



An Unfortunate Decision for the Rosemount Library

STATEMENT: READ Rosemount Expansion and Development Group

October 27, 2017

Change is coming to Rosemount Library - but is it change for the long-term good?

On October 10, 2017 the [Ottawa Public Library](#) (OPL) made an unfortunate decision. The library board rejected options to relocate or build a bigger branch and instead voted in favour of a [staff report](#) for a \$2-million renovation that will add no new space.

Library users and residents know the charming 100 year old Carnegie library building well. When the branch was built during the Great War in 1918, the whole of Ottawa had 150,000 residents and the Rosemount library served just a small number of those. Now the Rosemount library serves a quickly growing population of 40,485 (2015). The library is so small and crowded that many of its users often sit on the floor. If they're lucky, they might nab a spot at one of the few cramped working spaces. The building has 6,089 square feet of space.



The City has failed to acquire any adjacent land for expansion, and so the library has effectively been boxed in by development on all sides.



How did this happen?

Last year, the Board directed the staff to prepare a business case evaluating different options for the Rosemount library. These included an expansion on site, a new build (either stand alone or in combination with a housing or mixed use development), or leasing of existing space in the neighbourhood. The staff based its final recommendation on a business case [report by Boxfish Consulting](#). Remarkably, there is no indication in either the staff or the consultant reports that the \$2 million renovation would provide increased space.

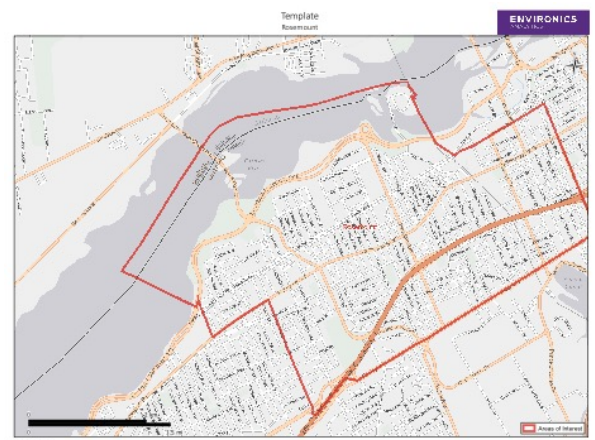


This is troubling. Consider the Carlingwood, St-Laurent and Alta Vista branches, each serving comparable populations of approximately 40,000. Each of these libraries has more than double the square footage of Rosemount. Each includes space for children and teen areas, community programming, public meeting rooms, lots of public computer stations, and ample working areas. Even when the proposed Rosemount renovation is completed, it will still lack the space and amenities of modern OPL branches.

A flawed business case

The Board's decision to renovate relied on what, in READ's opinion, is a flawed and misleading Boxfish Consulting business case report. The consultant weighted costs and risks but omitted any consideration of the benefits of expanding Rosemount. The only benefit that the report considered was the need to meet a "service level" which is far below that of other branches in Ottawa. The overriding issue in the Boxfish report was cost. By contrast, the federal government's guidelines for business cases say that the first characteristic to be considered is "benefits". The most important benefit for Rosemount users is to have a library that is a true community hub, capable of serving the needs of our rapidly intensifying neighbourhoods. The Rosemount business case does not even consider this core benefit. This is surprising since the business cases the OPL Board commissioned for a new main library fully considered both costs and benefits.

Rosemount's catchment area of 40,485 identified by the OPL administration itself, runs from Bronson on the east to Tweedsmuir on the west, the Ottawa River on the north and Carling to the south, and includes the Civic Hospital area. It is very close to the **Kitchissippi ward boundaries**. Kitchissippi Councillor Jeff Leiper recently stated that among the inside the greenbelt wards, Kitchissippi is the one experiencing the most development, by a huge margin, and has the fastest population growth. The City's demographers project that



by 2023 the population of the Rosemount catchment area will be 47,500. That's an increase of 17.3% from 2015.

However, the consultant's report redefined the Rosemount user population as part of a larger homogeneous "central west geographic area," running from Bronson Ave in the east to Woodroffe Ave in the west. This territory is all north of the Queensway, and excludes the Civic Hospital area. This is an unusual definition. It enabled the consultant to draw a surprising conclusion that the population is not growing very fast. This is misleading as Rosemount users typically live in the more eastern neighbourhoods such as West Wellington, Hintonburg, Mechanicsville, Westboro Beach, and the Civic Hospital, are very high growth areas. It is difficult to imagine how the current building, even brought to code and updated, can continue to serve our growing community.

There are other problems with the business case methodology. One glaring example is the report's assumption that half the floor space of the Carlingwood branch on Woodroffe is available to Rosemount area users. This assumption fails to capture accurately who uses Rosemount. It creates a misleading picture of just how busy Rosemount is. Rosemount already has the highest circulation per square foot and the third highest number of visitors per square foot of all OPL branches. The consultant seems not to understand how any library, such as Rosemount, functions as community library. The consultant seems not to know, or considers it unimportant, that many users walk to the library. This is especially true of students from local schools, Connaught, Devonshire, Fisher Park, and St-François d'Assise. How many of them would consider Carlingwood a readily accessible place to work or find library materials? How many people from Hintonburg and Mechanicsville, who easily walk to Rosemount, could make the trek to Carlingwood?



In another startling twist of logic, the business case asserts that Rosemount library need only provide space and services that are "on a par with libraries across Canada" or about 7,500 square feet. This notion of "on par" was neither explained nor substantiated. Instead, in its conclusion, the report recommends a renovation which would provide no additional space to the existing 6,089 square feet.

It was to avoid this unfortunate, undesirable outcome that our community group READ Rosemount, backed by all the community associations in the Rosemount catchment area and

supported by the findings from broad public consultations, has been advocating for the last 18 months for a significantly expanded, new building near the current Rosemount branch.

What has gone wrong?

The answer is simple. The consultant's recommendation was a foregone conclusion. The business case consultant and probably the Library Board itself were constrained by the stipulation that costs had to remain under \$2 million. Yet, federal government guidelines clearly state that a business case "should not be used as a justification for a decision already made or for an option already selected as a foregone conclusion".

While the library staff advising the OPL Board probably could have been more up-front about the inevitability of pursuing a renovation, their hands were largely tied by City Council. The City has failed to provide funding for infrastructure renewal in the urban core while simultaneously encouraging intensification. Rosemount is caught in this squeeze.

At a recent Hampton-Iona Community Association meeting (Oct 18th), local Councillor Jeff Leiper said that plans for new and expanded infrastructure, such as pools and libraries, have not kept pace with current and projected population growth. The current Development Charges bylaw provides funds for new library branches in new growth areas, but no funds to renew a facility like Rosemount. Councillor Leiper urged citizens to get involved when the next council sets new development charge apportionment rules, so that the politicians get it right.

What is next?

There will be a period of public consultation over the coming months about what people want in a renewed Rosemount library. In READ's view this has already been done. Based on the March 2016 consultations sponsored by Councillor Leiper and animated by READ the answer will likely still be "an adequate, modern and larger facility".

There will also be a municipal election in 2018, well before any projected start date for the renovations. A new Council may feel differently about supporting library infrastructure in growing parts of the urban core. READ will continue to work to gain a fully adequate facility for our community.

How do other cities handle urban renewal?

Ottawa (population 968,600 in 2016) could learn from other Canadian cities. The [Winnipeg Public Library's](#) 2013-2023 long-term library facility redevelopment strategy includes rebuilding/relocating/expanding nine existing branches in mature neighbourhoods at a cost



of over \$46.6 million. All will be bigger than Rosemount which has an annual circulation that is higher than eight of those nine Winnipeg branches. Winnipeg's population is 704,800 (2015).

The **Edmonton Public Library**'s 2006-2020 long term library facility development plan includes the renovation and expansion of 8 branches (\$78.9 million), the building of two new branches in growth areas (\$23.8 million), and the renovation/redevelopment of the central library (\$83.4 million). The final two branch renovations will be completed next year; the central library redevelopment in 2020. All the redeveloped branches in Edmonton are or will be significantly larger than Rosemount. The population of Edmonton is 877,926 (2015).



The Rosemount library has been treated inequitably for many years. Unless the City and the Library Board intend to perpetuate this, they will have to come to grips with finding a funding and redevelopment solution that is fair to the residents of the Rosemount area.



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