

February 3rd, 2014

The Town of Newmarket
Municipal Office
395 Mulock Drive
Newmarket, Ontario
L3Y 4X7

Attention: Elected Officials

Dear Mayor Van Bynen and Elected Council Members,

Please see the attached overview relating to the proposed Clock Tower redevelopment.

I would ask that each of you receive and consider this document with the same passion, thought and best intentions that it was written with.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim McClure', enclosed within a circular, loopy flourish.

Tim McClure
Ward 6 Resident

Proposed Clock Tower Redevelopment
February 3rd, 2014

General Comments

The downtown core and in particular, Main Street in every town across this country is so vital to the history and character that makes the community what it is. It represents the town's identity, is the heart and soul of the community and is not only a significant part of its past but also of its future. For a town to thrive and not merely survive, the downtown must be vibrant with people and successful businesses. At this time, this statement could not be more true for our town.

Heritage and history form the foundation and make up the DNA of any community. That said, controlled, progressive, responsible and well-planned developments are all crucial elements to the future. Not only does responsible development pump blood through the arteries to the heart of the downtown core but in fact, it is vital to the survival of Main Street as we know it.

Where We Are Today

"The easiest opponent to defend against is the one that is standing still." – Author Unknown

Main Street in Newmarket has one main opponent – that opponent is 'time'. Yes, Main Street has been there for many, many years but times have changed. If the core of our town does not change, it will erode and we will lose much of what it was in the past as well as what it is today.

We are at a serious crossroads. Without this redevelopment, the heart that has already slowed could very well come close to stop beating all together. Sure, it will always be there physically but the pulse will fade even more than it already has. If we walk away from this opportunity, the damage could be irreparable. The time to act and move forward with the Clock Tower redevelopment is now!

Only a couple of years ago, the downtown core was not an area that I would allow my daughters to go to at night. This followed a few separate incidents that took place. I am not alone in my opinion. Much has been done to clean up some of these problems and those responsible for this should be commended for their efforts.

Part of this positive step includes the new businesses that have come to Main Street. It is nowhere near enough though and it must not stop here; it needs to be just the beginning! More activity after standard office hours would mean that more businesses would be prepared to open and in turn, the existing businesses would be more willing to stay open later than they currently do. In fact, if the demand was there, some businesses would feel that they could not afford to be closed. We need to create that demand!

More businesses = more people frequenting Main Street more often. More people shopping on Main Street = more businesses that want to be there! The first thing that must happen is the proposed redevelopment. *"Build it and they will come!"* Riverwalk Commons and the Farmer's Market are two successful examples of this.

The challenges, while complex, can be simplified in terms of what so many residents, consumers and businesses not only want but need:

Residents & Consumers

- You will find that most, if not all residents, would like to come down to Main Street more often and would if there were more reasons to do so. We need to make Main Street the 'place to be' in town!

I did a very small study myself and asked 30 Newmarket residents about this issue; each of them has lived in Newmarket for between 5 to 40 years (the average being 28 years). The results were consistent and unanimous. Many voiced valid concerns (parking, fear that this redevelopment would lead to more future building in the downtown core) but every one of these people concluded that the positives far outweigh the challenges. Often the 'short term pain for long term gain' (re: any disruption during construction) comment was mentioned. The question is: Will any short term 'pain' that 'may' be realized be any worse than the erosion that is taking place right now?

- With some of the new restaurants and smaller shops, more people have gradually made their way to Main Street. Some have come out of curiosity while many want to show their support to the downtown merchants by purchasing something 'once in a while'. Others have now found their favorite place for coffee, breakfast, lunch or dinner and now come down more frequently. What is 'more frequently' though? Is that once a week...every few weeks...once every couple of months? That will not 'cut it'! Businesses cannot survive with the lack of consistent customer traffic and history is proving this point.
- For consumers to come to Main Street much more often, they have to have a reason other than just to eat! Creating a 'restaurant row' will not create that much needed frequency and sustainable density. Residents coming down for the Santa Claus Parade or Canada Day is fine but if they only frequent Main Street a few times a year, businesses will not make it!
- Consumers need selection, variety, uniqueness and more products and services that they are interested in. If they are to make it a regular place to shop, the product selection has to be there! I have experienced this personally. I came to appreciate a couple of stores that I supported for gift shopping; both have since left Main Street – one went out of business while the other one left Newmarket and relocated to Aurora. I know many people who now travel south to continue to support this business and when they do, they often stop to eat and make other purchases.
- Consumers want a downtown where each location is viable and offering products or services that they can choose from. More quality retailers and services will enhance the experience and attract more consumers. Those people will not only shop but they will also make their casual stops a more frequent occurrence (coffee, lunch). Conversely, if they come down only to eat, it is likely that that is all they will do, particularly if their visit is for dinner.

Businesses

- We understand the things that consumers want; those needs are obvious but can the businesses afford to provide them? The answer is simple: currently, not a chance!
- How much depth (color, size) can a retailer afford to carry? How much selection can they offer (number of brands)? How long can they put off the necessary in-store renovations? Who are they going to direct their marketing and advertising efforts to? Businesses have an even greater job and much more 'heavy lifting' because they currently need to get them to Main Street first!

These challenges don't even touch on those businesses that are faced with carrying perishable goods. While many in the public have suggested that Main Street is missing a grocery store; respectfully, this comment could not be further off base. The most honourable thing that could be done for a respected, local business such as Vince's Market is for us to encourage them not to open downtown! Under current conditions, they would surely be 'throwing good money after bad'.

- To better understand what the majority of businesses on Main Street have to go through, simply 'walk in their shoes' – not for a day, a week or even a month but rather be in their position for a 3 to 6 month period. Understand the pressures they face when they have their family's livelihood on the line. Get a true feeling of what it is like to have 2 customers walk into their store in an entire day and the prominent sound they hear is when the Clock Tower signifies the time of day.

As business owners, these people come in to the downtown with passion, excitement, hope and they open up a business on Main Street with the thought that they will realize some success. Sadly, many leave because they can no longer make it or they move to a much more promising area.

These businesses need people in order to just survive! Shouldn't we want to do all that we can to help them thrive? More people can only live in or will come downtown with this proposed redevelopment.

The Society We Live In

"It is not the strongest of species that survives, not the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change." – Charles Darwin

Our world is changing. Holding on to our heritage and preserving our history is critical however, so is progress. There is a fine line between holding on to our heritage and Main Street dying a slow death that seems to be accelerating. Our downtown core is right on that fine line.

While 'time' can be the opponent, it can also be the key to us having all that we require to see Main Street flourish. Right now, we have a choice. Time is on our side because we do get the chance to decide. If this opportunity is left much longer, that choice will be taken away from us. More lack of success from current businesses will only add to a track record that is already marked with questions and concerns for owners who are considering downtown Newmarket as a place to set up their business.

Yes, preserving our heritage is the key and keeping the historical look and feel is crucial – these are all things that must remain a focus without question! However, that alone will not keep businesses in operation. Painting buildings, adding more flowers and updating business signs are important steps but unless more is done, we will realize a ‘been there, done that’ result that will be as effective as rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic!

Like many of you, I remember when 8-track and cassette tapes were ‘it’ and that was the case until CD’s and DVD’s came along. There was a time not long ago when we only had paper tickets to travel, used cash, credit card or a cheque to pay for something and yes, bowling style shirts with flames printed on them were ‘all the rage’.

Now we have YouTube, Google, LinkedIn, Facebook...and who would have ever thought that we would be able to pay for most of our daily purchases using a smartphone?

Yes progress can be wonderful but it is also true that like anything else, if it is abused by those with ill intentions and self-serving motives, it can cause negative, unnecessary and disruptive challenges. We have seen this through the misuse of social media sources such as Twitter – a positive communication tool for most yet one that some abuse routinely to cloud facts and taint a view that they don’t agree with.

The point is simple: if people can work together unselfishly to understand the benefits of making responsible changes with this redevelopment in a controlled fashion, the benefits can be significant for everyone. Moving ahead with sustainable density...that must remain our focus!

I will share an example with you that will demonstrate how business owners have reacted and will continue to react without this redevelopment. This case took place within the past 10 months.

- A business wanted to open on Main Street in Newmarket. The principals wanted that downtown ‘feel’ and one of the partners insisted on exploring all options here because his roots were based in this town for over 40 years. Two buildings were looked at with the intention of signing a long-term lease or purchasing one of the buildings outright. Significant funds were involved between securing the desired location and doing the necessary renovations. Options were considered, renderings drawn up re: layouts, improvements and a study of the surroundings were reviewed carefully.
- The company business plan would see them bring in 30 employees and have clients coming in to the downtown core on a daily basis. This was not a retail based business but rather one that provided client services and therefore a regular flow of people from both Newmarket and surrounding towns within York Region would frequently visit the facility.
- The result: the company opted to not to open in downtown Newmarket and in fact, they made a decision to open their first office in Barrie. Not only are they operating there now but a second office is being opened in southwestern Ontario this week. While they would have much preferred to be here in Newmarket, the principals felt that not enough was being done to ensure that Main Street would progress and realize the vibrant potential it has within the time frame that worked

best for them. The questions surrounding the Clock Tower redevelopment played a part in this decision.

Why am I so aware of the details of this particular example? Simple - I am one of the company's principal partners. It was very disappointing to me not to locate here but it was the very best business decision for our company. My personal commitment is that we would consider relocating and/or opening another office here if things progressed in the future. We are not the only business that has made this decision for the very same reasons.

What the Future Holds With or Without the Proposed Development

"It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory." – W. Edwards Deming

People are only human. They will 'give it the old college try' but when they get past the first year or two and have lost money, they have to seriously consider closing or moving from downtown. Look back over the past 10, 5 and even as recent as the last 1-2 years; we have seen it happen and this will continue!

Decay of buildings, store windows papered up, signs changed from one business to another, continued dwindling and sporadic pedestrian traffic patterns – that is what the future holds for Main Street in Newmarket if this redevelopment does not go through. Guaranteed there will be few traffic or parking issues because less and less people and businesses will be there. While it is understood that some people will be passionate about our heritage and resistant and fearful of change, they need to be very careful what they wish for! Looking for a place to go for a quiet stroll ought to be left to Fairy Lake, Riverwalk Commons or Tom Taylor Trail; we need 'controlled vibrancy' on Main Street!

A vibrant downtown with healthy businesses, a continual flow of local residents and outside visitors, consistency in the businesses and services that are offered and the creation of Main Street as being the 'place to be' – that needs to be the goal of everyone who has sincere interest in this town. There is a saying that says: 'Shortage creates demand'. What a complete turnaround it would be to have businesses wanting to relocate to Main Street.

The time is now...not in a year from now because the erosion that will take place over the next 12-36 months will be the final 'straw that breaks the camel's back'. Continued discussion and delays on whether or not to move forward needs to change to how this redevelopment can be executed with the most efficiency and effectiveness for the short and long term.

With the development of Riverwalk Commons and some of the things that have been already done downtown, great strides have been made. Sadly though, the benefit of these steps will also suffer. People have started to come down to the core of our town to see what all the talk is about. Let's not forget though – it is usually the same people experiencing what our downtown has to offer. How many of our town's population actually go downtown? How many people between the ages of 30-50 spend money on Main Street? I would bet these numbers are extremely low and this should not shock anyone. We can change this. In a town our size, we are only scratching the surface!

In the competitive world of professional sports, the team that plays the game simply 'trying not to lose' never moves forward; the team that takes the approach of 'playing to win' almost always realizes success both on the field of play and from the business perspective! The Town of Newmarket has shown through many endeavours that it 'plays to win' and we ought to be looking at this redevelopment with the very same attitude.

Southlake Regional Health Centre is striving to become a world class health centre; they are going after this distinction aggressively and are quickly gaining notoriety all around the world by letting everyone know of their intentions. Likewise, the Town of Newmarket is one of the very best places to live in this country and this is in large part because of the continued progress that has been made over past years. This redevelopment can make a significant impact and certainly be a game changer for the future of our town. We need to take the attitude that we are not going to accept erosion or even the status quo because that in itself is a step backwards. Let's play to win!

The concerns about any disruption during the construction period and the short and long term parking requirements absolutely need to be addressed but should not block the progress of the redevelopment. Hold the developer's 'feet to the fire'; make them accountable, within reason, to upholding their commitments and doing all that they say they will do. Through collaborative discussions with all parties involved, the focus needs to be on making this happen and these short term obstacles can be overcome.

Closing Remarks

"He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institute that rejects progress is the cemetery." – Harold Wilson

It is fully recognized that with this being an election year, it is both a challenging and exciting time. Yes, some may say that in a perfect world, this decision would be made after the election has taken place however I would urge each one of you to not have any fear of making the right decision.

Almost every one of you has played a significant role in shaping Newmarket into what it is today. So many of you have put the interests of this town ahead of your own personal agenda and that is why Newmarket is one of the top places to live in the country.

Right now, this town needs your leadership. Now is your time! You have become an elected official because your constituents have believed that you are among the best people to make the difficult decisions. Whether or not you will continue on in your position following the next election should have no bearing on making the right decision for this town's future.

You are in a position to make a difference that will preserve OUR history, save OUR downtown and take Newmarket to the next level as one of the most progressive places to live in Canada. Please do not let this opportunity pass you by!