

To Mayor Guthrie and Guelph City Councillors
Re: The Main Library Project

The decision to proceed with the central Guelph Library must stand.

Last year, the Guelph City Council held a final vote to proceed with the long-awaited central library building project. Mayor Cam Guthrie told the audience that, though he intended to vote against it, if it was approved, he would be its biggest supporter and back it “110 per cent”. We have to trust him to keep his word, and not to attempt to derail the council’s commitment. The city has made a commitment to the developer, architects, partners and to citizens who have waited for over 30 years. To pull out or delay now would waste all of our investment in funds and good will and undermine Guelph’s reputation as a municipality with which to do business. The Mayor and City of Guelph have made a serious commitment. It must be honoured.

I am a citizen of Puslinch but like many neighbours pay to access a library card and privileges in Guelph. My book club uses the exceptional library program. With my husband, Dan Schneider, I have also supported the library through the Guelph Community Foundation, the Friends of Guelph Public Library and the Library itself. Dan provided several community library programs through “Where the Wild Things Live”, pre-COVID. While in town using the library we access Guelph businesses – but it is the library that is the draw.

Mayor Guthrie has expressed understandable concern for the taxpayers of Guelph. Canadian and American examples from recent history have shown that, in times of economic downturns, infrastructure projects stimulate the economy, creating jobs and adding value to cities. The library project will aid Guelph in its recovery from the pandemic. Studies have shown that for every dollar a community invests in library services, it gets six dollars back. Current estimates are that the annual economic benefit to Guelph would be \$9.3 million. Our downtown badly needs the revitalizing benefit of this project. The livelihoods of many downtown retailers depend on it. For the average cost to the taxpayer annually of a mere \$14 per household, no more than a few cups of coffee, we get an up-to-date facility for all to use and a significant boost to our economy.

The arguments against the library, refuted already so many times, still don’t make sense. It’s foolish to pit needed improvements against each other; Yes, the south end needs a rec centre, but the need for a new library was evident and documented when the south end was still farmers’ fields. The hospital is not a rival, as it is a provincial responsibility, not civic. A library is not an elitist frill. Far from it! It is the one facility that is open to everyone in the community. For many people, computers, Internet access, media, books in all forms and educational programs are unaffordable luxuries. The library resources and all of its programs are free. Free. For \$14 a year in taxes. Finally, the central library has to continue to be just that – central. Accessible by any means of transport, a hub which supports all of the satellite branches.

Our current library is, simply, a disgrace. It is rundown, contains asbestos and does not meet legal accessible standards. It is well below the code for a public building.

To pour more money into renovations would be a tragic waste. A draft report in 2002, a full 18 years ago, said that the main library was less than half the size it should be for a city of more than 100,000 people. Fifteen years ago, in 2005, a short-sighted city council made the biggest mistake in Guelph's history, rejecting the opportunity to buy the ideally situated former Canada Post building for a bargain price. Our current city councilors recognize that the new building is no longer a want but an urgent need. With wisdom, foresight and courage, they voted to move ahead. This decision must stand.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fiona Hanington". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.