

Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

WHY CONSOLIDATION?

What other partnership options were considered? Why was consolidation chosen as the preferred solution?

- The Joint Committee, along with its consultant, explored the entire spectrum of partnerships which included collaboration, formal partnerships, joint ventures, mergers, and consolidation. Only merger and consolidation would eliminate the inherent inefficiencies of operating multiple entities. The Joint Committee felt a merger (where one existing organization survived while the others dissolved) would not win the support of the various memberships. Consolidation will result in the creation of a single, new nonprofit entity with all of the existing organizations being dissolved.

Attendance at our current programs/events is healthy and our finances are solid...where is the threat to long-term sustainability?

- Fortunately, engagement with the partner organization's programs/activities is currently strong, as are our finances. While the threat to sustainability may not be outwardly apparent, it is real. Volunteerism is declining. Each of the partners already has difficulty staffing its museums during open hours. Each struggles to find prospective board members. Each currently relies on a limited base of core volunteers. These are the people who show up at the archive week after week, year after year. They are the ones who not only serve as a board member or officer, but *also* produce the newsletter and oversee all social media activity. The loss of any one of these critical people could have immediate consequences for our operations. A car accident, a severe illness, or simply volunteer fatigue can set in motion a chain of events that could cripple our ability to cover other basic functions.

Why consolidate now? Why not wait until it is absolutely necessary?

- The optimum time to consolidate is when the organizations are healthy. Waiting until one or more are at a crisis stage creates additional urgency, reduces each partner's ability to influence how the new organization is shaped, etc.

How will consolidation result in better service to the lake community?

- Consolidation will...
 - Provide the community easier access to its local history while continuing to offer all the same great content/programs/events as before;
 - Offer a one-stop destination for lake-area historical research;
 - Provide members with new volunteer / leadership opportunities;
 - Optimize existing resources to enhance our existing content/programs;
 - Extend the mission's reach to new audiences;
 - Raise the visibility of Lake Minnetonka history leading to increased museum traffic, program attendance, increased monetary and artifact donations, and new volunteers;
 - Ensure the long-term sustainability of Lake Minnetonka's historical assets.

Will consolidation help attract new volunteers/crew members?

- The new organization will have ample opportunities for people to get involved in areas of interest to them. Consolidation will elevate the profile of our organization/offerings and is expected to attract new volunteers. Additionally, our current members/volunteers will be welcome to volunteer at any of the museums and on board *Minnehaha*. Cross pollination of memberships will be encouraged as we transition into becoming a new, integrated historical organization.
- When *Minnehaha* restarts operation, she will need to replenish her ranks with new crew members. Special efforts to recruit new Captains and Engineers will also have to be initiated. And should crew members ever reach a point where they no longer feel they are able to serve on board *Minnehaha*, there will be ample shore-based opportunities to continue supporting our mission.

Has a lake-wide historical society been suggested before? Why is now the right time when it never became a reality before?

- The idea of a Lake Minnetonka Historical Society was originally proposed back in the early 1970's. It resurfaced again in the early 2000's. This is the third attempt to bring the organizations together and the only one to make it all the way to the memberships for consideration. Today the four partners share strong synergy and have successfully collaborated on several projects including the book *Images of America: Lake Minnetonka as well as recent Joint Committee projects* (Lake Minnetonka Virtual History Tour, PastPort promotions). Additionally, the current decline in volunteerism and reliance on our core volunteers looms as a future challenge to each of the partner's ability to survive independently.

Why aren't the other lake-area historical societies a part of this consolidation?

- ALL the lake's local history organizations were invited to participate in our exploration of strategic partnership opportunities. Western Hennepin County Pioneer Association (Long Lake) and the Excelsior Streetcar Line (part of the MN Streetcar Museum) opted to remain independent. The Minnetonka Historical Society and Deephaven Historical Society originally participated as members of the Joint Committee. MHS determined this was not the right time for them to consolidate. DHS ultimately concluded it was more expedient to dissolve and donate its collections to ELMHS. WHCPA, ESL and MHS have all expressed their desire to continue to collaborate in the future.

Since Minnehaha is not currently operational, why is MLM being included in this consolidation?

- *Minnehaha* is one of Lake Minnetonka's most important historical artifacts. She is the only authentic steam-powered passenger-for-hire vessel still in operation in Minnesota or the Upper Midwest and serves as a floating museum providing all who ride her an experiential trip back in time.
- *Minnehaha* is fully shipshape and ready to resume operation as soon as a solution is found that ensures she can be launched and hauled-out each season.
- The consolidated historical organization will be stronger with *Minnehaha*. With 200+ cruises carrying ~10,000 passengers each season, *Minnehaha* will be a catalyst to drive visitors to the other LMHS museums, exhibits, programs, etc. Quite simply, *Minnehaha* will be the center point of the consolidated collections and programs.

HOW WILL CONSOLIDATION IMPACT OPERATIONS?

Does consolidation mean all the collections will be combined into one museum?

- The Joint Committee is proposing to retain museums will be maintained in Wayzata, Mound, and Excelsior with *Minnehaha* serving as a floating museum once she can resume operations. The Joint Committee is proposing that each organizations' archive be consolidated into a single location. This will give those interested in researching lake history a single destination to go to rather the current time-consuming scenario of visiting multiple archive sites. It will also save on operational costs of maintaining multiple archives.

Will consolidation result in a loss of programs/events?

- The Joint Committee expects all the programs/events offered today will continue...and that many will be strengthened. Importantly, the burden borne by each partner organization in creating the content and hosting these events will be spread across all the partners, lightening the demands placed on *each* organization's volunteers.

I am mostly interested in the history of my local community. Why should I support a consolidated, lake-wide historical organization?

- Under consolidation, the local history of each of the lake's communities will continue to be represented with the same focus as each receives today...and very likely increased through expanded content, programs, events, etc.

Together, a consolidated organization will be able to optimize financial and volunteer resources allowing it to provide better service to the lake's communities: a single online access portal for local history content/events, a one-stop destination for lake-area research, and extend the mission's reach to new audiences.

How will my membership be impacted when the consolidation occurs?

- As proposed, all members in good standing on the day of consolidation will be offered a new LMHS membership valid for the balance of time remaining on the membership with the dissolving partner organization. Members who currently hold a "lifetime or honorary" membership will no longer have that distinction in the new organization (this category was not offered by all of the partners and will not be offered moving forward). Instead, "lifetime" and "honorary" members will be offered a 12-month LMHS membership.

Will dues increase as a result of the consolidation?

- Dues for the new organization will be determined by the new Board of Directors, however they are not expected to differ greatly from the current dues.

MINNEHAHA-RELATED QUESTIONS

Why isn't Minnehaha operating anymore? Will she ever be able to operate again?

- After 24 seasons of being allowed use of a privately-owned launch ramp, *Minnehaha* must now find a new site to launch and haul-out. No other existing ramp can accommodate the boat's size, weight, etc.
- Without a new launch site and home dock, *Minnehaha* will not be able to resume her cruises on Lake Minnetonka. As one of the area's most important historical artifact, it will be up to us to ensure her life is not cut short prematurely. (More information about *Minnehaha's* launch requirements can be found by clicking on this link: [What's the Status? – Steamboat Minnehaha](#))
- With continued care and preservation, *Minnehaha* can continue to operate indefinitely. There are numerous examples of other historic vessels around the country still in operation despite being 100+ years old.

How will Minnehaha's return to operation impact the financials of the proposed consolidated organization?

- Financially, *Minnehaha* broke-even or generated a slight profit each year from 2009 -2019, growing her cash reserves throughout this period. A typical season includes 200+ cruises with annual ridership averaging 10-12,000 passengers and generated total income of \$100,000.
- As with any passenger-for-hire vessel, *Minnehaha* will always need on-going preservation. The current hiatus has allowed her preservation team to upgrade numerous systems. This spring work will begin on refinishing the hull below the waterline. Major projects can generally be planned for ahead of time. *Minnehaha's* designation on the National Register of Historic Places now enables her to receive grants to cover major preservation needs. As a result, on-going preservation should not pose a financial risk to a consolidated organization.

Will Minnehaha require a capital fundraising campaign?

- A capital campaign will likely be necessary to get *Minnehaha* operating once again. A new launch ramp, storage barn, and trailer are all potential needs that will ultimately be decided based on the final site elected. The financial risk of taking on a capital campaign is minimal – work on a new launch solution will NOT commence unless the necessary funds have been secured upfront.

Does operating Minnehaha expose the new organization to financial risk if there is an accident?

- The safety of the passengers, crew, and the boat will continue to be of paramount focus for the new organization. Through 24 seasons of operation, *Minnehaha* has safely carried nearly a quarter-million passengers. As a licensed passenger-for-hire vessel, *Minnehaha* undergoes rigorous inspections to be certified each season. Crew members must go through a training program and be recertified each year. Captains and Engineers must also have valid state-issued licenses as a Boat Master or Boiler Operator. Additionally, the consolidated organization will continue to carry commercial liability and property insurance coverage.

How will consolidation benefit the search for a new launch solution?

- One of the greatest challenges is a lack of awareness – many people are unaware that *Minnehaha* isn't operating or why. With a combined membership of nearly 900 members, LMHS will be uniquely able to focus attention on *Minnehaha's* plight. Additionally, the new organization will benefit greatly from *Minnehaha's* tremendous popularity throughout the lake community.

Will the current efforts to find a new launch solution for Minnehaha continue unabated with the new organization?

- The search for a new launch solution will be accelerated, not interrupted, as a result of the consolidation. Initially, LMHS's new Board will be laser-focused on successfully transitioning the consolidation as well as a new launch site for *Minnehaha*. Her successful return to operations will serve to spotlight attention on all that is possible with a new consolidated lake historical organization.
- The sooner *Minnehaha* is back in operation, the sooner our consolidated operations can benefit from *Minnehaha's* ridership and ability to promote LMHS programs/events to all on board. As a consolidated organization, we will be able to bring all of our combined resources to bear on making a new launch site a reality.

Minnehaha was once a part of the Minnesota Transportation Museum (MTM), only to be spun off into the Museum of Lake Minnetonka (MLM) when her financial needs were not being fully met. What assurances are there that Minnehaha's needs will not get lost in a new organization operating multiple museums?

- In 1990, MTM supported three modal transportation divisions: trains, streetcars, and a steamboat division for restoration of *Minnehaha*. MTM's operations encompassed multiple geographical footprints simultaneously: Osceola - St Croix River Valley, Como-Harriet & Excelsior streetcars, & Lake Minnetonka/*Minnehaha*. These conflicting priorities resulted in competition and discontent over how the organization's limited financial resources were allocated. Ultimately MTM divested itself of the streetcar and steamboat operations.
- LMHS will not be subject to the dysfunction experienced with MTM for the following reasons:
 - Unified Resolve: The Boards of the four partner organizations are united in their commitment to see that *Minnehaha* is returned to active operation and her preservation is fully funded.
 - Competing Budget Priorities: *Minnehaha* will be LMHS' sole experiential operation. The operational expenses for LMHS' museums/exhibits/programs are limited primarily to rent, utilities, newsletter printing & other admin costs.
 - Singular Geographic Footprint: LMHS will be laser-focused on Lake Minnetonka.
 - Vested Interest: *Minnehaha* will be a core revenue driver for LMHS giving the new Board a vested interest in ensuring her operations continue without interruption.
 - Access to Preservation Funding: *Minnehaha's* new NRHP status qualifies the boat to receive grants for preservation projects (not available to *Minnehaha* when she was a part of MTM).

How will Minnehaha's operation and preservation be properly managed within LMHS?

- *Minnehaha's* operation and preservation require a technical expertise that only her crew members/volunteers can bring. Accordingly, *Minnehaha* will have a volunteer Director of Operations with a support team overseeing her preservation, safety, inspections, training, crew, etc. The Director of Operations will report directly to LMHS' Board of Directors / Executive Director and work together with the Programs and Museums Committees. The less technical facets of boat operation (ticketing, marketing, etc.) can be handled by administrative staff/volunteers.

VOTING-RELATED QUESTIONS

Who is Eligible to Vote?

- Only Current Members in good standing may vote

What are the Voting Choices?

- YEA to approve consolidation or NAY to reject consolidation
- Ballots not marked either YEA or NAY will be deemed not valid

When Will Voting Take Place?

- Voting will take place at the Special Membership Meetings.

I am a member of more than one of the partner organizations – may I vote more than once?

- Each membership is conducting its vote independently of the others. Members of multiple organizations are entitled to vote at each.

What is Required for Approval?

- A simple majority of the votes cast by eligible voting members in attendance at the meeting.
- All four partner organizations must approve the consolidation.

What will happen if only some of the partner organizations vote in favor of consolidating, but others do not? Does this proposal require a critical mass in order to be viable?

- Naturally the ability of a consolidated organization to afford paid staff and realize operational savings will be less if not all four partner organizations vote in favor of consolidation. The extent to which fewer than four is viable will depend on which vote to consolidate. Should fewer than four partners vote in favor, the viability of a consolidated organization will be reassessed.

When will the Results be Announced?

- Final results will be announced following the last of the four Special Membership Meetings.