

Lessons Learned from Pakenham Expansion

What do you remember from the Pakenham expansion in terms of highs and lows?

Highs

- Cooperation between Council and Board, with a joint planning committee. The project would never have seen beginning, much less completion, without the strong support of committee members. Personally, I think that an expansion of Almonte Branch would be doomed without commitment (both financial and logistical) from the Town Council and administrative staff, and the addition of such a wonderful community asset
- An excellent contractor
- The enthusiasm and effectiveness of the fundraising committee. Although their input was minor compared to construction costs, their work ensured high quality finishing - furniture, gardens, building and site aesthetics. We did get a welcoming, functional, flexible community centre for the village.
- Working with such a fine team of professionals with lots of experience and insight who really cared about the project which was rewarding for me
- Diane's leadership, skill and dedication for success. I could feel her pride in developing a landmark library branch. It was tremendously exciting to see the project unfold and to move from vision to completed building. It was gratifying to see and hear people's pleasure in entering their new branch for the first time
- That council approved the expansion and continued to support in spite of unforeseen issues and costing overruns.
- Very positive fund raisers, dedicated committee members, working with a great building committee team, even when things got heated between architect and contractor
- We got a wonderful new library facility which will serve the needs of our community well into the future, and result was far more beautiful than imagined
- I had the privilege of working on a committee composed of the Municipality of Mississippi Mills CAO, dedicated MM Councillors, the Library CEO, the Library Chair and several Library Board Members. Additional Municipality staff lent their expertise on matters of finance and building specifications. I learned so much about the direct impact of our hard-working elected officials and staff and this was but one of many projects that they were managing.
- I witnessed the tremendous amount of time and consideration that was applied to every decision in a project such as this, and I learned a great deal about cooperation and consensus building.

Lows/Challenges

- Project did not proceed as clearly as hoped
- Staff input not always listened to; although library staff were consulted and included in the process there could have been more inclusion
- Getting everyone on the same page in agreement as the goals of the committee members were not always united
- Disagreement(s) between contractor and architect made for delays and expense
- Pricing – you will always need more money; worry that we wouldn't be able to finish the project because of cost overruns; The project was initiated in response to a federal grant opportunity with a very tight application deadline, which constrained planning time and

costs from the beginning; There were several financial crises during the process and continuing fallout throughout the election; Cost overruns

- Although I felt we had a very cohesive group on the Building Committee, I was aware that there were members of the Pakenham community and within the larger MM community that felt that there were cheaper alternatives to our expansion and Renovation project. It seemed that there were polarizing perspectives without a lot of understanding about the project and for some these feelings remain to this day.

What did we learn from the Pakenham expansion?

- The need to ensure complete knowledge and understanding of what an extensive renovation entails and an expressed need for review and availability of all building plans old and new.
- Buy-in from the community is essential; inclusion in developing the project to fundraising.
- Avoid volunteers for packing and moving or plan full volunteer oversight including training and vetting of volunteers - leave this to professionals, both library and movers. This means allocating dedicated staff time specific to the project (i.e. outside regular hours; ensure adequate budget so Library Board must be on board); if using volunteers is necessary then establish small teams with a staff member lead, ensure volunteers are physically capable of lifting and they understand the unique packing requirement for books and that there are enough moving devices to comfortably move heavy cartons. Professional moving companies are worth the money in my view being equipped, strong and efficient. They save a lot of time.
- Make sure that finishes are included in the pricing
- Be realistic about the cost per square foot
- Always have a pot of money in reserve
- Need an excellent project manager to keep things on track. Diane served in this capacity, but more because of necessity than assignment
- I was impressed that Council saw the overall benefits of approving this project. I learned that the Council at the time was very supportive of this project and once the case was presented to Council and approved, our Canada 150 Grant was applied for and we were underway. As it should be, I believe the Council approved this Library Expansion a Renovation because it was understood that if the Pakenham Branch was eliminated and simultaneously, our Public School was closed, the community of Pakenham would no longer be a viable place for young families to live and grow.

If you were able to have a “do-over” what decisions would you have made differently?

- Allowing the architect to reduce the space across the front for aesthetic reasons. The four feet which was cut out of the children's section has really hampered its functionality. I will always regret not speaking out more
- I'd look at the challenges highlighted in first question to redress - more staff input, better planning for electrical and technology; clear objectives
- More effort into perimeter space: Example, the outdoor below ground level patio is problematic; Fancy is not always functional. Split entrance lobby has space issues for control. If land is not an issue, one storey additions save the cost / maintenance of a one storey lift and provide more convenient access needs for aging demographics
- I'm not sure that there would be anything that we would or should have done differently

- Chosen the experienced contractor as the project manager rather than the novice architect

What advice might you have for a municipality undertaking a library expansion?

- Don't proceed without clear financial commitments from Council and a strong fundraising committee.
- Think about a different way of letting the contract – consider design-build, as long as input into the design is accepted
- Be patient
- Be very careful in choosing an architect. Take time; visit other recent library projects, research firms carefully. Possibly ask for design proposals as part of the hiring process.
- Be thorough in planning - BEFORE construction starts!
- Establish trust and clear (open, transparent, frequent) communication. Ensure that goals of committee individuals are known and establish a process for prioritizing when goals are not mutual
- Sell and build new has advantages of not having to retrofit to accommodate. Be prepared for cost overruns if renovating an older structure built under old building code. Money is always a final decision maker, however, at times there are difficulties trying to “make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear”
- Move out of the building if you want a fast turn-around so you don’t have to put up with noise and dirt, and contractor doesn’t have to work around daily operations
- Speak to other municipalities with recent experience with similar size of collection
- If you hire an experienced architect, the finished product will speak for itself
- A design-build is a cheaper process, but the architecture is out of your control unless specified in RFP
- Look at the building or expanding of a Public Library as an investment in the future. A Public Library benefits community member of all ages, in the support of lifelong learning. Whether one longs to read books or magazines, wishes to gain information through technology, or wants to participate in the many programs designed to enhance the literary and social needs from babies to seniors, a Public Library is a wonderful community facility that provides for all.

Final Comments:

“Having said all this, the Pakenham Library Project was one of the best teamwork experiences of my life! “

“I am proud to have been part of it”

“The single-most highlight of my career”

“Such an accomplishment, and fantastic community asset”

“Seeing the look on people’s faces at the grand opening was worth every squabble we had to witness. It is truly a beautiful library.”