

WITHOUT

PREJUDICE

To: Regina Public Library Board of Directors

September 19, 2022

This letter (below) will serve as my independent submission to the Regina Public Library Board of Directors for their consideration. I had initially submitted it on September 14, 2022 to the individuals whose names are listed at the end of the letter. They may have forwarded it to others.

I ask that this submission be made available, in its entirety, to each Board Member and that it please be included in the minutes of the public meeting scheduled to discuss the future of the Central Branch to be held on Tuesday, September 27, 2022 at 1630 hrs.

Thank you for your anticipated efforts on my behalf.

Respectfully,

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306.757.5627 (unpublished; includes Message Manager)

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I know time is a valuable commodity these days; still, I would appreciate it if you took the few minutes required to read this communication in its entirety as its subject matter is, I think, important and well, I've made the effort to write it.

This letter is written to address the incredulous decision to tear down the Regina Public Library Central Branch. The letters I have read from concerned citizens that have been sent out or in the Regina Leader Post have been comprehensive, explicit, well written. I will make the concerted effort *not* to repeat much of what has already been explicitly stated by others in their respectful and assiduous manner.

On April 8, 1910, Andrew Carnegie, the American philanthropist who helped establish many of the libraries across Canada and the United States, provided an initial grant of \$30,000 for a new Library building in Regina, one of 125 built in the country. That amount was subsequently increased to \$50,000. On May 11, 1912, then Lieutenant Governor G.W. Brown officially opened the new Central Library building. Just 6 weeks later, on June 30, a tornado struck Regina. As you no doubt know, the new Library was among the many buildings that were damaged. Mr. Carnegie was contacted and he kindly paid the reconstruction bill of \$9,500. That structure was the predecessor to the current building built in 1961, designed in a classic Modernist or International style by the architectural firm of Izumi, Arnott & Sugiyama, as has been identified in other letters. The Modernist elements in its architecture are seen to include a low-slung roof, rectangular massing, cubist composition, and aluminium sunscreen-equipped windows. The library is wrapped in textured granite, with a glassy entrance oriented toward Victoria Park and the granite matches that of the Cenotaph in the park. The design was engineered to allow future expansion. Assorted detritus and rubble from the Carnegie building are featured in the forecourt.

One of the salvaged pieces is a circular stone medallion that bears the Library crest with a torch and open book and inscribed 'Qui Legit Regit', which, translated from the Latin, means 'He who reads, rules'.

It is with those words in mind that I suggest the content of *all* letters with regard to this matter be read and digested, with all due respect, by those to whom they are addressed. Every message, every bit.

The 20th century has been described as the century of destruction. I read somewhere that urban architectural culture had been destroyed at a rate unmatched in human history. It seems to be the same in the 21st, at least, in this city. Indeed, the physical manifestations of destruction are often readily identifiable. However, as it turns out, destruction is a complex phenomenon that means different things to different people.

The impulse, perhaps I want to say, the obligation, to preserve the past is part of a need to preserve the self. When we don't know where we have been, it is difficult to know where we are headed. I don't think it is excessive to say that the past is the foundation of our individual and collective identities, and any continuity between it and the present helps to make sense of the random chaos and the adversities of the world. Yes, change is inevitable, but a stable system of order enables us to cope with both metamorphosis and decay.

Heritage buildings (and those that should have such status) give us a point of reference. They tell us who we are because they provide us with a sense of security or point of refuge. They are visible. Stable, in a world that isn't. They are constants. Tangible. They identify and unify individuals and society alike. History, heritage, is irreplaceable and its conservation is necessary to convey local stories and present them to future generations. It is critical not only to save the important elements of rich

architecture in urban centres, but more importantly, to save our unique local identity and to secure the continuation of the culture found in such places and communities.

Personally, I advocate a cautious approach to change; to do as much as necessary to maintain and care for a structure and to keep it safe and useable. Change things as little as possible so that the cultural significance of the building is retained. Maintenance is the key. The RPL Central Branch should never have been permitted to fall into any state of disrepair, and perhaps the City of Regina and the Regina Public Library Board owe an explanation to the citizens of Regina as to exactly how and why the Central Branch was allowed to slide into its reported current state.

Then there is the importance and relevance of social value as it relates to heritage places in the form of their association between people and place. Places of cultural significance enrich people's lives and provide a deep sense of connection to their community and its relationship to the past and to lived experiences. Libraries are places of this description; they reflect the diversity of our community, and tell residents and others, about who we are and the past that has formed us.

Heritage conservation, defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), identifies that: 'Heritage is our legacy from the past; what we live with today and what we pass on to future generations'. This suggests to me that our cultural and natural heritage are irreplaceable sources of both life and inspiration. Any city's future must be anchored in its individual identity. Its 'urban heritage' is the start point for the development of its urban policy. The history of a city, its neighbourhoods, its residents, are the stories that must be studied, recorded and told. As the incomparable Thomas King says, 'the truth about stories is, that's all we are'.

The National Trust for Canada has stated that over the past 30 years, Canada has lost 23% of its historic building stock in urban areas and 21% in rural areas. This rate of destruction is disturbing in terms of lost heritage and increased environmental waste.

As the world works to set the pandemic-related reset button, we know, or at least, we should be aware, that heritage places hold extraordinary prospects for impact. In Canada, this includes support for the Truth and Reconciliation process and its associated reparations, equity, the reduction of resource consumption, and provision of the building blocks required for a sustainable future.

The other morning, I read that a significant study from Europe has found that the current rates of global warming have already moved the world dangerously close to several tipping points that could send key global weather systems into irreversible collapse. (CBC News / September 11, 2022). The study found 5 tipping points which included the abrupt thaw of the permafrost in the Boreal Forest and the end of an ocean current system in the Labrador Sea as two 'possible' points under current levels of global warming.

While tipping points can be difficult to predict, the fact that 2 of the 5 are in Canada and 1 of them in the Boreal Forest which is part of northern Saskatchewan, identifies that we need to do things differently. We can no longer refer to the state of the world in terms of climate change; we are now at the level of climate emergency, climate crisis. Is it not, by extension, incumbent for each of us, let alone a city, to do our part to save the earth?

Reduce, reuse, recycle. Too often we overlook the green side of architectural conservation. To demolish an existing building, to throw it away in a landfill, is an indefensible act of conspicuous consumption and yet, in my observation, this destructive, extractive approach to the built heritage in this city has been normalized over generations.

To reuse and refurbish old buildings is an easy way to reduce our carbon footprint, but first, we need to adjust how we think. The construction industry relies on a cycle of premature obsolescence, demolition, and redevelopment. Older buildings are often cited as liabilities and much of new development continues to operate on the 'take, make, waste' model, the opposite of what is sustainable.

It's like this: half the world's carbon emissions are from extractive industries like mining. In the last quarter century, the greatest increase of emissions has been through the extraction of non-metallic minerals used in construction, such as sand, clay, and gravel. In fact, the demand for concrete is now so high that we're running out of sand. In Canada, deforestation can be added to our carbon footprint, along with millions of tons of wood waste which includes old growth lumber. The result? A colossal amount of waste.

Once the up-front emissions associated with construction are acknowledged, perhaps existing buildings will not be seen as future trash, but as valuable stores of embodied carbon. Embodied carbon refers to the total energy expended and invested in the construction of a building, from the extraction of natural resources, through the manufacturing process, transportation, right up to final completion of the new structure. This carbon investment accounts for up to 50% of a building's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over its entire lifespan, and just so you know if you don't, this includes those buildings constructed with the most sustainable, up-to-date methods and materials.

It is important to note here that many Canadians already recognize the value of recycling and preserving architecture. It is the developers and regulators who need to figure it out. Let me just say this: architecture is a renewable resource. We must stop seeing it through the lens of planned desuetude.

Admittedly, not every building can or should be saved. All buildings, whether they are private, commercial, or public, heritage status or otherwise, need to be carefully evaluated for their architectural integrity, their relevance to social history and realities and their importance to the urban environment. As wisely said by others, we have built branch libraries that serve to accommodate our municipal growth.

Demolition may end the discussion about physical heritage, but the question of the heritage that the building represents remains. This is a significant decision that will impact those who have attachments and a history with this location. The social history of this branch is an integral part of daily lives in the inner city and has been so for 61 years. It is my hope that absence of memory is not the preference, as

in the desired outcome, and that the people who need a safe place in which to be, along with the connections they have made here, are not considered as expendable. Heritage preservation is distinctly and inherently political, and will often present as a privileged, elitist interpretation of historic sites while at the same time denigrate or even destroy significant built environments. I know this is not about the Acropolis. Still, any structures that are tied to people and places are often undervalued, under-interpreted, and sometimes purposely obliterated from the skyline. I'm concerned, for the record, about the politics of heritage, as in the trump of a new structure to the complete detriment of the other. The question of who has power to decide the significance of the current Central Branch means a great deal and maybe these decisions are best made by those who value history. I want to offer another way to think about Regina's heritage and what should be considered. I have read much about the concepts of inclusivity and all-

togetherness as intentioned means to embrace everyone. This is especially relevant in this matter because many people who go to the library daily have real and difficult challenges in their lives.

I ask that you distance yourselves from the present pressure you must feel and its social context and connect with the history that brought us to today. As a longtime resident of Regina, I think it is important to make space for and have kind, respectful interactions with those who know the location in a different way than is most often thought. There are conversations to be had about the social history here that tell us what the library, what this building means and what matters most. As a society, we benefit more if we accept that heritage and value is about more than the preservation of a building. Positive heritage outcomes take different forms. They can, and probably should, mean support for people directly impacted by the library, who use it, in part, as a lifeline, with the consideration that their relationships with the building and its people are not straightforward and linear, but rather nuanced in nature.

Simply, the thought process behind this decision needs to change. The memories are long of those who vote and they will as necessary, change the landscape.

Thank you.

Robin Clark; Bookseller and concerned citizen, Regina

Previously submitted to:

- Jeff Barber (Director & CEO, Regina Public Library)
- Sean Quinlan (Chair, Regina Public Library Board of Directors)
- Sandra Masters (Mayor, City of Regina)
- Andrew Stevens (Ward 3 Councillor, City of Regina)
- Stephen Whitworth (Editor, Prairie Dog magazine)
- Creeden Martell (Regina Leader Post / Central Library Location)
- Alexander Quon (Reporter / CBC News)
- Nelson Bird (CTV News Regina / Assignment Editor)
- Friends of Regina Public Library / (FRPL)
- EnviroCollective
- Stefani Langenegger (CBC / The Morning Edition)