

September 20, 2022

Members of the Board  
Regina Public Library  
2311 12th Ave.  
Regina, SK S4P 0N3

Dear Members of the Board:

I am writing to express my opposition to the announced plan to demolish the Central Library, and to construct a new building. I also object to the manner in which this plan was arrived at, without proper and transparent public consultation.

The 2021 Pritzker Architecture Prize laureate Anne Lacaton states, *"Demolishing is a decision of easiness and short-term. It is a waste of many things – a waste of energy, a waste of material and a waste of history. Moreover, it has a very negative social impact. For us, it is an act of violence."*

The demolition and replacement plan flies in the face of the City of Regina's commitment to environmental sustainability, to the City of Regina's Victoria Park Heritage Conservation District bylaw, and to the Board's responsibility to properly consult with the citizens of Regina, whose tax dollars allow the RPL to function.

There is ample scientific evidence on the environmental consequences of demolishing existing buildings rather than retrofitting and updating them. In case the Director and Board are unaware of these, I can recommend the following. The hyperlinks lead to full documents:

[Architects' Journal](#), *"Retrofit of existing buildings is cost-effective and generally less controversial, because it conserves and enhances existing places and neighbourhoods. As for carbon emissions, retrofit makes sense because of the substantial embodied energy savings made in repurposing existing buildings, compared with the ultra-high embodied energy costs of demolition and rebuild."*

[The Preservation Leadership Forum of the National Trust for Historic Preservation](#), *"Building reuse typically offers greater environmental savings than demolition and new construction... Reusing existing buildings is good for the economy, the community and the environment. "*

[Journal of Architectural Conservation](#), *"Two key benefits of building retention and adaptation, over demolition and new build are: the conservation of heritage, and reductions in embodied greenhouse gas emissions from construction materials... To reduce the impact of construction on the environment it is crucial that we calculate the embodied as well as operational impacts of demolition decisions and retain and refurbish buildings where this is the lower carbon choice."*

In light of the very damaging environmental impact of demolition, I wonder how the demolition of the Central Library aligns with the City of Regina's commitment to becoming a renewable, net-zero community?

In addition to the significant environmental costs of this plan, there is also the dismal symbolism of a public institution devoted in part to cultural preservation, willfully demolishing an elegant Modernist building designed by the Regina architect Kiyoshi Izumi, which is part of a heritage district protected by a City of Regina bylaw.

What would it say about a Public Library that doesn't respect heritage? What would it say about a Public Library increasing environmental degradation during a climate crisis? What would it say about a city that ignores the maintenance of its public buildings and knocks them down rather than maintain them?

The Central Library is certainly in need of rejuvenation and probably expansion, and this is where the focus of the Director and Board needs to be: upgrade the existing building and if more space is needed, develop plans for an addition to the building on property already available.

There are dozens of examples of very successful renovations and expansions to libraries and other public institutions that preserved and upgraded the original building (many of which were in much worse shape than Central). Here are a small sample. Again the hyperlinks lead to more detailed information:

[Winnipeg Millennium Library](#)

[Robarts Library](#)

[Bloor/Gladstone Library](#)

[OCAD University](#)

[Beyazit State Library](#)

[The Morgan Library](#)

[Boston Library](#)

These institutions, in addition to taking the environmentally responsible course of action by maintaining and updating the original structures, and the socially responsible course of action by preserving the built heritage of their cities, created exciting new additions that attracted very positive public responses, architectural awards, and media coverage that reflects well on the institutions and cities they represent. This is what forward-looking cities and institutions do.

What the RPL Director and Board have proposed is retrograde; it's planning from the 1950s, not the second decade of the 21st century.

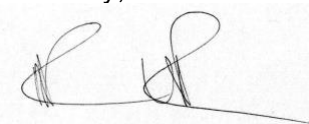
I've been a patron of the Central Library since the early 1970s, borrowing books and music, visiting the Dunlop Art Gallery, using the resources of the Prairie History Room, and until its 40-year legacy was destroyed by the current administration, I was a regular paying customer of the RPL Film Theatre. I had the pleasure of working at Central before beginning my graduate studies in Montreal. Central is an apt description of the role it plays in the public life of the city.

After more than a decade living outside Saskatchewan, I returned to Regina in 2003 to take a position at the University of Regina. Shortly after my return, the RPL Director and Board announced plans to close three branch libraries, the Dunlop Art Gallery and the Prairie History Room. The Director and Board had not consulted the public before these decisions were announced, and the rationales given for the closures did not hold up to scrutiny. Regina's citizens rallied to save the Library from the decisions of its Director and Board.

In 2022 I'm afraid we seem to have another Library Director and Board attempting to force a decision on the citizens of Regina without proper consultation, without transparency, and with rationales that don't hold up to scrutiny.

It's time for the Board to begin a proper process of public consultation, and work towards a plan for a rejuvenated and expanded Central that is environmentally responsible, that maintains our built heritage, and that has the support of the patrons of the Library - the citizens of Regina.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Wihak', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Wihak

c.c. The Mayor and Members of City Council