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**Commission des  
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**RE: CITY OF OTTAWA – INTENTION TO DESIGNATE THE PROPERTY KNOWN  
MUNICIPALLY AS 377 RIDEAU STREET (RIDEAU BRANCH LIBRARY)**

Robert Bowes, Chairman  
Barbara Humphreys, Member

April 20, 1998

The hearing was convened under Section 29.(8) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Ch.O.18 for the purpose of reporting to the Council of the City of Ottawa, whether, in the opinion of the Conservation Review Board (hereafter referred to as the Board), on the basis of evidence heard, the property known municipally as 377 Rideau Street (Rideau Branch Library) should be designated by by-law under Part IV of the Act, objections having been raised by the Ottawa Public Library Board.

Notice of this hearing was given under the Act in the newspaper the *Ottawa Citizen* in its issue of April 1, 1998 and in the newspaper *Le Droit* in its issue of the same date (April 1, 1998), the relevant affidavit by a member of the Board's staff being Exhibit #1. The meeting was duly convened on April 20, 1998 at 10 a.m. in the City of Ottawa, Guigues Room, City Hall, 111 Sussex Drive, Ottawa.

It should be noted that inclusion of the exterior design features of the building in the reasons for designation has been agreed to by both the owner (the City of Ottawa) and the occupant (the Ottawa Library Board) and the objection now raised by the Library Board relates only to the inclusion of the interior attributes of the building in the reasons for designation.

Prior to the meeting, the members of the Board viewed the property in question.

Present:

Ms. Anne M. Peck, Assistant City Solicitor  
Marc Brandt, Chairman, City of Ottawa LACAC  
Lucy Corbin, Vice-Chairperson, City of Ottawa LACAC  
Mr. Paul Robertson, Ottawa Resident  
Ms. Carolyn Quinn, President, Heritage Ottawa  
Ms. Monique Levoie, Manager, Rideau Street Branch Library

## The Case for the City of Ottawa

Presenter: Ms. Anne Peck

Ms. Peck tabled an affidavit confirming the ownership of the property by the City of Ottawa, (Exhibit #2), and a Book of Documents relating to the designation of the subject property which includes the Curriculum Vitae of the principal witnesses, (Exhibit #3).

Ms. Peck then called on her first witness, Mr. Paul Robertson.

### Witness: Paul Robertson

Mr. Robertson has been a resident of Sandy Hill (the area in which the Library is situated) for the past 12 years and is a former member of *Action Sandy Hill* and of the City of Ottawa LACAC. In his testimony Mr. Robertson dwelt largely with the importance of this building to the community rather than with its specific architectural or historical merit. It is the one branch of the Ottawa Library system that caters to the French-speaking population and has become an important landmark, its residential quality indicative of the neighbourhood which it serves. Mr. Robertson considers the somewhat “collegiate” appearance and atmosphere of the building to be non-intimidating in comparison with local libraries of more formal and/or contemporary design. This approach extends to the interior which he felt had an “old world cosy study” ambience which he found to be much more compatible with reading and research than that of the larger main Branch. Finally, he believed that despite a few changes made to the interior such as the replacement of the old lighting fixtures, the building has retained its charm as a community library.

### Witness: Ms. Lucy Corbin

Ms. Corbin holds a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Texas and is presently Vice-Chairperson of Ottawa LACAC and an active member of the local community (see Curriculum Vitae detailed in Exhibit 3, Tab 1).

Ms. Corbin reviewed the chronology of previous LACAC meetings relating to the designation of the exterior of the building and the subsequent amendment to include the interior (see Exhibit 3, Tabs 6 and 7). Consideration by City Council of the amended recommendation for designation was twice deferred to allow input from the Library Board and finally approved by Council on November 5<sup>th</sup>. In late November, the Library Board wrote to express their disagreement with the designation of the interior on the assumption that such designation could limit the Library’s future use of the building (Exhibit 3, Tab 8). Ms. Corbin drew the attention of the Board to the final paragraph of this response from the Library Board stating that the Library Board “highly values the irreplaceable fixtures, unique attributes and remarkable architecture of the building’s interior.”

A brief discussion followed of the evaluation scoring system used by LACAC and a review of the history of the building and its architectural merit, as detailed in reports prepared by M. Fairbairn and Sally Coutts (Tab 4, Exhibit 3).

The Rideau Branch was established in 1925 and operated for its first 8 years in rented space. Overcrowding of these premises moved the Library Board to erect the present building which opened in 1934, claimed to be the first bilingual library in North America and certainly the first one in Ottawa. It was designed by an Ottawa architect, John Pritchard MacLaren, and while the floor plan is that of all the Carnegie Libraries, no Carnegie funds were involved. It is a one-storey building with a steeply pitched hip roof, somewhat suggestive of the Norman-styled roofs sometimes seen in early Quebec architecture. The roof line is broken by Flemish-inspired gables crowning tall windows on each of the east and west elevations and a more stylized version with a circular decorative window surmounting the main entrance. The front oak door is further enhanced by a projecting stone frontispiece, bearing name and date and a protective hood of stone. Wrought iron railings and lanterns of the entrance steps are practical as well as decorative features. There have been only two major alterations to the building – the installation of ramped wheelchair access in 1982 and the erection of the rear addition in 1949, the latter included in the original plans. The addition is not visible from the street and the ramped access is neatly screened by shrubs. Also, in 1982 the original wooden sashes were replaced by those of stainless steel with false mullions.

The interior is relatively intact, the only changes being the substitution of metal bookcase units for the original free-standing wooden ones, the elimination of the original hanging lights, the provision of access to the rear addition and to the ramped entrance. The distinguishing architectural features of the interior – the highly decorative beams and trusses, the finely detailed classical pilasters and pediment of the interior door and the perimeter shelving, door and window trim--are all original and have been well maintained.

The witness further stated that this is the most intact of all the early Ottawa Library buildings and noted that its designation is very much in keeping with the intent and spirit of the Official Plan as detailed in the Heritage Resource Component, (Exhibit #4), which states as its objective: "To conserve the City's heritage resources in a manner which respects their architectural, historical, cultural, and contextual significance, and ensures their future viability as functional components of Ottawa's urban environment." Ms. Corbin assured the Board that LACAC would be willing to assist the Library Board in the design of any needed alterations. Finally, in response to a question by the Board, she was unable to explain why the interior of the building was not included in the original recommendation for designation.

Witness: Marc Brandt

Mr. Brandt is a partner in the Ottawa firm Thompson Brandt, Architects, with wide experience in the field of architectural conservation and restoration and in community development, both professionally and privately. He has held office in the major Ottawa organizations devoted to the preservation of heritage. As past vice-president of Heritage Ottawa, he has played a continuing role in the major Ottawa organizations devoted to the preservation of heritage and is currently a member of the Board of Directors of HODI (Historic Ottawa Development Inc.) and Chairman of the Ottawa LACAC (see Curriculum Vitae detailed in Exhibit 3, Tab 1).

Mr. Brandt concurred with the comments of the previous witness with regard to the chronology of events leading to this hearing. Comments on the context of the site followed with Mr. Brandt showing a map of that part of the city plan relevant to the Library and pointing out that the adjacent properties are largely in commercial and business ownership and the Library is the only one displaying a residential quality. He suggested that the rather unique design of the Library was an effort on the part of the architect to blend both qualities on the one streetscape.

After briefly reviewing the history and design features of the building which included elements of the different revival styles of the Queen Anne period typical of the post-Victorian era, Mr. Brandt expressed his opinion that the architect, while producing a highly eclectic design, had created a building both dignified and welcoming and of a scale and appearance in keeping with the surrounding streetscape. He felt that the portal of the front entrance and that of the interior provided continuity between the interior and exterior of the building—that the wooden beams were significant in the fact that Ottawa was originally a “timber town”—that the few alterations made over the years, namely, the change in window fabric but not design, the installation of ramped wheelchair access and the removal of the hanging chandeliers of the interior had not affected either the exterior appearance nor the interior ambience in any major way. He further stated that he considered the interior in some ways even more important than the exterior as its welcoming bright and airy atmosphere provided by the 18 ft. (5.4m.) high ceiling, the tall windows and unobstructed view, provided an oasis in the heart of a busy business district. The Library has been in continuous use since its erection and is now a well known landmark and its importance to the community cannot be over-emphasized. For all of these reasons he had strongly supported the designation of the building and regretted the unfortunate oversight in not including the interior in the original recommendation.

Case for the Library Board

Presenter: Ms. Monique Levoie

Ms. Levoie reiterated the fact that the Library Board fully agrees with the designation of the exterior of the Library and the objections raised only concerned the designation of the interior. Such designation could, it is believed, seriously restrict future alterations

required to meet the demands of increased usage and changes in technology—the latter including the necessity of adapting to the use of computers with access to the Internet, etc. She pointed out that there is a different usage of the libraries now and while she appreciates the attractive atmosphere of the Rideau Branch Library the fact remains that it is overcrowded and impractical in many ways, for example, in coping with the ever-increasing use of computers. In view of this the Library Board feels it must be free to alter the interior in any way it sees fit in order to improve the service to the public.

With regard to the designation of the exterior of the building, while the Library Board raised no objection, they are concerned that designation may place a restriction on the future sale of the building should this become necessary. They also feel that restoration or conservation of heritage aspects can be very expensive and difficult in determining what can be done and locating experienced people who can do it properly. Ms. Levoie also expressed concern with the condition of the floor and the necessity of rewiring the building and wondered what restrictions would be encountered in carrying out these and other essential changes.

In further discussions led by Ms. Peck, Ms. Levoie expressed her appreciation of the heritage qualities of the building and said that the Library Board would be willing to work with LACAC concerning the design and implementation of proposed changes but that money would be needed. Ms. Peck advised that assistance in locating expertise would be readily available to the Library Board and that some funding might be obtained through HODI (Historic Ottawa Development Inc.), or by municipal grants.

Member of the Public: Ms. Carolyn Quinn

Ms. Quinn is President of Heritage Ottawa and stated that she was present on behalf of that organization which she explained is an advocacy group with a mandate to educate in matters of heritage preservation. She felt there was always a tendency to limit designations to the exterior and felt in this instance the lightness and airiness of the interior of the Rideau Branch Library was a major factor in its continuous use over the years. Further, she believed that while being a public building, this Library had served in many ways as a secular retreat for the users. The long term use of it and the integrity of the building gave a sense of continuity to the community it served and it was important to protect and preserve not only the exterior but the interior as well. She also noted that, of the Ottawa libraries, the Rideau Branch Library is the only one that has not been altered over the years.

Summations:

Ms. Levoie said she had nothing further to add except to suggest that information regarding possible grants and accessibility to expertise in heritage conservation be sent to the Library Board for their information.

Ms. Peck summarized briefly the history of the building, its construction date of 1933, design by a local architect incorporating the standard Carnegie Library layout, the first bilingual library in the city and the one branch which has not been altered in a major way. She commented on the fine stewardship shown by the Library to date and said that any necessary alterations must be designed not only with respect to the heritage qualities of the building but to improve its use as well and in this regard LACAC is willing to work with the Library Board to assist in any way it can. In closing, she strongly recommended the inclusion of the interior in the Board's consideration of the designation of the Rideau Branch Library.

### Findings:

The Board feels it would be useful to comment on the nature of designation noting that it is the *property* not simply the building or buildings thereon that is designated. The "reasons for designation" can include the attributes and features, exterior or interior, of the building or buildings and stated surrounds which are important to the heritage character of a property and should be preserved. Designation does not prohibit alterations to a property. The "reasons for designation" guide future alterations to ensure that changes are compatible with the heritage of the property.

The original recommendation for the designation of the Library, (approved by all concerned), made no mention of the interior. This apparent oversight was corrected by LACAC in the issuance of an addendum to the effect that the interior be included. After several deferments Council approved the revised recommendation, at which time the Library Board expressed their disagreement with the amendment i.e. the inclusion of the interior. This hearing, as previously noted, is essentially concerned only with the interior design.

In rejecting the inclusion of the interior the Library Board expressed their fear that preservation of the interior could seriously inconvenience or even prohibit the alterations required to render and update the services to the community. These include the fact that there will inevitably be an increased use of computers which may require changes in the lighting system and increased shelving which demands the replacement of the too narrow original perimeter shelving. Other problems regarding space are a matter of the provision of personnel to supervise an existing lower floor area and not really relevant to the interior of the upper floor.

The plan of the main floor is in keeping with standards of the Carnegie Libraries, designed to produce open areas with unobstructed views for ease of supervision. In the Rideau Street Branch the resultant openness has been much enhanced by the provision of an 18 foot (5.4m) high ceiling and tall side windows with low bookcase units creating a very pleasant, bright and airy atmosphere. The distinguishing architectural features, which are original and intact, include a series of exposed decorative beams and trusses, a finely detailed classical pedimented portico and pilasters marking the interior of the reading room entrance, moulded trim on the windows and perimeter

bookcases. The original hanging chandeliers have been replaced by recessed lighting and the freestanding ash bookcases by units of metal.

The interior of the Library is very much an inextricable part of the entire design as there seems to be a natural transition in style from the eclecticism of the exterior to the rather eccentric blending of Gothic and Classical detailing of the interior. The result is a sort of quaint charm and informality much appreciated by those who reject the more functional and colder aspects of other City libraries. The Board believes that this aspect of the interior is a major factor in the attraction of the building which is a warmly regarded landmark in the community and in many ways a reminder of its history and development.

The Board finds the interior of the Rideau Branch Library with its distinguishing architectural features, to be an integral part of the building's design and of its heritage significance.

**Recommendations:**

- 1) The Board recommends that the Rideau Branch Library be designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.
- 2) The Board further recommends that the heritage attributes of the interior, as well as of the exterior of the building, be included in the "reasons for designation."
- 3) The Board commends the Library Board for their careful stewardship of the Rideau Branch Library over the years and is aware of their appreciation of its heritage qualities. We encourage the Library Board to work with the City and its Local Architectural Advisory Committee to ensure that any proposed alterations do not compromise either the exterior or the interior design.

(Original Signed by)

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Robert Bowes, Chairman

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Barbara Humphreys, Member

**List of Exhibits**

1. Affidavit of publication of Notice of Hearing.
2. Deed of Ownership of the property.
3. Book of Documents
4. Pages 1-5 of Chapter 11 of "Heritage Resource Management."