
Report To: Finance and Corporate Services Committee
Date of Meeting: March 27, 2006
Submitted By: Michael May, Senior Public Affairs Officer
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Ward(s) Involved: All
Date of Report: Thursday, March 23
Report No.: CAO-06-021
Subject: Centre Block Citizens' Forum

RECOMMENDATION:

None at this time - for information only.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report outlines some of the preliminary details staff have developed for the citizens' forum on the Centre Block redevelopment and central library projects, which was approved by Council at its March 20, 2006 meeting. The forum is scheduled to be held in the Council Chambers on the evening of Tuesday, May 23, 2006.

In addition to the citizens' forum, staff is also investigating other alternatives for how to obtain further public input including a pre-forum consultation process for those residents who may be unable to attend the forum on May 23. Any comments received during that pre-forum consultation period would be summarized by staff and presented at the beginning of the forum.

The forum will be fashioned similarly to the successful 2004 public consultation process used in creating the City's Economic Development Investment Fund. It will begin with a significant information presentation, go into a facilitated citizens' panel discussion and provide an opportunity for everyone in attendance to provide their feedback. Staff is considering inviting a small panel of subject matter experts who would be available to answer specific questions throughout the forum.

Citizen Forum Objectives:

The objective of the citizens' forum is to develop a recommendation which can be made to City Council in June 2006 on how to proceed with the Centre Block redevelopment and the central library projects. Based on preliminary, informal feedback received to date, three potential outcomes of the forum include, but are not limited to:

1. Proceed with the current proposal and process.
2. Hold off on redeveloping Centre Block until the library proposal is reworked and approved by Council.
3. Take more time to rework the library proposal and proceed with the redevelopment of the Centre Block without a new central library.

BACKGROUND:

Acknowledging the increasing amount of public feedback Council has been receiving in recent weeks on both the Centre Block and the central library projects, at its March 20 meeting, Council postponed a decision on how to proceed with these two projects until June 2006. The intent of the deferral of a decision on these two projects is to allow for further public involvement and input on them.

To facilitate public engagement and input, Council approved the hosting of a Citizens' Forum in May 2006. The main purpose of the forum will be to discuss several key questions about the current proposal to redevelop the Centre Block. It is anticipated that this forum will also act as a public education tool where relevant, factual information will be provided to citizens and, subsequently, where informed public input will be offered.

All feedback from the Citizens' Forum will be summarized and reported back to Council at the Finance and Corporate Services meeting of June 26.

After the March 20 meeting, City staff were subsequently directed to begin planning for the event and report back to the Finance and Corporate Services Committee on March 27 with their preliminary ideas on the forum for Council to consider.

REPORT:

Citizen Panel:

As part of the forum, a citizens panel will be chosen at random, to be made up of an equal number of citizens who represent a particular sector of the community and citizens at large. The panel will be seated around the Council horseshoe to discuss pre-determined questions. The questions will be developed by staff, in consultation with a professional facilitator and based on the informal feedback the City has received to date (ie. Who are you Kitchener? process, via email and letters to the editor.)

The process of selecting the citizen panellists will be done through a draw which will be open for the public and the media to attend.

Citizens At Large:

Representative: To ensure that the members of the panel represent Kitchener's overall population in terms of demographics and social values, one participant will be chosen from each of the six population segments identified by the Environics Research. As best as possible, staff hope to include a citizen from each ward.

Diversity of Viewpoints: To ensure that the members of the panel represent the diverse range of opinions that have already been expressed on the current library proposal, at least one member of the panel will be (a) in favour of the current library proposal; (b) opposed to the current library proposal, and (c) undecided about the current library proposal.

Citizens Representing Specific Sectors of the Community:

The forum panel will also include citizens chosen to represent specific sectors of the community, including: real estate, university and college, labour, downtown business, multicultural, library, development, high technology and education.

The purpose of these panellists will be to help facilitate discussions which consider all of the wide-ranging issues and options which have been raised by citizens in recent weeks.

While not finalized, some of the organizations staff is considering contacting to identify these sector specific citizens include:

Organization:	Subject Matter:
K-W Real Estate Board	Real Estate
UW, WLU, Conestoga College	University and College
Waterloo Regional Labour Council	Labour
KDBA, KW Chamber of Commerce	Downtown Business
Multicultural Centre, YMCA Settlement Services	Multicultural
Homebuilders	Development
Communitech, Canada's Technology Triangle	High Technology
Catholic and Public School Boards	Education

Forum Agenda:

Staff has put together a general forum agenda which will be broken down into three major sections:

1. Information Presentation: To ensure that the evening's discussions are well informed, there will be informational presentations prior to the public input portion of the event. Presentations will focus on issues such as a report on the City's Economic Development Investment Fund and the City's downtown strategy. Presentations will also be made on current proposal for a new Central Library Project and the redevelopment of the Centre Block.

Some of the questions these presentations may touch on include: a new central library vs. more branches; is Centre Block the best location for a new central library; the role of technology at the library, and; potential partnerships.

2. After a half-hour dinner break, there will be a facilitated panel discussion on major questions surrounding the redevelopment of the Centre Block and a new central library.
3. Following the panel discussion there will be an opportunity for everyone in attendance to provide their feedback on the panel discussions and on the two projects.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Not available at this time as staff is still working out the details of the event.

COMMUNICATIONS:

An extensive communications plan will be put in place to ensure that as many citizens as possible are aware of the forum.

CONCLUSION:

This informational report reflects the preparations that City staff has begun to make for the Centre Block Citizens' Forum in May.

Michael May, Senior Public Affairs Officer