

THE FUTURE OF MINISTERS ISLAND

A MESSAGE OF CONCERN TO LOCAL SAINT ANDREWS RESIDENTS



As the Board of Directors for the Van Horne Estate on Ministers Island Inc., we wish to alert the local Saint Andrews community to a significant issue regarding the future management of Ministers Island.

Ministers Island was purchased by the Province of New Brunswick in 1977. Since 2004, the voice of the Saint Andrews community in the development and management of the island has been expressed through the not-for-profit organization called Van Horne Estate on Ministers Island, Incorporated, or VHEMI. VHEMI is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors elected by the organization's community membership.



In 2008, VHEMI signed a 25-year lease with the Province of New Brunswick, with the mandate to manage, restore and operate the island. The lease contains provisions committing the Province to provide VHEMI with financial support. Although the lease did not stipulate the amount to be provided, a 1995 report called for a community-based organization to manage the island and be provided an initial investment of \$1 million, with matching funds up to \$1 million annually for the next five years. In 2008, the Province provided VHEMI with \$33,000. More recently, the amount of the Province's annual grant to VHEMI has been \$100,000. By way of comparison, Kings Landing, located near Fredericton, with comparable visitation numbers to Ministers Island, receives an annual grant of \$3.7 million.

Since 2008, VHEMI has lobbied the provincial government for a fairer and more sustainable level of financial support, to no avail. Unfortunately, due to the rising costs of operating the island, and the inability to invest in modernizing and diversifying its offerings to visitors, the island began to witness declining visitations and related revenues in 2018, before Covid. The pandemic exacerbated the problem and while we have rebounded to some degree, the inability to invest in new opportunities is limiting our growth potential. Given these troubling trends, the VHEMI Board of Directors has regrettably determined that VHEMI as an organization is no longer fiscally sustainable. In the absence of the Province providing a fair and sustainable funding model, the Board of Directors has been forced to make the difficult decision of potentially relinquishing the 2008 lease with the Province and dissolving the organization.

At this time, it is unclear how the Province will operate the island in the absence of VHEMI. A key concern is how, or if, the local community will be engaged in the governance and management of the island going forward. VHEMI was a key vehicle for ensuring local community priorities and concerns, such as environmental stewardship and sustainable development, were part of the decision-making process.

The VHEMI Board of Directors wishes to assure all interested parties that our preference is to continue managing the island, but the level of funding support provided by the province is forcing us out.

If you have questions or concerns with any of the above, please feel free to contact us at john.kershaw@ministersisland.net. If you wish to express your views to the government of New Brunswick, you may wish to contact either the Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture at Isabelle.Theriault@gnb.ca or the Premier of the province at Susan.Holt@gnb.ca.

All residents of the Saint Andrews area appreciate that Ministers Island is a national, provincial and local treasure. As VHEMI awaits final word from the provincial government on our request for additional funding, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support over the past 17 years and for the thousands of volunteer hours the community has dedicated to help protect and position Ministers Island as a global destination for tourists.

John Kershaw
Chair
Board of Directors
Van Horne Estate on Ministers Island, Inc.