

We all make mistakes as individuals, groups and organizations, private and public. But we can learn from our mistakes if we are wise and humble enough to do so. This does not seem to be the case with regards to the continued efforts by Sudbury City Council to develop the Kingsway Entertainment District (KED) in spite of evidence that would indicate this project is a bad mistake for a number of important reasons. If there is anything a politician hates to do it is to admit a mistake and this seems to be the case with this matter. This report will recap editorial opinion from the local press that deserves to be read again as our current council seems intent on continuing the same path as the past. This editorial content by Michael Atkins, a well respected business person and former owner of Northern Life and other publications.

**Going back in time from Northern Life now Sudbury.com:** “A little less than a year ago, city council, much to its own surprise and that of many others, decided to build a new \$100-million event center on the Kingsway. The past council was so anxious to reverse the tepid development strategies of the prior administration it was prepared to do literally anything. It careened from the previous dithering council to planning mayhem. In Sudbury, it's about the Kingsway Entertainment District. It is the biggest municipal decision the city has made in 50 years an ill-conceived entertainment centre perfectly imagined to mitigate growth, burden taxpayers, waste money, send more indirect taxes to Queen's Park, pollute drinking water, dissuade development and hollow out a downtown that is needed to help attract millennials who will power tomorrow's innovative economy.

The first order of business is to detach from the Kingsway Entertainment District. It makes no planning, social, financial, cultural, business, or environmental sense. It is unwise and ill thought out. The battle lines are well drawn on this project. There is no way to finesse this. You either plow ahead or you retrace your steps and take the original advice of city staff, city consultants (Price Waterhouse Coopers), the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Business Improvement Association, Laurentian University and the easily accessible anecdotal stories from communities across Canada and their arena war stories.

We got into this situation because after many years of councils dithering on major projects with lots of visioning but not a lot of action, Mayor Brian Bigger and his brand-new council wanted to deliver on something big for the people of Sudbury. They didn't appear to care where that something big was located. They didn't care if their decision conformed to city planning strategies developed over decades. They cared about getting something done, but gave virtually no direction, which of course is their job. And now we are a city divided. We went from too much visioning to no vision. This created a vacuum. There was no context for the proposals that were to come. The vacuum was filled — brilliantly by two smart entrepreneurs who owned some land in what many, including us, consider the wrong place. But they sold that place well and most of council bought in, hook, line and sinker. Many members of the public bought in, too.

But few, politicians or public alike, thought to consider the implications of ripping the arena out of the heart of the city, or the implications of creating a new economic zone out of whole cloth, and what that might mean for New Sudbury, for the big box development at Silver Hills, for downtown. Council doesn't appear to have considered the impact to the city's existing retail and entertainment economies by creating a competing entertainment district and economic zone.

If all big projects come to pass as planned, Sudbury will have new convention and performance space downtown (Place des Arts and a convention centre) and new convention and performance space (event centre and hotel) on the Kingsway. The city should conduct a capacity audit to determine if the community can even support doubling up that way. This is especially important considering the challenges the Sudbury Symphony, Sudbury Theatre Centre and Theatre Cambrian have had financially and in attracting audiences.

In another editorial by Northern Life publisher Michael Atkins he refers to a study commissioned by those opposed to the development :

“Tom Fortin, the Sudbury businessman, philanthropist and consistent critic of the new Gateway Casino and Entertainment Complex on The Kingsway has upped his game by hiring an experienced and well regarded economic consulting company to review the facts and impact of the Kingsway development. [It is not a flattering review by the firm urbanMetrics.](#) UrbanMetrics based its review on [this report](#) prepared in 2017 by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC).

Here are some of their conclusions:

- the relocation of the Sudbury Community Arena would be a lasting economic drain on downtown Sudbury;

- major sports leagues including the NHL and CHL have recognized that their most successful franchises are in downtown locations while the least successful franchises are on suburban sites;
- in making reference to the cities PWC consultants who helped guide the Council on its decision the report states “making a decision based on a subset of the PWC factors is a flawed approach”;
- the Kingsway Entertainment District would redirect business and investment away from other parts of Sudbury;
- the Kingsway would jeopardize the city's planned transformational large projects
- a casino would not significantly affect tourism to Sudbury and withdraw the vast majority of its support from within the city;
- Casino gaming extracts money from the local economy;
- the proposed Kingsway Entertainment District may not result in a significant number of new jobs for the city; and
- additional revenues to the city from the proposed Kingsway entertainment project may not be significant.

Not mincing any words the report states, “Our analysis concludes that the Kingsway Entertainment District is not a project that would make economic sense for the City of Greater Sudbury in that the benefits it would produce would be overshadowed by its economic and financial costs. Before investing further staff and financial resources in this project, we strongly recommend that the city proceed with the conduct of an independent economic and financial analysis of this project.”

There are of course differing views on this project in this city. It is also true that no one report on these matters is necessarily the gold standard.

This report does not provide a new data set. This report is a commentary from a professional and well-regarded organization that has done business with some of the top development companies in this country. It has also done important work with municipalities.

A reasonable person may not change their mind on this project as a result of the report. On the other hand, a reasonable person, given the startling critique of this decision from a creditable source, might want the city to slow down its unseemly race to approve it.

We live with this for the next 50 years. What, exactly, is the hurry?”