



**New Vision United Church Council**  
**Statement Regarding the Development of 85 Holton Ave S**  
**April 13 2021**

- **The lengthy engagement of the New Vision United Church (NVUC) community to sensitively redevelop 85 Holton Ave S has largely been lost in the current public discussion.**
- New Vision United Church's decision to seek a demolition permit in 2018 for the 85 Holton Ave building was the result of five years of work seeking a viable reuse solution for the property.
- Since 2018, NVUC has relied on the City Council's decision not to designate 85 Holton Ave. S. under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act to work **diligently to prepare a site plan that could be presented to the public** regarding our vision for the site.
- Our work on this since 2013 includes **thousands of volunteer hours over eight years, engaging with multiple private developers, as well as real estate, legal, and building professionals.**
- NVUC as a whole has engaged in **hours of congregational meetings** in order to identify a **development proposal that aligned with our faith** and social justice values.
- **The level of soul-searching, personal and financial commitment to this project has been immense**, and at times deeply painful. This level of dedication can only be **fueled by the lively and relevant faith of all our diverse members.**
- The current Planning Committee's decision on April 6 2021 to recommend designation completely changes the terms of our work with the community and our neighbours on this property without, we believe, due regard for the facts.
- **We thus also want to address some of the misinformation circulating around the redevelopment** of 85 Holton Ave. S. For some of the facts that correct this misinformation, we direct interested parties to our development partner United Property Resource Corporation's letter submitted to City Council on April 12. We attach our copy of that letter received from UPRC as property owner and partner in this project.
- We call on the community to come together with us, and cease the unfounded agitation surrounding what is for us, a very painful reality: the decision that this building is no longer affordable and usable to us in our practice of our faith. **A better future for the site awaits us and our neighbours.**

Contact

**Dixon Challoner**, Chair, New Vision United Church Council

[councilchair@newvisionunited.org](mailto:councilchair@newvisionunited.org)

**UNITED PROPERTY RESOURCE CORPORATION**

3250 Bloor Street West, Suite 200  
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4

April 12, 2021

Mayor Eisenberger and Members of Council  
City of Hamilton  
71 Main Street West  
Hamilton, ON  
L8R 2K3

Attn: Andrea Holland, City Clerk

Dear Mr. Mayor Eisenberger and Members of Council:

**RE: 85 Holton Avenue South, Hamilton  
Motion of Planning Committee to Regarding Heritage Designation**

---

We request that Council not proceed to designate 85 Holton Avenue South in order to allow time for UPRC to engage in further consultation with the community to determine a viable redevelopment approach to the site.

We appreciated the input and comments we received from Planning Committee staff and members of the community regarding the 85 Holton Avenue South site at the City of Hamilton's Planning Committee meeting on April 6, 2021. We remain open and will continue to work closely with the Planning Committee and the City of Hamilton to address the questions that arose.

We remain committed to a transparent process and further consultation with the community as we continue to explore the options to build mixed income and affordable rental housing on the site.

### **UPRC Background**

The United Resource Property Corporation is a separate corporation of the United Church of Canada mandated to work in partnership with local faith communities throughout Canada in reimagining their real estate for positive community impact and to meet community housing and social needs. UPRC have been working since 2020 with the New Vision congregation, which includes the former St. Giles congregation located at 85 Holton Avenue South, to facilitate that positive change which includes the provision of affordable rental housing on the site.

The events of the past few weeks have been very concerning to us. The positive work being pursued has been questioned and considerable misinformation was communicated during the recent Planning Committee session at which we have not have an opportunity to respond. We are writing to you to respond and clarify the facts to ensure that you have all the information you need to make an informed decision on the matters related to 85 Holton Avenue South. A copy of our submission to Planning Committee is also attached for your reference.

### **History of the Site**

The last religious service was held at the former St. Giles site in 2015 by New Vision United Church. the faith community that is the merger of the former St. Giles congregation and the former Centenary United congregation in 2014. Since February of 2015, the former St. Giles building at 85 Holton Avenue South

has been vacant, and unfortunately, like many vacant buildings, has suffered further structural damage. In July of 2018, Council considered the designation of St. Giles under Part IV of the Heritage Act. At that time, Council heard from New Vision United Church that the former St. Giles building was in poor condition, that New Vision United Church had explored paths to conserve elements of it as part of much needed mixed rental housing in the neighbourhood to meet its objectives as a religious charity and property owner. Council also knew then that New Vision United Church was committed to the heritage designation and maintenance of the historic 24 Main W 1868 building. The private developer working with New Vision in 2018 on the former St. Giles site redevelopment did not continue with the project, and in 2020, UPRC commenced working with New Vision to identify redevelopment options on the site. Council did not recommend a Notice of Intention to Designate in 2018. Everyone understood that the St. Giles church would be demolished. New Vision worked with Heritage staff to begin to document and record the history of the building. That work has expanded and continued as is described in the response below to the question of what work has been done in relation to heritage conservation on the site.

During these initial stages of the planning process for the redevelopment of the St. Giles site, UPRC has been in continued contact with Councillor Nann to ensure updated information is provided to the community on securing the site, improving maintenance and security, and on the plans for the redevelopment for affordable housing units. UPRC is committed to continuing its consultation with the community and Planning Committee through the planning process.

### **Clarification of Facts**

On April 6, 2021, Planning Committee passed a motion to recommend Council to pursue a Part IV heritage designation for the 85 Holton Avenue South property. In response to this motion, which is now before Council for ratification, we need to ensure that Council has all of the correct, factual information to make an informed decision.

#### **1. UPRC did not file a demolition permit moments before Planning Committee Meeting**

- In 2018 a Demolition Permit Application was submitted to the City and remained under review pending completion of a number of conditions. These conditions involved a heritage impact assessment to document and conserve several items from the church.
- On February 19, 2021 the Building Division closed the Demolition Permit application due to inactivity. Notice of the closure was sent to the address of the owner (85 Holton Ave) and not the applicant (New Vision-24 Main St W) and was therefore not received within the 10-day period prior to the department closing the application.
- New Vision and UPRC were made aware of the closure of the permit on March 29, 2021 through an article published in the Spectator and reached out to the Building division to renew the permit as the conservation work had not stopped. The Building Division advised that as the City's database does not allow an application to be renewed, the best approach was to submit a second application.
- It was to reinstate a lawful process to continue the work needed to meet the required conditions for the permit.
- The reinstatement of the application was not done with any intent to sidestep any process or mislead the Planning Committee or the community.
- UPRC has since withdrawn the Demolition Permit application to avoid any further accusation of trying to sidestep or undermine any process.
- UPRC has engaged ERA Architects and other consultants to ensure all work is done to the greatest ability to address the conservation and documentation of the salvageable items from the church.

#### **2. UPRC is not abandoning its commitment to the provision of affordable rental units**

- At the Planning Committee meeting it was stated that redevelopment will no longer provide affordable rental housing. That is false.
  - UPRC is using a mixed income approach to ensure affordable rental housing that is inclusive to all.
  - 100% of the proposed units will be rental.
  - Approximately 30% of the proposed units will be affordable (approx. 30 units). UPRC and Hamilton Housing will work together to explore opportunities for increased affordability.
  - Affordable rents will be per CMHC requirements for 79% of MMR, which would currently be \$474 for bachelor, \$790 for 1-bed, \$924 for 2-bed, and \$987 for 3-bed units.
  - To determine the rental rate for the market units, UPRC conducts a rental analysis of purpose-built rental within the surrounding area in Hamilton. This analysis will ensure the market units are fairly priced within the broader Hamilton rental market.
3. The existing building has been structurally compromised
- At the Planning Committee meeting and by reference on social media it has been stated that the building is still in reasonably good condition and can easily be reused. This is not true.
  - A structural assessment was conducted and has concluded the building has been structurally compromised.
4. UPRC has undertaken considerable work with its consulting team on conservation and redevelopment options to further address heritage matters
- Again, it has been stated that UPRC are doing nothing to reconsider options for the church or for any preservation or conservation. It has been stated that they have no interest in any conservation of the building.
  - This again is not true. UPRC has undertaken and continues to pursue a range of options for the redevelopment of the site that integrate components of the church. UPRC are happy to share these plans with members of Council and to meet with Councillors to review and discuss these plans.
5. In our opinion and based on our financial feasibility assessment, the site cannot be redeveloped to save the existing building while providing the same number of affordable units.
- Information was conveyed at the Planning Committee meeting that a developer is available to step in and save the building while redeveloping a portion of the site to provide the same number of affordable rental units.
  - UPRC have explored several opportunities to restore and adaptively reuse the existing structure through its consultants.
  - In order to offset the substantial cost of restoring the existing structure, the resulting redevelopment would have to consist of either a large residential tower at the rear of the property to achieve the same number of units. Above-market rents would also be necessary to offset the significant restoration costs.
  - In conserving the church, the same objectives for affordable housing cannot be met.
  - The ongoing restoration and work on New Vision United Church would also be impacted by this approach, which was and is to be funded partially from the operating revenue of rental housing on the St. Giles site.

### **UPRC's Commitment to the City and the Community**

We greatly appreciate Councillor Nann's support to referring the motion at Council back to the Planning Committee in order for UPRC to provide further clarification and certainty around the facts. We have been and continue to work on alternative development proposals that may allow for a degree of heritage preservation. This work is ongoing, and it is our commitment to the City of Hamilton and the community

that the fullest conservation possible that is feasible to ensure the affordable housing units can be delivered will be pursued.

We understand and appreciate the concerns of the community regarding the loss of a heritage property and recognize that there is an inherent challenge in effectively communicating and engaging with all groups involved. There is unfortunately a reality in the redevelopment of the site that not all objectives can be fully realised to their fullest and that people value objectives differently. We are not suggesting one should be more important than another but in context they must be considered and balanced as they were through Council's decision in 2018. That context has not changed and the housing crisis we face has become more critical.

UPRC also welcomes opportunities to hear from businesses and organizations in the Hamilton community that have the desire to lend their strategic support and fundraising efforts for 85 Holton Avenue South.

With this context before you, we request that Council not proceed to designate 85 Holton Avenue South, and commit to further consideration and consultation with the community on the alternative approaches to the site redevelopment that we have commenced.

We are committed to responding to the ongoing affordable housing crisis within Hamilton. We are committed to responsibly exploring all options for heritage conservation while creating affordable rental housing that is inclusive to all.

Thank you for your support and consideration.

#### **Contact Information**

Tim Blair, CEO UPRC  
info@uprc.ca