

By Mary Riley – Kawartha Lakes This Week

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## **Rail and heritage groups hope bid to obtain rail cars from Orillia is successful**

### **City of Orillia council was to review the City of Kawartha Lakes bid for eight rail cars at its Oct. 17 meeting**

(LINDSAY) City of Orillia council will consider the City of Kawartha Lakes offer to obtain eight railway cars that are sitting on a prime piece of waterfront property but have not been used in years.

Last month, Heritage Victoria and the Lindsay&District Model Railroaders appealed to council for help in obtaining the Ossawippi Express dining cars, which have sat empty in Orillia since the restaurant they were once used for closed. Both groups have been working with City staff to find a way to get the cars and restore them to their former elegance.

Most of them date back to the 1900s and many sport original brass furnishings.

Council approved \$25,000 non-refundable deposit to hold the cars over the winter, another \$25,000 for a business plan/funding application and will consider \$150,000 (the cost to transport the cars to Lindsay) in next year's budget.

The proposal prompted many councillors to object; some called it an "11th hour" request. Others were concerned that the City of Orillia is asking the City to ensure the site is left "clean" by removing the cars, their chattels and the railway ties they sit on. That raised concerns about possible environmental factors; that the City could be getting itself into a situation that could turn into a nightmare.

(That concern was later addressed when the motion was amended to say, in part that the City of Kawartha Lakes will not be responsible for any soil remediation, including soil contamination that may be discovered once the rail cars are removed; the definition of "flat, clean condition" be clarified and that the City of Kawartha Lakes will not be responsible for any liability or environmental issues arising from the removal of the rail cars.)

One councillor said he was very familiar with the cars, their condition and said he was concerned that no one in Orillia seemed to want them.

The two groups maintain the cars are a piece of history that if restored to the state the current rail cars in Lindsay are, they will be a beautiful tourist attraction and another piece of the area's rail heritage that should not be lost.

On Monday (Oct. 17) Ward 1 Councillor John Macklem, Heritage Victoria president Bill Ballentine and model railroad club member Russ Moore met with This Week to "clear up some inaccurate information."

Coun. Macklem noted, "Mr. Ballentine is a lawyer, I'm a numbers man and Russ is a train man," adding it was interesting all three learned last summer that the rail cars were going to be destroyed because the City of Orillia wanted the property they sit on. Mr. Moore said it was ironic that all three men learned the news through "our individual circles."

Coun. Macklem said when he toured the cars last summer, "there was no drop dead date" (deadline) for any interested parties to act. That, he said, came later, and when it did, the committee, working with City staff, had to act fast.

"Council is used to things coming in at the last minute sometimes," he said. "And, for those who said this was 11th hour; well, I guess they didn't read their agenda packages." Coun. Macklem said councillors could have read the proposal five days earlier before it came to council on Sept. 29. He said Heritage Victoria was already preparing its reports, but the Orillia-imposed deadline of Sept. 26, later changed to Sept. 30 meant they had to bring it forward to council right away.

The men wanted to ensure the public is aware the money, which totals \$200,000 if the transport cost is approved in the budget, is not going to their respective organizations; rather the project is a joint effort between them and the City.

Coun. Macklem also pointed out that other individuals/groups interested in the rail cars didn't want the cars and contents, as does the City.

"They want to pick them over; take out the brass...dishes (etc) and leave us the rest," he said.

He added he believes the City is the only party that has submitted a written offer, which is to take "all or nothing"; the cars and their contents.

Mr. Moore said many people who learned the cars could be destroyed were appalled; the Model Railroaders have heard from many who encouraged them to try and obtain the Ossawippi lineup.

"History shouldn't be going into the scrapper," he said.

Coun. Macklem said he planned to attend the Orillia city council meeting on Oct. 17 as the item was on its agenda, but he said it was not likely there would be any decision until Orillia received a legal opinion on the bid.