

Mennonite Heritage Farm Overview

Council Meeting
June 28, 2022

Purpose

- Feasibility, costs and other implications of Strathcona County purchasing the Mennonite Heritage Farm;
- How the acquisition might fit with current Strathcona County programs, operations and strategies; and
- Potential involvement of community organizations.

Background

- The farm was purchased in 1978 by Ernie and Linda Wiens.
- Communal gardens opened in 1979.
- Programming started in 2007 with the Annual Mennonite Picnic.
- Additional programming includes:
 - farm markets and u-picks;
 - petting zoo;
 - dry RV camping;
 - wagon rides;
 - workshops;
 - special event space; and
 - concerts.



Background



Background

- The Alberta Mennonite Heritage Cultural Society was formed in 2019 for the purpose of running the Mennonite Heritage Farm.
- There are currently 85 members.



Background

- The main house was built in the 1960s with the garage added in 1991.
- Also on the site are public washrooms, sheds, carpentry and mechanical workshops, and a barn.



Background

- Other considerations include:
 - bringing existing buildings and facilities up to building and safety codes;
 - long-term building maintenance needs; and
 - challenges and the need to improve the site to ensure accessibility.
- There are no historical buildings or structures on the site.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

- The value in the Mennonite Heritage Farm or other agrarian experiences is in the intangible cultural heritage.
- Intangible cultural heritage refers to the inherited traditions or expressions we practice.
- It is the living form of heritage that is a part of our cultural identity. These elements are of interest to visitors and are important to be preserved.



Operating Costs

- The operating and staffing costs need to be estimated in consideration of the following: seasonal farm and open space operations, year-round maintenance, programming and special events, and guest service. This expense could be anywhere between \$300-\$500k per year.
- Annual staffing costs can be estimated in the range of \$200-350K and would include both permanent and part-time staff.

Operating Costs

- Additional operating expenses would be incurred through the maintenance/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.

Strategies and Plans

- **Recreation and Culture Strategy**

- The Mennonite Heritage Farm, as well as Bremner House, provide the opportunity for programming that contributes to the well-being of individuals regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, financial circumstance, geography or self-identity.
- These programming opportunities also showcase rural history and heritage which boosts community identity and increases awareness of Strathcona County's rural roots.

Strategies and Plans

- **Municipal Development Plan**

- Agrarian experiences 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.

- **Tourism Strategy**

- It meets the vision of Strathcona County being known as a place where visitors can come to enjoy authentic agritourism activities, immersive cultural experiences and engaging festivals.

Community Partnerships

- The Strathcona County Museum & Archives is interested in programming opportunities for visitors to experience the heritage of Strathcona County beyond their own location. Partnering with institutions to deliver offsite experiences has great potential.
- The Strathcona Vintage Tractor Association was first involved with the Mennonite Heritage Farm for Open Farm Days in 2021. Their interest is in participating in similar events within Strathcona County.

Best Solution

- Intangible cultural heritage or agrarian lifestyle can be offered at other locations in the County. Many of the activities and experiences offered at the Farm are included in the Bremner Site Master Plan.
- The Bremner site is planned to be a rural community hub that provides authentic, dynamic and interactive experiences.
 - It is to be a venue for storytelling, events, gatherings, interpretation and education.
 - Site plan includes arts, crafts and heritage programming, interpretation, workshops, machinery display/storage, exhibit space, community gardens/u-picks, farmers' markets/flea markets, and food services.

Recommendation

- Administration does not recommend the purchase of the Mennonite Heritage Farm for the purpose of operating a Mennonite and agrarian experience for residents and visitors.

Questions