



101, Windermere Road West, London, ON N6G 2J4

Councillor Paul Hubert
Chair, Planning & Environment Committee
City of London
300 Dufferin Ave.
London ON

Re: The recent Staff report and proposal for the old Victoria Hospital sites and remaining heritage buildings

Dear Mr. Hubert and Members of the Planning & Environment Committee

I am writing as Chair of Heritage London Foundation, a charitable organization whose mission statement says that our purpose is “To maintain, preserve and establish viable contemporary uses for heritage buildings in the City of London.” It should come as no surprise, therefore, that we are distinctly worried about the recommendations made by Planning staff concerning the remaining structures on the Old Victoria Hospital sites that are being presented to you on Monday.

From the original staff recommendation to retain the four buildings in question, to a halving of that number for retention, is more than disconcerting; it is frightening. To make this recommendation based on an offer of money from the Province and the LHS intended to facilitate only **demolition** of two valuable buildings, seems to us to be short sighted. In addition I should like to point out that with an externally imposed deadline the whole decision surrounding this matter is being rushed. Has anyone asked the Province and the LHS if that money could be applied to **preservation** of the buildings in question? To us that makes a far better use of taxpayers’ money. It was taxpayers’ money that paid for the original buildings and many taxpayers who have associations with those buildings would be far happier seeing them retained and re-purposed.

The preservation of these four building and, just as importantly, the Hill Street buildings (TVCCTC and the former nurses’ residence) seems to us to be a “no-brainer.” These buildings form a focus for a revitalized SOHO district and lend both historic context and character to the community.

One does not often hold up Toronto as a model for Heritage preservation (in fact one could easily refer to it as a city of architectural vandals in what it has allowed to disappear) but one can think of the Distillery District and the many newly re-purposed factory buildings that are now shining examples of densely populated mixed-use neighbourhoods, with examples of historic preservation alongside exciting contemporary structures giving vitality and excitement to the streetscape.

Instead of showing timidity, and financial short sightedness, London could become a leader in the re-purposing of old hospital buildings which are now being replaced all over the province of Ontario,

We realize that Planning staff has to balance a lot more than “mere” historic value when making their recommendations, and that fiscal responsibility in times of austerity may seem to be the most desirable path to follow, but we simply disagree with the recommendation they have felt it necessary to make.

These buildings **can** be adapted for a variety of uses and the work generated by the projects will still provide for many jobs if the buildings are re-used rather than replaced. They were well built, and will stand for many years to come if they are imaginatively adapted for contemporary use.

If these buildings disappear the City will have lost a great opportunity to be a leader in the adaptive re-use of a large piece of our remaining built heritage. We hope very much that any RFPs will have a clause attached stating that these buildings **must** be retained and restored to be part of any future development.

It is our understanding that the London Advisory Committee for Heritage (the committee that advises Council on built heritage matters!) has recommended these buildings be retained. We heartily endorse their recommendation, and urge PEC to accept LACH’s advice.

Thank you for your consideration,

Yours sincerely,

Susan Bentley

Susan Bentley (Mrs.)
Chair: Heritage London Foundation