

to: **Capital Infrastructure Committee of the Brock University Board of Trustees**

from: **Rodman Hall Alliance**

Re: **Future of Rodman Hall Art Centre**

Date: November 14, 2016

Summary:

This report and recommendations arise from concerns raised by the recent public consultations undertaken by Interkom on behalf of Brock University concerning the future of the Rodman Hall Art Centre.

Brock University has a legal obligation to operate Rodman Hall Art Centre as a professional art museum until 2023, and if Brock should decide to discontinue its ownership at that time it has a responsibility to the community, to donors, to public funders, and to the Canada Revenue Agency to ensure a transition to a sustainable entity that will maintain the collections in public trust and provide a professional art museum experience to the citizens of St. Catharines and the Niagara region.

A plan for responsible transition already exists and it is our understanding it was approved by Brock's Board of Trustees in September 2015. This plan, the Rodman Hall Task Force Report, facilitated by respected arts consultant Janis Barlow, proposes to:

- cultivate partners for Rodman's four core businesses (public art museum; learning centre, historic site, public gardens) to sustain future operations;
- develop an endowment; and
- safeguard Rodman's assets and enable fundraising through establishment of a community property trust.

Under this plan, once the transition is fully realized Brock's commitment to Rodman Hall would be a contract-for-services to ensure continued pedagogical and research support for Brock's academic mission.

In contrast, at the recent public consultations Interkom presented "options" for Rodman Hall heavily weighted in favour of establishing a new downtown gallery under the governance of a new entity, the Art Gallery of Niagara. Unsupported by any credible financial projections and totally ignoring the issue of downstream operating costs, this option was vociferously rejected at all four public consultations.

This direction does not withstand any knowledgeable analysis, is clearly unpopular, and if pursued further will only do irreparable harm to Brock's reputation among the community and donors. We urge the restitution of the Rodman Hall Task Force Report as the map for addressing this issue, and urge that Brock work with Rodman Hall staff and Advisory Board and relevant community interests to ensure its orderly implementation.

Context:

Community Consultations, conducted by Interkom Marketing on behalf of the Brock University Board of Trustees between October 27 and November 3 were advertised as an opportunity to discuss how Rodman Hall could sustain itself beyond the 2023 expiry of the current agreement with Brock University.

Interkom presented 3 options for the future of Rodman Hall:

- 1) do nothing and watch Rodman Hall crumble without support;
 - 2) improve the Rodman Hall facility and incur unreasonable costs for which no one will fundraise;
- and
- 3) build a new facility in downtown St Catharines by turning Rodman Hall over to developers.

The consultant therefore focused the 'problem' on the building and assets of Rodman Hall; not on the institution's viability and sustainability. Their interest in transition from dependency on Brock University stopped with half the story.

In addition to a mistaken problem definition, the consultant supplied inaccurate and misleading information and evidence to support assumptions underlying their three options. For instance, to undergird their view that Rodman Hall infrastructure will be too costly to upgrade, they presented a sum of \$7.5 million (2010 dollars) and suggested that much more would be required to bring Rodman Hall up to Category A status* and satisfy coming accessibility requirements. Indeed, a 2010 report (See Lundholm Report below) forecast such costs for improving and significantly expanding Rodman Hall. Interkom failed to mention that Rodman Hall has - since 2010 - implemented much of the first phase of improvements recommended in the Lundholm report and Rodman Hall's Category A status has been reaffirmed. Experts estimate the cost of further accessibility accommodations will not likely to exceed \$20,000.

Interkom's eagerness to paint a rosy picture for the prospect of building a new art gallery has led them to mislead the community on the actual costs of improving the current Rodman Hall building and to misrepresent the true capital required to construct a new gallery. Their estimate for building a new gallery was \$10 - \$15 million - a figure that is optimistic, if not unrealistic.

Interkom, a marketing and fundraising consultant, did not in any way address the realities of programming and operation for the present Rodman Hall or, for that matter, for a new gallery. Instead they focused on the construction of a new facility predicated on vague assertions that funding would flow from real estate development of the current Rodman Hall property. The consultant suggests that there is weak community commitment to the future of Rodman Hall itself citing poor fundraising results in the past. They ignore the severe limitations on fundraising imposed on Rodman Hall by the University. The consultant went on to assert, while providing no evidence, that only the promise a new building would garner significant future community investment.

The consultants proposed no community partnerships for sustaining a public art gallery beyond that of a newly formed organization - Art Gallery of Niagara - created for the purpose of accepting ownership of Rodman Hall's art collection. This group has no stated interest in Rodman Hall itself, only its assets. Neither the consultant nor representatives of the Art Gallery of Niagara have attempted to provide any insights into the legal requirements for the transfer of this community asset, especially considering that its collections are a public trust and subject to federal requirements concerning cultural property, as well as the professional standards issued by the Canadian Art Museum Directors Organization and the Association of Art Museum Directors.

Despite all this, the overwhelming response from those present at the Interkom community consultations, was a desire to maintain and enhance Rodman Hall rather than abandon it and build a new building

elsewhere. Furthermore, evidence of the level of concern within the local, regional and national community about the potential abandonment of Rodman Hall can be seen in the petition which in the course of two weeks garnered more than 1000 signatures.

It is critical for the Capital Infrastructure Committee to have and consider the full record surrounding the current and potential state of Rodman Hall as well as a comprehensive plan for securing Rodman Hall's future through community partnership. We believe this forms a thorough and sound rationale that counters the notion that the construction of a new gallery facility in downtown St. Catharines constitutes a viable plan for Rodman Hall as it seeks to transition from its dependence on Brock University. Therefore **we posit an alternative problem definition: In light of Brock University's declared intention to withdraw from support of Rodman Hall in 2023, a new sustainable model of capital and operational funding needs to be established that leverages wider community and stakeholder support of the Rodman Hall as an art museum; learning centre, historic site and public gardens.**

Rodman Hall vs a new downtown Niagara Art Gallery

The consultant and his principal stakeholders are donors and major supporters of the Performing Arts Centre. They believe that a nearby art gallery will augment visitor traffic downtown. In fact, art galleries operate entirely differently from Performing Arts Centres. Art Galleries are destination attractions which benefit from having outdoor sculpture, historic components, public gardens and a national reputation stretching over 50 years. Rodman Hall is already easily within a coherent cultural district and the new Burgoyne Bridge will bring this district more closely into focus. Downtown St. Catharines may be a good location in future for a civic or regional satellite exhibition gallery but at current property prices it will never be able to economically serve all the functions that Rodman Hall does.

We were told by the consultant who has done no serious study of recent museums development that a new gallery would cost between \$10 - 15 million. Experts suggest a gallery that provides what Rodman Hall features would cost much more. The new Judith and Norman Alix Gallery in Sarnia, which cost \$10.3 million, was cited by the consultant as a model for St. Catharines as a replacement for Rodman Hall. It is a renovation of a former department store with only 18,400 sq. ft. (some of it leased) and no gardens and other complementary features. It is hardly comparable to Rodman Hall Art Centre. The new Arts Court development in Ottawa, also cited by the consultant, will provide 63,076 sq. ft for the Ottawa Art Gallery and cost in excess of \$100 million. These examples do not constitute a clear-eyed analysis of the needs, options, capital and multi-level government partnerships required to replace Rodman Hall with a new gallery in downtown St. Catharines.

A more ambitious and achievable goal is to maintain and develop St. Catharines as a nationally significant arts and heritage locale. Such a strategy must capitalize on Rodman Hall's name, reputation, virtues and property. Based upon its reputation for excellence as an art museum, Rodman Hall already receives and is further eligible for significant external funding. Further, Rodman Hall is an ideal site to celebrate the Merritt family and the underground railroad tunnels. The gardens that have been financed by Marilyn and Norris Walker should continue to be protected, not only for their unique place in the Canadian landscape but also in order to preserve Brock's integrity as a charitable organization. Rodman Hall's role as an art museum should be expanded and it should continue to protect the collection that has been donated to it by several generations of St. Catharines donors. Finally, we note that Rodman Hall is also an ideal location for Brock's academic requirements and summer art camps for children.

By resuscitating Rodman Hall as a community organization it will be eligible for funding from arts councils and other public entities for which a new gallery organization would not be eligible for several years.

Sustainability for Rodman Hall for beyond 2023

Public art museums, in various scales and formats, provide collection, presentation and interpretation of artworks. What makes an art museum sustainable is strong institutional leadership and funding for

- a) exhibition and other necessary infrastructure such as collections storage; and
- b) professional delivery of programs such as exhibitions, events, and education.

As we have stated, Rodman Hall is more than an art museum - it is the locus for community art education as well as an historical site and cultural landscape that is central to the identity of St. Catharines. Each of these components represents diverse opportunities for public and private funding from community partners.

Hence, a responsible plan for the future of Rodman Hall - as a totality - after Brock steps away must encompass far more than the simple transfer of property and assets and a dream of a new building.

The foundations for a well reasoned transition lie in two expert reports that have already been commissioned by Brock University and conducted by eminent museum and arts professionals. These reports clearly lay out credible and well researched approaches for improving Rodman Hall's infrastructure and sustaining its operation.

The 2010 Lundholm Report - Infrastructural Sustainability

The Lundholm Report was commissioned by Brock University in 2010 to provide a plan for improvement and expansion of Rodman Hall.

The report constitutes an exhaustive assessment of all Rodman Hall facilities (Building envelope and structure as well as systems) that support the core mission of Rodman Hall: visitor services, exhibitions, education and public programs, collections/preparation, and administration. It included a comprehensive needs analysis and a two phase improvement/expansion development plan pegged at \$7.5 M (estimated at \$10 M in 2016 dollars). The first phase included steps necessary for Rodman Hall to regain its Category A status* which is a prerequisite for federal funding programs. This work has been concluded thus ensuring that the facility meets professional standards such that it can accept significant donations and qualify for Cultural Property Export Review Board acquisitions funding. The remaining expansion work defined by the report can be carried out in the future as capital fundraising permits.

We submit that this analysis and development plan by one of the world's most respected museum planners, Michael Lundholm, provides a thorough basis that achieves all necessary planning and design objectives the community needs for expansion of Rodman Hall. The overall plan is respectful of the historic Rodman Hall facility and its surrounding gardens while establishing a stronger image for the Centre as a venue for contemporary art. It places dominant architecture at the front of the site to create a more prominent entrance and clarify circulation while adding new program spaces.

The 2015 Rodman Hall Task Force Report (Barlow Report) - Operational Sustainability

The Barlow Report was commissioned by the Rodman Hall Advisory Board. It was undertaken in the Summer of 2015 by the Rodman Hall Task Force consisting of:

- Stuart Reid (Chair)
- Donna Scott

Val Fleming
Tim Rigby
Peter Vietgen
Norman Bradshaw
Donna Szoke
Duncan MacDonald
Ben Mosher
Catherine Parayre
Sharilyn Ingram
Derek Knight
Danny Custodio

It was facilitated by professional arts consultant, Janis Barlow.

The Task Force's purpose was to outline a plan for Rodman Hall Arts Centre operation so as to reduce its financial dependence on Brock University. Their report, delivered to and approved by Brock's Board of Trustees and was adopted as University policy in September, 2015. The plan proposes to cultivate partners for Rodman's four core businesses (public art museum; learning centre; historic site; public gardens) to sustain future operations, develop an endowment, and safeguard Rodman's assets and enable fundraising through establishment of a community property trust.

To be more specific, the Barlow report recommended Rodman Hall revert to its pre-2003 ownership model as engaged with and accountable to the St. Catharines and Niagara communities. Brock's commitment would be reduced to a contract for pedagogical services. The City of St. Catharines, Region of Niagara, Niagara College and other clients will take on greater commitment to Rodman Hall for Art Museum, Art Education, Public Gardens and History Centre on a fee-for service basis.

The Urgent Recommendation of the Rodman Hall Alliance

1.
 1. That the Capital Infrastructure Committee reject any recommendation that suggests transferring Rodman Hall property and assets to any entity
 - a) whose sole purpose is to accept such assets;
 - b) with no established track record as a neutral champion of the public trust or arts presenter;
 - c) with no concrete, professional, and well documented plan for gallery sustainability; and
 - d) has not demonstrated that its plan meets the criteria of the Cultural Property Review Board.
2.
 2. That the Capital Infrastructure Committee urge the Brock University Board of Trustees to reaffirm its adoption of the Barlow Report as policy of the institution and to begin implementation of the report immediately. Rodman Hall's Advisory Board should be tasked with securing Rodman Hall through a property trust and cultivate partners for four lines of business: art museum, learning centre, historic site and public gardens. To that end the Advisory Board will work with new civic partners to
 - a) establish new governance structures that include the legal establishment of a property trust to assume control of Rodman Hall after 2023;
 - b) create a sustainable operational funding model based on fee-for-service agreements with key partners to be fully implemented by 2023.

c) immediately find community collaborators to share capital costs of improvements to meet accessibility standards. In the medium to long term, Rodman Hall leadership is urged to work with community stakeholders using the Lundholm recommendations as a basis for a planned expansion.

*Category A designation is defined by the Cultural Property Export and Import Act. Designation assures that institutions meet specific criteria including: legal, collections management and environmental requirements to properly care for, preserve and make publicly accessible, objects or collections that are of "outstanding significance and national importance to Canadian heritage."

Jean Bridge

Artist and curator. A founder of the Ottawa Arts Court and the Ottawa Art Gallery and nGen Niagara Interactive Generator (now the Generator at One). Retired faculty, Department of Visual Arts, Brock University. Former board member of Access Canada; Red Head Art Gallery, Extension Gallery, Print and Drawing Council of Canada.

Sharilyn Ingram

Past Director, Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts; former Deputy Director, Art Gallery of Ontario; former Director of Policy, Planning and Management Services of the National Museums of Canada; Chair, Fellow, Canadian Museums Association.

Elizabeth Hayden

alumna of Brock University holding honours degrees with distinction in both business administration and visual art.

Elizabeth Chitty

Interdisciplinary artist with work in museums such as the National Gallery and Hamilton Art Gallery. Former Director of ANNPAC, consultant in the Visual arts office of the Ontario Arts Council, executive director of St. Catharines and Area Arts Council and Developer of St. Catharines first Cultural Policy.

Sandy Middleton

Artist and arts entrepreneur. Current member of City of St. Catharines Culture Committee. Creator of the St. Catharines Legacy Project.