

Arts Centre work proceeds

By DAVID NAGY
Daily News staff

A tentative deal has been reached to fund the operating deficit, but not the operating costs, of the arts centre has been reached it was revealed yesterday.

Shirley Pomeroy, chairperson of the Peace River Regional District, told an Expo Legacy committee meeting that the district electoral areas B and C, the City of Fort St. John, and Village of Taylor have agreed verbally to carry any deficit of the operation of the arts centre. She emphasized this would not include basic operating costs of the centre.

Negotiations on this are still going on. The agreement will include any expenses under an operating deficit.

Word will be going out to all user groups to formulate ideas about how to operate the building when it is complete. Sue Popesku told the meeting that the building, now held by the cultural society under a charitable number, must be turned over to "someone else" with a charitable number when complete. It was pointed out that all the user groups should have charitable tax numbers.

The arts centre, located in the former Bay building downtown, will see actual construction begin later this month after tenders are awarded. The arts community (North Peace Cultural Society) took over the building last fall and has held dozens of functions in the building since that time. These have included plays, part of the music festival, the Miss Fort St. John pageant and other shows and displays.

An official ceremony to mark this the "raising of the roof" has been rescheduled to July 16. It had been planned for June 18 but Member of Parliament Frank Oberle had already made plans to attend the opening of the Extended Care Home Wing next month.

Vonnie Dixon of the building committee praised the efforts of Gene Blishen of North Peace Savings and Credit Union who arranged a line of credit for the society in order for them to get the promised federal funding (\$500-thousand) released in time for this year. Had this not been done, a year would have been lost and another

\$100-thousand been added to the building construction costs because of inflation.

Pomeroy and Blishen are also investigating the creation of a regional library out of the current library. This would mean more provincial funding for new books, and eliminate the need for user fees for the rural areas.

The theatre users are planning to make their temporary move to the former Pat's Home Furnishing building which is adjacent to the arts centre. The move is necessitated by the year-long re-construction stage that will convert the former department store into a theatre, library, artspace and art gallery.

Arts Centre gets hard won approval from city council

By Wendy Coomber
Daily News staff

Getting the new Arts Centre constructed may seem like a continual uphill battle for the North Peace Cultural Society, but they gained a few more inches at last night's city council meeting with council's agreement to support another grant application.

The application is for a Growth and Opportunities (GO) B.C. grant from the provincial government totalling \$650,000 which will be used in Phase II of the building. Phase I, says fundraiser Sue Popeskue, is totally paid for and that part of the construction will be finished before Christmas.

Ald. Peter Vandergugten refused to vote in favour of the motion because "You said you would never go ahead (with the Centre) unless all the money was in place first," he told Popesku. "I have to vote against the city giving you an endorsement because it could put us in jeopardy for things we might want to pursue later on. You say we are not in competition, but we are. We have other projects we might like to pursue."

"I don't believe we're in competition," Popesku replied. "I believe we're in planning."

It was her feeling that the money in the GO B.C. fund were for projects that were in place and ready to go. Earlier this year Premier Vander Zalm announced the \$162 million fund from the B.C. Lotteries for community projects over the next three years.

Popesku told Vandergugten that if the building hadn't gone ahead, even though they did not have all the money in place to begin, they would have lost \$500,000 through inflation and added costs of labour and supplies and the \$1 million Expo Legacy money would have been in jeopardy as well.

SUPPORT THE PROJECT

Ald. Steve Thorlaxson said he didn't know of any plans that were written in stone and went exactly as planned from day one. "We've got to quit sniping at it and get behind the project."

Ald. Jack Keough said he was a little disappointed because he would have liked to see the city apply for a GO B.C. grant for a new swimming

pool, but he agreed with Thorlaxson that the Arts Centre was going ahead and they should all get behind it.

Ald. Dave Bodnar added an amendment to the motion of support saying that any other groups coming before council requesting support for a GO B.C. grant would be considered equally and on its own merit.

"There've been a lot of groups intimidated by this project (the Centre), and sitting on the sidelines" said Bodnar. He said after the meeting that the amendment was "a historic step" and "they're no longer number one."

Bodnar said for the past two years other groups have been hesitant to ask council for help because they felt the Arts Centre's requests came first.

"They're on equal footing with everyone else who wants a grant now," he said.

The motion of support passed with Ald. Vandergugten opposed.

Phase I of the building finished off the exterior shell. Phase II will concentrate on building up the interior. Phase III will be finishing it off and moving in.

Library gives funds to Centre

The October meeting of the Fort St. John Public Library was held Oct. 20 at the Library.

Expo Legacy and Library Development: The Library board has contributed \$10,000 toward the Arts Centre building project. The project is well underway and community support is much appreciated. Our community is building a project everyone will enjoy and be proud of.

Raffle: The Canadian Encyclopedia is being raffled as a fundraiser with all proceeds going to the Arts Centre. Tickets are \$1 apiece or three for \$2 and may be purchased at the library or through any board member.

Group Memberships: Any organized group wishing to have a group membership at the library may do so by filling out an application. If this would be of service to your group, please check at the library.

Talking Books: These will soon be available for a small rental fee per taped book for a two-week loan period.

COMING EVENTS

Nov. 12 Children's Book Week is Nov. 12-19 and we have a children's book illustrator here to talk to us. Brenda Clark is the illustrator of Big Sarah's Little Boots and Franklin in the Dark, two well-known children's books. Her talk will be at 10:30 at the library on Saturday morning and will be of interest to all ages. There is no charge as this reading is sponsored by the Canada Council and the Canadian Children's Book

Centre.

Nov. 16 The Friends of the Library will hold their A.G.M. and Trivia Challenge and Trivia Challenge at 7:30 Nov. 16. They invite everyone to come and enjoy an evening of challenging fun. The Friends' ongoing project is raising money for furnishings for the new library. Anyone interested in joining this group will be more than welcome.

Nov. 19 This is a busy day in our community. Among the other community events will be the Friends of the Library Book Sale. The sale will be held at the Co-op Mall. Come and browse, there's bound to be a book just for you.

Nov. 22 Make-up workshop at 7 p.m. at the library. This is free of charge but please contact the library for more details or to pre-register.

Our library is busy. There's a lot happening — circulation is up, video circulation has almost doubled over last year and library registration has increased.

We are fortunate to have the cooperative, cheerful people who work in our library. Thanks should be extended to Romi, Linda, Diana and all the other terrific library employees and volunteers who are so helpful and efficient.

Please give us your suggestions and comments. The library is a public service and we need your input in order to give you the service you want.

Submitted by Pat Smith
Library Board

Art Centre needs more funds

With another \$62,000 in donations by Nov. 30 the Arts Centre could be made available for special events although the interior will not be completed. The additional funds added to the current contract of renovation to the Arts Centre would allow the public washrooms to be installed which would make the building usable for special fundraising events like one-time performances and barn dances.

The North Peace Cultural Society requires a total of \$1.6 million to complete the interior and furnish the building. Applications for large amounts of funding have been applied for. However, no word on the decisions has been forthcoming. Local businesses and individuals are asked to get their donations in as quickly as possible so those funds

can be matched with funds from outside funding sources such as foundations. Donations are accepted at Artspace.

The current contract with Hegge Construction will complete the basic structural changes to the building. The cladding of red with silver and gray trim will arrive in mid-November. The Arts Centre will look completed by Christmas but the inside will have no walls, lights, carpet or furnishings.

The volunteer building committee of the North Peace Cultural Society has been working throughout the summer with Howard Yano Ar-

chitects and Hegge Construction. The Society has raised \$2,050,000 which has now been used to purchase the vacant Hudson Bay building for \$400,000 and contract the current work of the basic structural changes to the building. The Society contracted the structural changes this past summer when they calculate the increased inflation rate of waiting until next spring. By closing the building in this fall, interior work can be contracted if and when more funds are located. The Society anticipates the entire project to be completed by early 1990.

Arts Centre money problems solved

By Paul Cowley
Alaska Highway News

Fort St. John and Taylor have come to an agreement on how to split the cost of completing the Arts Centre.

Taylor will pay \$23,000 each year toward the cost of finishing the centre estimated at \$860,000. The money will be taken from the approximately \$500,000 the district agreed to give the city under the tax-sharing arrangement negotiated several months ago.

The district's contribution is final and not subject to alteration even when the tax-sharing agreement is reopened for negotiation in three years.

The agreement represents a small setback for Fort St. John City Council which has maintained the tax-sharing agreement and the Arts Centre are completely separate items to be negotiated separately.

But Taylor politicians have consistently said the two are closely linked. Taylor's council indicated by the agreement it is unwilling to give Fort St. John more money on top of the tax-sharing funds to finish the Arts Centre.

Mayor Steve Thorlakson said he was not completely happy with the agreement but added it was the best deal the city could get under the circumstances.

The mayor said he would like to have seen "more dollars on the table" with Taylor and had more financial support from the regional district.

"But I'm glad we got it done. We demonstrated some leadership. We demonstrated we're committed to getting it done so we can put this issue behind us that has been haunting this entire community for the last five years."

Ald. Dave Bodnar was more vocal in his opposition to the agreement. He felt council had been "snookered" by the deal. "It doesn't cost the taxpayers of Taylor a cent," Bodnar continued. "That council must be laughing..."

The alderman was also critical of the Peace River

Regional District for refusing to help fund the project's completion.

"I'm not against the cultural centre, I want it done. But this is the wrong way," he added.

Thorlakson said it was important to come to an agreement on paying for the centre, adding he did not want to miss the "window of opportunity" to complete the centre.

Ald. Frank Koop said he saw the agreement as an "opportunity we can not afford to pass up."

Ald. Jack Keough, who supported the plan to finish the centre, expressed his disappointment that the regional district did not play a large role in completing the centre.

"I think it's unfortunate, to say the least, that we were not able to get some financial support from the regional district," said Keough.

Ald. Jean Pryndik, a long time opponent of using taxpayers' money to complete the centre, also opposed the settlement with Taylor. "I feel that the taxpayer should have a say where we spend their money or where the money comes from to pay it (the cost of the Arts Centre) off."

Ald. Peter Vandergugten said council should show some leadership and ensure the centre is completed so council can concentrate on other projects such as the proposed leisure pool.

The cost of completing the centre will be approximately \$940,000 when the interim financing costs and Municipal Finance Authority charge for arranging the financing are included. The money will be borrowed for a 20-year term with payments of \$137,000 per month.

The agreement, passed by the councils must still be adopted by the regional district before it is finalized. The money for the Arts Centre is being borrowed by the regional district and then loaned to Fort St. John.

Council vetos Arts Centre funding delay

By Paul Cowley
Alaska Highway News

Attempts to delay the passage of the Arts Centre funding bylaws or rescind them entirely were defeated in City Council Monday.

Ald. Jean Pryndik, a vocal opponent of funding the Arts Centre with taxpayers' money, called for council's borrowing bylaw to be rescinded. But her motion was defeated four to two, with only herself and Ald. Dave Bodnar voting for the motion. Ald. Frank Koop was absent.

Another motion, put forward by Ald. Dave Bodnar, to delay the passage of the funding bylaws, so the Peace River Regional District and the provincial government could be lobbied to provide more money for the centre, was also defeated 4-2.

About 60 people filled Council Chambers, many of them opponents of the city's plan to go to the taxpayers to raise the \$860,000 needed to complete the centre.

In opposing the Arts Centre funding arrangement, Bodnar was deeply critical of Taylor and Electoral Areas "B" and "C". The alderman rejected arguments from several council members, including Mayor Steve Thorlakson that unless the Arts Centre is completed the city has no hope of enlisting provincial financial support for the proposed leisure pool.

"I'd like to take that golden carrot away, the pool, because we all feel we're being held up for ransom," Bodnar told the crowd.

Bodnar accused the electoral areas of backing

out of the Arts Centre project by refusing to contribute any money on the capital costs of completing the project.

Bodnar said he was not opposed to using taxpayers' money to complete the centre, "... but it's got to be affordable and the city can not afford this alone."

Under the funding arrangement Fort St. John will pay \$137,000 per year over 20 years to complete the centre. Taylor will contribute \$23,000 per year towards this bill with money taken from its tax-sharing agreement with Fort St. John.

Many in the audience seemed to agree with the alderman's assessment that taxpayers could not afford to foot the centre's completion bill. A number of residents stood up to complain that tax dollars were being used to complete the project.

Robert Hardie criticized the city's plan to finish the centre, calling it a "taxpayer bail-out of a special interest group." Hardie said the city was setting a dangerous precedent.

But Thorlakson pointed out the city offers financial support to many projects, such as the curling rink, and arenas, which are used by special interest groups.

When questioned why he would not call for a referendum on the project, the mayor read from a three-page written statement.

The mayor said although he was opposed to the way the Arts Centre issue had been handled over the years he was determined to see it com-

pleted during his term in office.

Taking the centre to a referendum would require the entire completion package to be tendered out leading to higher completion costs, the mayor said.

If a referendum on the project was defeated, "new fundraising would have to start in a dispirited and discouraged group and corporate donations would not likely be forthcoming if we were looking at five or six more years to get the necessary money . . .

"Failure to complete this speedily will delay the pool, indefinitely, probably by at least five or six years," Thorlakson added. "The provincial government has made it crystal clear that there will be no more money for a pool until the cultural centre is finished . . .

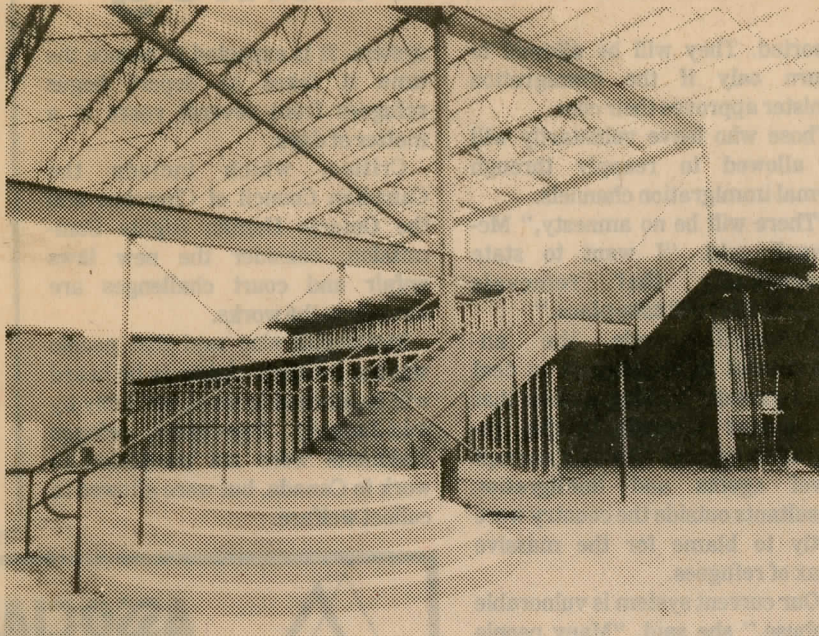
"This whole process leaves a bad taste in my mouth, but I believe that the present situation is the least painful option, and that it will never get any better or less expensive than it is right now."

Some residents criticized council for backtracking on its promises the centre would be built without going to the taxpayer. Others said taxpayers were already taxed too heavily.

The bylaws to authorize raising enough money to complete the Arts Centre are before the Inspector of Municipalities. The regional district has informed the inspector it hopes to have the bylaws returned to the district for its July 25 meeting where they will come before the board.

Thorlakson has requested the meeting be moved from Hudson's Hope to Fort St. John.

Arts Centre racing to raise funds



The Arts Centre construction is almost finished phase I.

By Scott Crowson
Daily News staff

As the first phase of the new Arts Centre nears completion, the project fund-raisers say they need an additional \$35,000 to take advantage of a plumbing bargain.

Fund-raiser Sue Popesku explained that if the North Peace Cultural Society can come up with the money by Jan. 31, the basic plumbing can be installed by the construction company currently working on the building exterior.

Otherwise, the water works will have to be done later at a much higher cost.

"The push is on for people and businesses to contribute because we have a chance to get the plumbing roughed-in at last year's prices," Popesku said in an interview Wednesday. "It will cost much less

if it's done now rather than six months from now or whenever the second phase begins."

Originally, the first phase of construction was to have been completed by this time. However, a shipping delay bumped the termination date to the middle of February.

The suppliers say the exterior cladding should arrive within the next two weeks. It will then take about a month for the construction crews to put the cladding in place, thus completing the exterior.

Popesku said Phase I came reasonably close to the original budget of \$1,767,000.

\$210,000 OVERRUN

The actual cost was \$1,977,000, an overrun of \$210,000.

The additional costs arose in three areas: the construction contract

(\$169,719), miscellaneous fees (\$22,152) and the feasibility study (\$18,440).

The task of raising money for the second phase of the project, the interior work, has already begun.

The budget for this phase is \$1.8 million, with \$1.3 million going towards construction. The remaining costs include equipment for the theatre (\$290,000), library (\$65,000), art gallery (\$34,000) and public area (\$30,000). Miscellaneous fees of about \$94,000 are also expected.

Popesku said the society is aiming to secure \$1.4 million before launching Phase II.

"The fact of the matter is we have the shell of the building in place, and now we need \$1.4 million to open the doors," Popesku said. "With that amount, we can at least move in with old equipment. It would be nice, though, if we had the additional \$600,000 for all the equipment and furnishings which are needed."

The majority of the Phase II funding is expected to come from the provincial and federal governments.

The society has made an application for \$650,000 from the GO B.C. program and has requested \$452,000 from the Government of Canada under two grant programs, Community Initiatives and National Galleries.

Approval of these applications is not guaranteed.

The society also hopes to raise \$350,000 in corporate contributions, \$350,000 in local donations and \$100,000 in foundation grants.

So far, approximately \$65,000 has been pledged.

"We're searching far and wide for

support," Popesku said. "If we don't receive the government grants we're counting on, we'll just have to keep looking. It will get done one way or another."

The society will hold an "Ideas Workshop" on Jan. 12 to get the public involved in suggesting effective ways of fund-raising in the community.

Those who come up with ideas won't be required to sit on committees or volunteer their time.

The meeting takes place at City Hall, beginning at 7:30 p.m.