

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
AUGUST 10 2022
REGINA PUBLIC LIBRARY PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
FLORENCE STRATTON

I am here today to ask you not to replace Central Library and develop “a new central library,” but rather to fix what needs to be fixed in the current building. Opened in 1962, Central Library is only 60 years old. That’s young for a building. The Legislative Building opened in 1912, making it more than 100 years old. Does the Library Board think it too should be replaced?

Why do I not want Central Library replaced? Here are my reasons.

First, the current building has heritage value. Designed by award winning local architect Kyoshi Izumi, it is widely recognized as a fine example of modernist architecture.

Second—and this is what I find most worrying about the “replacement and development of a new central library” document—is its vagueness about plans for the current site and the location of “a new central library.” Is the plan to make this much-desired piece of property in downtown Regina available to a property developer to build another office tower? This may seem like a far-fetched notion, but it was the actual plan of the Library Board in 2012. What saved Central Library on that occasion was that the developer also wanted the Mason’s property next door and the Masons refused to demolish their building and sell the property.

Or is the plan to turn the corner of Lorne Street and 12th Avenue into another downtown parking lot?

Central Library is located in the centre of downtown Regina. It is within one or two blocks of major Regina Transit bus routes. It is across from Victoria Park. This is exactly where Central Library needs to be located.

Third, I am also very concerned about losing services. Central Library, in addition to providing the traditional library service of “diffusing knowledge and information” through books and newspapers and journals and now the internet, also houses the Film Theatre, the Dunlop Art Gallery, and the Prairie History Room. These are invaluable services—and exceedingly valuable sources of knowledge and information. Ominously, the document before you today says nothing about them.

In 2003, the Library Board proposed closing the Dunlop Gallery and the Prairie History Room, along with three branch libraries. But there was such an outcry from the public, it backed away.

If Central Library is replaced and a “new central library” developed, will it include the Dunlop Gallery, the Film Theatre, and Prairie History Room? I want concrete assurance!

I wish now to comment on a few of the claims made in the “Central Library Renewal” document.

First, in attempting to make a case for replacing Central Library, the document claims the building is “Not Accessible.” Central Library has a wheelchair accessible ramp up to the main door. Inside the building, it has an elevator going to all the floors. What is not accessible about it?

A friend of mine who uses a wheelchair tells me she finds Central Library one of the most accessible public buildings in the city.

Second, the document lists a number of problems with the current building: “Windows not insulated,” “Roof...not reinforced,” “Aging electrical system” and so on.

If the windows need fixing, then fix them. If the roof needs reinforcing, then reinforce or replace it. If new electrical or heating systems are required, then please get them.

Third, the document quotes Regina’s *Energy and Sustainability Framework*: “Ensuring that new buildings are not sources of carbon emissions is key to reaching an ambitious emissions reduction targets.” Demolishing Central Library and putting up a new structure would create substantial carbon emissions, as well as adding substantial material to the Regina landfill. It would be much more economical in terms of both money and CO₂ emissions to retrofit the current building.

Fourth, the document implies that Central Library, “built to serve a population of 110,000” needs more space. If more space is, indeed, required, then why not add on to the current building? A study of a few years ago showed that the foundations of the building are strong enough for two floors to be added to the current structure. Moreover, there is plenty of room on the west side of the building for an extension.

Fifth and finally, the document claims that the RPL Board of Directors “Consulted with the public.” The most recent in person public consultation was held in February 2020, just before Covid. About 100 people crowded into the second floor of the Library to hear what the consultants the RPL had hired, no doubt at some expense, had to say about “Central Library Renewal.” All but one of those hundred people said very clearly and very loudly: Keep the current building and location and services.

I am not alone in saying the same thing today. Keep the current building and location and services. Fix what needs to be fixed in the current building.