

Subject: Civic Square Compatibility & Accessibility Project
From: Hilary Grant, Director of Community Development
Date: March 12, 2023



Recommendation

That Council direct Staff to work with Vigilant and Mills & Wright on refining Concept 3: Working with the Natural Landscape for the Civic Square Compatibility and Accessibility Project based on feedback from the disability community.

Alternatives

- Reject the What We Heard Report, citing the need for more comprehensive data analysis and/or community engagement.
- Defer a decision, allowing time for further Council review.

Background

On August 8, 2023, Council awarded the Civic Square Compatibility & Accessibility Project contract to Vigilant Atlantic. Vigilant Atlantic submitted the Civic Square Compatibility & Accessibility Project "What We Heard" Report to Staff on March 5, 2024 (Attachment A). This report encompasses draft concept designs and valuable feedback from a public workshop on November 30, 2023. Additionally, Staff led a focus group with representatives from the Lunenburg Royal Canadian Legion Branch 23 and members of the disability community on December 14, 2023. Further, draft design concepts were presented to the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee on February 7, 2024.

The Town of Lunenburg is undertaking this project to enhance accessibility and Civic Square's heritage value. The feedback received from the public should play a pivotal role in informing the design of Civic Square to ensure inclusivity and ease of use for all community members. It is imperative to treat the feedback from individuals reliant on proposed accessibility features with utmost seriousness.

Discussion

Civic Square's public use is part of Old Town Lunenburg's Outstanding Universal Value (Attachment B). Community members preferred Concept 3: Working with the Natural Landscape to achieve compatibility and accessibility through sensitive design. Concept 3 makes Civic Square fully accessible while minimizing the visual impact on Civic Square.

Staff received feedback for design refinement from focus group participants and the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee.

1. Considerations for Access:

- Explore the possibility of a switchback ramp at the front of Town Hall on Cumberland Street while acknowledging concerns about their maintenance and usage. External lifts were seen as challenging to maintain.
- Ensure accessibility for all floors of Town Hall, as accessibility is crucial for employment and civic engagement.
- Incorporate accessible pathways that are gently sloped and wide and incorporate seating and handrails.
- Provide direct access from the parking lot at the Old Fire Hall to Town Hall, ensuring accessible parking and routes to amenities.
- Prioritize accessibility for parents with disabilities in the design of play spaces.
- Provide choices in pathways and access points, such as ramps and stairs, to accommodate different needs and preferences.
- Provide lighting along pathways for safety and accessibility.
- Use non-slip and color-contrasted surface materials for pathways.
- Include accessible washrooms on each floor of the atrium if feasible.
- Ensure sufficient and strategically located accessible parking with clear signage and wayfinding.
- Install electric chair charging stations.

2. Specific Design Preferences:

- Preserve trees and maintain an organic feel in the design.
- Incorporate seating near the bandstand and ensure accessibility for wheelchair users.
- Consider incorporating monuments into organic pathways and explore new locations for war memorials.
- Consider burying electricity infrastructure to enhance aesthetics and safety.
- Explore opportunities to provide internet/Wi-Fi access in the area.
- Fence play spaces for safety and security, particularly for children with disabilities.

Several people who use wheeled mobility devices preferred the third design option compared with the switchback ramps for ease of use. Additionally, relocating monuments did not pose a significant concern for members of the Legion. Notably, ensuring accessibility to Town Hall emerged as a top priority for the focus group and the Joint Accessibility Committee, with cost considerations deemed insufficient to justify exclusion from this space. Conversely, some participants in the workshop raised apprehensions regarding potentially prohibitive construction costs, which tempered their support for the project.

The next phase of the design process is Vigilant Atlantic preparing tender documents encompassing architectural, structural, mechanical, and electrical specifications, accompanied by Class C cost estimates. These documents will also include an anticipated project construction timeline and an assessment of maintenance costs associated with the proposed new design. Progressing through this stage of the design process will provide a clearer understanding of construction expenses, enabling Staff to pursue funding opportunities and ensure readiness for implementation should Council opt to pursue grants and advance the project further.

Strategic Plan Relevance

- Community Structure: Direction regarding how the Town will be structured and how land will be used.
- Heritage: Preserve the valuable heritage resources of Lunenburg while embracing an ongoing landscape evolution.
- Urban Design: Direction to enhance residents' and visitors' experience of the built environment.

Relevant Legislation

UNESCO's Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage

Town of Lunenburg's Comprehensive Community Plan

Town of Lunenburg's Municipal Planning Strategy

Town of Lunenburg's Land-Use By-law

Town of Lunenburg's Old Town Lunenburg Heritage Conservation District Plan and By-law

Financial

This report is part of the \$76,070 (plus HST) approved by Council on August 8, 2023, and is within the amount allocated under the Town's Operating Budget.

Communications

Staff have posted the What We Heard Report on the Town's website.

Attachments

Attachment A – Civic Square Compatibility & Accessibility Project What We Heard Report

Attachment B – Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

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Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

Old Town Lunenburg is the best surviving example of a planned British colonial settlement in North America. Established in 1753, it has retained its original layout and overall appearance, based on a rectangular grid pattern drawn up in the home country. The inhabitants have safeguarded the Town's identity throughout the centuries by preserving the wooden architecture of the houses and public buildings, some of which date from the 18th century and constitute an excellent example of a sustained vernacular architectural tradition. Its economic basis has traditionally been the offshore Atlantic fishery, the future of which is highly questionable at the present time.

Criterion (iv): Old Town Lunenburg is a well-preserved example of 18th century British colonial urban planning, which has undergone no significant changes since its foundation, and which largely continues to fulfil the economic and social purposes for which it was designed. Of special importance is its diversified and well-preserved vernacular architectural tradition, which spans over 250 years.

Criterion (v): Old Town Lunenburg is an excellent example of an urban community and culture designed for and based on the offshore Atlantic fishery which is undergoing irreversible change and is evolving in a form that cannot yet be fully defined.

Integrity

Within the boundaries of the 33.85 ha property are located all the elements necessary to express the Outstanding Universal Value of Old Town Lunenburg. The property encompasses the intact original town plan in its entirety, missing only the fortifications that surrounded the Town in its early years, but of which there are no surviving above-ground remains. Its boundaries adequately ensure the complete representation of the features and processes that convey the property's significance, and there is a 32.44 ha buffer zone. The property does not suffer unduly from adverse effects of development and/or neglect.

Authenticity

Old Town Lunenburg is authentic in location and setting, forms and designs, materials and substances, and uses and functions. The original British colonial town plan remains evident, including the regular layout of property parcels in a grid pattern with geometrically regular streets, central public spaces, and key community structures, with a functioning waterfront as its focus. In terms of forms and materials, there is a harmony of scale, siting and materials (predominantly wood) throughout the property, and a regional architectural vocabulary that includes the 'Lunenburg bump', an indigenous five-sided dormer. While a continuing vernacular architectural tradition is integral to the property's Outstanding Universal Value, there has been very limited infill in the modern era. Many of the property's historic uses and functions survive.

Most of the recent changes to the property are renovations to specific buildings, some of which have better conveyed the heritage value of Old Town Lunenburg than others. Due to long-term economic circumstances, there are also ongoing pressures on property owners in terms of rising property values, maintenance costs, and the challenges of retaining historical accuracy in restoration planning.