

Edmonton

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City of Wetaskiwin vows to preserve archives despite sale of civic building

The Civic Building on 51st Street has been up for sale for the past three months.



The Wetaskiwin Civic Building has been up for sale for the past three months. (Alice Hoyle/Wetaskiwin Genealogical Society)

Wetaskiwin's city manager confirmed Tuesday the city's archives will live on, whether in their current building or another location.

The archives are located in the Wetaskiwin Civic Building, which served as city hall until the historic courthouse was refurbished in 2007. The Civic Building has been up for sale for the past three months, prompting fear among some residents about the fate of the trove of historical documents it contains.

"What happens to the originals?" Alice Hoyle said Monday on CBC Radio's Edmonton AM. "There is no plan at this point."

Hoyle, who is president of the Wetaskiwin Genealogical Society, spotted a "for sale" sign outside the building in March and wrote letters to public officials about the importance of preserving local historical records.

Digitizing the collection and publishing it online isn't the answer she's looking for. "Some of the items in the archives, they go back more than 100 years," she said. "We can go to the archives and look at these documents and they're still readable. Can the same be said for something that's digitized and online? I don't think so."

More than 100 years of history

City of Wetaskiwin Archives include city, church, school district and multimedia records.

One popular collection contains photographs by Carl Walin, dating from 1919 to 1956. Another has newspapers and negatives from the *Wetaskiwin Times* that date back to 1901.

City commits to operate archives

City manager Dave Burgess said the city decided to sell the Civic Building, at 4904 51st St., to save "substantial dollars." The cost of its upkeep is about \$90,000 per year.

He said the city is committed to running the archives, but the future location is uncertain. Burgess said city council prefers to keep the documents where they are and negotiate an agreement with the building's future owner.

If that doesn't work out, he said council has other locations in mind. He would not comment on specifics, saying council would decide on a location after the sale of the building.

Moving would be a 'major undertaking'

Archivist Rachel Knudsen said moving the archives would be a "major undertaking." Many documents are old and fragile, and sit in a climate-controlled, fire-safe vault.

"If a move became necessary, then my goal would be to try to keep the records as stable as possible until they could be transferred to a new location with the same humidity and temperature controlled environment," she told *CBC News* in an email on Monday. Knudsen said there has been an outpouring of community support for the archives since the Civic Building went up for sale.

"I am certain local leaders are aware of their concern and want to find a way to continue to preserve our local history, and maintain accessibility to these records for generations to come," she said.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/wetaskiwin-archives-historical-records-building-sale-1.4653659>

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