

July 15, 2025

Submission from Greg Buzbuzian – President Knar Jewellery

I would like to comment on the proposed redevelopment of St. Georges Square.

My property and business is on the Square, bordered by Play with Clay and the Royal Bank Building. We have been on this site since approximately 1981. We completed renovated the building in 2003 and currently employ 15 people at this location. We also have locations in Oakville and Toronto but consider our downtown Guelph location our headquarters. We have administration, bookkeeping and goldsmithing teams in the building in addition to our retail operation.

My downtown redevelopment background: In 1986 we opened our second store in downtown Kitchener at the corner of King and Queen streets. At the time, the main intersection of a thriving downtown. By 1995, the city had reduced King street from 4 to 2 lanes and reduced the street parking. The effort was partially initiated to slow the traffic. Instead, the traffic stopped and we were forced to move locations. We moved to King street Waterloo with moving traffic and plenty of parking spots on the street. Fast forward to the introduction of the LRT, shutting off roads for a drawn out construction project and ultimately, the elimination of much of the street parking. We saw the writing on the wall and shut the store due to declining sales and the inability of clients to easily access our location. Our former store in Waterloo, like many other retail stores downtown have been replaced by bars.

I am not against progress and support the development of rapid transit projects. We also recognise the importance and urgency of rebuilding the infrastructure of downtown Guelph. As the owner of a building built in 1880's, we have bumped into the challenges of degrading infrastructure.

However, our clients and many of other downtown merchants do not take transit downtown and they are certainly not cycling downtown. I feel restricting traffic to 2 lanes will create gridlock, especially at the intersection of Wyndham and Quebec streets. This future frustration is not conducive to bringing traffic downtown. Already, the number one issue for our shoppers is the difficulty finding convenient parking.

- 1) Is the information provided on the development research still valid today as it was in 2012/14 when the studies were done? It seems to me that the number of people walking around downtown is much lower than it was.
- 2) It has been suggested that the narrowing of the roadway is for traffic calming measures. Why not speedbumps or another technique to slow traffic. In fact, with a very short run between lights, is it a problem?
- 3) The reduction in parking in the Square and particularly in front of my store is absurd. Already, we are seeing older clients refusing to come downtown for several reasons. Do we need to add another irritant to their “downtown” experience? They are not coming down by bicycle, despite what the advocates of the Transportation Masterplan are hoping for. Current and mid term reality is not aligned with City aspirations.
- 4) We have a small playground in front of our Oakville store that is seldom used despite a very high traffic count. In Guelph, we see very few children in the square. There is some great summertime programming put on by the DGBA that are well attended by families. Otherwise, I don’t see families coming downtown to play in the Square.
- 5) There is a large area for pedestrian movement in the square in lieu of parking. Are those people really here? I don’t feel this plan best represents the support that we as downtown merchants require all year round. In the summer, the plan looks lovely. What about the other 9 months when the square is quiet?
- 6) The plan as it is shown, appears to eliminate two patios on the Square: Capistrano and Buon Gusto. This is disappointing if it is the case. These establishments draw people downtown and add a positive, continental feel to the surroundings.
- 7) In the main, I feel the downtown redevelopment, specifically the reduction of traffic lanes and street parking, do not represent the best choices to support downtown merchants and others who rely on client access and parking to do their business.

My concern lies with my perception that the proposed development of the Square is not taking into account our lived experience as downtown retailers. Aspirational goals are admirable but the reality of making a living for myself and all the families that rely on our success is a different matter. If this project does not take into account the reality of downtown merchants and service providers, the consequences will be dire.

Thank you,

Greg Buzbuzian