

# Civic Conservatory Renewal Options

## ISSUE

The Civic Conservatory (Conservatory) has been closed to the public since September 2017 and requires significant repair prior to reopening. Options for expanding the Conservatory to help address some of the facility's accessibility challenges and provide increased programming space was proposed as part of the 2011 Kinsmen Park Master Plan and a 2016 building condition assessment.

In preparation for the 2022-2023 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget Review, and to pursue potential senior government funding opportunities and community partnerships, Administration is requesting direction from City Council on possible options for the future of the Conservatory.

## BACKGROUND

### History

The Conservatory, located at 950 Spadina Crescent on the site of the former Mendel Art Gallery, is an important civic and cultural facility in Saskatoon which provided residents an opportunity to experience a variety of horticultural displays in an attractive setting on a year-round basis. The Conservatory and Mendel Building was designated a municipal heritage property by City Council via Bylaw No. 9482, The Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory Heritage Designation Bylaw, 2018 (Heritage Designation Bylaw). See Appendix 1 - Statement of Significance - Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory for details of the heritage character-defining elements.

On October 10, 2017, a report was presented to the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services outlining the building condition assessment, restoration needs and identifying the need for additional program development and stakeholder engagement in order to pursue any expansion ideas for the Conservatory. The Committee endorsed the recommendation for stakeholder engagement and Capital Project No. 2540 Civic Conservatory Repair/Replacement was approved by City Council in the 2018 Capital Budget.

In June 2018, a Request for Proposals (RFP) for conceptual programming and design options for restoration and expansion of the Conservatory was released. Five proposals were received. The contract was awarded to the highest-scoring proponent, the partnership of AODBT Architecture + Interior Design and DIALOG Architecture.

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services was provided with a project update and summary of feedback from the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee on June 11, 2019. They provided comments related to:

- 1) the potential for new rental space within each conceptual option and views to the South Saskatchewan River and river valley from those spaces;

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- 2) potential future restoration of the Civic Conservatory in addition to the potential expansion;
- 3) the importance of the heritage elements of the building and preserving the integrity of the original building; and
- 4) how the annual operating budget has been managed while the Conservatory has been closed.

### Current Status

The restoration, and possible expansion, of the Conservatory is an important component of the 2011 Kinsmen Park Master Plan. It is also in alignment with other projects and recent improvements in the area, including the Nutrien Wonderhub (formerly Children's Discovery Museum), Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan, Prairie Lily Riverboat Cruises and Meewasin Valley Trail.

The intent of the Conservatory Renewal project is to determine the programming needs and desires for the Conservatory to develop conceptual programming options for an expanded facility. The project scope has included determining space needs for the identified uses and developing conceptual programming options that incorporate possible uses into an expanded facility. Stakeholder and public engagement in this process has been essential to determine the right mix and balance of uses.

### Public Engagement

The Conservatory Renewal project began in spring 2018 with the release of both a public questionnaire on the importance of the Conservatory and a targeted stakeholder questionnaire on potential uses for an expanded facility. The 921 responses received provide valuable insight into the significance of the Conservatory as a prominent civic facility and ideas for its renewal and potential expansion.

Five stakeholder meetings and workshops were held from September 2018 through to January 2019, with a public open house held in conjunction with other Kinsmen Park area projects in April 2019.

### Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee

On May 1, 2019, the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee received an information report and presentation on project scope and conceptual programming options. Key feedback received at the meeting included:

- There was general support from the Committee members that contrasting the original architecture of the building with a new design would be the best practice and align with the National Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada.
- There was mixed support for the two options for connecting new buildings to the existing Conservatory or main lobby of the Mendel Building.

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- There was mixed feedback on the importance of preserving the view of the south elevation from Spadina Avenue. While some felt it was an important aspect and is the way Saskatoon residents have known the Conservatory, other comments suggest that the view is largely blocked already by the mature trees in front of the building.

In March 2020, Administration presented an update report to the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee. This report described two refined expansion options and requested the committee's feedback and advice on any impacts to the heritage character-defining elements for each of two refined conceptual programming options as well as a renovation-only option. In follow up, an additional report was recently presented to the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee to renew the conversation. Feedback from the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee on the expansion and renewal options may be presented to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services in conjunction with this report.

### OPTIONS

Administration previously provided information on the possible options for expansion. Direction is required prior to Administration preparing a more detailed Capital Project submission for the 2022-2023 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget and to support applications for possible funding opportunities from other levels of government and potential community partners. While the options discussed in this report include conceptual designs, the primary purpose of the report is to obtain direction from City Council for future budget and funding applications. More detailed investigation and design will be required prior to construction.

Expansion Options 1 and 2 significantly expand the planting area, adding discrete arid and tropical elements, an outdoor plaza, programmable public space for educational and gathering purposes, as well as washrooms, mechanical and circulation space necessary to support the expanded facility. Both options effectively provide the same programming elements and benefits but reflect substantially different spatial layout and architectural approaches. Options have been ordered below based on cost, not preference.

#### **Option 1 – 'Modular' Expansion**

This expansion option (see Appendix 2, for conceptual drawings/models) involves the construction of one main semi-spherical, egg-shaped building in addition to the restoration of the existing building. The design enables a variety of options for placement on the site. This flexibility provides opportunity for the new building to be the feature on the site by creating a new south elevation view from Spadina Crescent, or to create a public plaza by placing the building toward the eastern river side of the site. It could also be turned in a number of directions so that the views from the second-floor biomes are focused on the South Saskatchewan River and river valley.

This option significantly expands the planting area, adding discrete arid and tropical elements, an outdoor plaza, programmable public space for educational and gathering

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purposes, as well as washrooms, mechanical and circulation space necessary to support the expanded facility.

This option considers the heritage of the Conservatory and Mendel Building through contrasting architecture. While there is potential for significant impacts to the heritage character-defining elements, Administration would work with stakeholders, such as the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee, to mitigate any impacts during the detailed design process.

A Class D Opinion of Probable Cost of \$20.6 million was identified to fund the Modular expansion option for the Civic Conservatory. This cost includes funds to address needed repairs/upgrades to the existing building and mechanical systems as detailed in Option 3. Other government funding may be available to support a portion of the costs of this option, subject to successful application. Expansion of the Conservatory is expected to result in an increase in the annual operating budget required for the larger facility. The operating impact would be investigated as part of the capital project definition. The potential exists for operating partnerships that could offset some of these impacts. Administration is in the early stages of exploring possible capital or operating partnerships.

### **Option 2 – ‘Expand’ Expansion**

This expansion option (see Appendix 2 for conceptual drawings/models) involves construction of a building expansion with a new roofline, reminiscent of both the existing pyramidal form of the existing Conservatory and the sawtooth form of the former Mendel Art Gallery building, in addition to the restoration of the existing building. The building configuration enables a defined public plaza to be created on the south side of the existing building.

This option highlights the existing Conservatory by maintaining the original view of the south elevation from Spadina Crescent and creates a new public plaza by framing the eastern (river) side of the site.

This option considers the heritage of the Conservatory and Mendel Building through complementary architecture. While there is the potential for significant impacts to the heritage, character-defining, elements, Administration would work with stakeholders such as Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee to mitigate any impacts during the detailed design process.

A Class D Opinion of Probable Cost of \$14.6 million was identified to fund the ‘Expand’ expansion option for the Civic Conservatory. This cost includes funds to address needed repairs/upgrades to the existing building and mechanical systems as detailed in Option 3. Other government funding may be available to support a portion of the costs of this option, subject to successful application. Expansion of the Civic Conservatory is expected to result in an increase in the annual operating budget required for the larger facility. The operating impact would be investigated as part of the capital project definition. Potential exists for operating partnerships that could offset some of these

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impacts. Administration is in the early stages of exploring possible capital of operating partnerships.

### **Option 3 – Restoration ‘Plus’**

This option involves renovation/restoration of the existing Conservatory with expansion to include a new enclosed glazed walkway/ramp external to the current Conservatory building to address accessibility and maintain the same approximate programmable space and service level.

To restore the existing Conservatory to approximate its previous level of service, a number of significant repairs are required including:

- 1) repair or replacement of the roof;
- 2) replacement of the glazing to a more energy efficient and bird-friendly glass product;
- 3) installation of an upgraded heating and cooling system;
- 4) restoration of the walled Japanese garden adjacent to the south elevation of the Civic Conservatory;
- 5) repair of the east (river side) heritage brick wall; and
- 6) upgrades to address accessibility of the Conservatory area

A building condition assessment report is required to determine the extent of necessary repairs, Building Code compliance issues and associated estimated costs to restore/repair the existing Conservatory building. Any renovation/restoration of the Conservatory would be undertaken in alignment with the building’s Heritage Designation Bylaw.

The restoration-only option (Option 4), described later in the report, requires the use of a significant share of interior space from the current conservatory footprint to accommodate accessibility improvements. To avoid the loss of programmable space, Option 3 proposes a modest expansion to the Conservatory through the addition of a new enclosed glazed corridor and ramp to provide universal accessibility from the Mendel Building lobby to the floor of the Conservatory. This would mean that the pre-closure planting/programming area and service level would be maintained, subject to pathway expansion needs to accommodate universal accessibility. This option would also require a new entrance, either in the east or south facade, to provide access to the floor of the Conservatory.

This option has not previously been presented to the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee; however, Option 2 – Expand includes a glazed corridor at the approximate location of the walkway included in this option. Administration expects that Option 3 would result in more moderate heritage impacts than either expansion Option 1 or 2. Consideration will be required during the design phase to ensure materials selected for the restoration are consistent with the Heritage Designation Bylaw. Administration would work with stakeholders such as the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee to mitigate any impacts during the detailed design process.

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This option was not evaluated as part of the public/stakeholder engagement process and was not considered during the design exercise; however, as part of Option 2 'Expand' option, an enclosed glazed corridor was explored to address a connection between the current lobby and a future expansion. The cost estimate prepared for that corridor was used to inform this cost opinion.

A Class D Opinion of Probable Cost of \$6.0 million was identified to address needed repairs/upgrades to the existing building and mechanical systems (~\$4.5 million) plus add an enclosed connection corridor to address accessibility requirements (~\$1.5 million). Other government funding may be available to support a portion of the costs of this option, subject to successful application.

Though expansion under this option is minimal, there could be a modest increase to the annual operating budget associated with adding an enclosed glazed corridor. The operating impact would be investigated as part of the capital project definition.

### **Option 4 – Restoration Only**

This option involves renovation/restoration of the existing Conservatory with no expansion to address accessibility. Accessibility ramps/lift would need to be accommodated within the existing Conservatory footprint resulting in a reduced level of service due to a decrease in programable space.

In order to restore the existing Civic Conservatory to its pre-closure state, the significant repairs as described in Option 3 would also be required.

As in Option 3, a building condition assessment report will be required to determine the extent of necessary repairs, Building Code compliance issues, and associated estimated costs to restore/repair the existing Conservatory building. As with Option 3, any renovation/restoration of the Conservatory would be undertaken in alignment with the building's Heritage Designation Bylaw.

To meet modern accessibility requirements, the restoration only option would impose substantial reduction in programming space, reducing it to less than what was previously provided in the Conservatory as a portion would be utilized for accessibility infrastructure, ramps or required lift.

This option is not expected to result in heritage impacts; however, consideration will be required during the design phase to ensure materials selected for the restoration are consistent with the Heritage Designation Bylaw.

A Class D Opinion of Probable Cost of \$4.5 million was identified to address needed repairs/upgrades to the existing building and mechanical systems. Other government funding may be available to support a portion of the costs of this option, subject to successful application.

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### **Option 5 – Permanent Closure/Demolition**

The option exists to permanently close and demolish the Civic Conservatory. Selecting this option would not be in alignment with the Heritage Designation Bylaw. This option would require approval by City Council, through the process outlined in *The Heritage Property Act*. Administration would work with stakeholders to identify opportunities to document, interpret and potentially acquire heritage resources or features. Also, under this option, the year-round horticultural experience provided by the Conservatory and enjoyed by many residents and visitors would be lost.

This option was not part of the project scope for evaluating programming options so was not evaluated as part of the public/stakeholder engagement process and was not considered during the design exercise. As a result, cost estimates and implications of selecting this option are approximate and would require further, more detailed investigation.

An estimate of the cost for this option is in the range of \$300,000 - \$400,000 depending on complexity, landscaping repairs and presence of hazards like asbestos. If City Council selects this option, Administration would investigate further and prepare a capital project for the 2022-2023 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget to request the necessary funding to cover the cost of demolition and removal and rehabilitation of remaining portions of the Mendel building and site. It is not anticipated that other government funding would be available to support any of the costs of this option.

### **Option 6 – Status Quo**

The option exists to do nothing and continue to keep the Conservatory closed. Administration would not include a capital project proposal for renovation or expansion in the 2022-2023 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget and would not pursue other government financial support at this time.

This option was not part of the project scope for evaluating programming options and was not evaluated as part of the public/stakeholder engagement process.

For programming, this option would represent the current status quo – the Conservatory would remain closed until such time as it could be renovated, expanded or demolished in the future.

The current infrastructure for operating the Conservatory is temporary. Specifically, temporary heaters are used to maintain temperature during the winter, reducing the snow load on the roof. Existing structural and building envelope issues are subject to further deterioration over time, increasing the risk of failure and future costs to repair.

Selecting this option would be neutral in terms of its impacts on the heritage character-defining elements and would not preclude future renovation or expansion; however, deferring these activities raises the risk that further deterioration of heritage character-defining elements will result and may no longer be salvageable if restoration work were to be undertaken. Also, under this option the year-round horticultural

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displays historically provided by the Conservatory and enjoyed by many residents and visitors would remain unavailable.

The approximate cost to continue operating the Conservatory at its current closed status is approximately \$15,000 annually. The Conservatory would remain closed until at least 2024, assuming that it would be part of the next Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That this report be forwarded to City Council recommending approval of Option 3 – “Restoration Plus” as the basis for capital planning and potential funding applications through other government funding programs.

### **RATIONALE**

Option 3 provides an appropriate balance between multiple considerations while restoring, to like-new condition, an important heritage building and popular attraction for community recreation. It also represents a manageable capital cost, particularly when considering the potential ability to access senior government funding. This option retains, as closely as possible, the pre-closure programming or level of service while improving accessibility. Heritage impacts generally will be limited to only those changes necessary to restore the building and improve environmental performance and accessibility; however, the addition of an external glazed corridor and new entrance to the floor of the Conservatory is expected to have a moderate impact. Administration will work with stakeholders, including the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee, to mitigate impacts.

### **ADDITIONAL IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS**

Infrastructure Canada is currently accepting applications for retrofits and new building projects for community buildings under the Green and Inclusive Community Buildings Program. Based on the Administration’s assessment of the program, the proposed Civic Conservatory Restoration Plus project would be closely aligned with the purpose and requirements of that program. The deadline for “large retrofit project” and “new community building project” applications under this program is July 6. Based on an assessment of the program materials, Options 1, 2 and 4 could also meet eligibility requirements, though expansion options (Options 1 and 2) may have difficulty meeting building energy performance requirements. None of the options would be guaranteed federal funding support as this is determined through a competitive process. Administration will report to City Council at the appropriate time to create a capital project for the restoration project and also to report on a funding plan.

In addition to the project cost estimates identified in each option, all options except Option 6 – Status Quo, would require additional capital funding for the City of Saskatoon’s component of the project cost, to be identified in the future Capital Project submission.

Administration has identified this project as a potential opportunity for partnerships with non-governmental organizations and/or corporations for some role in the operation/programming of the renewed Conservatory. While preliminary investigation

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has begun, more certainty on the project scope and potential funding sources will enable more substantive discussions with potential partners.

With any of the renewal and expansion options, Administration will ensure the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee has opportunity for input into the detailed design as it affects the heritage character-defining elements.

Once Administration has direction from City Council on which option to pursue, it will undertake a number of next steps:

- Work with Finance to identify and pursue funding options, including other levels of government. (for Options 1-4 only).
- Refine cost estimates and operating impacts and prepare a capital project submission for consideration along with the 2022/2023 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget.
- Expand discussions with potential capital and operating partners, including senior government, community and corporate partners.

### **COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES**

Following City Council's decision on direction for the Conservatory, Administration will update the project web page.

As part of the future capital project work (subject to approval of the project in the 2022/2023 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget) a Communication Plan will be prepared to guide communication activities for whichever option proceeds.

### **APPENDICES**

1. Statement of Significance - Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory
2. Civic Conservatory Renewal - Conceptual Programming Options (Expansion)
3. Civic Conservatory Options Summary

### **REPORT APPROVAL**

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