

New proposals made on interpretive centre

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FULL TEXT

When it comes to the new interpretive centre, the City's culture department is talking big bucks and has a grand vision. The centre will cost a pro-posed \$7.4 million and will take 18 months to build, opening in mid- 2016.

Culture services director, Richard Gagnon, said it would cost about \$270,000 to just open the doors, cover maintenance and allow the interpretative centre to be operational. An ongoing cost of \$298,000 would cover staffing, expanded programs and customer service support.

"If we want to create a destination, we need to invest," Gagnon said during his culture service level presentation to city council on May 27.

He said the interpretive centre will draw more traffic and people into the downtown core.

He noted as the department approaches its completion of the North West Mounted Police Fort site, focus will now be placed on the new interpretive centre.

Gagnon said the new interpretive centre will take the typical small heritage museum and bring it up to the same level of other major provincial museums.

"This is a big step for us ... It will create a lot of growth in cultural services. You're talking about 15,000 square feet of prime space to really showcase our history, and we're very proud of that," Gagnon said.

Gagnon questioned whether or not the museum should have extended visitor hours. He said having evening and weekend hours would open it up to be used for different community functions. Currently, it's open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. for five to six days per week.

The Culture Services director said the department would like to see the following operation and programming changes:

- * The creation of a part-time special events position in 2015. This position would run about \$60,000 and would also coordinate the public art program.

- * In 2016, a full-time public program coordination position would be added to the museum for \$110,000. Some of their responsibilities would include developing a speaker series, new tech-mobile

interpretive tours, offering traditional crafting programs and ice sculpture contests, running heritage gardening programs and developing future historic events.

* Increasing school programs from twice a week to four days per week. This would mean a museum program assistant would be required, and the full cost of increasing that program would be \$25,000.

Other potential positions-- such as a Fort Heritage Precinct Manager and a front desk services provider -- were also included in information presented to council.

Gagnon said currently, their school programs are doing great. However, there is room for improvements in other areas, as he noted: "We need to bring some wow' to our public programs."

In 2015, the centre's exhibits will total a one-time cost of \$590,000 for construction, design, and furniture. Currently, it would be a read-and-walk visitor experience, considered display pass, and include history info, graphic panels, and artifacts.

Gagnon added the department would like to see an investment in revenue-generating, promotion and tourism position at \$110,000. This would include the salary, a computer, an office, travel expenses and fees for attended seminars.

"It's important to have a strong relationship with our local businesses and industries," he said. "We know they're there for us but we need to be better organized and have a focused position on that. It's money well-invested... It will pay for itself."

The culture director also outlined plans to introduce a summer horse and wagon service -- at \$40,000 -- that would add a "certain feeling" surrounding the old Fort site.

"There's nothing like the clip-clop business in the downtown.... It's the identity of the city, we need a horse -- it's on our logo," Gagnon told council.

Mayor Gale Katchur said she lost her breath when she saw that particular price tag, and asked if it would make more sense for the City to buy their own horses instead of renting them through a contractor. Gagnon added, most likely, there will be a charge related to the wagon rides to off-set the cost.

Coun. Stew Hennig said he appreciated the presentation because it outlined the City's future workload and costs related to the centre.

"(Like) I've said before, if you build it they will come -- and they will," Hennig remarked.

Coun. Ed Sperling added the centre will be a nice finishing touch and will be a great addition to the entire Historic Precinct.

Gagnon noted there would be 10 years of fundraising to complete the vision for the interpretive centre. He stated this is just the start of the discussion surrounding the centre and nothing is set in stone yet. Service levels and costs for the new interpretative centre will be later considered and debated during council's Fall 2014 budget

meeting.

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