

Imagine if you woke up one morning and your whole past was erased. Who would you be, then? What lessons would you draw on? What would your story be? We call the loss of memory in humans by different names, but most often, we call it dementia. I think that's a suitable label for what city council proposes for the city of Toronto: only a form of dementia would make the loss of the city's history a fair value for a million dollars. Is *your* soul worth a mere million? Apparently Toronto's is.

In two weeks' time, Toronto's city council is going to propose cutting one million dollars from its civic museums budget, a pittance in the context of the overall city budget, but a crippling blow to the civic museum infrastructure. It will force the closure of four of the city's ten civic museums. The museums that will be shuttered if these cuts go through are the Zion Schoolhouse, North York's *very last* physical remnant of its local history; Gibson House, which has been a part of Yonge Street's heritage for 160 years and therefore one of the oldest remaining houses still standing in Toronto; the Market Gallery, which is not only a historical site in its own right, but is one of the city's only museums of Toronto's history, and this building, Montgomery's Inn, which dates to 1830 and is a living link to Etobicoke's and Toronto's past.

All of these museums are also heritage properties that not only provide context for Torontonians in terms of their own lives as citizens, but they are living, physical connections to a past that the city of Toronto has, for almost its entire existence, done too little to preserve and celebrate. City council wants to close these museums because they cost money to run, but council has not considered the cost of closing them. Civic pride, informed citizenry, and the husbanding of our physical history for the sake of future Torontonians are all things that are worth a lot more than a million bucks a year. Worse, council and Mayor Ford have not examined ways of making these museums more marketable. They are so fixated on cost-cutting that revenue-building does not occur to them. The fact that this city council, and this mayor in particular, is unable to see the upside in keeping Torontonians connected to their own past is disturbing to say the least.

Governments are transient by nature, but history and culture are not. The value of these intangibles to living citizens is sometimes forgotten in the push and pull of daily commerce. We have to remember, however, that our leaders are also mere citizens, and if they forget the obligations of citizenship, it's up to others to remind them. I believe that one of our chief obligations is to pass our city on *intact* to those who come after us. Just a *glance* at this building communicates its value. It *embodies* the stories of our civic ancestors and tells us something about the place we are spending our lives in. Why would we even entertain the notion of cutting off access to it?

The current municipal government has shown it is willing to be lead by dollars, no matter the cost to the city's soul. And the closure of four museums that are also heritage sites is an indication of soul-sickness at the municipal level. This Inn has stood on this spot for over *180 years*, while this city council will be gone in three. Short-term fixes often lead to unintended consequences and the permanent damage that will be done to our city's story is something all Torontonians should stand united against. The coming budget cuts will effectively ensure the disappearance of four signally important historical sites

because there will never be the political will to reopen them once they are closed. That will make their loss permanent. All to save a million dollars a year.

Don't let them do it. Remind city council that it should be *bragging* about the city's heritage and its history, not erasing it. That should be a "gimmee," but the fact that it isn't to Rob Ford and his council is very distressing indeed. Neglect of these small but deeply meaningful physical heritage sites in a city Toronto's size is tragic. There is so little of it left here. Without a history to draw on, citizens will eventually think that there is no city to honour or preserve and that the needs of the present are the only ones that matter. We know what happens to people when they're convinced that their own needs are the only ones worth considering. Do we want to live in a city that thinks that way?