



Statement from the Friends of St. Giles on meeting with New Vision United Church June 30, 2021

Towards collaboration on St. Giles

Local residents and heritage advocates respond following their first meeting with United Church representatives

Update from the Friends of St. Giles

On Friday, June 25, the Friends of St. Giles attended a facilitated Webex session hosted by Ward 3 Councillor Nrinder Nann, to discuss the fate of St. Giles Church (85 Holton Ave. S.) with representatives of the United Church of Canada.

The Friends of St. Giles were grateful for the opportunity to meet with United Church representatives for the first time. There to represent the United Church were New Vision United Church minister and Board of Trustees Chair Ian Sloan, Church Council Chair Dixon Challoner, and Horseshoe Falls Regional Council Executive Minister Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa.

The Friends are a diverse group of local residents, Hamilton citizens who volunteer their time for the neighbourhood. Our group met ahead of the Webex session to arrive at a focused set of solutions-based topics that we saw value in bringing to the session, in order to make good use of everyone's time and keep the conversation productive.

Gratitude & praise for Councillor Nann's efforts

The Friends of St. Giles continue to be grateful to our elected representative, Councillor Nann, and facilitator David Derbyshire for their commitment to collaboration, and their work that enabled us to meet. We have the utmost respect for both their efforts in this process; their presence at this session was greatly valued by the Friends.

Our experience of the June 25th session

We approached the session — hosted by our respected Councillor Nann — in good faith, and with great seriousness. However, our group was met with hostility and domineering behaviour from the United Church representatives who were present. Most chillingly, they led with a request to silence the Friends, by vetting our future communications on the subject of St. Giles

— effectively for us to cease our work as community advocates. One senior citizen in the Friends described the meeting as one of the most humiliating experiences they've ever had to endure.

Next steps

We are a solutions-focused group. Despite all that has happened in the past — including the harassing behaviour towards the Friends by members of New Vision United Church, their associates, and their supporters — the Friends went to the meeting with an open mind, a willingness to collaborate, and a desire to find the win-win that both we and Coun. Nann believe is possible.

However, as a volunteer organization, **we cannot ask our members to go through another humiliating and unproductive experience like the June 25th meeting.**

The Friends of St. Giles remain committed to a collaborative process. **We are willing to return to the table at any point in the future**, to continue the crucial conversations with representatives of the United Church about the fate of St. Giles, an irreplaceable Hamilton landmark. We simply ask for assurances that United Church representatives commit to engaging in calm, open-minded, and solutions-focused conversations with our group of residents and community volunteers.

Sincerely,

The Friends of St. Giles
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