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Weird and Wonderful Greater Sudbury

by PAUL LEFEBVRE

This coming weekend, the annual UpHere festival will kick off here in “weird and wonderful Sudbury,” as local organizers call it.

I shamelessly point this out in part to encourage Sudburians to support and attend UpHere and to make the case that when we come together as a community, good things happen. Groups like UpHere, Northern Lights Festival Boréal, Cinéfest, La Nuit sur l'étang, Jazz Sudbury Festival, Capreol Days, Valley East Days, Café Heritage and so many others prove that, when a dedicated group of citizens come together with the support of all levels of government, we can make things happen. Science North and our greening program can be added to projects that have served civic pride and engagement well, and, like Greater Sudbury itself, deserves our admiration and respect.

I draw attention to this is because I think Greater Sudbury has a lot to learn from UpHere and the other groups. *We Live Up Here* was formed around the idea that art can inspire, transform and help build a better community. Its mission, in a nutshell, has evolved to “Save Sudbury, from Sudbury, within Sudbury.”

Whether through music, photography, its signature murals or even buttons, UpHere encourages us to be the best caretakers of our cultural and environmental heritage we can possibly be. To love our city, warts and all. In short, it exists to show Sudbury some much needed unconditional love. And that's why I think now is an ideal time and place to restart a discussion on the future of Greater Sudbury.

Ahead of a crucial series of decisions regarding the over-budget Kingsway Entertainment District, I made known my opinion that, given all of the divisiveness, city council should pause the project and leave it for the next council to deal with.

As the events unfolded, council took that direction when they recognized that the city could not financially move forward with participation in the KED.

But that decision is not the end of the event centre discussion... nor should it be. Right now, with an election on the horizon, Greater Sudbury has an excellent opportunity to talk about what comes next. What kind of city we want to be, and how do we want the world to perceive us? How can we build a sustainable city that nurtures future generations, attracts newcomers and invites investment.?

So, let's start with the basics.

Our community arena needs replacing. Or a very major overhaul. This is not in dispute... we have known it for years. It will take a considerable investment to renovate or replace it.

The same is also true of the main branch of the city's public library, which trudges along offering 21st century services in an undersized 20th century building. And the same is true of the Art Gallery of Sudbury, with its world-class art collection housed in an historic house.

These are big projects, and our community has struggled to get them right. I understand the trepidation around them. The easiest thing to do is give up. To assume big things can't be done, based on past failure. Or, perhaps worse, to assume they should not be done.

It can be argued that Greater Sudbury does not need these things, but a bigger discussion is in order in my opinion. A discussion that includes making strategic investments in our community that enhance our lifestyle, inspire citizens to be actively engaged and ensure that we meet the needs and expectations of younger citizens, newcomers and people contemplating moving to our great city. Strategic investments that ensure we grow in a sustainable manner, that we keep within our means and that we grow the tax base. The benefits of this strategy will benefit all: existing citizens and taxpayers, employers and employees, younger and older; and serve to attract the talents of the many people we need to grow our community.

We have ambition, resources and infrastructure. We have an historic downtown that has never stopped attracting investment and the interest of young people. We have allies in senior levels of government. We have plans and blueprints for success. We just must make a concerted effort to see them through, together.

I was born and raised in Kapuskasing. My wife is from Wanup, originally an unorganized township that was made a part of Greater Sudbury at amalgamation in 2000. When we graduated university more than 20 years ago, we chose to live, work and raise our family in Sudbury because it offered a quality of life second to none in Canada. I am convinced that this is still true today.

I am running for mayor now because I want to ensure Greater Sudbury evolves as a community in which my own children will want to stay, work and live. And their children... and their children. In fact, I want to work to make sure Greater Sudbury progresses into a community that attracts the best and the brightest from across Canada and around the world. We will need to listen to the next generation of leaders to learn what we can do today to retain and attract this generation to continue the city's long and proud legacy of being a great place to work, live and play.

In short, we need to recognize and celebrate who we are and what we have and offer the best possible version of ourselves, now and into the future.

These opportunities have always been available to us, but of late we have experienced division rather than unity of purpose. It's time our ambitions, civic pride and engagement matched our opportunity and create a brighter future for all. It's time we started working together to make good things happen in "weird and wonderful" Greater Sudbury.

