



Mailing Address:
24 Main St. W.
Hamilton ON L8P 1H2
(905) 522 6843

officeadmin@newvisionunited.org

June 22, 2021

The Hamilton Municipal Heritage Committee
Loren Kolar, Legislative Coordinator
City of Hamilton
By Email: loren.kolar@hamilton.ca

Dear Chair and Members,

It has been some time since we interacted directly with respect to New Vision's Holton Ave. S. campus. I write to you to review pertinent events and actions that have taken place before and since that interaction in June of 2018, and offer you guidance on what to expect from New Vision ahead.

Our interactions with you as an advisory committee of Hamilton's municipal council began in 2014 as an interaction with you over the effect of the Downtown Inventory of Heritage Buildings that the City notified us it planned to issue. We were notified that our 24 Main W. campus, the former Centenary United Church, was to be listed in the inventory. We objected to it being listed in the inventory because the City of Hamilton had not yet prepared a survey of heritage places of worship, nor instituted any meaningful protocols with respect to how to interact with heritage places of worship property owners as recommended in the *Heritage Places of Worship: A Guide to Conserving Heritage Places of Worship in Ontario Communities* issued by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

Our delegation was not received by the Committee at that meeting until after the Inventory was voted upon and approved – an action on the Committee's part that may prove the point of our 2014 objection.

In the summer of 2015 planning consultants IBI met with City Planning Department staff on behalf of New Vision in a formal consultation regarding redevelopment of our underutilized 85 Holton Ave. S. property. With clear indication from heritage planning staff at that consultation that heritage conservation would be a significant component of the City's response to any development proposal coming forward to the City, New Vision issued an RFP to potential development partners in the fall of 2015 seeking interest in the objectives for the property as outlined in the Formal Consultation report prepared by the City.

We were not able to secure a development partner. Further, our 2013 Capital Expenditure study issued by Edison Engineers confirmed to us what prospective development partners who engaged in preliminary due diligence were telling us: that the building was in very poor shape and would be very expensive to rehabilitate for any purpose.

Based on these determinations, and guided by our religious convictions that our role in the neighbourhood of which we have been a part for over 100 years was changing, we made application in the spring of 2018 for a demolition permit. We understood in making that application that the application would be reviewed by City heritage planning staff, who would take such actions as were reasonable to the planning staff, as a standard part of the application process, since 85 Holton Ave. S. is on the City's *Inventory of Significant Places of Worship in the City of Hamilton 1801-2001*.

The City's heritage planner issued a Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment and presented it to the Committee. The Committee adopted the planning staff recommendation that the former St. Giles site be given a municipal heritage designation.

The City Council, however, on the Planning Committee's recommendation, set aside the Heritage Committee's recommendation that the property be designated in July 2018, with the condition that New Vision provide a reasonable statement of heritage significance of the building for the City's heritage files.

It is New Vision's belief that the municipal council acted within the scope of the Ontario Heritage Act in July 2018, and did not find reason to agree with the Hamilton Municipal Heritage Committee that the building's heritage significance met the criteria established in the Ontario Heritage Act, 9/06.

This is an important point that we feel the subsequent actions of the Committee suggest the Committee has not reasonably digested.

At its meeting on March 26, 2021, without any substantial interaction with us as property owners, or further research of your own that could call into question the July 2018 decision by the municipal council not to designate, the Committee recommended to the municipal council that the property be placed on the Register of Properties of Municipal Cultural Value or Interest.

We wonder if the Committee's actions are meant as disrespect for us as religious use property owners, a disrespect which we have felt we have experienced as early as our first delegation to the Committee in 2014.

Subsequent to your March 26 meeting and through public reporting of your meeting, we learned that the Building Department incorrectly cancelled our demolition permit *application*. We then simply sought to correct the City to keep the redevelopment processes in order. As it turned out this administrative snafu within the demolition application process has caused considerable embarrassment to both the City and to New Vision in the past few months, including completely unwarranted negative speculation by some City Councillors in a public meeting of our intentions in our attempt to correct the administrative error. We ask you to correct your own understanding of what happened, if you have not done so. One way you could correct your understanding, for example, might be to ask heritage planning staff to dig into that with New Vision and with the Building Department and report to you.

Please note that New Vision had not completed the demolition permit application for the Department to review and adjudicate, and in fact, has not challenged the mistaken cancellation subsequent to the furor that developed as our attempt to be good citizens and neighbours by keeping processes in order was misinterpreted. We are not happy with the vacant and impaired building sitting in the midst of a

neighbourhood of which we value being a part. We want to arrive at a good outcome for our property in light of our changing place in the social fabric as soon as these processes of which you and we are a part permit.

The building remains standing. The reasons in favour of its demolition have not changed. It took us a further two years to find a development partner that could meet our objectives for the property. Our search was guided by the good faith understanding we had with our municipal council respecting our 2018 demolition application. Our development partner has transparently and openly invested resources into studies requested by the current term of Council that deepen the understanding of why this building is not preservable by the municipality without either a) unreasonably taxing the property owners themselves or b) charging proponents of preservation to find the significant sources of funding that enable New Vision to continue its religious presence on this site and in this neighbourhood and have the 1912 building preserved in a circumstance in which time is of the essence, because this vacant and impaired building is a blight upon *our* neighbourhood.

We believe this finding would already be evident without our development partner's good faith investment of resources into explaining it further if the Municipal Heritage Committee had completed the survey of heritage places of worship that it began in 2014. We note that the survey has yet to appear for public comment.

At no point subsequent to the 2018 decision has the Committee reached out to us as property owners of a place of worship in the spirit of the *Heritage Places of Worship: A Guide to Conserving Heritage Places of Worship in Ontario Communities*. New Vision, in contrast, has embraced a feasible future for the 24 Main W site as a municipally designated heritage property, and worked closely with heritage planning staff and economic renewal staff to make the 1868 former Centenary building a highly regarded example of heritage conservation in Hamilton. Once again, had your Committee either completed its survey of heritage places of worship, or engaged us in the spirit of the Provincial heritage places of worship guide, your understanding of the complexity and challenges of these two buildings and our mission as a religious charity might have made you more our ally than our antagonist. We would prefer the former relationship.

As you no doubt are aware, the Ontario Heritage Act has been amended and will be proclaimed July 1 2021. The Province has committed to provide clearer guidelines to municipal councils on how to evaluate and research heritage elements of the built form of their communities as part of its amendment evaluation process. We ask you join us in urging the Province to put those clearer guidelines into property owner and municipal council hands as soon as possible so that other religious property owners and successor municipal heritage committees to yourselves across Ontario have a better legislative environment within which to interact.

A draft revision of the *Heritage Places of Worship: A Guide to Conserving Heritage Places of Worship in Ontario Communities* has been issued for public comment. I close with a quotation from the revised preface and invite you to consider what comment you might wish to make to the revision team during this review period:

Many heritage properties change or are adapted over time, but places of worship may be different in that they often have evolving spiritual value in addition to cultural heritage value. Heritage places of worship may be thought of as “living cultural heritage resources” due to the ongoing need to change or adapt them to new philosophies, doctrines or practices of worship. This should be considered when deciding the best approach to conserving a heritage place of worship (<https://prod-environmental-registry.s3.amazonaws.com/2021-05/POW-FINAL%20DRAFT-compressed.pdf>).

We continue to seek open and meaningful dialogue with you over the two places of worship we own. We do this in accordance with the provisions of and in the spirit of the Ontario Heritage Act and the guidance related to it issued by the Province to municipal councils and property owners of places of worship.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ian Sloan".

Rev. Dr. Ian Sloan
Minister
Chair, Board of Trustees

cc. Councillor Nann