

Group progressing on purchase of Matapedia train station

Artistic hub will maintain the station's original calling

GILLES GAGNÉ

MATAPEDIA – A group of citizens has initiated steps towards the eventual acquisition of the Matapedia train station, ensuring it remains an artistic hub, while also protecting services to the passengers using it.

Between 2021 and 2024, the train station operated under the name Matapedia Station - Artistic and Community Hub as an art centre, managed by Montreal's Quartier Éphémère and Carleton's Vaste et Vague, another art centre. Both are recognized charitable organizations dedicated to supporting the research, creation and dissemination of visual arts artists.

"After three-and-a-half years of sustained programming, placing the reception and presentation to the public of some fifteen artists from diverse backgrounds and cultures at the heart of its project, the Station has reached a certain maturity and is accelerating its pace. Its development vision - which consists of receiving the building free of charge and then carrying out renovations and development work, opening four new spaces, enhancing its offer and its historical character - requires a solid anchoring in the community," explains Caroline Andrieux, a Matapedia-based art historian.

Ms. Andrieux has been the acting project manager of the Matapedia station since September 2021. Local support is taking shape through a new organization called Matapédia Junction Pôle, recently founded by three artists, Maryse Goudreau, of Escuminac; Pierre D'Amours, of Ristigouche South East; and Pierre Durette, of Causapscal. One of the goals is to take over operations of the station, which has been managed by the same team since its inauguration in September 2021. Luc Vallières, who is the coordinator, and Caroline Andrieux want to

make it shine to its full potential, she specifies.

"The name Matapédia Junction Pôle refers to its location on the territory, its river and viewpoint crossings, the famous salmon pool, the Junction Pool, its interprovincial border position, a railway and ideas crossroads, a threshold between fresh and saltwater, a tribute to its Mi'gmaq origins, "mata" meaning junction, to which is added its magnetic effect and its ability to polarize audiences around art and heritage," says Caroline Andrieux.

She recalls starting to work on the concept of an artistic hub for the Matapedia station in 2021. "I even sent a letter to VIA Rail in 2018, like a message in a bottle, over the fall of that year," recalls Ms. Andrieux.

Talks with the public transporter for the acquisition of the station have been ongoing for years

"In fact, since the beginning of our conversations, it (the property transfer) was a condition right from the start because VIA Rail wanted to find a taker, since the municipality was unfortunately not interested," states Ms. Andrieux.

Acquisition for one dollar

Since the beginning of the talks with VIA Rail, four years ago, it was also clear that the acquisition of the Matapedia train station would be made at a nominal cost, which means one dollar. Caroline Andrieux points out that Matapedia Junction Pôle has a fairly big project for the building.

"Our goal to acquire it is still targeted. It is surely complicated. Discussions are still very active with VIA Rail. We are waiting on the certificate of location. We are asking VIA to deliver it. We don't want to acquire two kilometres of platform! We are only supposed to own the land that is at most 30

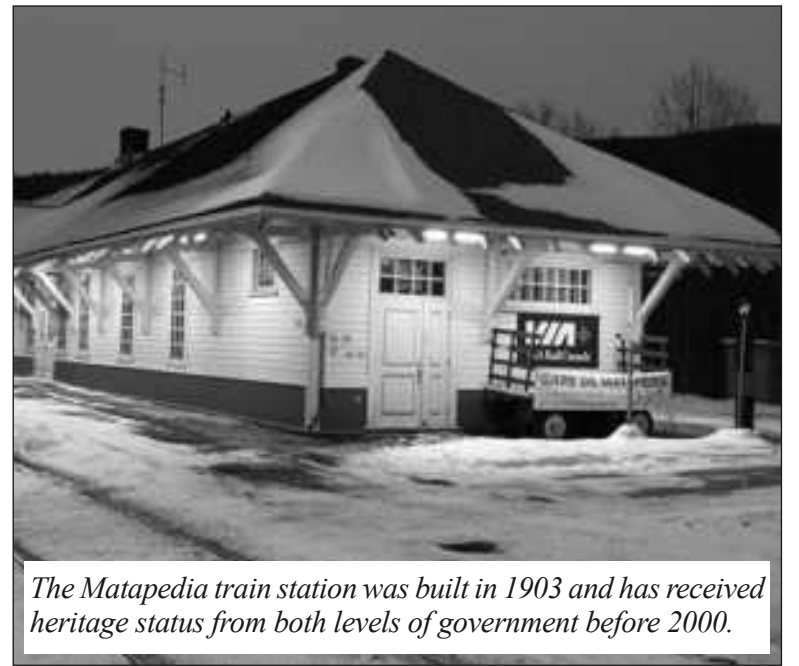
feet from the tracks. We are also required to refrain from organizing exhibitions outside the station, except for a sculpture that can be removed," notes Ms. Andrieux.

"We must reach an agreement regarding the problem of contamination in the building. There is a bit of mold and asbestos in the furnace of the basement. If we change to the building, there are asbestos slabs and paint containing lead. It is a small problem though. VIA Rail has carried out studies on those aspects," she adds.

A major project to revamp the station

For now, the Matapedia Junction Pôle organization consists of four people. The group will soon expand in order to conduct a major revamping project for the building.

"We had to be local instead of being recognized as a Montreal organization (due to the presence of Quartier Éphémère). We needed more local involvement. We as a group of four founded Matapédia Junction Pôle but we don't have official board members yet that can back us in our vision. We need to find people that can support us legally, ad-



The Matapedia train station was built in 1903 and has received heritage status from both levels of government before 2000.

Photo: G. Gagné

ministratively and with good communication skills. We will also need people with money and that have access to a network in order to land a development project of \$1.5 million. It was initially \$1 million but the inflation hit us too," underlines Caroline Andrieux.

The revamping project aims to restore the station to its original exterior, which was lavender.

"We will need to change the heating system, which burns bunker oil, a source of concern, and improve air circulation. We want to operate a café, with a MAPAQ certified kitchen for

visitors and hikers who take the neighbouring trails," says Caroline Andrieux.

VIA Rail is ready to invest in the restoration of the platforms, the building's decontamination and fixing the leaks. "For the artists, we want to add a workshop and connect the garage to the waiting room in order to improve the experience of the visitors. We want to keep offering services to the VIA Rail passengers by cleaning their area, the restrooms and the waiting room so that the public will benefit from a good service," concludes Caroline Andrieux.



Photo: Courtesy of Caroline Andrieux

Caroline Andrieux, pictured here speaking to attendees of the Matapedia station, assures that the building will continue offering services to VIA Rail's clientèle after the transaction.