

Scores of Sites, Little Concrete, In Civic Plans for New City Hall

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of The Journal.

The question of another city hall for Ottawa—in the 23 years since the old one was burned, the question has been the subject of two plebiscites, hundreds of hours of City Council discussion and more than a score of site proposals—is due for another presentation shortly.

During the last six weeks, there have been indications at City Hall that the presentation might be made in either of these ways:

As a concrete proposal, full-fledged with site and building plans, which would spring from a Board of Control meeting.

As a choice of two or three sites which would be offered to the voters on election day, December 6. This is a suggestion of Mayor Whitton's, repeated on at least two occasions.

Three Sites Mentioned.

During the six-week period, city authorities have been studying three sites in particular. Here they are, in the order in which, informants say, they are preferred:

The Pine Hill site in Rockcliffe. A city hall with extensive grounds and parking facilities would occupy three or four of the 30 acres of Rockcliffe Park designated as Pine Hill. The property, along with the other 70 acres of the park, is owned by the city and leased to the Federal District Commission. One great advantage of this site is that it would not cost the city a cent.

The Albert street car barn site which runs between the liquor store near Kent street to No. 2 Fire Station at Lyon and extends through to Queen. It is about 1½ acres in area and would cost about \$1,000,000.

The east two-thirds of the block bounded by Albert, Elgin, Slater and Metcalfe streets. The Jacques Greber National Capital plan recommended the whole block as a city hall

site but a new apartment hotel is now being built on the west third. On the remainder of the block, about 2¼ acres in area, are situated the Federally-owned Laurentian Building and several privately-owned buildings. The 2¼ acres could cost \$2,000,000 or more.

For some time the Albert street site was in high repute but the focus of favor is believed to have swung to the Rockcliffe site. The Albert and Slater site is advocated by Controller Donaldson, who, for the last several Board of Control meetings, has endeavored to bring the city hall question into formal discussion.

Those who are trying to "sell" the Rockcliffe site say the other two are unsuitable in terms of the future development of Ottawa.

Need Ample Parking Space.

Lots of parking space, they say, enough to fill the demands of 50 or 100 years hence, is a principle requirement of a city hall. Then again, a city hall, "should be built so that it can be looked at". The Rockcliffe advocates point to the downtown Confederation Building as an example of a beautiful building which can be viewed in its entirety from only a very few points.

Advocates of the downtown sites use, among others, the convenience-of-access argument. They say that a city hall could be built at either location with underground parking for 300 cars.

The downtown advocates hint at another possibility—they can only hint because the possibility has not been tested. It is that the FDC might be ready to contribute substantially toward the cost of a downtown city hall but might balk at contributing to a Rockcliffe building.

The National Capital Plan which the FDC is implementing is greatly concerned with beautifying downtown Ottawa but not Rockcliffe Park. The FDC is ready, in some cases, to contribute toward the cost

of making structures "conform" to the plan. It might be ready to contribute the difference between the cost of a straight, spare, office building and the cost of a plan-type building with exterior decoration.

That could make up \$500,000 to \$750,000 of the cost of a \$2,000,000 building.

Background of Controversy.

This is the background of the controversy:

The old City Hall at the head of Elgin street near the Police Station burned in 1931 and was demolished in 1932. On a 1938 plebiscite the ratepayers turned down a proposal for a city hall at Lyon and Sparks street but an another plebiscite six years later they voted in favor of allocating \$250,000 for a city hall, site undetermined. The money was never allocated and was lost somewhere in the municipal shuffle.

At one point, in 1939, the city got as far as offering to buy the Normal School Building on Elgin street from the Ontario Government but was turned down.

The Greber plan suggested three sites: one at the east end of a Mackenzie King bridge bifurcated to allow traffic to flow on either side of the hall; the Albert and Slater site described above and one at the southeast intersection of Elgin street and Laurier avenue on grounds now occupied by National Defence Headquarters.

The city turned down the first Greber site in 1950 and the Mackenzie King bridge has since been built across it. Use of the third site would be a long-term proposition pending the Defence Department move out of Cartier Square.

The city for three years had a standing option on the FDC-owned property on the west side of Nicholas street between the Mackenzie King and Laurier bridges but this was withdrawn this Spring because of plans for re-location of Union Station facilities.