

Members of Finance Committee:

I thank you for allowing me to address you today regarding the Kitchener Public Library. I come as two people this afternoon and will begin as president of Waterloo Historical Society. This 95-year-old organization, mandated with preserving and collecting the history of the people of Waterloo county/region, has been allied with the Berlin/Kitchener Library since 1912 and in fact for many years, the old Carnegie library building housed our artifact collection which later formed the core of Doon Heritage Crossroads collection. The main thrust of co-operation between WHS and KPL over the years has been in the management of the WHS *document* collection. From the beginning, first through the library's Mabel Dunham, Dorothy Shoemaker, Grace Schmidt, Susan Hoffman and now Karen Ball-Pyatt, the KPL local history librarian has also been the WHS archivist. This co-operation has resulted in KPL housing one of the largest and most important local history collections in Ontario. The formation of a special room, the Grace Schmidt Room of Local History, about 20 years ago was testament to the strength and importance of that collection. Today the GSR is a vital hub in historical research---but it is suffering.

Its collection---meaning that of WHS and KPL---is scattered over several parts of the current structure because proper storage areas have not kept pace with the growth of the collection. This makes retrieval of requested items a cumbersome and time-wasting action for the local history librarians. It also means that a large part of the collection is not maintained in proper climate-controlled conditions.

Yes, the Grace Schmidt Room is just one corner of an overall library operation but it is an important corner utilized by every segment of our population: go in any day and you may see high school or university students, professional and legal researchers, genealogical devotees, newspaper reporters, authors, visitors from afar looking for family background clues... and, indeed city staff have been known to dig up information at the GSR for reports which end up on your desks.

The third option that has been outlined in the library renovations proposals before you provides the best situation for the continued growth and value of Kitchener's, indeed the region's, most important historical resource. In a fast-changing world it is more crucial than ever to ensure that important aspects of our heritage and history are not lost through lack of space---lack of *properly-maintained* space.

The current library is nearing the age of the Carnegie Library when it had served its time but 85 Queen North is ready-aye-ready to give many more years of service and the best way to keep it a vital part of not only the downtown but of the entire city and region is to give it the best ‘second-life’ possible.

The second person I come as today is simply me. As a lifelong resident of Kitchener-Waterloo, mostly in this core area of Kitchener, I can recall the old library at Queen and Weber. Libraries were much different then and a young boy certainly tiptoed with sealed lips through the shelves...there is little tiptoeing and few sealed lips nowadays, but that is change. There are future authors, researchers, scientists, business leaders, perhaps even politicians curled up in chair at 85 Queen North right now as I speak, captured by a book. We must ensure there is proper room for that book, for that chair, for that person.

The councillors of that early 60s era saw the future and took the necessary steps to ensure Kitchener residents had the best possible resource center/library. My *old* main branch, the Carnegie, was gladly discarded to embrace this new, spacious, wide aisled, brightly-lit library.....my *new* library.

Like most citizens, I believe, I think the library is the closest ‘thing’ I feel that I own in the city as a citizen. I can enter those doors and I can end up anywhere in the world. I can listen to the greatest minds of our civilization talking to me (perhaps the stupidest also). I can dream of the future or wallow in the past.

But I don’t think I need sell you on the value of the library.

A couple of years ago I addressed you on another subject and called Victoria Park the heart of the city. If so, the library is our *head*, and that head needs a bit of surgery.

Those councillors of five decades ago had a vision and created a structure which took us from the 19th century into the 20th. I am confident that our current councillors can take a similar step to move our library into the 21st century. Please support Option Three.

-rych mills