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Councillors wrestle with fate of old market drain

The updated proposal to showcase the 1831 central drain at the St. Lawrence Market comes in at a lower cost than the original plan, but still carries a hefty price tag.



The city is once again wrestling with how to preserve an 1831 drain discovered at the St. Lawrence Market. (RENE JOHNSTON / TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO)

By **SAMANTHA BEATTIE** Staff Reporter

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City councillors will consider for a second time installing a glass viewing area over an [1831 central drain](#) discovered at the St. Lawrence Market.

The updated proposal comes in at a lower cost than the original plan, but still carries a hefty price tag.

City staff first recommended the drain feature in September at a cost of \$1.96 million, but received pushback from the public and city officials. Mayor John Tory said [in a statement](#) at the time he couldn't justify spending that much money on showcasing the drain at the market's north redevelopment.

At a government management committee on Sept. 27, Councillor Paul Ainslie referred the recommendation back to staff to consider other options.

Next week, the drain project will be back on the table with budget committee considering a scaled back version that would cost slightly less, at \$1.7 million, according to the proposed 2018 capital budget.

Of that cost, \$320,000 will come from an already approved budget, said the report. The remaining \$1.4 million will come from fees paid by real estate developers to the city for community benefits such as park improvements and heritage conservation.

City staff recommends creating a viewing area at the north end of the market with video and text displays and a partial reconstruction of the central drain, according to the report. A full reconstruction of the drain was originally proposed.

Ward Councillor Lucy Troisi (Centre-Rosedale) said she is aiming to get the drain feature approved at budget committee next week and then by council.

"Councillors who oppose this (drain feature) are really out of touch. I think the vast majority of people in our city want to preserve the history of something as significant as this find," Troisi told the Star.

She said she has heard from her community that heritage preservation is a high priority.

A recent archeological assessment where St. Lawrence Market's north building used to be uncovered remains of early market buildings, including the central drain, as well as a drainage system, walls, storage cellars and support columns from about 1820, 1831, 1851 and 1904. The archeological assessment is part of the ongoing market redevelopment.

Troisi said the central drain is "beautiful. It reminded me of something I saw in Europe. It's so unique to find something that old and in such great shape in Toronto especially."

The north building was demolished in 2016 and will be replaced with a new building housing a market, provincial courts and underground parking to be completed by 2020. The development has a budget of \$91.5 million, but city staff will request another \$9.5 million at budget committee next week.

The budget increase is due to higher than expected construction costs and delays related to the archeological findings and assessment, said a staff report.

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