



# CIVIC AFFAIRS

An independent fact-finding organization  
reporting to the public on civic affairs.

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## DESIGN FOR THE CIVIC SQUARE

Fellow Citizens:

In March, 1954, City Council gave the responsibility of designing a new city hall to a group of three Toronto architectural firms. Having been furnished with only the most general terms of reference these architects were unable to produce an acceptable design for a city hall and civic square. Now, in 1957, following a close affirmative vote for a new city hall by Toronto ratepayers, City Council is again preparing terms of reference, this time for an international competition among architects.

Council, we suggest, must not be allowed to repeat the mistake of 1954 of failing to make the necessary decisions on what is to be designed. It must not abdicate its own responsibility by leaving to the architects or the planners the right to decide what civic functions and related facilities should be accommodated on the civic square and adjoining land. It must, in fact, look beyond the utilitarian report to be prepared by a firm of management consultants on space requirements, and determine the full possibilities for civic improvement inherent in the civic square project. Without advance direction from Council as to its policy on the development of a new civic centre for Toronto, how can participants in a competition, national or international, hope to produce a satisfactory design?

On January 9, 1957, the city hall and civic square undertaking was reviewed by the Board of Control. That body has recommended to Council:

- (a) appointing Professor E. R. Arthur as professional advisor for an international competition;
- (b) retaining J. D. Woods and Gordon to work out space requirements in the new city hall for all city and metropolitan departments and agencies to be accommodated;
- (c) delegating to the City of Toronto Planning Board the responsibility for processing and reporting upon all matters affecting the development of the civic square.

This latest action is particularly encouraging when contrasted with the earlier unsatisfactory handling of both the civic square and the civic building projects. Nevertheless, the Bureau is concerned that the full lesson of previous failures may not have been learned. For one thing,



that so little publicity has been accorded the broader aspects of civic square planning is disturbing. And, for another, it is by no means certain that the members of City Council fully realize their responsibility to ensure that planning for the square is sufficiently broad in its conception and that firm decisions are reached on all matters affecting the character of the development before authorization is given to proceed with any actual projects having to do with the civic square.

If there is any tendency to think that architects or civic designers want the overall planning left to their discretion, the viewpoint of the 1954 architects should serve to correct that impression. In a memorandum on the civic square prepared by the Toronto Planning Board in August, 1956, the architects were noted as emphasizing in particular: "the need to determine the civic functions to go on the square and their space requirements, to avoid preparing any plans or designs until the requirements were known and to relate the design, when prepared, to the surrounding areas."

What the architects were objecting to was the necessity to guess at the Council's intentions for the area in order to proceed with a building design. They wished to be told more than the amount of space required for civic offices and the dimensions of the lot on which to place a city hall. Not only did they wish direction from the Council on the total intended use of the square itself; they were also hoping that some control would be exercised by the City over the future use of adjacent properties.

The Bureau supports the latter viewpoint. It recognizes the desirability of subjecting to civic review the plans for such lands as those occupied by Osgoode Hall, the University Avenue Armouries and the commercial establishments bordering the civic square. There are too many questions about the civic centre that have not received consideration. Should Osgoode Hall be asked to co-operate on increasing the amount of open space in the area? If the Armouries are to be purchased by Metro, should not Metro be seeking now for the sites for new suburban armouries, while there are still suitable sites available? What plans for improving the streets and providing parking can help to make the area to the north more attractive to private investment? Should any and all types of commercial enterprise be allowed in the surrounding areas, or should there be more restrictive zoning regulations?

It is at least as profitable to use such controls to protect public investment as it is to pass by-laws to protect private property. Here, also, is an area where an attempt at architectural control similar to that attempted for University Avenue should be made. More pressing, what steps can be taken to remove some of the objectionable industrial businesses in the bordering areas? Does the City intend to make use of the 1952 Redevelopment designation on the block bounded by Dundas Street West, Chestnut, Armoury and Centre Streets?

Private exploitation of the land framing the civic square should not be permitted to detract from any architectural achievement that might be attained by the construction of an attractive civic administration centre. Thus the whole question of redevelopment of the downtown core, especially of lands adjacent to the civic square, must be reviewed at the same time as decisions are being sought on the general plan for the civic square.

The planning of the civic square presents an unprecedented opportunity for dealing with many aspects of improving the downtown core, if the decisions are made before a final design is chosen rather than after.

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Matters that come to mind include the closing and opening of streets, the relocation of services, road widenings, the location of pedestrian cross walks, routes for public transportation vehicles, with their pick up points and safety islands, and traffic light coordination. Decisions on these matters are a necessary prerequisite to private development in the affected areas.

It is especially unfortunate that the related problems of entrances and exits for the underground parking garage, both vehicular and pedestrian, cannot receive identical consideration. On August 23, 1956, a meeting of planners and architects noted that "no firm decisions on location of underground parking should be made until studies of building locations have been made." As is known, this comment was disregarded by City and Metro Councils which approved construction of the first stage of the underground garage on November 5 and December 11 respectively. Now, unless the undertaking can be held up, any design for the civic square has to be related to the exits and entrances, and to the very necessary air intakes, which certainly limit the possibilities on the surface area. The effect of this unilateral planning by the Parking Authority emphasizes the necessity to consider the redevelopment of the downtown core as a single problem.

The Parking Authority has demonstrated its ability to do its job quickly and efficiently. Perhaps it has acted with too much enthusiasm in the matter of the underground garage. In its report of October 11, 1956, the Parking Authority states: "Since the conception of the Civic Square over ten years ago, and before lands were purchased for this authority, it has always been assumed that use would be made of the parklands on the Square for underground parking." This is a statement that cannot be verified by perusal of Toronto's Official Plan of 1949 or the report of the Civic Advisory Council of Toronto in 1952. The latter's special committee on City Hall-Court House Requirements visualized: "A Civic Square as an open area with greenery, a restful spot for shoppers and those visiting the area as well as for downtown workers to enjoy, an adequate gathering place for crowds greeting distinguished visitors, and to the visitors themselves an indication of the value Toronto citizens place on pleasant surroundings." Certainly, the ratepayers of the City of Toronto did not vote for the expenditure of millions of dollars largely to make possible the construction of an underground garage. When it is pointed out that large shade trees will not be able to thrive in the relatively thin earth covering over the underground garage it is obvious that the provision of parklands is now likely to take second place to provision for parking.

The Parking Authority has received approval of Stage 1 of its plans and presumably will continue to press its plans for Stage 2. Council has agreed to Stage 1 and it will be very difficult for Council to do anything but agree to Stage 2, unless definite decisions are reached quickly on the general layout of the civic square. The Bureau believes that, if there is to be an underground garage on the civic square, then the Parking Authority should be required to change its plans to conform with a desired surface layout, rather than that the use and planning of the square should be subservient to the wishes of the Parking Authority. In view of the fact that the traffic carrying capacity of downtown streets is already severely strained, the idea of providing capacity for parking on the civic square is not one that should be accepted so casually by elected representatives and the public. In dealing with the proposals for the underground garage Council adopted a very passive role. It is noteworthy that City and Metro Councils were warned that there is doubt about the existence



of statutory authority for a public underground garage, but voted to go ahead anyway. The Councils were also informed that the level of taxes proposed to be paid by the garage was lower than that considered equitable by the City Treasurer, but they raised no objection to the financial proposals. In view of the fact that the Parking Authority is to pay no land rental for the privilege of using the expensive property acquired for purposes of a civic square, this particular operation of the Authority cannot be categorized as a self-sustaining undertaking, offering fair competition to the private operator. There may be nothing wrong, of course, with a subsidized parking garage if the public is convinced of the necessity for subsidization in the general public interest.

Another aspect of the financing of the underground garage is the cost of relocating services affected by the construction, and a portion of the cost of the park surface development, together estimated to total some \$375,000. While the sums, for the garage, of \$3,625,000 in 1957 and \$2,500,000 in 1958 are shown in the proposed capital works of the City, there appears to be no provision for this \$375,000, nor for any other expenditures on the civic square. There is \$13,500,000 earmarked for the city hall, which along with the revenue from the sale of the present city hall will total \$18,000,000. Is this expected to cover the completion of the civic square as well as the civic administration building? While the completion of the city hall is a few years away, some provision must be made for surface treatment of the civic square following completion of Stage 1 of the underground garage expected in 1958.

At the present time the only publicized planning for this part of the civic square has been done by the Parking Authority. While it is relatively easy for a single body with a definite, restricted objective to formulate plans acceptable to itself, it is a very difficult matter to produce plans that will take into consideration all the public or private interests involved in a large project. Should the Parking Authority have taken it unto itself to design the streets around its garages, or should the Planning Board have investigated all aspects of street design in the civic square? If the proposals of the Parking Authority do not conflict with the interests of others all is well, but it should not be left to the Parking Authority to decide what is the best general layout of the area. The City as owner should not let the Authority as tenant make the decisions on the development of public property. The civic square should become the property of the citizen on foot, not the eminent domain of the minority able to make use of the parking garage. Too much consideration for vehicular traffic will result in an isolated civic centre cut off from the citizens by wide streams of motor traffic.

The fundamental need is for the establishing of some focal point of responsibility for planning the civic square. The present situation is that the city hall, the civic square, the underground garage, TTC routes, street widenings and jog eliminations, redevelopment, and zoning are all considered separately instead of as part of the same picture. To accomplish the aim of coordinating all aspects of the development of the civic square area the city should establish a committee under the City Planning Board to include representatives of all agencies affected by planning in the downtown core. Meanwhile, the City should budget for an expenditure of time and money by the Planning Board on investigations into what should go on the civic square and what can be done with street layout, etc., to provide a functional setting for the civic administration building or buildings.



The report on space requirements will be influenced both by Council action on the Woods and Gordon report on the civic administration, and by Council's decision as to what related facilities can be accommodated on the civic square. While the management consultants and the planning board can make recommendations it is the duty of Council to make the decisions. There are many questions which must be answered by Council. Should provision be made now for future needs, or should any building designed include provision for future extensions? Should the school boards, hydro commission, or other public bodies be invited to make use of the civic square site? In view of the emphasis given the possible use of the underground garage as a bomb shelter, should definite provision be made for the construction of a disaster centre on the square?

The area designated for a civic square covers about twelve acres. In addition, some possibility exists for the extension of the square northwards to Dundas Street, which would involve a further six acres. Plainly, space is available for more than the contemplated public buildings and accompanying grounds.

What are other civic facilities that could be accommodated in the future on the civic square or provided for in its environs? The possibilities include fountains, ornamental gardens, a bandshell, public comfort stations, a civic museum, a tourist and information centre, an orator's corner, a rallying point for fund-raising drives, outdoor cafes and perhaps some private concessions. If the successful design is to incorporate any of the above, not necessarily for immediate construction, the decision as to what might be considered suitable for the civic square must be made now, before the announcement of a public competition. While the necessity for decision making presents a demanding challenge to Council, it also constitutes a unique and pleasant opportunity for its members to lay claim to a large part of the credit for creating a community asset that present and future citizens of Toronto will approve as the symbolic centre of corporate life of the City.

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