Town of Huntsville Staff Report

Meeting Date: July 27, 2026 **To:** Council

Report Number: CS-2026-5 **Confidential:** No

Author(s): Jacqueline Surette, Jillian Jordan,

Subject: Muskoka Heritage Place Purser's Cabin Platform, Footings and Railings Budget Deviation

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Report Highlights

- Update Council on the Purser's Cabin Railing, Platform, and Footings Project included in the Muskoka Heritage Place's 2026 Capital Budget with recommendations to change the Scope of Work.
- Provide recommendations to fund the budget deviation resulting from the proposed changes to the Scope of Work.
- Staff are seeking approval directly from Council to aim to complete the project in the fall of 2026 and avoid further impact to operations.

Recommendation

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: Council approve the additional Scope of Work for the Muskoka Heritage Place Purser's Cabin platform, footings and railing project, as detailed in report CS-2026-5, at an additional cost of up to $101,500 to be funded as follows:

- $42,190 from deferred revenue related to Cannabis funding received in a previous year; and
- up to $59,310 from the MHP Capital Reserve.

Background

Through the 2025-2026 two-year budget process, Council approved $100,000 to replace the platform, footings and railings at MHP's Purser's Cabin as they had reached the end of their lifespan.

Discussion

The Purser's Cabin is located at the bottom of Lions Lookout, adjacent to Fairy Lake and Camp Kitchen. The Cabin and platform were installed on cement footings to accommodate the gentle slope to the lake. The platform, railings, and footings were scheduled for replacement in 2026 as they had reached the end of their lifespan.

Staff secured Tulloch Engineering, through the Town's procurement process, to develop the detailed design drawings for the project's tender documents. As part of their initial site inspection, it was determined that the footings of both the Cabin and platform had shifted since their installation; staff estimate approximately 7"-12" over 25 years (see Appendix A MHP Purser's Cabin Footings Photographs). A geotechnical investigation was

therefore conducted to explore the site conditions and soil composition and determine how best to address this shifting in the project's Scope of Work. As a result of this investigation, Tulloch is recommending that the cement footings be replaced with steel helical piles, and that the Cabin footings and bracing be replaced to shore up that asset as well, the latter of which is currently not part of the project's Scope of Work.

The Cabin and its exhibits have been closed off to the public until such time as this work can be done, as recommended by the Chief Building Official. While staff have made temporary accommodations to continue to make the Cabin's exhibits accessible to the public by staging the interpretive panels outside, they cannot temporarily display the artifacts outside. Furthermore, this practice is not sustainable over the long-term and would require the purchase and installation of new, weather-resistant panels. The Cabin itself is an important historical landmark designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, and an integral part of MHP's rail operations including the Portage Flyer Christmas, a 37-year-old local tradition where riders are taken on a magical journey to Purser's Cabin and Santa's workshop.

Options

Please note, the numbers provided are based on an Engineer's Class C Cost Estimate and subject to change as a result of the tender process.

Option 1: That the additional Scope of Work related to the Cabin's shoring and footings be added to the Purser's Cabin Railing, Platform, and Footings Project, at an overall increase in project costs of up to $101,500. This option would see the Cabin re-open to the public by year-end and eliminate the costs and possible risks associated with postponing the work to shore up the building to a later date. **(Recommended)**

Option 2: At minimum, Tulloch recommends adding the Cabin's helical piles to the project as an efficiency, eliminating the need to bring a contractor back to complete that work with the steel shoring, which can add mobilizing, demobilizing and other costs. Project costs associated with this option would increase overall by up to $70,000. While this option helps to alleviate the budget impact in 2026, it would leave the Cabin closed to the public until the bracing could be installed, impacting operations. **(Not Recommended)**

Option 3: That the Purser's Cabin Railing, Platform, and Footings Project budget be increased by $58,000, and that the additional Scope of Work related to the Cabin's steel shoring and footings be deferred to a future budget. This option is not recommended as it continues to impact operations and does not provide the support the Cabin needs moving forward. **(Not recommended)**

Capital

Project Budget

The Purser's Cabin Railing, Platform, and Footings Project was originally budgeted at $100,000. To date, $38,500 has been allocated to engineering costs which includes the geotechnical assessment along with detailed design drawings and specifications for the tender documents. That leaves $61,500 for construction.

Tulloch estimates the total project costs for **Option 1** (now including the Purser's Cabin footings and steel shoring) at $166,500, resulting in a budget deviation of $101,500.

Option 2, which only includes the footings, leaving the steel shoring for a future budget, is estimated to cost $131,500, resulting in a budget shortfall of $70,000.

Option 3, which does not include any change to the Scope of Work, is estimated to cost $119,500 plus applicable HST, resulting in a budget deviation of $58,000.

Funding Sources

There are a number of possible funding sources and combinations that could support this project, however, since the MHP Hartley Donation Reserve has been previously fully committed to the locomotive #1 project and the Municipal Accommodation Tax Reserve balance has been identified as a funding source for many of the 2027 User Group Budget Requests, it is recommended to fund the additional project costs as follows:

- There is currently $42,190 in unused funds received in a previous year related to a Cannabis grant which is no longer restricted for uses related to Cannabis. These funds can be fully allocated toward the additional project costs.
- The remaining funding of between $15,810 - $59,310 can be funded through the MHP Capital Reserve. While this reserve is projected to be in a deficit position of $201,707 at the end of 2026, it is meant to fund the replacement of existing capital at MHP. Future replacement costs included in the 10-year capital plan for Purser's Cabin are expected to be reduced as a result this additional scope of work. Future contributions to the MHP Capital Reserve will take into account the deficit position and the proportionate share of the overall capital contributions in future budgets can be adjusted accordingly to work towards bringing the reserve balance into a surplus position.

Operational

Should the Purser's Cabin footings and steel shoring not be completed in 2026, the Cabin would remain closed to visitors until such time as the work can be completed. This would impact the 2026 Portage Flyer Christmas Train to Santa event, our legacy event, which generates $5,000, and could impact operations in 2027 and beyond.

Relevant Policies / Legislation / Resolutions

Budget & Financial Controls Policy

Council Strategic Direction

- Balanced Growth-1.2: Ensure a continued focus on maintaining and upgrading existing Town infrastructure as part of growth management planning.
- Stable, Trusted & Engaged Community Partner-2.1: Create, implement, and invest in the Town's Asset Management Plan, including long-term financing strategies.

Attachments

Appendix A MHP Purser's Cabin Footings Photographs

Consultations

Chris Nagy, Chief Building Official
Stuart Bogart, Plans Examiner
Tulloch Engineering

Respectfully Submitted: Jacqueline Surette, Jillian Jordan,

Manager Approval (if required): Jacqueline Surette, Manager of Recreation, Culture and Heritage

Director Approval: Simone Babineau, Director of Community Services

CAO Approval: Denise Corry, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix A MHP Purser Cabin Footings Photographs



Figure 1: Purser's Cabin, east exterior side.

Appendix A MHP Purser Cabin Footings Photographs



Figure 2: Purser's Cabin, east exterior side, showing shifting floor joists.

Appendix A MHP Purser Cabin Footings Photographs



Figure 3: Purser's Cabin, west exterior side. Showing movement in cement footings and floor joists.

Appendix A MHP Purser Cabin Footings Photographs



Figure 4: Purser's Cabin cement footings. Improper structural load bearing.