

Lights out for the Norgoma

By **Christopher Shoust** - April 23, 2018



Several sides of the argument around the M. S. Norgoma were presented at city council tonight.

City staff recommended sale of the ship to a Chicago-based party.



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The Sault Ratepayers Association spoke to the legal sides of the argument saying that the city did not own the ship and had no legal right to sell it off.

The St. Mary's River Marine Heritage Centre board of directors spoke about the history of the ship and its attractions and did not want council to do anything but let them exist and go on its current path.

It had 25 letters of support for their work.



City councilor Susan Myers spoke to her motion to not take action to remove the vessel but to enhance and sustain the board and the activities on the vessel. Her motion, seconded by Sandra Hollingsworth, failed.

Seven options were sought by city staff and these options are noted below.

City staff said the vessel is not deemed a historic site.

City councilor Rick Niro and mayor Christian Provenzano were not comfortable with the lack of information on the Chicago-based buyer to go forward with a motion to look to let him acquire the ship.

City councilor Matthew Shoemaker and Rick Niro brought forward a motion to remove the berthing rights from the Norgoma board of directors and move to remove the ship. It passed.

The following were the options before council:

Option 1: Relocation to Parks Canada Site

In 2001, the Tourism Company was engaged to complete "Feasibility Study and Business Plan Phase 2 Report: Relocation Assessment". The focus of the study was to relocate the M.S. Norgoma to the Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site operated by Parks Canada. City staff has followed up with Parks Canada staff to investigate the possibility of relocating the M.S. Norgoma to the Sault Canal. Based on the discussions it was determined that there are a number of reasons why this is not an option at this time.

1. Currently, Parks Canada is in the midst of completing a new management plan which will take the site through the next 10 years. The focus during this next planning cycle will be on the investments and improvements to on-site infrastructure and heritage buildings that will help create a more dynamic offer at the Sault Ste. Marie Canal.
2. Since the M.S. Norgoma is not directly linked to the reason for designation as a national historic site, it is not something Parks Canada would be willing to assume responsibility for. Accountability is to those cultural resources that are currently managed by Parks Canada that are directly related to the reason for designation.
3. In addition, one of the pieces of infrastructure Parks Canada is actively seeking funding for is to repair the pier walls. In some areas they are compromised and Parks Canada could not guarantee they could safely accommodate such a large vessel at this time.

Option 2: Location near Canadian Bushplane Heritage Centre

A location adjacent to the Canadian Bushplane Museum was ruled out due to the lack of dock space and water depths.

Option 3: Relocation to the Pier at the Former Hospital Location

Currently, the pier at the former hospital location is owned by the City and could potentially accommodate the M.S. Norgoma. There are no utility services, telecom services, sewer connection or mooring bollards available at this location. Services would need to be brought to the site from Lucy Terrace. The cost to connect the Norgoma to the services would be an additional charge of \$185,000 to \$195,000.

This option is not recommended due to the cost to move and relocate the M.S. Norgoma.

Furthermore, there is no public parking available, the location has reduced visibility which would negatively impact visitation.

Option 4: Mr. Peter Gregos-Nicols Offer to Acquire the Norgoma.

Mr. Gregos-Nicols has expressed interest in acquiring the M.S. Norgoma and relocating the boat to Chicago. On November 14, 2017 City Staff and three members of the St. Mary's River Marine Heritage Centre (S.M.R.M.H.C) Board participated in a conference call with Mr. Gregos-Nicols from Chicago to discuss his interest in acquiring the M.S. Norgoma. On December 20, 2017 Mr. Gregos-Nicols travelled to Sault Ste. Marie to meet with S.M.R.M.H.C Board members and tour the M.S. Norgoma.

The M.S. Norgoma requires significant investment to restore the boat to its 1950's character and is estimated to cost approximately \$500,000 plus labour.

The vision is to restore the M.S. Norgoma and utilize it as a maritime museum.

Mr. Gregos-Nicols indicated his hope would be in the future that the M.S.

Norgoma would be able to tour and visit major cities around the Great Lakes.

However, staff cautions that this is preliminary and due to the logistics and associated expenses the M.S. Norgoma may not return to Sault Ste. Marie. It is also important to note that the timing for the removal of the Norgoma would need to be coordinated with City Staff to coincide with the replacement of the Roberta Bondar Marina Docks. It is currently recommended that this option take place in the Fall of 2018 and be done in coordination with a planned replacement of docks in 2019. The costs associated with inspecting the hull of the vessel, disconnecting the electrical and sewage connections to the ship, as well as, associated tugboat fees would be the responsibility of Mr. Gregos-Nicols. The City would be responsible for removal of the docks and disconnecting the services to the docks which is estimated at \$35,000.

Transport Canada and/or U.S. Coast Guard approval and insurance will be obtained and provided to the St. Marys' River Marine Centre and the Corporation of City of Sault Ste. Marie.

An agreement would need to be created to ensure there will be no liability to the Board of the Norgoma or the City of Sault Ste. Marie which would address:

- Permits and licensing
- Safety
- Environmental Protection
- International customs and security

Any additional permits or notifications (Conservation Authority or other Ministries) required to remove the Norgoma from Roberta Bondar Marina would be obtained and any associated costs would be covered at no cost to the Norgoma Board or the City.

There are a number of steps required in order to move the ship from Canada to the United States which include:

1. The Board of the S.M.R.M.H.C must pass a resolution requesting to be released from clause one in the 1982 agreement with Ontario Ministry of Transportation.
2. The City of Sault Ste. Marie would then need to pass a resolution at City Council requesting to be released from clause seven in the 1975 agreement with Ontario Ministry of Transportation.
3. Written notice would be sent to Transport Canada requesting approval to move the M.S. Norgoma within the Port of Sault Ste. Marie's protected waters.
4. The Department of Canadian Heritage, Movable Cultural Property and Heritage Policy Programs require an application be submitted for a "Permanent Export Permit". The permit is examined and then the application is either approved or refused. (The M.S. Norgoma meets the definition of a machine and is greater than 50 years old).

Option 5: Decommission and Remove the M.S. Norgoma from Bondar Marina

In 2013 the City retained STEM engineering to investigate various exit strategies for the M.S. Norgoma. The report concluded that the cost of decommissioning and removing the Norgoma would exceed any salvage value. A number of factors contributed to the costs and include:

- Disposal of hazardous materials from the ship (asbestos, lead paint and oil)
- An abundance of wood on the upper decks has no salvage value and must be disposed of.
- Its location in the marina requires either expensive onsite decommissioning or it needs to be removed to a ship breaking yard for demolition.
- Due to its construction, and condition, it has little value for being re-purposed as a barge or other vessel.

Through this investigation three exit strategy options were determined and evaluated, as follows:

A. Demolish onsite:

Estimated Cost >\$500,000 (2013 values and water depths at the time) Completely demolish the Norgoma onsite. This would require working from the top down and inside out until only the lower hull remains. The hull would then need to be lifted out of the water and the final demolition carried out on land adjacent to the marina.

B. Partially demolish onsite, final demolition offsite:

Estimated Cost \$200,000-\$240,000. (2013 values and water depths at the time) Remove the upper portions of Norgoma to lighten the ship enough so dredging would not be required. Once light enough, the marina docks would be removed and the Norgoma would be tugged out of the marina to a ship breaking yard for final demolition.

C. Remove off-site:

Estimated Cost \$200,000-\$300,000. (2013 values and water depths at the time) The marina docks would be removed, the marina basin around the stern of the Norgoma would be dredged until the Norgoma was able to be safely removed from the marina. The Norgoma would then be tugged to a ship breaking yard for demolition.

Option 6: Invest and Support the Norgoma

If the M.S. Norgoma were to remain in the Roberta Bondar Marina an investment would need to be made to assist the capital upgrades that are required. As suggested by Mr. Gregos-Nicols and discussed with the Board, it is anticipated an investment of approximately \$500,000 would be necessary to fully restore the interior and exterior for museum purposes.

A request was made of the Board to provide cost estimates and options to restore the vessel, however, a Board member response indicated they are a volunteer board and have only so much time available to do things. They indicated they could not provide this information in time for this Council report as this would require obtaining quotes and estimates. It was indicated they can try to provide this information in due time when they begin to examine their restoration costs and

projects for the fiscal year.

Currently, the M.S. Norgoma relies upon various grant programs to hire summer students and operates from mid-June to Labour Day each year. Sault Ste. Marie's peak tourist season is September to October, during which time the M.S. Norgoma is not in operation. In order to expand the operating season and ensure consistency in operating hours it would be necessary to secure ongoing financial support.

Option 7: Status Quo

The operation of the M.S. Norgoma would continue under the current arrangement without financial support from the City. In the event the St. Mary's River Marine Heritage Centre is unable to fulfill the terms of the agreement with the City, meet their financial obligations or dissolves the M.S. Norgoma reverts back to the City and the City assumes all liabilities.



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