

Chatham-Kent Public Library Board

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Board Response to Imagine Chatham-Kent Proposal

Discussions surrounding possible redevelopment of the Downtown Chatham Centre and relocation of the Chatham-Kent Public Library (CKPL) main branch highlight the need for a modern, revitalized facility. The current building is smaller than the 35,000 sq. ft. recommended in the Ontario Library Association guidelines and the Council-approved Library Master Plan. In addition, the present facility configuration allows no room for expansion as our community grows. Despite this challenge, in 2022 the Chatham main branch delivered high-quality programming to more than 15,000 participants with over 100,000 patrons through the door. The branch needs more dedicated programming space.

The CKPL Board has been asked to consider the options associated with the possible redevelopment of the Civic Centre and outlined in the CAO's memorandum to Council of August 2, 2023, three of which pertain to the CKPL:

- Option 1. Do nothing and fix issues as they arise.
- Option 3. Renovate the existing Civic Centre, Library and Cultural Centre.
- Option 5. Relocate the Civic Centre and Library along with Museum and Art Gallery exhibition space to the Old Sears building.

All three options present differing strengths. However, considering the limited data provided, it is challenging for the Board to respond in a well-informed, substantive manner.

Option 1 presents financial savings in the short-term but merely delays inevitable revitalization. Options 3 & 5 each create opportunities to develop programs, capacity, and infrastructure that would support CKPL in realizing the goals laid out in its Strategic Plan.

The weaknesses inherent in Option 5 outweigh its strengths. This option was developed without input from CKPL or anyone with library expertise. The plan does not demonstrate that the old Sears building can deliver the modern, functional library deserved by Chatham-Kent residents, both today and, in the future. It offers limited functionality, accessibility, and potential for growth. The proposal to co-locate with the Civic Centre could create an unwelcoming environment for the cohort of the community requiring access to CKPL's many social supports and targeted programming.

Option 3 avoids the weaknesses of Option 5, allows the main branch to remain in its current location, and, will accommodate future expansion. In addition, an expanded facility will grow its exclusive programming space, access to parking and will avoid a potential decline in usage. Regardless, any plans for revitalization must be developed by library professionals with the specific needs of library patrons in the forefront.

Further, the net financial investment of Option 3 will likely be the same or less than Option 5.

For these reasons, Option 3 – Revitalizing the main Chatham branch of the CKPL in its current location, is the clear choice for the Library.