

The Essex Free Press is an independent weekly newspaper, locally owned and operated by The Essex Free Press Limited

The Essex Free Press is published every Wednesday from  
16 Centre Street, Essex, ON N8M 1N9  
Tel.: (519) 776-4268 Fax: (519) 776-4014  
Email: [essexfreepress@on.aibn.com](mailto:essexfreepress@on.aibn.com)  
Website: <http://essexfreepress.reinvented.net>  
Publisher: Laurie A. Brett



The opinions expressed on this page are those of their original authors and do not necessarily represent the opinion of The Essex Free Press, its Editor or Publisher.

## Fighting the fizzle

If you believed initial remarks on the twin-pad arena project made by Essex Mayor Ron McDermott at last Friday's special council meeting, you might have momentarily concluded that the beleaguered project was about to move a step forward.

Dozens of project supporters turned out for the meeting, which was wisely moved to the Civic Centre in anticipation of a large crowd. Coun. Paul Innes was expected to reveal a new set of arena plans, which turned out to be an \$8.75-million facility that would anchor a new ice pad to the existing arena, much like the \$10-million plan already under review.

### editorial

*laurie brett*

"I've been told – get 'er done," McDermott said. The statement suggested some urgency.

But only moments later, the mayor surprised virtually everyone when he voted alongside councillors Innes, Rogers and Timmins in favour of deferring a decision to move ahead in principle with one of the three twin-pad options that had just been reviewed.

"It'll still go ahead, it'll just take two more weeks," McDermott reassured concerned attendees afterwards.

The mayor was referring to the time it will take for engineers to examine the existing arena for structural stability and prepare a report. Two of the three twin-pad options are dependent on using the existing facility and adding onto it. The third option, the most expensive at \$15 million, involves the construction of a brand new twin-pad facility with a community room.

Coun. Morley Bowman's remarks on the importance of sending a message that the Town of Essex is ready to proceed in principle with one of the three twin-pad options appeared to be lost in translation.

It is unfortunate that the Kinsmen – the group entrusted with the daunting task of raising \$1.5 million – are still dangling in the wind on this issue. Fundraising efforts have been completely stymied by the lack of decision and failure to progress with the project. And costs are naturally climbing.

It is equally unfortunate that a definitive answer on whether the existing arena is structurally capable of sustaining an adjoining structure has not been sought before now. If its shelf life is close to expiry, two of the three options go straight into the garbage. Consultants have already cautioned the town about the problems that can arise when a new arena is tagged onto an older existing one.

It is confounding how arena projects in this county typically begin with big fanfare and fireworks only to fizzle out or fumble along. This project is still fumbling along but the decision makers have got to start acting more decisively if we're to avoid the dreaded fizzle.



This year marks the 100th anniversary of the first Essex explosion. Five thousand pounds of nitroglycerine were being transferred from the main line to the branch line bound for Amherstburg in August 1907 when the improperly packed load exploded.

From various accounts, we know that the explosion was so severe it shook windows in downtown Detroit. Trainmen Leo Conlon and Joseph McNary were both killed. The stationmaster, Mr. Stimers, suffered moderate injuries but lost his hearing for life. The last thing he ever heard was the nitro exploding. As late as the 50's his wife was living in their home that still stands on Cameron Avenue.

Dr. J.S. Laird, the town doctor, died two hours after the blast from what was listed as natural causes, but the terrific shock of the event must have played a part. He lived in what is now the Stewart L. Kennedy Funeral Home, which was built by Dr. Laird in 1880. All of the



### opinion

*bill gay*

windows were blown out in the blast, so his funeral took place in the front yard of the mansion.

Among the many buildings destroyed as a result of the explosion was the Methodist Church. Rebuilt the following year, this impressive structure still occupies a peaceful green space in the centre of town as the Essex United Church.

Essex has, over the years, lost all public heritage buildings. Only the Michigan Central Station, Essex United Church and the Carnegie Library buildings are still with us. Some very well cared for private structures also remain.

Seventy-three years later another explosion rocked the downtown core as a result of a natural gas explosion at the rear of the Aberdeen Hotel block.

As we commemorate the centennial of the 1907 explosion, the never-say-die spirit of the people of Essex should be remembered. Each time they came back to rebuild.

Heritage Essex, a non-profit corporation that operates the historic Essex Railway Station on behalf of the Town, has produced a historical video highlighting significant milestones in the history of Essex. It may be purchased at the railway station. Plans are also underway to commemorate the 1907 explosion this August.

By the way, you are reading this account from the only business to survive both the 1907 and the 1980 explosions, the Essex Free Press, whose reporters covered both events. Next time you view our historical murals or visit the station, remember our past struggles and hopes for the future.



**Laurie Brett**  
Publisher & Editor

**Daniel Schwab**  
Staff Reporter

**Ron Dunn**  
General Sales Manager

**Cathy Campbell**  
Accounts & Circulation

**Sarah Krauter**  
Office

**Tom Warwick, Lana Garant, Mike Krieger**  
Graphic Design

**Gary Ramsay, Wilber Brett, Judy Brett, Randy Chedour, Pam Sovran**  
Production

#### Subscriptions

Canada: \$37.10

U.S.: \$100.00

(Prices include GST)

Payable in advance to The Essex Free Press Limited.

#### Advertising

Advertising is accepted on the condition that, in the event of an error, the portion of the ad occupied by the error, will not be charged for, but the balance will be paid at the usual rate. It is the responsibility of the advertiser to check their ads on first publication, and the publisher accepts no responsibility for errors in multiple insertions. The Essex Free Press reserves the right to reject or edit any advertisement likely to offend community standards and/or the laws of the land.

**Display Advertising Deadline: Friday at 4:30 pm**

#### Copyright

All layout composition, artwork, news copy, editorial copy and photographs produced or owned by the Essex Free Press are the exclusive property of the Free Press and are protected by copyright law. These materials may not be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher.

Share your **OPINIONS**

**LETTERS POLICY** – The Essex Free Press welcomes letters to the editor that are of interest to our community. Letters should be typed or neatly written and present the issues as clearly as possible in 300 words or less. All letters must contain the name, address, and daytime phone number of the writer. Anonymous letters will not be published. We reserve the right to edit for length, clarity or reject letters over matters of libel, legality, taste or style.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), towards our mailing costs. Second Class Mail Registration No. 1495.