

BACKGROUND

The Trail Historical Society was founded in 1953 as a branch of the BC Historical Association. Early on, the focus of its members was on sharing a love of local history and collecting artifacts and photos of early Trail. In the early 1970's, the Society began to campaign to establish a museum, which culminated in the City providing space in City Hall for that purpose. The City's first museum was opened in 1977 on the second floor in the former RCMP offices. In 1978 the Trail City Archives was established in the same location. The museum was modest in size and used old store display cases and home made panel boards for its exhibits. In 1978 several display cabinets were constructed to replace the panel boards, which remain in use today. The location of the museum was poor and hard to find and we struggled to attract visitors.

In 1989, space in the Trail Memorial Centre became vacant when the Seniors Centre was relocated to the Greater Trail Community Centre and the museum was moved to its current location.

We have had a museum for over 30 years but little has changed. Some exhibits remain as they were in 1977. Others have been revised as new artifacts and photos were acquired, while we have been able to create some new exhibits within the limited space we have to work with.

So, what are the issues with the current museum?

Location

- Not visible to the public, especially visitors, with a one word sign on a small canopy on a very large building with traffic speeding by at 50+ kph
- Access is poor for vehicles – can only be safely accessed from the west on a very busy highway
- Access from the east is near impossible and dangerous
- Parking is limited to 10 metered spaces which the museum must share with other TMC users making them unavailable at times
- No parking for RVs or buses

Size

- Only 600 square feet and long and narrow with the main door in the middle and doors exiting into the Arena
- This limits:
 - the organization of exhibits
 - visitor traffic flow through the museum
 - cannot handle large groups (e.g.: school classes)
 - number of exhibits and their size

- design of exhibits in old, outdated display cases

Presentation

- No environmental controls to protect the collection
- Heating and ventilation systems require frequent repair
- Ceiling lighting is poor and old and not attractive
- Electrical outlets located haphazardly requiring extension cords to light exhibits making the display unattractive
- Reception area is part of the exhibit space

Other issues

- Society cannot operate from the museum due to space limitations
- No programming can be undertaken in the museum
- Archives not part of the museum
- Staffing is limited to the summer months with a student
- Limited revenue source for the Society
- The museum does not meet current accepted standards for presentation of displays and does not depict our community's history very well

Conclusion

- A decent museum is the one major facility Trail lacks that other communities our size have
- The main focus of our Society should be on a community museum and yet it garners the least of our attention
- Our museum is not part of our community. Many residents don't know it exists and if they do, have never been in it. We are isolated from the community when we should be an integral part of the community, and can do nothing about it.
- The only solution is a new museum of adequate size in a new location that can be something the community can be proud of and that will be a visitor attraction for the City.

The Society feels support will be there for a new museum in the community. We need to articulate our vision within the community to gain its support.

CONCEPT

What should a modern museum be?:

- Name change to “Heritage and Culture Centre”
- Present the culture of the community
- Be entertaining
- Be educational
- Be sensory – be an experience for the visitor

VISION

The Society’s vision for the new museum and archives is:

- The museum and archives will reflect our community’s culture
- Exhibits will be designed to educate the visitor, entertain them and leave them with a lasting impression of what our community is now and how we got here, and how the culture of our community today is influenced by the past.
- Programming will be developed to involve the community in the celebration of our history
- Services we now provide will be enhanced and new services provided to the public wishing to learn about our history and experience our culture
- Attract both visitors and residents to the exhibits
- Become a focal point for the community, something we can be proud of.

Our vision for a new museum has always been directed towards creating a heritage attraction that differs from what most associate with a typical history museum. Over the course of the past year it has become apparent our past vision for a new museum may not be financially achievable under the current fiscal restraints facing all levels of government, the chief funding sources for such a project. With this in mind, the Society has reconsidered what kind of heritage facility would achieve our goals for a new museum, while also attracting the necessary financing to establish the facility and operate successfully.

The Executive of the Society believes our community’s strongest asset is our history of excellence in sports and the dedication of our citizens to foster an atmosphere where success and the enjoyment of sports is an integral part of our culture. This is exemplified by the popularity of the Sports Hall of Memories (SHM) and the City earning the title “BC’s #1 Sports Town” by the Province newspaper. The Society believes we should be pursuing a heritage facility that builds on this reputation and it should be the direction taken in planning for a new museum in the City. Accordingly, we have developed a new vision for a museum and archives that reflects this strength of our community.

We are proposing the main focus of a new museum be on the community's sports heritage using the collection of sports memorabilia and archival resources currently in possession of the Society, much of which is exhibited in the SHM. The Society's collection of sports related memorabilia is one of the finest in BC. Several of the items in the collection are of significant importance to the history of sport in the Province, particularly in hockey and curling.

With respect to hockey, the SHM collection contains items dating to the formation of organized hockey in BC. The first hockey leagues in BC were formed in the West Kootenay/Boundary region in the early 1900's and the Society is in possession of trophies and other memorabilia from those leagues. These items have the ability to form the nucleus of a museum describing the history of hockey in BC and exhibits depicting this sports history. When combined with the history of excellence in sports for which our community is known, we have the potential to create a major visitor attraction in the City.

At the same time, a new museum will also describe the history of our unique community, its culture and the reason our community is what it is today. Our new vision will be presented in the following manner:

1. Sports exhibits

These exhibits will be the primary focus in a new museum. An assessment of the SHM and related sports collection needs to be undertaken to determine what items are important to our community's history and what can be used to support exhibits dedicated to the history of sports in Trail and hockey in the West Kootenay/ Boundary area and southeast BC in general.

This assessment will include an analysis of what the future of the SHM should be. At this point it is the intention of the Society to maintain the exhibits and to replace any items moved to the new museum with items currently in storage. This assessment will also include a review of the current condition of the exhibits and what changes are necessary to improve their presentation or our sports history at this location and the long term operation and maintenance of the SHM.

2. Community history

The Society proposes to continue with our vision for exhibits to describe the history of Trail. We propose to amalgamate the history exhibits with our archives to create an exhibit area where the public can enjoy the presentation of our history and at the same time utilize the resources of our archives, one of the strengths of collections. The exhibit area would contain displays that describe our community's special history and provide

space for research and public programming. The Society's offices would also be located in this area. This exhibit area will include displays describing the important themes of Trail's history, including:

- Culture and immigration
- Smelting
- Wartime history
- Education history
- Union history
- The arts
- Settlement, community growth and development
- Columbia River

3. Partnerships with the Library

The Society supports the relocation of the Trail Library to a more convenient and larger premises in the downtown area. We share the same concerns the Library Board has with respect to their current location in the Memorial Centre. We are in exactly the same predicament and believe if we can relocate both facilities to space in close proximity to each other, the citizens of Trail will realize a significant benefit from the services we both will offer, which we are currently unable to fulfill.

For many years the THS and the Library have felt a partnership with each other would improve the delivery of our respective services and public programs in a more meaningful way and encourage the development of new cooperative programs that would enhance the quality of life in our community. We both are eager to explore the possibilities that would be available to us if both facilities are relocated together in the downtown area.

BENEFITS OF A NEW MUSEUM

Benefits to the community:

- Creates a major visitor attraction for the City that can be a contributor to the betterment of the City's economy
- Enables residents to identify and appreciate our community culture
- Allows residents to learn about the community's history and culture in a pleasant and stimulating environment
- Encourages residents of Trail to experience Trail's growing "arts and cultural district" and provides them with a greater appreciation of the contributions this sector makes to our lifestyle
- Acts as a stimulus to increase the public's presence in the downtown area
- Creates a modern museum and archives facility in which to preserve and protect the City's history
- Shows visitors the City understands and appreciates the legacy we have been given from the past
- Improve the ratings the City receives in the Heritage sector of the Communities in Bloom competition
- Provides an opportunity for the Society and the Trail Library to develop programs that will share the community's history with its residents and enhance the operations of both facilities
- Provides an engaging outlet for the spread of knowledge for our youth and students
- Allows for both the Museum and Library to share common services and facilities that will reduce the operating cost of both
- Creates an unique visitor attraction for the City and region
- Reinforces and supports existing community events, festivals, and programs (i.e. Remembrance Day, Silver City Days, etc.)
- Develops pride in our community.

Benefits to the Historical Society:

- Physical improvements
 - Increase to exhibit space
 - Consolidation of the operations of the Museum, Archives and offices of the Society to better serve the public
 - Better storage areas for the collections
 - Better access and parking
 - An area for public presentations and lectures
 - More visible presence in the community
 - Modern environmental controls to protect the collections
- Creates an opportunity for special programming and exhibits, including traveling exhibits

- Allows the establishment of outreach programs to schools, youth, and seniors
- Allows the presentation of a larger portion of the Archives' significant photograph and textual collection
- Improves public access to the Archives collection
- The museum will be open year-round
- A quiet research area will be provided.