

This Monday, council will, in all likelihood, ratify a committee recommendation that the new library construction contract be awarded even though both the chief building official as well as council have received legal notice that the project does not meet the zoning requirements for parking and will, if and when an exemption is passed, almost certainly face a legal challenge. Not to be outdone, council has thrown together a last-minute exemption bylaw and scheduled it for ratification only moments before the vote on the library tender.

Unfortunately, any legal challenge once initiated will inevitably lead to a second action under the building code that would effectively stall or rescind the building permit pending resolution of any and all legal proceedings. The Downtown Orillia Management Board (DOMB) through their solicitors, out of concern for the fiscal interests of our community, communicated their concerns and intentions well in advance. Council will no doubt stumble ahead regardless, knowingly exposing the taxpayers of our community to claims from the awarded contractor for delay or cancellation compensation.

So what exactly is the issue? Let me first establish what it is not. Many to this day still believe this to be simply a clash between the forces for and against a new library but this is, and never has been the real issue. In fact, all stakeholders in the downtown have, from Day 1, supported a new downtown home for our library.

This issue is about proper planning and process or in the case of this project specifically, the absence of either. Not in my 30 years in the construction industry and the literally billions of dollars of projects in which I have been involved, have I ever witnessed a project so recklessly mishandled from the outset. This project goes against every common sense rule of proper urban planning from symbiotic

institutional/commercial relationships, preservation of open space for revitalization initiatives, architectural consistency as well as the successful repurposing of vacant building assets. We've managed to break just about every rule known in our quest to construct the ultimate "do as we say, not as we do" edifice to ignorance.

This issue is about constructing a building, any building, on the market square adjacent to our heritage centrepiece that undermines the integrity, the history and the vitality of the entire western half of our downtown. This, despite the fact that there was not one, but two other locations that never merited rightful consideration. Contrary to what one councillor may have reported in this publication several weeks ago, other than a slanderous and erroneous response to an alternate proposal at the Woolco site, a staff report that was subsequently discredited by not one but three independent professionals, no documented evidence exists that details any investigation of any other location as there was never any other consideration other than the market square.

This issue is about heritage and how the heritage initiative could have established downtown Orillia as a relevant destination to the more than six million people within a 90-minute drive of our city. This downtown heritage initiative was to be furthered by the possibility of establishing downtown Orillia as a heritage conservation district as was detailed by Dr. Carl Bray in his presentation last week. Yet the city proposes to demolish our Carnegie library, a monument to one of the greatest gifts ever bestowed to our community that could have easily be "de-renovated" back to its original configuration and repurposed as a valuable community asset as Barrie did with the creation of the MacLaren Art

Centre. Our current library will be destroyed to make way for a contemporary building that will envelop our heritage centrepiece on two sides.

This issue is about history and how our downtown came to be. As was presented by Dr. Bray, Orillia is like a barbell -- a bar with a weight on either end. The weight or attraction on the one end is the waterfront, the park and open space. The weight on the other is our centre of culture, the Opera House, a bustling farmers' market and, of course, the library. The merchants of Orillia are the bar in between and are served by traffic migrating to and from these two attractions. In Dr. Bray's words, every effort should be expended not to upset this balance. Our farmers' market, a tourist destination itself, has operated from this location for nearly 140 years and has been successful in attracting up to 2,000 visitors into our downtown core on the busiest retail day of the week. It is now threatened and in all likelihood, if the course remains unchanged, may never return as the proposed building has failed to accommodate their needs and the absence of parking renders this site impractical.

This issue is also about cost. Both Orillia and the Town of Collingwood had identical library budgets in 2006 of \$9 million. Collingwood is nearing completion of a LEED gold, heritage-inspired, 30,000 square-foot downtown library, 13% below budget at \$7.8 million (\$260 per square foot) while Orillia, without a shovel in the ground is expected to exceed \$25 million (\$609 square feet) or almost 300% more than the original budget. This issue is about community involvement. No other stakeholder, other than the library, had a seat on the planning team including neither the DOMB nor the farmers' market. In addition, the voices of almost 5,000 petitioners who expressed concerns about location and the threat to our cherished cultural institutions were silenced without consideration.

And finally, the paramount issue: parking and the negative impact to the entire downtown economy the construction of a building, any building of any description for that matter that needlessly consumes parking essential to the survival of other area businesses. Parking is, and will remain for the foreseeable future, essential to the success of our downtown merchants. Reductions in the parking inventory will undermine area businesses, threaten their livelihood and possibly their very existence. We made mistakes in the hospital district planning in not adequately addressing parking, why are we destined to repeat the same mistake once again?

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