

To:

clerks@guelph.ca,
cam.guthrie@guelph.ca
dan.gibson@guelph.ca
bob.bell@guelph.ca
james.gordon@guelph.ca
rodrigo.goller@guelph.ca
phil.allt@guelph.ca
june.hofland@guelph.ca
cathy.downer@guelph.ca
mike.salisbury@guelph.ca
christine.billings@guelph.ca
leanne.piper@guelph.ca
mark.mackinnon@guelph.ca
dominique.orouke@guelph.ca

From: Bonnie Jeanne Knight

Date: October 1, 2020

Re: Committee of the Whole Meeting, October 5, 2020
Agenda item: Baker District Project Update - 2020 - 148

I support the building of a stand alone central library of 88,000 sq. ft. at the south end of Baker Street. The new central library has to meet the needs of both the current and the projected population of Guelph. This central library will be a significant element of the revitalization of the downtown. A central library, illuminated by natural light, providing public space both inside and out, and serving the needs of children, youth, and adults, could be seen as the jewel in the crown of the Royal City.

Indeed, it is even more crucial in times of financial stress such as during this time of covid19, to have a central library with the space to accommodate even more people, (and to permit them to be physically distanced if necessary). During such times, those in the community who may find their disposable income painfully reduced can find in their libraries books, both hard copy and electronic, access to computers or the wifi to power their own devices, and if there is sufficient space to offer such, enriching activities for everyone in the community: adults, youth, and children.

When struggling under a financial burden, people turn to their libraries even more. During the Depression, American author Ray Bradbury, too poor to go to college, began to spend three days a week in the library, and continued that practice for 10 years. A prolific writer of science fiction and fantasy, Bradbury could not go to college, but he could go to the library. In the library he found access to a typewriter, and a place where it cost nothing to access books. The late, award-winning Canadian author, Richard Wagamese, struggled as a teenage drop out and was living a bare survival existence on the streets before he took refuge in libraries. Then, "During [his] late teens and early twenties, [he] practically lived in libraries". (canadianencyclopedia.ca) We cannot use the pandemic as an excuse to reduce the size of the central library; rather it should be the reason we insist that the library be a place that can accommodate all segments of the community, in times of both prosperity and hardship. The new Guelph central library needs to be spacious enough to accommodate those with and without financial resources.

It is short sighted to consider a reduction in size of the central library at this point. To see the library as a place that 'no one uses anymore' is a myopic view. A library that can meet the needs of its community is a used library. I visited the new Calgary main library a year ago and was truly amazed. I saw a huge, beautiful, public space, filled with light, and filled with people. A place offering endless numbers of services. I realize Calgary is a much larger city, but to see what a library *could* be, to see the true potential of a library, was so encouraging. Beautiful and functional and *used*. It will take years to build Guelph's new library, and if it is reduced in size, it will be outdated by the time it is completed. And then we will be faced with yet another decades-long campaign to build, or to rent, *additional* space. Let's commit now to a long range view of the Guelph central library, and see it through to its proper, worthy of the Royal City, end.

The central library needs as well to be the central operational hub for Guelph's branch libraries, and a place to archive Guelph's history. In short, a central library that truly meets the needs of the community can be seen as the measure of a city. It can be the determining factor as to whether Guelph is seen as the city where choosing the least expensive way to move forward moves us yet further back, or as a city that is a forward thinking place to live, a place to invest in.

It will never cost less to build more capacity later, so why not build what is required, to meet both short and long term needs, now, at the costs of today? The cost of building has already increased over the initial push decades ago for a new central library. The consultation has been done. The needs determined. The plan agreed upon. Why do a reversal at this point and waste what has already been thoroughly considered and accepted as necessary to meet the needs of the Guelph community? Let's have a clearly focused vision for the future, and the future will look back fondly on the council, that in 2020, was far sighted enough to have such a positive vision for Guelph's central library.

Bonnie Jeanne Knight
Guelph, ON