



Ville de Huntingdon

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Communique

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Non-Renewal of the lease of the Friperie Communautaire

Huntingdon, December 30, 2021 – At the regular meeting held on November 15, the Municipal Council of the Town of Huntingdon decided not to renew the lease contract reached between the Friperie Communautaire and the Town of Huntingdon for the rental of a space in its industrial building at 4, Lorne Street.

As members of a public organization, the Municipal Council of the Town of Huntingdon must adopt honest and responsible conduct in its decision-making and in the achievement of its mission which is in the public interest. One of the important aspects of its mission is to make and allow the safe use of property belonging to the municipality. It is therefore as custodians of public property that the municipal council was informed of the problematic situation caused by the inadequate and excessive storage of objects in the space occupied by the Friperie communautaire. What started out as a minor problem has, over the years, grown out of control.

Over the past few years, prevention visits have enabled our Fire Department to observe several irregularities in the rear part of the Friperie communautaire. Among these irregularities we speak of a blocked exit preventing people from escaping in an emergency, a complete obstruction of the interior fire protection system, inadequate and dangerous electrical connections, an excessive quantity of goods representing a serious threat to the teams of emergency response and complexity for the firefighters to find the occupants in this labyrinth, which represents a risk that they would be trapped, difficult evacuation caused by the large amount of smoke and fire that would be generated and which would prevent the evacuation of occupants as well as those of neighboring properties, high risk for the building of the municipality and for the property of other tenants, etc.

The Town is entitled to expect the occupants of its buildings to exercise foresight and prudence regarding fire risks. It is each and everyone's duty to respect the laws, regulations and standards in force with regard to fire risks. The administration of the Friperie Communautaire has been advised on several occasions to correct the situation but unfortunately no serious action has been taken. Our request to reduce their inventory went unheeded.

Like everyone else, the Town has responsibilities and obligations to its insurance company. In the event of a fire, who would be responsible? The Town for not having acted diligently, or the Friperie Communautaire? Who would be prosecuted? The city or the non-profit organization? We understand here that when we talk about the City, we are talking about the citizens of Huntingdon and be assured that the insurance companies of the other tenants would go out of their way to have the Town recognized the liability for damage to property and their clients' businesses.

In view of this situation, we also have a reality with which another community organization is confronted, La Bouffe Additionnelle. In recent months, La Bouffe Additionnelle reports a sharp increase in demand for its services. The organization's traffic increased with the arrival of applicants who, to date, had never used the services of the food bank. It is understandable that this strong demand is directly linked to the rise in the price of basic necessities in recent months. More requests require more space. The premises currently provided by the municipality are now too small for the needs of the organization. The Town must therefore find a solution.

As the saying goes, things come in threes, Town Council learned that Services Québec, formerly the Local Employment Center (CLE), intends to close its doors and relocate its staff to Valleyfield. The City is mobilizing and embarking on a campaign to convince Services Québec to keep its services in Huntingdon. After several months of discussions, an agreement took shape. Services Québec will be able to continue to offer its services in Huntingdon but only through a partnership with the Town of Huntingdon. And to do this, the Town must accommodate them in one of its buildings.

We are therefore facing a dilemma. This is a time when the values and principles of a city council clash and make difficult decisions. Faced with this impasse, it becomes necessary to determine which solution will take priority over the others. This is precisely what it is to make a decision and take responsibility for it.

The City Council, after analyzing the situation, therefore made the following decisions:

1. Protect the property of the municipality and adequately manage the financial risks that could cause a fire, by not renewing the lease of the Friperie Communautaire which expires on March 31, 2022.

2. Relocate the Bouffe Additionnelle to a part of the Friperie Communautaire space and repair the roof and the room in this part of the building at 4, rue Lorne;
3. Refurbish the building at 16, rue Prince to accommodate the Services Québec office in partnership with the services offered by the Town of Huntingdon.

It is clear that whatever decision we made, someone would have been the loser. Rest assured, however, that the Town has always been the largest financial partner of the Friperie, despite what some claim. For 12 years, the Town of Huntingdon has contributed to the funding of this organization by providing them with premises of nearly 10,000 square feet in return for an annual lump sum of \$10,700. This amount included all the costs of the occupied space: electricity, heating, maintenance, insurance, snow removal, debt repayment and interest. This represented, in fact, an annual contribution of \$49,700. If you multiply this amount by 12, you will find that the citizens of Huntingdon have done their part.

We hope that the citizens of Huntingdon will understand the difficult choice that the Town Council was faced with but rest assured that our decision was made in the public interest of our municipality.

The Mayor

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "André Desrosiers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'A'.