

Flatiron Revitalization Initiative

Lacombe & District Historical Society

Melissa Blunden



Background

The Flatiron Building has served as an interpretative centre and home to Lacombe Regional Tourism (LRT) for several years. LRT has recently indicated an interest in changing its focus to a more online and mobile function, with the intent of departing the basement and main floor of the building by the end of 2021. At the same time, the Lacombe & District Historical Society (LDHS) has been seeking a suitable space to host their growing collection of artifacts and archival records pertaining to the entirety of the Lacombe region. The current holdings, housed in the basement of the Michener House Museum, is overcrowded and has reached its capacity. Additionally, and based on a Facility Assessment by the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), the current holdings for the Archives & Collections is

considered *not-suitable*, for numerous reasons, including its location below the water table, making it in danger of seepage and/or flooding. The opportunity to develop an Archive & Collections space in a safer venue with compact shelving as well as a permanent publically accessible research workspace will be a positive move for the Society as well as the community in general.

LDHS has considered a purpose-built facility, but with the downturn in the economy and the ongoing pandemic, the focus has shifted to other alternatives for the near future. With that in mind, an Collections & Archive professional visited the community to provide advice on the repurposing of potential locations. After visiting multiple locations, the consultant indicated the Flatiron Building to be an ideal size and space for the intended use. LDHS has approached other partners to create a joint-use facility they believe will benefit themselves, LRT, Lacombe County, and the City of Lacombe.

Proposal

The idea is a simple one. LDHS would move into the Flatiron building and occupy the main floor and basement to serve as an exhibit space, gift shop, archive, and front-line services for visitors. The building owner has agreed to provide the second floor at a reduced rate. This space would become a new art gallery featuring items from the City of Lacombe public collection. LDHS also plans to maintain a small-shared office for use with LRT on the second floor. This approach provides LRT an affordable space, peer support, and access to a meeting boardroom.

As for the cost involved in making this transition a reality, LDHS anticipates a slight increase to the City of Lacombe, who would maintain the lease with the building owner.

Current Cost lease cost:	\$27,000
Proposed lease cost:	\$36,000
Less LRT contribution:	\$4,000
Total increase:	\$5,000

Implementation

As a first step, LRT & LDHS offices will relocate to the second floor to allow the main floor to be organized for the inaugural exhibit. Should the proposal move forward, and the current Public Health Orders be lifted, the LDHS estimates the exhibit/gallery space will be ready for a 2021 opening. LDHS suggests 3-4 exhibit changeovers per year to keep the facility fresh and inviting, with the opportunity for regional heritage groups to submit exhibits annually to showcase their communities as well. The Archives & Collections will move into the Flatiron Basement in 2022, as budget and funding allow. Additionally, the second floor will be restructured to function as a secondary gallery and programming space.

As the facility moves into the second year of operation, LDHS would look to augment the budget by embracing new revenue opportunities. On the main floor, this would take the form of a candy or soda shoppe, as well as the Vintage Photo Booth program, gala and special evening events. LDHS will also look to secure exhibit sponsors for each changeover. The goal of these actions is to eliminate the need for future operating budget increases.

To ensure LDHS has the stability to advance the plan and maximize the initiative's opportunity success, the request also includes a minimum five year lease term be established. The building owner has agreed to freeze the annual lease cost for the first three years of the agreement, with a small increase for the final two years.

Synergies

LDHS requires a home for our archives but we also want to proudly display our wide range of Lacombe artifacts. But we also see an opportunity to provide some cost savings to LRT, which should help them to advance other priority initiatives including their new mobile operation. The City of Lacombe gains a new exhibit space for their public art of which most resides in storage as well. Additionally, this iconic building remains vibrant, occupied and active, which is a key Downtown Area Redevelopment priority.

Both the City and County will benefit as LDHS and LRT will operate more efficiently, with more capacity to promote the greater region as a tourism and cultural destination. This will be of particular importance post-pandemic.

City of Lacombe Strategic Plan Alignment

This proposal aligns with Lacombe City Council's strategic plan strategies:

4.2.3.C "Work with Lacombe's downtown economic sector to stimulate the development of the historic downtown area."

4.3.4.B "Maximize the community value of City owned (used) properties."

4.4.1.C "Encourage community groups to develop other revenue sources."

"Growing from our historic roots, the City of Lacombe is a vibrant, thriving and welcoming community." - City of Lacombe Vision Statement

Lacombe County Strategic Plan Alignment

This proposal aligns with Lacombe County Council's strategic plan principles:

5.1.A "Utilize a comprehensive and consistent strategy of providing information to the public."

7.3.A "Develop a funding formula and criteria for partner participation for County owned & non-owned facilities."

8.4.A "Research and implement new and innovative ways and technologies to provide and/or improve services."

"Recognizing our history and solid foundation, we approach the role of providing the best possible level of municipal services for our citizens through a base of collaborative and supportive teamwork." - Lacombe County Key Principle Statement