

## **The Baker Street Development and new Library Proposal \***

**Summary Notes for a Delegate Presentation to the City of Guelph Committee of the Whole (October 5, 2020)**

### ***Introduction***

Besides my qualifications as a citizen resident of Guelph, since 1985, my professional background includes a variety of urban and regional economic development projects (over 100), directing or co-directing several downtown revitalization projects (e.g. Port Hope, Cambridge (Galt), Waterloo, Edmonton, Lethbridge), and five co-authored books on these and related fields. I have been and remain an active volunteer in several community development issues in Guelph.

### ***The Baker District Development, the Library and the Guelph Urban Economy***

The world of urban economic development has changed. The investment magnets of plentiful water, low taxes, cheap hydro rates, rail sidings, highway access, pools of cheap labour, plenty of serviced industrial land, and assorted other attractors have now been replaced in priority by *quality of life and quality of place*.

The *New Economy*, the footloose knowledge economy, seeks out cultural diversity, personal security, richness in recreational facilities and services, art galleries and studios, research institutions, the best of telecommunications, richness in cuisine offerings, an educated, skilled and versatile labour force, good schools, environmental health and wellbeing, community cohesion and leadership, a climate of innovation and creativity, and other assets.

This is what externally accessed investment looks for, and what internally generated investments builds on today.

Accessing and keeping a high priced, information dense, skilled and highly mobile (often globally so) labour force is now a central consideration. And this labour force, in turn, looks to a community's quality of life. *Place matters*.

This why the entire urban development field has shifted from the “lure brochure” and “smokestack chasing”, and the cheapest offer, to community driven *place-based development*, and *place making*.

And the multi-functional, dynamic, open, and the organic community entity we still call the Library, is a central consideration in place-making. It has evolved from the hushed, passive, often musty book depository to a vibrant, pulsating community hub. An interactive

nexus in the modern urban community. It is now a major contributor to the quality of place. And, therefore, to Guelph's future.

Place-making is all about asset-based community development (the so-called ABCD of development). Winning communities carefully identify their distinctive assets, they build upon them, and leverage them. That's why we go to Paris, Bilbao, San Francisco and elsewhere. That's why investment seeks out vibrant communities.

The Baker District development, and the new Central Library, constitute a unique opportunity for Guelph to place-make, and engage successfully with the *New Economy*.

Let's not miss it!

### *Libraries and Immediate Economic Returns*

It is now convincingly established that community libraries pay for themselves, in a multiplicity of ways, and then several times over. It's now one of the self-evident facts for local government in terms of bets and risk management.

The record indicates that in Canada \$1 in means \$5 out. In Kawartha Lakes and Newmarket, as local examples, it goes up to \$8 for the \$1 investment. Adding in social returns, with all the complexity to measure and capture these, it might be as much as \$25 for the \$1 (NORDIK Institute). As further examples, Woodstock's library generates \$7.20 in benefits for every \$1 invested in the library. The West Gwillimbury library brought in \$11 million to the local economy in 2018. Markham's library generates \$82.6 million annually. It gives \$5.97 for every dollar invested.

This story is repeated again and again, almost everywhere. It pays for itself, and more, and is a smart public investment, especially in times of economic stress.

### *The Baker District and Library Project and Guelph's Downtown*

Our community's city centre is on life support. This malaise has been evident for some time. It needs an innovative, integrated, consistent, public/private development strategy.

It needs a major, vibrant and mixed use generator to assist in the revitalization of the Downtown's economy. In the last five years we have seen massive personal and private sector investments. But they are not sufficient. The Baker District redevelopment and the Library will not be the "silver bullet". There rarely is such. But, properly designed, executed and leveraged, this major joint investment can be, and should be a vital *engine of regeneration* for a growing urban community's core area. It's in everyone's interest to have a thriving, diverse and growing Downtown.

And, in turn, this itself is another *place-based asset*. Vibrant, exciting, buzzing, diverse, people places such as downtowns, are where the new mobile labour force wants to be,

where new business types seek out the best “addresses”. This is a vital place asset that the successful urban economy now needs.

## **Conclusion**

**Here are three solid and credible reasons to move this proposal ahead. Let’s have the courage and foresight to translate community vision to community benefit. Yes, the project needs refinements, as we have heard. These will enhance it even further. But Council should now move ahead on this, without further costly delay.**

**\*City of Guelph – Staff Report - October 5, 2020**

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