

Week of June 25/18

ESTONIAN CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE

Community comes together to hear news of exciting next phase for Estonian Centre

The Estonian community turned out in strong numbers on Thursday, June 21 to mark a major milestone in the development of the Estonian Centre Project.

This information session marked the completion of the initial due diligence process, and there was strong enthusiasm and a palpable sense of excitement from the community at the meeting. Moving forward with these plans will help ensure that the hard work, vision and pride that we have inherited from previous generations will grow, thrive and prosper.

Approximately 130 people attended the session at Tartu College to hear from the project team. Representatives from the boards of the four organizations - The Estonian House Ltd., Estonian Credit Union, Estonian Foundation of Canada, and Tartu College – were at the meeting to provide information and answer questions.

Each board has voted to proceed with the project as they believe that the risks are acceptable, sustainable operations are possible, and funding is achievable.

Estonian House President Veiko Parming kicked off the meeting with opening remarks thanking everyone who has gotten the project to this point and encouraging members of the community to think about how they could see themselves being involved in this project as it progresses.

He noted that while the decision to move forward with the disposition of the Estonian House was hard, this project is not the Estonian House board pursuing an “Esto House 2.0,” but rather four organizations working together toward a generational opportunity that can embody a forward- and outward-looking



identity for our community, bring Estonians on the periphery back into the fold, build bridges to Estonia, and keep our youngest generations active.



“I don’t believe that there is another Estonian community on this continent that has endeavoured to do what we are doing – build a new community home for the next 50 years. And Toronto has traditionally been the largest and most active Estonian community outside of Eesti,” he noted.

“While we in Toronto are going to be the regular users of the new centre, we’re also building this so that our friends from Hamilton, from right across Canada, from the United States, and from Eesti and beyond can see this as their home, too.”

Veiko concluded by thanking the first generation of Estonians who came to North America and have inspired succeeding generations to be proud of our Estonian heritage.

“If our parents and grandparents can dig deep – very deep, in time and money – to build everything they did, can we as Estonians born here do even half as much as they did to build a modern, beautiful Estonian Centre? And by “we,” I don’t include only those Estonians who have already been active, I also mean those who have been less active but who are proud of their roots and pleased to contribute to the right cause.”

A highlight of the evening was the announcement by Estonian Centre Project Steering Committee Chair Ellen Valter that Toomas Hendrik Ilves will be the Honorary Chair for the Capital Campaign to raise funds for the new centre. Toomas Hendrik Ilves served as the fourth President of Estonia from 2006 until 2016.

“He is pleased to endorse this project,” Ellen said. “It is a tremendous honor for us to have his support and backing as we move into this important new phase.”



Ellen also announced another major achievement for the future of the new centre, which is the confirmation of the Capital Campaign's lead donor. Andy Prozes has stepped forward with a \$3 million donation. This news was greeted by a warm and extended standing ovation from the community members.

Andy attended the session along with his mother, Salme, who lives in Kingston, son Kevin of Toronto and brother-in-law Shepherd Heery, who is from San Francisco. Andy grew up in Ontario on the Niagara Peninsula and now makes New York home with his wife, Laura.

Andy has had a distinguished and successful career as a business executive and is now a private equity investor. He invests in and serves on the boards of various companies, primarily in the information and technology sectors, serving the personal identity, legal, risk mitigation and financial industries, as well as non-profits.

His interest in becoming involved with the Estonian Centre has a deep and personal meaning. He maintains strong ties to Estonia and actively explores ways to promote information and technology businesses in Estonia.

“My wife Laura, and the other members of my family and I are extremely proud to be involved in this project – it will be an exceptional and beautiful building.” Andy said at the meeting. “A huge amount of work has gone into this project already, and I am enjoying tremendously working with my fellow Estonians on the next steps.”

Andy said he strongly supports the development of the international aspect of the centre's operation.

“I am very interested in exploring a business accelerator focus so young Estonians here and in Estonia can come to the Centre and plug into the North American technology community. Both Laura and I believe this is vitally important to attract young Estonians and to encourage ongoing sustainability.”

“I'm very proud to be Estonian and very much appreciate the hard work, integrity and sense of responsibility in doing the right thing that has gone into this project so far.”



Prozes Family:

Members of the Prozes family: from right, Andy Prozes, Lead Donor for Estonian Centre Project; Andy's mother Salme Prozes and son Kevin Prozes.

Two Co-Chairs have graciously agreed to plan out and lead the Capital Campaign: Andy Prozes as lead donor and Mihkel Liik, partner at Fraser McKenzie, an investment fund, and Estonian Centre Steering Committee members. They will be more fully introduced in an upcoming article about the Capital Campaign.

Centre architect Alar Kongats provided an overview of the design process. A number of the spaces in the centre, including the lobby, courtyard, roof terrace, classrooms, main hall, kitchen, office space, storage areas and kitchen have been sketched out with preliminary locations and dimensions.





Alar showed renderings of the proposed spaces and reiterated how a “Nordic Estonian” design sensibility with clean lines, a controlled palate of materials and connection to the outside will figure prominently. Flexible use of space that meets community needs is important.

Interviews have been conducted with over 40 user groups and a “Statement of Requirements” is

being developed that includes input from the community to be incorporated into the final design. Community groups will continue to be consulted as the design plans develop.

Project Manager David Kalm presented a synopsis of progress to date and what tasks are ahead. The primary focus of the due diligence process was to examine in comprehensive detail sources of funds, use of funds, sustainability and the legal structure of the centre.

Next steps for the pre-construction phase include establishing operating and charity entities for the new centre, closing on the 9 Madison property (the current parking lot purchased from the city of Toronto, located next to Tartu College), further develop the business plan and mobilize the Capital Campaign.



Capital Campaign consultant Mark Gryfe gave a summary of the feasibility study (previously reported through Estonian Centre Project Update articles and available at estoniancentre.ca). Mark, who is former President and CEO of the Baycrest and Mt. Sinai Hospital Foundations, conducted what he reported was a very successful study, which showed strong interest in supporting the campaign.

“The response was overwhelmingly positive,” Mark said.

In addition to the lead donor contribution, other potential major donors have also been identified. Mark described how a number of “dedication opportunities” exist within the centre so that donors can link their name with a particular part of the building.

He encouraged the community to act as “campaign ambassadors” and to come forward with potential donor names as well.

“You may wish to consider making a meaningful, multi-year contribution,” he added.

Mark has been hired to work on the Capital Campaign and organize a process for donations to the centre. These campaigns generally last several years and donors often manage their giving so that they span a number of years.

If you would like to provide any input or contact names, please email info@estoniancentre.ca

This evening marked a major, positive turning point. The Steering Committee is immensely grateful to the many project volunteers, contributors and community members and, of course, our foremothers and forefathers, who have worked so hard to get to this stage. Much work lies ahead and, by working together, much more can be accomplished.

A copy of the due diligence report will be available online shortly.

