

Environmental Responsibility Begins Now!

A Plea to the Regina Public Library Board of Directors

(Please Distribute to All Members)

September 27, 2022

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Introduction

The last time the Regina Public Library Board of Directors made a closed-door decision that would create immense changes to the RPL system was when the Head Librarian announced, with great bravado, the closure of branch libraries, the Dunlop Art Gallery, and the Prairie History Room. Within a week, Merrilee Rasmussen, Vanessa Thorson, and I met to set the stage for incorporating Friends of the Regina Public Library. The amount of personal time and energy I expended in building a public campaign in response to that bad decision was also immense. Those first few weeks were gruelling. I came close to burnout and stepped away for my own good. Other concerned citizens and library patrons – not customers, we do not purchase services from the RPL, we are patrons – stepped up and gathered more than 26 thousand signatures in support of maintaining those branches and services.

Going forward with a teardown and rebuild is reigniting my passion for libraries. Should the RPL Board decide to go ahead with this *terrible, horrible, no good, very bad*¹ and utterly old school decision to tear down the iconic Central Library in favour of a new build, I feel I have no choice but to collaborate with others who share a concern for planet's future and stop it. But first, let me share some information all your documents ignore.

Some pertinent history.

With his interdisciplinary approach to scientific investigation Nobel Prize winner, Svante Arrhenius, identified *human industrial activity* as the *main source of new CO₂²* being released

1 Viorst, J. *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. Athenian Books, 1972.

2 Arrhenius, S. *The Philosophical Magazine And Journal Of Science*, Fifth Series, April, 1896. Accessed 16 September 2022 https://www.rsc.org/images/Arrhenius1896_tcm18-173546.pdf

into the atmosphere. He predicted climate change could occur as a result of increased emissions. Proven, and published in *The Philosophical Magazine And Journal Of Science, Fifth Series*, in April, 1896, his work was largely ignored until the 1970s.

Up until the seventies, the imagination of Canadian citizens and politicians focused on the conservation of the environment through the creation of parks and wild spaces. But the late sixties and early seventies brought an awareness of harmful pollution in our air and water, the dangers of hazardous wastes, and the carefree use of toxic pesticides. Indigenous communities working together with newly-formed local and national environmental organizations such as the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the World Wildlife Fund Canada, the Canadian Audubon Society, and Nature Canada helped bring forward legislation to protect endangered species. They also raised awareness about air, water, and the health of our planet.³

Since then, we've made some progress on environmental issues, but we have so much further to go to make this a livable planet for future generations. Youth have become very involved in actions. It's their future. They understand the need to act now. Autumn Peltier, who challenged Prime Minister Trudeau on water issues, is now the Chief Water Commissioner of the Anishinabek Nation. Greta Thurnberg has gained an international following of adults and youth with the *Fridays for Future* movement. Both young women provide fundamental leadership to young people, share vital information about the climate crisis, and offer opportunities for youth to stand **for** something—***for nothing more than to stand in favour of a healthy planet on which to live out their lives!***

3 Hummel, M. and James-Abra, E. *Environmental Movement in Canada*, [Canadian Encyclopedia](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/environmental-and-conservation-movements) <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/environmental-and-conservation-movements> Accessed 19 September 2022.

They know the importance of science. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the body of the United Nations that *provides regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.*⁴ The IPCC released its sixth report⁵ on April 4th, 2022. The Chair, Hoesung Lee, said, *Without immediate and deep emissions reductions across all sectors, limiting global warming to 1.5°C is beyond reach.*⁶ There is an urgency.

The next day, longtime *Agence France-Presse* (AFP) environmental reporters, Kelly Macnamara and Marlowe Hood, summarized the IPCC report, saying: *Humanity has less than three years to halt the rise of planet-warming carbon emissions and less than a decade to slash them by nearly half, if we want a liveable future.*⁷ I don't know about you, but I want a future on a livable planet.

*More than five million extra deaths a year can be attributed to abnormal hot and cold temperatures*⁸, according to the world's largest peer-reviewed, international study led by Monash University.⁹

4 IPCC. *About the IPCC* <https://www.ipcc.ch/about/> Accessed 19 September 2022

5 IPCC, 2022: *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, R. Slade, A. Al Khourdajie, R. van Diemen, D. McCollum, M. Pathak, S. Some, P. Vyas, R. Fradera, M. Belkacemi, A. Hasija, G. Lisboa, S. Luz, J. Malley, (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA. doi: 10.1017/9781009157926

6 IPCC, *Sixth Assessment Report Mitigation of Climate Change* <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/resources/press/press-release> Accessed 16 September 2022

7 *Science Alert* <https://www.sciencealert.com/new-ipcc-report-shows-we-can-still-save-our-livable-future-if-we-act-now-here-s-how> Accessed 15 September 2022

8 <https://www.monash.edu/medicine/news/latest/2021-articles/worlds-largest-study-of-global-climate-related-mortality-links-5-million-deaths-a-year-to-abnormal-temperatures>

9 Guo, Y. et al. *Global, regional, and national burden of mortality associated with non-optimal ambient temperatures from 2000 to 2019: a three-stage modelling study. The Lancet Planetary Health, Volume 5, Issue Z*, July, 2021 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00081-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00081-4/fulltext) Accessed 19 September 2022.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says that *climate change is the single biggest health threat facing humanity, and health professionals worldwide are already responding to the health harms caused by this unfolding crisis.*¹⁰ WHO's latest numbers indicate that more than 1,500 people are dead in Pakistan, a third of those, children, and more than half a million people are homeless. This is attributed to floods caused by climate change.

But let's come closer to home. Last year's drought wreaked havoc on mustard crops the world over. France, the premiere producer of Dijon mustard, had to reduce production because Prairie farmers could not supply them, as they usually do, with the mustard seed necessary to continue production.

Now, to Regina where our Mayor and Councillors had the wisdom and foresight to unanimously approve the *Energy & Sustainability Framework Energy & Emissions*, outlining how the City can achieve its goal of being a 100 per cent renewable city by 2050. In so doing, according to Mayor Masters' introductory letter to it, they recognized that, *from urban forests to transportation networks, building construction and natural habitat preservation, cities play an important role in determining how we grow and interact with ourselves and the natural environment.*¹¹ I fail to see how the decision to tear down and rebuild Central Library and increase CO2 emissions to the degree the RPL Board would like, will be passed at Council.

Failed Background

The RPL Board has failed to consider the implications to the climate, to the health of its citizens, and the citizens of the world. There is no environmental audit in the many documents

10 World Health Organization "Climate change and health" *Fact Sheet* <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health> Accessed 19 September 2022.

11 Masters, S., Hon. "A Letter from the Mayor" in *Energy & Sustainability Framework Energy & Emissions Reduction Action Plan* January 2022.

now finally available on the website. There is no consideration for the embodied energy already in the building's granite and materials. The upfront carbon costs of a demolition and new build are enormous! The carbon released during the teardown of the old building will be massive! And, the RPL Board's failure to account for the carbon released into the atmosphere during the manufacturing process of the products the new build will use is absolutely unacceptable at this point in time. The carbon the new build releases will hit the climate within the three-year window the IPCC identifies as one that can make all the difference to the future of our planet, of our youth. (See Appendix 1.)

But here we are today with another RPL Board of directors saying it's "too expensive" to retrofit and expand the current building, pointing out all its faults, producing documents more than two years after the fact, expecting us to nod our heads and say, yes, to a plan that will not halt increased CO₂ emissions until **after** the new building is erected. I am appalled that you would ask us to do this when young people meet on Fridays to insist that we stop climate change. You are obliged, as citizens of the globe, as a **public** library to do better for us all.

No new build!

Appendix 1

Provided as an aid to learning why and how refurbishment and expansion of the RPL Central Library is preferable to a new build.

How to measure embodied energy in building materials: A tool for calculating how concrete and steel contribute to climate change. <https://www.treehugger.com/embodied-energy-in-building-materials-5441578>

Air Quality Sinks as Climate Change Accelerates. <https://greekreporter.com/2022/09/13/air-quality-earth/>

Let's rename "Embodied Carbon" to "Upfront Carbon Emissions". <https://www.treehugger.com/lets-rename-embodied-carbon-upfront-carbon-emissions-4855487>

Material Baseline Report, July 2021, Carbon Leadership Forum. <https://carbonleadershipforum.org/2021-material-baseline-report/>

Looking for the "Greenest" Building? Start with the one that already exists. <https://forum.savingplaces.org/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=42215e77-adc1-008a-2000-0a0da46bb9ed&forceDialog=0>

Preservation Green Lab: Value of Building Reuse. Sustainable Conservation. https://sustainableconservation.ca/sustainable-conservation/value-of-building-re-use/?fbclid=IwAR15MXS9HfwiDBKVDZTTswStrp63_ei-DJFEEl6TzCm6foR2zAjESO6EFX8

Act Locally: The Municipal Role in Fighting Climate Change, Federation of Canadian Municipalities. <https://fcm.ca/sites/default/files/documents/resources/report/act-locally-municipal-role-fighting-climate-change.pdf>

Watching the world burn. <https://correspondent.afp.com/watching-world-burn>

RetroFirst: Introducing RetroFirst: a new AJ campaign championing reuse in the build environment. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/introducing-retrofirst-a-new-aj-campaign-championing-reuse-in-the-built-environment>

Questions for the Board

Has the RPL Board determined the environmental impacts on climate change, human health, ecosystem quality, and resource depletion embedded in a tear-down and rebuild? If so, what are these? If not, when can we access this data?

How will the RPL mitigate the negative impacts on climate it will create during the deconstruction and the upfront carbon costs of the construction process?

Will the Board undertake an environmental audit of the options for expansion?