

Dear Regina Public Library Board:

Without public discussion before or since the decision to demolish RPL Central in September 2022, and without public explanation of the ramifications for the public of no access to a Central Library, nor what will happen to the Dunlop Art Gallery, Film Theatre, or Prairie History Room during this multi-year upheaval of moving out of Central Library, it seems as if we are once again where we were 20 years ago in November, when the RPL Library Board, without discussion, announced the closures of three inner city library branches, and the closure of the Dunlop Art Gallery and the Prairie History Room.

If we understood that the closure of Central Library was meant to renew and expand the existing iconic Modernist Library, with temporary accommodation for a Central Library, an art Gallery and a Film Theatre, we might be sympathetic and supportive of our beloved public institution that serves all citizens of Regina.

I was a child when the Carnegie Library was demolished. Even though I lived in a grocery store on the next block, my grade 4 introduction to a public Library was a walk from Victoria School to Connaught Library. Central Library was closed for many years during its demolition and construction. There was no replacement Central Library during this time.

We are only told the decision is made, with no transparent process to explain how funding has been secured, or and future plan, a huge contrast to the planning for the existing Izumi library, where citizens understood the finances, design and fiscal ramifications of a plan for a new library that was approved after a plebiscite vote., to build a new quality Central Library for \$1,000,000.

While we might understand the new library envy of Calgary or Halifax, with expansive atriums, our Library Board refuses to allow the Regina public to enjoy our beautiful 2 story atrium, as Bernard Flaman says in his essay in Biblio Files (2017) “ which shines like a beacon, even on a cold snowy winter evening”. RPL Central’s foyer is roped off: we are no longer allowed to even pack our books and put on our winter coats, as we used to (never mind using or even sitting on the purpose-built boot racks), so now we get in the way as we try to pack books on the floor, and struggle into our coats. In other words, if we are not even using what we already have, how can we want more?

Our iconic modernist library, designed by internationally-known and Massey Award-winning local Japanese-Canadian architect I Kiyoshi Izumi, could be dynamically and ecologically expanded onto the west lot, as plans had allowed, if space is needed.

In 2024, the MacKenzie Arty Gallery will host an exhibition of the work of Kyoshi Izumi, curated by Bernard Flaman and Tak Pham. It is shameful that the Library Board has no respect for a world-renown local architect nor his iconic modernist Central Library, itself currently double-protected under the Municipal Heritage Act and the Provincial Heritage Act.

Regina has developed a bad habit of eagerly knocking down buildings by local architects that end up with as failed sites: Joseph Pettick's Plains Hotel (empty lot), Francis Portnall's CNIB, built especially for the Blind (demolished by Brandt without a demolition permit), the Provincial buildings (were they designed by our Provincial Architect, when we still had one?) on Lorne that are no surface parking.

In our age of climate crisis, it is ecologically and financially unsound to continue to toss away civic and provincial architecture. To demolish, with no acknowledgement or discussion of the cultural and architectural worth Izumi's modernist Central Library from either the Library Board or Colliers does not bode well for our history or for our future.

Our modernist Central Library is now even more a community hub than it was over 60 years ago, or perhaps, during these socially difficult times, just as during the Wars and during the Depression, people from all walks of life depend on Central Library. Its closure will cause even more hardships. Regina Public Library had established many cultural experiences beyond books since its founding, and in the 1960s, was a model for the libraries for its outreach programs diverse communities. We were the active model of many new theories of what is a library!

The dire desolation of Regina's downtown is now an admitted problem, but will not be solved by building a hockey rink across from a library and two seniors apartments. Without a film Theatre at Central Library during this proposed removal of Central Library, especially now, 25 years after the first threatened closure of RPL Film Theatre, and now that there are no commercial cinemas downtown, we will have even fewer reasons to come downtown. What will happen with the nationally renown Dunlop art gallery? Will planned exhibitions once again be cancelled, as in 2003, an action that shocked the entire country?

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