

A Place to Rendezvous and Remember

Proposal Submitted by the Labour History Project of the Winnipeg Labour Council For the Development of Alexander Docks

The area around the Alexander Dock, in Winnipeg's Exchange District, is one of the city's most important historical places, but one that is in danger of being forgotten and lost to future generations of citizens. The Red River has been designated a heritage river by the Canadian government and very few Winnipeggers know.

While there have been some civic efforts to preserve and promote the historical significance of the Exchange District, there has been little done along the Red River, directly east of the District. During the late 1990's plans were developed for restoring Victoria Park to its former glory but nothing was done.

A hundred and fifty years ago two dozen river boats worked the river and docked at the end of Alexander Street. The area was a crossroads of commerce and culture. Just to the south-west of the docks, and across the current Waterfront Drive was Victoria Park, a central meeting place for workers and their families, where they could relax from the daily grind, have a picnic and play games.

Today, the Paddlewheel Riverboat Tours and over 40,000 people a year take trips along the Red River from this dock. There is nothing on this site that helps visitors know its significance, other than a solitary and modest cairn. Victoria Park no longer exists. Instead, there is a road through where grass used to grow and rubble from the steam plant that was demolished a

decade ago. A new condominium development will soon occupy the space.



Historical Memorial

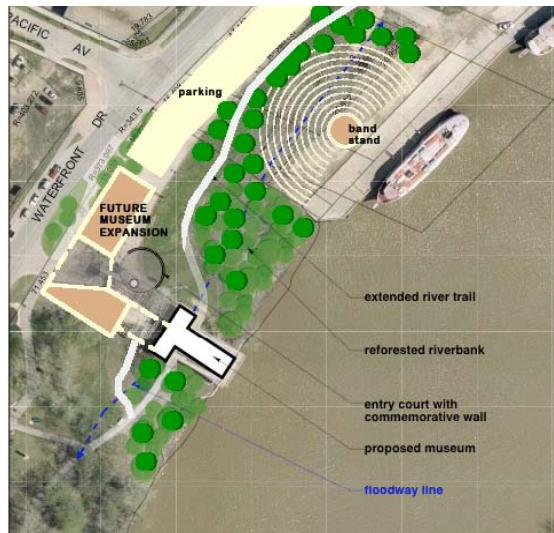
A modest historical development is ideally suited for the area, that will preserve the social significance of the area and be a public facility complimenting other attractions in the Exchange District. The plan is to create a landscaped area and structure that represents the late 19th and early 20th century Winnipeg. By rejuvenating the existing harbour master's building and creating new recreational attractions, we can create a new meeting place that reflects what once existed in this area.

The WLC Labour History Project is proposing *A Place to Rendezvous and Remember*, a three-phase development for the Harbour Master's Building at Site B in the Alexander Dock area.

Features of the Project

Museum and period displays, commemorating the commercial and cultural importance of the area, in particular the Dock and Victoria Park. About 2,000 square feet of space will be used initially for the displays, in the centre of the existing Harbour Master's building. In the long term, additional buildings could be built to the west of the existing structure. Note the attached building layout.

Café, souvenir and ice cream kiosk that could cater to the public during two or three seasons of the year. It is feasible to consider the facility for the winter season also, at least on weekends, to support activities that take place along the river. While an economically viable café would need about 1,500 square feet of space, a smaller café may start the service, or both interior and exterior space may be used.



Ten to 12 **parking space** for vehicles, adjacent to Waterfront drive. There would also be room for parking bicycles and mopeds.

Public dock, with a capacity to dock up to six small private boats. This facility could be for river traffic use (those coming to the location for short visits) and for residents along Waterfront Drive who have boats and need a safe area to dock. There could also be benches for the public to enjoy the river.

Landscaped and treed area, with walkway that extends the walk and green space along the river from the south. Though there is limited space above the flood line, it could be designed to accommodate the public, especially when the floodwaters recede.

Architectural link to the developments to the north (Lot A that includes the actual Alexander Dock) that promote the history associated with the area. The whole space could be integrated, so that it maximizes the tourist potential and facilitates other commercial usage, such as for movie locations.

Small band shell or stage area for presentations, re-enactments and live music. Initial capacity should be for 100–150 people. The slope of the land towards the river would lend itself to a natural stage setting for small events. (Danny Schur has suggested for example, that such a setting would be ideal for regular presentations from his popular play, *Strike*.)

Development Phases

* Phase One

Transform the Harbour Master's building into a museum. Components of this phase would include:

- Digital (video based) museum
- Cafe (with drinks and light lunches)
- Memorial walkway & museum entrance
- Pathway extension to Juba Park

The estimated cost is \$450,000.

* Phase Two

Develop outdoor facilities and expanding the museum. Components would include:

- Bandstand and landscaping
- A small dock for private boats
- Expanded displays and audio-visuals

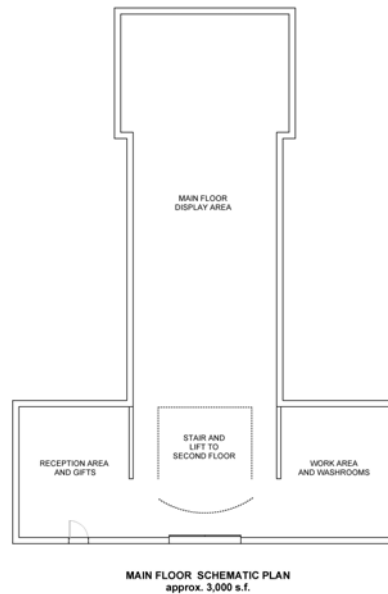
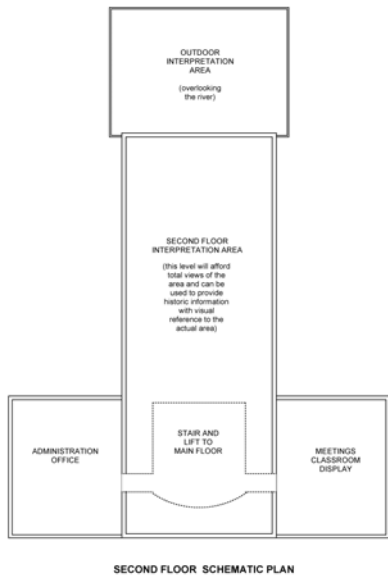
The estimated cost is \$255,000.

* Phase Three

Expand geographically and commercially. This phase (5-8 years from now) would include:

- Expansion to include Alexander Dock
- New buildings
- Heritage fixtures and artifacts
- Façade for movie set locations

Costs for such an expansion have not yet been determined.



Financing the Project

The broad estimated cost for the first phase of development is in the range of \$450,000. This would cover the initial renovations for the Harbour Master's building, to make it presentable to the public. Tentatively, we expect the entire project to cost out at approximately;

Renovations for the main building	\$200,000
Landscaping & Memorial	\$150,000
Initial history installations	\$40,000
Site servicing (water, sewage)	\$10,000
Renovation for office and cafe	\$50,000

To develop this historical site on a commercial basis would cost a great deal more. We see the above estimate as a core cost for materials and some professional support. As the project develops, we expect to get significant in-kind assistance from the historical community, unions representing workers in the trades, student groups, other community volunteers, as well as local business.

The second phase of the project will include accompanying facilities and

expansion of the historical installations. Very generally, the cost estimate is;

Bandstand and landscaping	\$100,000
Small dock for private boats	\$75,000
Expanded displays, AV kiosks	\$80,000

An important aspect of the development of this project is making it environmentally appropriate. Not only would there have to be consideration of the river flow and ecology in the building of water front facilities, but all aspects of the project should respect the environment and should minimize the negative impact on the environment. For example, heating for the building should include plans for a geothermal heat-exchange system. Water and waste water services also have to be installed and should consider environmentally friendly alternatives.



Proponents of the Project

The WLC Labour History Project is committed to formally starting the development of the site and setting up the organizational and management mechanisms to maintain the facility. The WLC will guide the development process until a new not-for-profit corporate is established to take responsibility for the site and its facilities. The Labour History Project of the Winnipeg Labour Council is prepared to take on the design, fundraising, and management of the facility to get it started and established.



A small working group of individuals has been discussing for over a year how the memory and contribution of this historic area of the city could be commemorated. They have considered a number of options, and have supported the EoI as it provides an opportunity for utilizing historically significant space in the Exchange District.

Those involved in this initiative include;

Derek Black (retired)
Ken Campbell (contractor)
Cynthia Cohlmeier (landscape architect)
Christine Common (hotelier)
Giovanni Geremia (architect)
Glen Michalchuk (union leader)

Paul Moist (national union leader)
Dennis Lewycky (researcher)
Sharon Reilly (historian)
George Siamandas (photographer)



The WLC, working closely with the Manitoba Federation of Labour, is prepared to create a new organization to manage the site. The Victoria Park Trust Inc. would be a not-for-profit corporation, registered in Manitoba. This organization would be composed of a Board of Directors with the legal ability and professional competence to manage the facility, raise funds and hire an Executive Director. Draft By-Laws for the Trust are available.

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