

November 12, 2020

City and Province work together to determine the future of Michener Lands

The City of Red Deer has been working closely with the Provincial Government regarding the future of the Michener north lands. In August, The City entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Alberta to provide for shared planning and consultation on the future land uses, including existing buildings and infrastructure on the Michener North lands.

1. Where are the Michener lands located, and what does it include?

The Michener lands, located at 3250 55 Street, is a 132.2 acre parcel that is primarily undeveloped and was used for residential purposes through the Provincial Michener Centre residential operations for persons with disabilities. The lands consist of former residential area lands, trail connections to the Waskasoo Parks and Trail system, natural wetlands, former grounds including grassed and treed areas.

2. What is a Memorandum of Understanding and why was one put into place?

In May of 2020, The City of Red Deer learned of preliminary plans by the Government of Alberta to demolish the buildings on the Michener North site. Following that, The City entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Alberta to provide for shared planning and consultation on the future land uses, review from heritage perspective, including existing buildings and infrastructure, on the Michener North lands. A MOU was drafted in negotiation with the Province and was signed on August 28, 2020.

3. What is the history of these lands?

There is a long history of use of these lands, beginning in 1912-1913 when the Alberta Ladies College was constructed for rural young women education in Red Deer by the Presbyterian Church. The building was sold in the spring 1916 and the college students were relocated to Edmonton. Following that, the Soldiers' Sanatorium was established for shell-shocked soldiers in the building. In 1923, the remaining 47 veterans were transferred to the new Oliver Hospital near Edmonton.

In 1923, the Provincial Government opened an institution for children with mental disabilities in the building to provide academic, vocational and personal development training for the children. A large wing was added to the main building in 1928 and a "cottage" constructed nearby in 1930.

The Provincial Training School (later renamed Alberta School Hospital) continued to expand over the next several years. In 1955, construction began on an adjoining institution Deerhome, for adults with mental disabilities. Alberta School Hospital and Deerhome were amalgamated in 1973. At that time, the Centre was home to about 2,200 people and hundreds more people worked there. The combined institution was renamed Michener Centre in 1977 in honour of Governor General Roland Michener.

Under the now repealed Alberta Sterilization Act, almost 2,800 people were sterilized between 1928 and 1972, including many who were not mentally disabled. By 2000, the government had paid out over \$140 million in compensation for almost 900 people. The approach changed when medication became available in the 1960's and was put into widespread use.

The Michener Centre has a long history in the community. Many current residents of Red Deer have had an involvement with Michener Centre either as an employee working there or as a family member of a resident.

4. Was there assessments done to determine if any of the buildings could be saved?

Yes, a significant heritage assessment and cost analysis was carried out to review potential costs of refurbishing a building for a potential commemoration site. An estimated total cost of refurbishment was determined to be approximately \$23 million.

5. Why was the decision made to demolish the buildings on this land?

The Province's intent to demolish of all buildings was based cost prohibitive building rehabilitation requirements, and the opportunity for a legacy park to commemorate the past, while providing for future park and recreational economic development opportunities. The City will continue to explore meaningful site commemoration to honour the history of the people who lived there.

6. How much will it cost for The City to purchase these lands?

Administration has initiated the land acquisition process with the Province and it will be finalized within the coming weeks.

7. What does the future of this land look like?

The intent is for this area to be remediated and developed into protected public lands. The City will consult with the community about future community uses for this site in the coming months.

