

Planning Committee presentation (Lin Hart representing Council)

Thank you, Madam Chair and Councillors for this opportunity to speak to you as a member of the congregation and a church leader.

Our history, which began in 1792, is one of strength and struggle, with many moves and changes throughout all that time. Our mission is Discovering and Sharing God's Love and we have always strived to do this in our worship and service to the community. We are still serving our neighbours in need, but it's harder and harder to "share" because we have so little. Regrettably, we find ourselves concentrating more and more on maintaining our building, our home. But we do continue with the community luncheons, Wesley Urban Ministry assistance, Lakeview Retirement Centre services and Clarion Nursing Home sing-alongs to name a few.

In the 1950's and 60's, when attendance was 700+, we had 2 Sunday services. Money was available to serve the community through several ministries and still maintain the building, make repairs and even build additions. Indeed, a Christian Education wing was added, and a new sanctuary was built during these years, which, along with the narthex, stairway, hallway, and atrium completion, virtually encased the original church. So, after the 1960's, much of the heritage architecture was not visible. What survives needs a significant amount of remedial investment.

Our struggles began in the 90's, when we started to experience a decline in attendance **and** revenue, which continues to the present day. Unfortunately, as the years passed, it was only the challenges that grew. Now we are serving the community with just 149 financially supporting households. In the meantime, building needs have multiplied and intensified, to a point where nearly \$1,000,000 is required for capital upgrades.

As a retired educator, I've seen this happen in our schools. When the budget is tight, we take care of the essentials (student learning materials and other supplies) and what we decide are the priorities. In most cases the significant building needs don't make the list, and so year after year the plant deficiencies grow. It's the same with our church: serving the people is always our priority, so we don't always hear the voices reminding us of other important necessities.

We have looked at a few strategies to address the present dire problem at our church. We've explored co-existing with another church. We engaged in planning a joint venture with Kiwanis to build a small church along with affordable housing on the current property. We even promoted a membership loan program to bolster the church's financial situation and keep going as a congregation.

But we are now at a crossroads. [PAUSE] **Sadly**, we must sell our beloved church to survive as a faith community. We are up against a wall and looking for a new, more suitable, home. Without the sale of our church at a good price, which would be undermined by a heritage designation, then we are done as a church community. Indeed, we would all be witnesses to the end of the 200+ year history of SCUC. You see, without a sale, we would simply have to walk away, abandon the property, and disband. Please consider our unique situation to help stave off that result.

I thank you sincerely for your attention.

God bless.