

Deputation to the September 24, 2020 Committee of the Whole (Special Session - Program and Service Review)

The Friends of the Thunder Bay Conservatory attended a positive workshop with City staff and other stakeholders, in March of 2017, to discuss an upcoming Needs Assessment and Design Build of the Centennial Botanical Conservatory and its growing greenhouses.

May 10, 2017, a well attended Open House was held at the DaVinci Centre to gather public input as part of that Needs Assessment study.

That same month, \$100K in Canada 150 federal infrastructure funding was announced for the Centennial Botanical Conservatory to “help with renovations, as well the widening of pathways to accommodate people with disabilities or mobility challenges.” (1)

The Needs Assessment documents were finally presented to Council in March of this year. **We sincerely hope that Council members have had the opportunity to study them. They were paid for by the \$100K Canada 150 Infrastructure funding that was intended for upgrades to the Conservatory.**

In the City’s 2013, 2015 & 2017 Citizen Satisfaction Surveys, the Conservatory redevelopment had **MORE public support than the Waterfront development in popularity of major capital programs or projects!** (2)

In the 2019 survey the Conservatory was no longer mentioned. (3)

In 2013, 2015 & 2017 "parks renewal and enhancements", which are intrinsically tied to the Conservatory & its horticultural operations, came **2nd overall in Citizen Satisfaction Surveys**, only beaten by "roads, bridges and storm water drainage" in popularity of major capital programs or projects! (4)

Appendix B of the Conservatory Needs Assessment says:

"Based on feedback from public and stakeholder consultations, the facility has served the community well and there is clear direction by the public that the facility should continue to do so..." (5)

Earlier this spring a survey for Grant Thornton's Program and Service Review asked if the city should divest from the Conservatory. The results once again showed **strong citizen support for keeping the Conservatory.** (6)

The citizens of Thunder Bay have clearly said again and again that they want the Conservatory and they want it upgraded!

The Program & Service Review states that usage of the Conservatory in 2017 was approximately **32,500** people. These numbers are incomplete because the now defunct people counter was unreliable. (7)

In addition, these stats don't include the many visitors who enjoyed the Conservatory's outside gardens without ever going inside.

Since the Conservatory reopened in 2013, trees, shrubs, flower beds, a pollinators garden, demonstration gardens, beehives and more have been added. There are visitors outside throughout the growing season. When the temperatures drop the tropical gardens draw these same visitors back inside the Conservatory. Although COVID-19 temporarily closed our Conservatory, the beautiful grounds continued to attract visitors.

The Program & Service review says:

"The cost to update the Conservatory structure to be accessible to the public, to meet safety requirements and to realize efficiencies is approximately \$2.5-\$3.1M in total." (8)

It fails to explain that modern updates would provide significant savings in energy efficiency and reduced labour costs.

The Needs Assessment states:

"Based on a recently updated energy audit, completion of the work noted in this report is expected to achieve approximately \$80K in annual energy savings. Additional annual saving in the amount of \$10K can also be realized with the elimination of the current annual glass replacement and boiler maintenance." (9)

In addition: "The automated climate control and irrigation systems would reduce overtime costs by \$12,000 annually." (10)

Further it says:

"Expanded service opportunities including multi-purpose room rental, educational programming and installation of a coffee bar have been identified as options to increase revenues and attendance." (11)

A Canadian Garden Council press release in 2019 stated:

"Over 25 million people travel annually in North America to see gardens, and the global market of garden visitors exceeds 250 million. Research indicates that 46 per cent of garden visits result in an overnight stay, and the demographic of garden visitors includes all age cohorts. Destination British Columbia estimates the value of garden tourism in the Province of British Columbia alone exceeds \$300 million annually. Latest research in the UK show that Garden Tourism generates almost £3 billion of economic impact. Gardens not only have a significant economic impact but also enhance the tourist experience of a destination, while providing positive social and health benefits." (12)

TripAdvisor lists the Conservatory as number **8 out of 61 "Top Attractions in Thunder Bay"** (13) and number **4 out of 34 in the "Nature and Parks" category.** (14)

A review of Conservatory guest books from July 2019 to January 2020 shows visitors from 22 different foreign countries, plus 18 American states, 9 provinces, 1 territory and 68 other Ontario communities, all spending money while visiting the City.

Thunder Bay's Strategic Plan says that the city will "Promote, both inside and outside Thunder Bay, our many attractions, parks, facilities, services and innovative product development to encourage use." (15)

We hope that means that the City will finally start actively promoting one of its top tourist attractions, the Centennial Botanical Conservatory.

Two sections of the Program & Service Review resonate. On p.8 it states:
"In the public sector, these financial concerns must be balanced against being able to continue to offer vital services and maintain infrastructure that supports citizens including vulnerable groups in the community" (16)

On p. 65 it states:

"There is qualitative value that certain facilities provide (above and beyond financial performance). It will be up to the City to determine if there are sufficient public areas that allow for access to green space, natural spaces that directly link with wellbeing and quality of life." (17)

The Conservatory is a lush, green, indoor park accessible to all ages, abilities, cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. In the midst of a northern winter it serves as a sanctuary to vulnerable populations including those with low incomes, young families, the elderly, those with physical or mobility issues, those recovering from illness or surgery, people with physical or mental health issues, those unable to escape to southern climes, **especially now, in this time of COVID-19.**

The Centennial Botanical Conservatory was opened in 1967 to celebrate Canada's 100th birthday. It remains a beautiful botanical legacy bequeathed to us by a previous generation.

Appendix B of the Needs Assessment Study states: "The structure of the Conservatory is of notable historical significance..." (18)

Thunder Bay's heritage advisory committee recognizes the Conservatory as a "culturally important landmark." (19)

Sep 30, 2019, City council voted to list the Conservatory on the City Heritage Register. (20)

This year Thunder Bay is celebrating its 50th birthday. Will the loss of our beloved Centennial Botanical Conservatory, through closure or willful neglect, be the legacy we leave for future generations?

REFERENCES

(1) FedNor Investments Help Improve Community Infrastructure in Thunder Bay: “An investment of \$100,000 will enable the City of Thunder Bay to improve and expand the Centennial Botanical Conservatory. Opened in 1967, the Conservatory features exotic flowers, trees, shrubs and plants from around the world, and is a popular local attraction for schools, seniors, cultural groups, and wedding parties. The 50-year old facility is in need of structural repairs and FedNor’s funding will help with renovations, as well the widening of pathways to accommodate people with disabilities or mobility challenges.”

https://www.canada.ca/en/fednor/news/2017/05/fednor_investmentshelpimprovecommunityinfrastructureinthunderbay.html

(2) City of Thunder Bay 2013 Citizen Satisfaction Study, Ipsos Reid, July 2013, page 34:

<https://ipsos.com/sites/default/files/publication/2013-07/6208-ppt.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3N8BiVvi69DloSp13MRHSqVYbrglF6CTJrRPC2iS1NfqsqAHS319tXhSg>

City of Thunder Bay 2015 Citizen Satisfaction Survey, Ipsos Reid, May 2015, page 31

<https://getinvolvedthunderbay.ca/8742/documents/14978>

City of Thunder Bay 2017 Citizen Satisfaction Survey, Ipsos, June 2017, page 30

<https://getinvolvedthunderbay.ca/8742/documents/14976>

(3) City of Thunder Bay 2019 Citizen Satisfaction Survey, Ipsos Public Affairs, May 2019:

https://icrt-cotb.esolutionsgroup.ca/11140334_CityofThunderBay/en/city-hall/resources/Documents/Get-Involved/2019-Citizen-Satisfaction-Study-Report.pdf

(4) City of Thunder Bay 2013 Citizen Satisfaction Study, Ipsos Reid, July 2013, page 34:

<https://ipsos.com/sites/default/files/publication/2013-07/6208-ppt.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3N8BiVvi69DloSp13MRHSqVYbrglF6CTJrRPC2iS1NfqsqAHS319tXhSg>

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(5) Conservatory Plant Assessment by Green Design Landscaping Inc. / Kernow

Garden Inc., July, 2017, page 92:

https://136317745924965352.weebly.com/uploads/4/0/1/7/40172209/plant_assessment_report.pdf

(6) City Program and Services Review Phase Two Final Report, Grant Thornton, June 11, 2020, page 71:

<https://getinvolvedthunderbay.ca/10286/widgets/39799/documents/35818>

(7) City Program and Services Review Phase Two Final Report, Grant Thornton, June 11, 2020, page 47:

<https://getinvolvedthunderbay.ca/10286/widgets/39799/documents/35818>

(8) City Program and Services Review Phase Two Final Report, Grant Thornton, June 11, 2020, page 46:

<https://getinvolvedthunderbay.ca/10286/widgets/39799/documents/35818>

(9) Centennial Botanical Conservatory – Expanded Services Opportunity Evaluation and Facility Renewal Updates, March 2, 2020, page 7:

https://www.thunderbay.ca/en/city-hall/resources/Documents/Mayor-and-Council/Non-public_Meeting_Committee-of-the-Whole_COW---16_51-A.pdf#page=20

(10) Centennial Botanical Conservatory – Expanded Services Opportunity Evaluation and Facility Renewal Updates, March 2, 2020, page 6:

https://www.thunderbay.ca/en/city-hall/resources/Documents/Mayor-and-Council/Non-public_Meeting_Committee-of-the-Whole_COW---16_51-A.pdf#page=20

(11) Centennial Botanical Conservatory – Expanded Services Opportunity Evaluation and Facility Renewal Updates, March 2, 2020, page 7:

https://www.thunderbay.ca/en/city-hall/resources/Documents/Mayor-and-Council/Non-public_Meeting_Committee-of-the-Whole_COW---16_51-A.pdf#page=20

(12) Canadian Garden Council press release, Victoria, Canada, November 5, 2019: <https://www.bgci.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-Canadian-Garden-Tourism-Awards-media-release.pdf>

(13) Trip Advisor “Top Attractions in Thunder Bay”:

https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Attractions-g155017-Activities-Thunder_Bay_Thunder_Bay_District_Ontario.html

(14) Trip Advisor “Nature and Parks in Thunder Bay”:

https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Attractions-g155017-Activities-c57-Thunder_Bay_Thunder_Bay_District_Ontario.html

(15) Thunder Bay Strategic Plan, ONE CITY, GROWING TOGETHER, 2019-2022, #5 under Renew section:

<https://www.thunderbay.ca/en/city-hall/resources/Documents/Strategic-Plan/FINAL-Strat-Plan-Feb-13---2020.pdf>

(16) City Program and Services Review Phase Two Final Report, Grant Thornton, June 11, 2020, page 8:

<https://getinvolvedthunderbay.ca/10286/widgets/39799/documents/35818>

(17) City Program and Services Review Phase Two Final Report, Grant Thornton, June 11, 2020, page 65:

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(18) Conservatory Plant Assessment by Green Design Landscaping Inc. / Kernow Garden Inc., July, 2017, page 93:

https://136317745924965352.weebly.com/uploads/4/0/1/7/40172209/plant_assessment_report.pdf

(19) Quoted in CBC article, "Thunder Bay conservatory would 'broaden scope' of heritage registry, committee says", May 1, 2019:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/thunder-bay-conservatory-heritage-1.5117415>

(20) City Website, Heritage Properties:

<https://www.thunderbay.ca/en/city-hall/heritage-sites.aspx>

https://www.thunderbay.ca/en/city-hall/resources/Documents/Mayor-and-Council/Sept-30th-Meeting_Committee-of-the-Whole_COW---43_50---Accessible.pdf

Full guest book statistics

“A review of Conservatory guest books from July 2019 to January 2020 shows visitors from 3 Asian, 7 European, 4 South American, and 2 Middle Eastern countries as well as Australia, New Zealand, Trinidad, South Africa, Cuba and Mexico, plus 18 American states, 9 provinces, 1 territory and 68 Ontario communities beyond Thunder Bay, all spending money while they visit the City.” - as per Marilyn Stinson