

November 7, 2013

Chair and Members
Planning and Environment Committee

Re: 275 Thames Street – Fugitive Slave Chapel

As many Council Members will be aware, the building located at 275 Thames Street, the Fugitive Slave Chapel, was constructed in 1847. It is a building of world historical significance as a terminal point of the Underground Railroad and is, therefore, an extremely important part of London's Black History, constructed within the context of London's early Black community, the Civic War and the fight against slavery. The Chapel holds immense importance as a building of heritage culture value for London, and has the long-term potential to serve as an important cultural heritage tourism draw, together with other Black History assets in London and Southwestern Ontario. We are most fortunate that Beth Emmanuel Church has offered to have the building relocated adjacent to its property at 430 Grey Street, particularly as Beth Emmanuel Church is where the congregation of the Fugitive Slave Chapel moved to in 1868-1869. Clearly this rich history speaks to the historical significance the Chapel has to London, making it well worth preserving.

Much to my dismay, however, I have become aware that that the organizers of the Fugitive Slave Chapel Preservation Project, which is raising funds for the relocation of the Chapel, is experiencing difficulty in raising funds. Until such time as sufficient funds are raised for its relocation, the Chapel will be increasingly vulnerable to vandalism, break-ins, animal destruction, deterioration and the potential for fire. The impending winter months will only intensify the threat to the integrity of the Chapel.

Given that the City of London, by Council direction, has re-zoned the Beth Emmanuel site such that it could accommodate the church use associated with the Chapel, the SOHO Community has expressed support for relocation of the Chapel within its neighbourhood, and that with each day there is increased risk to this important heritage asset, I respectfully request that the Municipal Council approve that the following actions be taken in order to move ahead with ensuring the proper protection and preservation of the Fugitive Slave Chapel:

That the Civic Administration BE DIRECTED to take the following actions with respect to the Fugitive Slave Chapel, currently located at 275 Thames Street:

- a) *prepare a report for a heritage alteration permit to allow this heritage building to be relocated to 432 Grey Street;*
- b) *work with the community, with the assistance of the City's Facilities Services staff, to establish an accurate cost for the Fugitive Slave Chapel Preservation Project to transfer the Chapel to 432 Grey Street, place the building on a full basement foundation, secure the building with an adequate roof, doors and windows, and equip it with basement stairs, heating, plumbing and electrical service, so that the building is adaptable for any future additions, as may be planned at some future date by the Church;*
- c) *assist with exploring opportunities for in-kind contributions from the development, home building and construction industries that may assist the Church with excavating and constructing the basement foundation, relocating the Chapel and improving the building as described in b), above;*
- d) *before the end of December, 2013, report back to the Municipal Council on the funding gap, if any, between what has been raised by the community by way of financial and in-kind contributions, and the identified costs for constructing the basement foundation, relocating the Chapel and*

improving the building, as noted above, so that if there is a funding gap, the Municipal Council can give consideration to:

- i) providing a grant to Beth Emmanuel Church to address the funding shortfall in order to protect this important heritage asset;*
- ii) receiving the Civic Administration's advice as to what conditions should be tied to the grant including, but not limited to, the requirement that further improvements to the interior and exterior of the Chapel would have to be in keeping with good heritage stewardship; and*
- iii) identifying a potential source of financing for the grant.*

Respectfully submitted,

H.L. Usher
Councillor, Ward 12