

Feds must ante up Centre Pier cash

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It's uncertain what the final fate of the historic industrial buildings on Port Hope's Centre Pier will be.

On the one hand, there's the Pier Group, residents who want the structures preserved, cleaned up and reborn as a money-generating tourist magnet the likes of Toronto's once derelict Distillery District. That site hosts 40 former Gooderham and Worts Distillery buildings, housing cafes, restaurants and shops that attract millions of residents and visitors annually.

Then there's the Port Hope Area Initiative (PHAI) staffers who recommend the buildings be demolished, on direction of the Port Hope Harbour Commission (or Port Hope council since they're one and the same) to allow planned remediation of the harbour and pier to proceed as scheduled. The PHAI says building remediation to the public reuse level will add both years and millions of dollars to the low-level radioactive waste (LLRW) cleanup project.

In late October, a council-appointed task force charged with making recommendations on what to do with the buildings will offer council its final report. But whether the buildings remain or fall to the wrecking ball, one thing is certain, Port Hope doesn't need another downtown park. What the community desperately needs is economic development, a project to enhance and add value to its tourism sector. And with its proximity to Port Hope's well-recognized heritage-designated downtown, the Centre Pier is the idea spot for such a development. The Centre Pier buildings are like a gold deposit waiting to be mined.

Council must go to bat for taxpayers to ensure the federal government fully compensates Port Hope should these buildings come down. Should council decide it wants the buildings saved, then the feds must pick up the remediation tab. If council decides the buildings have to go, then the federal government must ante up cash.

If this means the municipality must renegotiate its original deal struck with the feds, the deal that made Port Hope the 500-year storage site for historic radioactive and industrial waste produced by former Crown Corporation, Eldorado, so be it. Port Hope deserves a fair shake.



Jeanne Beneteau.

Jeanne Beneteau can be reached at jbeneteau@northumberlandnews.com Visit her blog, 'Jeanne's Menagerie' at www.northumberlandnews.com.
