

To the Editor:

I've sent a slightly longer version of this letter to Mayor Avis and the Councillors of Fort Frances because as a former resident of Fort Frances and current cabin owner in Watten Township, I am deeply concerned that the tremendous foresight and vision of the Fort Frances Library project will be detrimentally scaled back simply because of short-term financial issues. A decision to compromise the vision of the current plan is not only short-sighted but will very negatively impact current and future residents of Fort Frances for years to come both culturally and economically.

From the perspective of an academic researcher and teacher in the area of library science, I know how important providing access to the proposed modern library, information hub, and learning centre is for communities. I recently chose to join the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto as a professor because it is currently undergoing the process of transforming from a traditional library and archives academic program to Canada's first i-School. I see this as a parallel to the way the Fort Frances Public Library is being transformed by the vision of the new library project. The i-School movement is sweeping across North America because leaders recognize that information is everywhere, it is varied and dynamic, taking many different forms (text, images, video, sound, number), and access to information and the ability to understand and manipulate it in different ways will provide new cancer treatments, solve global warming, and open new markets. In short, information and how we interact with it is critical to the economic and cultural health of society. The idea that Fort Frances will have a centre that will give young members of our community opportunities like that not only makes me proud but optimistic that the future for my hometown is bright.

The potential also exists that the town can use the facilities to attract more people and businesses to the community. In his book, *Flight of the Creative Class*, author and scholar Richard Florida argues that the global competition for creative talent will be the defining economic issue of the 21st century. He shows that those features which make a region economically strong today are not its raw materials or its natural resources but the people it is able to attract from around the world. His ideas are being called "a wake-up call to business, political, and cultural leaders" as he describes how communities, cities, and countries need to ensure equal access and treatment while harnessing the creativity of all people. Investments in attracting and retaining creative and high-quality people to a region are much more important for long-term prosperity than building sports stadiums and shopping centres, he suggests. I believe the library project as envisioned will do more for the long-term prosperity of Fort Frances than many other possible investments.

My family has been inspired by visionaries in Fort Frances such as Joyce Cunningham who are bringing this project to reality. We are thankful for the fundraising efforts that so many residents of Fort Frances have tirelessly led and organized. We have contributed personally to see this tremendous vision come to fruition. It's time for the Town of Fort Frances to step up and provide the financial resources necessary to fulfill this vision and continue with the plans.

Sincerely,

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