



Chair's Column
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Why development matters

A few days ago, Fortis Properties pulled their proposal to the City of St. John's to develop a building in the downtown. Today, the need for office space in the downtown still exists. Just because this proposal 'went away' does not mean that the issue did.

St. John's needs Class A office space in the downtown to ensure and maintain our economic prosperity. People want to be in the downtown because their employees want to be there, because their suppliers, customers and partners are there, and because there is an attraction to a business core. A development that would have added capacity for growth would have contributed to this objective.

In launching its series on Why Development Matters, the Board talked about urban sprawl and noted that concentrated development could help reduce this sprawl. Basically, urban sprawl is growth over a geographic area. Urban sprawl can reduce green space, drive up the use of automobiles, and increase the cost of public infrastructure like water and sewage and snow cleaning because of the size of the area that requires coverage. Re-development on already developed land, close to other amenities, that supports public transit by providing a large number of people with a single destination is something that can help against sprawl.

We can grow, sure. But there are reasons to look at development and say 'maybe we should put some parameters around how far it reaches. The reasons aren't just business related; they are environmental, cost, and convenience focused as well. A report on Ontario sprawl by the Sierra Club of Canada, for instance, says that growth that they are seeing is problematic for the 'environment, threatens the quality of our community life, and forces substantial local tax increases.'

This may seem atypical for a Board of Trade chair to be writing about. But the point of putting this type of research into the public domain is to focus discussion on issues of importance to the business community and the community as a whole.

Here is something else to consider, from the Martin Prosperity Institute. One of their reports quotes a number of academic studies that suggest creative industries benefit from a "geographically concentrated economic structure." It goes on to say that "dense production agglomerations drive originality and innovation in cultural industries" and suggests that integration of artists into the same geographical area can help the business community.

What can we draw from that? Being together is better than being apart.

What the Board is trying to achieve is a climate in which prosperity flourishes. A climate where business growth is valued because it will mean a more diversified and robust economy, provide opportunity (particularly to youth) and achieve continued success is a good goal for everyone. That's why we continually work on the business climate overall in the city and the province. Development and heritage

can and must co-exist. We have also said that development matters and we're proud that we put research out into the public domain to support that view.

The Board is hopeful that the economic momentum that we have seen continues. But as much as stewardship of the environment and culture and heritage is collective, also too is our collective stewardship of our economy. Progress and growth can be embraced when we see that friends, family, neighbours, volunteer peers, community leaders, artistic contributors are all part of the business community and supported by that community. We, quite literally, are together in everything we do. Our local community is made up by many different people but with a shared interest in making this a better place.

There is a local solution to be had, and we need to find it. If we don't, someone else will solve the problem and reap the benefits.