

City Clerk's Office
City of Guelph
1 Carden Street
Guelph, ON N1H 3A1

October 1, 2020

Dear Councillors, Mayor, and City Staff:

I am writing to provide comments regarding the Baker Street Library Development. I am in favour of continuing with the Baker Street Library Development plan with the recent amendments. I believe that it has been over a decade that it has been discussed as a need for the city and with each year costs continue to rise. If we come from a standpoint that a new library is needed (as was the recommendation from staff, combined with needed repairs and accessibility concerns of the current building), then I cannot understand how costs will go down over time. They have only gone up over the years that the library continues to be pushed back.

I recently read Councillor Gibson's letter to the editor where he discussed that the pandemic has affected families and required government supports, and in line with this, it is not the time to remove supports that this new library would provide. A 21st century library is bigger than books (as the business case for the new library has already been made), and the main central branch is needed. An accessible space for all is needed.

Taxpayer cost – A recommendation has been made for an approval of the \$62.0 million library that includes an increase of 0.39% via a tax levy on \$19.7 million. This is estimated to be about \$15-20 per year for the average household based on house assessments (versus prices in the market). It would be beneficial that Councillors/Mayor/media communicate these actual annual costs to the public when they make social media posts or write opinion letters to the media. It would help a citizen to make an informed opinion based on the actual numbers versus percentages of a portion of a large number. Additionally, if this is the case then I think it's important to acknowledge all of the costs that appear on a tax bill (i.e. education levy etc.) in relation to this amount. I am concerned that if we let this project go now, it will cost us all much more a few years down the road.

Return on Investment – It would be remiss to discuss costs without looking at returns on investments also. The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries provides cases of varying sized cities in Ontario with an average ROI of approximately \$5.00 (<http://fopl.ca/news/selected-economic-roi-return-on-investment-current-studies-for-canadian-public-libraries/>). The tangible benefits are important to acknowledge when discussing this project.

Population health – As I wind down my Master’s in Public Health degree, I think often of the Social Determinants of Health and how they relate in our local community. Libraries have been shown to benefit health at both the individual and the population level of the community. The new library allows for employment searches, work, technology, literacy, play programs, social support, and an accessible safe space for all people.

Another library? - Of recent times, the main branch is not my main branch to visit. However, I used it numerous times when I had a young toddler. And my elderly father uses it as on a daily basis. Some people feel we may not need another library because they themselves do not go to one or to that particular branch. However, what one citizen themselves does is not what makes up a city. I paid taxes towards education for many years when I neither attended school, nor had a child in school. At different times in one’s life we may not always use a service, but it is part of what makes up the city we live in. I would ask that the Council consider the original business case of why this library/ Baker district plan was created. I feel that the business case for this library project has already been made numerous times over the years and this is not the time to go back to the drawing board. It will cost Guelph more money in the long run if we keep putting this off.

Respectfully,

Julie Gill