

May 30, 2024

Dear Mayor Guthrie and Members of City Council,

RE: Committee of the Whole, Tuesday, June 4, 2024 Staff Report "Drill Hall Responses to Expression of Interest and Planned Future Use"

Advocating for cultural enterprises is challenging due to budget constraints and competing needs. It is complicated when the discussion pivots on the use of heritage assets. However, the City plays a crucial role as a leader, partner, and collaborator in local community place-making, ideally embracing its unique facilities. This role should be supported, even in difficult times.

Today, the Drill Hall reminds us that the Guelph community has long practiced the tradition of volunteers meeting in public spaces to participate in social, political, and cultural activities. You can acknowledge this legacy by taking a simple action.

I ask City Council to consider the following request:

The Guelph Centre for Visual Art (GCVA) expression of interest/proposal presents compelling opportunities that align with the City's RFEOI requirements and deserve thorough consideration. As part of the City Council's commitment to the community, exploring innovative solutions to address pressing challenges is essential. Given that City Council has yet to have the opportunity to review the GCVA's submission, I request that you invite representatives from the Guelph Centre for Visual Art Committee to present their proposal to the Council. If City Council finds their ideas have merit, it would be prudent for City Council to request a comprehensive feasibility study and in-depth assessment to evaluate the proposal's viability or decide on the appropriate course of action.

I suggest this approach because the staff report recommendation to declare the Drill Hall a 'surplus asset' and proceed to sell it (at a nominal price) is premature for several reasons.

1. The GVAC arts proposal is reasonable to explore as it addresses the Drill Hall's structural and operational challenges in a phased approach that allows for innovation and local investment.
2. It may be unfair to disqualify the GCVA's whole proposal with the argument that it 'exceeds approved and proposed budget limits' when these financial limits are not clearly stated in the RFEOI.
3. To discount any 'expression of interest' that failed to ensure that the City of Guelph is made financially 'whole' and safe from further expenditures is an overreach. Again, this condition was not explicitly clear in the RFEOI. Further, it may also be unrealistic to expect this, given the results of the earlier market survey that concluded no private market interest.

4. The intention to sell the property at a 'nominal price' is concerning, given the significant taxpayer investment to date (est. five million). Shouldn't the process seek the best price possible or prioritize long-term community benefit over a direct sale to private hands?

Some further thoughts for consideration:

Anticipated Capital and Operating Expenditures: The City knew of the Drill Hall's structural weaknesses and the necessity for system upgrades, regardless of future use. The City should not be surprised that capital and operating expenditures would be in the \$5-10 million range, which the staff report echoes. An independent heritage assessment completed over a decade ago documented these costs.

Protection and Cultural Restoration for Community Benefit: City Council has a duty to carefully explore all options to secure the protection of and future cultural restoration of the Drill Hall. This condition originated with Guelph City Council. Specifically, after the City added the building to its heritage list, the Drill Hall was given to Metrolinx/GO as part of the financial package to secure work on the Guelph Transit Terminal project (*Refer to Report: CDES Report 10-52 Guelph Transportation Terminal: 72 Farquart Street - April 26, 2010; and later, as with the staff report attachment CAFE-2013.42 - December 16, 2013*).

At that time, City Council imposed conditions on Metrolinx to ensure the protection of the Drill Hall and to secure its future for cultural restoration. Those conditions were transferred back to the City when Metrolinx transferred the property as per a separate agreement several years ago.

In conclusion:

The Drill Hall can be explored by City Council to benefit our community. This may take more time. Staff's recommendation to sell the Drill Hall as a stranded asset is premature.

Offering the Guelph Centre for Visual Art the opportunity to present its ideas to Council supports City Council's interests without obligation. Ideas may be generated that support Council's role as a partner and collaborator in cultural enterprises.

However, suppose that Council approves the staff report's recommendations. In that case, the public should be given a clear and transparent explanation beyond the fact that the Drill Hall has yet to be budgeted.

The Drill Hall has waited many decades, a few more months, to determine its best and highest purpose is reasonable.

Please contact me if you have any follow-up questions.

Best wishes,

Ann Pappert