

Creative Spaces Case Study Series

The Canadian Automotive Museum



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The Canadian Automotive Museum

Mission

The Canadian Automotive Museum is dedicated to preserving and sharing Canada's automotive history. The Canadian Automotive Museum is an independent not-for-profit charity, incorporated in 1964.

Background

The Canadian Automotive Museum (CAM) was established in 1962 as a community project of the Oshawa Chamber of Commerce to promote the history of the automotive industry and to promote tourism in the area. At the time, a number of prominent Oshawa residents made financial contributions or provided interest-free loans to acquire a former car dealership on Simcoe Street. It was converted into a facility where antique automobiles and related artifacts could be displayed. CAM opened in 1963 and was incorporated in October 1964 as a charitable, not-for-profit institution.

For the next couple of decades, CAM shared its home with several other tenants, but in 1982 CAM renovated its front lobby and consolidated the entire building into museum use. In the 2000s, the two nearby rental homes were demolished to accommodate increased parking and the long-standing entrance sign was removed.

In 2015 the board of directors began a multi-year plan to refresh the exhibits and invest in maintaining the historic structure of the building. The priorities aligned with Canada's 150 anniversary in 2017 and federal funding assisted with the physical improvements.

Today CAM continues to maintain the nearly century-old former car dealership building at 99 Simcoe St. South. The main floor holds the majority of European vehicles, while the second floor tells the story of automotive manufacturing in Canada. A gift shop and reference library compliment the automobiles and the adjoining lot hosts drive-ins and car shows.

Project Summary

In 2015 CAM began a multi-year project to refresh their facility and invest in maintaining the historic structure of the century-old former Chevrolet-Oakland car dealership building. As priorities aligned with Canada's 150 anniversary in 2017, federal and provincial funding assisted with improvements. This project saw the installment of insulated metal cladding, new doors and safety lighting to improve the exterior facade, as well as the integration of a new HVAC system. The \$235,000 capital project was intended as a rejuvenation for CAM and to support an increase in attendance.

The “What”

What did the Canadian Automotive Museum build?

The project featured major renovations to the museum's exterior and a much-needed HVAC climate control upgrade. In regards to the exterior, upgrades were made to the museum's façade by installing insulated metal cladding around the building, as well as adding new doors to create more accessibility for patrons, and outdoor lighting/security cameras for improved building safety.

With poor insulation and unpleasant aesthetic from the deteriorating brick, the first step in the project was installing the insulated metal cladding. This involved securing six inches of insulation, then wrapping a metal exoskeleton around the building. Newly constructed double doors that matched the building's ascetic were added as well. The new door also eliminates drafts and supports reduced heating and cooling.

CAM also replaced all of the emergency exit doors in the building, which had settled over time. As the emergency exit in the back is on the second floor, there is an outdoor staircase leading to the ground. As part of this capital project, CAM removed the staircase, refinished and reattached it. It was taken off site to a steel fabrication company where it was painted and reinforced to ensure it was fit for use. Improvements were also made to the dimly lit parking lot to increase security measures this included the installation of bright lights and security cameras.

In regards to the interior HVAC climate control upgrade, improvements had to be made to the building's temporary heating solution that was introduced in 2004. When the museum's original boiler was no longer repairable, it was replaced with a gas furnace that was too small to effectively heat the building. While heating was also supplemented by space heaters throughout the building, it was costly and insufficient. Temperatures would jump from one extreme to another, as the museum became extremely hot in the summer without air-conditioning. The instalment of an efficient HVAC would ensure visitors would be comfortable during all seasons and collections could be temperature controlled.

The “Why”

Why did CAM take on these capital projects?

As CAM's historic building was originally built as a Chevrolet-Oakland car dealership in the early 1920s, it had faced a significant amount of wear and tear over the years. The museum's exterior has been worn down by weather and vandalism, resulting in an unwelcoming appearance. By upgrading the exterior, they would breathe new life into the museum, provide a more inviting atmosphere and increase

attendance. Similarly, having an emergency exit up to code and improved lighting in the parking lot would ensure safety and comfort for all staff and guests.

The CAM also required new heating, air conditioning, and ventilation to improve the year-round visitor experience and preserve their collection of automobiles. The temporary solution of using gas and electric space heaters to keep the museum warm during the winter was neither effective nor energy efficient. An updated HVAC system would allow the museum to better control its interior environment and reduce energy costs. Ultimately, providing warmth, improved anaesthetics and safety were all equal motivators for this capital project.

The “Who”

Who led the project within the Canadian Automotive Museum?

This project was lead by CAM’s Executive Director and Curator, Alex Gates, along with the President of the board, Denis Bigioni. For this project, CAM’s Executive Director received mentorship through ArtsBuild Ontario’s Creative Spaces Mentoring Network. The project also featured major involvement and support from CAM staff, Board members and volunteers. The electrician who designed and installed the lighting for this project volunteered his time and was very flexible with scheduling. Similarly, a board member who had access to a crane organized its transportation to the site and use for the instalment of the air-conditioning unit on the roof. This project involved dedicated volunteers that offered physical support by helping with the installation and clean up process, as well emotional support by effectively communicating the project to visitors and addressing any questions or concerns they had.

Who opposed the project?

There were some hesitations from board members that these projects would not be realized. However, CAM Executive Director’s deep understanding of the organization, clear plan that would benefit the future of CAM and previous experience with capital projects helped mitigate hesitations.

Who was contracted for this project?

CAM did not engage a contractor to oversee the entire project. Instead, it was internally managed by the Executive Director and Board President. Local companies were engaged by CAM during the construction-planning phase to complete the project.

The “How”

How did the project go from concept to construction?

While the need to renovate the building’s exterior and internal HVAC system was an established priority within the organization, it was the availability of the Canada 150 funding that enabled the project to move forward.

How was a construction plan formed?

Once local contractors were hired, CAM’s and Board President worked with them to establish a construction schedule. CAM worked with different contractors and volunteers for each aspect of the project, and coordination proved to be a challenge, which required a great deal of flexibility.

How were contingencies managed?

The scope of the project which entailed upgrade work in a medium sized heritage building, meant securing construction contracts was more of a challenge than originally anticipated. As local companies were pre-booked with larger projects, construction had to take place during the winter months. Similarly, CAM also faced communication and punctuality issues with one of the contractors, which forced them to reconfigure their construction plan to accommodate them.

Another issue, that was not an original consideration for CAM, was the amount of waste and debris that would result from construction. Managing the clean up during construction involved coordinating dumpster rentals and removals. CAM learned that there were a number of unexpected costs that came up during the construction process that they had not originally accounted for in their grant. Another example of this was the cost of securing electrical permits and labour. While a company may come to install the furnace and air conditioner, organizations will still need an electrical permit and an electrician to hook them up. In this case, CAM worked with a volunteer that had a solid electrical background, and they were able to effectively manage these contingencies and organize all of the electrical permits into one day of inspections from the electrical inspector.

How were day-to-day operations impacted?

During the capital project, operations were not drastically altered. While there was increased responsibility for the project leads and a shift in priorities, the work from dedicated board members, staff and volunteers enabled CAM to move through the project productively. Other than closing for a week to account for the power and plumbing being cut off, CAM remained open to visitors. CAM staff felt this was positive for public perception as it enabled visitors to witness that the museum was being rejuvenated and improvements were being made.

CAM offers parking rentals to the community on an hourly, daily or monthly rate. In order to compensate for inconveniences caused by construction, such as having a spot blocked or not wanting to risk having a vehicle damaged, CAM waved all parking fees for the month of February when construction work was most active. While this may have cost them a few hundred dollars in earned revenue, it mitigated any potential disputes from their visitors and helped maintain community support for the project.

How was accessibility included in the project?

Accessibility was a consideration in the construction of the front doors and emergency exits. The push bars on the emergency exit doors have been retrofitted to accommodate the new building code that requires them to require less force to open. A new front door was also installed to ensure an entrance without physical barriers to entry for visitors.

How was energy efficiency and the environment incorporated?

Energy efficiency was a main consideration in the project, as HVAC renovations and insulation improvements were intended to make the building more sustainable. Improvements will allow the museum to better control its interior environment while reducing energy costs. LED lights were also incorporated into the parking lots' improved lighting as well as in the new sign above the main entrance.

How was the project funded?

This project was primarily funded by public grants. CAM received \$90,000 from the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program. As this was a matching grant, \$72,000 was received from the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Ontario150 Community Capital Program, and the remaining funds were taken from a capital reserve fund and minor donations.

The "Ongoing"

How has the project affected CAM's financials?

CAM's renovations enabled the museum to save on operational expenses through a reduced hydro bill every month. Rates are more manageable and consistent, which has enabled CAM to better predict their yearly operating budget. CAM has also seen an increase in visitors since their renovations. Attendance rates have increased from an average of 4,000 to 15,000 in yearly patrons, which has supported earned revenues.

Were any new staff hired?

No new staff were hired as a direct result of this project, but plans for operating the space at a higher level have started to move forward following the capital project.

How will CAM be maintained?

As CAM continues to grow and evolve, the organization's staff and board are beginning to strategically plan for the evolution of CAM. This includes being able to operate well in their current facility as well as looking at where they would like to be and what type of a facility they would need if operations and collections continue to increase.

What lessons were learned?

Throughout this project, CAM staff learned that a dedicated, hard working and reliable group of board members and volunteers will go a long way in the success of a project. While the leader of a capital project may feel solely responsible, they need to step back and recognize that it's an organization moving the work forward.

Case Study Summary

While the historic setting of CAM's facility has added to the visitor experience for decades, it required maintenance and upgrades to thrive in the 21st century. Through this capital project, a series of renovations to the front facade increased the museum's street presence, and reduce energy costs by improving the museum's insulation. Improved climate control also allowed the museum to better maintain international collections, and create a comfortable visitor experience year-round. With support from timely infrastructure grants and a dedicated group of staff, board members and volunteers, CAM was able to breathe new life into their facility, enabling it to thrive as a space to celebrate Oshawa's and Canada's rich automotive history.

Resources

The following resources below have been provided by CAM as additional information for readers.

Website:

- [The Canadian Automotive Museum](#)
 - [About the Canada 150 Projects](#)
 - [Exterior Façade improvements](#)
 - [HVAC Upgrades](#)