Use Cultural Centre if it is developed. Where possible, we have briefly noted the rationale for the suggested priority in the discussion that follows. It should be

emphasized that the following indication of priorities is based on the groups' general discussion as recorded and interrupted by the facilitator and that not all participants may agree with the priorities as listed. This is an issue that requires further discussion and we have commented on this in the final section of the report (Next Steps).

Figure Two – Facility Components and Priorities

| <u>Key Program or Activity Areas</u> | |
|--|--|
| Component/(Priority) | Rationale for the Priority |
| Theatre/Performance Space (H) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seen as a key component for many of the possible user groups - a key feature for attracting residents and visitors to downtown - can be a major contributor to downtown revitalization |
| Movie Theatre (H) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the most frequently requested facility in Cultural Master Plan facility with broadest appeal - most likely to bring people to downtown - no existing, comparable facility in the community now - priority assumes that space can be shared with live theatre |
| Museum (H) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - current facility is inadequate and isolated from community - Council has directed Museum to identify a new location - Existing facility in the community - Opportunities for expanded programming and community appeal enhanced if part of a Multi-use Complex - Priority assumes that some space is shared with other components of the Multi-use Cultural Centre |
| Multipurpose Program Space (H) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - broad appeal and can be used for the widest possible range of programs required to support other arts and cultural facilities and programs |
| Dedicated Studio Space (M) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - would complement the performing arts components by providing facilities for the visual arts - likely serves fewer residents and attracts fewer users than the theatre space |
| Gallery Space (M) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - would complement the performing arts components by providing facilities for the visual arts - likely serves fewer residents and attracts fewer users than the theatre space |
| Banquet Hall (L) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - duplicates existing facilities in the community - not required for arts and cultural programming - primarily of interest if potential to generate revenue |
| Dance Studio (L) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - duplicates existing facilities in the community - may compete with private sector |
| Library (L) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - desirable and complementary use but can stand alone - library could share multi-purpose programming space and thereby achieve economies of operation - related to arts and cultural programming but not a required facility to support the programming - likely requires too much space to be accommodated with other uses on sites that are likely to be available |
| Community Office Space (L) (e.g., BIA, Chamber of Commerce) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - desirable and complementary use but can stand alone - not a required facility to support arts and cultural programming |

The Principles Guiding the Development of the Multi-use Cultural Centre

Workshop participants were asked to identify principles that might guide the further planning and development of the Multi-use Cultural Centre and that were important if: (1) the Cultural Centre is to achieve the desired outcomes and benefits, and (2) the Cultural Centre is to win the support of the community, users and funders.

The participants identified a number of principles that should guide the future development and operation of the Multi-use Cultural Centre. In most cases these principles were generally stated and the manner in which adherence to the principle will be determined was left for further consideration. The exception, however, was financial sustainability that was specifically defined as “no ongoing operating contribution from the municipality”. Similarly, relative to the capital costs of the project, the municipality was seen as playing a secondary role.

The following eleven principles were identified:

1. **Multiple-use** - to the greatest extent possible the facilities at the Multi-use Cultural Centre will be designed, programmed and operated in a manner that promotes use by as many community arts and cultural interests as possible.
2. **Financial Sustainability** – the project will be financially viable and will not require an ongoing municipal contribution to operating costs.
3. **Community Capital Support** – the community, rather than the municipality, will play a lead role in raising funds for the construction of the Multi-use Cultural Centre.
4. **Private Sector Participation** – the private sector is seen as a potential contributor to the project.
5. **Inclusive** – to the greatest extent possible, the programs and services provided at the Multi-use Cultural Centre will be of interest to all Strathroy-Caradoc residents and cater to the widest range of interests in the community.
6. **Maximum Use** – the objective is to maximize the use of the Multi-use Cultural Centre and offer programs, services and events that bring as many people as possible to the facility.
7. **Innovative** – a creative approach will be taken to the facility development and management.
8. **Unique** – the facilities, programs and services at the Multi-use Cultural Centre will not duplicate existing, comparable community resources.
9. **Accountability** – the Multi-use Cultural Centre will be professionally managed and accountable to the users, the community and funders.
10. **Compatibility** – the facility will be compatible in design and function with the community and its immediate neighbours.
11. **Downtown Location** – a downtown location is preferred for the Multi-use Cultural Centre.

The Partners

Given the desired outcomes, key facility components and principles it is apparent that a number of community groups and agencies may ultimately participate in some way in the project. Workshop participants were asked to identify possible partners and to identify a lead partner or partners. A lead partner(s) would presumably take the central role in planning and developing the Multi-use Cultural Centre and might also play a significant role in financing the project – both as a capital contributor and fund-raiser/grant recipient but also, if need be, as an ongoing operator.

The Multi-use Cultural Centre as envisioned in the Cultural Master Plan was a facility both used and supported by a variety of community interests. Not surprisingly therefore, all workshop participants agreed that partners are critical to the success of the Multi-use Cultural Centre. However, there is less clarity concerning a possible lead partner(s). Possible partners that were identified include the Arts Council, the BIA, the Chamber of Commerce, the municipality, senior levels of government and other private interests and benefactors.

The list of possible partners includes the key arts and cultural groups in Strathroy-Caradoc, business and downtown interests, and the municipality. Given the proposed facility components and the anticipated programming of the Multi-use Cultural Centre, these are all reasonable candidates.

Decisions concerning a lead partner, or the roles that the various partners might play, were more difficult and they may be premature given that the Multi-use Cultural Centre is not fully defined. Before roles and responsibilities can be assigned to potential partners, the facility components, operating costs and revenues and primary programming focus needs to be better defined. In the short term, it was agreed that the Arts Council should take the lead to address these issues. This is discussed further below (Next Steps).

Challenges and Next Steps

As noted at the outset, the purpose of the Workshop was not to determine the feasibility of the project. Indeed, as anticipated, the discussion generated more questions than answers. At this early stage in the process of exploring the feasibility and potentially developing the Multi-use Cultural Centre, there are of course a wide range of unknowns and significant challenges. A clear understanding of these challenges is necessary to prepare an effective strategy to proceed with implementation. The challenges identified by the participants are outlined in Figure Three.

Figure Three - Key Challenges

1. Securing the capital and operating funds to proceed.
2. Identify an acceptable location – both a location that can accommodate the required facilities (e.g., appropriate size, access, cost, configuration, zoning, etc.) but also one that will have the support of the community, can contribute to downtown revitalization.
3. Generating public support for the facility and any potential costs.
4. Generating Council support for the facility and any potential costs.
5. Clarifying the market for the facility and ensuring that the appropriate facility components are provided both to maximize use and to be financially viable.
6. Building political and community support for an arts and cultural project in view of other issues and priorities (e.g., hard services, recreation, etc.)
7. Ensuring the Multi-use Cultural Centre components do not duplicate existing community resources.
8. Successfully involving the private sector in the project; securing commercial partners that will ensure the financial viability.
9. Keeping the partners together and united in their support for the Multi-use Cultural Centre.
10. Identifying a viable lead partner to champion the project.
11. Successful fund-raising securing funds from external sources.

Given the anticipated challenges, the following are the recommended next steps in the process of exploring the feasibility of the Multi-use Cultural Centre. These next steps emerged in part from the discussion at the Workshop and in part from the facilitator's experience with comparable projects.

1. Confirm Goals and Facility Components and Priorities

The Workshop provided an initial indication of goals and facility components and priorities. These should be confirmed with additional discussion among the affected parties and potential partners. The Arts Council should facilitate this discussion. This would take about 2 or 3 meetings with no direct costs incurred.

2. Determine Key Partners and the Anticipated Roles and Responsibilities

Based on the Step 1 discussions, a firm definition of the key partners and their roles and responsibilities is required. We anticipate that the Arts Council can and should continue to play a central role in the project. They best represent the broader arts community and should speak with a unified voice for these interests. Their role in the ultimate programming and potential operation of the Multi-use Cultural Centre makes it essential that they be actively involved throughout the planning process. The Arts Council could assume responsibility for this step in the process. This would likely involve two or three meetings at virtually no cost. The Art Council may also wish to convene public meetings at points in the process to share progress with the community.

The role that the municipality will play must also be clarified. Assuming that there is sufficient support to continue with the project, the next step is to commission a feasibility study to firmly establish the market viability of the project, and if viable, a business and management plan to move forward. Regardless of the role that the Township might ultimately play in the capital development or ongoing operation and financing, the municipality's involvement in the planning stages of the project is clearly required. Their involvement at minimum is required to lend credibility and support to the project. Their active participation will likely be a pre-requisite for external funding and the detailed planning studies are likely not possible without a municipal financial contribution. Municipal staff brings information, experience and professional expertise to the project. Finally, and most importantly, Township staff and Council members must be involved to represent the municipal interest in what may be prove to be a project with significant social and economic implications for the community.

In addition to the Arts Council and the municipality, the roles and responsibilities – including the potential contribution to the project financial and otherwise – should be clarified at this point.

Finally, we understand that there may be benefactors in the community who would be willing to provide financial support for this project. If that is indeed the case, these individuals should be approached at this stage to determine their interest, willingness to support the project, and desire for on-going involvement in the planning process.

The result of this step in the process should be the decision to proceed with a feasibility study (Step 3) with a clear indication of how the study will be financed and managed and who will be represented on the Steering Committee. If there is insufficient support to move forward with a feasibility study, the project should probably be delayed.

3. Prepare a Feasibility Study

Assuming that the project will proceed to a feasibility study, a Steering Committee would assume responsibility for this step in the process. The Committee should have representation from the Arts Council, the municipality and other affected and interested community partners. Expert assistance might also be sought from the Provincial ministries responsible for arts and culture. Ministry representatives could advise on work programs, key study issues and the experience of other communities with feasibility studies.

The nature of the feasibility study is such that specialized expertise will be required. Consultants should be retained for the project. Consultants should be selected in a competitive process in response to a Request for Proposals drafted by the Steering Committee.

The study should be conducted in two parts. The first is a market assessment to define the facility and determine the potential level of use that might be realized in a Multi-use Cultural Centre in Strathroy-Caradoc. The facility definition involves generating a physical description of the components and a preliminary space program and capital costs. Determining levels of use involves carefully assessing potential community use in the context of competing venues and realistic constraints – including requirements for shared use and rental fees. In addition to possible use by community organizations, the private rental market, possible use by touring events and productions, and the regional market should be analysed. The product of this endeavour is a projected calendar of use that will show the extent to which proposed facilities will actually be used at various times of the year and in peak and non-peak periods. If the projected use is sufficient, the second part of the study would be undertaken. This is the business and management plan.

The business and management plan will establish detailed operating costs and revenues. It will clarify partnership opportunities including the potential for private sector involvement. Finally, based on assumptions concerning ownership and willing operators, an operating model must be recommended. Facilities of this type in Ontario operate under a wide range of models, and options will be available to Strathroy-Caradoc. The best management and governance approach, staffing requirements, and ongoing operating procedures – such as marketing – will be addressed to fully describe the ongoing implications of the facility for potential partners and funders. Some studies will also investigate economic impacts to quantify possible benefits to the larger community and may also conduct a preliminary assessment of fund-raising capacity in the community.

With both parts of the feasibility study in hand, the potential partners have the information required to decide if they wish to continue with the project. If they proceed, the feasibility study will include a detailed implementation strategy outlining the next steps. The consulting costs of a feasibility study of this type would depend on the Terms of Reference. However, a budget in the order of \$30,000 and \$20,000 respectively for parts one and two would not be uncommon.

Conclusion

The Planning Workshop confirmed the interest of the arts and business community representatives in this project, and the potential benefits. We have described a process for pursuing the project in the short-term and, if warranted, commissioning a detailed feasibility study. These are logical next steps.



Appendix A



**Workshop Participants &
Key Informants**

Appendix A

The following individuals participated in the Workshop (W) and/or were key informant interviews (I):

| Organization | Name |
|--|---|
| Township Council | Mayor Mel Veale (I) Councillor John Brennan (W) Deputy Mayor Joanne Vanderheyden (W) |
| Business Improvement Area (BIA) | Dale Ross (WI) Melissa Boucher (WI) |
| Strathroy District Arts Council (SDAC) | Ralph Thorn (WI) Hillary Nicpon (W) |
| Strathroy Middlesex Museum | Steve Pelkman (W) |
| Chamber of Commerce | Ralph Coe (I) Ed Iutzi (WI) |
| Strathroy Dance Club | Pat Mahovich (W) |
| Staff | Jim Fairlie, CAO (WI) Tim Hanna, Director of Recreation and Cultural Services (WI) Andrew Meyer, Curator, Strathroy Middlesex Museum (WI) |
