

New library in plans... but not in park

Council directs staff to develop strategy for new Georgetown branch

Georgetown will get a new bigger and more modern library, but it won't be located in the Dominion Gardens Park.

At Monday's council meeting, Halton Hills Library Board chair Jay Jackson and a hired consultant, Jim Morgenstern, of dmA Planning and Management Services, presented a 40-page report on the future of the Georgetown library.

That report recommended the closure of the downtown Georgetown library branch and the construction of a 33,000 sq. ft. modern library with 100 parking spaces in the Dominion Gardens Park— displacing long-planned-for park features. The pricetag would be \$11.7 million in capital costs, plus \$2 million in operating costs.

Ranking higher in almost all evaluation criteria, but not getting the library board's nod, was a second option: keep the current 12,000 sq. ft. Georgetown branch open and build another 21,000 sq. ft. library. That would cost \$10.3 million (including the renovation of the existing branch) but had a higher annual operating cost of \$2.4 million.

Both options included Monday openings— something the library does not have now.

But the \$440,000 difference in operating costs seemed to shift the consultant's view towards the first option.

"Would you support the retention of the existing Georgetown library at roughly \$440,000 on the tax base every year— about a 2.5 per cent increase?" Morgenstern asked members of council.

And council answered at least part of that question unanimously. Rejecting the library board's resolution, all members of council voted for a new motion written by Wards 3 and 4 Regional Councillor Jane

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roughly \$440,000 on the tax base every year?'

— Consultant Jim Morgenstern



Fogal, and seconded by Mayor Rick Bonnette.

It endorsed the principle that the Town should build a new modern library, but did not agree that the Dominion Gardens Park should be the location, or that the present Georgetown library branch should be closed "at this time".

Noting that the retention of the Georgetown branch ranked high on other criteria, Fogal said, "there are other issues to be considered (than just money) and we have to look at those."

The council resolution called for a staff report, to be completed by April, to recommend a strategy, including a preferred site and addressing the concerns of the Georgetown Business Improvement Area (BIA). Council members also want community input.

Kate Murray, representing the

'Guelph St. will be under siege. ... I don't think that block can take any more pressure, let alone a 33,000 sq. ft. building with 100 parking spaces.'

— Mayor Rick Bonnette



BIA, spoke against the library board's recommendation of closing the current Georgetown branch.

She told council that the library's presence in the core has played a vital role in the downtown's renaissance in the last few years and its removal would have a negative social and economic impact on the downtown. The library is one of the first services that newcomers seek out when moving to town, and as a result, they discover the downtown area, she said.

"It would not be in the community's best interests to replace a strong and popular public institution well established in a historical public space within a thriving neighbourhood, with a library in fortress-like setting surrounded by parking lots and a highway," Murray said.

Morgenstern cited the Dominion Gardens Park's centrality and proximity to the primary commercial area of Georgetown as other reasons for its selection.

But that's why the mayor disliked the site.

"Guelph St. will be under siege. ... I don't think that block can take any more pressure, let alone a 33,000 sq. ft. building with 100 parking spaces... let's stay the course with what our vision was for the Dominion Gardens site."

"Does our vision for a vibrant downtown include a library? For me, it does," said Wards 1 and 2 Councillor Clark Somerville. "The library (at Dominion Gardens) would have such a huge impact that it would cut the heart out of the park." Somerville added he thought the report showed a "complete lack of regard and arrogance" towards the people who have spent years developing the park vision for the centre of this community.

Many of the councillors also wanted to have a clear idea of what could replace the Georgetown library as tenant in the Cultural Centre, before a potential closure.

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—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

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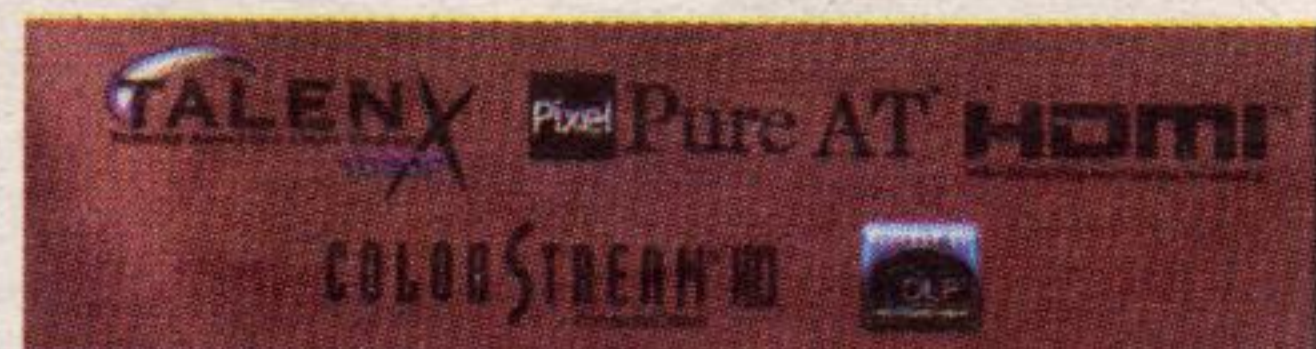
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