

Sept. 30, 2020

Dear Mayor and members of the Guelph City council:

It seems as though one of the annual events at council is finding excuses to postpone the construction of a main library complex. I suspect the problem might be in the design of the proposed building itself. Had the planners allowed for an atrium with a hockey rink and skating paths through the stacks, the library would have been a reality by now.

Or if the architects had had the wisdom to combine the building with a sports bar so that patrons could watch big-time wrestling while perusing Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*, funding the project would not have been a problem.

I'm being facetious, of course. I don't want a hockey rink or a sports bar in the new library. We have our fair share of those. I just want the new library.

I've done a great deal of travelling, and one of the things that has impressed me is the number of libraries in the world. China leads the way with Russia and India right behind. I was surprised that the U.S. didn't even make the podium at a distant fifth, and was somewhat appalled to discover Canada in 19th place behind Mexico, Azerbaijan, and Iran.

Libraries are everywhere. Uganda has twenty-four. Papua, New Guinea has twenty. North Korea has twelve. The Isle of Man, with a population of some 90,000 and a land mass of only 572 square kilometres (half the size of Ontario) has eight.

Some of the most famous and beautiful buildings in the world happen to be libraries. Trinity College Library in Dublin. Seattle Central Library. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library in Toronto. The New York Public Library. The Library of Congress in Washington, DC. The Yale University Beinecke Rare Book Library. The National Library of St. Marks in Venice. The Vatican Library in Rome. The Boston Public Library. The Salt Lake City Public Library. The National Library of China in Beijing. The Central Public Library in Vancouver. The Halifax Central Library. The Library of Parliament in Ottawa.

As well, it should be noted that one of the original Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was the library at Alexandria.

What does all this have to do with the new library in Guelph? Nothing. I simply throw all this out to remind ourselves that libraries have always been and continue to be a vital part of any civil society (and some uncivil ones as well).

In fact, I would contend that libraries are among the most important and necessary spaces in any town. They act as gathering places for the social and political life of a people, as hubs for arts and learning, as repositories for our histories. More than that, they bring an energy and strength to a community that is unmatched by any other public institution.

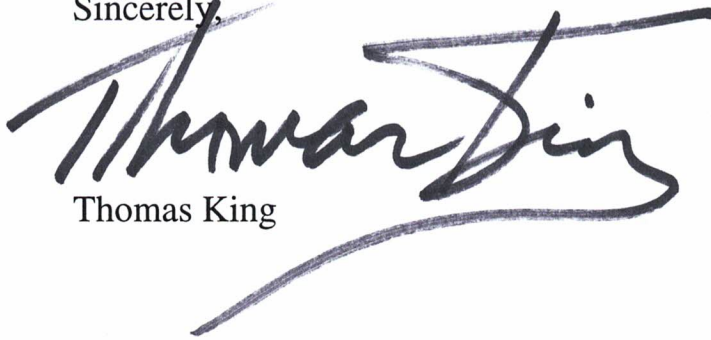
We currently have a main library. It's worn out. It's been worn out for years. It should have been replaced long before now. But mayor and council have always found ways to put it off. Budget concerns, more pressing projects, pandemics.

The new library is a project that deserves our support. We give away millions of dollars of public monies to private enterprise in the form of reduced taxes, grants, and land, as well as entering into public/private partnership where the public builds something such as a hockey arena and then turns it over to a private company that takes the lion's share of the profit.

Isn't it time we spend some of our public money on a public institution that benefits the public while enriching our city?

I'm hoping the answer is, yes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Thomas King". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end that extends downwards and to the left.

Thomas King