



Encouraging Private Investment in Thorold

A Presentation to Thorold City Council

Prepared by the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce

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Good Evening Mayor Luciani, City Councillors, and members of city staff. My name is Kithio Mwanzia and I am the Chamber's Director of Policy and Government Relations.

On behalf of the Chamber, I would first like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue to the business community.

As the voice of business, the Chamber of Commerce is committed to ensuring that there is a vibrant business and investment environment in our community. One of our responsibilities as a member driven organization representing over 1200 businesses and 28,000 employees is to provide input on matters such as the one before you this evening regarding the future of the old city hall.

As with previous opportunities to revitalize the site of the former city hall, the Chamber's position has not changed. We support developments that increase the taxable base for the community and reduce the burden of maintenance and upgrading of buildings that are no longer beneficial to the city.

With Thorold's rich history, there have been several buildings that have served as the city's city hall. Today, the city still has five former city hall buildings – including the one that is under discussion today. While each one played a role during its time as a place in which people like you made choices about the future of the city – each one outlived its useful purpose.

As we have stated before during budget deliberations – council must also deal with its land holdings such as the other city hall locations – and move forward to develop a plan to sell those properties for redevelopment.

Now, the former city hall of Carlton Street is a unique opportunity. Located in the heart of downtown Thorold – the one time school turned city hall – is ideally located for the proposed redevelopment by Mr. Cottage and Mr. Flus. The private - public partnership that is being proposed is the kind that is being developed in communities across Ontario – and it's the kind of the business venture that attracts further investments to a community.

The report before you two gives you two options.

A completely new use for a parcel of land that is ideal situated for a multi-use seniors centre with a residential component that will keep people downtown built by private developers; or an upgrade to the current building to make it usable for a seniors centre – paid for by the city (and ultimately by the taxpayer).

The report provides the details of the building's estimated costs as well as the private proposal and its estimated costs. As you can see, the private sector proposal provides unique added value in that it provides an innovative use of space while minimizing conversion costs. In addition, a private sector investment would provide real-assessment value to the city while minimizing public maintenance costs.

This last point should be a central point in your council deliberations as this past spring Council grappled with a 6% tax increase. Councillors acknowledged that the only way to manage tax affordability is to increase real assessment growth. The project proposed by Mr. Cottage and Mr. Flus is one way in which to address increased tax pressures that will be coming forward year over year.

Taking leadership on this issue and being decisive on a major private sector investment in Thorold will send a powerful signal to the business community that the city is ready and willing to leverage its economic development potential. Previous councils have stalled on this issue when partners were willing to shoulder the costs of redevelopment and revitalization – and its your time to move forward. We urge you to support the private sector redevelopment project. It’s good for the city, and it is good for the downtown – and once this has been dealt with – it will allow you as a council to move forward and pursue more economic development opportunities in the community

We thank you for the opportunity to address council on this issue and for your consideration on an important issue to the business community.