



LONDON REGION

Paul Hubert
Director, Planning and Environment Committee
City of London

Feb. 26th, 2015

Dear Committee:

Old Victoria Hospital Lands and Buildings

I would like to take this opportunity to convey to you the London Region Architectural Conservancy Ontario's position on the retention of heritage buildings on the site of the old Victoria Hospital's grounds in London.

We have been following the possible development plans for this site and feel very strongly that the four already agreed upon important heritage buildings *viz*: the Colborne Building, the War Memorial Children's Hospital, the Gartshore Nurses' Residence and the Health Services Building should be conserved. Victoria Hospital is regarded as a place of health sciences innovation as well as being a long-established health facility and is recognised as such throughout this city and the province. Thus it is an important cultural heritage landscape which represents aspects of the city's past, present and future.

These four structures were identified as being of significant heritage importance by several reports to/ and by the City:

1. The *Old Victoria Hospital Secondary Plan – Report to the Planning and Environment Committee* (June 20, 2013) which incorporates the *Cultural Heritage Assessment: Buildings in the South Street Hospital Complex* (May, 2011) was written by heritage consultant Nancy Tausky and commissioned by the City. In this report Tausky identifies these four (among others) as being of high cultural and architectural significance and recommends that they be assigned Priority 1 on the Inventory of Heritage Resources.
2. Subsequently LACH supported these recommendations and determined that the existing Priority levels of four of these identified buildings be made higher, with a view to subsequent designation of these buildings. The LACH further suggested that the hospital lands might be designated as a 'Cultural Heritage Landscape' or a Heritage Conservation District.
3. The *Old Victoria Hospital lands Secondary Plan* (2014) specifically noted the intent 'to preserve and incorporate heritage buildings **identified in the Cultural Heritage Assessment, 2011** within new development blocks, where possible'.
4. LACH has subsequently (emergency meeting Feb. 25th 2015) reiterated its position on the heritage importance of these four buildings.

The question arises as to why the City's position on retaining these four buildings has suddenly, and in a very rushed fashion, changed to a recommendation to demolish two of them? Although we understand that this hastily convened issue of retention v demolition on the table is in response to a new deadline of provision of demolition costs by outside parties and agencies, we cannot make a proper connection between the statement from other agencies: 'we'll help pay to demolish' to the City's: 'ok then, we'll demolish', ignoring and overturning its previous studies and plans.

We are also told that the RFP process is still ongoing and 'undefined'. Any projected demolitions would be preceding this process. Provision of demolition funds from outside agencies might influence the RFP process.

We would like to strongly recommend that:

- a. The City proceed with, and stand firm on, previous recommendations to retain all four identified heritage buildings.

And remind:

- b. Demolition costs need NOT be solicited if the buildings are permitted to stand.
- c. Demolition should not be regarded as a 'stand alone' option. It should be seen in the light of new building costs which would far outstrip the preservation costs. The difference is that these would be borne by new developers who should be given these firm guidelines by the City.

We understand that these buildings are on the whole in a good state of construction. In today's world innovation does not need to spell destruction. Adaptive re-use is of prime significance. We are all aware that buildings can be and are very successfully adapted, re-purposed and re-used and that conservation is an environmentally-friendly goal which should be actively pursued. Remember that the building still standing is the greenest!

Along with these structures already mentioned, the London and District's Crippled Children's Treatment Centre now the Growing Concern Child Care Centre is a very solid building that can be adapted with even the addition of 5 additional floors – not demolished for landfill. The city also recommends demolishing 385 Hill St – a fully functioning historic and architecturally-unique building that successfully transitioned into a thriving daycare centre 30 years ago and which serves the entire city. There is no need to bankroll the abatement, repurposing or mothballing of this building – it is already an exemplary and highly successful adaptive re-use project.

These buildings are not simply of concern to architectural historians and conservationists. The citizens of London, and particularly the local residents, feel a strong connection to these buildings, which help to give them a sense of belonging and stability. The City has produced plans for this area: *Roadmap Soho: Regeneration South of Horton Street* (2011), which recommends providing 'opportunities to preserve

and celebrate heritage resources to ensure that the hospital remains etched in the community'. The 2014 *Secondary Plan* referred to above re-iterates this with a vision of the SoHo neighbourhood as 'a vibrant and healthy urban neighbourhood that celebrates its rich sense of community and heritage'. Local residents feel a great fondness for some of the old buildings. Development of this area should retain the old feel and does not upscale the neighbourhood to drive out a lower income population.

For all of us, redevelopment of this riverside site should consider this city-wide connection. For the wider London community these four buildings help to tell important aspects of our City's story. Retention of two buildings alone, and the retention of as yet unspecified 'exterior architectural elements' would be tokenism and lend a 'Disneysque' appearance to a future new development, which is surely to be avoided.

This is an opportunity not just to retain old buildings for history's sake alone, but to know that, through a significant retention of original buildings, colour, character, vitality and interest can be injected in to the new development of this appealing and very important riverside site. We do want to avoid London becoming a 'blandscape' which is the fate of so many Ontario communities who have traduced and obliterated their past and end up all looking the same. And they have often regretted it. 'Once gone, it's gone forever.' You can't 'grow' a new historic building.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Maggie Whalley, President, ACO London Region

Grosvenor Lodge, 1017 Western Rd, London, On N6G 1G5, 519 645-0981 www.acolondon.ca

