

Times 28.1.77 C

# \$1 Museum Deal Worked Out By City, Gov't

By PAUL MOSS  
Times Staff

A valuable piece of real estate in downtown Victoria which the city of Victoria purchased in 1963 for \$110,000 and is now valued at around \$500,000 will be sold for \$1 — and the city seems to consider it's got a good deal.

The property is the old courthouse building in Bastion Square housing the Maritime Museum of B.C.

City council was told Thursday that the provincial government — which had originally sold the building to the city 14 years ago — has agreed to an offer to pick it up for a nominal \$1 subject to certain conditions.

It's the conditions that make the transfer an attractive one to the city, and which also spare council the embarrassment of having to evict a respected institutional tenant.

And, from the museum's point of view, the agreement also appears to provide a security of tenure — either in the present building or some other future location — which has been lacking in the past.

"It sounds like a splendid arrangement to me," museum curator Capt. Keith Cameron commented today. "Frankly, I was hoping something like this would materialise."

A key clause in the tentative agreement, which has been endorsed by Provincial Secretary Grace McCarthy, states that the province "would assume responsibility for the location of the Maritime Museum, whether in the courthouse building or another location."

Under the deal the province would also undertake to pay the city its standard 15-mill grant in lieu of taxes on the building; to retain it in public ownership and "active use;" and to upgrade its construction and fire safety standards "if and when" the museum is relocated.

For several years, successive city councils have complained that the Maritime Museum's rent-free and tax-free occupancy of the courthouse building — with maintenance thrown in — placed a heavy burden on taxpayers.

In effect, they said, the city was having to subsidize, by as much as \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year, a cultural asset which has province-wide significance.

(When cabinet minister Sam Bawlf was a city alderman, he estimated the commercial rental potential of the building at around \$100,000 a year).

Under the mayoralty of Peter Pollen, council gave the museum notice to vacate the premises and in the summer of 1975 the building was put up for sale. But there were no takers and since then the museum has occupied it on a month-to-month basis.