

## OUR VIEWS

# Algonquin must grow

**W**hat makes for a better city? Letting 1.5 hectares of land sit fallow at the transit hub of Baseline station or expanding Algonquin College there to build a new centre to train trades-people or health-care workers?

Obviously, the latter is the preferred option. The city and province have a shortage of personnel in these two sectors and Algonquin, with its practical rather than theoretical bent, is the perfect place to address that problem.

The fly in the ointment is the fact that the cash-challenged city needs the \$3.2 million the land would generate if it were sold. The municipality is not in a position to give away property while it is expected to run a \$78-million operating deficit next year. Of course, the municipality is also not in a position to unilaterally develop Lansdowne Park or fix its aging, creaking infrastructure.

At least allowing expansion of Algonquin College doesn't cost the municipality money — just the chance of selling the land.

There is, however, a loss in this deal. The land was part of an experiment that former deputy city manager Ned Lathrop had concocted. That would have seen located there housing built by developers that would show how communities could be developed around rapid-transit facilities.

The project died with the retirement of Mr. Lathrop (the city's former planning czar) and is unlikely to be resurrected. That's too bad. In a community that is but tract housing for the most part outside the core, the Lathrop experiment might have been a good example to spur the creative juices of the local development sector.

The result is that the Algonquin proposal is probably the best idea this city will see for the site. The college's economically challenged students are great users of transit. Algonquin on one end of the Transitway and downtown on the other of the 90-route buses means the vehicles will be full both ways during rush hour. Thus reconfiguring the Transitway station and building a \$5-million bridge from the bus hub straight into the college makes good practical sense. Busy Woodroffe Avenue, combined with students' poor crossing habits from the school to the station, are a prescription for disaster.

The bridge and the new station may deprive the city of money it doesn't have. But the benefits of the project are too great to lose.

The new Algonquin facility would put Ottawa in the forefront of training the trades and health-care workers. That would create jobs in teaching and provide employers with an unmatched pool of labour as Ottawa and Ontario face an impending skills shortage.

Perhaps Premier Dalton McGuinty can reimburse the city for the cost of the college site. After all, education is a provincial responsibility and one would hate to see an already taxed municipality miss an opportunity to raise some cash.