

Letter to the Editor

You have asked me, as author of the campus master plan, for a comment in regard to the retention or demolition of the Memorial Library:

An integral component of the master plan we completed in 2002 was a recommendation to retain the Memorial Library. The proposal was to renovate and extend the building for Fine and Performing Arts.

We developed a space program via consultation with users and potential users of the facility; the space program was tested via preliminary schematic designs; life and fire safety issues were also addressed. Our conclusion was that such an approach was and is indeed feasible.

We were not commissioned to take the analysis any further. As a consequence I cannot give a definitive assessment in regard to the costs of such an approach in comparison to one of demolition and new construction. It is possible, though certainly not conclusive or inevitable, that the capital costs could be greater with the retention of the Memorial Library. However, such a purely utilitarian assessment ignores other important factors, ones Mount Allison ignores at perhaps greater cost. These include the importance of the physical quality and character of the campus, issues of historical and physical continuity, which surely a University should honour, if only to retain the generosity of it's alumni in future fund raising campaigns. It is widely recognized that campuses that have an attractive physical character and have retained their historic buildings also retain the loyalty of their alumni much more than campuses that don't. Many universities and colleges recognize that an attractive campus is an important recruiting tool for both students and faculty. This is particularly true for Mount Allison.

Finally I would say that imaginative, even merely competent architects, can create excellent outcomes if there is a will to do so. Using historical structures in new ways offers great potential in regard to the achievement of deeply satisfying environments. In this way too the retention of the patina of history can only add to the richness of the University as an institution.

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