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Brown named town's new CAO

By Duane Hicks
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Fort Frances will have a new chief administrative officer effective July 4.

Doug Brown, who currently is the town's manager of Operations and Facilities, will replace outgoing CAO Mark McCaig, who's been in the post since May 1, 2004.

The town received 35 applications for the position, then

narrowed it down to a short list of 12.

After tasking the short-list candidates with a written deliverable, council then began a thorough interview process.

Brown ultimately was chosen unanimously.

"When it got right down to the short list, we had some very good applications from out-of-town as well as in town," Mayor Avis noted yesterday.

"We've always felt people that are working for the town

should have the opportunity for promotion within the organization if they're capable and have the right credentials for the job," he added.

"And so therefore council decided that Doug Brown would be our best fit.

"Doug has spent 13 years with the town," Mayor Avis said.

"I was on the hiring committee when we hired Doug 13 years ago, and I've worked with him as chairman of the

Operations and Facilities executive committee and also as the mayor.

"Doug is a very passionate and committed individual, and he really respects and likes Fort Frances," the mayor added.

"I feel very confident that as time progresses, he will become a perfect fit for the CAO of our community."

Mayor Avis added council is happy with how the town is operating—and hopes residents feel the same way.

He also believes there will be "a smooth transition" in leadership from McCaig to Brown.

Mayor Avis said the management staff is very receptive to the change in CAO, given they've worked with Brown and everyone knows where each other stands.

"And Doug is very, very strong in financing and projects, which are a big part of the role of CAO," he stressed.

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"Brown," A6

INSIDE



Library looking for new CEO

The Fort Frances Public Library Technology Centre will be searching for a new chief executive officer this summer.

See story on A2



Inclusivity focus of symposium

The Rainy River District School Board celebrated inclusive schools last Thursday during a student symposium of LGBTQ-Straight Alliance school-based programs.

See story on A7



Nosan undeterred by tryout setback

Despite not making the final cut at the National Pro Fastpitch (NPF) open tryout in Chicago on May 29, Shelby Nosan, who plays shortstop for the Stratton Eagles in the Rainy River District Fastball League, was clear on two points.

See story on B1

Market square aiming to be flexible

By Duane Hicks
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The possibilities are "Boundless."

Plans for the \$1.4 million Rainy Lake Market Square project were unveiled Thursday afternoon—revealing a site that's both aesthetically pleasing and able to be transformed for everyday use, market days, small performances, large concerts, dining events, or any number of other activities.

The design includes a covered stage, seating areas, a water feature, lighting, and landscaping with a variety of trees and rocks, as well as plenty of open space to accommodate a wide variety of activities.

Landscape architect David Bodnarchuk of Scatliff + Miller + Murray said the design team got a good "wish list" as to what stakeholders wanted in a market square, and it became their job to figure out what was compatible and what would work—not only with each other but within the budget.

The resulting design is meant to reflect Fort Frances, lake life, and the natural history of Rainy Lake.

"We think that everybody who lives in this area has that [Rainy Lake] as a common ground," Bodnarchuk noted.

"It's something that tourists are coming here for.

He said the design of the market square represents the "primal glacial forces that formed Rainy Lake."

"When you look at Rainy Lake on Google Earth, you see that sort of dragged feel and we brought that into the actual plan—that's why the angle is there," Bodnarchuk explained.

"It's very close to the angle the glaciers retreated from this area.

"From there, you have these islands of densely-planted boreal forest with that rock

Please see
"Market," A5



Sheri De Gagné admired the design of the future Rainy Lake Market Square during last Thursday afternoon's unveiling. Winnipeg architecture firm Scatliff + Miller + Murray hosted a come-and-go open house at 235 Scott St. (former Rainy Lake Hotel), which drew plenty of public interest.

—Duane Hicks photo

Market square has people talking

By Duane Hicks
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Love it or hate it, it's got people talking.

The design for the future Rainy Lake Market Square was unveiled on site last Thursday afternoon—eliciting a wide spectrum of responses from the public.

"I think the plans look fantastic," said Ben Morelli, owner of From the Grind Up on Scott Street.

"I'm real excited to get a space for community gatherings.

"I think bringing a sense of community to the downtown area is something that had been lost in the past, and started coming back over the last five-10 years," he noted.

"And this is going to be the icing on the cake as far as having a sense of community downtown again."

Morelli's favourite feature is the canopied stage.

"Being able to stage events will go a long way as far as general entertainment for the town," he remarked.

"I think its going to be a lot of fun."

"This is going to be a wonderful open space for any use people can think of."

—Charleen Mallory

Morelli said there's currently community events that sometimes have a hard time finding spaces, or are held in spaces that are less than ideal.

The market square could help provide those events with the perfect location.

"What I do hope to see from the town is ease of access for the facilities as far as red tape and being able to set up an event," Morelli added.

"Obviously, you don't want to cut any corners but make it as easy as possible for not only community groups but community members to use the space."

"I love the design," echoed Charleen Mallory, who was a citizen rep on the Rainy Lake Market Square Advisory Committee.

"Basically what they've done here is built us a house and we, the residents of Fort Frances, need to furnish it with our good ideas," she explained.

"And by furnishing it, I mean

we need to use it.

"This is going to be a wonderful open space for any use people can think of," she added.

Mallory noted she'll be participating in "Market Thursdays" there, and hopes to see the young professionals hold a street dance.

"I'd love to see Friday night teen dances here," she said. "I'd love to [see] Carole Mackintosh and her Tai Chi group here at 6:30 in the morning."

"The design is giving us what we need," Mallory concluded.

"We now need to make it Fort Frances."

Jane Gillon agreed the design is "fantastic" and much more than she imagined.

"I think they've done a lot with a small space," she noted, saying she likes the "bump out" (the section of the market that encroaches onto Scott Street).

"I like the stage because I think that's something critical that will draw people here,"

Gillon added.

"The first thing I think we should do is get one of the old pianos everybody's trying to get rid of, put it on the stage, and put something about Lady Frances Simpson and the piano and just let everybody play it. Seriously," she stressed.

"I think you could do a big event about it."

"I think it's definitely a big improvement to the overall area," said Gary Rogozinski, who chairs the town's Economic Development Advisory Committee.

"To me, it's much better than what was here," he remarked, referring both to the decrepit Rainy Lake Hotel, which was demolished last fall, and the empty lot sitting there now.

"I think it definitely will add to the ambience of the overall downtown.

"It will encourage people to stop," Rogozinski added. "If you're travelling through as a tourist and if there's some place you can buy a coffee close by, sit down and have a coffee and enjoy downtown."

Rogozinski said the market square should draw both local residents and tourists.

Please see "Square," A5

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Market square designed to be flexible

More from A1
shore," he added. "Where the water starts to form, you have the beaches and the bays."

"We started playing with these ideas and seeing how they form space."

This spatial analysis determined how and where elements were placed.

Bodnarchuk said one of the key words to describe the market square is flexibility.

"People wanted a space that would transform itself based on whatever's happening here," he remarked.

"So if you have a concert here, how you interact with it is different."

The permanent covered stage is comprised of a multi-level deck. The primary deck is the stage while two other decks will be used for the audience to either stand or sit.

There's no fixed seating, noted Bodnarchuk, adding it's important people can assemble how they want in a public space.

For a larger concert, the crowd would spill out beyond the decks into the cafe areas.

The design also features five parking spaces in the rear, as well as a storage building for tents, tables, chairs, etc.

Bodnarchuk also said the centre of the market has a gradual slope to it so that if you were standing there during a concert, you would have the same viewing opportunity as people on the decks.

The entrance to the market square will be perfectly level with the street to allow for wheelchair access.

As well, the northern perimeter of the market square "pushes into" the downtown

sidewalk—drawing pedestrian traffic into the space.

"As a pedestrian, if you're walking down Scott Street that way [along the south side], your view is interrupted and it directs you into the space," Bodnarchuk explained.

"We're really trying to get people in."

The water feature will be a series of granite slabs with drill holes in them. Water will bubble up through the drill holes and trickle down the face into a basin and circulate.

It has both an aesthetic and functional purpose.

Bodnarchuk said the functional purpose of the water feature is to "acoustically separate" market square users from the street.

"If there's noise out on the street, that white noise of water flowing will quiet the street," he noted.

For instance, he added the Copper River Inn here has a water feature that acoustically separates its coffee shop from its reception area and hallway to the dining area.

The trees and other flora will represent the boreal forest here, with a mix of coniferous and deciduous species.

Possible choices include white pine, white and black spruce, ash, aspen, and birch trees, along with dogwood shrubs.

The mix of deciduous and coniferous trees also means there will be "four-season colour" at the site.

The design also looks to the future, Bodnarchuk said. For example, it includes raised "cafe areas" adjacent to Causeway Insurance and Brockie's Jewellers, which basically are seating



An overview of the future Rainy Lake Market Square—from the south side of the site—gives a better idea as to "less is more" design approach, which will allow the space to be used for any number of events. —Submitted image

areas with tables and chairs.

But in the future, someone may open up a coffee shop or other food service in one of those buildings, put doors into the sides adjacent to the cafe areas, and utilize those areas as outdoor cafes, Bodnarchuk suggested.

"We wanted to make sure we left that possibility open," he stressed.

The market square won't feature public washrooms due to the cost (about \$250,000).

Instead, the town is exploring improving access to the public washrooms located in the entrance to the Fort Frances

Museum.

For special events with large crowds, portable washroom facilities will be brought on-site.

It also includes space for vendors to set up tents and tables to sell their wares, but no permanent vendor booths per se.

Bodnarchuk said the market is "an ephemeral event" that only happens once or twice a week. And when it's not on, it's like it was never there.

The space also doesn't include solid canopies to provide cover from rain or snow. Bodnarchuk noted that canopy cover is very expensive and must be placed strategically.

Rather, the open web joists included in the market square design are "strategic for the budget," he added, saying they provide some shade but avoid problems with snow-loading that you would get with a solid canopy.

And the idea of building a fort or having fort-themed elements in the market square also was rejected, though the concept may be explored further at a different location.

Meanwhile, the Winnipeg-based architecture firm was pleased with the open house.

"It was a very successful event [Thursday], and it's great

to see the passion and enthusiasm of the local community," architect Bob Somers, principal of Scatcliff + Miller + Murray noted Friday.

"That passion is often not always positive but from the reviews we got yesterday [Thursday], the majority are definitely in support."

The firm will have tender-ready construction drawings set to go by early July.

The town then will tender a contractor to build the market square, with the intent to begin construction in late summer and be completed before winter.

Square has people talking

More from A1

Retirees such as himself, for instance, love going out for coffee—and the market square is the perfect spot to do so, he reasoned, adding "it's very nice-looking on paper."

"And it might encourage me to come shop downtown more if I can have a rest here—that's what older people like to do," he chuckled.

"As for tourists—if you're driving through and you see someplace and you're tired, you think, 'Maybe we'll just stop here and rest here for a while and have sandwich,'" added Rogozinski.

"It will encourage them to walk around and enjoy the downtown."

Having community events—or even just some music—will encourage residents and tourists alike to stop and sit for a while, he reasoned.

"I know if you're in downtown Toronto in the summertime, there's always something going on, and it encourages you to stop and see what's going on," Rogozinski said.

Resident Sheri De Gagné said she liked quite a lot about the market square—from the alignment of the stage, the colours, and even the fact that not too much space was set aside for parking.

Her husband, Michael, said he'd love to see fewer rocks and more grass.

"The nicest park I've ever been in is in Gananoque, Ont., and they have the park in the middle of the town," he recalled.

"It's probably 100 years old. There were people in that park. It was gorgeous. It had greenspace, there were kids playing," added De Gagné.

"This isn't really family-friendly."

Improvements needed

Others felt the design is a start but that it needs more.

"It doesn't meet the needs of Fort Frances," charged Ink Spatz Apparel+ owner Scott



Landscape architect David Bodnarchuk of Scatcliff + Miller + Murray explained the market design concept to a couple of the many people who attended the unveiling last Thursday afternoon. More than 160 people came downtown over a four-hour period to check out the plans. —Duane Hicks photo

"It is a good first draft, a basis for an interesting and useful space, but it needs elements added that will transform the space into something exceptional."

—Nathalie Donaldson

Krienke-Turvey, a BIA rep on the Rainy Lake Market Square Advisory Committee.

"It's very pretty," he conceded. But according to what many people who attended the open house here in February said they wanted in a market square, "it just does not meet the needs," he added.

Krienke-Turvey cited public washrooms, as well as the ability to hold events in different weather conditions, as just two things people wanted and are not included in the design.

Nathalie Donaldson, a resource person on the Rainy Lake Market Square Advisory Committee, said the design "does not do enough for families," and needs more of a "wow" factor—a place where visitors will stop for photo ops.

Donaldson said the design "although aesthetically pleasing, does not inspire people to stop."

"It does not speak to the history or culture of our area, and nothing in this design differentiates it from any other market square in any other small town," she reasoned.

"We need to aim higher.

"It is a good first draft, a basis for an interesting and useful space, but it needs elements added that will transform the space into something exceptional," Donaldson noted.

"We need simple changes to be made to the existing design, with more consideration to tourism, local culture, market vendors, and families."

Donaldson has drafted several "vision boards," indicating a slew of ideas for the market square, which have received enthusiastic support from The Shops on Scott (BIA).

A lakeside theme, for example, could include a canoe for kids to play in and get their photo taken in, paddles painted by individuals or organizations, furniture and archways made of driftwood, art installations with beach glass, and vendor booths that fit that theme.

The ground could be made to look like a lake with blue tiles, or painted concrete or bricks.

Another possible idea is a woodland theme, with carved "wood spirits" by local artisans, whimsical signage, rock art and

statues, garden paths, furniture that looks like overgrowth, and all-natural materials.

Mythical and folkloric elements would "transform the space into an experience," Donaldson said.

She also suggested an emphasis on community art and culture, including murals, wood carvings, Ojibwe artwork, and school projects—all of which would "foster a sense of ownership and inclusiveness" among residents.

Still others were dead set against the market square design.

A long-time local resident, who did not want to be named, said the design is "not Fort Frances."

He noted he's seen Donaldson's ideas, including an earlier fort design, and felt they would be much more appropriate.

"That's what we should have in the Rainy River District—we're not Toronto, New York, Minneapolis, Winnipeg," he remarked.

"We're not that sort of people."

"We're all rustic people that live here," he noted. "We like hunting, fishing, and stuff like that—nothing like this."

He added the public submitted good ideas, such as a fort, but these were ignored.

"Ninety percent of people coming into Fort Frances ask, 'Where's the fort?'" he said.

"If they had it here, they've got plastic logs you can put up."

Market square draws fire on social media

By Duane Hicks

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The Fort Frances Times' Facebook page has "blown up" with commentary about the future Rainy Lake Market Square, with many people—but not all—feeling negative about the project.

"I must say as a new BIA board member, our voices and/or concerns were not heard," wrote Ed Gackley of Flint House.

"We have stated our concerns with a park and no real draw for our community or tourists as they pass through," he added.

"Over a million dollars and we as a BIA are contributing 200K," noted Gackley. "On top of that the town wants to install parking meters."

"Scott Street had not been heard!"

"I volunteered as a resource person for the committee using the Facebook page, Downtown Fort Frances, to gather public input, which was largely ignored," said Nathalie Donaldson of Betty's.

"There were a few of us that I feel 'get it' but the majority don't, so this is what we get," she added.

"Two things that were mentioned over and over was the need for washrooms and more parking, and I don't see either," wrote Yvonne Noonan.

"Tourist draw? Covered seasonal shelter? Public washrooms? Downtown economic growth? Financially self-sustaining?" asked Travis Glowasky.

"Weren't these a few items we were promised by 'officials' this space would provide? What happened?" he wondered.

"This will draw tourists in how?" echoed Terry "Goose" McMahon.

"I can save the town a million dollars—just toss me a cool mil and I'll go down and rip out the fences and spray paint parking lines so the people of the town get what they need and tourist have room to park larger vehicles," said Kevin Lambert.

"Just turn it into a nice parking lot with a few picnic tables. Money saved and more area for tourists to park to shop downtown," agreed Nicole Burner.

"Might be a nice place for people to sleep after they stumble out of Club 88 or an area to fight," wrote Monica McRory.

"Useless for anything else," she added. "I think this will be a policing nightmare."

"I give it a summer and it will be trashed, and no one will want to go near it," echoed Tanner Lavere.

"I am underwhelmed. Not impressive at all," said Monica Armour.

"Should be used to draw tourists and still have something related to the RL," noted Karrie O'Connor McCormick.

"Waste of space," exclaimed Dan James Carruthers.

But not everyone is against the new market square.

"This is beautiful. Can't wait to go there while visiting family in Fort," wrote Heather McFayden.

"I can't believe all the negativity," said Dana Bridgeman Cross. "How many people participated in the planning and feedback sessions?"

"I think it looks beautiful! And pretty special that it was designed by a local," she added.

"Washrooms would be a nice addition, but otherwise I think it looks very nice," noted Bridgeman Cross.

"People are asking for more parking, but then we don't support the stores that we have. So many people have tried to open businesses in this town and we don't have local support."

"Looks great—luv it . . . maybe a little tweak or two but all in all good," wrote Ron Pidlubny.

"[Kudos] to the committee for all their hard work."

"Looks great—we have something similar in the exchange district," agreed Greg Pidlubny.

"You may have to park at bit further away and walk to events, but that is normal in most places," he added.

"I am sure with special events, they can bring in portable toilets."

"I don't know if any of y'all have been to major cities but [the] majority of major cities have spaces like these, which are awesome for tourists," wrote Jonathan James McCoy.

"It is typical Fort Frances attitude to be so negative after the fact," he added.