

Ossawippi cars on track for Port McNicoll?

By SARA ROSS

Posted 13 hours ago

Orillia's Ossawippi Dining Cars could become part of a future development on the shores of Georgian Bay at Port McNicoll Harbour.

After the city's plan with Kawartha Lakes fell through in December, Skyline Investments contacted Orillia staff to see if the cars were available.

"Skyline Investments is anxious to take possession of all eight railcars and incorporate them into their Port McNicoll development..." states a city staff report.

The request comes before council committee at tonight's meeting.

Skyline, which owns Horseshoe Resort in Oro-Medonte, is establishing their Port McNicoll property into a premier tourism and heritage destination in Huronia and Simcoe County.

The plan would be to display all eight railcars next to the 1907 Great Lakes passenger ship, the S.S. Keewatin.

"Skyline was making inquiries in an attempt to locate an appropriate railcar or cars which could be acquired for incorporation into their dockside plans in conjunction with a rebuilt train station and the historic ship," states a staff report.

A memorandum of understanding would see Skyline take possession of the railcars as is, states the report.

Skyline will provide a \$25,000 non-refundable deposit to defray costs associated with the transfer. They must also remove the railcars, at their present site, at their own expense.

Skyline must also remove all debris associated with the railcars to a depth of 12 inches.

Orillia will be responsible for all aspects of the site, specifically any soil remediation, states the report.

\$1.7B transformation begins in Georgian Bay's Port McNicoll - Victorian resort village taking shape on former CPR lands

Fast Facts

PORT MCNICOLL, FOUNDED as a company town by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1907 when it moved its Great Lakes terminus here from Owen Sound, was named for David MacNicol, then CPR's vice-president. No one knows why the village name is misspelled.

RICHARD KAY, A Scottish immigrant who had initially come to the area to tend to the gardens of a local

lumber baron, developed the famous, but long gone, CPR Gardens, which were a tourist attraction in the days of passenger ship travel. The flowers, grown in greenhouses on the docks, included sunflowers, hollyhocks, sweet William and geraniums. They were watered and manicured each night by six men.

ALONG WITH Port McNicoll, Tay Township includes the urban communities of Victoria Harbour, Waubauskene and Waverley. Tay, like many other townships in the surrounding area, such as Tiny Township, was named after one of the many dogs owned by the wife of Sir Peregrine Maitland, the former Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada

Port McNicoll, once one of CPR's biggest terminals and the departing point for rich tourists travelling the Great Lakes aboard luxurious passenger ships, is about to make a comeback.

Skyline 'would love' Orillia's railcars: CEO

By MIRANDA MINASSIAN, *The Packet & Times*

Posted 12 hours ago

Port McNicoll wasn't always a sleepy village tucked away in one of southeastern Georgian Bay's quiet corners.

Once a transportation hub, the waterfront village's rail and steamer networks were where Canada's east met west.

Canadian goods and travellers used Port McNicoll as a transfer to their final destinations, be it Prairie grain headed for Montreal or the wealthy tourists taking luxurious cruises through the Great Lakes in the Roaring Twenties.

With its purchase of 825 acres of Canadian Pacific lands and a proposed \$1.7-billion redevelopment project, Skyline International is looking to return the Tay Township community to its former glory.

In its sights is the re-emergence of a waterfront park complete with English royal gardens and a replica of the town's original train station — a feature that could see Orillia's Ossawippi Express train cars as part of the main attraction.

"To be able to have original railcars as part of the train station fits into our vision perfectly," said Michael Sneyd, CEO of Skyline International Development.

"When I heard they were available, I immediately got on the phone and said we would love to get them."

Council committee passed a motion Monday that authorizes staff to work out a contract with Skyline with the hope of saving the train cars from being demolished.

"Most of all, I'm pleased because we have a proposal that's going to respect the heritage value of those railcars and preserve them," Coun. Pete Bowen said. "I think it's a good solution. I'm pleased it's at least going to be in Simcoe County, so it's nearby."

According to a report prepared by city staff, Skyline has offered to take all eight cars, as is, at its own expense while providing the city with a \$25,000 non-refundable deposit to defray any costs to the city associated with the transfer.

Skyline has already secured the SS Keewatin — one of the most luxurious in Canadian Pacific Railway's once-mighty Great Lakes steamship fleet — from the previous owner in Michigan, with the intention of returning the great ship to its home off the shores of Port McNicoll.

With the addition of the railcars, Skyline is hoping to create a historical destination for tourists, as well as a quaint downtown setting for locals, Sneyd said.

“We see an advantage to keeping the Ossawippi cars in Huronia. The opportunity to bring all these historical gems together back to one location is unique,” he said. “We want to help reinvent Port McNicoll as one of the reasons people come to Huronia.”

With archival research on hand, Skyline plans to spend the time and money necessary to refurbish the units for their new home, Sneyd said, noting there is the possibility of them functioning as a restaurant once more.

With council still needing to ratify the decision, the timing and details of the contract have yet to be decided.

“I’d like to see it done before our prime tourist season occurs in the summertime so it’s not disruptive to that. I’d also like to have them moved before they’re subject to any vandalism. They’re certainly a liability to the city just having them sitting there,” Bowen said. “From that aspect, I hope they’re gone sooner than later. At the same time, they are a bit of an icon at that part of our waterfront and we’ll miss them.”

Skyline plans to take hold of the train cars as soon as possible, Sneyd said, adding he hopes they will be in place in June for the Keewatin’s homecoming.

— With files from Sara Ross

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