

## **The Municipal Plan and a Library: My Wish List**

**(The Telegram 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014)**

Has anyone heard anything about the City of St. John's municipal plan review? I spent a couple of hours the other day searching the internet, including "stjohns.ca", and came up with nothing. I gave up my Saturday on February 25<sup>th</sup> 2012 for the Mayor's Symposium. I made numerous written contributions. I participated in my Ward 1 Public Consultation Session on the evening of May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012. I was enthused about the process. I shifted my reading preferences to books on urban planning for almost a year. I engaged everyone and anyone who would listen to me opine on the topic.

Since that time there's been a municipal election. There's also a new pope. We've had a summer Olympics - and a winter one! Gangnam Style came and went. Curiosity has travelled almost two kilometres across Mars and it only has a top speed of 300 feet per hour. William and Kate conceived and had the baby. Miley Cyrus grew up. Rob Ford became a populist.

I'm not getting any younger, and that's probably why I can't remember much about all the "plan" hullabaloo back in 2012. I do know that we've got some rather dodgy developments under the municipal microscope and people are upset that there are no sidewalks to be found. Nothing new there.

I do remember one thing though. I remember someone saying that when all the Class A office space, condos and hotel rooms got built in St. John's, that would be just about it for development. All the multi-national construction companies that have come down here salivating like Pavlov's puppies would see that we're done, pack it in, and go back to where they came from.

But cities go through cycles. They mature. Those offices, condos and hotel rooms will be filled with people. And a lot of them will be interested in theatre, art and music. Fortunately, we have those bases covered to a certain degree. The Rooms and the LSPU Hall will cater to their needs to some degree (excellent both in what they do and have to offer). The Arts and Culture Centre is even tolerable if the quality of the performance allows you to forget that you are suffocating with the heat. But finding rehearsal or studio space in this town is practically impossible at any price, and a modern 600 seat (mid-size) theatre is, in my opinion, desperately needed. Such a venue would allow a natural evolution for successful shows, and hopefully broaden our appreciation of live performance. In other words, put bums in seats - something that my wife and I regularly bemoan when superb local productions fail to draw the audiences they deserve.

So I presume that the Municipal Plan, should it ever come to pass, will offer some direction. That we might actually take it upon ourselves, as a civilized mature society, to spend money on the arts and consider where the venues should be relative to where all those occupants of the offices, condos and hotel rooms are.

But to the main point of this little diatribe: You know how we have always had this little thing going with Halifax about whom or what really is the heart of Atlantic Canada? Well guess what? The Blue

Nosers have beaten us hands down. They have had the audacity to design and construct a new library. You know, that place where you can go to borrow ... what are they again now ... umm, oh yes, BOOKS! Also a place that fosters lifelong learning, public debate, history, technology, cultural awareness and personal growth. Check out [www.halifaxcentrallibrary.ca/](http://www.halifaxcentrallibrary.ca/) or if the editor of this fine publication would be so kind as to toss up a rendering of this building alongside these words, I suspect it would pique your interest.

Already, this building has been singled out by CNN as one of the “ten eye-popping buildings that you’ll see in 2014”! The only building selected from North America no less.

The construction cost for the Halifax Central Library: \$55 million. A mere bagatelle. Sure the extension to the Convention Centre will cost almost that, and you won’t see our children loitering around there trying to learn stuff. And even at that bargain price, Halifax has gained a piece of civic architecture guaranteed to put it on the map. We look like yokels in comparison.

The AC Hunter Library at the Arts and Culture Centre is staffed by dedicated, professional people. I have personal knowledge of this. They, like many library staff across this province are to be commended. But this facility is a joke. It is not accessible to people with disabilities. It is not inviting to our children or new Canadians. It has no space dedicated to instruction and public forum. It does not foster cross-fertilization of ideas. It does not possess the wherewithal to promote our community. It is not repository of our culture. It is in the wrong location.

This is a terrible ramble. I only visit a library about twice a month. If I went there more often I bet my writing skills would be better. Oh yes! The Plan. In November of 2012 I wrote a letter to this paper that begged MUN to come downtown. A short time later they went out and bought the Battery. So now I am begging for leadership on this downtown library thing. Who will step up to the plate?

I also ended that letter with the call: “Give us a plan with vision.”

I am now forced to scale that back slightly this time around. Just give us a plan.

Jim Case