



# COUNCIL REQUEST FOR DECISION

**MEETING DATE:** March 30, 2026

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**REPORT TITLE:** Dr. Woods' House Museum and Unified Heritage Operator Options Report - March 30, 2026

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2025, Council selected the Unified Heritage Operator (UHO) as the preferred governance and operating model for Dr. Woods' House Museum and directed Administration to prepare transition plan options. To support this direction, Administration engaged EM Museum Consulting and Elevate the Path to complete Phase 2: Executive Costs & Planning Summary and a companion presentation on the transition to a Unified Heritage Operator. The results of this work were presented to Council on February 2, 2026. At that time, Council requested additional information on a seasonal, student supported, City-operated option which has been provided herein.

This March 30 report provides Council with 5 options for decision: 3 UHO options, one status quo option, and one City-operated option. Each option yields different deliverables which can be compared against each other in Attachment 1. The recommendation reflects Council directions to date; however, alternatives provide options to reconsider asset use (options for what the building and land could be used for) and/or options to reconsider asset operations/governance models (options for how museum services could be delivered).

## RECOMMENDATION

That Council directs Administration to bring forward a Request for Decision report for a Service Level Adjustment based on Option #\_\_\_\_\_, as described in the March 30, 2026 Council agenda report "Dr. Woods' House Museum and Unified Heritage Operator Options Report - March 30, 2026", that includes budget impacts for 2026 and subsequent years.

## COUNCIL HISTORY

- *November 6, 2023 – Dr. Woods' House Update*  
Council received an update confirming Leduc & District Heritage Society (LDHS)'s decision to end its occupancy, the transfer of collection stewardship to the City, and the need for one-time funding to support collections work and an operational assessment.
- *December 9, 2024 – Dr. Woods' House Update*  
Council was advised that the collection was significantly larger than anticipated (over 15,000 artifacts vs. the original estimate of 5,000), that staffing and collection transfer delays had extended timelines, and that a consultant had been engaged to explore sustainable operational models.
- *March 3, 2025 – Asset Use (Operations)*  
Council received "Dr. Woods' House – Asset Use (Operations)" report outlining the need for a long-term operating direction and committing Administration to return with a Request for Decision on governance options and recommendations from the Parks, Recreation & Culture (PRC) Board.

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- *March 3, 2025 – Asset Management (Collections)*  
Council received “*Dr. Woods’ House – Asset Management (Collections)*” report which confirmed the size and scope of the collection and presented options to complete the cataloguing and digitization work.
- *March 24, 2025 – Museum Operating Governance Model*  
Council received “*Dr. Woods’ House – Museum Operating Governance Model*” report, along with the related PRC Board recommendation, outlining the Unified Heritage Operator (UHO) as the preferred model. Council directed Administration to prepare a transition plan and related Service Level Adjustment for consideration during the 2026 budget process and allocated \$45,000 to do so.
- *February 2, 2026 – Dr. Woods’ House Museum: Unified Heritage Operator Model*  
The purpose of this report was to provide Council with the financial and operational context required to understand the UHO options and to prepare for a Service Level Adjustment Request for Decision. The report included Class D costing as well as a transition cost framework (see Attachment 2) for three UHO staffing/service options (1–3), plus a status quo option (4). The report was accepted for information; additional information was requested by Council to bring back an alternate option for a seasonal, student supported, City-operated model.

### BACKGROUND / RATIONALE

Council approved the Cultural Development Strategy (2021–2025), which identifies City-owned cultural sites (including Dr. Woods’ House and the Grain Elevator) within a long-term facility framework and calls to pursue the creation of a “Leduc Heritage Authority” as an arms-length organization to provide governance, leadership, and fiscal stewardship for heritage.

Most recently, the City commissioned research, benchmarking, and engagement work (2024–2025) to better understand current heritage trends, gather community input (see *Phase 1: WWH Report - Leduc Heritage 2024* on the City’s website), and evaluate sustainable operational models for Dr. Woods’ House Museum within the context of Leduc’s broader heritage landscape. This work identified sector pressures affecting local sustainability, including escalating infrastructure/operating costs and declining volunteerism, and provided an evidence base for governance modernization and implementation planning.

Operational model analysis found that Hybrid Model 2 (Unified Heritage Operator), a model similar to the “Leduc Heritage Authority” concept, achieved the highest feasibility score and emphasized that, while it improves scalability and coordination across heritage assets, it also demands robust governance systems to manage governance complexity and ensure equitable outcomes across sites.

This became the basis for building transition plan options under the UHO governance model report that Council received on February 2, 2026, and is Administration’s recommended option due to its ranking in access and programs, organizational capacity, revenue and growth, and long-term sustainability (see Attachment 1).

#### **Option 1 – Complete UHO Model (2.8 FTE + seasonal)**

Provides year-round programming, volunteer stewardship, and governance stability, while mitigating operational and stewardship risk. This option aligns with Phase 1 findings and offers the strongest platform for sustainable operations and future multi-site integration.

#### **Option 2 – Reduced UHO Model (1.8 FTE + seasonal)**

Achieves a 21.5% cost reduction of the annual service agreement between the City and UHO. Supports only basic operations, with limited programming, higher burnout risk, and slower revenue and audience growth. Introduces significant sustainability issues.

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Transition costs are identical for both Option 1 and 2; differences only appear after 2028. Option 3 is the only option that reduces transition costs for the city

### **Option 3 – Reduced Transition UHO Model (2.8 FTE + seasonal)**

Supports reduced program research and development undertaken before the transfer to the UHO, as well as slower audience growth, achieving a 2.7% cost savings. Introduces a moderate risk of limited programs available upon transition to the UHO, likely to delay immediate access to external funding opportunities.

### **Option 4 – Status Quo**

Take no immediate action. Conclude the Asset Inventory, approved in March 2025, using previously reallocated and reserved funds. The museum remains closed indefinitely. Return to Operating Models explored in Phase 1 of the DWHM Project.

### **Option 5 – City Operated, Student Supported, Seasonal Opening (see Attachment 3)**

Provides limited public access to Dr. Woods' House Museum with a light service offer and direct municipal staffing. The 2026 and 2027 access formats are intentionally different: 2026 is scoped to what could reasonably be delivered using existing staff capacity, while 2027 assumes additional seasonal staffing support:

2026: A light seasonal opening using existing Cultural Collections Assistants for front-line public hours through some reallocation of existing collection work priorities.

2027: An expanded seasonal opening supplemented by two summer students / interns, with on-site supervision by Cultural Collections Assistant(s).

Scenario is confined to seasonal opening requirements in summer 2026 and summer 2027 only. Consideration of this option as an ongoing service level beyond 2027 would require separate evaluation due to Cultural Collection Assistant staffing positions eliminated after 2027.

## **STRATEGIC / RELEVANT PLANS ALIGNMENT**

The recommended operating model for Dr. Woods' House has been developed to align with the City's strategic priorities, existing cultural/heritage plans, and broader community goals:

- Municipal Historic Resource Designation (Bylaw 690-2007): As a designated Municipal Historic Resource, Dr. Woods' House is legally protected and the recommended model advances that obligation through active stewardship and operations consistent with heritage conservation standards.
- Municipal Development Plan (Bylaw No. 1057-2020): The MDP directs the City to value and protect tangible and intangible heritage and supports built-heritage promotion, Downtown public art, and rehabilitation/re-use/preservation of historic resources (MDP s.2.7).
- Urban Centre Area Redevelopment Plan (Bylaw No. 1199-2024): The UCRP positions the Urban Centre as an anchor for the visitor tourism economy by celebrating diverse history and connecting arts/culture, and it specifically identifies Dr. Woods' House Museum and the Grain Elevator as protected heritage resources requiring active stewardship.
- City of Leduc 2023–2026 Strategic Plan: This recommendation aligns with Goal 1 (Quality of Life) by supporting arts/culture and heritage preservation through sustained museum operations, accessible programming, and community engagement/volunteerism (including Strategies 1.1.1 and 1.1.6).

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- Cultural Development Strategy (2021–2025): The recommended UHO approach aligns with the Strategy’s call for sustainable heritage management and governance capacity (including the Heritage Authority direction) by embedding museum best practices, professional oversight, and partnerships within a City-wide cultural framework.
- Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan (2025–2029): The model supports the Strategy’s focus on tourism development, placemaking, and community identity by strengthening the visitor-ready function of a municipal museum within a connected heritage landscape.
- Public Engagement Framework (2022): The recommendation was shaped through staged engagement designed to ensure community and stakeholder input meaningfully influenced the outcome—supported by clear purpose, multiple participation pathways, and “What We Heard/What We Decided” reporting—and that engagement consistently confirmed community priorities to preserve local history, expand educational opportunities, and strengthen civic identity.

### ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

#### ADMINISTRATION:

Option 1 requires an integrated, cross-departmental transition led by Cultural Development, with targeted support from Facilities, Communications & Marketing, Strategic Services, and other corporate areas, while municipal responsibilities for collections stewardship, asset ownership, and capital remain with the City.

#### RISK ANALYSIS: FINANCIAL / LEGAL:

Option 1 requires higher front-end municipal investment in 2026–2027, but consolidates ongoing operations into a single, predictable UHO Operating Agreement in 2028; legal/governance requirements include incorporation, bylaws, service agreement, and reporting structure, with final legal implications still to be confirmed through implementation.

#### IMPLEMENTATION / COMMUNICATIONS:

Implementation is phased through staffing, governance, SLA, accessibility/readiness work, and launch planning. Communications support is a material implementation requirement and should include both transition/launch communications and continued engagement with heritage partners and advisory participants.

#### ALTERNATIVES:

- Option 1 - Complete Unified Heritage Operator Model
- Option 2 - Reduced Unified Heritage Operator Model
- Option 3 - Reduced Transition Unified Heritage Operator Model
- Option 4 - Status Quo
- Option 5 - City Operated Student Supported Seasonal Opening

If the basis for building a transition plan under a UHO governance model has shifted (if Council is reconsidering asset use and/or governance criteria and priorities), Administration recommends Council revisit these parameters in greater context so that alternate options can be created for Council’s decision. For example, if Council would like to explore City-operated models, additional options to the one proposed by Council on February 2, 2026, could be provided.

- Option 6 - Bring back alternate operating / governance models
- Option 7 - Direct Administration to bring back alternate asset use options

### ATTACHMENTS

1. Qualitative Matrix Comparing 5 Options
2. Detailed Cost Tables from Feb 2 2026 report for Options 1, 2 and 3
3. Option 5 Seasonal City Operated Draft Proposal
4. UHO 5 Options PowerPoint Presentation