

**Mennonite Heritage Farm Acquisition****Report Purpose**

To present a report on the feasibility, costs, and other implications of Strathcona County purchasing the Mennonite Heritage Farm and how the acquisition might fit in with current Strathcona County programs and operations, strategies and potential involvement of community organizations.

**Our Prioritized Strategic Goals**

Goal 1 - Build strong communities to support the diverse needs of residents

**Report**

The farm was purchased in 1978 by Ernie and Linda Wiens. They opened the first communal gardens in 1979 and programming started in 2007 with the Annual Mennonite Picnic. Additional programming at the site includes farm markets, u-picks, petting zoo, RV camping, workshops, special event space, wagon rides, and concerts. The Alberta Mennonite Heritage Cultural Society, which has 85 members, was formed in 2019 for the purpose of running the Mennonite Heritage Farm.

The property has a main house that was built in the 1960s with a garage added in 1991. There are washrooms, workshops, and a barn on the site. While there are no historical buildings or structures on the site, the value is in the intangible cultural heritage it showcases. Intangible cultural heritage is the living form of heritage that is a part of our cultural identity.

The intangible cultural heritage or agrarian lifestyle that is currently presented at the Mennonite Heritage Farm can be offered in other locations in the County. Many of the activities and experiences offered at the farm are included in the Bremner House Heritage Site Master Plan. As these activities and experiences can be obtainable at various locations, it is not recommended the County purchase the Mennonite Heritage Farm.

*Strategy Links*

The Mennonite Heritage Farm provides the opportunity for programming that showcases rural history and heritage which boosts community identity and increases awareness of Strathcona County's rural roots. The current vision of administration is to bring similar amenities to Bremner House and the land adjacent to The Pointe.

Agrarian experiences such as the Mennonite Heritage Farm meets the goals of the Strathcona County Municipal Development Plan with providing opportunities and support to residents to celebrate arts, culture and heritage and recognizing the unique history of the area.

The Tourism Strategy also has a vision of Strathcona County being known as a place where visitors can come to enjoy authentic agritourism activities, immersive cultural experiences, and engaging festivals.

*Operating Costs*

The operating and staffing costs for the property need to be estimated in consideration of the following: seasonal farm and open space operations, year-round property maintenance, programming and planning, special events and guest service. This expense could be

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Associate Commissioners: Jason Chance, Community Services

Lead Department: 25

anywhere between \$300,000 - \$500,000 per year. Annual staffing costs can be estimated in the range of \$200,000 - \$350,000 and would include both permanent and seasonal staff.

Additional operating expenses would be incurred through the maintenance and the lifecycle delivery activities of required equipment and machinery. Other costs to be considered include bringing existing buildings up to codes or replacing them if required, building maintenance and supplies.

**Council and Committee History**

November 9, 2021      THAT the November 9, 2021 Priorities Committee Presentation on the Mennonite Heritage Farm and request for assistance be referred to Administration to provide a report by the end of Quarter 2, 2022.

**Other Impacts**

**Policy:** N/A

**Legislative/Legal:** N/A

**Financial/Budget:** Purchase of two parcels of land and approximately \$500,000 - \$850,000 in staffing and operating expenses.

**Interdepartmental:** Planning and Development Services

**Master Plan/Framework:** Municipal Land Framework, Recreation and Culture Strategy

**Communication Plan**

Letter to Dr. Ernie and Linda Wiens on the outcome of the presentation.

**Enclosure(s)**

1                      Mennonite Heritage Farm Overview