

Forth Junction Heritage Society

**Annual General Meeting Oct. 25, 2018**

## **Annual Progress Report 2018**

Another busy, eventful and exciting year has brought us closer to our vision of creating an educational, family-friendly and sustainable community heritage park.

The acquisition of the now-closed Calgary & Edmonton Railway Station Museum collection from the Junior League of Edmonton, the encouraging consultation with Red Deer County officials for use of the 60-acre parcel south of the regional nature park at Springbrook and the adoption of the Springbrook Community Heritage Park Master Plan have been the major hallmark accomplishments of the past year.

Going forward, the big challenges are increasing public awareness and buy-in, increasing membership, getting corporate and individual commitments for investment and philanthropy, and completing a business plan for the proposed park. These objectives are necessary in order to move forward with the Springbrook site and to have a home to exhibit the acquired C&E Museum collection.

### **The C&E Railway Station Museum Collection**

On July 11, I received an email from Phalyn Chenard, President-elect of the Junior League of Edmonton, a non-profit women's leadership organization, indicating that they intended to close the C&E Railway Station Museum that they have operated since 1982 and were looking for a heritage group that could provide a new home for the artifacts, 90% of which had been directly donated to them. Originally, the JLE had decided in 1977 to restore the Strathcona (South Edmonton) C&E Railway combination station, the last remaining station of its type between Calgary and Edmonton, for their headquarters. Similar stations had been constructed during the summer of 1891 at Red Deer, Innisfail, Olds, Carstairs, Airdrie, Lacombe, Ponoka, Wetaskiwin and Leduc as well as at Strathcona. Five more similar stations were later built south of Calgary. However, the station was determined to be unsalvageable so they decided to replicate the station, except for the freight house section, instead. I immediately responded indicating an interest. It was discovered later that they had contacted other organizations and existing museums but no others had responded.

I immediately called for a special meeting of the Board of Directors, with other society members welcome, to discuss the offer. Several of us met in Springbrook, along with Morris Flewwelling and Liz Taylor, on July 17 and it was decided to proceed with pursuing the offer. There was also a discussion on developing a collections policy and contacting the Alberta Museums Association. Morris graciously offered to purchase the AMA Museums Manual on the society's behalf, which was done and is now in my possession. After the meeting, a few of us went on a brief field trip to the Springbrook option site.

On July 20, we received an inventory list from Phalyn and on July 29, Rick and I went on a field trip to the museum to get a first-hand look at the collection, to look for challenges and to attempt to determine how much space would be needed to store it. After the visit, we started

the process of trying to find a way to move the collection to the Red Deer area and finding a storage facility for that collection. We approached the Benalto Booster Society (operators of the restored Benalto station), Red Deer Museum and the Red Deer Cultural Dept. None had space but the City did suggest we apply for a Culture Opportunities Grant.

Another special meeting of the Board was set for August 21 at which time, several resolutions were passed that included pursuing the acquisition of the C&E Railway Station Museum collection and applying for the Culture Opportunities Grant in the amount of \$2,950, which at the time seemed sufficient for moving and storing the collection. At that point we thought regular storage might be acceptable but we later determined that heated storage would be preferable increasing the cost of storage.

Application for the city grant was submitted on August 24 and we received word on Sept. 6 that our request was granted. We received the cheque on Sept. 24.

Meanwhile, we had to wait for the Junior League of Edmonton Board to pass a resolution to gift the collection unconditionally to the society, which they did on Sept. 12. On Sept. 17, we received the Transfer Agreement which was signed by us and returned to them.

We contacted several storage companies, most of which only offered “cold” storage. Sentinel Storage and StoreSmart Self-Storage in Gasoline Alley provided quotes and StoreSmart was chosen due to having the lowest price for storage for one year.

After several attempts at finding a moving company willing to move the collection at a reasonable cost, we decided to move the collection ourselves when Roy offered the use of his 16-foot trailer. I purchased a number of moving supplies from StoreSmart and they lent us some moving blankets, most of which we ended up not needing as Roy had lots of blankets available.

On Oct.5, the first trip to Edmonton to move the collection was undertaken. Roy, Steve, myself and the family of Jill, Daniel and Katie Craig packed items and moved most of the smaller items and some of the heavier items into the trailer. It was unloaded to the storage unit on Oct. 10 by Roy, Steve, Clayton, Mike (a friend of Roy’s) and myself. On Oct. 14, a second trip to Edmonton was undertaken with Roy, Heather, Lane and myself moving the remainder of the collection into Roy’s trailer, except for the freight wagon which is in need of restoration. Lane was particularly helpful in removing the Morse telegraph equipment from the wall. That load was moved to the storage unit on Oct. 17 by Roy, Steve, Mike and myself.

So the challenge now of course is finding or building a suitable facility to exhibit this collection and make repairs on the items that need some TLC.

### **Finding a Suitable Rail Park Site**

At the beginning of this year, we were focused on two potential sites for our vision of a major rail park destination – Innisfail and Springbrook. By the end of the period, we were more focused on Springbrook.

On the Innisfail front, I met with Innisfail Town Council for a second time on Feb. 20 necessitated by the fact that much of council, mayor and administration had changed since my meeting with council in September of 2017. The response was quite enthusiastic but there were concerns about the cost of access and servicing. On March 7, I met with Doug Bos, a councilor and owner of Discovery Wildlife Park. There was some discussion about a partnership between ourselves and the wildlife park since he was considering purchasing the quarter section north of his facility from Melcor, part of which we had been considering for our own vision. Doug attended our March 15 meeting when we discussed the pros and cons of the site along with a few others still being investigated. After some attempts at scheduling another meeting with Doug without success, the Innisfail option has been put on hold. Bill Wilson, FJHS member and operator of the Alberta Central Railway Museum near Wetaskiwin, was also in attendance and he mentioned several challenges of laying track and the regulations about running trains with passengers.

On the Springbrook front, there are reasons to be optimistic that this option has some legs even though there is still a long way to go before access to this site will be granted. After meeting with Red Deer County Planning Director Dave Dittrick and Planning Manager Ron Barr in October of 2017, I sent our proposed site plan at the time for our park vision based on our previous discussions to Dave, Ron, short-term planner Treena Miller and councilor Dana Depalme. Ron suggested some changes and that I contact Marc Jerry at RDC Donald School of Business who I met with on Dec. 1. Marc offered some options and said he would take it to his class to determine if a student would be willing to take on creating a feasibility plan for us as their community project. Ten days later, Marc indicated that none of his students was willing to take it on as it seemed like too big a project.

On Feb. 28, I met with the county councilor, Dana Depalme, representing Division 3 (which includes both Springbrook and Niobe). She was new to council so needed some time to get up to speed but she seemed excited about the concept and promised to look over the documents I gave her. She and Ron were also at the open house in Springbrook on May 24 concerning the county's plans for the area east of our proposed site and I had a chance to review our vision with them.

At our special meeting of August 21, we adopted the Springbrook Community Heritage Park Master Plan. We also passed a resolution to pursue negotiating with Red Deer County officials regarding the Springbrook site. I emailed several to see who would respond. I was invited to meet with County officials on Sept. 24 with Ron, Dana, Mayor Jim Wood and Community Services Director Jo-Ann Symington attending. It was a very positive meeting and I left with the impression that, if certain conditions were met, they would be willing to partner with us for the development of the park and would be open to providing services like water, sewer, power, roads, pathways and possibly landscaping. However, a number of conditions were outlined that includes support from the community of Springbrook and promises of funding from corporations, philanthopists and investors. Their primary concerns were that the project might take a long time to get the funding to start construction and that, once started, it could not be completed. So they want assurances that the project can be completed in an unspecified reasonable period of time.

On Oct. 16, Rick and I manned a display booth at the Discover Springbrook information fair. Several attendees showed great enthusiasm for the concept plan and that the park could be located in their community.

### **Springbrook Survey**

Surveys were taken by many at the Discover Springbrook information fair and eight were returned. All showed support for the concept and that they would visit the park on a regular basis. All thought it represented a good balance of education, recreation and entertainment. The most popular community features were trails and benches, a proposed natural park interpretive centre and family activity space. The least popular community feature was the campground and RV park. The mid-range features were the transportation-themed playgrounds and decorative gardens.

The most popular proposed visitor features were the railway historical interpretive centres, children's pavilion, railway station resort, historical model railway pavilion and transit centre and tour depot. The least popular visitor features were the elevated restaurant and train viewing platform. The mid-range features were the roundhouse conference centre, miniature train rides and full-size train rides.

Very few commented on values or what was missing from the concept. The values that were mentioned were community, family-friendly, care of land and history and Alberta history. Features that were mentioned that might be missing were a water park and community hall. Seven of the eight respondents live in Springbrook and one in Red Deer. Half of the respondents were in the 55-64 age range. There were no respondents under 25. Most of the respondents were female.

### **Member Activities and Miscellaneous**

Several society members were active during the year, especially with respect to the transporting and storage of the C&E Railway Station Museum collection. A big thank you to Roy for supplying his 16-foot trailer and participating in the removal, packing, transporting and physical moving of large items on both trips to Edmonton and both transfer of items from the trailer to the storage unit. Steve also actively participated in most of the transfer moves from Edmonton and to the storage unit. In addition, three members of the Craig family, Heather, Lane and Clayton were extremely helpful in the packing and loading of the collection.

Also a big thank you to Rick for our field trip to the C&E Museum, his work on the collections policy, his help at the Discover Springbrook fair and facilitating the creation of the souvenir rail medallions. A meeting between Rick, Morris and myself is being planned regarding the collections policy.

Brian and I met in April to discuss the future image of the society, the park and the website. There have been a few updates to the website in recent weeks, especially as it relates to the proposed Springbrook park.

Although we were not able to participate in Supertrains this year, I did have some productive discussions at the event with Bill and a few other museum operators and heritage projects.

We had a display at the Carstairs Model and Hobby Show in May. In previous years the Didsbury Model Rail Club had been using the Olds College for the event.

I met with David More and a few members of the Benalto Booster Club in September primarily in regard to the possibility of exhibiting or storing some of the C&E Railway Station Museum artifacts. They decided to decline the offer but Dave was willing to create an artistic rendition of a portion of our proposed park in return for historical tidbits about the Benalto railway station and the Alberta Central Railway that could be mounted on the walls of their facility.

I have had a few brief discussions with Gary Southgate over the past year and he is still looking for a property to display his railway equipment collection. He still prefers to have direct access to a rail line and having the opportunity to run his train. However, if we can acquire a site in the near future, he may be willing to discuss working with us again.

## **Priorities**

Priorities haven't really changed over the past year in spite of all of the efforts expended to acquire the C&E Railway Station Museum artifact collection.

There are three major areas that board members can work toward as our vision progresses:

**Membership** – a larger membership has been identified as being necessary to get major funding and I suggest we quickly develop strategies to increase membership. I also encourage all current members attempt to find additional members. Some form of reward for becoming a member could include a newsletter, a pin, a shirt, or a free poster.

**Public Engagement** – this includes a lot of areas. It would be useful to have someone who could contact and arrange for presentations to various organizations and service clubs. Another project that would be useful is a three-dimensional model or renderings of our proposed park. A model of the Springbrook park site in N scale would be 6'x16' in size while one in Z scale would be 4'x12', very impressive but costly and labour-intensive. A compressed version might be possible. A good artistic rendering might be more cost-effective.

**Fundraising** – this has always been the most challenging of our needs. We need people to research and prepare funding proposals to a variety of potential funders including government, corporations, individuals of means and organizations. Crowdfunding has been discussed several times and it may now be the time to pursue this avenue. We also need innovative ideas for unique fundraising events or projects.

Much of my work has been in researching, developing, updating and modifying the park concept and promoting the idea to individuals and institutions. That will continue of course, but for the concept to become a reality, there will be a need for increased leadership initiatives .

As mentioned last year, once we acquire a site, many volunteers will be needed to promote, engage and build the park. Eventually, a project manager or executive director will need to be hired to fund-raise and promote the park and, as the park develops, more staff will need to carry on the work.

It's been a very exciting year and much has been accomplished. Our journey to realize an important dream is gaining momentum.

Paul Pettypiece, President