

D E P O T M U S E U M

T A S K F O R C E R E P O R T

22 January 2015

HISTORY OF ISSUE

The Depot Museum was established immediately prior to the Bicentennial of the United States in 1976, through the efforts of Mrs. William Hardman and others. It was seen as a remarkable asset to the city, and served for many years as an adjunct educational facility for area schools and colleges, and as a tourist destination, enhancing the several other attractions which then functioned in the immediate area. In recent years, operations of the Depot Museum have deteriorated due to the lack of adequate funding and staffing, relying solely upon the efforts of volunteers.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The City of Lake Wales is the appropriate title owner of buildings and ancillary properties comprising the Museum. Whereas the City lacks the specific expertise to develop and maintain Museum exhibits and educational programs and maximize the potential of the facilities, it is appropriate that the City enter into an operational agreement with a not-for-profit entity to provide those functions. This is a parallel to the City's funding and reliance upon the Economic Development Council to encourage effective inducements to attract potential employers to the area.

Specifically, the Task Force has reached the following conclusions:

- The Museum holds numerous artifacts which are 'on loan' and remain the property of others;
- City staffing of the Museum was discontinued in the past due to budget constraints, and operations are conducted solely by volunteers;
- At the present the Depot Museum is not fulfilling its maximum potential, either as an educational facility or as an ancillary to economic development efforts currently underway;
- Public confidence in the ability of the Historic Society to maintain and operate the Museum is diminished.
- Maintenance of buildings and existing railroad equipment has been neglected due to lack of

funds;

- Current exhibits are stale, and do not communicate the history of the area in a clear and concise fashion;
- The City of Lake Wales, as owner of the facilities and most assets, has a responsibility to ensure that these assets are maintained and are of maximum benefit to citizens and the goals of the City;
- The Museum offers significant potential to become a part of the city's overall efforts to generate additional economic activity through the attraction of visitors;
- Opportunity exists for achieving meaningful income through admission fees and utilization of museum space for both public and private special events;
- The Museum offers an affordable and direct means of reaching both children and adults with the beneficial story of our area's history, culture, and economy;
- Museum operations require a stable base of funding in order to be consistent and successful;
- Conduct of the operations requires energetic and 'hands-on' management rather than continued reliance on long-standing and commendable volunteer efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Conduct an Annual Meeting as called for in the By-Laws of the Lake Wales Historic Society, Inc.;
- 2) Expand the present Historic Lake Wales Society, Inc. board of directors to better represent the interests of the community, and review and adhere to the requirements of the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws;
- 3) Develop a realistic operational budget (see attached sample);
- 4) Achieve an initial one-year agreement between the City of Lake Wales and the Lake Wales Historic Society or successor organization providing for adequate municipal funding to allow the Museum to continue operating and underwrite the cost of retaining the consulting services of a qualified curator on an as-needed basis, and to retain a Museum Director with the following responsibilities:
 - Manage and coordinate the efforts of volunteers;
 - Complete an inventory of owned assets, and negotiate the donation of desired materials, and removal of unneeded items or items owned by others;
 - Re-vision and redesign the Museum so that it more clearly communicates the natural and human history and economic development story of our area;
 - Develop a program to employ the assets of the museum in fund-raising through special events and activities;
 - Liase with neighboring museums to develop joint programs, events, and exhibits to raise public visibility and increase attendance;
 - Develop partnerships with area colleges and universities to provide resources in areas of marketing, business operations, special projects and internships;
 - Propose specific long-term operational arrangements that ensure the continued efficient functioning of the Museum with maximum private funding;
 - Establish a Museum Foundation in order to attract long-term funding of operations, special exhibits, and improvements;

- 5) Develop a multi-year plan to move the Museum toward independent operational sustainability;
- 6) Provide the City of Lake Wales with quarterly written activity and detailed financial reports to include line-item budgeting and expenditures to allow tracking and assure accountability.
- 7) Provide a year-end review of the progress achieved, so that further continuing funding levels may be considered.

Respectfully submitted,

Depot Museum Task Force

Lake Wales Museum Task Force

Executive Summary

In September 2014, Lake Wales City Manager Ken Fields recognized the current overall situation of the Lake Wales Museum and Historic Society was not sustainable, and reached out to the community for assistance. A task force was authorized and commissioned by the Historical Society of Lake Wales (HSLW) as part of an agreement signed by Ms. Mimi Hardman on September 3, 2015 to secure temporary funds from the city to continue operation of the Museum. The task force consisted of the following six citizen volunteers: John Atkinson, Jessica Bray, Mike Carter, Robert Connors, Tina Peak, and Rich Thompson. The task force was formed to review the current operation of the HSLW and to make recommendations to promote and enhance the Lake Wales Museum as a continuing asset to the community. The task force met officially seven times between October 3, 2014 and January 16, 2015 at either the Lake Wales Museum or City Hall. Several informal fact-finding meetings with community members also took place during this time. Minutes of the formal meetings were kept by Jennifer Nanek, Assistant to the City Manager.

The attached report is the result of the task force's findings and recommendations, and was presented to the Lake Wales City Commission at the regular commission meeting on February 17, 2015. The city manager was briefed on the contents of the report by task force representatives on January 26, 2015, as were Ms. Hardman and HSLW Board Member Demming Cowles on January 23, 2015.