

# Battery Facility Consultation Report

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## Background

Memorial University purchased the former Battery Hotel, located on Signal Hill in St. John's, on March 31, 2013, as part of a solution to a pressing campus space shortage, a lack of graduate student accommodations and to help establish the university's provincial public engagement activities. With the acquisition of the property, Memorial University has a unique opportunity for a bold and progressive expansion to campus infrastructure. With stunning harbour and city views, this great physical setting and downtown location presents new opportunities for the university to interact with the community.

The location is planned to be a provincial public engagement hub which offers the university an opportunity to establish a presence in downtown St. John's while also addressing some of its pressing space needs. In its initial phase, the property will provide four Memorial University units that engage with the public regularly with a highly accessible location from which to do so. In addition to these units, graduate student accommodations will also be located at the property and there will be conference and public spaces. Further site development is possible over the long-term as future phases of this project advance over time.

The Battery Facility presents an exciting and active location for the university and community to connect and work collaboratively on a variety of the province's priorities and opportunities. With the volume of traffic drawn to the building from the initial tenants, combined with the active flow of individuals to Signal Hill (approx. 750,000 annually), the Battery Facility will be a showcase for all that is Memorial University and a gateway into its teaching & learning, research and public engagement activities.

## Project Progress

Since the purchase of the Battery Facility a number of identified maintenance projects have occurred and the contents of the property have been either removed or re-distributed throughout Memorial University, as appropriate. In addition, a conceptual master plan was commissioned in September 2013 and received at the end of February 2014. This document helped to bring the overall vision of transforming the former hotel into a public engagement hub to life and has set the stage for the more detailed architectural design phase.

Following receipt of this document the university engaged in a public consultation to share the progress of the project and conceptual vision for the property, while also inviting feedback. Through this process the public had an opportunity to submit potential ongoing public engagement programming ideas which could occur in the main public engagement space of the facility as well as potential partnership initiatives for the unallocated portions of the property which the university would consider for future phases of the development. General comments and considerations were also collected to assist with the next architectural design phases and the facility's operational planning.

## Consultation Process Overview

From March 12 – June 26, 2014, Rob Greenwood, executive director of public engagement, and Jordan Wright, project manager, of Memorial University's Office of Public Engagement hosted 20 information and consultation sessions with a variety of stakeholders from across the province regarding Memorial University's Battery Facility. Face-to-face sessions were hosted in St. John's, Corner Brook, and Happy Valley-Goose Bay and were also supported by an online consultation platform, hosted through the Battery Facility website.

In total, close to 300 individuals participated in the public consultations; learning of the university's plans for the facility and progress to date, while also providing their input to help shape the future of the project and development.

## Feedback Summary

Through the consultation process it became evident that there was strong support for the university's vision and intended uses of the facility and site, both from the public and business community. There was a sense of genuine appreciation from participants that the university would seek their input into the project and allow them an opportunity to help shape what the facility could become for the community and university.

The consultation also yielded a number of high-level recommendations and considerations to help the project succeed in achieving its vision as the process advances. These elements should help to focus discussions moving forward and are summarized at a high level below, with a complete capture, organized by theme, available in Appendix A of this report:

- The Battery Facility could be positioned as a recruitment tool for the university. To succeed as such it needs to be operated and staffed accordingly.
- The Battery Facility could be a showcase and portal into the university's activities and programming – similar to an interpretation centre. It could serve to orient people to the university and how best to connect with it. The perceived challenge is there has to be a draw for the public to genuinely engage.
- Movement to and from the space is seen as an important element to the facility's success. Transportation (shuttle, carpool, public transit access), traffic control (in the neighbourhood, roundabout, new access road) and parking (enforcement, access, alternatives) all require consideration as planning advances.
- Visual and performing arts were identified as topics of specific interest. It was recommended the university consider ways to incorporate visual art both in the interior and exterior of the site and that both visual and performing art could fit within the existing or unallocated space.

- There is demand for a downtown public library and/or reading room. It was recommended the university consider ways to incorporate some of these elements in either physical or virtual form.
- The name of the facility is a divided topic that warrants further consideration. Some believe the name is too firmly rooted in St. John's specific culture while others feel it is inevitable it will retain its former name.
- The multi-use/purpose of the facility was strongly supported; however, privacy and security were identified as themes for future planning in terms of finding ways to make the variety of spaces connected yet distinct. Soundproofing, building materials and respecting the balance between public and private space and living were associated with this discussion.
- To realize the vision of a provincial public engagement hub, it was felt the facility would require appropriate technological infrastructure and equipment investment. The facility's connectivity will warrant further exploration as planning advances to match the programming requirements.
- The exterior of the building and site received a lot of attention. It was frequently asked whether the university could make significant alterations to improve the exterior look of the building given its financial investment in the project. Participants also felt that gardens and landscaping could also be used to enhance the site.
- The university's decision-making regarding the future of the City View and Pool Wing was understood and well received during the sessions. The general sentiment received from the public and various professionals was that the university would be better served by removing this section of the facility and re-developing based on identified programming and budget.

## Next Steps

The public consultations proved very helpful in garnering support for the university's vision and plans for the site, while also introducing and affirming a number of concepts and considerations which now require attention as the planning for the facility continues to advance. Specific next steps include:

- Provide this summary document to the public as well as to the design architects contracted for the project
- Establish advisory groups in the areas of Programming, Operations & Logistics and Technology to further consider and advance planning in these areas, as an input for the design process and facility's operations
- Explore partnership opportunities further with the Battery Executive Management Committee to determine which opportunities to pursue in the next phase of the project and to make a decision regarding the unallocated portion of the facility

## **APPENDIX A: Detailed Record of Feedback Received During Consultation**

*The following is a more direct capture of the feedback received during consultation sessions, both in-person and online, organized thematically. These details are being shared as captured, and do not imply the university's endorsement or intention to advance them.*

### **Commonly Asked Questions**

- Will classes be taught at the Battery?
- Is there a way to incorporate sustainable design principles and have green spaces at the site?
- When will the facility be open to the public?
- Is there anything you can do to improve the exterior of the building?
- How many people can fit in the conference facilities?
- Are you going to have public washrooms – how do you control that?
- Are you going to have a shuttle with main campus?
- Will it have accommodations for visitors – conference or out of town?
- What disciplines of grad students will be living there?

### **Consultation Process**

- If a developer had purchased it, we likely wouldn't have this kind of opportunity for input – it's a lot better that the university purchased it.
- I appreciate MUN's efforts to give people some ownership of what it's going to become.
- Will the public get access to the submissions – to continue the public engagement?
- What is your process for evaluating submissions?
- Can you share the lessons learned with others?

### **Technology**

- There needs to be technology to connect activities happening at the facility with the public, university etc...
- Distance Education Learning and Teaching Supports (DELTS) needs to be heavily involved with the next architects.
- I'm assuming there is going to be free wifi in the building – take them directly to the MUN website when they login.
- Being able to web conference and connect from the facility would be significant. It would help make activities accessible to our membership.

## Operations / Logistics

- How will you handle undesirable building traffic/visitors?
- There is nowhere to go downtown to study after 10pm. Maybe the café / bar should be open all night?
- We would recommend some grassroots and healthy options for the café / bar – have it represent the culture and ethnicity of St. John's.
- Would rather a set caterer not be mandatory for groups using the space.
- What protocols will there be to deal with issues of privacy and security.
- Maybe you have a non-profit / community rate for your space.
- It is challenging to have full-sized buses on the road with cars parked on either side. Recommend Go-Bus size if considering shuttle etc...
- People use the Battery and GEO Centre lot now for free parking. If it becomes pay for use we are concerned it will force further parking traffic on our roads, which means we can't park in front of our own houses.
- I have a concern about the hours they work on the site. You have to respect noise bylaws. Why is parking lot clearing happening so early / late at night?
- You can't underestimate the value of having knowledgeable customer service people working there.
- You are going to generate a lot of traffic. What have you done about urban design? Hope you have engaged with the city and other levels of government to integrate with an improved urban system – think about roundabouts.
- Will outside groups be allowed to charge guests for programming happening there?
- Will other units be charged for the use of space/rooms there?

## General

- What is the public draw to enter the building? Why would I turn off the road while driving to Signal Hill?
  - There has to be rotating and changing activities and programming for it to be successful.
- A restaurant is a good idea, and will help to break down barriers.
- Make sure to differentiate how teaching, learning and research are happening there vs. traditional thinking.
- Are there ways to collaborate with our provincial government? Under the open data and access to information and research.
- Be sure to consider sound proofing so there isn't disruption felt by different users (Gardiner, Conference space, Grad students).
- This can be a window into the university for those who don't interact with it often.
- How are you going to promote / communicate what activities are happening there?

- Will community groups and not for profits with no budget be able to access and use facilities at the building? We would love to see NGO involvement.
- You should focus on outcome oriented and experiential learning at the Battery.
- Maybe there could be a blend of co-working / shared space – similar to the commonground model.
- Would there be special bookings available for student clubs and societies?
- Does getting people going to the Battery mean people can engage with the university? Should we be worried about taking people away from campus?
- Our community groups need meeting and collaboration space – most don't have money however.
- I'm surprised to hear it won't be in competition with the private sector, with hotel rooms and weddings. Other places are doing this as a revenue generator.
- How are you going to balance the public's needs with the impression that MUN is a privileged tenant of the space?
- Will the units moving to the Battery still do programming on main MUN campus?
- What about office space for retired faculty?
- Happy to hear you won't be competing with the private sector.
- There is a gap in the 200-300 person sized conference facilities in the market.
- Overall we are delighted with what you're trying to do, and the space is desperately needed in the city.
- It's remarkable what you're trying to accomplish here.
- Will you be upgrading the exterior look of the building – siding. Can you do something to clean it up?
- This seems like a perfect recruitment opportunity – subtle, not overt. You need to have knowledgeable people working there who can answer a breadth of questions about the university and its programming.
- You have four university units going in when it first opens – have you thought about the other side – are you trying to have community partners there when you open?
- I can see teaching & learning and research happening in the building – but what about creative activity – specifically the arts?
- Is it possible to see the Jim Case study regarding the feasibility of a downtown multi-purpose arts facility? That could inform how you use your building – or if some things are needed or not.
- Have you given consideration to the name? It could benefit from a more distinctive name.
  - “The Battery” is townie slang for a particular neighbourhood. I suggest Signal Hill Campus, or something with Signal Hill in it. As presented in your video, the facility is about signaling the way forward.
  - Consideration of using Grace M. Sparkes in the naming of facility / portion. Her lifelong support of MUN, former member of Board of Regents, Alumni of the Year. She lived a life of public engagement and contribution.

- What a beautiful building it will be. This is a very exciting project for the city and community. Just think – it could have been a casino – or even worse, it could have continued with what it was.
- Maybe you should see if there are things the new convention centre couldn't accommodate that you would be interested in.
- Either use the unallocated space for grad student accommodations or tear down the City View wing on and start from scratch. It's the oldest section and more costly to renovate, you would be wasting your time trying to get other new tenants for that section. You should also add some further parking in the process.
- Municipalities face a number of challenges – maybe some Genesis Clients could connect with them to help relating to those needs?
- Having Gardiner Centre and a training facility on site could also open up possibilities for partners to help build capacity.
- One concern – is a project such as this the start of government going to move more services to St. John's?
- I see it as a platform to reach out – to help make Labrador feel more a part of Newfoundland and to make it feel included in day to day activities happening at Memorial.
- Most universities have a guest house for visitors – worth noting if you're thinking international.
- The Battery Facility is a great leaping off point, into a new topic area – public engagement – helps to make it real.
- I like the analogy of a stage – there are stages down below, and the building itself is a stage for programming.
- The interpretation model is very appealing. It would be nice to be able to bring businesses in to build awareness of your partners and possible collaborations.
- Make sure you stay true to your criteria or the building will lose its identity and you'll get overwhelmed. Not everything can happen here.
- Consider opening up the Battery to all profiles of students – undergraduate and graduate.

## Design

- Make sure you build in accessibility as you are doing your planning – it's much easier to do it up front – maybe you should engage the Blundon Centre.
- It's an opportunity to showcase sustainability at the university. (BOMA Best Program as an example, LEED certification).
- Does it make sense to switch to a staging kitchen when you already have a production kitchen? This could add cost to bring food onsite.
- I would question the logic of keeping the large kitchen.
- Make sure you have double airwalls for sound, and put in as many subdividers as possible for the space.
- What kind of interaction will there be between grad students and public spaces?
- Should you consider engaging a landscape architect long term?

- You should have a user group going through the process, this will help you catch omissions from your design (eg. where is storage, how to open door while carrying things).
- We hope you aren't considering building higher on the property – you would have a lot of objection if you did.
- You should consider the pathways for people trying to access the public washrooms in the building – allowing access while not interfering or intruding on building activities.
- Maybe you can get a local artist to paint a mural on it. It's one of the ugliest buildings in the city, there has to be something you can do within your budget to improve it?
- What are the acoustics going to be of the spaces? You need to think about this if arts groups are going to use the space.
- The zoning and development regulations were put there as a condition for the previous owner. I would expect Memorial would have more respect for the cultural heritage of the area than to build up the site further.
- Be sure to consider the lighting and sound when designing the conference and public spaces.
- Don't forget to build in storage space.
- Glass doesn't contain sound that well. How are you going to manage the sound? Make sure you think about soundproofing.

### **Parking / Transportation**

- There is a car sharing cooperative being worked on in the city – maybe it could help with your transportation challenges?
- How much will parking cost at the Battery? Will there also be meters for the public?
- Will you differentiate between MUN and the public for parking?
- Monitoring and enforcing your parking can be a huge issue, also people parking there overnight and vandalism.
- Have you considered approaching the city / province about putting a new road in across from the Battery that comes out behind the workers' compensation building / Miller Centre? This could alleviate a lot of traffic pressures and increase access, especially during the winter.
- Underground parking would be an enticement to potential tenants if you do a rebuild.
- A regularly scheduled shuttle service could be offered between various MUN locations [Marine Institute, St. John's Campus, Ocean Science Centre, Battery Facility + other].
- Having Bicycle Racks on a potential shuttle/bus could be useful.



## Programming / Activities

- Civic engagement group working on programming ideas.
- Semester in dialogue – think of ways to bring community and government leaders together.
- Find ways to get teaching and research happening at the building.
- Maybe install large television screens. For example the Olympics. People gather for events – maybe you can have a booth / screen as a feature space for people to gather?
- Graduate students may be interested in running a speaker series and weekly seminars?
- You should engage faculties and departments to get things to display or people on site on a rotating basis. This will keep the public interested.
- The Battery will be about public engagement and a showcase. This is a place where faculties can showcase on a rotating basis. It could be easier to see what Memorial is doing in an hour at the battery than in three days on campus.
  - Maybe the Battery is a portal into Memorial – to help orient people – like a visitor centre?
- What about a community garden?
  - Is it worth putting a new garden in if there are other gardens you could partner with instead to help develop theirs?
- Think about how you can bring the programming outside the building on the site.
  - Maybe you could have a public boardwalk – with traditional Newfoundland posts and ropes – integrating the walkway with the trail system?
  - Maybe a walking path – you could have encased art or photography with a descriptor to challenge people, make it issue focused?
- Maybe a communities gallery – make it more provincial – like a living museum?
- Opportunities to connect with Arts & Culture facilities across the province.
- You have a good mix going into the building. You are missing tourism, folklore and history, if you are going to be successful in making this facility a window for the university.
- I think you should put a giftshop in there. The university on the hill – it’s a great opportunity to put something in there to draw people in to the building.
- Is there a way to promote Memorial’s digital collection. Maybe the Battery could be a way to promote this further and get the word out?
- Perhaps you could have stand up kiosks with ipads for people to check their mail and socialize.
- There should be an opportunity for visual and performing arts in the space.
- Have a session where towns bring their challenges in and see what happens.
- Is there an opportunity for the library to put some of its resources up there?
- Do you think there can be a focus on connecting MUN & NL to global events? Our perspective often seems to stop at our geographical borders. This could help us connect internationally and to the world.
- From a “pracademics” standpoint we would like more connections between policy people and academics. Maybe this could be a creative place where we could connect. A policy and innovation lab perhaps? This could be a catalyst for pracademics.

## **Life at the Facility**

- Have you considered a space for childcare? For people attending events? Maybe you ask the community to set up an operation – or maybe it's something you share with the GEO CENTRE?
- Maybe an ambassador program for graduate students as part of the life and community of the facility?
- Does there need to be an advisory board for the Battery? Including Faculty, staff, students, tenants, neighbours etc...
- You should have bicycle stalls and lockers inside where backpacks and things can be secured.
- Maybe you could have some business incubation in the unallocated space? Similar to the Quidi Vidi Coop.
- Have you considered temporary grad student accommodations? Short term availability for students.
- Are you going to put an exercise room / wellness centre in there – given its distance from main campus?
- There isn't much separation between students' living area and the rest of the building. How are students going to feel like they are "home" and not living on top of the building?
- Is there a way for grad students to enter privately into the facility at all hours?
- Are graduate students going to be willing to live there while the main renovations are ongoing?

## **Art**

- Have you considered commissioning some public artist or displaying art? You should engage local artistry.
- If you want people coming to this place you need to make it a destination. Think about why people would come. Memorial should get part of its art collection up there. Display it and rotate it.
- Wondering if you could have an exhibition space for NL born artists – some way to publicize/display their works in the community spaces.
- What consideration have you given to artistic design – hanging works, tapestry in the atrium spaces – similar to hospital in Labrador.

## **Ideas for the unallocated space**

- Our university and city is impoverished for theatres. The pool area could be a state of the art theatre facility – maybe you should approach theatre and film partners?
- What about a downtown library?
- There is a lack of performance space. There is so much happening in the local film community, many looking for screening or performance space.

- You should keep the pool area as a public pool. It would be good for bringing the community together.
- You should speak with MUNPA regarding having accommodations for retired faculty at the site
- Has the university bookstore shown interest in being in the space? The location has potential to sell books about NL.
- Maybe you could have a science centre there – but maybe this conflicts with GEO Centre?
- Maybe a reading room or library? A reading / research craft room could bring in startup companies, bring in technologies and revenues. The space could include a digital innovation hub and 3D printer to encourage start-up companies and technology companies – could be an innovative community space.
- Retired faculty office space. Retirees are a knowledgeable base who have time to commit for activities at an active facility.
- Would you consider opening up this space to host trade shows?
- You could turn the pool into a big black box room – with installations and art that has an impact on public opinion.
- There is nowhere in the city where you can reimagine conference space – this is a space where you could get creative for a group of 200-800.
- Maybe you could have some sort of planning lab or GIS lab.
- NGOs have been interested in shared space. I don't know if there's a movement or plan already advancing or not.