

Gow's Bridge



Linking the Old University Neighbourhood to the City of Guelph since 1897

Old University Neighbourhood Residents' Association Inc.

2 October 2020

Members of the Guelph City Council,

As City Council considers the design, location, and timing of building a new Main Library, the Executive Committee of the Old University Neighbourhood Residents' Association offer the following comments:

- The existing downtown library building has reached the end of its life as an effective main library for the Guelph Public Library system. It is too small to support the services expected of a modern main library; it is not adequately accessible to meet the requirements for buildings under Ontario legislation; and it cannot be renovated in any way to meet present-day service expectations.
- The GPL system is heavily used in comparison with systems in similar sized cities. Clearly, the public in Guelph see a need for library services and make good use of them. It only makes sense that Guelph have an up-to-date Main Library to meet the needs of a population in need of critical information and other services.
- While the Main Library building in any system will support the administrative needs of the wider system and will provide specialized services not efficiently provided in branches, we would note that the Main Library is, in fact, the neighbourhood branch for the residents of the OUN (as well as for other neighbourhoods near the City centre). Our residents are heavy users of the library and maintaining a viable downtown library is vital for us.
- Our society is moving rapidly and strongly to a reliance on technology and digital communications. It is essential that Guelph have a library facility that can support such changes in our social and business operations. The existing main library cannot meet such a need. A new building that is well planned and designed is essential if Guelph is to provide these important human capital supports.
- The library has always provided essential digital and spatial infrastructure and supports, particularly to vulnerable populations in the city. In the era of COVID-19, this has never been more the case. A spacious public library is essential to meeting current physical distancing requirements. Furthermore, we cannot assume that all children, youth and families have adequate physical space and digital resources to work and learn remotely.

- Evidence from other communities that have recently built new and effective Main downtown libraries have identified important economic advantages from such developments. It is fairly certain that the downtown Guelph will benefit from a new and enlarged Main Library.

We know that while there is general agreement in most quarters about the necessity of new Main Library for our City, the current discussion at Council relates to timing and cost. We appreciate the challenge that City Council faces with regard to financing during this uncertain time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

That being said, it is our opinion that the financing options that have been shared with us by our city councillors, Cathy Downer and Leanne Caron Piper, are fiscally responsible and a modest investment for significant returns. *(The library will be funded by Development Charges, sale of property, reserves and a new Tax Levy of .39% for 20 years. The .39% works out to an average of \$14.65 annually per household or \$293 total over the 20 year time frame.)* Besides giving us an urgently needed Main Library that can be used by all in the community it also will provide a needed stimulus to making an under-utilized part of our downtown core into the centrepiece of downtown renewal. We would urge you to move forward with this initiative.

Thank you for your work on our behalf,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Lawson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

John Lawson, President
Old University Neighbourhood Residents' Association