

**Mack Laing Nature House Advisory Committee**

**Minority Report**

***Comox, British Columbia***

**June 24, 2016**

## Executive Summary

*The minority members on the Mack Laing Nature House Advisory Committee (the Committee), Angela Burns and Mark Ouellette, felt it necessary to prepare a minority report, largely because the Chair's report, presented to and endorsed by the Town of Comox Council, disregarded professional judgements, and never met the stated Terms of Reference (TORs) which were supposed to guide the Committee's work.*

## Formation of the Committee

The Town of Comox newspaper advertisement, asking for applications for the Committee (November 10, 2015), stated that it would be tasked with "reviewing the current status of the lands and buildings" in Mack Laing Park, deeded to the Town in 1973 by Hamilton Mack Laing. The Committee was to make "recommendations per the Terms of Reference" regards the house known as Shakesides (the Property). (**See attached Document 1**)

**The Terms of References (TORs)** – The committee was tasked with examining the feasibility of converting the property into a natural history museum in keeping with the terms of Laing's 1982 *Will and Testament* and then make "recommendations per the TORs". (**See attached Document 2**)

## Discussions

- 1. The Committee did not review, in depth, the potential of converting the Property into a natural history museum, as per Mack Laing's Will (the Will) and the terms of the Trust.*
- 2. Discussion of any community engagement in a restoration project for the Property was disallowed.*
- 3. The Chair disallowed the consideration of reports about the Property, including professional engineering assessments and the professional construction experience of a committee member, despite objections, when determining the viability of restoring the Property.*
- 4. The Chair disallowed a discussion of funding sources, a list of which had been prepared and circulated upon request. Despite the TORs, leverage of the existing Mack Laing Trust Fund was not discussed.*
- 5. The Committee did not discuss how the Property might be converted into a nature interpretive centre or nature house, as per the modern interpretation of a "natural history museum", to meet the TORs and in keeping with the intent of the Will.*
- 6. An action plan was not developed based on a moderate alternative reached by SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. A majority vote on the three final options resulted in the Committee putting forward the third option, to demolish the Property and construct a viewing platform. It is our opinion that the third option does not satisfy Mack Laing's desire to provide a place that teaches the wonders of nature. An option for a traditional natural history museum, in strict accordance with the Will, was also discarded.*

## References

### **1. Professional Engineering Reports and Construction Assessment**

The state of the Property was reviewed by Harold Bates (P.Eng), and found to be structurally sound. (**See attached Document 3**) Building upgrade feasibility and costs were carried out by Cascadian Woodtech Ltd. (**See attached Document 4**) These assessments were corroborated by the Committee member appointed for his construction knowledge and experience (Mark Ouellette), after visiting the Property.

## **2. Restoration Funding**

A list of about 20 organizations was circulated to the committee members regarding funding for conversion of the Property into a public museum. The Mack Laing Heritage Society, a 2016 recipient of a Heritage BC Award, offered to assist in attracting provincial and federal financial support, and engage in community fundraising. This discussion was disallowed.

The Will bequeathed sufficient funds to create and operate a museum in the Property in 1982. Some Committee members declared that the existing Trust fund was inadequate to restore the Property. However, the second TOR asked the Committee to examine ways of leveraging the Trust fund. This was not discussed, despite requests by the minority Committee members.

## **3. Business Plan**

The Committee process should have resulted in an action plan as directed by the TORs. A manual provided by the Museums of Alberta included a series of checklists that would have ensured detailed discussion about the use and potential of a museum in the Property. Discussion on this was disallowed. (*See attached Document 5*)

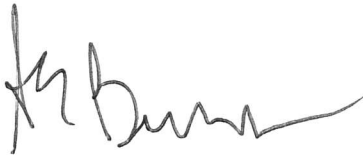
## **Conclusion**

A reasonable compromise between a traditional museum and the destruction of the Property, namely the creation of a modest nature house/interpretive centre for public use and enjoyment, was dismissed by the majority of the Committee in favour of demolition.

Opportunities were presented to the Committee regarding making the Property a financially-viable and publicly-accessible nature house and interpretive centre. Discussion on these suggestions was disallowed, despite the name of the Committee.

We, the undersigned, participated in this Committee to assist in examining and discussing options for the Property, as per the Will and TORs. Despite clear TORs, the stated goal was ignored, no deliverable plan was produced, and discussions regarding the scope and advantages of a public project were actively ignored.

Signed this 27 day of (month) JUNE 2016



Angela Burns

Committee member representing the Mack Laing Heritage Society of the Comox Valley



Mark Ouellette

Committee member Citizen-at-large with construction knowlege/experience