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REGIONAL DISTRICT OF
NORTH OKANAGAN

October 29, 2013

Board of Directors
Regional District of the North Okanagan
9848 Aberdeen Rd.
Coldstream BC

Dear Directors

Did you know that Vernon is the smallest city in Canada to have a Science Centre? Why is there a Science Centre in Vernon and not in Kelowna? The answer: because Marg and Bill Sim lived in Vernon.

In 1985 it was Marg and Bill's vision to see a world class science facility in Vernon. Along with their daughter (Roxi) and son-in-law (Tony) they shared their vision with other members of the community. A grass roots get-together, in Bill and Marg's garage, sparked what has since grown to become a unique feature in both Vernon and the Okanagan valley. Through the dedication and hard work of staff and volunteers and the support of a visionary board, the Okanagan Science Centre has now served for decades as a magnet attracting curious minds of all ages as well as persons of renown.

Most recently Col. Chris Hadfield came to the centre to attend a reception in honour of Bruce Aikenhead. A video about Bruce was created through a federal grant obtained by the centre. The "Community Memories Project: Bruce Aikenhead: Canadian Space Pioneer" details Bruce's history with the Canadian Space Agency, the NASA Mercury project, his work with the Avro Arrow and his work on the Canada Arm.

What good fortune it was when Bruce Aikenhead retired to Salmon Arm and consequently discovered the centre upon a visit to Vernon. Bruce, who has received the Order of Canada, generously volunteered his time, expertise and vision to create a permanent planetarium and other space displays that now reside on the top floor of the centre.

In honouring Bruce, Col. Hadfield spoke how Bruce had played a role in the selection of Canada's first astronauts and how later, he had been privileged to operate, in space, the Canada Arm that Bruce had worked on. Delightfully, Col. Hadfield also shared that, as a nine year old boy visiting a Science Centre, he had

the privilege of holding a piece of actual Moon rock in his hands and how that experience inspired him to become an astronaut. In a wonderful, full circle moment, the Okanagan Science Centre was privileged to host two of Canada's most reputable and honourable Canadians, certainly a pinnacle moment and one to build upon.

For us, as members of the original founding family, to have a vision like the Okanagan Science Centre realized to such a degree is a very humbling experience. And, we see more for the Science Centre, much more. We have seen the Science Centre grow from "Science on Wheels" where Starlab, a portable planetarium visited schools all over the province, to a temporary home in the Tolko building then to the heritage building that it occupies today. Like other worthwhile organizations serving and enriching a growing community, the centre also needs room to grow.

We are aware that the Art Gallery and Museum are in need of new facilities. As community visionaries, we have been involved with a number of other successful community projects over the years, such as the Salmon Arm Art Gallery, the Enderby and District Arts Council, The Okanagan Artisan's Guild and the Enderby Wild Wallflower Community Mural project. We would like to offer a common sense suggestion that offers a win, win, win scenario for not only the Art Gallery and Museum but for two other community organizations.

First a little history about the Museum and Art Gallery as told by Armstrong Artist Frances Hatfield. At one of the first meetings about establishing a museum Frances stood up and suggested that the Museum include, at least, a small room that could be used as a Public Art Gallery for local artists to display their work. Because of her vision and timely suggestion, the Topham Brown gallery was created in the Museum. The Topham Brown gallery became a busy place for openings and a great launching ground for local artists. Soon the Art Gallery outgrew that small room and went out on its own, eventually arriving at its current location.

Since both the Museum and the Art Gallery need room to grow and both institutions share many of the same very specific needs would it not make sense to once again "come full circle"? Let's make the best use of our financial resources by creating a "Community Cultural Campus" that not only meets the needs of the organizations but most importantly meets the needs of the citizens of Vernon in a

financially responsible way by avoiding costly duplication of services, equipment and long term operational expenses.

There could be a further precedent encompassed in this vision that would result in winning situation for the Art Centre which currently resides next to the Science Centre. By also including the Art Centre within the "Community Cultural Campus" the Art Centre would benefit from new purpose built facilities. With all three, Art Gallery, the Art Centre and Museum in one complex, the Art Gallery and Art Centre can offer art programs in modern studio facilities while the climate control needs of both the Museum and Art Gallery could be provided and operated more cost effectively. Putting it all on one campus and under one roof, further savings could be realized with shared facilities such as reception, administration, bathrooms, storage, janitorial and security and parking. Those savings would allow for more flexibility in design allowing for more storage and restoration/curatorial room as well as a shared lecture theatre, gift shop, coffee shop and green space. This fabulous cultural campus would give the community the best bang for their tax dollars and create a focal point in the community that would be so much more than its individual parts. At the same time and added benefit would be increasing visits and memberships for all. And now, here is the added bonus in this multiple win scenario so the Science centre too, can grow.

Back in 1998 the Science Centre set up displays in that area when it brought in the popular "Thingamagigs", a hands on science display, from the Vancouver Science Centre. The precedent is there and would give the Science Centre the opportunity to develop as a "Science Campus" at Polson Park echoing a downtown "Cultural Campus".

The community wins in so many ways. The Art Gallery and Museum win with new facilities, some of which they would not be able to afford separately. The Art centre would win with new purpose built space. Together they could offer very exciting educational and studio programs for all ages and interests. This common sense solution shows responsible use of tax dollars, better combined facilities and greater service to the citizens of Vernon and act as a draw for Tourism. This all adds up to a big win scenario for the community and area as a whole. In speaking with friends we feel that coming together under one roof and expanding the Science Centre, would garner a great deal of support at Referendum time.

In the Past, city councils and regional staff have shown vision and support for cultural development with great success. We are encouraged and heartened to

see positive strides being made by current council and administrators. Under an umbrella of Arts, Science and Culture, four community organizations could become a shining example of what grassroots talents and vision are capable of achieving. We are the smallest city in Canada to have a Science Centre because we are not small on either vision or accomplishment.

Thanks for listening.

Sincerely

Roxi Sim Hermsen 

Tony Hermsen 

William Sim 

In spirit Margaret Sim

The Founding Family of the Okanagan Science Centre.

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Cc: Mayor Sawatsky and Vernon City Counselors
Regional District of the North Okanagan
Vernon Public Art Gallery
Okanagan Science Centre
Vernon Museum
Vernon Arts Centre
Editor Morning Star