



Friends of the Regina Public Library

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Catalyst Committee
City of Regina
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Re: MODERNIZATION OF CENTRAL LIBRARY BUILDING

The following were the key points of a presentation to the Catalyst Committee on October 20, 2022, regarding the "Modernization of Central Library Building".

PRESENTATION NOTES

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this meeting.

Friends of the Regina Public Library began when Regina's public library was threatened with closures of the Glen Elm Branch, the Prince of Wales Branch, the Connaught Branch, the Prairie History Room and the Dunlop Art Gallery and that we have the support of over 26,048 Regina residents who signed a petition to stop those closures in 2003.

The mission is, in an equitable and public manner, support the maintenance and development of a strong set of diverse and accessible library products, services and programs that meet the needs of all Regina residents through an ongoing dialogue between the public and decision makers.

I am Shawne Arzab, a frequent user of the Regina Library Central Branch. Jim Elliott and I will present and Jim will answer questions. We are members of the Friends of the Regina Public Library. Joanne Havelock sends regrets. Due to other commitments, she is unable to attend today and do this presentation.

Value of Libraries

The Regina Public Library proposal document contains a number of aspirational positive messages about the value of libraries, with which we would agree. Regina's citizens strongly support Central Library and all of the library branches throughout the city. Libraries are centers of knowledge and learning.

Need for Consultation

While supporting the value of libraries, we find that the Regina Public Library Board could improve its practices by sharing more information with the public.

Until September 16 of this year, the RPL Board withheld reports on Central Library. In June 2021, Friends of the Library was told that no recent reports were available. Yet, on September 16th 2022, they finally released 12 new ones, some going back to 2009.

That the RPL Board decided to move ahead and have a Board vote on September 27 should concern us all. The vote appears to be its "line in the sand" to maintain the library on its current site. Since the proposals for sports facilities downtown seem to be calling for entire blocks to be demolished, it is understandable that the Library Board would want to lay claim to remaining on its original location.

However, the Board missed critical steps in sharing options with the public. The 8 options listed in the KPMG 2020 "Central Library Needs Assessment and Project Plan" report were not discussed publicly. The RPL Board decided behind closed doors that it preferred to go with the option of demolishing the current building, stated in the report as "disposal of" the building, and constructing a new one.

Options

Over the years, many suggestions have come forward from the public about ways to handle any renovations needed to Central Library. We had hoped

that these ideas would receive full and serious consideration by the RPL and the merits of these proposals would be fully discussed in a public review.

- Maintaining the current building.
- Adding a third storey to the current building, as engineering reports have said is possible.
- Constructing a tower on the west section of the library property, as was envisioned by the library's original architects.
- Creating a structure that goes "up and over" the current library building, as was elegantly done with the Centennial Library in Winnipeg.
- Rather than building a large edifice downtown, resources could be put into neighbourhood branches.

We recognize and appreciate that the library desires more space in order to provide resources and carry out programs. We also recognize that staff need a healthy and pleasant work environment in which to thrive and provide those services.

The desires for new services and the space requirements should be discussed in detail with the public.

Cost Assumptions

Where are the facts and figures that contribute to the currently claimed cost of \$50 million to "maintain operations"? Without a clear explanation being provided, the \$50 million figure seems to be somewhat inflated.

In reviewing the cost figures from the Group 2 "Building Assessment Report" of February 2015 and the KPMG "Central Library Needs Assessment and Project Plan" report of 2020, it seems there have been some errors in double counting in the RPL statement of the \$50 million cost.

On page 139 of Group 2's report in 2015, short term remediation strategies were identified as 0 to 4 years, medium term as 5 to 15 years, and long-term as 15 to 20 years or more. On page 137 it is explicitly stated that "It should be noted that each remediation strategy (i.e., Short, Medium and Long Term) has been priced as mutually exclusive and does not build on each other." But the \$50 million guesstimate put forward by the RPL Board seems to have been obtained simply by adding the columns across horizontally.

Some items, such as windows and curtain walls, outlined on pages 146–147, were described as: replacing failing window units in the short term, or

replacing all windows in the medium term, or replacing the entire curtain wall including all windows in the long term.

Also, the figures already had an escalation factor of about 4 % per year to account for inflation in each column, with great amounts of escalation as time went on. So RPL statements about adding amounts for inflation need to be clarified.

Deloitte's "Central Library Business Case – Phase 1" Report of May 2017 considered the costs of rehabilitating the current library and constructing an addition, versus demolishing the current library and constructing a completely new building. Table 19 on page 26 shows that when Deloitte included demolition, construction, operating and other expenses, the cost of rehabilitating the current building and constructing an addition was actually less than a new build.

Heritage

Central Library is nationally recognized as an iconic example of modernist architecture, well built on a solid foundation.

Part of Central Library's history is in the innovation of the designer himself - to have the foresight to plan for future expansion, an idea that fits right in with the current mode of thought in this city to sustainable use of resources.

The current building is legally designated by a City of Regina bylaw as being in the Victoria Park Heritage Conservation District. The option to retain and expand it must be explored rigorously and written into the consultant terms of reference for any design work.

The approach of rehabilitation plus expansion has been successfully used by many libraries in Canada and around the world. One example is the renowned Winnipeg Millennium Library, or the revamped Edmonton library.

This is the approach we would recommend for Central Library, improvements and then additions if needed. Because the building requires some remediation does not mean it should be torn down.

Environmental Considerations

There is embodied energy in this building that will be lost if the building is demolished. In spite of any efforts to recycle the building's components, there would be extensive waste going to the landfill. Then there would also be the upfront carbon costs of the new materials for the new construction.

An environmental audit is needed.

Maintaining the building, and not letting it decline, would be responsible stewardship and contribute more positively to Regina's goal of being a sustainable city.

Location

Historically, a Central Library building has been in the same ideally-located site for more than one hundred years, across from Victoria Park and close to public transit. It should be maintained on that site.

If more space is desired for Library services, perhaps another downtown location could be utilized. Or, an addition to the Central Library building could be constructed.

Revitalization

Constructing new large buildings downtown is not a way to "revitalize" the downtown. What happened to the Regina Revitalization Initiative, the Downtown Neighbourhood Plan and the Official Community Plan, created at considerable expense and with extensive input from the general public?

Large buildings, cold and windswept, will not make the downtown a more inviting place.

Large sports facilities will only be useful for those who can afford to attend.

Large complexes that destroy entire blocks of heritage buildings in the core area will not add to the character and charm of Regina's downtown; as, for example, there apparently has been a site proposed for a new arena consuming the entire block bordered by Lorne and Smith Streets and 11th and 12th Avenues.

Has there been consideration of the parking problems that will ensue? Has the noise and disturbance been considered for Central Library patrons and the many apartment dwellers, including seniors?

As of now, the Cornwall Centre and Central Library are the only indoor public spaces in downtown Regina. And Central Library is the only place where someone can go that doesn't require spending money. This applies to people with limited funds, and many others, such as downtown workers, who aren't interested in going shopping every day. Why not create additional spaces?

There could be more than one space downtown for creativity, learning and social connection.

Better Use of City Money

In the City of Regina, expenditures should be prioritized for major issues such as homelessness.

The Library serves a wide range of people from all economic and social backgrounds. Therefore, funds for improving the Library should be high on the City's priority list.

Conclusion

Libraries are about preserving and sharing knowledge. This knowledge is contained in books, in digital formats, in art, in music and in buildings and landscapes. Thus, preserving the public heritage embodied in the Central Library building fulfills the role of the Regina Public Library.

The RPL has stated that our heritage is not bricks and mortar, it is in what we do. But, saving bricks and mortar is part of what we do; it is of no less importance than historical collections of art, books, music and history.

Not every library building will necessarily have significant historical and cultural value, but this Central Library building certainly does.

Let's work together to identify and share the options available, before irrevocable decisions are made.