



Memorandum

Office of the City Clerk
Fax: 623-5468
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TO: Members of Council
FROM: Krista Power, City Clerk
DATE: Tuesday, September 22, 2020
SUBJECT: **Additional Information**
Committee of the Whole – September 24, 2020

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Additional Information

1. Correspondence from Ms. K. Moore, dated September 18, 2020, requesting to provide a deputation relative to the above noted, and deputation letter from Ms. K. Moore, dated September 21, 2020.

Hello,

Please note the following response to Speak to City Council has been submitted at Friday September 18th 2020 11:52 AM with reference number 2020-09-18-082.

- **Please state what agenda item you would like to speak about:**
Conservatory renewal and production greenhouse replacement
- **What are you requesting from Council?**
other:
- **If other:**
Renewal of Conservatory and rebuild of production greenhouses
- **Have you already been in contact with City Administration in regards to the subject matter of your deputation request?**
No
- **Please select the date of the meeting:**
Committee of the Whole - Thursday, September 24th
- **First name:**
Kyla
- **Last name:**
Moore
- **Email:**
Kylaturner@gmail.com
- **Phone:**
(807) 626-0728

Please note the names of the presenters that will be attending with you:

Kyla Moore - via written letter

Monday, September 21, 2020

Mayor Mauro and Members of Council
City of Thunder B7ay
500 Donald Street East
Thunder Bay, ON P7E 5V3

Dear Mayor Mauro and Members of Council,

Thank you for taking the time to review my previously emailed concerns pertaining to the Conservatory and its production greenhouses. I have elaborated on those concerns in this written deputation and hope you will take the time to review it, particularly the figures bolded for easy reference.

The video "A Promise Unfulfilled: The Thunder Bay Conservatory." *YouTube*, uploaded by Torin Gunnell Digital, 17 Aug. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAWk255DEdo raises questions that need answering before a decision is made regarding the Conservatory's future. In the video Councillor Bentz welcomes the community's input and states this is a community decision, asking the public to "learn some of the facts surrounding the conservatory and its costs."

The fact is that we cannot judge the value of our city's Conservatory paradise by its operational budget - that is illogical, as it was not built to generate income. No one asks whether Hillcrest Sunken Gardens or Vicker's Park or Friendship Gardens break even at budget time because their value is not measured in dollars and cents; their value is measured in pleasure and joy. It is intrinsic. Our Conservatory, a garden located indoors and free of charge, is unique among all our city parks and facilities.

But there's another reason we can't judge the Conservatory's value by its budget - because no one knows what its budget really is. For example, when the roads crew comes to clean the Conservatory parking lot it charges that service to the Conservatory budget. This is regular practice for all city departments, but not for the Conservatory. The Conservatory budget has been absorbing costs for services delivered to the Parks department for decades. This practice has just recently been amended so the changes are not reflected in the cost analysis currently being reviewed by Council. **The data is inaccurate and therefore cannot be used to decide the fate of the conservatory.**

Grant Thornton's review claims the "Conservatory" generates a net loss of \$622K and is one of our worst performing facilities, but that is misleading. Total Conservatory expenses are split 50/50 between Parks Operations and Conservatory. That's \$311K which includes the Conservatory facility itself, plus:

- operational costs of growing, planting and maintaining annuals and perennials in all city park beds (at consistently lower prices and higher caliber than privatization can offer)
- materials and labour for Low Impact Development (LID) projects (Conservatory staff have had to mitigate inferior contracted out planting services via infill and replacement of plants which were dying – the proper planting and maintaining of LID beds is critical for their success and this is why the Conservatory's skilled workforce is so valuable. LID projects are government funded and hundreds of future projects represent a massive savings if kept in-house)
- training and labour for essential Invasive Species Programs (which have long term payoffs and are also government funded)
- wages for a skilled full-time and seasonal workforce available on demand for overflow Parks Operations labour needs (e.g., Arbor Day, skilled assistance at the Marina, etc)

If services and materials for Parks Operations were actually invoiced and charged to Parks, the Conservatory's budget line would be drastically altered. Instead of asking how much the Conservatory costs, we should be rephrasing the question to, "How much does the Conservatory save?" If council is seriously considering closing the Conservatory based on erroneous division of costs, calling it a "cash drain" may be the furthest thing from the truth, especially if \$311K of materials and services were provided to Parks at a savings of \$83K compared to hiring private business.

If this is true (which it is) I must echo Councillor Bentz in welcoming council to "learn some of the facts surrounding the conservatory and its costs" and revisit the entire dialog surrounding its closure.

Looking back over the last 50 years one can appreciate how the conservatory has continued to inspire and uplift hearts across generations and international borders. It has served the whole community across class, age, and ability - everyone benefits. As a cost-free oasis in a cold winter, it provides a slice of the tropics for those without financial means to travel. It is a draw for tourists and visitors to the city. It is an educational opportunity. The impact it has upon many who visit it is deep and incalculable. Yet during all the decades it has provided these benefits, its upkeep and repair have been overlooked by council after council - until here we are today, making a "decision" about whether it was all worth it.

Who decides whether the Conservatory is a valuable city asset? Your constituents do. We've decided it is. We've expressed this sentiment again and again. In fact every time council has opened up discussion about whether it is worth the cost to repair and operate this facility moving forward your constituents have responded in shock and outrage at the mere idea we may abandon the Conservatory. Why can't council hear us? How many times is council going to ask and then ignore the answer? In 2013, 2015, 2017 Citizen Satisfaction Surveys the Conservatory's redevelopment and parks

renewal and enhancements led in popularity. In 2019 the Conservatory was taken off the survey. Repeatedly Thunder Bay citizens have voiced their desire to see investment in this gem so our children and our children's children can continue to enjoy it for another 50 years.

Councillor Bentz stated to me in an email, "I am concerned that with the decision to move forward with the \$42 million indoor turf facility that our ability to reinvest in the botanical gardens may be jeopardized." Vague threats that reinvestment is beyond the ability of council are unacceptable and simply not true. I've watched council move to invest millions in new infrastructure while our growing infrastructure deficit, evidenced by degrading facilities, is cited as an excuse to abandon those facilities when their needs reach critical levels. Committing resources to repair and maintain infrastructure that already exists, which is beloved by the community, is not beyond the ability of council and should be top priority. In my opinion council's lack of follow through on a decision about the Conservatory and consistent ignoring of public opinion is a failure in your role as council, as outlined in Municipal Act, section 224 (a): *to represent the public and to consider the well-being and interests of the municipality* and (d.1): *to ensure the accountability and transparency of the operations of the municipality, including the activities of the senior management of the municipality*. Is this failure part of a larger agenda? Is it on purpose?

Principles Integrity, a firm appointed in Feb 2020 by the City of Thunder Bay as interim Integrity Commissioner, works towards enhancing public perception of Council and their mantra beings with, "The perception that a community's representatives are operating with integrity is the glue which sustains local democracy. We live in a time when citizens are skeptical of their elected representatives at all levels." While many citizens are privately skeptical and shy away from directly asking for clarification about rumours, I prefer open communication. Forgive me for sounding like a conspiracy theorist for a moment, but I heard a disturbing rumour that our city council and those in positions of power over these matters may have purposely neglected Conservatory repairs while working behind the scenes on an ulterior motive which doesn't align with the public's clear will. Why? Who could possibly benefit from such machinations? I heard another rumour that the land which the Conservatory sits on is valuable, saleable, and if it weren't for that darned Conservatory already inhabiting it, deals could be made. Can council honestly tell me that there is no truth to these rumours?

Prove it. Do right by your constituents and take the Conservatory off the chopping block once and for all by investing in necessary repairs, upgrades, and expansions. After voting to invest in the Conservatory, council and administration must be held responsible to follow through in carrying out our democratic process with transparency and accountability.

An often overlooked but essential component of our Conservatory is its production capacity, made possible by its greenhouses. Mayor Mauro stated to me in an email, "My sense is many on council value the conservatory as a community asset" but I do

not get the sense that many on council value the production greenhouses as a community asset, and this is why I'm submitting this deputation.

Council has deferred a decision on the Conservatory and its greenhouses for 15 years. Now council is making controversial funding decisions during an unprecedented pandemic. Decision avoidance and risky decision-making are both outcomes of *decision fatigue*, a term referring to the deteriorating quality of decisions made by an individual due to the emotional and mental strain resulting from the burden of choices after a long session of decision making. I am very concerned the Conservatory's production greenhouses are about to become a casualty of council's decision fatigue. For those councillors on the fence or actively considering divestment, I want to stress that the numbers indicate this would be the wrong decision. And, more importantly, doing so would essentially be *cutting off the hands of the Conservatory*.

The Conservatory's production greenhouses are used to produce all of the flowers for our city parks, but they play a much larger role than this. They are necessary for propagating new plants, quarantine (biosecurity), strategic acclimation/healing/rest and horticultural care of plants, rotation of displays (seasonal displays being highly favoured as a reason for visiting conservatories), ongoing re-propagation of existing plants for in-house replacement and potentially even for trade with other conservatories. Horticulture operations made possible by use of the greenhouses achieve substantial annual Capital project savings by growing perennial plants internally for storm water retention sites while also helping Thunder Bay to become a more climate-ready city. Many of these plants provide ecological value to the community by contributing to biodiversity, raising awareness and supporting species recovery efforts (e.g., pollinator-friendly varieties, native plant species, and monarch butterfly food sources).

If the Conservatory renewal moves forward, the greenhouses can provide interim relocation, storage, and care for existing plants during renovations, as opposed to building a temporary holding structure or renting space locally. To illustrate the value of this capacity alone, local nurseries quoted rental services for storage of Low Impact Development (LID) plants at **\$48K/month + \$2K transportation** ("A Promise Unfulfilled: The Thunder Bay Conservatory" 31:38-31:57). Additionally, reports presented to council did not consider that even if the city were to contract out plant production, it would still need to install a new greenhouse facility to receive and hold plants while they were being installed in city beds. That is *if* the plan is for our city workers to continue to perform this work internally. Why should we keep this work in the hands of the Conservatory? Here is one good reason, illustrated by a recent quote from the Conservatory's lead hand and curator Karen Nadeau (Sandi Krasowski, 'Conservatory staff have had a busy summer', *The Chronicle Journal*, 16 Sept, p. A2):

"Crews spent the summer repairing and replanting the beds that were installed by outside contractors. Nadeau and the staff examined the work

and found about 3,000 of 4,000 plants installed by contractors had perished...”

Work carried out by trained, knowledgeable Conservatory staff is always going to be of superior quality compared to outsourcing because the city’s horticultural operations are not profit-driven. For those councilors who wonder whether purchasing plants from a vendor would be cheaper than producing plants in-house, here is another good reason not to cut off the hands of the conservatory by divesting the greenhouses:

In-house parks plant production = **\$55K/year**

In-house installation & maintenance of park flower beds = **\$254K/year**

VS

Contracting out plant production = **\$80K/year**

Contracting out installation and maintenance= **\$312K/year**

“Therefore providing this service internally results in a net savings of \$83,000 annually.” – Corporate Report No. R 23/2020

If the city can produce, install and maintain plants AT COST for the next 50 years, as they have been for the previous 50 years, my calculator says $\$83K \times 50 \text{ years} = \mathbf{4.15M}$ in savings.

Is there any truth to the rumour the city is consulting with local vendors in efforts to increase capacity to take over plant production? When the city investigated contracting out this work previously, no local vendors had capacity to fulfill the contract. If a local vendor decided today to move forward with building a huge new greenhouse in order to assume the city contract, who would be paying to build THEIR greenhouse? The taxpayers would pay – and we would continue to pay year after year. Why would we purchase plants at marked-up prices? Why would we even consider surrendering our greenhouses and all their added value if it just means someone else can build and maintain their own private greenhouse at taxpayer expense?

Some councilors may wrongly conclude that because the city has been strategically increasing the number of perennial flowers included in garden bed designs this would lend further weight to the argument for contracting out plants (i.e., because less flowers would need to be grown and purchased in the future). Although more perennials (8000 in 2020) were incorporated in the garden bed designs, the city still planted a majority of annuals (58,000 in 2020) because annuals bloom intensely until the frost arrives, adding colour and texture all season and giving a good show during our short summer months. Having a variety of annuals, perennials, bulbs, shrubs and trees provides ongoing interest. The hypothetical future scenario of not requiring greenhouses due to a higher usage of perennials does not warrant contracting out plant production because it is based on an unbalanced shift to perennials. However, expanded use of perennials has successfully resulted in garden planting being finished sooner, enabling resources to be redeployed to bed maintenance and other horticultural services.

If council were to invest in both the Conservatory and its greenhouses:
 Update to Conservatory structure = **\$2.6-3.1M**
 Replacement of production greenhouses = **\$1.6M-1.8M**
 Total price tag = \$4.2M-\$4.9M, so we'll call that an average of **\$4.5M**.

That may sound like a lot, but don't forget that's a **1x investment while the anticipated greenhouse lifespan is 30 years** (current structures have been standing for over 50 years). Consider how that investment will affect future expenditures over time. I've listed some numbers below so council can multiply them all by 30 years, or if council is feeling optimistic, multiply them by 50 years!

Simple Savings Analysis	X 30 years	X 50 years
<i>*all figures obtained from Corporate Report No. R 23/2020</i>		
Energy savings when updates are complete = \$80K/year	2.4M	4M
Overtime savings with automated climate control and irrigation = \$12K/year	360K	600K
Savings on annual glass replacement and boiler maintenance = \$10K/year	300K	500K
Savings on in-house parks plant production = \$25K/year	750K	1.25M
Savings on in-house parks plant installation/maintenance = \$58K/year	1.74M	2.9M
TOTAL SAVINGS	5.55M	9.25M
**PLUS potential savings via internal LID plant production/ installation/maintenance of \$30K/LID bed or \$120K/year . In 2016 council adopted 20 year Stormwater Management Plan which includes 500 LID beds	120K/year X 20 years = 2.4M	
**PLUS Parks Capital budget carry forward for the replacement of the Conservatory Production Greenhouses	\$222K	

The Expanded Services Opportunity Evaluation Report concluded the majority of botanical gardens and conservatories are not self sustainable and are funded by municipal and provincial government. The Report outlines funding stream possibilities and economic and social benefits to be had if the city implements its recommendations. After waiting anxiously for years, reports and assessments now prove that updating the Conservatory and replacing its greenhouses while keeping plant production, installation and maintenance in-house will more than pay for themselves over time through savings. So instead of continually asking, "Should we repair the Conservatory and replace the greenhouses?" the real question at the heart of this decade-long discussion is whether our city feels the Conservatory and its horticultural operations are "worth it" in terms of operation on an annual basis. The citizens of Thunder Bay have answered this question with a clear and unwavering, "YES!" and now we are relying on council to represent the public's will and translate it into action, as you were elected to do.

Sincerely,

Kyla Moore