

Campus closure no surprise, says Orangeville mayor

Josh Bergant

NEWS REPORTER

Humber's first foray outside of Toronto officially met its end.

The Orangeville campus, which started with hopeful beginnings, will officially close in June 2021 and it doesn't come as a surprise to the town's mayor.

Sandy Brown said the numbers "didn't really add up."

"Humber had been paying roughly \$150,000 per year for its current location," he said. "They could have went the route of Georgian College and bought a facility outright."

Brown was also disappointed that, when Humber was "gifted" land by the town, it didn't take the opportunity to build a full-service campus.

He said the town is now developing plans for the space at the centre.

"We're making an application with the provincial government to build a new library inside that space," Brown said. "What we want to build is more of a community hub — which libraries have become over the years. They used to be quiet places of study and reflection and education but now they cover a lot of different areas of everyday life in a community."

The Orangeville campus was first announced in 2005. The campus officially opened in 2006 in the town's Alder Street Recreation Complex.

The original plan for the campus consisted of a much larger square footage than what ended up being developed. Surplus land provided to Humber by the town aimed to house a \$20 to \$30 million, full-service campus that would more match the likes of Georgian College in Barrie.

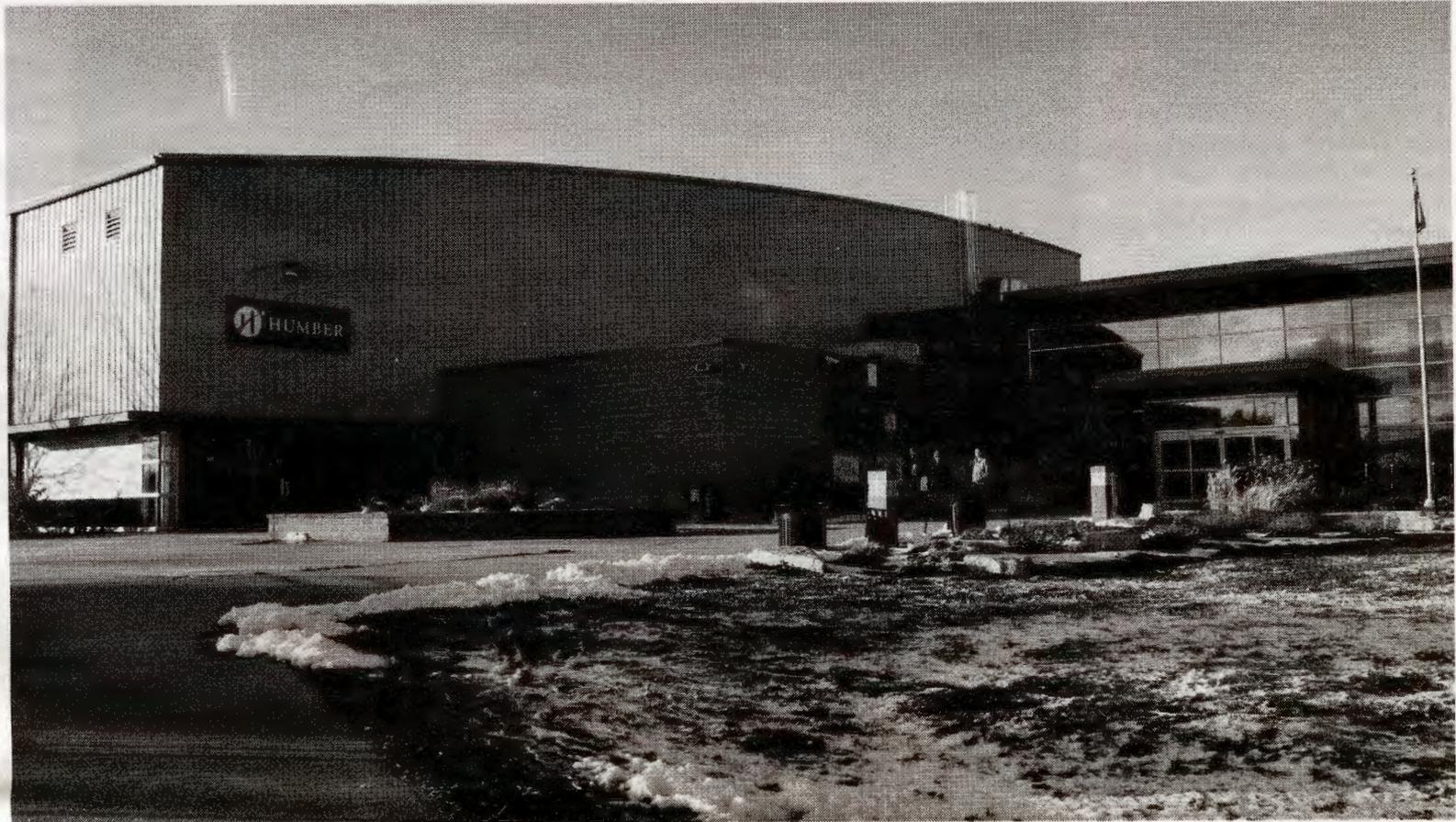
Orangeville seemed like the ideal place to expand. Surrounded by verdant, protected Niagara Escarpment lands and many smaller communities immediately serviceable by the college.

The town spent \$3.1 million in 2005 for land to develop a campus. The land was returned in 2013.

Orangeville as a municipality was growing in those years as well — with the population growing to 30,734 from 29,007 between 2011 and 2016. Orangeville is a popular choice among potential new residents due to its proximity to major job centres such as Brampton, Mississauga and even Toronto.

Then problems arose.

Demand wasn't high enough to sustain the campus. Predicted numbers of students never came to



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Despite being given land to construct a new facility, Humber instead rented space at the Alder Street Recreation Complex for its Orangeville campus.

fruition — and some residents were even disappointed at the sheer lack of space and programs provided at the Orangeville campus.

Joe Andrews, the principal of Orangeville campus, said although he was saddened by the news, he understood the ultimate reasoning behind the closure.

"Like most business decisions, it came down to finances" Andrews said.

"If we can't sustain a campus in Orangeville and provide the same, great services we had before then it doesn't make a whole lot of sense from either the town's side or Humber's," he said. "It saddens me to see the campus go — but you have to make certain decisions to remain sustainable. Humber still plans on remaining a vital part of the community of Orangeville."

"Whenever you are a part of something for a long time — it's hard to leave that," Andrews said.

Current and former students had mixed reactions to the news of the closure.

Hannah Leighton, a first-year Police Foundations student, was shocked to hear of the news.

"I thought they were going to close the campus before I finished my program — so it was a huge relief to hear that I could finish next year,"

Leighton said.

Leighton said she enjoyed the connections to the community and to Orangeville Police the program built for her.

Lisa Post, a town councillor and a student at Lakeshore campus, was disappointed by news of the closure. Post noted Humber was a "valuable community supporter" and that she "loves attending Humber."

"The facilities at North and Lakeshore campus where I attend classes are world class and state of the art facilities," said Post, who is currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Community Development program at Lakeshore campus.

Todd Taylor, also a town councillor in Orangeville, expressed strong regret when it came to the closure.

"It was a punch in the stomach to be honest," he said. "I felt a bit angry and sad at the same time."

Taylor supported a full-service campus.

"Part of schooling is the experience," he said. "It's about pushing forward in some way. You grasp and get that with a school."

"There are circles that continue to turn like a watch. All the levels and elements of a town are like a watch. The entire experience with Humber has now come full circle," Taylor said.

Long-awaited Presto machines may come to campus this month

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Humber finds out later this month whether its three major campuses get a PRESTO machine.

PRESTO machines capable of loading PRESTO cards are available at both subway stations and GO transit stations throughout the Greater Toronto Area. However, none of Humber College campuses at North, Lakeshore, and Carrier Drive campuses, have access to PRESTO machines and their corresponding cards.

TTC tokens, previously a staple of the city's transit system, are also being phased out as of Nov. 30.

The topic of a PRESTO machine has been discussed among members of IGNITE for several years and has until recently been among the main campaign promises of some candidates.

Devon Fernandes with Sustainability Humber said ongoing negotiations with Metrolinx — the provincial body governing

transit construction and planning in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area — involves the price, placement and timing of delivery. Price and placement are both elements that are being ironed out.

Students can expect to see the machines "as early as late November," Fernandes said.

"I'm all for students voices," he said. "If they have any specific questions or concerns about PRESTO they should contact me and learn more about the process."

Rob Corail, a first-year Tourism management student, said he's enthusiastic about a PRESTO machine and the entire concept of the TTC in general. His other main mode of transportation is a skateboard emblazoned with a TTC subway map at the bottom.

Loading and buying a PRESTO card should involve a lot less hassle than it does, Corail said.

"I have to load my card at Kipling station usually. It would be super convenient to have one on campus," he said.