

What is the Coalition for the Preservation of the Hope Station House?

We are a group of likeminded people – residents of Hope and their families – who are passionate about history, and who believe that a renovated Station House would be of great long-term value to the community.

In December 2020 Hope's local newspaper, the Hope Standard, published news that the town's historic Station House building would be demolished by the District of Hope in early 2021. Our group came together following this news, to form the Coalition for the Preservation of the Hope Station House.

Our aim has been to combine our efforts to gather facts, look at feasibility, and find a way to preserve the Station House for the overall benefit of our community of Hope.

Why is the Station House being demolished?

Unfortunately the District has opted to pursue a demolition option. The Coalition has attended two District of Hope Regular Council meetings (on 8th and 22nd February) to advocate for more time, to allow alternative options to be explored, including removal of the building to a suitable new site. (This reflects the fact that the process of moving a building has a certain lead time, to allow routes to be explored, permits to be obtained, etc.)

After the 8th February meeting, minutes of discussions during our Coalition's presentation stated the following:

"Is a stay of demolition even a possibility? It was noted that the District has until May 31st to have the building removed from the property. This is part of the District's Agreement with the Province. It will have to be up to the volunteer group to approach the Province to inquire."

Accordingly Coalition members liaised with the Province, and were advised that any discussion regarding an extension to the timeline would need to be instigated by the District approaching the Province.

At the 22nd February meeting, members of the Coalition passed this information to the District, and asked that they agree to liaise with the Province regarding this issue. We also presented a compelling case to explain why renovating the building makes economic and environmental sense. To view our presentation please visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/DistrictOfHope/videos/922845835126777> (31:52 is the start time of our presentation).

Unfortunately the District refused to consider this option, citing the agreement they have in place with the Province. Here is an excerpt from the minutes of the 22nd February meeting:

"Council recognized that it is unfortunate that it has come to this point where demolition of the building is a part of a legal settlement with the Province, in the District's favour, and the matter is out of the control of the District."

However, the information from the lease agreement (information which has also been confirmed to us by a representative from the Province) clearly shows that this isn't the only option open to the District:

"The Licensee [i.e. the District of Hope] has agreed to demolish or remove the Hope Station House from the Land, or to transfer the Hope Station House to another party acceptable to the BCTFA'. This must take place by 31st May 2021."

It is the District's choice to pursue the demolition option, and to not allow exploration of any other options.

What is the background to this situation?

The land on which the Station House currently sits at the corner between the Old Hope-Princeton Way and Water Ave, belongs to the Province (specifically, the Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure - MOTI / BC Transportation Financing Authority - BCTFA).

Since 2014 the District of Hope has owned the Station House building and leased the land from the Province. The intended plan was for the District to acquire the land from the Province, and to work with Advantage Hope (to whom certain District functions such as tourism are contracted) to renovate and repurpose the Station House into the District's Information Centre & Museum.

A project plan was agreed, engineers and architects undertook relevant surveys and drew up plans, and some remedial and construction work began.

There was some debate over costings for the project. Unfortunately the opportunity to look into concerns further and find a viable way forward, did not materialize due to an error in the land transfer plans.

On April 23rd 2018 then Mayor Wilfried Vicktor reported to the District of Hope at its regular Council meeting that "The Station House project is not continuing at this time. Unfortunately, there may have been an oversight of the Province of BC, as they did not undertake the required aboriginal consultation; therefore, the land is not able to be transferred to the District." You can read more detail about the land-related issues below.

This is a summarized history in the interests of brevity, but the Coalition does have more detailed information so please feel free to contact us if you have any questions. Our email address is savethehopestationhouse@gmail.com

Why save the Station House?

The Station House building has so much intrinsic value due to its age and beauty, and to the role it has played in the vibrant history of our area. Before the recent alterations were made, and before the last few years of neglect had taken a toll, the Station House was a beautiful building. As the second oldest building (built in 1916) in a town with relatively few older buildings, it's vital that we protect it.

Here in Hope we have so many obvious natural attractions, which our local tourist organizations do a wonderful job of marketing. But some other local communities can outdo us in terms of the appearance of their 'built environment'. Visitors these days expect sympathetic preservation and restoration of historic buildings. The Station House, with its beautiful architecture, interesting history and picturesque setting, would be a strong draw for today's increasingly discerning tourists.

With restrictions on out of province/out of country travel due to Covid likely to continue for some time, now is an ideal time to consider afresh the ways in which Hope can safely market itself to residents of surrounding communities, many of whom sadly view the town only as a fast food stop on their way to somewhere else. The Station House would offer a unique (and very 'Instagrammable'!) photo opportunity to travellers who might otherwise drive straight through.

Most importantly we want to see the Station House preserved and used as a vibrant cultural space for the benefit of our beautiful community of Hope.

What support do you have?

Thousands of people support us! We've received letters of support from over 60 individuals, organizations and historical societies, along with over 2000 signatures on our petition. We have been advised by Heritage BC that this is a significant volume of support for this type of petition.

Isn't it too late to save this building?

It's never too late! The building is still standing, and while it has deteriorated somewhat, renovation potential still exists. Our history has so much intrinsic value, and the potential to generate income through preservation of a beautiful and historic building is too important to give up on at this stage, especially given the possibilities for grant funding.

Some people have a little difficulty in seeing its full potential, because there has been some deterioration of the Station House over time. Unfortunately the requirement that the District had to keep the building in a safe, clean and sanitary condition hasn't always been met. However, you only have to look at other communities where they have renovated and maintained their heritage structures (Agassiz, Nelson, and many others) to see how much potential there is here.

Furthermore it was actually part of the handover agreement between the Arts & Heritage Society and the District that the District would preserve the building for future use benefitting the community. The Society would not have handed the building over, had they known the District would renege on these terms and demolish the building.

I read that it can't be a heritage building because it was moved from its original location?

Latest guidelines for heritage status from Heritage BC make clear in their definition of heritage that this is not the case:

"There are no hard and fast rules, that determine what is, and what is not heritage. Many people think of heritage as old buildings, however, heritage is whatever a community, past or present, values and would like to pass on to the future, regardless of age or vintage. It can be a place, a landscape, a cultural practice or a language, to name a few."

Isn't the building is on First Nations land?

Much of the land on which Hope sits is the unceded territory of the Stó:lō people, including many homes and businesses, and the land on which the Station House currently sits.

The specific land issue here relates to a failure of the Ministry of Transportation, to consult with the Chawathil First Nation – as they were obliged to do – when they entered into an agreement to transfer the land to the District.

According to a recent Hope Standard article <https://www.hopestandard.com/news/hopes-historic-station-house-coming-down-in-2021/> these discussions have now taken place:

'In a statement, media relations person with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure Danielle Pope said the ministry "engaged with the Chawathil First Nation to determine their interest in the future operation of the Hope Station House, and have learned the Chawathil First Nation is not interested in doing so."

As neither the district or Chawathil are interested in future operations of the station house Pope said, the district will proceed with plans to remove it.'

The Coalition for the Preservation of the Hope Station House is in the process of trying to contact First Nations to discuss this further with them.

Ultimately though, our aim is to preserve the building for the long-term benefit of the community, even if this involves relocating the building to an alternative site. We have consulted about the technical possibility of the building making another move, and it is possible!

I'm worried about costs...I've heard people say that the Station House has already cost Hope taxpayers millions of dollars...

Regarding money spent by the District so far on the Station House, they are currently 'in the black', as explained in a recent Hope Standard article:

<https://www.hopestandard.com/news/district-settles-with-province-for-650000-ownership-of-station-house-transfers/>

'The mayor of the day Wilfried Vicktor said...the district insisted on reimbursement of the funds already spent on the project...The district has spent money on architectural drawings, as well as cost estimates for the renovation of the building...Hope's Mayor Peter Robb confirmed the district has settled with the province after negotiations with the B.C. Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI), with the district receiving \$650,000...The district came out "way ahead" in the funding they received from the province Robb said, adding he's comfortable with the outcome of negotiations.'

Based on our reading of Council meeting minutes and supporting documentation, as well as informal information provided by parties involved in the Station House project at that time, this amount of \$650,000 far exceeds the monies spent on the Station House by the District, and indeed there is currently a 'Station House reserve' fund in operation at this time within the District.

...And won't it cost a lot to renovate?

Research carried out by Coalition members, suggests that renovating the Station House would be a more cost-effective option than constructing a new building. Repurposing is the cheaper choice, largely driven by the skyrocketing price of lumber: in just the last year, the price of lumber has jumped by 50% (and soft lumber by 75%). It is also the green choice: research published by Heritage BC shows that it takes 35 to 50 years for a new energy efficient building to save the amount of energy lost in demolishing an existing building.

Going forward our aim is to seek grants available through a range of provincial and federal funding streams. We will also be looking at other fundraising opportunities, in-kind donations, and volunteer time to help take the project forward. Ultimately we aim to see the Station House run as a self-sustaining space for the benefit of the community, and as a tourist draw which will ultimately bring more money into our town.

On the topic of grants, The CN Station House restoration project in Boston Bar looks set to be an exciting joint venture between local First Nations bands and the Boston Bar North Bend Enhancement Society, and it has recently been given nearly \$2 million in Federal and Provincial grant money. Although this particular grant is currently closed to applications, this is just one example of the types of monies that become available.

Research by Heritage BC shows that the return on investment in the tourism market is significant:

"With a return of investment of nearly 1 to 2, heritage tourism makes dollars and sense. Heritage-related tourism is a significant contributor to BC's economy. Of the nearly \$40M invested in heritage tourism, an equal amount is generated through indirect and induced spending (e.g. hotels, restaurants, support services). The original investment also

generates \$34M to BC's GDP and \$5.7M in tax revenue. **\$1 heritage investment = \$2 spending, GDP and taxes"**

What has the Coalition been doing so far?

We have been working conscientiously to gather relevant facts and organize support, including:

- Creating an online petition where people can add their names to voice their support. At the time of writing (8th March) over 2200 people have signed.
- Launching a letter writing campaign to encourage supporters to share their personal opinions and stories with the District of Hope. At the time of writing over 60 people have written or contributed to a personal letter.
- Attempted to liaise with stakeholders from the District of Hope, the Ministry of Transportation, and local First Nations to find a satisfactory way forward and to save this historic building.
- Under Freedom of Information regulations, we've obtained records from the District of Hope pertaining to the Station House. This has allowed us to gather important details about the 'history' of previous preservation efforts, so that we can be aware of the pitfalls, and avoid them in the future.
- Attended – via a virtual, Covid-safe delegation – the 8th and 22nd February meetings of the District of Hope Council, to present our case and request a stay on the demolition, to allow more time to explore important avenues such as grant funding and land issues.
- Carried out initial research on costs versus benefits of similar projects; availability of grants funding.
- Liaised with Heritage BC, the BC Historical Federation and the Provincial Heritage Registrar, for advice and guidance.
- Made links with other local heritage projects, with a view to developing productive supportive relationships with relevant experts as we move forward.
- Spoken with a number of people involved with the Station House in the past, including engineers and members of the previous Arts and Heritage Society.

How can I help?

If you support our cause, please send an email to the District of Hope's mayor and councillors.

We have provided the email addresses and an example email below. You can use the following email text, or feel free to edit this or write your own message:

Dear District of Hope Mayor & Councillors

I am writing to ask that you please reconsider your decision to demolish the Station House building, and instead consider moving the building to an alternative piece of suitable land. I understand that the Coalition for the Preservation for the Hope Station House has presented you with a number of compelling financial and environmental reasons for saving this building. There is also of course the intrinsic, irreplaceable value held by the second oldest building in a town with very few historic structures remaining. At this point thousands of people have signed a petition asking that the building be saved. Many more have written letters, and added supportive comments on social media.

Heritage tourism is increasing in popularity, and Hope shouldn't exclude itself from the benefits that it can bring. Look at the examples of towns like Fort Langley and Nelson, who have reaped the rewards of investing in history and heritage. Hope has stunning scenery and trails, but tourists appreciate the full package! Urban beautification through the preservation of rare historic buildings like the Station House is such an important draw, which Hope should be offering.

I appreciate that there are some obstacles in your path, but please do not proceed with the demolition! The Coalition have presented their suggestions to you, and have shown willing to work with you on grant applications, and whatever else is needed to create a successful future for the Station House, for the benefit of the community of Hope, and for all the many tourists & visitors who love this building and want to see it saved.

Yours faithfully

Add your name

and a brief description of your interest, e.g. that you are a resident of Hope, or a visitor, or a history lover etc.

Here are the email addresses...please copy and paste each of these addresses, to send your email to the Mayor of Hope and all Council members:

To: probb@hope.ca
vsmith@hope.ca
berickson@hope.ca
ctraun@hope.ca
smedlock@hope.ca
dsmith@hope.ca
hstewin@hope.ca

Please also feel free to copy in savethehopestationhouse@gmail.com if you would be happy to receive a follow-up email of thanks from us, along with more information about how you can help or be kept informed.

You can also sign our virtual petition to show your support. Please visit <http://community.sumofus.org/petition/cc475db9-c2ce-46d3-bb51-5a25cc559820>

If you would like to play an even more active role in our efforts and to consider joining our Coalition, please email savethehopestationhouse@gmail.com for more information or send a request to join our private FB group Hope for the Station House (please note you will need to answer a few standard joining questions to be admitted to the group).