



# Bookmark the Core

Citizens for a new central library  
in downtown Ottawa

## **Technical Analysis of the Report on Site Evaluation for a New Central Library for Ottawa**

**January 26, 2017**

### 1. Introduction

The following is an analysis of certain selection criteria as applied to the three top-ranked sites for a New Central Library in Ottawa. The data are taken from the Deloitte report submitted to the Ottawa Public Library Board on December 15, 2016, for consideration and decision on January 31, 2017. The site selection criteria themselves were approved by the Ottawa Public Board in July 2016.

Looking at the weighting of the site selection criteria, it can be concluded that the library is seen primarily as a development driver rather than viewed in terms of meeting the needs of library users of all categories (residents, downtown workers, visitors to the city.) This has led to a blurring of the distinction between Project Needs versus the City's overall Urban Development Strategy.

The weighting of various factors differs somewhat when assessing an Ottawa Public Library stand-alone facility versus an Ottawa Public Library – Library and Archives Canada joint facility, and the latter assessment includes three additional criteria, as is explained below. The additional criteria are found in the section titled “Opportunities to Contribute to Civic and National Planning Initiatives and City/Nation Building.”

While weighting of each of the assessment elements is expressed in points (10 or 15 or 25) the actual assessment rating is expressed as a percentage, which makes for difficulty in effecting comparisons between sites.

## 2. Analysis

The selection of assessment criteria chosen for this analysis are the following:

From the Stage 1 Evaluation (worth 80%)

- Accessibility (40 points out of 100)
- Contextual Suitability (20 points out of 100)
- Contribution to civic/national planning and city/nation building (35 points of 100)

From the Stage 2 Due Diligence Evaluation (worth 20%)

Where total Due Diligence cost for Site X = potential acquisition cost or appraisal value + E (the cost impact of all the due diligence issues.)

### a) **Accessibility**

By public transit, worth 25 points. S5

Site 8 – 70%

Site 9 – 100%

Site 6 – 85%

Site 8 is 300 metres from the Pimisi LRT station, 100 metres uphill and across a busy intersection (Bronson) to OC Transpo bus stops.

Site 9 is adjacent to the Pimisi LRT station and possibly next to OC Transpo bus stops.

Site 6 is 80 metres from the Lyon LRT station and adjacent to OC Transpo bus stops.

**Why is Site 6 assessed lower than Site 9 when they share the same access to public transit?**

By walking and by cycling, 15 points. S6

Site 8 - 85%

Site 9 - 85%

Site 6 – 70%

Site 8 sits on Albert Street, a busy major road with no bicycle lane. It is at the bottom of the escarpment accessed by a steep hill on Bronson and a steep hill on Albert, which pose significant access challenges for persons with mobility challenges, for elderly persons and for children attempting to cross Bronson or Albert

Site 9 sits at the intersection of Albert and Booth, busy major roads. The site is flat, but poses challenges for pedestrians crossing the busy major roads noted above. The nearest cycling path is to the north almost 1 kilometre away. Access to this site from the residential area to the south is down a steep hill (Booth Street) presenting hazards in the winter, or a staircase connecting Upper and Lower Lorne which would be equally if not more dangerous in the winter even for able-bodied pedestrians.

Site 6 is on a parcel of land with a slight drop in height north to south, but level east to west and with no grade change from the surrounding area. There is a north-bound

dedicated cycle lane on the west side (Bay Street) and a south-bound dedicated cycle lane on the east side (Lyon Street.)

**Why is Site 6 ranked lowest in terms of walking and cycling access when it has the best access of the three sites? Why is Site 8 ranked higher than Site 6 when it is clearly deficient in terms of cycling and pedestrian access?**

**b) Contextual Suitability**

Existing or planned future development in the surrounding areas will be complementary in terms of character and image of the facility, worth 10 points. D4

Site 8 – 100%

Site 9 – 100%

Site 6 – 70%

Site 8 is on Albert Street, with no existing adjacent buildings except for a 1960s-era apartment building above the site on the escarpment. Ten years ago the City developed an Escarpment Zone development plan, but no implementation has taken place. There has been discussion in recent weeks of additional residential development on the “Claridge land” immediately north of Site 8, but the timeframes for this development are estimated at 20-25 years from now. The RendezVous LeBreton development is one kilometre west of the site.

Site 9 is adjacent (east) of the proposed LeBreton Flats development project being negotiated between the NCC and the Rendezvous LeBreton consortium, which if it passes a number of approval hurdles, may be built over 20-30 years. Apart from this development, there are no existing or planned future developments. The area immediately south of the site is low-rise residential dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Site 6 is in the traditional downtown core, adjacent to residential (high-rise) and office buildings (government and private), and to hotels. The site is three blocks (5 minute walk) from the headquarters of Library and Archives Canada and the Supreme Court of Canada.

**Why are Sites 8 and 9 ranked 100% when the existing immediately surrounding areas are empty and planned development unlikely to take place for 20-25 years, and Site 6, ranked at only 70%, is already well-situated where residents, downtown workers and visitors to the city can reach it?**

Proximity to existing or planned cultural, commercial, residential and institutional facilities that are complementary in terms of function and use. D5

Site 8 – 85%

Site 9 – 70%

Site 6 – 70%

Site 8, as noted above, is not close to any planned cultural, commercial or institutional facilities. The residential facilities being discussed for the area to the north of the site are unlikely to be built for 20-25 years.

Site 9, as noted above, is not near any existing cultural, commercial or institutional facilities. Any such facilities would be constructed over the next 20-30 years as part of the LeBreton Flats development plan, the latest iteration in a 50-year saga of demolition, neglect and much talk of re-development.

Site 6 is within metres of existing cultural, commercial, institutional and residential facilities. As noted re D4 above, Library and Archives Canada, the Supreme Court of Canada, the Bank of Canada, the former Technical High School of Ottawa with its large auditorium, some of the largest office buildings in the city and three hotels, soon to be four, as well as high rise condominium and rental residential buildings immediately to the south of the site. As the site is on the LRT and OC Transpo bus routes connecting to the University of Ottawa, use of a Central Library at Site 6 by students can be expected.

**Why is Site 6 ranked low in this assessment when existing commercial, cultural, institutional and residential facilities are present at and near the site, whereas the other sites are scored for facilities that are only in the planning phase, with considerable uncertainty as to timeframes for them to be realized?**

**c) Opportunities to contribute to Civic Planning/National initiatives and City/Nation Building**

Development of the new library facility would serve as a catalyst and economic driver for Central Area development D6

Site 8 – 100%

Site 9 – 100%

Site 6 – 70%

Site 8 is at the eastern edge of LeBreton Flats, which has received a lot of attention over the last two years from private development interests. The time frames for these developments is not clear, and the history of the last 50 years is not an encouraging example of how soon the projects might be realized. Within the last few weeks another private developer (Claridge) has announced plans – timeframe not clear but likely several decades – for a residential development immediately to the north of the site, which will overshadow any building at Site 8 and block views to the Ottawa River, the War Museum and the Holocaust Monument. There is no scope for development to the south of Site 8 as the escarpment represents a significant physical barrier to any building, as is the case to the east of the site

Site 9 lies to the south of what is referred to as the “Claridge Lands” – see comments above re Site 8. Development to the west of Site 9 will take place as part of the re-development of LeBreton Flats under the control of the NCC, during the next several decades.

Site 6 is in the western section of what is downtown, where re-development is underway but where further development opportunities exist.

**How relevant is the building of a new Central Library in terms of propelling private sector development initiatives when these plans are already being developed without assurance that the new library facility will be nearby?**

Development of the new library facility contributes to the City's development policies, secondary plans and transit oriented growth and intensification. D7

Site 8 – 100%

Site 9 – 100%

Site 6 – 50%

Site 8 is assessed at the maximum, even though it is not aligned with the City's access, walking and cycling policies. It is the furthest from an LRT station of the top three sites. The site is ranked high in terms of car access, even though there is no existing parking nearby and the cost of parking is not shown as part of the cost calculations.

Site 9 is also assessed at the maximum, based on assumptions regarding proposed but not confirmed development schemes. While it appears consistent with the City's transit-oriented growth policies, it is deficient in terms of walking and bicycle access. The site is the furthest distant of the top-ranked sites in terms of the concentration of current library users, both residents and workers; this would act as a disincentive to frequency of visits.

Site 6 is in line with the City's transit-oriented growth, cycling and walking policies and featured in the now decade-old Escarpment Development Plan. Siting the library here would encourage intensification of development of the western section of downtown.

**How can Sites 8 and 9 receive the maximum assessments, and Site 6 receive a much lower ranking, when there are clear disconnects between the City's policies in a number of critical areas and the characteristics of the higher-ranked sites?**

Development of the new library facility contributes to the establishment of a new civic focal point and civic identity. D8

Site 8 – 100%

Site 9 – 85%

Site 6 – 50%

Site 8 does not lend itself to becoming part of a new civic focal point, given its location at the bottom of a 30 metre cliff and, as David Reevly of the *Ottawa Citizen* has put it, surrounded by "a bluff, a moat, an interchange and cleared field between two arterial roads." As well, the proposed mixed residential development to the north of the site, if indeed implemented, will eliminate the oft-cited views to the Ottawa River seen as an asset for Site 8.

Site 9 is an empty parcel of land surrounded by other empty parcels of land, some of which may be developed if the RendezVous Lebreton project goes ahead over the next 20-30 years. It is difficult to know how placing the library on this site will contribute to the establishment of civic identity, given that the character of that identity is not defined for the purpose of the site assessment process.

Site 6 offers an attractive placement in an area of the City with a high resident population density as well as high density of workers who use the library. It is near institutions and sites with high levels of attendance and with innovative, world-class architectural design will offer an attractive destination for visitors to the City, a visitor focal point together

with the Parliament Buildings, the Bank of Canada, the Supreme Court of Canada and the headquarters of Library and Archives Canada and serve as a civic attraction amid the panoply of federal institutional destinations.

**Why is Site 8, a site hidden against a cliff and out of site from the source of users from the east, the traditional and densely populated source of library visitors ranked highest? Why is Site 9, which offers the prospect of a library built in splendid isolation on LeBreton Flats, accessible chiefly by public transit at a potentially significant cost to library users, also given a high assessment rating? Why is Site 6 penalized for being close to resident, worker and visitor users, consistent with the placement of new Central Libraries in other major Canadian cities?**

#### **d) Encumbrances**

No significant environmental encumbrances D 11

Site 8 – 70%

Site 9 – 70%

Site 6 – 70%

**Given that Sites 8 and 9 are on LeBreton Flats, a known brownfield site, how can they be given the same assessment as Site 6 which has no known significant environmental encumbrances?**

#### **e) Conclusion**

There appears to be compelling evidence that Site 6 deserves a higher ranking than has been given in the Deloitte report and recommendation to the Ottawa Public Library Board. Based on accessibility factors alone (worth 40 points of a total of 100) Site 6 should be the top ranking site. Site 8 is ranked high for its proximity to residential and institutional facilities (Deloitte p. 24), an assessment not backed up by evidence, whereas Site 6 is downgraded because it is in a “predominantly residential area” (Deloitte p. 25), which is not an accurate statement.

It should also be kept in mind that Site 6 was the preferred site for a new Central Library in 2010.

Finally, if a site that is not City-owned were selected, the acquisition cost could be offset or met in total from the proceeds of the sale of City-owned Site 8 and the existing Central Library at Laurier and Metcalfe. (Note too that simply because Site 8 is City-owned does not mean it is “free.” There is a cost to every site; using a City-owned site means forgoing the revenue that would be raised from its sale).