

**MUNICIPALITY OF CENTRAL MANITOULIN  
TOWNHALL MEETING  
RE: FUTURE OF BIG LAKE SCHOOL AS A MUNICIPAL ASSET  
MINUTES – April 26, 2021**

A public townhall meeting to gain public input into the future of Big Lake School as a municipal asset was held on April 26, 2021 by video conference with the following in attendance:

Chair Mayor R. Stephens, Councillors Diebolt, Johnston, Scott, Shaffer, D. Stephens, and Tribinevicius. Municipal Coordinator Patricia Mader, Maintenance Supervisor G. Strain, Community Development and Outreach Coordinator, Marcus Mohr. One member of the press, Tom Sasvari, was in attendance.

Big Lake Community Association representatives were in attendance: President Jeannine Desmarais, Secretary Linda Farquhar, Lois Keller.

Friends of the Mindemoya Old School (FOMOS) representatives Allison McAllister (treasurer), Malene Brynildsen (Secretary) and Aaron Quesnel (director), Lynn Quesnel (Vice President) were in attendance, as well as approx. 8 members of the public.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

**MOTION: D. STEPHENS and Tribinevicius**

That the agenda for the April 6, 2021 ‘Townhall Meeting re: Future of Big Lake School as a Municipal Asset’ be approved....carried.

There was no declaration of pecuniary interest.

Mayor Stephens gave a brief introduction describing various historical school buildings across the island, and how many schools have been sold to private sector, handled in different ways but that the two in Big Lake and Sandfield were handed over to the municipality.

Jeannine Desmarais, President of the Big Lake Community Association, provided an update on behalf of that group that described the work the group does in the community, how many member there are currently (6), the impact of COVID-19 on the groups activities, and role the building plays in the function of their Association. Desmarais also revisited the previous discussion regarding the consolidation of efforts between the Big Lake Community Association and the Merry Makers who operate out of the Sandfield Community Hall. Desmarais noted that the events they run would not work at Sandfield because of the perceived lack of outdoor space and picnic tables.

Mayor Stephens spoke about the potential of consolidating efforts between the Merry Makers and Big Lake groups and how at a meeting held in December with the two group Merry Makers expressed an openness to collaboration.

The floor was then opened to input, comment and questions from members of the public.

Alison McAllister, (FOMOS Treasurer) spoke about the value of historical buildings, the impact that COVID-19 has had on community groups and organizations and put forth the recommendation from the FOMOS Board that the building be sold to the Big Lake group for \$1.

Sue Middaugh, community member spoke to the sentimental significance of the school to her and her family.

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Lois Kellar spoke about the value of historical buildings and described the community work that the group does through fundraising, keeping the playground equipment for families and Euchre nights. Lois requested clarification on the insurance costs for the Big Lake School Building.

Aaron Quesnel then spoke and asked what the ramifications of breaking the lease with this group might be, if there has been any interest expressed to buy the property from private groups, and that the Memo mentioned by the Mayor be shared.

Mayor R. Stephens provided additional information noting that this issue has come to a head due to decreasing membership and concerns about the capacity of the group to manage the facility, and the potentially significant cost of repairs needed. So, the question came up whether it is time to move the facility out of the public sector. The Mayor provided clarification regarding the lease agreement.

Councillor D. Scott then spoke and requested that the Big Lake Community Association provide Council with pre-Covid fundraising numbers and financial information for two years prior to COVID-19 impacts with the intent of determining whether the group can afford to repair the building.

Councillor Johnston requested clarification from the group on what the group is specifically requesting from the municipality. Is the Big Lake Community Association interested in having the building turned over to them by the Municipality? Or is the group requesting that the lease stay exactly the same, or is the group asking the municipality to cover all the costs of repair and maintenance?

Lois Keller noted that there is disagreement about the interpretation of the lease agreement and who is responsible for what kinds of maintenance. Lois asked whether insurance would cover the damage, and whether competitive pricing has been obtained on repair costs.

Mayor R. Stephens and P. Mader provided clarification on these questions noting that insurance will not cover this damage and there is a large deductible on the policy and that three quotes have been obtained for air quality testing which is phase I of the work that needs to be done. Phase II will involve creating a remediation plan if poor air quality is confirmed through testing. Until this requirement is confirmed, and the remediation plan is created, the extent of repairs needed is not yet known, so phase II quotes would be obtained at a later time. There is significant expense in each phase, even to obtain quotes because testing and site visits are required.

G. Strain provided further clarification on the insurance question and his role with the building as Municipal Maintenance Supervisor.

Councillor Shaffer spoke about three potential options moving forward with regard to the building and capital costs required. Options included a) Turning the building over to the Big Lake Community Association, b) Municipality absorbs all capital costs, c) share the costs between Municipality and BLCA and asked which of the three options are preferable to the BLCA.

The BCLA was not prepared to provide an answer in the moment.

Municipal Staff posted the memo to the website and shared the link to the document in the Zoom chat box.

Lynn Quesnel noted that the BCLA has raised a lot of money over the years, and noted that now that the public is more aware of the issue that the potential to raise more money and gain more membership is increased.

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Terry Meeker asked how old the building has to be to be considered a historical and why it would be taken down if it is historical.

Mayor Stephens provided clarification that there has never been any discussion of taking the building down. The discussion centers on function of the building and ownership.

Linda Farquhar spoke about the Big Lake Women's Institute and requested that if the building is sold, that the Women's institute be allowed 90 days, as per lease, to vacate the building.

Councillor Scott asked how the rate payers would feel about the Municipality giving away an asset for \$1 that has been appraised at over \$100,000 value.

A. McAllister spoke requesting more time on behalf of the BCLA group to make any major decisions and noted that she thought that demolition of the building was mentioned.

Freida Tann spoke about the significance of the Big Lake School, its role in identity and strong roots in the community and its role welcoming new community members.

L. Keller asked about the recent market appraisal of the building.

P. Mader and Mayor R. Stephens provided clarification that a Market value appraisal has been acquired and that the report is available to the public upon request. This was undertaken as it is a required step should the municipality wish to declare the asset as surplus to sell, and necessary to determine how the cost of repair relates to the value of the asset should the municipality choose to repair.

Malene Brynildsen spoke about fiscal responsibility and costs to be saved versus value provided by the BCLA to the community.

Sue Middaugh spoke again about the how much the school means and how community members do not want it to become another camp. Amalgamation should help all amalgamated communities and allow them to keep an unique identity.

Mayor R. Stephens provided some closing comments and thanked those who joined and shared their thoughts.

The meeting was adjourned on a motion from Councillor D. Stephens at 8:15 p.m.