



SUBJECT: Proposed next steps for the operation of Freeman Station

TO: Committee of the Whole

FROM: Recreation, Community and Culture

Report Number: RCC-09-24

Wards Affected: all

Date to Committee: May 13, 2024

Date to Council: May 21, 2024

Recommendation:

Direct the Director of Recreation, Community and Culture to assume the responsibility for the operation, upkeep and maintenance of Freeman Station after the sunset of the Friends of Freeman Station as a non-profit charitable organization; and

Direct the Director of Recreation, Community and Culture to move forward with the implementation of Option 1(A) while continuing to collaborate with the Museums of Burlington to facilitate a smooth transition of operations of Freeman Station and through the 2025 budget development process as outlined in recreation, community and culture department report RCC-09-24.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture

Background and Discussion:

Freeman Station stands as a testament to Burlington's rich railway history, dating back to its construction in 1906 by the Grand Trunk Railway. Originally serving as a vital transportation hub for surrounding communities, the station faced the threat of neglect until concerned residents formed the Save Our Station Committee in 1985. Their efforts culminated in successful restoration initiatives, preserving the station's historic integrity.

In 2005, the City of Burlington acquired ownership of the Grand Trunk Railway Station, known as Freeman Station, at no cost. Subsequently, an ad hoc committee comprising citizens and City Council members spearheaded renovation and relocation efforts. This endeavor led to the establishment of the Friends of Freeman Station (FOFS) in 2011, a non-profit licensed charitable organization entrusted with the moving, restoring and managing the operations of Freeman Station.

Under a license agreement with Ashland Canada Corp. and later Solenis Canada ULC, Freeman Station found a new home, where FOFS restored and developed the site for the public to enjoy. The restoration journey, marked by dedication from volunteers and enthusiasts, reached a milestone on Canada Day, 2017, with the station's official reopening to the public.

Freeman Station remains a cherished site, with the potential of showcasing exhibits on Burlington's railway history and providing a venue for small community events. Despite its cultural significance, FOFS encounters major challenges. As a non-profit organization reliant on external support, FOFS faces funding constraints and operates solely with volunteer efforts.

Recognizing the need for sustainable stewardship, FOFS initiated discussions with the City of Burlington in February 2023, seeking the transition of management and operation responsibilities to the municipality. This initiative was formalized through a board motion in March 2023, signaling FOFS's intention to dissolve and transfer ownership to the City.

Subsequent to consultations with FOFS, the City of Burlington took steps to engage Burlington Museums regarding the assumption of responsibility for Freeman Station's operation, upkeep, and maintenance. In November 2023, report RCC-11-23 directed the Director of Recreation, Community and Culture (RCC) to commence discussions with Burlington Museums Board, paving the way for a potential transition of stewardship.

Strategy/process/risk

The Future of Freeman Station (FOFS) has been an integral part of the community, committed to preserving and promoting the historical significance of Freeman Station. However, recent challenges have jeopardized FOFS's ability to continue its mission effectively. This report aims to provide insights into the current situation, challenges faced by FOFS, and proposed interim solutions.

Challenges Faced by FOFS:

1. **Lack of Resources and Funding:** FOFS has struggled due to insufficient resources and funding, hindering its operational capabilities. The organization has faced difficulties in maintaining and operating the station.
2. **Impact on Service Delivery:** The inadequacy of resources and space has directly impacted FOFS's capacity. Events and educational programs have been cut back, diminishing the station's role as a cultural and historical hub.
3. **Volunteer Burnout:** FOFS heavily relies on volunteers for its day-to-day operations. However, prolonged resource constraints have led to volunteer burnout, further exacerbating the operational challenges.

After many years of tireless and outstanding work by many volunteers, FOFS feels it has fulfilled its mission of salvaging the Freeman Station and is now embarking on the dissolution of the organization, scheduled to commence on July 1st. This process entails terminating contracts, informing relevant stakeholders, and notifying provincial and federal authorities.

FOFS aims to complete the divestment of all responsibilities related to the operation and management of Freeman Station by November 30, 2024. This marks a significant milestone in the organization's journey, reflecting its commitment to the preservation of local heritage.

Proposed Interim Solution:

Given the imminent dissolution of FOFS, an interim solution is imperative to ensure the continued operation, upkeep, and maintenance of Freeman Station. This interim solution includes having city staff assume immediate responsibility for the operation, upkeep, and maintenance of Freeman Station. This includes ensuring the safety and security of the premises, conducting essential maintenance tasks, and managing any ongoing commitments or contracts where possible.

Options Considered

The Future of Freeman Station (FOFS) is currently at a critical juncture, requiring decisions regarding its future. This report evaluates two potential options: keep Freeman Station in its current location or relocate the Station to another location on city-land. Each option presents distinct challenges and considerations that need to be addressed.

Option 1: Keep Freeman Station at 942 Brant Street

An Ontario Land Surveyor was hired in 2024 to sketch the improvements on the property, attached herein as Appendix A. Items on site include, Freeman Station, train car shed, rail tracks, box car, caboose and decking, as identified within Schedule A. There are 3 Sea Containers on site which must be removed. It is unknown at this time what contents are within the containers and where/if they will be disposed/donated. The current zoning of the property is MXC, Mixed-Use Corridor Zone, therefore, a Community Institutional Use is permitted.

The City has two pathways forward if the Station were to remain at 942 Brant Street:

1. City complete minimal renovations and site improvements for site to function as a community facility to be programmed by the community or the Museums.
2. City complete substantial renovations and site improvements for the site to continue to operate as a museum.

In both pathways forward the site will require the City to submit planning applications. It should be noted that a requirement of approval will be the asphalt paving of the site to accommodate approximately 10 parking spaces.

If the Station is to remain at 942 Brant Street, there are several items from a property standpoint which should be noted:

- (i) The site is Licenced from the property owner Solenis. The property owner must be agreeable to the improvements. If desired, the cost to purchase the land would be in addition to the costs outlined in the section. Staff have not discussed any changes to the current agreement with Solenis at this time.
- (ii) The site does not have vehicular ingress/egress, access to the site is shared with the Fire Station.

Option 1 (A): Convert Station into a community facility

In Consultation with Asset Management, renovations to be in compliance with a Community Institutional Use and planning applications will be required to receive an occupancy permit.

The Station has a maximum occupancy of 36. An occupancy of only 36 poses a challenge for its use. Community facilities typically require larger capacities to accommodate visitors and facilitate engaging experiences. Therefore, this limitation may need to be addressed through creative design solutions or alternative arrangements to maximize the station's potential as a facility.

The Museum feels that there are opportunities for additional programming to be developed and delivered onsite. The subject matter and the important story that Freeman Stations talks about Burlington could be explored and experienced by the community through tours, community programming, events and family activities. The Museum could provide limited programming to small homeschool groups, youth groups and smaller interest groups.

Total initial capital investment to convert the Station into a programable community facility use managed by the Burlington Museum is approximately \$250,000.

The Operating Costs associated with this option will require an annual investment by City of approx. \$30,000 in addition to staff resources estimated to be approx. 2 weekend PT positions, 2 PT educators, 1 part time maintenance position. Once again, these resource requirements would be spelled out through the 2025 Budget development process.

Option 1 (B): Convert Freeman Station into a museum

In addition to the site improvements and planning applications mentioned in Option 1 (A), the City will have to engage with Museums of Burlington and an external consultant to determine the necessary renovations required to meet applicable building code requirements for community facilities such as museums and safety standards. A cursory review by Asset Management indicated renovations may include structural repairs and accessibility upgrades.

The Station has a maximum occupancy of 36. An occupancy of only 36 poses a challenge for its use as a museum. This constraint may restrict the scope of exhibits, events, and educational programs that can be hosted within the space. Museums typically require larger capacities to accommodate visitors and facilitate engaging experiences. Therefore, this limitation may need to be addressed through creative design solutions or alternative arrangements to maximize the station's potential as a museum.

Total initial capital investment to convert the Station into a Museum is approximately \$1-1.5 Million.

The Operating Costs associated with this option will require an annual investment by City of approx. \$30,000 in addition to staff resources estimated to be approx. 2 weekend PT positions, 2 PT educators, 1 part time maintenance position. Once again, these resource requirements would be spelled out through the 2025 Budget development process.

Option 2: Move Freeman to City owned lands

Relocating Freeman Station to other City Owned land requires hiring a structural engineer to ensure the building's integrity for the move. A full site plan and building permit process would be necessary along with the retention of qualified professionals to design foundations specific to the new location and connections to utilities. Duplicating the current foundation and basement adds to the complexity and cost. Transporting such a large and historically significant structure involves expenses like specialized contractors, permits, and overcoming logistical challenges such as highway overpasses and hydro line clearances. Additionally, potential costs for restoring the current site include removing the basement and restoring the land.

Option 2 (a): Move Station to Ireland House, 2168 Guelph Line

Staff have performed a cursory inspection of the Ireland House site. If it is determined following a structural review of the Station that it can be moved, Ireland House has land to accommodate the structure to continue as a museum.

It is crucial to assess and potentially address any trees in the vicinity that may obstruct the relocation process. This could involve pruning, trimming, or even removing trees to create a clear path for transportation. Additionally, if any of the trees are deemed purebred and subject to protection regulations, additional costs may be incurred for measures such as creating protection zones.

The Museum feels that there are opportunities for additional programming to be developed and delivered onsite as occupancy would not be a barrier. These program opportunities could include, increased school trips, additional day camp programs and large-scale community events. Shared resources, staff and programming could reduce some costs.

Total initial Capital investment to relocate the Station to Ireland House is approximately \$3-3.5 Million. In addition to this, Museums of Burlington would also require an operating budget to cover program and facility expenses in addition to resources to operate, maintain and offer programming in the space. These additional resource requirements would be further developed in a business case through the 2025 budget process if this option is preferred by Council.

Option 2 (b): Move Station to a City Park

In 2010, staff thoroughly examined options for relocating the Station, identifying numerous obstacles. They evaluated 16 locations against various criteria, shortlisting 5. However, the Council decided against pursuing any of them. Prior to 2010, over 20 other locations were also investigated. Staff now anticipate difficulty in identifying

another suitable location for relocating Freeman Station. If this option is chosen, the base cost to move the Station to a proximate park will have similar financial implications as Ireland House minus the cost for duplicating the current foundation and basement. This option would likely mean the retirement of the Station as a Museum.

Total investment to relocate the Station to a City Park is approximately \$2 Million.

Financial Matters:

Total Financial Impact

As part of the assessment, staff will examine the financial implications, including both operating costs and long-term capital requirements, based on the chosen option. Any financial impacts identified will be presented to Council for their consideration through a business case during the 2025 Budget process.

Source of Funding

n/a

Other Resource Impacts

n/a

Climate Implications:

n/a

Engagement Matters:

The Friends of Freeman Station, the Executive Director, and the Chair of the Boards of Directors of Burlington Museums, were briefed and consulted on the proposed approach and options outlined in this report. Additionally, internal staff from various specialties including Realty, Engineering, Community Planning, Facilities and Building, and Parks and Open Spaces were also engaged in the consultation process. Staff continue to collaborate with other stakeholders as the situation evolves.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the recommendations outlined in this report are designed to safeguard the ongoing preservation and operation of Freeman Station for the community's benefit. By directing City staff to assume responsibility for Freeman Station's operation, upkeep, and maintenance following the dissolution of Friends of Freeman Station the City can ensure a seamless handover to the City. Additionally, proceeding with Option 1(A) is advised to uphold Freeman Station's functionality and historical significance, taking into consideration factors such as location, funding, and resource allocation.

Furthermore, it is imperative to maintain discussions and collaboration with the Museums of Burlington to facilitate a smooth transition of operations for Freeman Station. This joint effort will guarantee the preservation of its historical significance and continued community value. Through the implementation of these recommendations, the City can effectively steward Freeman Station, perpetuating its enduring contribution to Burlington's cultural heritage.

Respectfully submitted,

Angela Paparizo

Manager of Arts and Culture

Appendices:

- A. Site Sketch of 942 Brant Street

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.