

GRAND TRUNK SITE — PUBLIC Q&A

Delivering the Community's 2018 Vision — the Full Cost, and How It's Paid For

What is the Renewal Plan?

In 2018, following extensive community engagement, the City's Grand Trunk Master Plan set out a Community Hub inside the reused Grand Trunk building — a new YMCA, a new public pool, childcare, the library, and space for the arts, heritage, and public gathering. The master plan set that direction but never put a price on it.

The Renewal Plan, developed by architect Robert Ritz (R. Ritz Architect Inc.), is the first time anyone has put a full price to that vision, along with a plan for how it is paid for: **a total project cost of about \$143 million.**

Didn't the City propose more than one Build New option?

Yes. After the ad hoc committee's term ended, City staff advanced two Build New options of their own. The smaller option, at 75,000 square feet, includes a 10,000-square-foot childcare centre, an atrium, a library, and the YMCA — yet the current YMCA alone is 42,000 square feet, and the library program calls for 40,000 square feet. It is worth asking how that math works: at 75,000 square feet, this option appears to largely rebuild what the community already has, with no real accommodation for future growth. The cost comparison in this Q&A uses the second, 100,000-square-foot option, since it offers larger facilities than what exists today. Both options, however, develop a smaller new building on the site rather than making use of the existing 163,000-square-foot Grand Trunk superstructure — building less, not more, even though the Renewal Plan is sized to serve a future Stratford population exceeding 40,000, up from roughly 32,000 today.

How does the cost compare to the City's New Build Plan?

The City's New Build Plan has not yet been priced against that same full list of community spaces. Applying that same rate — \$654 per square foot, the rate implied by the City's own partial New Build proposal of 100,000 square feet for \$65.4 million — to a matching program, and budgeting site remediation at an estimated \$2 million per acre for the additional land its footprint requires, shows what it would cost in full: about \$156 million with an open-air parking garage, or about \$161 million with an enclosed parking garage to match the Renewal Plan's — \$13 million to \$18 million more than the Renewal Plan's \$143 million, even though the cost per square foot works out to about the same. Much of that gap comes from site remediation: the Renewal Plan needs it only where the pool addition is built (about \$1.3 million), because the rest of the building already stands. The New Build Plan disturbs the ground under every new building and its parking structure — surface parking in both plans doesn't require remediation — putting its site remediation at closer to \$12 million.

At about \$415 per square foot including parking, the Renewal Plan's per-square-foot cost is comparable to the City's New Build Plan. This \$415 figure blends the finished community spaces, priced at \$654 per square foot, with the parking garage, which costs considerably less per square foot — pulling the overall average down. But once matched to the same full program, the New Build Plan costs \$13 million to \$18 million more overall. The difference is that the Renewal Plan reuses the existing building rather than replacing it — requiring far less site remediation — and comes with a funding structure that spreads the cost across the facilities, apartment revenue, and parking revenue.

Does that mean taxpayers are on the hook for \$143 million?

No. A \$143 million project is not a \$143 million bill to taxpayers. The plan is structured so that each part is paid for by the people and revenues that use or benefit from it — not through direct municipal capital. The one exception is the library: as an existing City service, its space may be financed in part directly by the City, potentially alongside fundraising, rather than paying for its space entirely on its own like the other facilities.

How does each community facility get paid for?

The YMCA, pool, library, daycare, theatre, clinic and the other uses each rent or buy their space for what it costs to build — about \$654 per square foot, including the shell — the same construction rate the City used for its New Build Plan. The final size of each facility is set by that tenant, and additional spaces are available to buy or rent, which helps cover the building's shared operating areas.

By comparison, once the New Build Plan is priced to the same full program, it costs \$13 million to \$18 million more overall — even though its cost per square foot works out to about the same, once it accounts for site remediation and the cost of demolishing two-thirds of the existing building while retaining and rehabilitating the remaining third.

Who pays for the concourse, entrances, and site remediation?

In the Renewal Plan, the profit from the residential apartment — a separate development — finances the capital cost of the concourse and entrances that link the building for year-round access (about \$10.0 million), and the remediation of the site where the pool is built (about \$1.3 million). Property taxes generated by the residential building also help offset the ongoing operating costs of the concourse and entrances.

Who pays for parking?

Parking pays for itself. The parking garage (about \$23.0 million) is financed by parking revenue — from this garage together with other municipal parking.

Why reuse the existing building instead of building new?

The building is structurally robust: it was originally engineered to carry an overhead crane rated at 200 tons running the length of the building — a far heavier structure than the lightweight steel typically used to build something like a shopping mall — giving it more than enough capacity for its new community uses.

The Grand Trunk site is also different from the clean sites this kind of redevelopment usually involves: it carries the added cost of contaminated land that a typical mall-to-housing conversion wouldn't.

Because the structure already stands, each facility can buy or rent its space and be financed as it commits — the money can arrive over time rather than all at once — and adaptive reuse qualifies for heritage and sustainability grants that new construction does not. While individual facilities in a new build could similarly be added over time, the building itself must still be fully funded and constructed before any of them can open.

Who developed this plan, and why?

The Grand Trunk ad hoc committee was created by City Council to help move the Master Plan forward. Robert Ritz was not appointed to the committee, though he put his name forward to serve — both as chair and as a general member. He stayed closely engaged with the committee's work regardless: he attended every meeting as an observer and appeared before it as a delegation on three occasions.

The committee's mandate, as adopted by City Council, was: to support the Grand Trunk Master Plan; to act as a sounding board to the City on matters dealing with the renewal of the Grand Trunk building, including building designs and architectural plans; to identify fundraising opportunities and support fundraising initiatives; to advise and assist with the development of a public engagement program and promote the activities of the Grand Trunk renewal; and to liaise with other committees or organizations with overlapping roles and responsibilities. Notably, the committee concluded that as much of the existing building as possible should be used, even after a consultant to the committee recommended demolishing it and building new instead, on the grounds that it would cost less. That conclusion, however, did not come with a costed design or funding plan for the committee's or Council's consideration.

As an architect, Mr. Ritz saw value that had gone unrecognized: a structurally robust building that others had written off, on a site whose contamination others have long acknowledged but never costed. He pursued the analysis entirely on his own initiative — no one asked him to.

Drawing on his engagement with the committee, a full review of the 2018 Master Plan, and the building's structural analysis, Mr. Ritz developed the Renewal Plan to give that work a concrete proposal to weigh — a design and a full cost for repurposing the Grand Trunk building into a Community Hub.

Does Robert Ritz benefit financially from this proposal?

No. Robert Ritz will receive no financial or professional benefit from the base building or site plan concepts themselves, either now or in the future, and neither he nor his architectural practice will seek that work. Given the scale of the project relative to the firm's size, R. Ritz Architect Inc. may be asked to design one of the individual tenant spaces within the building; any such work would be pursued only through a transparent, fair, and equitable process open to other qualified firms, not awarded as a result of this proposal. Robert Ritz may, however, use this work as a portfolio piece to promote his practice for other similar work elsewhere.

This is a contribution to the community — not a commercial opportunity — offered in the hope that it will help Stratford make informed decisions about one of the city's most significant heritage assets.

What happens next?

With a full cost and a funding plan on the table, community groups that want a home in the shared Grand Trunk building can move from interest to commitment. Each interested group is invited to inform the City of its intent to be part of the Renewal Plan, to bring forward a program of the space it wants — including its size — and to begin fundraising for its part. Every group that steps forward turns a costed vision into a funded one, and brings the Grand Trunk closer to reality — in time for the City's 2032 Bicentennial.

After months of research and consultation, Robert Ritz is placing his research on the future of the Grand Trunk site into the hands of the people of Stratford. As a lifelong Stratford resident and an architect with decades of experience in planning, heritage conservation and community development, he has prepared these materials simply to contribute his knowledge and ideas to an important public conversation.

These proposals are offered as a resource for citizens, community organizations and future decision-makers to consider as they see fit.

Figures were prepared by R. Ritz Architect Inc., using the City's \$654-per-square-foot development rate — the rate implied by the City's own partial New Build proposal of 100,000 square feet for \$65.4 million — for the finished

spaces, including the shell. Because portions of that shell are the existing building rather than new construction, those portions — along with the parking garage — were instead budgeted using an independent Letter of Cost Opinion from a construction cost estimator with over 20 years of experience with Canada's largest construction manager/general contractor, who has no vested interest in the project. That opinion is a Class D estimate — the same class of estimate the City's own \$654-per-square-foot figure is based on. A detailed tenant-by-tenant cost breakdown is available. It is provided as public information about the Grand Trunk renewal, available at our website www.gtrshops.ca. We encourage the City to publish its own complete, all-phases figures so the community can compare full numbers side by side.