

PRESENTATION TO CITY COUNCIL OPEN HOUSE (July 2, 2014)

Stratford Market Square Committee

Presenter: Eleanor Kane

- Ladies and Gentlemen, I am presenting today on behalf of the hundreds of citizens of Stratford who have been engaged in a dialogue about Stratford's Market Square for over a decade now.
- Community-based volunteers (some of whom are present today) have been active on this issue for over a decade. Together, they have helped develop and refine **a vision for the Market Square.**
- In 2006, some of these volunteers, appointed by City Council and funded by the Province of Ontario and the City Centre Committee, oversaw an international design competition that drew entries (design concepts) from Israel to Japan.
- The jury, led by the Dean of the School of Architecture and Design at the University of Toronto, selected PLANT Architect Inc. as the winner. This winning design concept and the rich display of worldwide entries gave Stratford citizens their first sense of how great their square could be and how excited designers all over the world were to envision its redevelopment.
- Many experts have told us that we have the potential to create something **world-class** right here in Stratford. Something that could stand up with the great city centres of the world.

OUR VISION

- This vision, as captured by PLANT Architect Inc., is still at the heart of our efforts as volunteers to keep people engaged and to help plan for the future.
- We'd like to reiterate that vision today for Councillors and for all of the interested citizens who have come out tonight.
- So brace yourselves, we dream BIG!
- Our vision is for a green and people-friendly Market Square that is embraced by local citizens and Stratford's many visitors.
- We see a Square that is a central gathering place for the arts, families and children, citizen action, leisure, and community celebrations.

- We get excited when we think about the economic benefits this development could bring for local businesses, tourism and the City. We have case studies to prove that every community that has taken bold steps in redeveloping their market square has realized a **significant return on investment** in terms of business traffic, taxes, enhanced cultural life, citizen safety etc.
- We see a space that is safe, and walkable and bikeable with parking and bus transit, nearby.
- We see trees and park benches, and outdoor cafes.
- We see a redevelopment that speaks to Stratford's heritage roots and our track record of taking chances, dreaming big and aspiring to the very best.
- Most importantly, we see a redevelopment that never retreats from an impeccable design standard. We do not support half-measures or "make do" options.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

- Our Committee understands that the City is cash strapped and that there is a priority concern with the sewer and other infrastructure problems that lie beneath the Market Square.
- Market Square is a top priority for the City but it is unfunded.
- We understand that there are parking and transit issues to be considered.
- We know that the City is looking at what to do with the Cooper Site.
- The Walmart gift to the City for the Market Square redevelopment is time sensitive.
- There may be some potential for federal contributions for Canada's sesquicentennial in 2017.
- There may be some potential for other corporate or citizen funding contributions.
- Nobody knows when or how the Market Square will be redeveloped right now. And it remains an unsightly and discouraging place to traverse (unless you cast your eyes up so you can take in the beauty of City Hall).

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- First and foremost, our Committee wants to be helpful and constructive with our interventions. We think we can do that by commenting on the **WHAT, HOW** and **WHY** of the Market Square redevelopment and by providing support to City Council.
- We also believe we offer an important link to the people who live and work in Stratford.
- The **WHAT** is the Vision for Market Square. What is the vision that Stratford citizens share? We think it is pretty close to what has evolved in our discussions with Stratford citizens to date and through the development of the PLANT Architect design concept.
- More information about this vision is posted on our website at www.stratfordmarketsquare.ca and we encourage people to find out more about how we arrived at this vision for Market Square.
- And now to the **HOW**. For us the journey is as important as the destination at the end.
- Whether work starts this year, or five years from now, we think the City needs to develop an **Official Market Square Redevelopment Plan** and confirm a shared Vision for the Square now.
- That plan would confirm the site design, set out an effective process for project management and vendor relations, and include means to provide ongoing and transparent public/business engagement through the implementation phases.
- This latter point is particularly important. This process needs to be very transparent and needs to engage people from all walks of life in Stratford. It is often hard for our citizens to know and understand what is being considered for the Square. With this in mind, our Committee has launched a social media initiative today that utilizes the hashtag #MyMarketSquare. We see this as a way to keep the public engaged and to ensure that their comments get to City decision-makers.
- We need everyone collaborating too – business, the City, cultural groups, our Tourism authorities etc.
- We may need to raise funds together too.
- Our Committee strongly recommends the creation of a **community-based Advisory Committee** to ensure public input, design and

process integrity, and the economic benefits component. This Committee can help make sure that we stay true to the Vision.

- Getting more specific, we would ask today that:
 - City officials and Councillors confirm the renewal/redevelopment of Market Square as their top capital project.
 - That the City articulate when and how general revenue will become available for this project.
 - That the City outline the steps it will take to secure the funding for this project by 2017 (the Sesquicentennial).
 - That if the City is able to manage/service the existing debt, it outline and define when, and under what terms, it would consider additional debt. (e.g., What if the ancient sewage infrastructure under the Square were to collapse or explode in a serious storm?)
 - Would the City consider selling any other assets (or any other innovative approach) to move this project forward?
- Of course, these and other questions can be addressed as the City moves forward with the development of an Official Market Square Redevelopment Plan.
- And finally, **WHY?**
- Why does this matter? Why do we need a plan?
- The redevelopment of Stratford's Market Square speaks volumes about the character of our community and the vision of its citizens.
- In design and purpose, it can express how we want to live together, how we want to connect, how we will welcome visitors and how we want others to see us.
- Experts and research tell us that healthy cities work hard at creating these common spaces that draw people together by creating places for common work, commerce and play. Healthy communities offer safe and liveable environments for children, the elderly and young professionals.
- Research also tells us that this kind of development is good for businesses. It attracts business and customers for those businesses. It also generates tax revenue for the local municipality.

- In conclusion, we know that this is a complex project for Stratford to take on, but we believe strongly that we can do it and that we should continue to aspire to a great vision and a great plan.
- Tom Patterson left Stratford with an amazing legacy that we benefit from every year in this community.
- He did what he did because he had an unstoppable vision. Eventually others became excited about that vision and things began to snowball.
- We see the redevelopment of the Market Square in the same light.
- It is an idea whose time has come. We just need to start to plan, keep our standards high, and work together.
- And then, it WILL happen.