

City Council
c/o The City Clerk
City of Hamilton

Re: Designation of 679 Main St. East and 85 Holton Avenue South under Part IV
of the Ontario Heritage Act
June 27, 2018

Mr. Mayor, and City Councillors:

My name is Daniel Peace and my family were members of St. Giles Church for 5 generations. The discussions regarding the founding of St. Giles Church took place around the table in my great-grandfather's dining room.

From 1908 until 2014 St Giles' ministry was creative and energetic, and made a significant impact on its neighbourhood and the city. These include, as a small sample:

- Early in the 20th century, St Giles was instrumental in welcoming and supporting refugees from the Armenian Genocide. Many of those families were welcomed into St Giles, and in 1980, a number of those families supported the St. Giles congregation in its sponsoring of four families of 'Boat People' from Laos.
- In 1925, St Giles was the only Presbyterian Church in Hamilton to join the United Church of Canada. As the city grew, the St. Giles congregation played a significant role in supporting new congregations starting up on the mountain, as well as the founding and development of Wesley Centre, now known as Wesley Urban Ministries.
- Throughout its ministry, the church offered many community programs to the neighbourhood: Scouting, Guiding, AA, sports, music, recreational programs for folks living in the many residential care facilities in the neighbourhood, the establishment of the Friendship Centre network, assisting folk with schizophrenia, strong leadership in the Sherman Hub, and many, many others.

It is important for each of you to know that the knowledge, the skills, and, most importantly, the values taught, practised, and lived out at St Giles United Church live on, and prosper, at New Vision United Church, currently worshipping and

growing at the much more significant heritage site at 24 Main St. West, formerly Centenary United Church. The true ongoing heritage of St. Giles United Church is witnessed daily in the innovative and affirming congregation at New Vision. The church is the people, not the buildings.

In our deliberations over how to deal with our building at Main and Holton, we used an ‘Evaluate the Need’ approach:

- There is **no** need for the building as a church. The people in the neighbourhood have not been attending for years. When the Congregation decided to embrace the New Vision opportunity, over 70% of the St. Giles congregation lived outside Ward 3. Other churches looking for a church building have rejected the St Giles building because of its state of disrepair, and its massive operating costs.
- There is **no** need for the existing building as housing. The building is not structurally or architecturally suitable for conversion into the housing that would provided sufficient density to meet the needs and mid-range rental expectations of the City. Most churches that are converted to condos etc. are aimed at the high-end market. It is our religious view that a former place of worship should not be converted into high-end housing for the wealthy.
- There is **no** need for the building as an example of noteworthy architecture, as there are 10 other buildings designed by Stewart and Witton throughout Hamilton.

We support a ‘Win-Win’ approach to the opportunity that the empty building that once housed the St. Giles congregation provides:

- The City of Hamilton wins on two fronts. First, much needed mid-range rental housing, designed to fit into the existing community, will be created in Ward 3. Second, the restoration of the New Vision building includes the creation of the ‘Music Hall’, a concert and meeting venue seating 700 to 1100, filling a current void in the inventory of performance halls in Hamilton. A few decades ago we had 17 such venues, now we have potentially one – at New Vision.
- New Vision United Church wins, as the funds received from the creation of the housing at Main and Holton will be used to finance the major restoration of the much more significant heritage building at 24 Main Street West, the 150-year-old former Centenary United Church. We cannot restore and

maintain these two buildings, and we are choosing to restore the former Centenary site.

- The United Church of Canada wins, as the religious freedom of its congregations to manage their assets for the greater good of its members, and the communities in which it lives, is confirmed.

Our proposals for the former St. Giles' building have been unanimously supported by the Hamilton Presbytery of the United Church of Canada.

We realize that the City Heritage Committee is doing its job in determining whether a building is designated on the architectural criteria defined in the narrow and flawed provincial legislation; however, the social impact of designating the property at Holton and Main will cause the loss of significant opportunities. We at New Vision, the owners of both properties, are counting on our City Council to see clearly these 'big picture' opportunities: mid-range needed housing in Ward 3, and the restoration of New Vision's heritage property at 24 Main Street West, including a city-wide opportunity for the Music Hall.

We ask you to support these opportunities and vote to defeat the motion designating the Holton and Main property as 'heritage.'

The decision to see the former St. Giles' building is painful to me, and to many others whose lives and families have grown up in the neighbourhood. We wish that things didn't have to end up this way, but sometime we just have to do the right thing, for the good of the City, with new housing and the development of the Music Hall, and to support the efforts of the growing, affirmative, diverse congregation of New Vision United Church at Main and MacNab.

Thank you all for your consideration,

Daniel G. Peace
Chair, Board of Trustees
New Vision United Church