



Friends of the Regina Public Library

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2042 Garnet St., Regina, SK S4T 2Z6

June 24, 2024

Mayor Masters and Council
City of Regina
Regina, SK, S4P 3C8

Re: Regina City Council meeting of June 26, 2024,
CR24-74 Central Library Renewal Project Debt Financing Report

The following are comments from the Friends of the Regina Public Library (FRPL) on CR24-74 Central Library Renewal Project Debt Financing Report.

Participation in Discussion

First, we would like to note the number of letters and presentations to Executive Committee and Council on this topic. In 2003 without any prior public discussion the Library announced decisions to close Connaught, Prince of Wales, and Glen Elm branches, along with the Dunlop Art Gallery, the Film Theatre and the Prairie History Room. FRPL was created, significant public protest arose, and the closure decision was cancelled. Since then, FRPL has strived to promote public discussion of library issues. So, it is good to see the number and variety of opinions being expressed about the RPL's plans for Central Library.

Libraries are Valued

Second, we want to reiterate that FRPL greatly values our library system in Regina and throughout the province. Libraries are community focus places, keepers of resources and programs that promote creativity and learning in our society, in places that are open to everyone.

Square Footage

Is the square footage of 125,000 to 150,000 simply obtained by saying that since Regina's population has doubled, the square footage of Central Library should double?

The RPL's report Central Library Development Plan by Resource Planning Group Inc., January 15, 2010 on page 4-1 listed Total Library Component Areas square footage desired as 127,410 square feet, with a total of 150.000 for the Total Building Area.

According to KPMG's "Central Library Needs Assessment and Project Plan" report of 2020 report (NAPP), RPL is using the Wisconsin model for size estimation. However, this model was based on smaller cities with only one library branch, unlike Regina which today in 2024 has one Central Library, 5 large branches, and 3 smaller branches, with an estimated 160,000 or more square feet in total. This total was about 75,000 to 80,000 in 1962, with the new Central and 3 branches and bookmobiles operating at that time. So, in some ways the overall system square footage has already doubled since 1962.

At the City Council Executive Committee on November 1, 2023, the RPL discussed its plan for a rigorous environmental scan of all of the library branches over the coming year for a branch renewal plan to be completed in Spring 2024 followed by a Board review and then projects going ahead in 2024 or 2025. We welcomed this review. FRPL has said in the past that this review should be made in conjunction with decisions about Central Library.

This winter of 2024 RPL conducted surveys, stakeholder consultations and 2 public meetings about possible ways to service more areas of the City – "... potential new RPL service locations and the scope of associated services".

These could include small branches located in conjunction with schools and community centres and book delivery kiosks. No cost estimates have yet been developed on these options, which will be presented to the RPL Board likely by September, 2024.

Should our model of library services, and our money, be invested in a large downtown library, or would the money be better invested in library services for our current growth, and what City Council wants, a further expanding City? This question needs to be publicly discussed in light of the debt financing request for Central Library. Also, what role should developers of new areas be playing in planning and paying for community resources such as libraries?

More Details Needed

With the RPL's request for a \$119 Million in debt financing, it seems the RPL Board of Directors is asking the citizens of Regina to sign a blank cheque. More public awareness of the reasoning behind this request is needed for

citizens to make a good decision. We all love the Library and value its services, we just want the funds to be wisely spent.

The 2010 Central Library Development outlined with specific details the library's ideas about various physical spaces for Central's services. (This project was not enacted.) KPMG's NAPP report of 2020 briefly described what would be in each area of a renewed library. Later on, the details of current RPL wishes for Central will be developed in its Functional Program. But more details are needed now.

Revitalization

"Revitalization" of Regina's downtown is what is expected from a new Central Library. But Central is already a hub of the downtown. How much more can it be expected to do for the City centre? Other social and business efforts are needed to make people see the City core as a safe, welcoming and interesting space. Many small and unique businesses and spaces have been removed from the downtown in recent years. Should we be expecting the downtown to be a huge major attraction, or would our efforts be better spent on a modest downtown combined with energizing other neighbourhoods and areas of the city? Remember the "walkable neighbourhood" ideals of a few years ago?

Heritage

Central Library, built in 1962, is a heritage building in downtown Regina next to Victoria Park and this heritage should be preserved. It is part of the officially designated Victoria Park Heritage Conservation District. This modernist icon was designed by Regina's own Izumi, Arnott and Sugiyama. Their renowned design work will be featured this Fall in an exhibit at the Mackenzie Art Gallery.

The heritage value of Central Library was confirmed nationally at "The Ordinary Amazing Symposium: The Cultural Value of Modernist Architecture" held in Regina in May 2007, with a declaration signed by national architects and Regina citizens.

Central Library is a Municipal Heritage building and part of the Victoria Park Heritage Conservation District, thus doubly protected by Civic and Provincial Heritage Designation. The City of Regina must respect its own bylaws and the authority and responsibility it has that derives from the Provincial Heritage Property Act. It must approach the existing building as a designated heritage building rather than a "tear down". We have two

excellent examples in Regina of such work by Saskatchewan consultants: Darke Hall, Globe Theatre and the SaskPower building.

Rehabilitation

Retaining the Central Library building, rehabilitating it to modern standards, and creating an addition are the most environmentally sound options, retaining the embodied energy in this building. Embodied energy will be lost if Central Library is demolished; extensive materials will be wasted going to the landfill. There will be upfront carbon costs of new materials for new construction. An environmental audit is needed.

The Kenyon engineering report stated that it was possible to add another two stories onto Central, (Pages 22 to 24 of Regina Public Library Building Assessment, June 5, 2012, P3Architecture Partnership, P3A File # 2012-42).

And there is space on the west for an adjoining office tower.

Deloitte's 2017 Central Library Business Case – Phase 1 Regina Public Library report (page 28) found that the construction, maintenance and other costs were nearly equal for renovating and adding onto the current building as compared to a new build.

Rehabilitation and an addition to the current building should have been included in the recent Expressions of Interest calling for potential partners on revitalizing Central Library. And the option should be included for any architectural planning and design work.

With rehabilitation and renewal, the Winnipeg and Edmonton Centennial Libraries were expanded without demolition, for \$21 million in 2005, and \$84.5 million in 2020 respectively, creating more space for less money than a new build, but more importantly, preserving civic history and cultural heritage,

In August 2022, the RPL claimed that it would cost \$50 million, just to “keep the doors open” at the current Central Library, with no supporting written details for this estimate available to the public.

In reviewing the cost figures from the Group2 “Building Assessment Report” of February 2015 and the KPMG “Central Library Needs Assessment and Project Plan” report of 2020, it seems there was a double counting error in the RPL's estimate.

In Group2's report, the BTY Group engineers identified time-based modification strategies according to the building's intended lifetime. Columns on page 139 listed costs for Short term (0 to 4 years), Medium term (5 to 15 years), and Long term (15 to 20 years or more). On page 137 the report states, "It should be noted that each remediation strategy (i.e., Short, Medium and Long Term) has been priced as mutually exclusive and does not build on each other." For example, a Short term modification of something is not needed if a Long term replacement is planned, and the Medium term modification is generally encompassed by the Long term modification. Therefore, these costs don't need to be counted twice or three times. However, the RPL's \$50 million figure seems to result from simply adding the three estimate columns across horizontally, then adding an arbitrary amount for inflation.

We believe the proper approach, without double-counting, would be to take up BTY's estimate for long-term remediations of \$28.58 million, with construction inflation adjustments to present day. We also believe that, especially for a civic heritage building, the sensible remediations should have been made all along instead of passed over.

The RPL has had ample time over the last 10 or 20 years to upgrade Central Library, but the RPL Board seems to have only done the minimum to carry out its responsibility regarding the building. Last year, at City Hall the RPL Board stated it had spent \$3.2 million on Central Library over the past ten years. Funds were available for other things – it is not right that the issues with the building were allowed to escalate to the point where the RPL Board considers it a risk to stay there in case any of the systems have problems. For example, electrical repairs were slated for 2023, but the RPL had chosen not do them, because the RPL hoped to move out of the building in the next year or so. The delays seem to be adding to the risks for the building.

Executive Committee on November 1, 2023 asked for more details on remediation expenses and how these costs would compare to the costs of relocation. Have these costs been made available to Councillors and to the public?

Current Situation

In 2023, RPL decided to move earlier to a temporary location because of potential risks for service delivery interruption due to problems with the electrical system, boilers and roof. Further research conducted by the RPL recently has indicated that such a relocation is not feasible.

The RPL will have to stay in the current building, which will require undertaking some needed repairs that had been postponed.

The RPL should give the City and the public a list of the repairs needed and approximate costs. Roof, boiler, electrical?

Public Opinion

Many citizens support the value of libraries and services provided.

The RPL has conducted a number of public surveys about Central to get opinions on what is wanted by the public, however the questions and approaches, talking about libraries for the 21st century, seemed to be slanted toward dissatisfaction with the current building and perhaps creating a demand for a larger building that would require the demolition of the current building. No one was asked whether they wanted to have Central Library demolished.

Over the past couple of years, the RPL website has shifted Central Library's fate from 'renovation' to 'renewal' to 'replacement', before settling on the misleading (but less alarming) term 'modernization'. When people in the general public are asked how they interpret 'modernization' or 'renewal', they almost invariably reply 'renovation', not 'demolition'. The RPL is not mentioning demolition of the building, instead they are talking about 'decommissioning' and no mention of what follows. One wonders how many thousands of downtown citizens remain uninformed about the proposed changes coming their way.

Conclusion

We agree with the City choosing to take some more time to evaluate its financial priorities, as City Administration and Executive Committee have recommended.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne Havelock, Chairperson
Jim Elliott, Board member
Friends of the Regina Public Library