



June 12, 2023

Debi LucasSwitzer  
Chief Administrative Officer  
Township of South Stormont  
2 Mille Roches Road, PO Box 84,  
Long Sault, ON K0C 1P0

Dear Debi:

**Re: Raisin River Heritage Centre Final Assessment**

TCI Management Consultants is pleased to present this brief report on the process of finding a user for the former Raisin River Heritage Centre in St. Andrews West in the municipality of South Stormont. In short, after undertaking an extensive process to identify a proponent and negotiate a preferred use for the facility, no such potential user has been found. Accordingly, as we had outlined in our proposal letter of January 16, 2023, it is our recommendation that the process now move towards making a recommendation to Council to demolish the building and restore the site to a 'greenfield' basis.

In this letter, we outline: a) the current situation with respect to the building; b) a description of the process undertaken to find a potential user; and c) our recommendations relating to moving forward from the current situation.

**A) Current Situation of the Structure**

The former Raisin River Heritage Centre, currently owned by the Township, is an approximately 12,000 sq. ft. structure located adjacent to the St. Andrews Catholic School, operated by the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario (CDSBEO). Originally built in 1906, the building has served as a nunnery, a school, a library branch, and most recently a home for collection of historical artifacts owned by the Cornwall Township Historical Society. However, in 2016 the building was vacated by the Library due to low utilization. Shortly afterwards, the Township closed the building to the public following the outcome of a building condition assessment. Since then, the building has been essentially empty, and considerable environmental deterioration has occurred. In 2020, the costs of rehabilitation and re-use were prepared which were estimated to be nearly \$900,000 to renovate the building to acceptable public use standards and double that to bring the facility up to the standard where it could function as a proper Archival repository. At the same time, the cost to demolish the structure outright was estimated to be nearly \$700,000 (there are toxic substances including asbestos, that need to be dealt with and require special handling).

At present the structure is categorically unsafe. Despite the fact that there is a barrier fence surrounding it, there have been situations where people have broken into the building. In addition to risks associated with the deteriorating structure itself, there are toxic substances in the building materials used a century ago, as well as with what has accumulated in the building since its abandonment (animal excrement). Clearly the building poses a health and safety risk, especially given its close proximity to the st. Andrews Catholic School.

Recognizing that the municipality could not afford to restore the building and that the costs quoted above would only increase with the passage of time, the municipality decided to undertake a public process to determine interest on the part of a potential third party to take ownership and responsibility for the structure. An issue with a potential third party user, however, is that the very close proximity of the structure to the existing school operation constrains the use significantly (the School Board is understandably very cautious about any use that might involve members of the general public coming into close proximity to the school operation). Accordingly, it was tacitly assumed that any third party user would likely need to relocate the building. Discussions with the School Board prior to the launching of a public process to identify a potential user confirmed this stance and also agreed that the representatives of the CDSBEO would participate in the evaluation process should and serious candidate proposals for re-use be received.

In January 2023, TCI Management Consultants was retained to assist the municipality with a widespread search process to identify a potential user for the facility and evaluate responses.

### **B) Process Undertaken to Find a Potential User**

The process to find a proponent interested in repurposing the facility was extensive. With the assistance of Township staff, TCI developed a Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) document that was advertised on the tender site Biddingo (from April 11<sup>th</sup> to May 19<sup>th</sup>). Associated with this REOI was a detailed 'Backgrounder' that outlined the history of the building, its current condition, and contained links to additional background documents including the following:

- **2023 Air Quality Study:** (link to study for participants who register when available)
- **2022 Ontario Land Tribunal Report:** [Ontario Land Tribunal Final Report](#)
- **2020 Architectural Analysis and Update:** [2020 Architectural Analysis and Update Report](#)
- **2020 Demolition Estimate:** [2020 Demolition Estimate](#)
- **2017 Building Condition Report:** [Building Condition Report](#)
- **2017 Building Costing Report:** [Budget Costing Report \(Class D Estimate\) for Building Condition Report](#)
- **2016 Designated Substance Report:** [2016 Designated Substance Report](#)
- **1980 Reference Plan of the Site:** [1980 – Reference Plan](#)

Township staff also arranged for videos of the interior and exterior (through drone footage) to be made available to proponents. Also, part of the 'Backgrounder' were links to examples of other heritage structures that had been relocated and /or reused for other purposes to act as inspiration for what might be possible with the building.

In addition to being posted on the tender sites, the opportunity was advertised locally as well as nationally in the real estate section of The Globe and Mail (April 13<sup>th</sup>).

The criteria for consideration were explicitly laid out in the REOI. They included having a cogent plan for use of the facility, outlining expected costs to the municipality, being able to show sufficient financial resources to undertake a renovation and potential relocation of the structure and ideally having a track record of success with similar projects elsewhere. The proponent was also required to complete a signed Submission Form providing additional information in connection with the REOI process. It was however, made very clear in the REOI that the Township was prepared to negotiate with any reasonable proponent, including the offer of financial assistance to assist a proponent with the cost of moving and/or refurbishing the building.

Despite these widespread efforts to identify potential proponents, response to the REOI process was muted. Initially only four parties expressed interest in receiving the REOI. Through subsequent Q&A and provision of additional information these initial expressions were either withdrawn or not pursued. By the time of the deadline for submissions, only one response was received, and this from a fifth proponent. Subsequent to the deadline, a sixth response was received just in the form of a vague expression of intent without any specific details.

The one response received (the fifth proponent referred to above) was clearly non-compliant in not addressing the detailed requirements of the REOI process. No specific use was specified and there were no financial or other details provided as required, nor was the Submission Form completed and signed.

Accordingly, in the judgment of TCI, there are no qualifying responses from potential proponents. After doing all that could reasonably be expected of it regarding the building, the municipality is now in a position where it must act in the interests of the public regarding the unsafe structure: i.e., proceed to demolition.

### **C) Recommendations**

In the opinion of the consultants, recommendations for the Township going forward would be as follows:

- 1) Council should formally accept the conclusion that after an exhaustive search process, no credible use or user for the former Raisin River Heritage Centre has been found, and that the process should now move towards the expedient demolition of the structure;

- 2) The CDSBEO should be informed of this decision and their input and cooperation solicited in the demolition process;
- 3) The remaining members of the Historical Society should be informed of this decision and their input solicited in the appropriate rescuing and storing of any items in their collection left in the building;
- 4) Township staff should issue an explanatory note to all proponents and stakeholders expressing any interest in the building through this process, thanking them for their interest, and outlining their decision regarding demolition and the rationale for this;
- 5) A press release to the wider community explaining the general situation should be released;
- 6) A commemorative process for the building and its various functions (as outlined in the TCI proposal letter of January 16<sup>th</sup> 2023) should be undertaken;
- 7) The Township should develop an RFP for demolition of the structure and preparation of the site should begin as soon as can be arranged;
- 8) Ultimately, negotiations with the CDSBEO should be concluded with a view to transfer of the site to their ownership.

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Thank you very much for the opportunity to assist the Township with this most interesting project, and the opportunity to work with you and your staff. Should you have any questions about this approach, please do not hesitate to call me.

Yours truly,



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TCI Management Consultants

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cc. G. Young