

Staff Report

Report To: City Council

Report From: Bradey Carbert, Manager of Corporate Services
Eckhard Pastrik, Manager of Parks and Open Spaces

Meeting Date: June 23, 2025

Report Code: CR-25-083

Subject: Centennial Tower Structural Assessment and Capital Needs Update

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CR-25-083 respecting Centennial Tower Structural Assessment and Capital Needs Update, City Council directs staff to include the cost for the rehabilitation of the Centennial Tower and associated path of travel upgrades in the 2026-2030 Multi-year Capital Plan as an unfunded project until a comprehensive asset management program for facilities has been approved by Council.

Highlights:

- The Centennial Tower was constructed as a Canada Centennial Project and was led by local high schools and the community.
- The tower was rehabilitated in 2001 and has received minor maintenance since then.
- A structural review conducted in 2024 recommended \$265,000 in rehabilitation needs and recommended the closure of the tower due to safety concerns related to the structure.
- The estimated rehabilitation cost to bring the pedestrian access route to the tower to an acceptable standard is \$170,000.
- The tower is recommended to remain closed until the completion of a comprehensive asset management program for all City facilities.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Clear Direction.

By considering the rehabilitation needs of the Centennial Tower alongside the needs of the City's other facilities and other assets, it will ensure that the City maintains the direction of a 1% capital levy increase while attempting to meet approved levels of service.

Climate and Environmental Implications:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Previous Report/Authority:

N/A

Background:

The Centennial Tower, located at 290 9th Avenue East, was built on the foundation of Brown's Lime Works (Wellington Lime Company)—a lime kiln and quarry. Kilns operated on this site beginning in 1887.

The construction of the tower was a "Centennial Project" in 1967 to celebrate Canada's 100th Birthday by the students of the two local high schools—the OSCVI and West Hill Secondary School.

The tower is a landmark that holds significance for residents and visitors who have enjoyed the vista over the City after climbing the circular staircase to the viewing deck.

Funds were raised for the project by selling "Indentures," which were printed by RBW on parchment-like paper, promising the bearer one square foot of land located in the United Schools Centennial Committee Park.

The design for the tower was done by A.M. (Sandy) MacKay, who had offered to design and supervise the construction of the tower. The design moulded the tower out of four pre-stressed concrete sections, twenty-five feet high, that were to be placed on the existing thirty-two-foot steel lime kiln. The concept of using pre-cast concrete beams on end was highly innovative and demonstrated great design ingenuity. A circular steel staircase winds its way

up to the top from the main level. The tower resembles an old fortress-style tower with small windows and a railing around the top.

In 2001, City Council worked with residents, many of whom served on the original School Committees, to restore the tower to its original condition. The project was funded by the City and grant funding through the Main Street Ontario Millennium Funding Program.

Since 2001, the tower has received minor maintenance, including painting, miscellaneous railing repairs, and the replacement of the wooden deck on the ramp that connects the tower to the trail. There have been no structural repairs to the tower.

In August 2024, staff requested that a structural engineer conduct a structural review due to the deterioration of the steel surrounding the concrete structure and other identified deficiencies.

Analysis:

Structural Review Report

GEI Consultants (GEI) completed a structural review of the exposed structural components of the tower on August 23, 2024. The scope of work involved an on-site visual inspection, condition assessment, and an estimate of the costs to rehabilitate or replace the structure's components.

The structural review report includes estimated rehabilitation costs for general project management, concrete repairs, corrosion and recoating repairs, structural repairs and reinforcement, slope stabilization, and contingency and contract administration allowances, totalling an estimated cost of \$265,000.



Immediately upon the completion of the on-site assessment, staff from GEI contacted the City to notify staff about structural concerns that needed to be addressed prior to public use of the tower. The most notable concern was considerable corrosion and section loss of the eastern steel panels that support the upper concrete tower and make up the lower portion of the tower.



It was also identified that the entrance arches of the inner brick layer, supported by the steel panels, are showing signs of deflection, and some bricks have shifted.

GEI recommended that the tower be closed to the public until the City could address structural concerns, as well as pressing issues that were later identified in the structural review report. Parks and Open Spaces installed temporary barriers and signage on August 23, 2024, based on the recommendations of GEI and later replaced the barrier with a more permanent barrier, as well as formal signage on the Centennial Tower wayfinding signage to inform the public of the closure. The barriers, signage, and closure are still in effect.

Additionally, GEI recommended that the trail network immediately adjacent to the tower also be closed. This recommendation was made with an abundance of caution, given the potential risk to the public observed.

Despite best efforts to eliminate public access to the area around and under the tower, ongoing trespass has been an issue.

The Centennial Tower structural review report did not assess the access path from the parking lot down to the tower structure. This is the primary pedestrian access route to the tower that also forms part of the Bruce Trail. There is no defined maintenance access route to the tower. A staff-led assessment identified a series of required trail improvements related to the existing access route surface and slope, railings, and signage. There is also no defined vehicular access route to the tower to support routine maintenance. The estimated rehabilitation cost to bring the pedestrian access route up to an acceptable standard for this prominent location is \$170,000, with the timing dependent on the rehabilitation schedule of the structure. This cost includes design services, construction, construction administration, topographical survey and any required geotechnical testing/sampling.

Risk Management

The structural review report focused on the tower structure only and did not evaluate the surrounding area, use, or operations of the tower.

Hub International, the City's insurance provider, also supports the City's risk management program through the completion of risk assessments. It is the intention of staff to have the insurer conduct a risk assessment report for this location in 2025 so that any recommendations or proposed risk controls can also be included in future rehabilitation plans.

Ongoing Closure and Next Steps

[Report CR-24-107 - 2024 Building Condition Assessments Summary](#) was presented to the Corporate Services Committee on October 10, 2024 and was approved by Council via the Committee minutes on November 4, 2024.

The report identified that building condition assessments were completed on 29 of the City's larger facilities in early 2024 and identified over \$31 million in rehabilitation and replacement needs over the next five years for these facilities. The average annual funding gap for these 29 facilities is \$5.75 million.

Smaller and less complex buildings, like the tower, were not included in the 2024 assessments. Staff plan to complete building condition assessments on an additional 30 buildings this summer and fall to update the condition, asset management, and financial needs for more city-owned facilities.

Staff will then utilize the information from the 2024 and 2025 building condition assessment projects to develop a facility-specific asset management program for all City facilities. This program will include establishing levels of service, developing asset management strategies, and creating a financial plan.

Based on the 2024 BCA project results and the anticipated results of the 2025 assessments, a significant funding gap is expected. Council and staff will need to develop a proposed level of service to mitigate this funding gap. Methods to reduce the funding gap can include additional tax levy increases, increased user fees, third-party contributions, and reducing overall costs through facility rationalization.

As the Centennial Tower does not deliver core services, staff recommend that the Centennial Tower remain closed until funding can be secured for the

project or until a facility-specific asset management program is developed. This will allow all facilities' needs to be evaluated in a holistic manner rather than on an individual basis.

It is also important to note that the City's pursuit of grant funding will not be limited to this project only. It is the City's practice to submit applications for the most eligible projects within the prescribed guidelines when third-party funding becomes available, regardless of whether the project is on a funded or unfunded list.

Parks and Open Spaces staff will continue to monitor the barriers and signage installed at this location throughout the closure period, as part of their regular inspections.

Financial Implications:

The rehabilitation of the tower and the associated improvements to the path of travel are not currently included in the draft 2026-2030 Multi-year Capital Plan.

The Centennial Tower rehabilitation project at a value of \$265,000 and the associated access route improvements at a value of \$170,000 will be added to the unfunded project list in the 2026-2030 Multi-year Capital Plan.

The annual operating budget does not include dedicated funding for activities such as biannual structural inspections, repairs (vandalism), security (daily opening/closing of the facility), or other general maintenance items for this structure. Staff will include these costs in the draft 2026 operating budget and as part of the evaluation of future rehabilitation plans.

Communication Strategy:

The City has installed signage at the Centennial Tower parking area and the tower indicating that the tower is closed. Staff have updated City-maintained websites to reflect the closures and have been in contact with other agencies, that also promote this location to advise of the closure.

Consultation:

Director of Community Services
Parks & Cemetery Supervisor
Chief Building Official

Deputy Chief Building Official
Director of Corporate Services
Corporate Facilities Project Coordinator
City Manager

Attachments:

None.

Recommended by:

Bradey Carbert, Manager of Corporate Services
Eckhard Pastrok, Manager of Parks and Open Spaces

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Bradey Carbert, Manager of Corporate Services at bcarbert@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 ext. 1240.