

Wednesday, November 4th, 2020

Mayor Bernadette Clement & City Council
City of Cornwall
360 Pitt Street
Cornwall, Ontario K6J 3P9

Re: Cornwall Newspaper Digitization Project

Dear Mayor Clement & City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to present at your November 9th Council meeting. I appreciate the chance to share with you a request to partner together to preserve a key part of our local history: our local newspaper collections.

Over the past year, a volunteer Committee has been formed to examine ways we can achieve a goal that has been discussed for many years, but has had difficulty coming to fruition: digitizing our local newspaper collections and host them online to be preserved permanently and to be easily accessible to the public.

I am pleased to work with the following community leaders on this project:

- Helen McCutcheon, CEO & Chief Librarian, Cornwall Public Library
- Don Smith, Associate Curator, Cornwall Community Museum
- Hugo Rodrigues, Managing Editor, Standard-Freeholder
- Rick Shaver, General Manager, Cornwall Seaway News

Council may be aware of a current project underway with the United Counties of SD&G. County Council has allocated between \$150,000-\$200,000 in the past two budget cycles to digitize the full collections of every newspaper based in the United Counties of SD&G. This includes the Glengarry News, Winchester Press, Morrisburg Leader, Chesterville Record, and other past publications. We also partnered with Jim Brownell and the Lost Villages to digitize hundreds of photos of the Lost Village communities.

Our Committee is proposing the creation of a similar initiative in the City of Cornwall to digitize decades of our local newspaper history. We believe that this project is vital to preserving our history and providing easy access to residents, researchers, and students.

The project would include a RFP for services to provide both the digitization of the newspapers, and to make each newspaper page as OCR (Optical Character Recognition) searchable. This means that a search of any keyword(s) in the online database will provide all results in seconds, without having to manually search each page and publication.

We are working with the Cornwall Public Library Board through CEO McCutcheon to arrange donations of the collections to the Library, where they can be stored safely in the basement. Shelving, storage boxes, and other capital items required for storage of the physical collections will be fundraised through local service clubs and organizations as needed.

It is important to note that this project is a bit more difficult and complex than the initiative undertaken in the United Counties of SD&G. While we are looking at various sources for obtaining copies of the newspapers, the largest publication, the Cornwall Standard-Freeholder, is not available in all years physically. Many decades of the Standard-Freeholder are only available on microfilm. This is not an ideal format as they could become damaged over time, and they are also very difficult to search and conduct research with.

We would engage with other accredited companies and obtain quotes on how to digitize and make those microfilm files OCR searchable and will provide further updates to Council.

Request 1: That Council approve a resolution to direct administration to report back to Council in by mid-Q1 2021 on options to formalize a relationship with the City of Cornwall, Cornwall Public Library, and our volunteer committee on how the digitization project could be undertaken collaboratively over the course of the next two budget cycles.

Request 2: That Council consider funding the cost of digitizing the physical Cornwall Seaway News publications (35 years) in the 2021 budget and the purchase/installation of the appropriate online software to store and host the collection online to the public general.

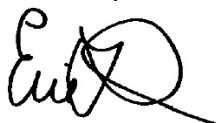
An estimate cost (based on page calculations and using the rate being paid in SD&G) will be provided in time for your budget deliberations.

Since the cost of this project is above the threshold for the City's community grants funding envelope, and since the asset of digitized records would become the asset of the City of Cornwall, we believe that this report from Administration could provide Council with viable options on how to proceed with this unique initiative.

We believe that now is the time to move forward on this project. Management of the two largest newspapers are on board. There is a great template and model to achieve this goal underway next door in the United Counties of SD&G. Most importantly, we need to act now to make sure we save our history by digitizing and preserving it online in a safe, secure format for decades to come.

We ask for your support to make this happen. Our future generations will be grateful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Duncan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eric Duncan