



Photo by Chris McPhee. Source: Flickr

MUSKOKA HERITAGE PLACE

Draft Report Recommendations/Projections- June 28, 2017

Lord
Cultural Resources

Creating Cultural Capital

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Understand strengths and weaknesses of the existing Muskoka Heritage Place (MHP) operation;
- Recommend an implementable and sustainable plan for the future of MHP;
- Prepare credible projections of attendance, operating revenues and expenses for MHP associated with the plan.

SUMMARY OF CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

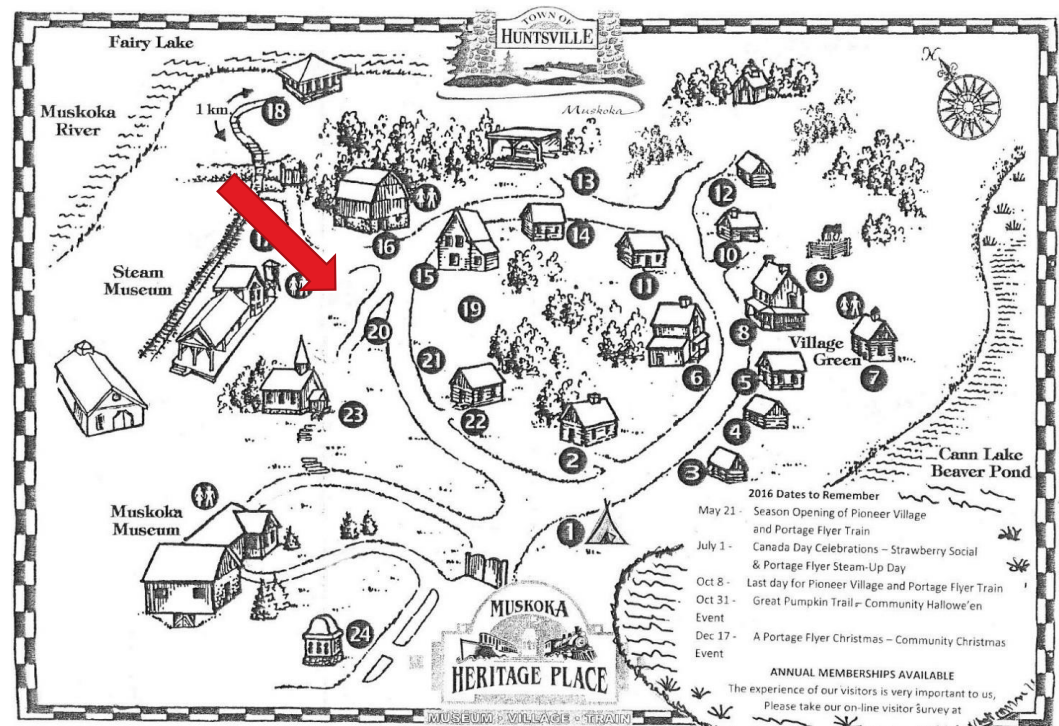
- MHP should be both a charged admission village and train attraction and also a free admission public park but at largely different times.
- Modify the MHP name/brand be **Muskoka Heritage Park**.

SUMMARY OF CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Village should be available for free admission to Huntsville residents except during special events. The train should continue to be charged for all visitors.
- Pursue written offer from Rotary Club of Huntsville to increase support for MHP on condition that the Town maintain or increase its annual financial support for MHP.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS: REVENUE

- Covered outdoor rentals and programming pavilion between the Wesley Methodist Church and the Boles Barn. This would allow, for example, for wedding ceremonies in the church and receptions in the pavilion.



CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS: PUBLIC PARK

- Re-creation or development of walking, snowshoe and other trails, skating rink and other recreational amenities for residents when MHP more a public park than heritage village
- Heritage-themed playground in association with Building 9 and outdoor area that has been used for farm animals.

PARTNERSHIPS

- Tying into downtown events.
- More native and heritage garden species and summer flower garden, in collaboration with Huntsville Horticultural Society.
- Better and lengthier experience when people get off train. One suggestion for private sector boat operator to coordinate a boat tour, potentially to include a stop at the downtown Huntsville dock. Longer term objective.

OPERATIONS

- Experiment with operating the train on Sundays during July and August, where practical, especially in advance of holiday Mondays.
- Modify admission charges

Regular Charges	Village Only	Train Only	Combination
Adult (25-64)	\$9.00	\$7.00	\$14.00
Senior (65+)	\$8.00	\$6.00	\$12.00
Youth (13-24)	\$8.00	\$6.00	\$12.00
Child (3-12)	\$6.00	\$5.00	\$9.00

OPERATIONS

- MHP operates with only 1.75 FTE staff. Add one more full-time staff person to serve as a Volunteer Coordinator and provide support to core staff on year-round basis, including when operated as a public park. Therefore 2.75 FTE.
- More part-time staff to support rentals and other needs.

PRIVATE SUPPORT

- Introduce a menu of sponsorship opportunities.
- MHP Foundation or Friends organization to raise funds and issue tax receipts.

VERY PRELIMINARY CAPITAL COSTS

- \$685,000 – Short Term (Phase 1)
- \$160,000 – Medium Term (Phase 2)
- \$105,000 – Long Term (Phase 3)
- \$950,000 – Total
- Main cost is covered rentals and programming pavilion in short term: \$350,000

ATTENDANCE PROJECTIONS

As heritage village and train attraction:

- 11,000: Current
- 22,000: Stabilized Short Term
- 24,000: Stabilized Medium Term
- 27,000: Stabilized Long Term

Park users would be additional

OPERATING PROJECTIONS

Total Operating Budget (rounded):

- \$325,000: Current
- \$485,000: Stabilized Short Term (Phase 1)
- \$498,000: Stabilized Medium Term (Phase 2)
- \$513,000: Stabilized Long Term (Phase 3)

All figures in constant 2017 dollars

OPERATING PROJECTIONS

Earned Income as Percentage of Total Budget:

- 36%: Current
- 45%: Stabilized Short Term (Phase 1)
- 50%: Stabilized Medium Term (Phase 2)
- 57%: Stabilized Long Term (Phase 3)

OPERATING PROJECTIONS

Additional Amount Required from Government and Private Sources:

- \$86,000: Stabilized Short Term (Phase 1)
- \$68,000: Stabilized Medium Term (Phase 2)
- \$40,000: Stabilized Long Term (Phase 3)

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

PLANNING PROCESS

The conclusions and recommendations are based on:

- Understanding the history, market, operation and finances of MHP
- Facilitation of a vision/assumptions workshop, public meeting, open house (60 attended) and interview process in Huntsville
- On-line survey (351 respondents)
- Analysis of potential resident, school and tourist markets for Huntsville
- Learning from experience of other museums and heritage villages

KEY FINDINGS/ CONCLUSIONS

- The need is for evolutionary change, not revolutionary change for MHP, consistent with the 1978 legal agreement between the Rotary Club and Town of Huntsville that the site operate as a pioneer village or park.
- The attendance decline at MHP is consistent with a general decline at heritage sites throughout North America in the past two decades but predominantly reflects lack of capital reinvestment, dwindling programming, a small resident market, limited staff, volunteers and other factors specific to MHP.

KEY FINDINGS/ CONCLUSIONS

- Compared to other heritage villages, the MHP visitor experience is currently weak and over-priced.
- Special events represent a high percentage of visits, and on most open days there are few visitors on site.
- The train offers the strongest appeal of MHP, as seen from attendance data and survey results, but the experience is too short with not enough to do at the other end of the trip.

KEY FINDINGS/ CONCLUSIONS

- Major capital reinvestment in MHP is not recommended because of the limitations of the market, site and potential earned income but modest capital reinvestment is needed.
- Similarly, a major increase in staff and the operating budget is not recommended but a modest increase in both is needed based on meeting the needs of MHP and wider community needs.
- Rebuilding volunteer support is essential to the future of MHP.

KEY FINDINGS/ CONCLUSIONS

- All museums and pioneer villages in Canada require substantial operating support from government sources, including MHP:
 - For MHP, 62% of \$337,000 operating budget, compared to 81% of \$1 million for Lang Pioneer Village near Peterborough and 55% of \$800,000 for Westfield Heritage Village near Hamilton.
 - Government support averages 49% of operating budgets of museums in Canada.
- The taxpayers of Huntsville are the primary funders of MHP but very few attend. Only 6% of non-school and non-event visitors reside within 100 km of Huntsville.

MAIN SUPPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Capital Improvements: Covered Outdoor Pavilion



Source: Courtesy of Parks Canada



Source: Har-Ber Village, Facebook



Source: Peterborough Museum & Archives, Facebook

MAIN SUPPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Capital Improvements - Covered Outdoor Pavilion:

- Main opportunity for revenue generation is in rentals but not more indoor rental facilities to avoid competing with Canada Summit Centre, Active Living Centre and hotels.
- Covered outdoor pavilion between the Wesley Methodist Church and the Boles Barn. This would allow for wedding ceremonies in the church and receptions under the pavilion.

MARKETING

- A new brand identity and logo should be developed associated with the Muskoka Heritage Park name.
- MHP should have its own modest marketing budget in addition to the marketing services provided by the Town.
- The web site and social media presence should be enhanced.