

Ms. Joan Thomson
Chief Administrative Officer
City of Stratford
Stratford Ontario

November 13, 2024

Dear Ms. Thomson:

Re: Erie Street Parking Lot Alternatives

We understand that at its August 12, 2024 meeting, City Council provided the following direction to staff related to the existing municipal surface parking lot on Erie Street.

THAT Council authorize staff to proceed with the design and issuing a tender for the resurfacing of the Erie Street Parking Lot at this time;

THAT the matter with respect to the Erie Street Parking Lot project be referred to staff to investigate alternative options for the site;

AND THAT staff be directed to report back with alternative options for the consideration of Council at a future meeting.

As requested, we have reviewed the extensive background information available related to previous assessments for this surface parking lot, and the parking and development concept recently presented to City Council by Mr. Robert Ritz of R. Ritz Architect.

While City Council has authorized staff to issue a tender for the resurfacing of the Erie Street Parking Lot as noted above, it is prudent to confirm that resurfacing is the most appropriate short-term option prior to awarding a tender for this work with an upper limit estimated cost of \$750,000.

This letter report presents our independent professional opinion on feasible short and long-term alternative uses for this surface parking lot and is organized as follows.

- A) Background
- B) Previous Assessments of the Erie Street Parking Lot
- C) Need for Additional Downtown Parking
- D) Feasible Short-Term Alternatives
- E) Feasible Long-Term Alternatives
- F) Recommended Short and Long-Term Actions

A) BACKGROUND

Since the 1960s, the Erie Street Parking lot has been utilized for surface parking needs in the downtown core, and with only pedestrian access to the City Hall area through "Allen's Alley".

Summary documentation from the City Clerks Office confirms that portions of the property have restrictive easements and rights-of-way as follows.

Easements

Three (3) standard easements are in place for utilities including a water main, gas main, electrical service and Bell phone lines. While these easements are all with public bodies including the City of Stratford, it is likely that in the case of redevelopment for multi-level parking or other purposes, that all costs associated with replacement/relocation of these utilities would be solely the responsibility of the City (as developer) or a private developer. While these costs may be significant, it is likely that these restrictions could be overcome amicably in a reasonable timeframe.

Rights-of-Way

Clerks Office records indicate that seventeen (17) abutting landowners have vehicular and/or pedestrian rights-of way over the Erie Street Parking Lot. It is estimated that approximately ten (10) holders of rights-of-way have vehicular access rights, some of which include access to all lands between the rear of their Wellington Street properties and Erie Street. These vehicular rights agreements seem to have been developed because of the closure of “Allen’s Alley” to vehicular traffic in the 1960s. At least three of the agreements grant use of parking spaces within the municipal parking lot in perpetuity.

While we offer no legal opinion on these agreements or the granting of “in perpetuity” rights, it is our professional opinion that some of these restrictions will be challenging, time-consuming and costly to resolve for any structures proposed on the Erie Street Parking Lot that would in any way restrict truck access to the rear of nearly all the abutting Wellington Street properties.

B) PREVIOUS ASSESSEMENTS OF THE ERIE STREET PARKING LOT

Since establishment of this parking lot, there have been numerous reviews for possible intensification of parking at this location. Key studies, findings and relevant costs are noted below.

1988 – Assessment of Structured Parking on Erie Street Lot (Read Voorhees and Associates)

This comprehensive report concluded that downtown parking needs were best addressed by continued and expanded use of the Cooper Site. The cost per additional parking space was estimated to be \$14,500 (1988 dollars) with little revenue opportunity to offset capital and operating costs.

2005 – Request for Proposals for Private Development of the Erie Street Parking Lot

Private sector proposals were requested and received in 2005 for improved parking and commercial development. After public input, the process was terminated and the parking lot remained unchanged.

2014 – Staff Recommendation to Reconstruct Erie Street Parking Lot

Staff presented reconstruction options including two-level structured parking adding between 39 and 69 net additional parking spaces. The bare cost for the above-ground parking structure was

quoted at between \$24,000 and \$35,000 (2014 dollars) per net additional space. No action was taken.

2016 – Downtown Parking Strategy (D Sorbara Parking and Systems Consulting)

This comprehensive study concluded that *“The Erie lot shows excess capacity. While its geometry is best suited to a parking structure, the current parking metrics do not provide a solid case for building a parking structure today or in the short-range planning horizon.”*

Another key conclusion was that *“...in order for an additional layer of parking (say 200 parking spaces) on the Erie lot to become critical, the downtown floor space volume would have to increase between 11,111 and 20,000 square meters (215,000 square feet) based on observed peak hour trip demands attraction.”*

2019 - Staff Recommendation to Reconstruct Erie Street Parking Lot

After public input, this project was deferred.

2024 – Staff Recommendation to Resurface/Delegation by Robert Ritz

The July 24, 2024 Infrastructure, Transportation and Safety (ITS) Committee Report (24-016) presented both resurfacing (\$750,000) and full reconstruction (\$2 million) options for this surface parking lot. Staff recommended the resurfacing option.

Mr. Robert Ritz (R. Ritz Architect) spoke as a delegation to Council. Mr. Ritz also presented detailed drawings for a development concept including a five (5) level underground parking garage, ground floor retail, and residential condominiums on higher floors. Mr. Ritz did not provide an estimated capital cost for either the underground parking spaces or the above-ground development.

C) NEED FOR ADDITIONAL DOWNTOWN PARKING

It is not currently possible to determine long-term downtown parking needs until City Council confirms the density and development type for the Grand Truck Railway (GTR) Site, also commonly referred to as the Cooper Site.

For example, if following completion of the current Ad Hoc Committee review process, City Council confirms high-density residential zoning over most of the available GTR site, then overall downtown parking needs can be determined. More than likely an aboveground parking structure would be required as originally presented in the approved 2018 Master Plan for the GTR Site. The originally proposed location for the parking structure is behind the existing UW building abutting Cooper Street. Aboveground parking structures are far more cost-effective than underground structures, even if soils are not environmentally impacted. Larger multi-level structures also result in lower “per space” costs compared to smaller structures.

At this time, it is premature to assess the need and revenue potential for a parking structure on the Erie Street Parking Lot. Given its size and complexity, development of the GTR Site will drive downtown parking needs for the foreseeable future.

Also, the above-referenced 2016 Downtown Parking Strategy Report highlights that the current free all-day parking policy on the GTR Site may contribute to overstating paid parking needs in the downtown. That is, once free parking is eliminated parking demand may actually be reduced by as much as 33% as drivers seek alternatives to paid downtown parking. This concept is a key

consideration when developing any economic analysis of expanded parking capacity at the Erie Street Parking Lot.

D) FEASIBLE SHORT-TERM ALTERNATIVES

Staff have presented a well-considered and cost-effective recommendation to resurface the Erie Street Parking Lot in the near future. Resurfacing and reconstruction of this lot has been deferred several times.

Considering the uncertainty surrounding the ultimate type and density of redevelopment at the GTR Site, it would be premature to proceed with any additional development activity at the Erie Street Parking Lot at this stage.

Resurfacing provides for 10-15 years of ongoing parking capacity while the scope of the GTR Site redevelopment is formalized and implemented.

It is already apparent that this is a complex site, and its development will require substantial staff time and financial resources. Reallocating either of these resources would jeopardize maintaining the current momentum towards effective redevelopment of this brownfield site.

D) FEASIBLE LONG-TERM ALTERNATIVES

While the existing easements and rights-of-way present challenges to redeveloping the Erie Street Parking Lot, there may be several feasible redevelopment alternatives for this property once the GTR Site is nearing full build out. Options include mixed-use buildings that incorporate residential units, office spaces, and retail areas, and may also feature upgraded parking structures.

If Stratford continues to grow, and downtown density (both commercial and residential) increases significantly, then there will likely be an economic case for several development alternatives.

However, it would be premature and highly speculative at this time to forecast suitable development alternatives in the period following build out of the GTR Site.

F) RECOMMENDED SHORT AND LONG-TERM ACTIONS

In conclusion, additional downtown parking needs related to the GTR Site and elsewhere are likely to be most cost-effectively met on the GTR Site as proposed in the 2018 Master Plan. This is best determined by a Parking Strategy Update following City Council approval of GTR Site development types and densities.

Resurfacing the Erie Street Parking Lot will allow the City to maintain redevelopment focus on the GTR Site for the next 10-15 years.

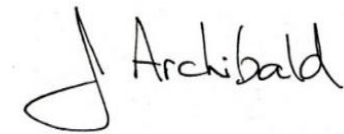
Our recommended short and long-term actions are listed below.

- 1) Resurface the Erie Street Parking Lot in 2024 or 2025.
- 2) As resources permit, resolve and adjust easements to a level that facilitates optimal development (2025-2027).

- 3) Update the Downtown Parking Strategy Report following City Council approval of the redevelopment types and densities for the GTR Site (2026-2027)
- 4) In 2030 (Year 5 following resurfacing) formally review timing of the GTR Site build out and the implications on the Erie Street Parking Lot.
- 5) In 2033 (Year 8 following resurfacing) present a comprehensive strategy report to City Council with a timeline for redevelopment of the Erie Street Parking Lot.
- 6) In 2035 (Year 10 following resurfacing) proceed with preferred development if desired. .

Thank you for the opportunity to assist the City with this project.

Yours truly;

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J Archibald". The "J" is large and stylized, with a loop at the bottom. The name "Archibald" is written in a cursive script.

Jim Archibald P.Eng.
Principal