



**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 public participation meeting at City Hall Monday March 2<sup>nd</sup>  
regarding the South Street and Hill Street hospital buildings

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

Thank you for the chance to participate in Monday's meeting. I was one of the lucky ones able to remain long into the evening. Sadly, at least three of my HLF colleagues who would have liked to address you had to leave because of time constraints. It was obvious to me that many others could not return either. You therefore received much less input from the public than would have been available to you had we been able to speak earlier in the evening.

Since then I have been mulling over all that took place, and am gratified to realize that there was little appetite amongst the committee members to demolish **any** building. I was also gratified to see many other Council members present to observe. I still hold out hope that sanity will prevail and that you will, with a unanimous voice, vote to save at least the three buildings in the City's control, and perhaps even reach an agreement with the hospital that the Medical Services Building should be turned over to the City rather than demolished.

This will be a long letter I am afraid, but here is much to be said, so I crave your patience.

I would first like to address a matter that came up on Monday night which worries me considerably, and that is the matter of the phantom financing from the Province. We would like to see a member of staff, or even the Mayor if more appropriate, ask the Province if this money has to be given **only for demolitions**. **Someone** needs to be tasked with asking this question, and I am amazed that the Committee did not request that this be done. It would be a complete travesty if we allowed any demolition to take place without that question having been asked of the Province at all.

Secondly, I would like to refer to John Fleming's "three circles" of what the defining principles governing your decision are to be, namely **Heritage, Culture/Social and Financial**.

You heard many arguments from members of the public about the importance of retaining the South Street buildings to anchor this area with a significant cultural streetscape that will give character and context to the newer portions of the neighbourhood. You also heard arguments about preserving them for their

historical associations such as the pioneering treatments offered at these institutions, as well as memorialization of certain individuals. These arguments indeed supported and emphasized both the heritage and cultural principles articulated above (circles 1 and 2.)

However, although it was well made by Alice Gibb and then by Cheri Macleod of the SOHO Community Association and expanded upon in her excellent short video, you may not have **heard** the argument as I did, for preserving these buildings for **financial** as well as for social reasons. If the City were to build services down the road to revitalize the SOHO neighbourhood, which it should, as a community needs more than roads to enable it to function well, it would need a library, a community centre/gymnasium, and so on. These *already exist* in two of the buildings now standing. It could save the City a fortune down the road if these buildings were to be re-used now.

In addition The City has a crying need for social housing as well as for affordable housing and the **nurses residence** would provide at a stroke, *many* rooms that would be suitable for step-up housing. It has a dining-room, it has a large kitchen and many washrooms, all making it suitable for a large number of people to reside in. Individual rooms would give people a sense of privacy and a place where they could keep their own belongings safe, a critical issue in persuading homeless people to take shelter.

I do encourage you to take to look at more than the initial financial doomsday scenario presented by Planning Staff and echoed by yourselves in your debate. Public /private partnerships, the use of service clubs, granting agencies such as the Trillium Foundation and other private trusts and foundations can all come into play to reduce the overall cost of preservation. One also needs to take into account what it cost to build these structures in the first place when calculating all the costs inherent in preservation versus demolition and rebuilding, in order to get a truer financial picture.

**The London Plan**, so happily embraced and promoted by our Mayor and by many of our new councillors as they sought office, needs to be referred to here. This is a PERFECT example of the kind of development proposed by the Plan that our young “millennial” population loves and would love to live in, namely a lively, walkable neighbourhood with a mix of old and new buildings, with places for live/work ventures, funky bare bones loft apartments etc.

We fully admit the carrying costs are indeed substantial, but the City does not need to be the developer/ builder of these buildings, so throwing out the notion that it will cost millions to renovate the buildings is a red herring. Council’s job, as we see it, is to seek out those developers who are sympathetic to these kinds of undertakings and who want to be recognized for their creative and environmentally sensitive and sustainable projects.

Thirdly, that the Hill Street buildings should even be considered as part of the proposed collection of buildings identified by Planning staff for demolition simply boggles the mind. That two perfectly functioning and occupied and **useful** buildings might even enter into this debate is not only preposterous but it is environmentally irresponsible. The fact that both have considerable architectural merit, as they do, just makes it worse. It was encouraging on Monday night to see

that at least two members of the committee picked up on this and found it worthy of further questioning.

As a city we have already allowed the destruction on a vast scale of many significant buildings in this area. The loss of the Elsie Perrin Williams wing of the old hospital is particularly galling for an organization (HLF) that exists, in part, to manage her old home, the Elsie Perrin Williams Estate. As you may know, Mrs. Williams left several million dollars to the City along with her house and land to enable the house to be used by the people of London. The City broke her Will by act of Provincial Parliament, then took most of the money and built the Elsie Perrin Williams Memorial Library and the Elsie Perrin Williams wing of the South St hospital. A good public use of that private money you might say, but the irony here is that one of the buildings was sold by the City and the other has been demolished. Great stewardship of the funds taken by force!

I would like to remind you that in writing to you last week as Chair of Heritage London Foundation, I invoked our mission statement, which says that our purpose is “To maintain, preserve and establish viable contemporary uses for heritage buildings in the City of London. On Monday I urged you to consider adaptive re-use as the governing principle of managing these heritage assets and I would like to do so again.

I repeat. 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 fervent wish that the promise Londoners embraced when they elected what seemed to many to be a bright and progressive Council with the imagination and courage to take London out of the destructive dark ages and into an age of creativity and flair for transformative policy, was not actually a false hope.

Please be daring and imaginative and use **what we already have in place** to transform the SoHo neighbourhood into a shining example of creative community building.

Thank you, once again, for your consideration,

**Susan Bentley**

Chair: Heritage London Foundation

cc. HLF Board

Mayor Matt Brown

Members of Council

John Fleming, Planning Department

