

Mill of Kintail Museum Strategic Plan Update

TO: The Chair and Members of the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority
Policy & Planning Advisory Committee

FROM: Sally McIntyre, General Manager and Scott Lawryk, Property Manager

REPORT: 3502/25, July 3, 2025

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Policy & Planning Advisory Committee recommend that the Board of Directors direct staff to:

- 1. Engage with Mill of Kintail Museum patrons and the broader community regarding the proposed changes, Vision Statement and Objectives set out in this report; and*
- 2. Return to the Committee and Board in the fall with findings and recommendations for update of the Mill of Kintail Museum Strategic Plan.*

1.0 Purpose

In order to be eligible for provincial funding, MVCA must update the [Mill of Kintail Museum Strategic Plan](#) every 5 years. The current Plan was approved in 2019 and the Province requires it to be updated no later than next year. The purpose of this report is to set out the rationale for changing the museum Vision Statement and to seek direction to engage with the public on this matter prior to drafting an update of the strategic plan. Direction regarding the Vision Statement will also inform update of the [Mill of Kintail Master Plan](#), which is to commence this fall.

2.0 Background

In 2019, the Province clarified and defined the mandate of conservation authorities (CAs.) Operation of the Mill of Kintail Museum (MOKM) as a space focused on telling the story and displaying artifacts of R. Tait McKenzie and James Naismith is outside the mandate of CAs and, as of January 1, 2024, the MOKM no longer qualifies for funding via

the Municipal Levy.¹ MVCA was given a reprieve of five years by its member municipalities to try to make operation of the Museum and a selection of other programs cost-recoverable.² MVCA is now 18-months into that period with no sustainable financial model on the horizon for maintaining the current museum beyond 2028.

Since announcement of the funding change in 2019, MVCA has taken the following actions to pursue alternative service delivery options, secure alternative funding, and implement cost reductions. MVCA:

- Struck a committee of community volunteers to examine the future of the R. Tait McKenzie and Dr. James Naismith Collections.
- Worked with community leaders on outreach to potential funders including the Ministry of Sport, National Capital Commission, National Basketball Association, Canadian Heritage, Canada Walk of Fame, and decedents of James Naismith.
- Solicited community volunteers for establishment of a fundraising committee through the Mississippi Valley Conservation Foundation.
- Held a fundraiser for replacement of the museum roof.
- Changed the staffing model to reduce overhead costs.
- Worked with the Town's Heritage Committee to make tactical and architecturally appropriate capital improvements prior to changes in the funding model to extend the building's life.
- Worked with the volunteer Museum Advisory Committee (MAC) to plan and implement improvements to museum exhibits.
- Improved WIFI at the building and made changes at the MOKM gift shop to facilitate greater sales and donations.
- Attended and discussed MOKM challenges and opportunities at meetings of the Lanark County Arts & Heritage committee.
- Attended and shared concerns at a Museums Stakeholder Meeting hosted in 2023 by consultants working for the Town of Mississippi Mills at which legislative changes affecting MOKM funding was a central topic of discussion.
- Raised the concept of museum consolidation with decision-makers and staff at both the municipal and county level.

¹ For details refer to the [Conservation Authorities Act](#) and [O.Reg. 686/21](#) and [O.Reg. 687/21](#).

² MVCA's eleven municipalities signed [Programs & Services Agreements](#) that allow a portion of the annual municipal levy to be allocated to non-core programs until December 2028.

- Invited the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) to conduct a review of the MOKM collection and facilities, during which funding challenges were discussed.³
- Sought and received a Judge’s ruling regarding MVCA’s legal obligations as it pertains to operation of the museum and grounds, and associated financial matters.
- Fully catalogued the collections of both R. Tait McKenzie and James Naismith to allow for legal transfer of the collections.

In December 2024, MVCA’s Board of Directors considered current regulations, the state of operations and ongoing financial challenges of the Museum, and approved the following policy direction as part of MVCA’s [Land Conservation & Resource Strategy](#):

- Transfer sensitive artifacts to the Gate House climate-controlled archive on a permanent basis.
- Continue to investigate opportunities to transfer management of the museum collections to another organization.

3.0 Current State

3.1 Finances

While reestablishment of the Museum Advisory Committee (MAC) in 2023 has been beneficial—particularly in planning and programming matters—the financial uncertainty related to museum staffing and capital renewal remain a major concern. Neither staff nor MAC volunteers or our Foundation have been able to resolve this issue and nobody has stepped forward to champion the museum cause or make a long-term funding commitment.

Currently, the capital reserve intended to support renewal of all structures at the Mill of Kintail Conservation Area is nearly depleted (<\$25,000.) And, the museum has run a deficit for the past three years, in part due to a lack of grants to support hiring summer staff—essential for museum operations.

Table 1 summarizes recent museum expenditures and revenues and the 2025 Budget. Of note:

- Municipal Levy contributions fluctuate year over year based upon the amount of monies secured from grants and other sources. Levy-based revenue is currently scheduled to cease in 2029.

³ Findings and recommendations are to be received from CCI in Fall 2025.

- Salaries were higher in 2024 because an additional person was retained to support cataloguing of the collections, which is now completed.
- The curator position was changed from a full-time to a seasonal position in 2025 to reduce overhead.
- A reduction in utility costs was achieved by relocating staff and sensitive items during the off season to the Gate House and shutting off the heat.
- The museum does not charge an entry fee.⁴ Site day-pass revenues are allocated to the museum and Annual Passes are allocated to general site operations.
- Earlier this month MVCA was informed that the 2025 federal grant request was denied, therefore, the museum is expected to have a deficit at year-end.
- Some expenditures for 2022 and 2023 are estimates or unavailable because MVCA did not distinguish between museum and other Mill of Kintail Conservation Area site operational costs. These are now tracked separately.

Table 1: MOKM 2022-2024 Actuals and 2025 Budget

	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget
Expenditures				
Salaries incl. O/H	82,051	93,210	107,336	75,000
Utilities	2,200	11,298	9,706	4,800
Insurance	n/a	15,754	13,129	10,000
Taxes	n/a	2,471	1,596	1,000
Supplies & General	484	2,021	1,446	1,270
Subtotal	84,735	124,755	133,212	92,070
Revenues				
Federal Grant ⁵	0	4,863	0	11,544
Provincial Grant ⁶	13,445	13,445	13,445	13,445
Municipal Grant ⁷	12,700	12,460	13,081	13,081
Municipal Levies ⁸	20,441	18,792	70,991	30,500
Fees	24,675	22,321	17,646	17,500
MOKM Donations	\$1,316	\$7,574	\$3,492	\$6,000
Subtotal	72,337	79,694	118,656	92,070
Profit/Loss	-\$12,398	-\$45,061	-\$14,557	\$0

⁴ In previous years when MVCA implemented a separate museum entry fee attendance at the museum declined.

⁵ Canada Summer Jobs for hiring students.

⁶ Community Museum of Ontario Grant (CMOG) to support curator costs.

⁷ Town of Mississippi Mills. By comparison, the Mississippi Mills Textile Museum receives \$74,309/year and the North Lanark Regional Museum \$28,697/year from the municipality.

⁸ Total contribution from 11 municipalities within MVCA's jurisdiction of which ~90% is paid by the City of Ottawa.

3.2 SWOB Analysis

In 2024, MVCA enlisted Fauzya Moore to assist MVCA in reviewing and updating the existing *MOK Museum Strategic Plan*. Since then, she has collaborated with staff and members of the MAC to evaluate the effectiveness of the current strategic plan and to gather input for its update.

In April of this year, Ms. Moore tabled her findings at a meeting of the MAC and concluded that implementation of the MOK Strategic Plan has been uneven. The museum building itself is an attraction and is a well-maintained former grist mill built in 1830. It is wheelchair-accessible on two levels with modern amenities including a kitchen and flush toilet. While there have been notable improvements in collections management and facility operations, significant shortcomings persist in communications, marketing, and fundraising.

Results of a survey issued to MAC members indicate general recognition of curatorial strengths but also a need for better communication and visitor engagement.

Table 2 provides the results of a Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Barriers (SWOB) analysis carried out during the review.

4.0 Discussion

Based upon staff's experience over the past six years and analysis carried out by the consultant, staff have concluded that 2025 is the time to make a strategic change in direction if MVCA is to be able to make long-term use of the heritage building.

- The *Mill of Kintail Museum Strategic Plan* is required to undergo update, and there remains 3.5 years to implement any changes in direction before agreements with member municipalities expire.
- Even if municipal agreements are extended beyond 2028, long-term financial stability will remain illusive and MVCA will face the same challenge each time municipal agreements approach their expiration.
- In the meantime, funds are limited to refresh and update the Museum's appearance which will make it increasingly challenging to attract repeat and younger visitors.
- MVCA has made regular investment in the MOKM structure to ensure fire code compliance and building preservation. As a valued community landmark and heritage attraction, abandonment of the building is not desirable.

Table 2: SWOB Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified staff • Quality archival storage and collections management system • Strong facility management • Existing visitorship (7,100 visitors to Museum in 2024) • Supports critical mass of heritage museums in Lanark County • Strong/growing involvement from Museum Advisory Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor alignment with Conservation Authority mandate • Challenging to keep Museum relevant and interesting for younger generation • Lack of community involvement beyond core group of volunteers • Narrow scope and limited materials inhibit regular rotation of exhibits and attraction to visitors • Unsustainable business model due to new funding regulations • Outdated website • Lack of a communications and community engagement plan
Opportunities	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolve to closely align museum with Conservation Authority mandate • Transfer of collection to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, Bank of Canada, McGill U. • Sale of current collection • Acquire exhibits that facilitate regular rotation with greater appeal to broader audiences • Sustainable resource management, historical and present practices (forest, mining, agriculture, hunting and fishing) • Allows for exhibits beyond the walls of the museum • Solicit historical artifacts from across eastern Ontario • Involvement in new Education Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expiring Agreements with member municipalities leading to financial uncertainty • Limited funds to acquire new assets • Community resistance to change • Insufficient fundraising capability • Aging infrastructure • Layout of facility/lack of available space • Naismith collection less attractive in comparison to McKenzie • Other recreational opportunities in surrounding community • Comparatively lower municipal funding than other museums within Mississippi Mills

Under *O.Reg. 686/21*, there is an opportunity to evolve the Museum's mandate to align with MVCA's core mandate, which includes:

- public awareness, education and outreach related to the risk of natural hazards;
- programs and services to support the provincial stream monitoring program;
- programs and services to conserve, protect, rehabilitate, establish, and manage natural heritage on lands owned by MVCA; and
- various responsibilities as a source protection authority under the provisions of the *Clean Water Act*, 2006.

Converting museum space to support these fundable responsibilities would contribute significantly towards the delivery of mandatory educational programming offered to area schools and the public at the Mill of Kintail Conservation Area while maintaining use of a heritage structure and valued tourist attraction in Lanark County.

To ensure future public access to the McKenzie and Naismith collections and preserve and celebrate the history of the building, staff propose that the entire museum undergo a 360° video and that the collection be posted to a Virtual Museum housed on a website. Furthermore, it is recommended that a Transition Plan be developed with input from community partners to determine what is to happen to the collections.

Staff believe that if a decision is made in 2025 to pursue this new direction that it can be implemented within the life of the current municipal programs and services agreement.

5.0 Proposed Museum Vision Statement and Objectives

The following draft Vision Statement is proposed to guide update of the *Mill of Kintail Museum Strategic Plan*.

A vibrant interactive museum on the Indian River that celebrates the beauty, power and importance of water and watersheds.

The following objectives are proposed. *A museum that tells the story and allows visitors to experience:*

- *Water, as a source of life, power, and enjoyment and the need to protect it.*
- *Watersheds, how they function, and how they shape our communities.*
- *Natural hazards and the work of MVCA to protect people and property from harm.*
- *Conservation and stewardship and what people can do to manage water and land responsibly now and for future generations.*

6.0 Next Steps

The McKenzie-Naismith collections and the museum at the Mill of Kintail Conservation Area have strong community ties and some see them—particularly the R. Tait McKenzie collection, as inextricably tied to the Mill of Kintail property and will object to relocating the collection.

Before asking the Board to approve this change in direction, staff propose to engage with museum users and community members to explain the gravity of the situation, and to provide other organizations and the community at large the opportunity to consider their involvement in the long-term funding and display of the collections.

Following this, staff would return to the Planning & Policy Committee and the Board of Directors in the fall with the results of public feedback, and recommend a course of action for update of the *MOK Museum Strategic Plan*.

7.0 Corporate Strategic Plan

This report supports implementation of the following corporate strategic goals and objectives:

Goal 1: Asset Management – revitalize watershed management activities and invest in our legislated mandate.

- a) Implement priority actions identified in the *Mississippi River Watershed Plan*.
- b) Plan for the next phase of asset development and management.

Goal 3: People and Performance – support the operational transformations required to achieve MVCA’s priorities and to address legislative changes.

- a) Monitor the quality, efficiency and impact of what we do and modify to improve operational effectiveness.

Attachments

- *Strategy Workshop Highlights* Report, Erik Lockhart.