

Dear Premier

Today marks the 54<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Ontario Science Centre on September 26, 1969. It should be a day of celebration. But instead, we are compelled to express grave reservations about your plan to move the Ontario Science Centre to Ontario Place.

Since your announcement in April, we have been waiting for the Business Case for this move cited by Minister Surma – which you promised would be publicly released. As this has not yet happened, we're reaching out to you directly to share the substance of our concerns and propose a positive way forward.

We speak as leaders with extensive global experience in the science museum field. Lesley Lewis was the Ontario Science Centre's longest-serving CEO from 1998-2014. During that time, she also chaired ASTC, the global network of science centres based in Washington. Since leaving the Centre, she has worked as a consultant to the Boards and CEOs of science centres across North America and in Asia, Europe and Australia. Kevin Von Appen was the Centre's director of science communication. He helped create hundreds of innovative science exhibits, publications, public programs, and partnerships with the Centre's in-house team and represented the Centre in projects around the world over a career spanning four decades.

When Premier John Robarts chose to build a new museum as a centennial gift to the people of Ontario in the geographic centre of Toronto and outside downtown, it was a visionary choice. Today, the OSC is at the core of a diverse and rapidly-growing neighbourhood served by a new transit hub for the Eglinton LRT and future Ontario Line and it leads a cultural precinct that includes the Aga Khan Museum and Japanese Cultural Centre.

Selecting architect Ray Moriyama to create an iconic building was also a visionary choice. In partnership with Chief Designer Taizo Miyake, Mr. Moriyama transcended old models of traditional museums filled with static artifacts to create one of the world's first interactive science centres.

Globally, there are now more than 3,000 centres based on the Ontario Science Centre's approach. Since opening, the Centre has:

- Welcomed more than 52 million visitors
- Sparked the imaginations of more than 9 million students
- Created world-renowned exhibits, experiences and travelling shows
- Won international awards and museum clients around the world

And finally

- Formed a unique bond with the communities of Flemingdon Park and Thorncliffe Park, two neighbourhoods that have been historically underserved in our city

Governments often use the term “world class” to describe bold initiatives. If today you Google "Top Ten Science Museums in the World", the Ontario Science Centre will appear – guaranteed. It’s sadly ironic, then, that the Province would contemplate decimating a science museum recognized everywhere as world class. Even more disturbing are the negative comments members of your government have made publicly about one of Ontario’s most visited and well-loved cultural attractions.

You have said a new centre at Ontario Place will increase attendance, particularly from tourists, but you have offered no supporting evidence. We do know, however, that most cities of any size now have their own science centre and that attracting tourists requires unique offerings. For example, Science North in Sudbury offers tours of a decommissioned nickel mine. The California Science Centre hosts one of the few remaining space shuttles. The Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago has a restored German U-boat.

But in the RFP for the new Centre, proposed large-scale immersive experiences (such as the current rain forest and planetarium) were designated an unfunded optional “Science Centre Plus” - strange wording since this is clearly “Science Centre Minus” compared to the current Centre.

Without unique experiences – things they cannot experience in their own “local” science centre – it’s unlikely tourists will be drawn to a new OSC that’s half the size of what we have now. The proposed 200,000 square foot building is simply not big enough for a growing region of 6 million people, let alone tourists. Further, it’s impossible to see how the new Centre could accommodate the current Centre’s onsite research, design and fabrication shops that create unique experiences and which are renowned globally.

Does the current Ontario Science Centre need renewal and updating? Without question. The Centre is working to recover from being closed for a year and a half during the pandemic; the never-ending construction of the Eglinton LRT has negatively impacted visitor access and as you are aware, there’s a very serious backlog of deferred maintenance.

Your initially announced plan to demolish the current building and build housing was quickly modified following public pushback and a realization that the land (with the exception of the current parking lots) is owned and protected by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and cannot be built on. You have since suggested the building be converted to other uses. However, accomplishing such a conversion would still require addressing the serious backlog of deferred maintenance *and* building a new Science Centre at Ontario Place. This is a far more expensive option and a questionable use of taxpayer dollars given the unique value of the current Centre.

Premier, as you’ve seen, the proposal to move the OSC has not been well received by the public, the Flemingdon Park and Thorncliffe Park communities or the media. We urge you to seize the chance to reconsider: to recognize that it would be wrong to demolish the iconic Moriyama building; that the land available for housing on the Centre’s site is considerably less

than first thought; and that the costs of both repurposing the current Centre and building a new one have moved well beyond earlier assumptions.

You and your government now have an historic opportunity to

- reinvest in our iconic Science Centre at Don Mills and Eglinton,
- address the Centre's long standing maintenance issues and
- capitalize on the new LRT that makes the Centre more accessible

Science has never been more important. Public science literacy is essential if we are to address the challenges we collectively face.

If, as we both assume, you're eager to add an educational attraction at Ontario Place, let's create a smaller and more tightly-focused satellite of the Science Centre there – perhaps presenting unique experiences which illuminate Ontario's unique gift of 250,000 lakes holding one-fifth of the world's fresh water? Or how about a Centre exploring an Ontario perspective on innovation, resilience, and adaptation to climate change?

The potential and possibilities couldn't be more exciting. And with a vision equal to that of the Centre's founders, we can make them happen together.

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