

HUNTSVILLE COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN

A PROPOSAL
FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE
HUNTSVILLE RAILWAY STATION
AND LAND
FROM MAIN STREET
TO HUNTERS BAY

Submitted by:

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BACKGROUND TO DATE

October 2001 – After 13 years of on-again-off-again negotiation, the Council of the Town of Huntsville decided not to pursue the purchase of the CN Station. Members of the community rallied to tell the council of the day that they would raise funds to financially support the restoration if Council would continue to work toward the purchase of the station from CN. The non-profit charitable organization known as The Huntsville Train Station Society (HTSS) formed in July 2002, developed a plan for the site and began to raise funds. The Town continued negotiations with CN and finally acquired the station in December 2003. By February 2004 the CN crew were relocated to their new office facilities constructed within the historic freight shed and renovations on the station began.

The freight shed, perhaps one of three remaining in Canada, was given a new roof and siding and the windows which had been boarded with plywood for 50 years were uncovered and repaired. The station roof required insulation as well as new shingles, flashing and eave troughs. The soffits with their decorative rafter tails, along with the Porte Cochere were restored, repaired or replaced as required. The windows and doors were repaired. The old CN offices were removed from the interior and a new floor plan was constructed to accommodate both the new tenant Suzuki Strings and the Ontario Northland passengers. Interior trim and paint was matched to historic materials found during renovation. New accessible washrooms were constructed. A modern heating system was installed. Finally, after the District Pumping Station was removed from the roadway hillside and the station's lines were rerouted, the grading of the roadway improved the drainage of the site.

By Fall 2007 - the buildings had been stabilized.

In addition to providing volunteer labour and materials, the HTSS fundraising provided over \$55,000 in support of the Town's work to date on the site. In addition to the Town's expenditures, the Trillium Foundation provided \$25,000 and the Ontario Heritage Trust (previously known as the Ontario Heritage Foundation) provided \$12,500 in support of the heritage work being done.

Speaking of Heritage did you know the station was first designated as a Heritage railway station by the Federal government in 1988 and later designated as a Heritage Building both by the Town of Huntsville and the Province of Ontario? Are you aware of the role the station and rail link played in the economic development of the Town of Huntsville?

The Northern and Pacific Junction Railway (1885), the Grand Trunk Railway (1886) and finally the Canadian National Railway (1924) each in their own way provided the essential link in the steamship dominated transportation network of the Muskoka area. The railway connected local farmers, loggers and our tannery with their customers, while introducing tourism to the lakes via steamships such as the Algonquin and the Iroquois. Passenger rail travel was the norm.

Today passenger rail travel is considered “The Green Way to Travel” and steps are being taken throughout North America to encourage passenger rail traffic.

Ontario Northland has been receptive to Muskoka passenger issues raised recently by local town representatives who presented several marketing opportunities at a recent commission meeting in North Bay. Both Federal and Provincial representatives understand the needs of the passenger rail service and continue to support the HTSS in their endeavours.

In 1961 the Station Dock sank into Hunters Bay – our structural engineer and underwater divers feel we could ‘renovate’ the piers and install a deck. Voila – a fishing dock in summer and a skating dock in winter! Wired for music!

The concrete curbs on the station platform just north of the station are tell-tale reminders of the level crossing made of railroad timbers between the rails which allowed traffic to cross the tracks. Photos show the crossing and signage that once was in place so it is not too difficult to imagine our new crossing in the same place. A designated safe crossing!

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP? The HTSS membership continues to support the original proposal to the Town which included three phases:

1. Phase 1 To assist the Town to stabilize and restore the 1924 Huntsville Train station buildings and site.
2. Phase 2 Construction (actually re-construction) of the pedestrian walkway over the railroad tracks, connecting Centennial Park on Main Street to the waterfront and trail system on Hunters Bay
3. Phase 3 Reconstruction of (part of) the original steamship dock located on Hunters Bay creating a landing opportunity for public and private boating on the local lakes (and skating in the winter?).

This excerpt is from the **STRATEGIC PLAN– September 2002 - CN Station**

“The Huntsville Train Station Society has been working in conjunction with the town on a process to acquire, stabilize and restore the 1924 CN Train Station. The purchase and restoration of this site will greatly enhance the waterfront between Avery Beach and the downtown, will tie into the trail system along Hunters Bay and make significant improvements to the west end entrance into Town. The usage plan for the building contributes in the areas of tourism, trails and traffic concerns.

Recommendation

THAT the restoration, rehabilitation and usage plan as developed by the Huntsville Train Station Society be endorsed.”

Now under the new **2008 COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN**, the HTSS would like to participate in a working group to be created by the Town to further develop the station site, from Main Street to Hunters Bay. The HTSS would like the working group to develop the plan for the Station site, including site landscaping (such as plants, trees and rocks, flagpole installation, road safety barriers, signage, installation of the caboose on site) as well as investigate the feasibility of the Phase 2 & 3 initiatives originally suggested.

This project touches on many main stream issues of our town – heritage, tourism, recreation, transportation, and rail safety. The Town owns all the land from Main Street to the waters of Hunters Bay with the exception of the rail beds.

To be able to create a development for the entire site is an opportunity just waiting to be put into action.

And with volunteers ready to assist financially!

The opportunities abound:

Waterfront trail users able to access modern washrooms at the station;

Main Street pedestrians (non vehicular) able to access the trail/dock to create a new trail loop;

A safe crossing with clear sight lines;

Opportunities to expand the town's waterfront interests, perhaps creating a public/private partnership.

Enhancement of a transportation depot for the public