

SAULT STE. MARIE

# THE SAULT STAR



## Council wants staff to price out cost of new bus terminal on Queen Street

*The move to Huron Street has been viewed as an opportunity by the city since at least 2005, former reports indicate.*

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The current bus terminal building on Dennis Street is deteriorating and needs a new roof and HVAC system, says official. JEFFREY OUGLER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

It's back to the drawing board – at least for now.

City council voted unanimously Monday to ask city staff and its consulting engineers to plan out and cost a new bus terminal building at the existing Dennis Street site.

While the option to stay at the existing site and renovate the building was earlier dismissed in favour of creating an integrated facility with more space, security and communications at the Huron Street bus barns, council wants to see alternatives for a new build on Dennis Street.

Ward 5 Coun. Rick Niro moved the resolution, mainly because of a comment in the consultants report that referred to the Dennis Street location as a prime location, central to customers, residents and downtown development.

“I don't believe there is enough information here to go ahead with a new rebuild on this site,” Niro told council.

He moved a resolution, seconded by his wardmate Marchy Bruni, asking staff and consultants for a full costing of building a new terminal on the existing site, reducing parking and give council an indication of what it would look like and comparing the options with the others presented.

Amalgamating the downtown terminal with the existing bus barns on Huron Street would offer the city cost savings not only in administration and communication, but fuel and capital costs.

Neither staff nor the consultant could say what the costs of a new terminal at the existing location would cost or how what the operating dollars for that facility would be.

It's expected that city council will receive a report at its next meeting outlining a process and timeline to move forward with another alternative comparison.

Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker also wanted staff to consider yet another location – the former ACR train station at the Station Mall. Although the property is not owned by the city, he said he believes the location meets much of the criteria wanted by transit customers and downtown businesses, who have created an uproar with the possibility of moving the terminal to Huron Street, fearing a loss of business and staff.

A report to council states the City of Sault Ste. Marie has allocated \$43,354,392 over eight years with the city's share at \$11.6 million to present the city with an opportunity to upgrade its transit infrastructure. Of that, council has allocated \$2 million, of which the city's share is \$533,400, as part of the transit service relocation costs.

A completed environmental assessment report, which examined the potential relocation of the transit terminal from Dennis Street to the existing transit depot facility at 111 Huron St., was presented to council.

That EA contained a consultation process that included two virtual public consultation sessions and a direct survey with riders at the Dennis Street terminal and followup with members of the public who have raised concerns.

Staff had recommended council pass a resolution authorizing an RFP be issued to obtain a consultant to complete construction drawings and administer the tendering process for the renovation/build at Huron Street.

Mounting opposition has been received by city council, especially from downtown businesses.

A letter to city council from lawyer Joe Bisceglia notes that oral presentations from the businesses was not permitted.

His letter argued that the downtown should not be abandoned because of safety issues, that the terminal has served the city well for decades, including when its population was much greater, and that shortcomings with the Huron Street location have also been identified.

The letter urges council to spend money on a new Dennis Street terminal and agrees the existing one is crumbling, but is necessary for the economics of the businesses located in the downtown area, especially on Queen Street.

Council was told that its decision, under the Schedule A Environmental Assessment study, is final. There is no option by the public to appeal the decision.

The presentation from Tulloch engineer John MacDonald on the EA process and its findings noted the bus terminal is considered the starting and ending point of all bus routes.

Relocating the Dennis Street terminal to the Huron Street location may reduce both capital and operating costs for the city and provide other efficiencies by consolidating operations at one location.

The existing terminal is also reaching the end of its useful life, MacDonald admitted.

It is deteriorating, needs a new roof and HVAC system, it has operational issues and the age of the facility means its accessible washroom requirements for compliance cannot be met.

Security and safety concerns at the existing terminal also pose a challenge for staff.

“These challenges can be addressed by upgrading the security systems in the existing terminal but that doesn’t address the remoteness for other staff,” MacDonald told council.

By comparison, the Huron Street location will not decrease service levels but it will improve communications among staff and create operational and safety improvements, the EA results show.

A relocated terminal will also result in accessibility compliance, a less congested site, bus pathways and pedestrian safety and staff facilities will be at the start and end point of the routes.

MacDonald said that consideration will be provided to servicing the downtown area around the Dennis Street terminal and additional stops may be added.

Renovations of the existing building would cost \$671,500 to improve accessibility, washroom facilities and security.

Creating the facility on Huron Street would cost about \$2 million. Annual operating costs would reduce by about \$105,000 per year and an estimated of \$66,000 per year of savings in fuel would be realized, the consultant noted. It's anticipated the payback return would be in less than five years.

Other options examined included moving the facility to Sackville Road, which was not recommended.

The move to Huron Street has been viewed as an opportunity by the city since at least 2005, former reports indicate.

A 'do nothing' option was not considered.

The matter is expected to return to council at its June 28 meeting.