

# Shoemaker fears there is “No amount too much” for downtown revitalization projects

By **Dan Gray** - June 14, 2022 @ 12:05 pm



Last night, in an 8-3 vote, the city of Sault Ste. Marie Council supported spending \$1.4 million more dollars in the area of the Downtown Plaza.

This time, the new allocation is to compensate for the federal government denying that amount for the relocation of the Mill Market.



Three councillors were concerned with the amount being spent along with other aspects of the project and voted against the the additional funding. Those councillors were Matt Shoemaker, Matt Scott and Marchi Bruni.

Matt Shoemaker was the most passionate about the amount of money being spent. In a nearly two-minute address to council after his deferral motion was defeated, he noted what others have already said publicly, that there appears to be no end in the spending to this project.

We have chosen to post his comments, as well as the Mayor's comments in full. Others can be seen in the 45 minute video below-

Matt Shoemaker-

*"When the plaza proposal came to us in, I think it was August of '19. The amount that the city was being asked to put in was \$2.2 million. When we approved the construction of the plaza, a couple of meetings ago, the amount the city was putting in was something like \$7.9 million of an \$8.9 million dollar project, by my rough numbers. And now we're being asked to add another 1.5 million to the kind of global project."*

*So the plaza and surrounds are now pushing \$11 million, the city's contribution is about \$9 million. And I guess, where does it end? How much money is this council willing to put into this project?*

*I heard that the \$1.5 (million) Mr. Mayor, is something that you're willing to proceed. Without funding, you know, if the city has to put it in on their own it will, so, obviously, the rest of council agrees with that as well.*

*I mean, there's another motion, we could move here, which is why don't we just eliminate a cost limit on this project altogether? Because it seems to me, the council is willing to spend any amount of money on this project that is going to come forward.*

*So we're at 11 million, why not 20? Why not 30? Why not do like Aurora and spend 60 million?*

*Okay, well, we need either other sources of government funding, or to put a cap on this project, and there is no cap, and it's a vanishing amount. Because whether we're spending five or 10, or 15 or 20, it seems that there is no amount too much for this Council to approve.*

*So I mean, it just goes to show a willingness to proceed with this project in the face of denials from upper levels of government, lack of public support my opinion. And I have long ago stopped supporting the project. And and I just think that it's absurd that we continue to increase the spending limit on this so drastically.*

Mayor Provenzano-

*Okay, so [I'm] just going to respond to three of Councillor Shoemaker's comments, and then we call the vote on this.*

*Councillor Shoemaker, I understand why you've had a habit of lumping all of the dollars in municipal dollars and I recognize that the federal government gave us funds that we could use for things that are non-public square projects.*

*But some of the \$9 million you're referencing is federal funds that we received from the federal government. So the specific municipal contribution, I would suggest isn't consistent with how you represented it.*

*I think that it's important to recognize that you made a comment about a lack of public support. I don't take any issue with that being your gauge. That's not my gauge.*

*I have had a number of businesses figures, reach out to me and tell me they hoped the plaza moved forward. We have we heard that actually, in one of the chamber events where a business leader had indicated that there was a communication issue because he didn't think we were doing a good enough job on selling the value of it. They thought it was a good project.*

*I've had residents say the same thing to me. I was at Drake Park, where my family lives and a young family was there and the mother walked up to me and said, I really hope it works, because it would be a lovely place to bring the kids on a Saturday, now, that's my gauge of it.*

*But in any event, whether there is public support for something or isn't public support for something, it's up to us, the the 11 of us to decide whether to move forward with it, independent of that, and in a representative democracy, we have to make that decision. We have to make decisions based on information given to us and based on a plan we're moving forward with and I think that this decision is consistent with the plan that we've been trying to move forward with.*

*Two final comments, I don't think there's any basis to say that we would spend any amount of money on that, I think you know me well enough that I do have my limits and I made that very clear with the twin pad (McMeekan), I wasn't going to go over what we had, ultimately decided to do to do, they're not withstanding that, we added what I think is the same amount of money to build a walking track. So you know, we added over 1 million, might have been 1.4 million and I don't recall that it was close to what we're adding here to build a walking track.*

*So this in the context of other things that we're doing, I think is a reasonable investment and I think it really, to me, the middle market is critical to the whole class project.*

*So there is a limit and I would suggest to you that there's no basis for saying that any of us would spend any amount of money to make this happen.*

*I think it's it's a good project, I think the community will appreciate it, and enjoy it when it's done and I think it complements the rest of the work we're doing.*

*So I'm supportive of moving it forward. And if we are able to garner more resources, in the meantime, it will will diminish the burden to us and we'll have resources to put elsewhere.*

*But I think the fact that we have access to these resources is evidence that we are managing things pretty prudently here, and that we need to as my colleagues pointed out, make investments in ourselves in our own community if we want other parties to make investments in our community.*

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### **Dan Gray**

A native of Centre Wellington, Ontario, I have worked as a freelance journalist all over the province of Ontario. Most recently I ran a local news page in my hometown of Fergus, Ontario. I look forward to bringing my experience covering breaking news, municipal matters and general interest stories to the team at Superior Media and communities we serve.

