SUBJECT: Beach Lighthouse Operational Study and Heritage Building Assessment (ECS07073) (Ward 5)

RECOMMENDATION:

(a) That the Beach Canal Lighthouse Group be provided with funding in an amount not to exceed $50,000, from the City of Hamilton's Beach Restoration Fund, to have a Business and Operations Plan prepared and Cultural Heritage Assessment conducted for the Burlington Canal Light Station.

(b) That as a condition to providing the funding mentioned in item (a) the Beach Canal Lighthouse Group will provide a presentation of the Business and Operations Plan and the results of the Cultural Heritage assessment to the Emergency & Community Services Committee.

Joe-Anne Priel
General Manager,
Community Services Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Burlington Canal Light Station buildings are the oldest surviving structures on Hamilton Beach. In 2003, local residents formed the volunteer Beach Canal Lighthouse Group (BCLG) to acquire, restore, and ensure the long-term conservation of the landmark. The BCLG has a goal to allow visitors to view a restored site by 2008.

The goal of the Burlington Canal Light Station Business and Operations Plan and Heritage Building Assessment is to ensure the responsible preservation of the
lighthouse and keeper’s house. The Plan will also establish a governance and business plan for the operation of the Burlington Canal Light Station for a sustainable public use.

The specific objectives for The Burlington Canal Light Station Business and Operations Plan and Heritage Building Assessment are to:

1. Identify, examine, and rank options for sustainable public access and use, and to recommend one of the options;
2. Propose a governance structure, based on the recommended option;
3. Prepare a Five-Year Business Plan for the recommended option (2008-2012); and,
4. Determine the condition of the heritage buildings and recommend an approach from preservation and restoration with costings.

**National Historic Significance**

Under the criteria described in *Framework for Evaluating the National Historic Significance of Lighthouses, Agenda Paper 1998-49* the Beach Canal Lighthouse meets at least two of the four guidelines proposed in the Preliminary Assessment of Significance and therefore “may be considered of potential national historic significance”. Eight Canadian lighthouses were designated as national historic sites in 1974, but none has been designated since.

**BACKGROUND:**

“The Beach” is a low-lying baymouth barrier, formed as the glaciers retreated at the end of the last ice age, which separates Burlington Bay from Lake Ontario. A shallow and narrow natural outlet emptied into the lake at the north shore of the bay, but it was not navigable.

In 1823, the Burlington Bay Canal was proposed as one of a series of waterways, which would open Lake Erie to sea traffic from the Atlantic. Local residents supported this proposal as a way of making Burlington Bay into a usable harbour by linking it to nearby Lake Ontario.

Work on the canal began in 1826, but was not completed until 1832. A wooden lighthouse was constructed on the canal in 1838 to guide ships to and from the harbour. On its completion, a lighthouse keeper was hired to maintain the light and building. The keeper worked in conjunction with the ferryman; their homes were built nearby. The wooden lighthouse, along with the lighthouse keeper’s and ferryman’s dwellings, burned to the ground in 1856, when the wooden piers were ignited by sparks from a passing steamer. The two dwellings were quickly replaced with new brick structures in 1857; the builder may have been L. or A. McCallum, possibly sub-contracted by John Brown.

A new stone tower was completed in 1858. The new 55-foot tower and brick keeper’s dwelling served until 1961, when the light was deactivated. The lights at the ends of the piers have been modified over time. The present Burlington Canal Range Light, built in
1909, is a white concrete structure set on the eastern end of the south pier. The other three pierheads are currently marked by round steel towers (two red and white, one green and white) similar to the one at Oakville.

John Brown, who had been contracted to construct “imperial” towers in the mid-1850s on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, was hired to build the 1858 lighthouse (officially identified as the Burlington Canal Main light) which still stands today. The tower has walls of white dolomite limestone (over five feet thick at chest height) and is about 55 feet high. It is similar to the “imperial” lighthouse Brown built on Christian Island in Georgian Bay, and is a shorter version of the other five “imperial” towers, such as the recently restored Chantry Island light off Southampton in Lake Huron.

Over the years, a series of bridges were erected and replaced, for both road and railway crossings over the canal. All of the early bridges were operable, to permit ships to pass through the canal into Burlington Bay. The three bridges now crossing the canal are the Burlington Lift Bridge, immediately east of the lighthouse, and the two parallel high bridges of the Burlington Skyway, which carry the Queen Elizabeth Way over the canal. Eastport Drive, which swings under the Skyway to cross the Lift Bridge, passes very close to the rear of the lighthouse keeper’s dwelling, from which it is separated by a high retaining wall. The lighthouse keeper’s dwelling was relocated to its present location in 1896 when the swing bridge for the new electric “radial” railway line was being constructed; before it was moved, its front door faced the canal. The lighthouse still stands on its original site. Despite the proximity of the Lift Bridge looming above the lighthouse, there is no intention to consider moving the heritage structures.

These two venerable buildings are now the oldest surviving structures on Hamilton Beach. Except for the 1996 designation of the lighthouse and keeper’s dwelling under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, the light station has largely been ignored since its decommissioning in 1961.

The Waterfront Trail runs along the entire length of the Lake Ontario side of the Beach. At appropriate locations, the Trail has interpretive panels about the canal, the light station, shipping and the various canal crossings. The Trail passes under Eastport Drive in a tunnel, then up steps to cross the canal on the Lift Bridge sidewalk, thus leading all Trail-users directly past the light station site.

Any development or rehabilitation of the light station is subject to review and approval by federal departments and agencies, including:

- Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC), which owns the land on which the buildings are situated and operates and maintains the Lift Bridge;
- Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), which owns the buildings; and,
- Hamilton Port Authority, which owns adjacent lands and has an ongoing study for redevelopment of the area around the canal, titled the Fisherman’s Pier Development Plan.

In addition, any development of the area is subject to the City of Hamilton’s re-zoning of the entire length of Hamilton Beach as a significant cultural heritage landscape; a
Heritage Conservation District under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act falls within this re-zoned area.

Besides various City of Hamilton departments, other local agencies and organizations, which may have an interest in the future of the light station include:

- Parks Canada: Canada Marine Discovery Centre
- Bay Area Restoration Council
- Hamilton Conservation Authority
- Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan
- Hamilton Naturalists Club
- Hamilton Waterfront Trust

In 2003, local residents formed the volunteer BCLG to acquire, restore, and ensure the long-term conservation of the landmark, with the goal to allow visitors to climb the tower by 2008, visit the lighthouse keeper’s dwelling, and learn about the canal, the light station and the history of Hamilton Beach. To date, over 200 members have joined the group, including City Councillors from both Hamilton and Burlington, engineers, artists, architects, members of local heritage organizations, and the last lighthouse keeper, Peter Coletti, now retired and living in New Brunswick.

In 2004, PWGSC declared the land on which the DFO-owned lighthouse and keeper’s dwelling are located, surplus to the needs of the Department. DFO was the only respondent to the circulation and anticipated that the land would be transferred to DFO. As a result, for three years, BCLG worked closely with DFO to prepare for the transfer of ownership of the land and buildings from DFO to the non-profit group. DFO prepared for the transfer to BCLG by funding the entire cost of removing the guano from the interior of the building last year and, more recently, securing both buildings to prevent entry and vandalism.

The land transfer from PWGSC to DFO was never concluded. It was not until July last year that PWGSC confirmed that they were not prepared to transfer ownership of the land to a non-public sector group such as BCLG (or to DFO for subsequent transfer to BCLG) under any circumstances, but would consider a licensing agreement, during which BCLG could carry out the restoration of the buildings.

The 150th anniversary of the lighthouse in October 2008 has been BCLG’s target date for completing the restoration project, their goal being to enable visitors to climb the interior of the tower.
ANALYSIS/RATIONALE:

National Historic Significance

Under the criteria described in Framework for Evaluating the National Historic Significance of Lighthouses, Agenda Paper 1998-49 the Beach Canal Lighthouse meets at least two of the four guidelines proposed in the Preliminary Assessment of Significance and therefore “may be considered of potential national historic significance”. Eight Canadian lighthouses were designated as national historic sites in 1974, but none has been designated since.

The Paper also notes, however, that “A lighthouse should not be considered in isolation, as the ensemble of buildings at a light station may collectively have a value greater than the sum of its parts”. Together with its 1857 lighthouse keeper’s dwelling, the Beach Canal light station is Canada’s only complete light station remaining on Lake Ontario; this unique situation was not considered in the preliminary assessment but might enhance its eligibility for recognition as a national historic site, if such an application were to be made.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION:

The alternative would be to leave the buildings “in situ” and not pursue presenting them to the public as a heritage site.

FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Financial:

The funds are available and qualify under the City of Hamilton’s Beach Restoration Fund criteria.

Staffing:

There are no staffing implications associated with the recommendations of Report ECS07073.

Legal:

There are no legal implications associated with the recommendations of Report ECS07073.
POLICIES AFFECTING PROPOSAL:

None.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION:

Anthony Butler – Chair, Beach Canal Lighthouse Group  
David Auger - Beach Canal Lighthouse Group  
Shawn Selway - Beach Canal Lighthouse Group  
John Hammond - Public Works and Government Services Canada  
Linda MacDonald - Hamilton Port Authority

George Thompson - *Diaries* of his time as Light Keeper at the Burlington Canal covering the 1856 fire and the 1857 and 1858 construction and operation of the dwellings and lighthouse (*a copy of the diaries is with BCLG; The original diaries are in the collection of the Joseph Brant Museum in Burlington)*.

*Department of Transport Records* - Cornwall.


Cyndi Rottenberg-Walker, (Urban Strategies Inc.) - *Fishermans Pier Development Plan, Coordinated Environmental Assessment, Phase 2.* Hamilton Port Authority, 2005

Archaeological Services Inc. - Appendix B-5 to the above document: Phase 2 Cultural Heritage Resources Assessment.


CITY STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:

By evaluating the “Triple Bottom Line”, (community, environment, and economic implications) we can make choices that create value across all three bottom lines, moving us closer to our vision for a sustainable community, and Provincial interests.

Community Well-Being is enhanced.  ☑ Yes   ☐ No
Public services and programs are delivered in an equitable manner, coordinated, efficient, effective and easily accessible to all citizens.

Environmental Well-Being is enhanced.  ☑ Yes   ☐ No

Economic Well-Being is enhanced.  ☑ Yes   ☐ No
Cultural industries are enhanced.

Does the option you are recommending create value across all three bottom lines?  ☑ Yes   ☐ No

Do the options you are recommending make Hamilton a City of choice for high performance public servants?  ☐ Yes   ☑ No