

If you are not aware of the "Shakesides Controversy" in Comox (and even if you are following the saga) here is a short Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) fact sheet regarding the proposed Hamilton Mack Laing Shakesides Home Relocation from Comox to Merville. This house move is being supported by the Merville Community Association as well as by many Comox Valley citizens.

Q: Who was Hamilton Mack Laing?

A: Hamilton Mack Laing was an internationally respected author, artist, naturalist and ornithologist who lived in Comox from the early 1900s until 1982. He built two houses on the Comox foreshore, the second one being named Shakesides. His story can be found here: <https://macklaingsociety.ca/>

Q: What is the "Shakesides House"?

A: The Shakesides house and property was deeded to the Town of Comox in Trust by renowned birder Hamilton Mack Laing. The house was to be used as a 'nature museum' for education and enjoyment after Laing's death in 1982. The house was instead used by the Town of Comox for rental income only (monies which it kept), then left empty, poorly secured and the exterior was allowed to deteriorate after the last tenant left in 2015. The deeded property is now called Mack Laing Park.

Q: Why does the Town of Comox Council control its future and why does the ToC Council vote to destroy it?

A: The ToC, by appealing to the office of the Attorney General of BC, has had the provisions of the Mack Laing Will legally changed so that it does not have to preserve the house nor turn it into a museum. The Trust money has been spent and now the ToC wants to get rid of the building and thus avoid further responsibility.

Q: What is the Merville Community Association (MCA) proposing?

A: The MCA is offering to relocate the Shakesides building from the Mack Laing park site in Comox to the Merville hall site, where it will be restored and repurposed as a caretaker's residence and a mini museum honoring the Mack Laing legacy.

Q: Does the MCA believe the building can be moved successfully?

A: Yes. The building was assessed inside and out by competent House Movers and found to be structurally sound.

The Main Floor:

Sub-floor is solid first-growth 3" x 8" tongue & groove fir supported by sturdy post-and-beam construction on an 8 foot concrete foundation.

Several rooms have additional 1" x 2" decorative hardwood flooring on top of the 3" x 8" T&G fir.

Walls are 2" x 4" studs with 1" x 8" shiplap outside sheathing and shakes with inner walls of 1" x 12" vertical, beautiful Pickwick Pine paneling.

Second Level / Attic:

Floor is solid first-growth 3" x 6" tongue & groove fir supported by interior 8 foot Main Floor interior walls.

Roof:

Rafters are 2" x 6" with 1" x 8" collar ties. Sheathed with 1" x 8" shiplap.

The rooms are dry, walls are straight, ceilings not sagging. The building is a very sturdy structure and will withstand a move. A similar move was successfully completed at the Merville hall with the 1915 Stolen Church, which was in much worse condition. Shakesides was hand built by an Internationally celebrated Comox resident and could be a heritage building for this fact alone.

Q: Are there professional House Movers who are willing to, and capable of, moving the house?

A: Yes. Several House Moving companies have toured the site, inside and out, and have expressed an interest and willingness to complete the move.

Q: Has this idea been proposed before?

A: Yes. Terry Chester, the Chair of the Mack Laing Nature House Advisory Committee in 2016, first proposed that a local house moving company cut the house into pieces and move it to another site. The suggestion was never seriously considered by the Committee, which ultimately voted to demolish Shakesides. The idea of moving Shakesides to Merville was first suggested publicly in a 2017 Letter to the Editor in the Comox Valley Record.

Q: Does the Attorney General of BC now support this move?

A: Yes. A letter dated February 13, 2025, from legal counsel to the Attorney General confirms there is no objection to the MCA receiving the building. The move is considered a valid form of 'disposal' under the current agreement and absolute demolition is not necessary.

Q: What route will the building take during the move?

A: The structure will be moved overland via the same inland route the Town of Comox will use for its own equipment, across a neighbouring property, up to Balmoral Avenue, and then to the highway leading to Merville.

Q: Why wasn't this overland route considered earlier?

A: The Town had already planned the route for its own equipment but did not inform the MCA, which led to unnecessary time spent planning a costly barge route. The overland route is now the preferred and much less expensive option.

Q: What are the expected costs of moving the building?

A: The MCA anticipates the move will cost under \$100,000. It is anticipated that the Town of Comox will contribute approximately \$50,000 toward the project which will come from monies which would otherwise have to be spent on demolition costs.

Q: Will the move impact Komox First Nation land or concerns?

A: No. The building will follow the same route the Town is using for its own remediation work. The foreshore will not be disturbed, and the MCA is in communication with the KFN to ensure compliance.

Q: What will happen to Shakesides once it is moved?

A: It will be renovated as a heritage building on the Merville site, maintained by the MCA, and used as both a caretaker's residence and a museum celebrating Mack Laing's legacy.

Q: Is the Merville Hall site supportive of the move?

A: Yes. The Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD), which governs the Merville area, supports the MCA's plan and sees it as a positive addition to Area C.

Q: Is the MCA in opposition to the Town of Comox's demolition plans?

A: Yes. The MCA believes demolishing the building wastes public funds and neglects the heritage value. The MCA feels that the Town has acted uncooperatively with the MCA and has failed to secure the site properly, resulting in avoidable risks to the structure.

Q: Can the Town of Comox reverse its demolition decision?

A: Yes. The MCA is urging the Town Council to reconsider and collaborate in relocating the building to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome for all parties.

Q: Have Town of Comox Councilors been inside the building to see it and assess it for themselves?

A: This is not known but based on their "assessment" at council meetings, where Councilors claim the building is "derelict", it would appear they have not seen nor appreciated the sturdy construction of Shakesides for themselves.

Q: Are the Town of Comox Councilors practicing the current Municipal, Regional and Provincial governments' mantra of Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle?

A: No. Demolishing a perfectly good building containing valuable old growth and second growth wood and sending it to the overflowing regional landfill does not follow the 5-Rs nor does it support the region's initiative to create additional housing in the Valley.

Q: Did the Town of Comox Councilors vote unanimously to destroy Shakesides?

A: Apparently, they did, even though one of those Councilors maintains an active connection to the Green Party of BC and is running to be the party leader. The BC Greens support the idea of **Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle**.

Q: If there is a viable option to save Shakesides, why isn't that option being explored or supported by the ToC Councilors?

A: If there is a rationale for the Town of Comox Councilors to push for the demolition of Shakesides, when it can be saved as an important historical cultural asset that celebrates the legacy of a Comox citizen, it has not been shared publicly with the citizens of Comox. Moving Shakesides rather than destroying it will actually save the citizens of Comox tax dollars and will help to celebrate a renowned Canadian citizen. Plus, having Shakesides at the Merville hall site will complement the other heritage buildings already on the hall grounds and will encourage international birder tourism in the region.

Q: Are there petitions to sign in support of saving Shakesides?

A: Yes. There has been a petition with 2000 signatures. In addition, residents can send a brief letter to the Town Council, stating support. Here are the addresses:

Mayor Nicole Minions: nminions@comox.ca

Councilor Steve Blacklock: sblacklock@comox.ca

Councilor Ken Grant: kgrant@comox.ca

Councilor Chris Haslett: chaslett@comox.ca

Councilor Jonathan Kerr: jkerr@comox.ca

Councilor Jenn Meilleur: jmeilleur@comox.ca

Councilor Maureen Swift: mswift@comox.ca

Q: Are there other organizations that are supportive of relocating Shakesides?

A: Yes. These organizations include:

Mack Laing Heritage Society (MLHS);

Mountain Avian Rescue Society (MARS);

Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Area C;

Merville Community Association (MCA);

Q. What's the bottom line?

A: Saving and moving Shakesides, instead of destroying it, is cheaper, fulfills donor wishes, strengthens partnerships, supports tourism, and preserves heritage.

Demolishing Shakesides is more expensive, offers less benefit, and risks damaging community trust.

Today, though the exterior of Shakesides looks unkempt with a tarped roof and with windows, porch railings and some hand split shakes having been recently and illegally removed by the Town of Comox, the "bones" of the building are healthy, solid and sound. Shakesides is truly a Diamond in the Rough.