

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Corporate Services

Closure of the Oxford Historical Society Resource Centre

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the County Council authorizes Archives to assume the official repository of the Oxford Historical Society's archival holdings as described in Report No. CS 2021-44 titled "Closure of the Oxford Historical Society Resource Centre".

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- As of January 2022, Oxford Historical Society is closing their resource centre located at 82 Light Street, Woodstock – co-located with Oxford County Archives and Ontario Ancestors (The Ontario Genealogical Society) Oxford County Branch
- Oxford Historical Society has requested Oxford County Archives to assume the official repository of their archival holdings
- The County's assumption of the Oxford Historical Society's valuable collection of historical records related to the County would enhance preservation of local history for future generations to access

Implementation Points

Upon approval of the recommendation contained in this report, Archives staff will proceed with the review and transfer of the Oxford Historical Society's records, in 2022, as outlined in an agreement between the parties.

Archives staff review will include assessment of the vacated space at 82 Light to maximize the use of the newly acquired portions of the building previously used by the Oxford Historical Society and will work with Oxford Ancestors (formerly the Oxford Genealogical Society) to ensure an effective use of shared areas.

Financial Impact

The Oxford Historical Society has had a lease agreement with the County for use of approximately 820 sq. ft. on the main floor of 82 Light Street, Woodstock for a rental fee of \$4,800 annually. The loss of revenue that has assisted in paying a portion of the costs related to the County-owned facility at 82 Light Street on the Court House Square will result in the Archives budget assuming those costs, therefore the 2022 draft budget will increase by \$4,800 accordingly.

The Ontario Ancestors plan to continue to occupy their portion of the building, consisting of approximately 820 sq. ft., for a rental fee of \$4,800 annually (indexed by CPI). This area includes their resource centre, a portion of a storage vault, and common areas.

Communications

The Oxford Historical Society made known to its members in October 2021 of their intentions to close their Resource Centre at the end of the year and to transfer their archival holdings to the Oxford County Archives.

Archives staff have discussed the transition with agencies in the community seeking others' interest in assuming the records, including museums and the Woodstock Library, however it was suggested that Oxford County Archives would be the most appropriate steward of these local history records.

Further, staff consulted the Ontario Ancestors – Oxford County Branch as a co-tenant and they indicated their support of the County's Archives retaining the Historical Society's records in their current location – refer to Attachment 2.

Subject to Council's approval, notice of the new arrangement will be made available through the Oxford Historical Society's, Oxford Ancestors and the Oxford County Archives' websites and social media platforms. Regular patrons will also be notified.

Strategic Plan (2020-2022)

					
WORKS WELL TOGETHER	WELL CONNECTED	SHAPES THE FUTURE	INFORMS & ENGAGES	PERFORMS & DELIVERS	POSITIVE IMPACT
				5.i. 5.ii.	

DISCUSSION

Background

A resolution of County Council, dated October 27, 1999, created the County of Oxford Archives effective January 1, 2000. The establishment and operation of the Archives assists the County in meeting the legislative requirements stated under Section 254 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

The County of Oxford Archives is a well-respected “total” Archives responsible for the collection of local government records as well as local history materials. Its holdings include the corporate records of the County of Oxford; area municipality corporate records; private fonds from local businesses, community groups, and individuals; as well as an extensive photograph and postcard collection. The Archives is also the official repository for the records of the District of Brock, 1842-1849, which was the precursor to the County of Oxford.

The principles of the County Archives as established under section 3.0 of Archives Management Policy No. 3.04 includes:

- To assist with and promote the efficient and effective management of all records created, received, used and maintained by the County, its agencies, boards and commissions;
- To preserve the County’s recorded memory by identifying, acquiring, preserving and protecting its valuable and vital records;
- To acquire and preserve records relating to the social and economic development of the County of Oxford in order to:
 - foster an understanding of local history;
 - preserve information about the history and development of the County and people involved;
 - provide educational and academic resources; and
 - promote tourism through attracting researchers;
- To provide access to the information necessary to support current and future decision making and to permit County Council and the various County departments to meet institutional accountability requirements;
- To assist with and promote compliance with any statutory requirements relating to the collection, use, disclosure, retention and disposal of County records; and
- To provide adequate facilities and services for storage, preservation, retrieval and use of archival records.

The volunteer-operated Oxford Historical Society was founded in 1897 by Andrew Pattullo, in order to preserve and promote the history of Oxford County. Their vast archival collection includes such valuable records related to people, businesses and organizations throughout the county, maps, directories, oral histories, military records, and publications.

In 2011, the Oxford County Archives, Oxford Historical Society and Oxford Branch of Ontario Ancestors (formerly the Oxford Genealogical Society) moved into the newly renovated 82 Light Street, Woodstock. The three organizations have worked closely together to provide research services, and ensure that the history of the County is preserved and made available to the public.

In June 2021, the Archives was approached by the Oxford Historical Society to assume the official repository of their archival holdings as they are no longer able to maintain a physical reference centre due to cost, which has become more difficult to meet as a result of the loss of revenue due to COVID-19 and the closure of the resource centre to the public. The Oxford Historical Society's volunteer base is also aging and they are unable to find new dedicated volunteers to continue to operate their resource centre. The Society still plans to operate as an organization with meetings and other events, and intends to provide research services remotely – refer to Attachment 1.

The Executive is also encouraging Historical Society members who previously volunteered at the Resource Centre, as well as other Historical Society members, to become volunteers with Oxford Archives, which would help expand the Archives' volunteer base, aid with backlog of unprocessed donations and record transfers, and other potential projects.

Comments

Archives serve as the County's collective memory and can help foster and promote a sense of community and identity by collecting, preserving, and interpreting materials relating to the people, places, and history of Oxford County.

Oxford County Archives has the resources, staff and means to maintain historical records for all of Oxford County and are the only heritage institution, besides the Oxford Historical Society, in the County that does so. By acting as the official repository for the Historical Society, it would allow for their collection to remain intact, while at the same time, strengthening the Archives' current local history holdings. Moreover, records of a similar nature belonging to both organizations could be amalgamated, thereby making it easier for researchers and the public to access information. Records could continue to be accessed through the Archives, with assistance from volunteers of the Historical Society.

In addition, as the Archives is facing space limitations, having access to the former space rented by the Oxford Historical Society, would provide additional work and storage space for Archives staff. At the same time, it would allow Archives staff to continue to foster strong partnerships with Oxford Ancestors and the Oxford Historical Society which is imperative in the collecting, preserving and promoting of the County's rich history.

Conclusions

The Oxford Historical Society's archival holdings provide a wealth of information with respect to the County's past. The assumption of these records by Oxford County Archives will ensure they are preserved and made accessible upon closing of the Historical Society's Resource Centre.

The Oxford County Archives is an ideal candidate, as it has the staff and means to properly preserve these vital materials and make them accessible to the public. At the same time, these records will strengthen the Archives' local history holdings and provide more storage and work space at 82 Light Street.

SIGNATURES

Report Author:

Original signed by

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Departmental Approval:

Original signed by

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Director of Corporate Services

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

Michael Duben, B.A., LL.B.
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Oxford Historical Society correspondence, dated July 19, 2021

Attachment 2 - Ontario Ancestors (The Ontario Genealogical Society) Oxford County Branch correspondence, dated October 27, 2021