



The Architectural  
Conservancy  
of Ontario

**Stratford-Perth County Branch  
356 Ontario Street, Suite 272, Stratford Ontario N5A 7X6**

February 10, 2014

Mr. Dan Mathieson, Mayor of Stratford  
and Members of City Council  
City of Stratford  
1 Wellington Street  
Stratford ON N5A 2L3

Your Worship and Members of City Council,

Re: the Cooper Site  
and the January 21, 2014 Finance and Labour Relations Sub-Committee Report

The starting point in any discussion of the future of the Cooper Site surely must be the historical and heritage significance of the site to the city and the people of Stratford.

Putting aside each and every view and opinion of what the site now looks like, the condition of the building and other remains of the railway industry for which the site was originally created, and the variety of possible future uses of the site, there are the findings and judgment of Reports and public consensus that the railway industry (and thus the Cooper Site itself) is of primary and significant importance to the history and the growth of this community.

With the Site's heritage significance recognized and accepted by Council and by the citizens of Stratford, it makes sense next to investigate how the site could be put to use without the radical step of demolition of the building at this point in time.

The building and site is extensive and the use of the site is hedged-in by the environmental impact of the original industry for which it was built and functioned.

The financial outlay required to immediately re-develop the whole of the site for another use is a major hurdle.

And, there is no immediate and pressing need the site, in its entirety, is being asked to meet.

Given these facts, a reasonable and wise course of action would be to investigate uses of the site to meet interim needs while still looking ahead to possible future and long-term development and use(s).

Thor Dingman's proposal and suggestions submitted at tonight's Meeting are an excellent example and contribution to the discussion investigating how the site could be put to use in the interim – that is, before the long-term development of the Cooper Site is determined.

It makes good sense that possible uses generating income should be part of the discussion. Putting the site 'to work', rather than letting it just sit, is a positive suggestion worth serious consideration.

What we today generally refer to as 'heritage' is more than bricks and mortar and the fabric of structures built to house the population, or to serve as places of government, commerce, industry, work and worship.

Our heritage 'built fabric' (whether grand and imposing, or simple and humble) embrace more than city halls, courthouses, churches, theatres, sports arenas and other buildings, that by their usage (if not legal ownership), belong to all of us.

Houses and other dwellings, stores, factories and the great variety of work places are all part of our inheritance and heritage. As time passes and industry changes, often what was once vital to people's lives and livelihoods and to the community's prosperity, is thought obsolete and redundant.

The longer a building or a site, once vital, sits vacant and begins to deteriorate, its significance is forgotten and dismissed, providing fertile ground for the argument for demolition.

To proceed to demolish the building on the Cooper Site at this time would be a decision, in retrospect, the citizens of Stratford will regret.

Hand-in-hand with the investigation of uses the Cooper Site might supply in the interim (and long-term) must go the commitment, this local Branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario believes, to commemorate the railway industry in a significant manner.

Given what remains on the site, there is the wonderful (although challenging) opportunity to commemorate the railway industry with more than an historical plaque.

Whatever the configuration and size, a significant part of the building should be retained in such a manner that the original uses of the building are obvious and illustrated.

Functioning as an interpretive centre illustrating the scope of the industry conducted in the building and on the site, citizens and visitors to Stratford will be informed, appreciate and remain in touch with our heritage and the importance the railway industry played in the city's (as well as in Canada's) past and development.

Given the voices we are hearing at this Meeting, there is vision and excitement about a site in downtown Stratford which may appear to many people as an eyesore, but a site reasonable, bold and creative thinking and discussion (and time and energy) could transform, once again, into a vital and living part of the community.

The Stratford-Perth County Branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario strongly urges Council to step back from the Motion as received from the Finance and Labour Relations Committee and to continue to call upon the vision, excitement, skills and contributions of the citizens of Stratford regarding the future of the Cooper Site.

Throughout the province there are many communities regretting the loss of their built heritage.

People may mourn the demolition of an early Georgian dwelling, or a stately Victorian town hall, but we tend to forget the sad loss of an Edwardian industrial factory (which often is a marvelous example of the ‘state-of-the-art’ of its time)...a building, that in another era, secured the community’s prosperity and its future.

With a good part of the grand purpose-built fabric of the Cooper Site still intact, Stratford Ontario has the exciting and the challenging opportunity to step forward...and to affirm and to commemorate the railway industry...an industry which played a key and a major role in Stratford’s history and heritage.

It would be an historic loss should the building and the site completely disappear.

Respectfully submitted,

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