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NP Cultural Society

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Zeros in on future goals

Cultural Centre's exec director quits



Photo Credit *Bronwyn Scott*

Bettyanne Hampton, former executive director of the North Peace Cultural Centre, and David Batterham, president, at a Fort St. John Committee of the Whole meeting on Sept. 15, 2014.

BRONWYN SCOTT

reporter@northeastnews.ca

FORT ST. JOHN – There is a changing of the guard at the North Peace Cultural Centre with Bettyanne Hampton's recent resignation from her position as executive director.

Hampton held the position for five years,

and "wholeheartedly enjoyed the unique challenges and exciting triumphs of northern working and living," she said, in an email. However, a "warmer and less remote opportunity" factored strongly in her decision to leave.

Hampton tendered her resignation prior to the 2014 Annual General Meeting of the North Peace Cultural Society on Weds., Dec. 17, indicating that the previous year had caused great stress to herself and her family.

At the meeting, attended by more than 70 people, Hampton thanked the board of directors, and said she was taking with her "many wonderful memories of successful accomplishments, of inspiring artistic events, and of the warmth and friendship of many."

Big changes planned for the Cultural C



Photo Credit Bronwyn Scott

At a public meeting about the future of the North Peace Cultural Centre, members of the public participated in an activity to help choose priority actions and goals.

BRONWYN SCOTT
reporter@northeastnews.ca

FORT ST. JOHN – The North Peace Cultural Society board members have been making progress in leaps and bounds to improve the cultural centre, from community inclusion to funding and management.

On Weds., April 8, the society held the second of three public meetings designed to help determine priority actions and goals.

“As a society, some of the challenges that we’ve had in the past, before the new board has come into being, was we had some problems in the administration of the centre,” said David Batterham, co-chair of the board.

“The community is looking for more than we were providing, and we were having some challenges with the management, but I think that we’re correcting.”

The board has taken a number of positive steps over the past four months, including making a business plan, which was presented to city council in February.

The goals outlined in the plan include enhanced transparency, re-engaging the community, and fiscal responsibility, as well as revising policies and procedures, and making sure that centre staff are well trained.

In addition, they’ve streamlined the theatre and room bookings process, and they’ve been exploring options for additional funding sources. They’ve also got an audit on the horizon.

“We’ve hired a new office manager, we’ve adjusted rental rates, improved internal operations, we’ve tied a lot of things down,” Batterham said.

While the first meeting, held five weeks prior, had a strong turnout of about 45 people, the second had a lesser showing, with just 15 turning up.

At the first meeting, suggestions for improvements, either in strategy or infrastructure, were written on large

pieces of paper. At the second, each of those suggestions had been copied, word for word, on recipe cards, and displayed at the front of the room.

Each person in attendance was given four stickers, and was invited to place them on the causes they most supported. The exercise provided a visual display of priority actions that the board will take into consideration moving forward.

“Any opportunity that we can take for people to make their input tangible, so we’ve recorded what people said, we’ve put down a sense of community priorities, and as a board we then have to take those and make our own set of priorities, because we have other

considerations,” Batterham said.

The suggestions ranged from expanding the gallery space, and putting in a rubber dance floor, to incorporating a rooftop patio.

The public meetings initially came out of the new board’s enthusiasm for improvement, and a recognized need to retain the momentum that started with the society’s annual general meeting in December, where there were four members from the previous board who were standing, and nine people from the community who wanted to be part of the board. They held a vote to increase the board size to accommodate everybody.

Since then the board has strived to keep positive changes on the horizon, and to keep the community involved.

“I think that we very much achieved that at the first meeting, and maybe that’s part of the reason why the attendance at this meeting is small, because people who really had felt like they

LOCAL NEWS

Positive financials for cultural society

Deficit clawed back into surplus for 2014-15

William Stodalka
Staff Writer

FORT ST. JOHN — The North Peace Cultural Society has gone from a deficit of nearly \$100,000 last fiscal year to a surplus of more than \$30,000, according to information presented at its annual general meeting.

Around 20 people attended the society's AGM at the North Peace Cultural Centre Wednesday, with much of the meeting revolving around the group's financials.

Secretary-treasurer Melissa Paakkonen told the group it took "hours upon hours" to sort through issues with the society's books.

When all was said and done, the group had its financials for 2013-2014,

showing \$841,000 in expenses, but only about \$742,000 in revenue.

The main reasons for the losses, according to Paakkonen's report, were low box office sales, little return on advertising expenditures that did not bring higher ticket sales, outsourcing contracts for services that could have been completed in-house, and legal expenses over a union battle.

The 2014-15 fiscal year was a different story, however.

According to an unaudited draft financial statement presented Wednesday, the society brought in about \$794,000 in revenue against \$761,000 in expenses.

Financials have been a sore spot with the society and certain community

groups that use the cultural centre, which in the past have expressed difficulties with rental contracts and timeliness of payments after events.

In her report, Paakkonen said the society has implemented improved invoicing and tracking procedures to improve its financial stability.

Oliver Hachmeister, the North Peace Cultural Society's operations manager, told the AGM crowd that the society is still working to rebuild relationships with community groups. He expressed optimism about the future.

"The community still wants to see this to be a shining light," he said.

reporter@ahnsfj.ca



WILLIAM STODALKA PHOTO

The North Peace Cultural Society board addressed a crowd of around 20 people at the North Peace Cultural Centre Wednesday night.

LOCAL NEWS

North Peace Cultural Society turning a new leaf

Society working to recover from deficit, repair community relations

Bronwyn Scott
Alaska Highway News

The North Peace Cultural Society was before Fort St. John city council on Monday to request a grant of \$199,396 to help recover from last year's \$98,000 deficit.

The society has been working hard to streamline their processes, however, and its efforts aren't going unnoticed.

"There has been a repairing of community relations . . . you had a tarnished public image, and I think that you've come a long way to turning that ship around," said Mayor Lori Ackerman, at the conclusion of the society's presentation.

The society lost some of its cli-



North Peace Cultural Society board members Margaret May, Connie Surerus, and North Peace Cultural Centre Operations Manager Oliver Hachmeister present to council on Monday.

BRONWYN SCOTT PHOTO

the board in December, it wasn't even close to being ready," Surerus told council. She was able to discover the reasons for the \$98,000 deficiency.

Revenues were down about \$93,000 compared to 2013, she said, and the expenses were up \$53,000 compared to 2013.

More money spent on contract services, such as advertising and promotions, are partially to blame. They've gone back to having these tasks done in-house, she explained.

All of the commercial shows that were hosted in the year ending June 2014 were at a loss, which also accounted for the deficit.

"If we had spent \$5,000 on bringing in a commercial artist, the ticket sales were like \$2,500. So, not a great marketing program to draw people in and bring people into the centre, and maybe also some of the artists that were selected to perform weren't well received in the community," Surerus said.

Box office sales were down considerably. The society also

past, a result of poor management, and unfair rates and policies, society members have said. But restructuring and a new business plan are helping to repair the damage, alongside nine additional board members that have breathed new life into the society.

"We think we've got a great space, I think it's a quality building, a quality exhibition space. With proper management, I think it can thrive into a great service for the community," said society board member Margaret May.

"We look into the future . . . staff and board are working well together, and I think we've had some great positive strides in that area."

One of the society's goals was to enhance transparency to the community and stakeholders. To help meet that goal, it's held three public forums and added society meeting minutes to its website.

Demonstrating fiscal responsibility was another major objective moving forward, and a new business manager has worked to improve the society's financial position by leaps and bounds. A new business plan and a number of cost saving measures have been implemented.

"We have checked our rental rates and made sure that they are where they need to be," said Oliver Hachmeister, operations

manager at the North Peace Cultural Centre.

"To a large degree, we've actually reduced rates and made it easier for people to rent the rooms and rent them more often. The reduction in rent has actually not cost the center any money."

Perhaps most important is the work members have done to improve the society's reputation.

"Repairing community relations, that's a big one for me. I've seen groups that left the centre, and this past September one of them has come back and re-engaged with us, and they're going to be back on a monthly basis, so, that's actually a great thing,"

Hachmeister said.

The centre has also streamlined its policies to make it easier for people to book in the centre, and created an awareness campaign letting the public know it's re-opened on Mondays.

"To that end, we're also trying to have a more organized physical space and a more organized office, that people can see that things are clean, neatly managed, well managed," Hachmeister said.

Connie Surerus, a board member, has been looking over the finances for the 2014 year.

"It was a tough slog, and it was a lot of work. When I came on

brought in about \$15,000 less in fundraising in 2014 compared to 2013.

The negative trend, however, is turning around.

"2015 is looking better, we're looking around the break even point," Surerus said.

"We haven't finalized anything yet . . . we're showing a \$4,000 shortfall but actually it's a little bit better than that, around break even or just a slight surplus, but not having finalized everything I don't want to say that's the firm number. And so we expect to certainly come back from that loss."

Council won't make any funding decisions until a future council meeting.

peacereporter@ahnfsj.ca