



# Centre Pier scandal sets off ratepayer alarms

*A back-room deal between the federal and municipal governments would turn an active industrial park into an unserviced vacant lot – but citizens aren't buying it.*

If plans by Port Hope Area Initiative (PHAI) go ahead, we will lose more than the buildings on the Centre Pier – we will also lose valuable underground services.

Water, sewage and electrical utilities are essential and expensive parts of infrastructure. The Centre Pier has had these services for generations, and the services still meet CNSC standards for sprinkler systems in nuclear storage facilities.

But PHAI's plan calls for the buildings to be levelled, and the underground services to be removed – because that will be cheaper for PHAI. Port Hope ratepayers will face huge costs in attracting any new development to the Pier.

PHAI's effort to strip Port Hope of these assets is a scandal, and our politicians must stand up for the interests of the town, not the interests of the federal bureaucracy.

## ***DECISIONS FIRST – FACTS LATER***

### ***What didn't they know, and when didn't they know it?***

It now appears that municipal officials didn't know what the Centre Pier buildings are worth, or what it might cost to fix them, when they decided the buildings should be demolished, and when they restated that conclusion over and over through the years.

Since 2008, the Pier Group and others have asked to see the studies that showed the buildings could not be saved, but no such studies were released. Even the municipality's Centre Pier Development Task Force, set up in February of 2011, was provided with no clear information on the condition of the buildings or the cost of remediation. Just before the Task Force

Interim Report was due in July, municipal officials set up meetings between some Task Force members and PHAI. These meetings resulted in back-of-the-envelope guesstimates of huge remediation costs and lengthy delays, without written sources. Finally, PHAI released a written memo in late August repeating these claims, but with no more back-up evidence than was provided to the Task Force.

***If the advocates of demolition still can't produce the evidence they used to arrived at their conclusion, is that because they never had the evidence in the first place? That's one key question in the Centre Pier scandal.***

## Task Force member presents dissenting report

*Will Ryan argues against an “all or nothing” approach to the Pier buildings*

In a dissenting report to be delivered to Council, Centre Pier Task Force and Pier Group member Will Ryan says that remediation must not be viewed as an “all or nothing” choice. Rather than destroying all the buildings, or saving them all, the most sensible approach is to ask which buildings or parts of buildings are most valuable and can be re-purposed in a cost-effective manner.

Ryan’s “Great Canadian Compromise” notes that the most interesting buildings make up about 50% of total building footprint on the Pier. Removal of the other 50% will address some of PHAI’s key concerns. For example, Ryan suggests that removing the northernmost building, which has little heritage value, will provide extensive staging room for the cleanup. (PHAI estimates that lack of staging room would cause substantial delays in the overall clean-up timetable.)

Ryan notes the one valuable feature of building 40 – the magnificent wood trusses – could be saved and re-used. For example, they could be erected on pillars to provide a low-cost roof over the Farmers Market.

Ryan stresses that he is not trying to present *the* solution, but merely *a* solution. Specific development plans would depend on detailed engineering studies of the buildings, along with detailed business plans by prospective tenants.

Of particular interest to ratepayers, however, Ryan notes that rent-paying tenants could be found as soon as the clean-up is done. Cameco plans to tear down and replace some of the buildings on its own property, and has already indicated an interest in renting space on the Pier during this period.

There is also a lack of indoor storage space for boats on Lake Ontario. The Centre Pier, with spacious buildings only a few metres from the waterline, would be ideal for this purpose.

Saving the underground infrastructure would be key. Ryan notes that major excavations during clean-up will disrupt sewer and water services. But it will be far more sensible to replace the services before back-filling begins, rather than starting from scratch later and sticking Port Hope ratepayers with the bill.



## Whatever happened to ‘Community Consultation’?

*Reforms in the aftermath of the ‘Port Hope Pillars’ controversy are ignored in the Centre Pier scandal*

The Port Hope Pillars project was a small one, but the lack of community consultation outraged citizens, resulting in a new and well-intentioned Community Consultation Policy. In the Centre Pier scandal, council appears ready to sacrifice millions of dollars of municipal assets – while ignoring their new Consultation Policy.

The overwhelming majority of citizen comments

to the Task Force Interim Report said there must be full consultation, including public meetings. So far the response of councillors (with the notable exception of Greg Burns) has been silence. In spite of delaying the presentation of the Task Force Final Report by one month, there is no indication from Council that they are taking citizen comments seriously.