



Corporate Report

Report from Recreation & Community Services, Programs and Cultural Services

Date of Report: November 1, 2012 **Date of Meeting:** November 26, 2012

Report Number: RCS-651-2012 **File:** 35.60.86

Subject: Mayor's Advisory Committee for Black History – Update

Recommendation

That City Council approve the overall concept for the development of a Black History Interpretive Centre (MAC-BH) within the City of St. Catharines; and

That Council endorse the Committee's recommended vision statement for the proposed facility; and

That Council support the MAC-BH in continuing its role of investigating the feasibility of this undertaking; and

Further, that a request for funds to support a formal Feasibility Study be referred to the 2013 Budget Committee. FORTHWITH.

Summary

This report summarizes the activities of the Mayor's Advisory Committee for Black History (MAC-BH) and outlines recommendations for the next phase of this committee's work.

Background

On January 21, 2011, a staff report was brought forward with the recommendation to form a Black History Committee to investigate the feasibility of establishing a National Black History Museum in the City of St. Catharines. At that meeting, Council approved the establishment of the committee and the Terms of Reference to guide their work.

Committee membership was advertised and recruited and is composed of representatives from stakeholder groups, Recreation and Community Services (RCS) Staff, Council and community members. The inaugural meeting of the MAC-BH was held on August 11, 2011. The committee has met monthly since that time. The bulk of the committee's work has centered around investigating whether it is feasible to establish a Black History Interpretive Centre in St. Catharines. This

report will summarize that process and outline the committee's recommended course of action for council consideration.

Report

Committee membership has been inclusive and represents all the stakeholders

The MAC-BH was established to investigate the feasibility of establishing a National Black History Museum in St. Catharines. The Terms of Reference for this committee's work were amended by Council to add the option of an Interpretive Centre rather than a Museum as a feasible option. The committee membership represents a cross section of stakeholders as well as Council, RCS Staff and community. Stakeholder groups who are represented on the committee are as follows:

- BME Church / Salem Chapel
- Central Ontario Network for Black History
- Ontario Black History Society
- Zion Baptist Church
- City Council
- St. Catharines Museum Advisory Committee
- Community members

In addition to this, the committee has invited representatives from the Fergie Jenkins Museum to attend two of the meetings to provide comment on potential future partnership options.

Work of the committee has focused on establishing feasibility

The committee has met monthly since August 11, 2011 and has undertaken a feasibility process to determine whether there is sufficient interest and opportunity to establish a black history interpretive centre/museum within the City. The primary document used to guide the feasibility process is a discussion guide and workbook published by Museums Alberta. This comprehensive document takes the users through a series of questions relating to the process of opening a new museum or cultural facility. This includes the investigation of adequacy of community and financial support, visitation potential, community need, existing resources, and potential revenues.

The Committee spent a number of meetings discussing a vision for the proposed facility and its nature – i.e., museum versus interpretive centre. It was agreed by all members of the committee that an interpretive centre was the most appropriate option for the City of St. Catharines. The committee drafted a vision statement for this proposed facility as follows:

To interpret the history, experience and contributions of Canadians of African descent in Niagara, within North America, for the purpose of educating, engaging and inspiring future generations.

The committee agreed that in moving this project forward, the interpretive centre would need to be a place to tell the stories that are unique to our community – both St. Catharines and Niagara - and that this community must feel a sense of ownership in the facility and its vision for it to be a success.

A Black History interpretive centre is feasible

The committee's roles and responsibilities included seven (7) points:

1. To liaise with City Staff and City Council Representative appointed to the committee and advise Council when necessary.
2. To investigate the feasibility of establishing a National Black History Museum / Interpretive Centre within the City of St. Catharines.
3. To research and investigate the potential audience of such a facility.
4. If such a facility is feasible within the community, investigate the best location in the City of St. Catharines.
5. To investigate opportunities for funding to establish a National Black History Museum.
6. To investigate opportunities for on-going operating funding for a National Black History Museum.
7. To report to Council on the potential role of the City of St. Catharines in the establishment of a National Black History Museum within the community.

In the first phase of this work, which is comprised of points one through three, the committee has completed the first two points and has done some investigation of point three. In order for the MAC-BH to investigate the concept further, the committee requires council's endorsement of the work to date and a mandate to carry out phase 2 which includes points four through seven.

Most significantly, the committee has determined that it is feasible to establish a Black History interpretive centre within the City. There is adequate interest from stakeholders; a strong potential audience; and well developed community to make such a centre a feasible option as a new cultural facility within the city.

In the next phase of work, the committee will investigate more fully opportunities to bring the project to reality

The next phase of the committee's work will begin the more detailed investigation of potential audiences and funding opportunities related to opening an interpretive centre. A formal Feasibility Study will need to be undertaken by a third party which will look at the operating environment within which such a facility would exist, expected expenses, potential audiences, sources of revenue for both capital and operating and preferred locations within the community. This Study will serve the purpose of creating a roadmap for the City to bring this project to fruition in the future. In the meantime, MAC-BH will also investigate options for developing the project over a number of steps. This would create a graduated plan with realistic

milestones for building upon current successes in black history interpretation and working towards the final interpretive centre as envisioned by the plan.

Financial Implications

A formal feasibility study for this type of cultural facility will cost the City approximately \$50,000. This amount has been requested in the RCS 2013 operating budget submission.

Conclusion

The City of St. Catharines has continued to play a prominent role in African-Canadian history. The City has been a haven for settlers of African descent looking for a safe home from the founding of the community to the present day. The City's association with the Underground Railroad and prominent figures such as Harriet Tubman, Rev. Anthony Burns, and Richard Pierpoint underline the community's place as a hub for telling these significant stories of St. Catharines' past.

The development of a Black History Interpretive Centre in St. Catharines will provide a place for continued learning about this important part of our community's history and provide a venue for dialogue and education moving forward.

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