

October 2, 2020

To City Council, Mayor Guthrie, and the citizens of Guelph,

I am writing to show my support for the revised, 88,000 square foot library as part of the Baker Street redevelopment and library plan. The new changes provide an innovative solution to some of the challenges that have arisen with the previous Baker St. plan, including increased property values and economic uncertainties springing from the COVID pandemic. I wholeheartedly endorse this new plan and urge Council *not* to accept the one-year delay proposed by City staff, but to push ahead with the new project as soon as possible.

This city desperately needs a new main library to be able to provide the various services that libraries provide for Guelph citizens – lending of books and audio-visual materials, access to the internet, printing and copying services, public interest programs for adults, children, and families, a work space for students and those without a home office, and quiet places for reading, reflection, and contemplation. The current main branch has run out of space, and it's frankly far past its due-date for a city of the size and sophistication like Guelph.

Some of my fondest memories as a child come from the exploration and discoveries that I made in our public library in Waterloo, where I grew up. It opened a world far beyond my small household. I come from a family of immigrants and my parents didn't even finish primary school. Libraries were a lifeline for me, opening up a world of dreams and possibilities, helping me find my way in Canadian society. I have no doubt that our public libraries put me on a path to educational success in this country, making it easier for me to go on to university, graduate work, and complete my PhD at Canada's best institution of higher learning in Toronto. Public libraries are not a place for elites or intellectuals, as some critics of the new library are arguing. Public libraries are institutions for the people - for everyone.

We should never forget that our public libraries are institutions that serve and support the most vulnerable and most disadvantaged in our city. Two years ago, when my wife and a small group of friends helped bring a Syrian refugee family to Guelph in chilly December, the first public institution that our new Syrian friends visited was the main branch of Guelph's downtown library. After that, they were regular visitors to the library – meeting with other Canadians, exploring all the library had to offer – the children's book area, the technology nooks, the quiet places for young teens to sit and enjoy some person time. Isn't it wonderfully appropriate that this family of new Canadians, escaping a repressive, brutal dictatorship, civil war in Syria, and the strains of years in a refugee camp in Turkey, should come to Canada and within days be enjoying their new-found freedom and intellectual discovery in that most Canadian of public institutions – our local, public library!

I won't repeat all the arguments for why Guelph needs a new library and why the new 88,000 sq. ft. Baker St. proposal makes sense. The plan and the arguments are solid. However, I would note one important point about the new Baker St. plan. This plan isn't just about the library; it is about the economic revitalization of the downtown and fulfilling the vision of the City's

Downtown Secondary Plan. The private sector developer, Windmill Developments is bringing \$125 to \$175 million of private sector investment to the table. At least 300 units of preciously needed downtown housing will be part of the Baker District plan. When the project is completed, it will generate around \$1 million annually in property taxes. As our City continues to suffer from the economic dislocation and financial impacts of the COVID crisis NOW is the time to approve the plan, put our shovels into the ground, and signal with a strong vote of confidence that this is a city with a vision – a social vision, an economic vision, a vision for the future to serve every current and new resident to Guelph. Council must simply act to approve the newly revised Baker St. plan.

Thank you for your consideration,

Tom Deligiannis  
Guelph, ON