



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 2
Halifax Regional Council
March 15, 2011

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by Director

SUBMITTED BY:

Paul Dunphy, Director, Community Development

DATE: February 2, 2011

SUBJECT: Status Update - Halifax Explosion Memorial

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

A letter from the Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee dated November 17, 2010, expressed concern over the lack of attention being paid to a sculpture commemorating the Halifax Explosion which had originally been installed in the front plaza of the Halifax North Memorial Library (HNMPL), currently being stored in HRM facilities. A subsequent meeting was held with various representatives of the Committee, His Worship Mayor Peter Kelly, and members of HRM Cultural Affairs staff.

As a result of the meeting, staff was instructed to work toward the resolution of this issue.

BACKGROUND

The Halifax Explosion Memorial was created by prominent Canadian artist Jordi Bonet as a feature of the Halifax North Branch Memorial Library. It was installed in the front grounds of the Library (Gottingen Street) in 1966.

In 2003, public meetings were held to identify priority projects for the Gottingen Street Community. The Halifax North Memorial Library entrance plaza was identified as a potential project. The scope of this project included the replacement of the Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture which was in a state of disrepair and which had been deemed a public safety risk. In 2004, the Streetscape Improvement Project (Capital District) confirmed the HNMPL as a priority. As part of the planning for the redevelopment of the HNMPL plaza, a conservation report was conducted on the Explosion Memorial Sculpture which made recommendations regarding the proper storage and ongoing treatment of the sculpture.

After the conservator's report in 2004, the artwork was moved to an outdoor HRM storage site where it sustained further damage and some components went missing. The remaining pieces of the sculpture were moved to a more secure HRM storage location. Some metal components of the sculpture were still being stored at the HNMPL. The pieces of the sculpture remained in these locations until very recently.

DISCUSSION

The attentiveness of the Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee has led to a renewed focus on the current condition of the sculpture. The Committee has expressed a great deal of interest in the restoration of the sculpture, citing the importance of the artwork's creator, Jordi Bonet, an artist of national and international renown, as well as the importance of the Memorial as a commemoration of the Halifax Explosion and its impact on the city's North End.

Staff acknowledge that the removal of the artwork from its original site in front of the Library in 2004 was executed improperly and without sufficient regard for the standards of collections management and heritage preservation.

Over the last several months, steps have been taken to locate as many of the original components of the sculpture as possible and to identify a proper storage situation for these pieces according to the recommendations of the 2004 conservation assessment. As of late December 2010, all known remaining pieces of the sculpture had been collected and are currently being housed in a shipping container in the Cowie Hill storage yard.

Over the next several months a conservator will conduct an inventory to categorize all remaining pieces of the sculpture. This information will be made available to all interested parties including, particularly, the Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee and the estate of the artist, Jordi Bonet. Based on the information compiled over the course of the inventory process, the recommendations made by the presiding conservator, research of best practices models of de-accessioning/decommissioning art and heritage objects, a decision will be made on

how to proceed with the sculpture. No determination on any possible treatment scenarios will be made prior to the conclusion of the inventory process, scheduled to take place in spring 2011, or without proper consultation with the Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The budget implications of this report will be determined in and through the results of the upcoming conservation assessment, and through a thorough examination of best-practices treatment or de-accession options in coordination with the Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee, the Jordi Bonet Foundation and relevant HRM staff.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES/BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Project and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Project and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community engagement component of this project has been mediated in large part through contact with the citizens group The Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee. This group has provided extensive background information on the sculpture, its deterioration and the various stages of its removal and storage. They have been an invaluable resource to the consideration of this sculpture and a strong advocate for its proper treatment and storage. The group is comprised of private citizens, historians and heritage stewards, members of the museum community and arts professionals.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Most recent conservator assessment of the component pieces of the Jordi Bonet Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture, compiled by McIvor Conservation

Attachment 2 – Letter from the Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee dated November 17, 2010

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Jamie MacLellan, Public Art Coordinator (902) 490-1039

Report Approved by: Original Signed
Andrew Whittemore, Manager, Community Relations & Cultural Affairs, 490-1585

Attachment 1

Update: Jordi Bonet, 'Halifax Explosion Monument'

July 6, 2010

Background: In 2005/06, the Bonet sculpture was decommissioned and removed from its original site at the North Branch Library, Gottigen St. (The library still houses a collection of detached pieces.) The base with the attached pieces were transported to HRM storage at a defunct school before being moved to 81 Isley Dr., Burnside. At that time, an iron 'eyelet' or davit from the Mont Blanc as well as a copper casting of a doll, sculpted by Bonet, were removed from the base and wooden supports.

In March 2010, digital images show the copper doll and the davit in the Burnside facility. In 2007, the davit was donated to the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic and is now part of their Explosion collection. (See background report by Dan Conlin, MMA Curator.) There is a possibility that a second fragment of the Mont Blanc could be amongst the detached pieces. This small iron rod would have been originally located beside the davit.

The base and its associated pieces was moved (according to HRM Cowie Hill staff) to the exterior storage facility at Cowie Hill and subsequently moved again to its current location at the HRM Parks and storage facility, Cobequid Rd., Sackville.

Cobequid Rd. compound, Cowie Hill storage, HRM Burnside facility and the North Branch Library were inspected on June 24, 2010.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that a maquette of the work existed at the time of the unveiling and many years later, it may have been loaned to the library by the architect. However, other anecdotal evidence suggests that there was a model of the building but not a maquette of the piece. This is currently being investigated.

As Found Condition:

The base and pieces are located in a secure compound, beside a shipping container. The base was installed on wooden beams so that there is a small gap between the metal and the ground. It is surrounded by vegetation. It now consists of the flat sheet iron base with the two 'sub-structures' at either end. There are several pieces that are now detached but retained on the base. The small welded section that contains the artist's signature is fine.

Overall, the sculpture is in very poor condition. The components are quite sound but there is substantial corrosion and many parts appear to be missing.

The North Branch library houses approximately 15+ pieces from the sculpture, including a large cast iron piece that appears to have been artist made/sculpted. This collection also contains the aluminum and steel wheel as well as several of the scythe-shaped sheet pieces.

The copper doll was not located and HRM employees did not have any recollection of it. An internal search by HRM is being conducted although it would appear that the bronze doll is gone.

Next Steps:

1. Storage Location - Secure storage is required for all of the components. Ideally, the pieces are secured in a shed or plywood structure, a shipping container or interior location. It was moved from Burnside because it is a dangerous (sharp) item to have near workers and it does measure 10'x5'. At this time, the location may be temporary or it could be very long-term. There may also be requests for access by the public. One option is to leave the base as is and store the smaller, loose parts in the adjacent shipping container at the Cobequid Depot. This would save on transport costs and still provide a safe location. The area around the base could be improved by removing vegetation and possibly spreading gravel for drainage.
2. Inventory - each piece will be measured, photographed and tagged for storage.
3. Remove items from North Branch library, tag and move them to final location.
4. HRM to contact the family for input.
5. Final decision made by December 2010.

Possible Options:

- The sculpture remains in storage for the very long-term, with no actions required beyond occasional monitoring (if in a secured space).
- The sculpture pieces are returned to the family of Jordi Bonet. The family has not been contacted and they may not want the piece... However, the Bonet family should be given first rights if HRM is considering donating the pieces.
- The sculpture is restored. This is problematic as pieces are missing, archival images seem scarce, the artist is not living, etc. This situation occurred because there was a lack of maintenance and the sculpture itself was never suited for the external site. Could this happen again? If the sculpture is restored, it needs to be sited in an interior space. How does the process work? What are the costs and who pays? How can the artistic integrity be upheld? Permission from the family would be required or at least strongly suggested.

- The work is 're-interpreted'. The components of the piece are incorporated into a new sculpture in honour of Bonet and his original work. This could be a controversial project as the original artistic intent is not being followed to the letter but is being celebrated. Permission from the family would be required or at least strongly suggested.
- The sculpture is interpreted in a physical sense. Select pieces of the work could be displayed with an interpretive component, so that the story of the sculpture and artist are not lost. There are a few pieces that are clearly the work of the artist (aluminum wheel, cast iron panel) that may be appropriate.
- The sculpture is interpreted through an HRM web-site link. The decommissioning of art happens and HRM's decision to remove the sculpture was prudent at the time. The process was not ideal but there is no shame in what has happened and a 'cautionary tale' does not have to be negative. Although the sculpture is physically gone, there is still a great story there. Bonet and his Halifax work can be still be celebrated.

One of the Bonet group participants had an interesting take - he thought that if the decommissioning of the sculpture helped create a new culture of embracing public art in HRM/ the public, then this might be the most powerful legacy of all.

Attachment 2

HALIFAX EXPLOSION MEMORIAL SCULPTURE COMMITTEE



November 17, 2010

Mayor Peter Kelly & Regional Council
Halifax Regional Municipality
Office of the Mayor
1841 Argyle Street
PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5

Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture

Dear Mayor Kelly and Councillors:

On Monday, October 24, 1966, Mayor Charles Vaughn, and other representatives of the federal, provincial and municipal governments officially opened the Halifax North Memorial Library. The library was partially funded by the Halifax Relief Commission as a memorial to those who died during the Halifax Explosion.

Also on this date, a memorial sculpture by the internationally renowned Canadian artist, Jordi Bonet, was unveiled as a symbol of the Explosion and the city's rebirth. It stood outside the library, as part of HRM's Public Art Collection, until 2005, when, without public discussion, it was removed and stored in various City Field locations. Prior to its removal, the sculpture was showing signs of deterioration, and has subsequently degraded further with a loss of pieces, especially the cast bronze doll "that is indicative of the hundreds of children who lost their lives."

Jordi Bonet is an artist whose works number over a hundred, and are located in every major city in Canada, the United States and internationally. Currently, information is being sought on all Bonet's works of art. If it were known that a sculpture of his in Halifax, lay in pieces, not even properly stored, it would reflect badly on our city and its attitude to important public art.

The treatment of this sculpture offends the memory of those people who wished to remember those lost and those who survived the explosion. It is disrespectful to the legacy of those Library Board (Commission/ Committee) members who were present on that day. The lack of care dishonours the sculptor whose own story of

overcoming adversity should be something with which HRM would want to identify with.

The city's own Public Art Programme must encourage artists to donate or sell important, and historically significant works of art to HRM. Appropriate policies, will have little effect in the future, if this sculpture is not treated more respectfully.

It is more than ironic, when we hear so often, from people, of how HRM should build on our heritage as we build for the future; that a modern work of art that showed the city rebuilding from the destruction of the explosion is on the verge of being totally lost.

The Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee is concerned about this potential loss, and would like to see the current situation corrected immediately. Ideally, the remaining pieces must be gathered in one place, inventoried, restored, and displayed in an appropriate location, such as library, art gallery or museum with interpretive panels. Every effort must be made to retain the sculpture, and make it available to the public – it is a part of our heritage. December 6th is coming up and it would be a fitting date to announce a resolution.

The liaison person for the Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee is Mrs. Janet Kitz, who may be reached at 423-4284, or 1110 Rockcliffe Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B4H 3Y6.

Thank you for your assistance and support in this matter.

Blair Beed *Blair Beed*
6467 Summit St, Halifax

Keith McPhail

Janet Kitz

Janet Kitz

Marilyn Gurney

Marilyn Gurney

Nancy Little *Nancy E. Little*

Beulah Prevost

Beulah Prevost

John Little

John Little

Halifax Explosion Memorial Sculpture Committee

Cc. Andrew Whittemore, Manager, HRM Cultural Affairs and Immigration.