

**The Bruce Mines & District Chamber of Commerce
January 2011**

Bruce Mines Town Office and Community Hall: INFORMATION & CONCEPTS

Preamble:

The Bruce Mines & District Chamber of Commerce wishes to convey support for the newly elected Town Council of Bruce Mines and to acknowledge the difficulties they have inherited.

The Chamber of Commerce has, for some time, been concerned with deteriorating conditions and neglect of the existing Community Town Hall. We have discussed the problem and have developed a position that we would like the Town Council to include in their deliberations.

We consider the Community Town Hall an important public asset that should be renovated and maintained.

A: New Town Office Space

The proposal to relocate the Town Offices is potentially reasonable, but is one that we believe the Town Council should decide strictly on the basis of requirements and available cash. The Chamber of Commerce does have some input that we hope might help your deliberations.

Buildings exist in town that are available for purchase and would provide good facilities. This option has the advantage of making use of existing space and reducing overall costs, but it is our understanding that that would be considered renovation and that the funds currently secured by the Town Council could not be used for renovation. The cost would then have to be borne by the Town. That does not seem to be financially viable given the current cost overruns and that, added to the cost of the new offices, we would still have the costs of repairing and maintaining the Town Hall.

The Town has a **grant of \$500,000** and accrued interest that is earmarked for the new waterfront office complex. The Town Office has told us that these funds cannot be used to renovate, that they must be used for an new facility.

We have also been lead to understand that the original proposal included several elements in addition to new offices. We understand they include a marina lounge area, an area for physical fitness, a display area for the museum, an emergency co-ordination area, and a town office.

We understand and agree that the proposed waterfront location, and the funding for this complex, is problematic for several reasons that are not likely to be resolved in the format as originally proposed. It seems that the complex is simply not a viable option in its original form. While that is the case it does not preclude the use of the funds for a smaller and more cost

effective space that could meet the basic requirements of the initially proposed building.

The Chamber of Commerce wishes to strongly recommend that options for retaining the \$500,000 grant be thoroughly explored so that it can be used rather than returning it to the funding partners. The stress that the Town finances are going to be experiencing, because of the cost overruns of the street scaping, dictate that we must find ways to finance the required new office without using up our very scarce Town funds.

The Chamber believes a smaller building, including the required elements of the grant proposal (office, marine lounge, museum display area, physical fitness area, office and emergency co-ordination space), can be built on a turnkey basis for well under \$500,000.

The new building could be built on Town land that is already serviced, or that has services readily available, that does not involve the problems of the waterfront. The waterfront can then go ahead, as finances dictate, as a community green area. Such a building must not preclude the repair and maintenance of the current Community Town Hall.

With regard to the waterfront: **Waterfront** washrooms/showers should be maintained at least until the Town accepts ownership of the marina. Funding included in the marina exchange process may open other options for marina facilities. Maintaining the waterfront washrooms would remove the only legitimate objection to putting a new office complex in a location such as Lookout Park: a much more cost effective site than the waterfront and one that would allow for shared services with the library. An advantage of this proposal is that if and when specialized facilities are not required in the new office building, the council would have space available to rent to other government agencies.

B: Town of Bruce Mines Community Hall

The Bruce Mines and District Chamber of Commerce stresses that the Town cannot afford to not have a well-maintained and effectively-sized hall. The hall portion of the building, new or renovated, must be at least as large as the present space: (35 x 76 feet) including the stage area. Ceiling height, natural lighting, and a good dance floor (not tile on concrete) are necessary features. A kitchen, with facilities that meet health guidelines and that are capable of producing up to 120 full meals, is required as are accessible washrooms on both levels. Extra rental space with drop in capability should be constructed in either a new building or as part of the renovation of the existing building.

Rationale for the need for a proper Community Town Hall

The Community Town Hall has not, in recent years, been used to its potential. The proof for that lies in the number of enormously successful events that take place in it annually. With proper maintenance and marketing it is reasonable to believe that it would only become more cost effective.

The Town Hall is a vital resource to the Town and District and should be the heart of the community. Its potential within the community and for creating community is considerable. Beyond that, events at The Hall draw people from Sault Ste Marie to Elliot Lake, and actually from around the world, into Bruce Mines and while here they spend their money and thus add greatly to the economy of Bruce Mines.

The Four and Friends Art Show and Sale has been held in July for 20 years and is a good example of the impact The Hall has on the local economy. This event draws 2000 to 3000 people into town every year and they spend up to \$24,000 inside The Hall. More importantly, however, they fill the restaurants, and buy gas, lodging, and products in town. The Four & Friends Committee estimates that these guests spend a minimum of \$20,000 with the merchants of Bruce Mines every year and that means the spin off from the Art Show alone has added approximately \$450,000 to the Bruce Mines economy over the last 20 years. It should be noted that this show cannot be held in a smaller venue.

The Chamber of Commerce uses The Hall to sponsor several other annual events that also require this size of facility. Some examples are: Citizen of the Year, the Trade Fair, Candidates Meetings and meetings too large for the library meeting room.

The annual Library Gala committee held a very successful fund raiser every year until recently. This event was attended and supported by many out of area people and businesses and it added approximately \$6,500 per year to the local economy. Again, this style of event could not happen in a smaller facility. Other organizations use The Hall for fund raising dinners, craft sales, Heritage Day displays, and events that would not be financially feasible in a smaller space. Some of these organizations are The Lions Club, The Legion, Sno Glyders, and the Fire Department. A renovated hall would also draw wedding rentals which require a mid size hall. Occupancy rates and safety regulations would severely limit the marketability of a smaller venue.

The organizations that use the Community Town Hall are the backbone of our community and they can not function without The Hall facilities. The Hall is also required as a hub for our community. The Community In Action Initiative Study completed last year pointed out the need for a hub and drop-in centre and determined that the Bruce Mines Community Hall is the logical location.

Is Renovating the existing Community Town Hall feasible?

The Chamber of Commerce accepts the reality of budgets. We stress that cost estimates for repair of the existing Hall must be accurate, clear, and **professionally** done before considering the building of a new facility. There have been suggestions that a smaller town hall could be built.

We do not, at this time and given the current conditions, support the building of a smaller town hall. A smaller facility would not meet the needs of organizations or community members

and would run the risk of becoming a white elephant.

The main reason we suggest renovating the existing Community Town Hall is financial. If we assume the new town offices can be built, using the established grant dollars, we still have major cost overruns for the street scaping and possible waterfront costs to contend with. We cannot afford to create another problem of that sort.

The existing Community Hall can be repaired over time, with a systematic and long-term strategy for repair and renovation that will spread the cost over several years. It is also possible, within this plan, to keep the offices in the building for the short term. It is possible that grant dollars may become available as we progress and it is true that many grant agencies are open to smaller, clearly defined projects. It is also possible that local fund raisers may be able to contribute to the costs of specific repairs or upgrades.

Actual renovations to the existing Community Hall:

- " It is acknowledged that mould in the add-on kitchen area is a major problem and this would probably be the first decision: to remove the addition or repair the foundation, a decision that only professionals could decide. The rest of the renovations could be looked at by a committee guided by the experts.
- " The Chamber of Commerce recommends that the kitchen be left in the basement. It could, in that location, service both the basement and the main floor. This would leave optimal hall space on the main floor to accommodate rental functions.
- " The basement should be renovated as a second rental area, with the possibility of office space(s) and a smaller rental or drop-in area. It is valuable rental space and should not be used for storage.
- " The washrooms in the basement need to be upgraded and if possible a grade level entrance should be established in the basement on the north side.
- " A second set of washrooms should be added to the main floor.
- " A dumb waiter or possibly a elevator (keyed), similar to the Desbarats arena elevator, would need to be installed (possibly where the small stage office presently exists). This would be a costly item that might entail some extra fund raising but would greatly enhance accessibility and so should be eligible for specialized funding.
- " The main floor hall and stage should remain with any repairs, or upgrades as required. The stage is a rental advantage and provides potential for public speaking and theatre.
- " Roofing, windows, and siding and insulation would be replaced according to a systematic

plan of renewal.

- " The existing Town Office area, depending on room required, should be changed into approved washrooms, a cloak room and, if space allows, a back stage area. The floor level at the entrance to the existing office area would need to be altered to allow wheel chair access to the new washrooms. (This assumes that the offices would be moved to a second building.)
- " The operational needs of the hall will need to be considered. Parking is a concern although there is public parking at the marina and present parking, though limited, is workable so we do not consider that a problematic issue at the present time.

We acknowledge that the renovations will need to be prioritized, and that this document can only provide an overview, but see the gradual rehabilitation of the Community Town Hall as a responsible and reasonable objective. It will also set a strategy into play that will ensure that the sort of irresponsibility that allowed the Hall to fall into disrepair will not be repeated. The Chamber of Commerce is encouraged by the present Town Council's concern for this matter.

C: Our Recommendations in Brief and Prioritized:

1. That the present Community Town Hall be repaired and renovated on the basis of a long-term plan. This is a priority for us even if town offices are ultimately relocated to another building. For the time being the offices could remain in The Hall.
2. If present grant money can be utilized to purchase an existing location, and create town offices and facilities, that do not include a Town Hall, we would be in favour of such a project as long as it does not preclude the repair of the existing Community Town Hall.
3. If present grant money can be used to build a small Town Office facility that would house Town Offices and services, we would be in favour of such a project as long as it does not preclude the repair of the existing Community Town Hall.

Postscript:

Finances may well dictate that the most viable option is to maintain the Community Town Hall in its existing form and to proceed to repair and renovate it with a systematic and long-term strategy.