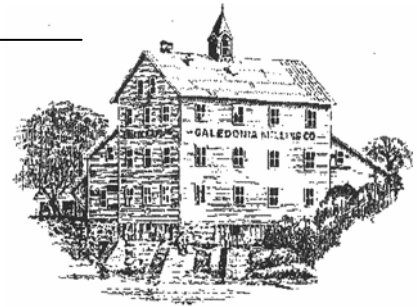


# CALEDONIA OLD MILL—COMMUNITY VISIONING PROJECT UPDATE

SUMMER 2009



## PHASE I OF PROJECT NEARING COMPLETION

Phase I of the Caledonia Mill Community Visioning Project is coming to a close, and some of the findings are now being shared with the community.

The Caledonia Old Mill Corporation (COMC) was awarded a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) in 2008 to produce an adaptive re-use plan for the mill by using a comprehensive community consultation process. Over the past year, Dr. Laura Dent of Dent Planning in Stratford has been engaged with the Caledonia community in order to tap into residents

visions for the adaptive re-use potential of the mill.

Dr. Dent used many methods to gain information about the mill and residents' ideas. For example, three separate reports were done that reviewed: 1) the history of the mill and its significance, 2) community planning and policies that impact the mill and mill property, and 3) best practices from other individuals and groups that have adapted mills in their communities.

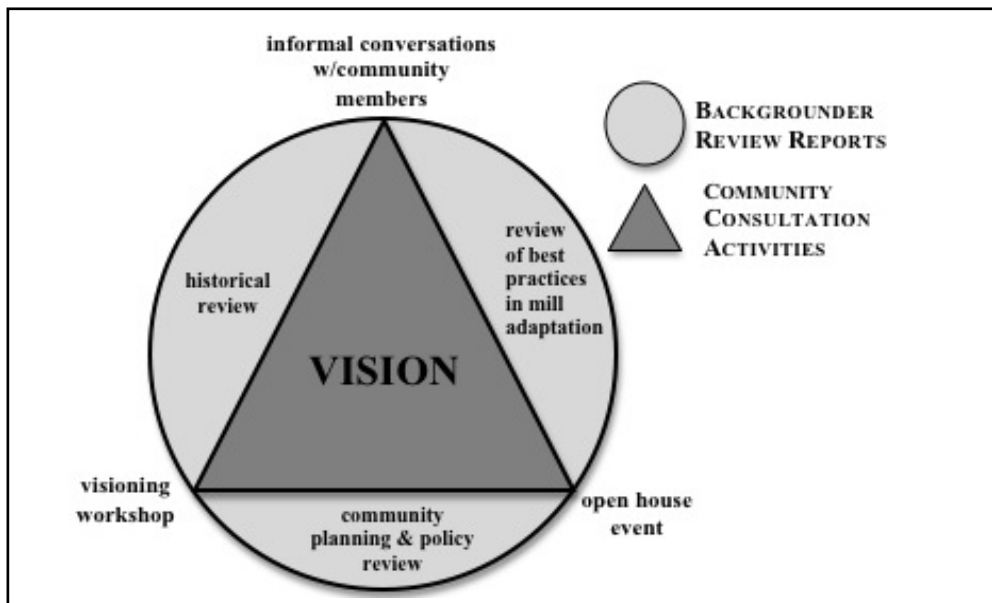
Dr. Dent says that the most interesting and enjoyable part of her work over the

last year has been leading and participating in the several community consultation activities that have been held. These activities include a visioning workshop held last summer where more than 20 key stakeholders in the community were invited to 'brainstorm' about adaptive re-use scenarios for the mill. Also, in the fall of 2008, an Open House was held at McKinnon Park Secondary School, and upwards of 150 people came out to provide their feedback on various aspects of the mill and its re-

use. And finally during the past year, over 40 residents have participated in informal conversations with Laura and she has been so fortunate to be able to record their memories and ideas for the mill.

Recommendations to move the project into Phase II over the next year, include commissioning several reports including an existing conditions and structural report to insure the mill is structurally stable and that no further deterioration will occur. A conservation plan is also being recommended so that basic, commonly agreed upon policies and practices will be established prior to any ownership change and/or adaptive re-use. Also being recommended is a review of capacity limits and costs to fully service the site. Since the community engagement process has been well received, another recommendation is to continue the community engagement process into Phase II.

A brief overview of some of the outcomes from Phase I follows on page 2 and 3 of this newsletter.



METHODS USED TO CAPTURE COMMUNITY'S VISIONS FOR MILL ADAPTATION

## THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND PLACE

One of the best places to begin to engage people in visioning adaptive re-use possibilities is to have them think about what the Old Mill means to them today. Four themes emerged from Phase I research that encapsulate people's feelings. These surround:

- its historical significance,
- the fact that it is a community attraction and has economic potential,
- that it embodies a sense of community and functions as a focus and central meeting place in Caledonia, and finally,
- that it needs to have a function and be a useful resource in the community.

**“I want my kids to see what I grew up with my entire life.”**

## FUNCTIONS & ACTIVITIES: WHAT COULD THE OLD MILL BECOME?

Community consultation activities in Phase I focused on having residents think about and describe how the future adapted mill might be used. The following is a list of the primary uses mentioned.

The new mill...

- is a **CENTRE THAT HOUSES THE ‘ARTS’** to include the performing and/or visual arts and comprising any of the following functions:
  - a theatre or playhouse,
  - an auditorium for concerts (featuring local talent),
  - an art gallery,
  - studio space for performing and visual artists,
  - artisan shops,
  - outdoor performances in a band shell or on an adapted mill dock,
  - an outdoor public sculpture park.
- is a **MULTI-USE** project that combines various functions such as:

- an operating mill, bakery and gift shop (specializing in organic products), or
- a theatre, dining and interpretive museum, or
- a ‘local’ centre celebrating community, arts, food and culture.
- be economically sustainable.
- be functioning year round and have a variety of rotating attractions.
- be a unique venture that offers something new.

- is a project that becomes the **FOCAL POINT AND PRIMARY GATHERING AND MEETING PLACE** in the community;
  - it develops into a multi-purpose community focused centre, serving a wide segment of the local residents and attracting tourists/visitors.

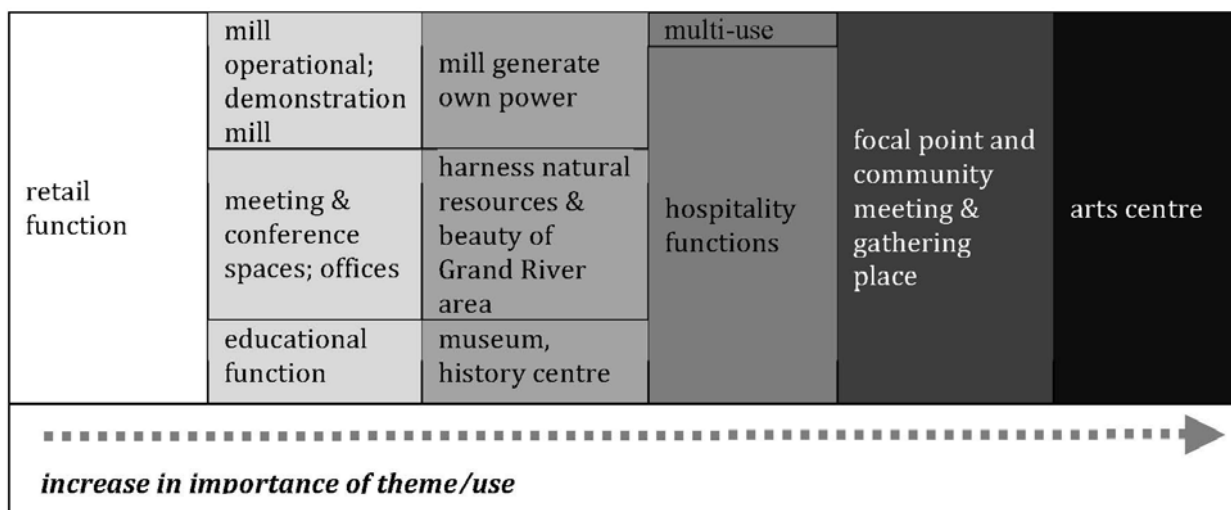
Community members expressed that as a successfully functioning enterprise, the new mill should...

- remain a landmark in the community.
- be integrated into the community.
- combine public and private uses.

**“It needs to be restored to come back to life!”**

Findings indicate that public accessibility is an important consideration and residents would like to see the mill open to the public in some way in the near future (even if it is not open year-round).

Finally, it is clear that residents value the landmark status that the mill has in the community and would like to see the historical integrity of the mill respected in any adaptive re-use scenario that might be pursued.



IMPORTANCE OF FUNCTIONS/ACTIVITIES FOR MILL EMERGING FROM CONSULTATION PROCESS

## THE COMMUNITY DISCUSSES THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ADAPTING THE OLD MILL

Findings from Phase I community consultations underscore both the many opportunities and challenges of adapting the Old Mill.

Residents discussed the important connection that people draw between the mill and Caledonia's history. The mill is unequivocally a major icon in the community that as one interviewee stated, "sets us apart and gives us distinctiveness." The scenic characteristics of the mill have made the site an extremely appealing and unique spot for a variety of outdoor functions. It is a huge community asset.

Residents identified many benefits of the mill and the mill site. Primary benefits include that:

- it is the most viable location for outdoor gatherings in Caledonia.
- it is the only place for services on that side (south) of the river.
- the river landscape surrounding the mill is a great asset (with east and

west walkway extensions).

- there is good access from the mill site for services in Caledonia to other areas within and outside the County.

Challenges identified include the need to:

- insure that the building is safe and structurally sound, and that its heritage integrity is not compromised.
- address planning and programming issues such as road access, parking and privacy concerns.
- garner financial resources to carry out capital costs and later on, ongoing operational costs.

Irregardless of the challenges that may lay ahead with its adaptation, most everyone agrees that the Mill is a key landmark and part of a historic district; it is a critical component to local tourism and cultural led regeneration that will benefit tourists and community residents alike.

## WHAT COULD THE ADAPTED MILL LOOK LIKE?

Residents were asked to envision future details of the mill (beyond a specific use) and here is what they said.

The design for the new mill...

- retains primary views and vistas of the mill.
- preserves the historical integrity of the original mill; new work respects the old.
- retains features such as the raceway and cupola.
- highlights interior structural timber framing and scriptural wall writings.

- utilizes the existing mill loading dock as a stage—or band shell—for outdoor performances.
- is accessible to all people with the addition of a new elevator.
- includes enhanced landscaping and beautification of green areas surrounding the mill.
- creates a mill park which is connected with the existing linear park system; park to include boat launch area, interpretive areas, sculptures and bridge to island.

## HOW DO WE REALIZE OUR VISION FOR THE MILL?

Residents identified a number of future steps that they felt were critical to realizing [an adaptive re-use] vision for the mill? Some suggestions follow.

We need to...

- secure the mill from further deterioration, make it safe, connect services, and insure that it is well maintained until its adaptation is complete.
- respect the cultural integrity of the mill; its history, structure and the community in which it once operated.
- develop a vision for the mill that is realistic and economically sustainable.
- make sure that we are engaging with the community during the process,
- and that ultimately, community needs are being met.
- engage the native community in the adaptation process.
- promote the importance of the mill & this project to Caledonia residents/businesses & the County.
- demonstrate the critical link between the mill and cultural tourism within Caledonia & the County.
- have champions and community leaders on board who are able to develop partnerships and identify the benefits of this project to all partners involved.
- continually identify funding sources to move the project forward through multiple phases.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION?

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### AGM-2009

The Caledonia Old Mill Corporation held its Annual General Meeting on **August 17th** at the Grand Trunk Train Station. Thank you to all attendees and participants.