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Date June 6, 2023 **Report No.** 2023-294

To Chair and Members
Committee of the Whole - Operations

From Aaron Wallace
Acting General Manager, Community Programs and Social Development

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item ☐
Item for Consideration ☒

2.0 Topic Bell Homestead National Historic Site Annual Report and 150th Anniversary of the Invention of the Telephone [Financial Implication \$60,000]

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Staff Report 2023-294 titled "Bell Homestead National Historic Site Annual Report and 150th Anniversary of the Invention of the Telephone" BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT an expenditure of \$60,000 from the Parks and Recreation Capital Reserve (RF0494) be approved in 2023 to complete the renovation of the telephone exhibition gallery at the Bell Homestead National Historic Site.

4.0 Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide members of Council with an update on the programs and activities undertaken by the Bell Homestead National Historic Site in 2022, and to highlight planned events for 2023.

Additional details are provided within:

Appendix A: 2022 Bell Homestead Annual Report

Appendix B: Bell's Bulletin (Spring / Summer 2023)

This report also summarizes preliminary plans for the 150th Anniversary of the Telephone (2024). City staff from the Bell Homestead, and Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives, are seeking all available funding opportunities to offset costs for the celebration events.

Any costs associated with the 150th Anniversary that cannot be offset through sponsorship, grants or other third party funding will be brought forward to the 2024 Estimates Committee.

City staff from the Bell Homestead, and Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives, are seeking all available grant and funding opportunities to offset costs for the celebration events.

Staff are recommending a \$60,000 capital project to update the telephone exhibit at the Henderson House in advance of the 150th Anniversary of the Telephone.

5.0 Background

For 112 years, the Bell Homestead has attracted worldwide attention for the City of Brantford, "The Telephone City".

The Bell Homestead, buildings and grounds, was deeded to the Brantford Board of Park Management of the City of Brantford by the Bell Telephone Memorial Association in 1909, to be maintained in perpetuity as a public property, and a memorial of the invention of the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell in Brantford in 1874.

The Bell Homestead was opened to the public in 1910 and officially dedicated to the City of Brantford by the Governor General of Canada on October 24, 1917.

Today, the property includes three historic buildings and a collection of over 900 Bell Family, period and telephone artifacts. The site also features rural parkland that reflects the Bell's 1870s farmstead, and a visitor centre that includes the Phone Booth Museum Store, the Exchange Café, public programming and rental space.

HM Queen Elizabeth II declared the Bell Homestead a Canadian National Historic Site on June 28, 1997. The Ontario Heritage Trust, provincially designates the Henderson Home as Canada's first Business Telephone Office, which was relocated to the Bell Homestead property in 1969.

In 2010, the Lt. Governor of Ontario rededicated the site to the City of Brantford in celebration of the Homestead's 100th anniversary.

With the invention of the telephone sparking a new age in communications technology, the City of Brantford very proudly adopted the moniker, "The Telephone City".

1974 marked the 100th anniversary of the invention of the telephone in Brantford. The City marked this milestone with a wide-variety of events under the banner, "Thanks 100 Mr. Bell", proudly celebrating its place in telephone history.

Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the site re-opened its doors to the public in 2022, reintroducing the museum's programs and events, while launching new activities for residents and community visitors.

6.0 Corporate Policy Context

City of Brantford Strategic Priorities 2023-2026

2. Focus on productive and collaborative relationships

6 a) Effectively and consistently engage with the community

7.0 Input from Other Sources

Economic Development, Tourism & Cultural Initiatives

Parks & Recreation Services

Bell Homestead Committee

Museum Advisor with the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism, and Culture

Ontario Museum Association

Brant Museums & Galleries Association

8.0 Analysis

In 2022, 27,113 individuals attended the various programs and services offered by the museum, including interpretive tours, in-person and virtual education programs, special events and community outreach activities.

In addition, the museum reached 3,399 students and teachers participating in one or more of the 29 curriculum-based school programs, structured day camps, or scouting and guiding programs offered by the site.

Preservation and maintenance of the two historic homes, and the over 900 artifacts held in-trust for the community, remained the first priority of the Homestead operation. Of particular note, was the restoration of two sets of encyclopedias owned and extensively used by Alexander Graham Bell in the late 1870s. Following conservation treatments to stabilize both sets of books, they were placed on exhibit within the Bell Homestead after 40-years in storage.

8.1 Partnerships and Volunteers

The programs and events at the Bell Homestead are reliant on a wide range of community partners and volunteers, including the following:

- Bell Homestead Committee (representing the Bell Homestead Society, Bell Canada, the Bell Family Descendants, Brant Bell Volunteers, County of Brant, and City of Brantford).
- Brant 4-H Community Involvement-Bell Homestead Club
- The Brantford School of Instrumental Music
- Brant Theatre Workshops
- Bell Canada
- Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, the
- Department of Canadian Heritage

8.2 150th Anniversary of the Telephone

July 26, 2024 marks the 150th anniversary of the invention of the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell.

To celebrate this milestone, a planning group has been formed, including various City staff, members of the Bell Homestead Committee including

Bell Canada, Wilfrid Laurier University-Brantford, representatives of Brant Theatre Workshops, and Bell Homestead volunteers.

The goal of this planning committee is to celebrate this historic achievement, and to leverage the activities and events to re-affirm Brantford's significance as "The Telephone City".

The following is a preliminary list of planned celebration activities, with the full program of events to be finalized prior to the end of 2023. City staff from the Bell Homestead, and Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives, are seeking all available funding opportunities to offset costs for the celebration events.

A weekend of events surrounding July 26, 2024 is presently being planned including:

At Harmony Square:

- Movies in the Square - A screening of the 1939 movie "The Story of Alexander Graham Bell".
- Music in the Square - a telephone-themed music concert.

At the Bell Homestead:

- Official opening of "Life on the Line", the Bell Homestead's newly redesigned telephone exhibition gallery. Renovations of the existing exhibition space within the Henderson Home are expected to begin in the fall of 2023;
- Book Launch – "My Dear Aleck: Selected Letters of the Bell Family, 1878-1881;
- Book Launch – A Melly the Platypus Adventure;
- "The Bell Telephone" – an interpretive dance choreographed by Elsie Myers Martin, great-granddaughter of Alexander Graham Bell and performed by Brantford's Academy of Dance;
- Bell Summer Theatre Festival – performances of "Helen, Annie & Aleck" and the sequel.

Brantford to Paris:

- World's First Long-Distance Telephone Call Trail Trek – an 11 km hike/bike/run in celebration of Alexander Graham Bell's telephone test between Brantford and Paris.

Additional Events

- Various annual Bell Homestead programs and special events will feature a telephone theme, including the Summer Music Series;
- An Audio Tour/Podcast project is being developed as an audio storytelling of significant locations in Brantford pertaining to Alexander Graham Bell's history. It will be written in conjunction with Folktale Studios and the Bell Homestead, produced by Folktale Studios and narrated by Brian Wood. It will be accessible at most locations via a QR code and housed on the Discover Brantford podcast, launching in Summer 2023. These specific episodes will launch until 2024.
- A permanent public art piece is in development in recognition of the 150th Anniversary and Brantford's title as "The Telephone City";
- An augmented reality driving/walking tour will be launched, taking visitors to several Bell-related historical locations throughout downtown Brantford and further into the community. This project is dependent on available funding.
- Community groups will be encouraged to join the celebration by adopting the "Thanks 150 Mr. Bell" theme for their own events.

8.3 Henderson House Renovations

The redesigned telephone exhibition gallery at the Bell Homestead will be a long-standing legacy project of the 150th anniversary.

Located within the Henderson Home at the museum, the existing telephone gallery has not significantly changed in over 40 years, and features only a small number of telephone models.

The gallery will be redesigned into an open-concept modern space including new LED lighting, flooring and display stands, providing a transition from the Victorian surroundings of the Homestead and first telephone office.

Entitled “Life on the Line” the new exhibits will interpret the evolution of the home telephone from 1877 to the most recent land-line models produced by the Bell Telephone Company.

In addition to highlighting the physical and technical changes of the telephone, the exhibit will focus on sentimental connections, with various models stirring up memories of the phones visitors used as children and adults.

The exhibit will feature an operational telephone switchboard and 1930s telephones used prior to the advent of direct dial, an interactive switchboard that provides visitors the opportunity to try their hand at being a telephone operator, a vintage phone booth and pay telephone, standard telephone models used in most homes as well as the unique designs that were available between the 1960s and 1980s. Interpretive materials will include Bell Telephone advertising spanning 100 years of home telephone service.

9.0 Financial Implications

Staff are requesting \$60,000 from the Parks and Recreation Capital Reserve (RF0494) for renovations of the Bell Homestead telephone exhibition gallery. Finance has confirmed that these funds are available.

Any costs associated with the 150th Anniversary of the Telephone will be brought forward for consideration through the 2024 Estimates Committee; however, the planning group will make every effort to obtain third party, sponsorship and grant funding to offset the municipal cost.

10.0 Climate and Environmental Implications

There are no direct climate and environmental implications as a related to this report.

11.0 Conclusion

The Bell Homestead continues to be an important tourism, historical and educational asset for the City of Brantford. This report provides a summary of 2022 activities, and outlines plans to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Telephone in 2024.



Aaron Wallace, Acting General Manager,
Community Services and Social Development

Prepared By:

Brian Wood, Curator, Bell Homestead National Historic Site

Attachments (if applicable)

Appendix A: Bell Homestead 2022 Annual Report

Appendix B: Bell's Bulletin (Spring / Summer 2023)

Copy to:

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required ☐ yes ☒ no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk ☐ yes ☒ no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? ☐ yes ☒ no