

Subject: FW: letter to mayor and members of council for Nov. 16 meeting of council

From: Paul Wilson

Sent: November 3, 2011 2:15 PM

To: clerk@hamilton.ca

Subject: letter to mayor and members of council for Nov. 16 meeting of council

November 3, 2011

To the mayor and members of Hamilton city council:

Take A Lesson From The Past - Council Can Keep Education Jobs Downtown

Nearly 50 years ago, the Hamilton board of education decided it needed to build a headquarters. It planned to do that on land it owned in the Westdale area.

Hamilton city council believed it was important to have the board downtown. The board disagreed. So council got creative and looked for a suitable site in the core. It expropriated land on the east side of Bay Street between Main and King and turned it over to the board at a deep discount. The rest is history.

We can learn from history. I wrote often about Hamilton's history in my StreetBeat column in The Spectator. When I left the paper in January after 30 years, I joined the city's Heritage committee. One topic up for discussion was the board of education building. I hate to see that distinctive structure go, but it looks as though that battle is lost. And it is wonderful that McMaster will finally have a significant presence downtown.

But I don't understand why the city seems content to now lose those several hundred good board of education jobs in the core.

Yes, we'll be replacing those lost jobs with the McMaster development. But downtown is still a fragile place. Our core needs every body it can get. It needs people in the stores and restaurants and it needs life on the streets. Downtown cannot afford to let those education jobs slip away.

So I hope that council of today will now work as hard as that council of yesteryear to persuade the board of education to stay downtown.

The core certainly has room for the board. The \$31.6-million headquarters the board wants to build in the suburbs is to be 113,000 square feet. There is that much space and more on the nine empty floors at the top of Hamilton's tallest office complex, Stelco Tower. You have to believe the owners would be glad to change the name of that landmark for an important tenant.

That's just one option. I'm sure council can come up with others.

It's true that the board of ed answers to the province, not City Hall. So perhaps our new minority government at Queen's Park could be helpful. Andrea Horwath has been a strong advocate for the core. It is, after all, her turf.

The province might want to know why the board plans to spend so much on a new headquarters when money is tight and when student enrolments are predicted to decline for many years to come. And after all, the local separate school board has operated successfully for decades from its downtown headquarters and has no plans to move.

The public board surely wants to do right for Hamilton. It knows Hamilton must have a healthy heart to prosper and to be a city where graduates can live and work.

11/4/2011

It's now up to city council - maybe an assist from the province - to help the board of education find a way to do the right thing in downtown Hamilton.

Sincerely
Paul Wilson

