

To: Planning committee via email loren.Kolnar@hamilton.ca March 31/2021
c/o Legislative Co-ordinator Lisa Kelsey

From: Ken Watson

Re: Deliberations on 679 Main St. E. Or 85 Holton Ave. S. (Formerly St. Giles United Church)

The Hamilton Spectator article on March 29/21 about deliberations on St. Giles started my search for how to offer perspective on the plans for this property. It has been a circuitous route but I hope I can offer thoughts that are helpful to your deliberations.

Below, is a copy of the letter I sent to the CEO of United Property Resource Corp who seem to be involved. I received only one call, from Mr. Travella to ask for a personal copy of the letter. I don't think they own the property, but seem to be advising if not being sought as developers by the New Vision congregation who probably own the space. I'm gathering that your committee will be setting some parameters on that development. On that basis, let me continue.

Based further on the email kindly sent by Ms Loren Kolar on March 31 urging reply before mid-day on Apr 1 (presumably not a joke) **I write then to support the efforts of those who seek**

- a) to have the property added to the Municipal Heritage Register as a property of Cultural significance
- b) that staff be tasked with outlining options for the development of the property
- c) That staff liaise with the property owner to impress upon them their responsibilities to maintain and protect the property in the interim. I noted that neighbours complained in the meeting I listened to (Feb 11/21), that the owners had been derelict in mowing lawns and keeping the area presentable.

Personally, I thought the news that the interior items had been auctioned off was shocking. If what I hear is correct, the interior was pillaged. Stewardship took a hard hit that day.

But going on, I think there are possibilities that should be acted upon. Making it a community centre as it once was, would honour that tradition but not with another high rise suggestion like the one that was supported by the architect who spoke at the Feb 11 meeting as being 'best practice', or 'efficient design'. What I heard in those comments was a saddening lack of awareness of the place that congregation held - its heritage.

So what do I see in the hours left to imagine? Well the option to 'do as was recently done' seems dead if this is to be a heritage site. Having high-priced boutique housing might make money but betray any community connection to the place's past. The only option I see worthy of the heritage designation is going to take time and imagination to create.

The 'hundred year building' idea was tossed into the meeting I heard back in February. In that timeline, Hamilton should expect weather events never seen. Everything from windstorms, to heat waves to ice storms is headed our way. We will not be driving cars, even electric ones. This building won't be heated by carbon fuels. Economic disparities are a continuing threat.

The community we're headed into will be the one where most will walk to what they need in about 15 minutes. In that community, I see St.Giles filling local needs beyond housing and commercial requirements - like recreation. So into the building must go at least one gymnasium, playgrounds - plural, places for people to gather co-operatively perform for each other. The different special-interest groups will share common spaces based on some code of conduct and behaviour. I've imagined a housing set-up in which residents 'buy into' helpful and supportive actions. That will require some sort of concierge or social building system beyond keeping halls and walls clean.

You can dismiss such imagining in favour of what happens at present but current behaviours got us here - and into the prospect of bulldozing the building and what it represented. Climate change will impose new rules; people will have to create or recall strategies for coping well.

Whatever ways and means you decide to proceed with, I won't be living there. It would seem that those who would like to, should be setting the rules that benefit them all. All I can do is offer background and tradition with all the caution and inspiration that those perspectives can pass along.

If those are helpful efforts, I'd be pleased to contribute them and bring others from that time and space who could augment that offering. Phone [REDACTED] is the best way to reach me.

To: Tim Blair, CEO

Feb 24/2021

United Property Resource Corporation Presenters

3250 Bloor Street West, 2nd Floor, Etobicoke, ON M8X 2Y4

From: Ken Watson [REDACTED]

Re: Presentation on Feb 11, 2021 concerning 85 Holton Ave. Affordable Housing Development

I listened in by telephone to the presentation on Feb 11 and would like to offer comment and history, if you would like. It has taken me until Feb 24 to find an address to which to send them.

I was baptized in that Church and grew up a block away. In those days, the congregation numbered over 3000, as I recall. There was a local competition with Ryerson United down Main St for bragging rights to biggest congregation and most influential members.

In those days, most of the congregation lived within walking distance of the building. I grew out of the nursery school into regular Sunday School, into the young people's group then the young adults. All were safe and healthy places to be. I went through the Cub Pack then the Scout Troop and then retraced my steps to be the Cub Leader. I was the person the grownups called to run the 16 mm movie projector or slide projector for meetings or services.

When families moved to the 'burbs, many still returned out of loyalty. And then they died. In the intervening years, it is my impression that the community around the church stopped coming to it and whatever 'outreach' happened brought in people who left after the meeting ended. So it was no surprise for me to hear the anxiety in the questions of the neighbours. The United Church has been an absentee landlord for over a generation as far as they are concerned.

The corporate-speak I heard did not allay their fears. "Efficient design", "Best Practice", "Solar power and Geothermal" were terms that missed the mark. I heard frustration that a building that has so long harmonized with homes along the street, would be replaced with a slab-sided concrete or glass box with balconies hung on it - ugly as sin.

The speakers who tried to skate over the demolition thought seemed unaware of the eyesore decorating downtown Hamilton that everyone else knows about. It used to be James Street Baptist Church and it represents everything neighbours fear about your project once you hit the demolition button.

I don't know what the picture was that a previous consultant had produced and the presenters only gradually disowned. The waffling only stoked the angst from what I heard. The stated aim of the meeting was to get comment from the community. I didn't read it that way. What I heard was a developer trying to tell the neighbours what was possibly going to happen. I didn't hear an invitation to join some advisory panel. I had to find your contact through the Councillor who set up the meeting.

What I heard at the root of the exchange was the matter of trust. Does UPRC, or the Architect, or the Developer really trust that others can make suggestions they can, or wish to implement. And on the other side, can you really trust a developer?

Frustrating this attempt is the fact that whatever you decide to do, you won't be there to live with it. You will get in a car and go home. It reminds me of the engineers who design buses - but never take one with shaky feet, cataracts, and a cane. You people have a communication problem that is a test of faith.

The solution would seem obvious. Within the next weeks, you need to be on a first-name basis with every person who called in and then all those between - if you seek the credibility you seem to desire. Well those weeks have passed and I guess you can tell me how it's going.

I wanted to offer concrete thoughts for your consideration. I'm afraid they are all over the map but they will have done what I intended if they stimulate a design that the neighbours, residents and you are happy with.

- 1) Does anyone consider setting up a studio - with a window to watch an artist sketch different designs - and then dialogue with those on the other side about the problems that arise? An on-site dialogue, classroom demo, after school talk? I know that construction sites regularly have 'office trailers'. What would be the effect of putting a window in it and a porch outside for visitors and then having someone to give updates to the curious and concerned?
- 2) I think you heard pretty clearly that the neighbours like the exterior of the building. It has character. I also heard Mr. Peace lament the discouraging state of the foundation in the NE corner and water leakage, I presume over the Chapel, that made it's way to the kitchen. But I think you need to start to seriously entertain **how** to save the bulk of the exterior.
- 3) In a letter of 2013, I wrote to St. Giles suggesting modifications to the Sanctuary. Surely that space deserves to be preserved as performance space. I suggested you might turn both transepts into bachelor apartments. I think there is space to put two units upstairs and two down on both sides. I would put an indoor roof patio above the upper units. There is space below the ceiling to 'sit out' and enjoy concerts below, maybe under a transparent roof.

In the rear balcony space there is room for another 6 units, 3 up and 3 down., again with roof patios. In that design, I imagined a perimeter walkway around that interior space just under the lower edge of the stained glass windows to allow for indoor walking and study of the glass details.

- 4) Music was a huge, like HUGE part of St. Giles presence in the community. If the organ was still in place, it would seem to be a slam dunk. You would honour that tradition by including that in the final design.

The bells were part of that sonic presence. I believe they have been sold. Too bad. Maybe the sound can be resurrected in the design. In distant days, there were chimes on the quarter hour, at both St. Giles and St. Peter's (at St. Clair and Main). Hymns were played as a call to worship. Everyone tuned in to the carillonneur practicing for the weekend 'concert'.

A late arrival to the auditory landscape was St. Stephens I think, on Mountain Brow near Upper Sherman. Anyway, these sounds were signatures of the buildings' presence.

The St. Giles carillon was originally a gift of Ms Helen? Holton. Her picture used to hang in the vestibule. I was told she donated the bells for all to enjoy despite the fact that she was deaf. I know of two people, still living, who played those bells if you should want to gather their recollections for your heritage file.

But that has changed greatly. St. Peter's bells don't sound now. I hear St. Stephan's electronic and distant tinkling rarely. There is room again for what bells can bring to a community. Will your building fulfill that invitation to the communal soul? Will you serve that need in more than visible ways?

The space you want to develop once attracted the whole community. They still need such a place to gather though it might be for different reasons. How will you show concern for that legacy?

5) I can imagine that the current exterior walls in which the large stained glass windows are situated, could become interior walls along a promenade. Relieved of their load bearing requirement, would allow them to be stabilized and still appreciated. Their mass could store heat.

Stained glass windows come with a lot of baggage but it seems a mark of reverence, if not just remembrance, to preserve them. When, or if, you do, there is a quirk in the middle one on the *west side* of the sanctuary that has been there since it was installed. I was at the commemorating service with my eagle-eyed mother who spotted the 'oops' feature.

At the top of the window on each side is circular element that is meant to blend with the colour scheme of the narrow panels below. On one side of the window, the colours are red and green; on the other, the colour scheme is blue and gold. The installers were completing the installation in the dark because it had to be done by service time next day. I was told it was almost midnight before they finished. But it was ready for next day. Oops! The circular elements had been switched by mistake and they remain so to this day. So in the new placement, do you fix the problem or leave it? It brings a wonderful liberal reminder to an otherwise conservative image.

What happens to such windows? One speaker seemed to say there are a lot of churches and they have a lot of dedicated windows looking for a place to go. In conversations with a former chair of Presbytery, she was lamenting the loss of those symbols. I suggested there might be a place for them to be assembled and respectfully displayed in a redevelopment like St. Giles, or

Centenary, at that time. A school/museum for the study, preservation, display, and creation of such art could be a part of such a development - at least in my mind. Heritage respected.

- 6) This thinking brings commercial aspects of the redevelopment to my mind. While your presentation focussed on housing, I think of adding to this place, facilities that the community needs - reasons for the community to re-engage; basic needs that the development could supply to re-earn its place. A bakery that makes breads of the world would be worth considering, I think. In the Church's heyday, there was a bakery a couple blocks away, near Sherman. Surely bread is as close to a universal food as you get - even gluten-free kinds. So as a reason for neighbours to come to that space, it would seem a pretty good idea - an aromatic chime - and unifying call to community.

St. Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square has a downstairs cafeteria that is a good place for a meal in overpriced London. There is a similar eating space below St. Giles in Edinburgh (the place after which this church was named). They might be another commercial suggestion for this space.

I think that other commercial and business tenants should include Social Services, Health services (a 1-stop Family practice with testing, at least on scheduled days, and a dentist), day care/tutorial services, financial service (Credit Union - not a bank). I think Ms. Nann thinks there is a child care centre at the old St. Peter's (Main & St. Clair). It may have been there pre-covid. That building is locked at present.

In a recent novel that centred on a high-rise refuge for abused women, the women who sought sanctuary there were employed by businesses that rented space on the lowest levels. By teaching them the skills that would make them independent while allowing them to build a financial foundation, the businesses got a reduced rent. The businesses also had a guaranteed labour pool that was helpful to them. I don't know if this is an idea that would be useful to your planning.

- 7) I'm not sure where the 'back yard' idea came from but it was repeated by the presenter and is obviously important, at least, to him. Someone is going to have to put a size on that term.
- 8) What I think such a plan-for-backyarding would dictate is a terraced building with wide spaces at each level to accommodate this need and probably a pod design of apartment units around the space. I shiver at the possibilities here - good and bad - when I imagine what could come out of that. The facade that comes from terracing could be like a seaside village in Europe or with house fronts similar to those which are part of the Crossroads Media site, 1295 N Service Rd. In Burlington. Such a streetscape could be used for movie shoots, if it was planned, and need not enter to living quarters. I've seen terraced streetscapes in numerous English cities.

In the backyard I grew up in, a block away, we had a large yard where any child in the neighbourhood could be found if they were late for dinner. Is this the image you want to restore or allow room to grow?

There is no park space nearby and it was plainly an interest of the Councillor Nann. In a distant day, and before the CE wing was built at St. Giles (in the 1960's?) the parking lot was a community skating rink. I would recommend it as a community focal point in your design. In the other seasons, when you don't skate, I'd hope there would be a playground in the space. I'd start with the playground in the middle, and a ring, loop or serpentine structure upon which ice could be laid, arranged around it. In the off season, a 'ring' could easily be divided into a 'shooting hoops' space, bicycle/skateboard path with removable ramps added as desired.

I'd also link "yards" of different residences by ramps not stairs. Kids can use them as play spaces that way. Going for a walk could be possible without going outside.

- 9) The front stairs up to the entry on Main St. is a killer if accessibility was an objective.
- 10) The use of light wells could be a helpful way to create 'yard space' - front or back. Domes over them could create passive solar heating in cool weather and could offer draught conduits for warm weather. We do not have AC in our house. We cool it by opening lower windows and exhausting heated air through the attic crawl space. I'll bet the idea could be super-sized in a project like this.
- 11) In a novel I wrote, I imagined a home for homeless men that was created by installing modified shipping containers into pre-serviced slots in a high-rise tower. Each resident got a raw container, and then the practical help to turn it into a cottage which was lifted into place when he joined the group. But nobody got in without that commitment to join with others to build his house and home. The 'homes' were splayed, on each level, like petals around the central hoist by which the units were moved to the proper floor. The new 'homes' were accessed from a wide concourse running along the front of the units. Each man also got a 6'x6' bin with a 6' trellis in which to grow a 'garden' as part of their new life. A psychiatrist I know says he has never had a patient who was an active gardener. Don't know if this is an idea you could use.
- 12) I wonder how each unit will be identified. Will they be numbered? Is this the image you want to create? Would naming the suites like estates in Britain be an alternative?
- 13) In every apartment I know, there is a problem with cockroaches, bedbugs, or mice. These pests move from one unit to another through the holes left around conduits and cables, or when someone adds something without thinking of the space they leave unsealed. I would hope that sealing each unit would be a requirement of the builder's contract with a hefty enough penalty for failure to ensure that each unit is sealed.

- 14) The way 'solar' was tossed out at the meeting I listened to, I had the feeling the person was trying it for effect. Yes. Solar sympathy in the design is a necessary idea but there are lots of ways to do it beside those ugly panels on a roof. There are many better things to do with horizontal space. I'd suggest solar cells on vertical surfaces. The Ivanpah Solar Generating System in Pimm, Nevada on a smaller scale, might be another design to be considered rather than driving a geothermal system.
- 15) As a spin-off of the solar heating, the sheer mass of the outer walls surely earns them some credit for the passive heat storage they represent. So maintaining them might be a consideration for whatever 'green' heating system you have in mind.
- 16) In the novel I mentioned (#11), the need for security was accomplished by everyone who came into the building being photographed and 'registered'. It might help in the event of a fire and improve pedestrian safety within the building.
- 17) I can't see a building like this operating without a concierge. You can pretend that a 'security lock' on the door would work but look at what really happens. If there was a bakery with a window on the entryway, employees might serve both needs during the day. Night staff could have other duties and monitor remotely.
- 18) I don't know if you've decided to name the building - like St. Giles Place - rather than the address you are currently using. Along the same line, what sort of history is/has been written about the building? What is the point of it? A chronology? Hmmmm. If the point is to integrate the new into the old, someone should start on doing something with the old, using the pieces you've got instead of storing them. I imagine a school project or hobby in which one learns research skills while re-creating the legacy. I would suggest such material might be accessed, in the future, by a QR code sort of device built into a dedicatory plaque.
- 19) One of the items I'm sure you know about is the asbestos insulation around heating pipes in the basement. I know about the material in the south east corner. Just mentioning it here so it doesn't come as a surprise later.
- 20) This used to be a house of worship. Is there any place in the plans for an ecumenical ministry? The mention of social needs brings up another thought. As I grew in that space and interacted with many adults (because I knew how to do AV equipment and they didn't) I faced the usual collection of teen-age and young adult problems. When seeking advice on part time jobs or where to apply to university, or how to fix something, my mother would suggest a name of a person I already knew, or who knew me. I was truly raised by a village united through a social connection. Is this a plan for this development - to model, and culture, a social system of support. What sort of common spaces will they need? Who will minister to that need? How?

21) This objective (#20) may conflict with 'open market' rental. If you are just going to rent to anyone who applies, who might then sub-rent to an Air BNB, how will that mesh with others who are trying to raise families or just survive? If someone wants to tent-over their 'Yard' is that going to be OK? All of these questions suggest you may have a behavioural or economic image of the people to whom you wish to offer housing. I suggest you get that questionnaire or filter figured out soon because it will affect the units in fundamental ways.

The evolution of this line of thinking suggests you may be looking at creating some sort of condo corp in which residents can buy in inexpensively and agree to a code of mutual support.

22) Over the year's I've had conversation with City Hall staff in their attempts to improve the percentage of home garbage that goes to recycling. The rate has stalled because it is just too easy to put everything in a black bag and drop it at the curb or down a chute. Apartments are at the top of their list of reluctant participants. If waste management is going to be another demonstrator of responsible citizenship, I suggest you're going to need to build in a personal pickup at each unit and an immediate reward system for properly sorted trash.

23) The comment that I heard made during the presentation of the intent to make this building a 'hundred year old building' brings up a problem of every church I know of - 'growth like topsy'. It starts out with one plan that has to be changed when the next minister arrives, or expanded to meet new needs. This leads to a labyrinths of corridors and passages through one room to reach another. I don't know if any thought is being given to building with preventing this in mind. Moveable walls in apartments are not something I've heard of in places around here and surely you can't move load-bearing ones. The presence of water, heat or electrical services restrict other walls only because nobody planned for any other configuration that another might seek - a century from now. Is this part of a planning process you wish to consider?

24) Building codes require a certain window/floor area ratio as I recall - but that was a long time ago. I can imagine units in this building where windows might be replaced by mega TV screens that are less expensive and more energy efficient. I would surround the screen with window molding so that it would be hard to tell the difference because those windows would be receiving live feed from outside TV cameras, say on the roof. Every apartment could have the a penthouse view on any side that has a camera! With the flip of a switch, or opening of a faux frame, you might even get outside air as though the window was really open. Such features might make the air exchange control required of non-carbon heating sources more manageable.

If you wish elaboration on any of these points, I'd be pleased to augment my notes here. Phone [REDACTED] is the best way to reach me.

Copies: Since this letter was sent, copies have been forwarded to

1) (Kris Travella [REDACTED] who called on Mar 18)

- 2) Rev. I Sloan, at New Vision United Church, 24 Main St. W., Hamilton, ON, L8P 1H2
- 3) Ms. N Nann, Ward 3 Councillor, Hamilton City Hall, 71 Main St. W., Hamilton ON, L8P4Y5