

Speaking note to brief to Planning Committee July 10 2018

Ian Sloan

Councilors and Chair, thanks.

In a nutshell – New Vision owns two buildings. New Vision is a merger of two congregations. Their merging meant something had to be done with one building to support the other if one of the two were to continue standing.

We made the choice to keep the 24 Main St. W. building, based on community responsiveness to the building.

Having decided, now we have to make the other assist us in keeping the doors open at 24 Main W. But there's more to the story than that...

I am here to speak against your recommending a heritage designation to Hamilton's City Council for the New Vision United Church 1912 building at 85 Holton Ave. S., formerly known as St. Giles United Church.

My name is Ian Sloan. I have been in United Church ministry for 30 years, in Hamilton for 9 of them. I minister to and with New Vision United Church, the owners of 85 Holton S. New Vision is the product of a merger four years ago of the former St. Giles congregation whose church building was at 85 Holton Ave. S., and the former Centenary United Church, whose church building was at 24 Main W. New Vision holds title to both properties.

There are two main propositions that I want to advance with you. First, my church is an "accidental developer" at both 24 Main W. and the subject property of this recommendation, 85 Holton Ave. S. We knew little about development when we began our study and decision making about the 85 Holton Ave. S. and 24 Main W. four years ago. We know a fair bit more now. Development of real property is the domain of individuals and corporations with deep pockets, whose primary incentive is a pecuniary or financial one. There are many risks in property development, not risks typically a congregation would consider. Our focus and our calling is something like "self-emptying." We own property as a church as a collective, for the common good.

When we formed New Vision out of St. Giles and Centenary United Churches four years ago, we vowed as a collective that we would not sell off our real property, but we would seek to redevelop it ourselves for the best good we could find. The church's role has shifted in the new social fabric, and we intend to continue to be a pillar of it, in a new way.

In our new role, we might appear to be "accidental developers" at 85 Holton Ave. S. In fact, we are engaged in social enterprise.

Social enterprise is a movement of creating not-for-profit and for-profit businesses with a core vision to make a better world. This movement is engaged largely by post-Boomer generations. Typically, social

enterprises focus on contributing to social good, healing the environment and making “enough” money to keep the venture going. This is called a “triple bottom line” approach. They sacrifice maximizing profit in the short term for the long term good of social and environmental impact. New Vision adds a “spiritual” bottom line in pursuit of “quadruple” bottom line results as it seeks to develop as a social enterprise.

Social enterprises like we at New Vision are developing transgress a lot of boundaries. The Canada Revenue Agency is trying to figure out where income taxes begin and charity ends. The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation is trying to figure out how to assess church properties that mix profitable businesses and charities. It is a strange place - obviously for the civil servants who work on policy and its implementation in those areas - but also for us. This is not the church your grandparents were a part of.

The transgressions we as a social enterprise commit as a church leads to my second proposition to you. Another legislative regime that is heavily affected by the many changes in the social order with respect to Christianity is heritage legislation. Civil servants working in this policy area have exactly similar challenges to the CRA and MPAC. Churches are not deep-pocketed developers, but for a long time we have been easy targets of deep-pocketed developers – we’ve been shrinking congregations, making mergers, desperate for cash, selling buildings, living in the illusory hope that next year, or maybe the year after, things will turn around. People will come back. It has not happened, and we are more realistic in our hopes.

If your heritage planner is dealing with a deep-pocketed developer who has swooped in and paid cheaply for a church property, it makes sense to me that the municipality needs legislative tools to stop a further erosion of community value that happens after the congregation packs up and stops adding its value to the neighbourhood. That’s the erosion that comes with the demolition of the symbol of all that community good. Indeed, I observed Councilor Partridge at the Hamilton Municipal Heritage Committee on June 21 make the assumption that this is what is happening at 85 Holton Ave S. I could see her surprise when she learned that the very church itself is seeking to change the use of the lands.

Councilors and chair, the ground has shifted under us all. It is not a deep-pocketed developer in front of you this morning, it is your neighbours who work hard to make a positive difference in the community, the present generation of many generations of people like us – like you and me. New Vision is few, but our religious convictions and purpose burn strongly in our hearts. We did not leave St. Giles Church, the community around it left it. As we who are still there look at the painful and vast deferred maintenance that inevitably arose as numbers diminished, at the absence of will in the neighbourhood to recreate the social economy by which such a building can flourish, we know it is time for the building to go down to the dust with its ancestors. That’s our heart in the matter. It’s our symbol, our place. We as a church are called to new uses of our lands.

There are new needs to be met with these lands at 85 Holton Ave. S. Our redevelopment plan is to bring urgently needed mid-market purpose-built rental housing into our urban neighbourhood. Revenue from the housing will generate ongoing funds for our core vision of making a better world. And by deciding to

bring down the building at 85 Holton Ave. S. we have chosen against a civic trophy for a passing Christian-dominated society, and we have chosen for housing people.

That, Councilors and Chair, is our case for your support for our intentions for the lands at 85 Holton Ave. S. New Vision as a collective, a proud collective, a Christian collective, precedes you in making a decision not to seek heritage designation from you for it. We will carry on with those lands. They will do what they have done, though are not doing now, yet will again do in the future – they will make the community a better place to live.

Thank you.