

To the London Advisory Committee on Heritage, meeting on May 9, 2018

Dear Members of LACH,

This letter is a follow-up to my report to the London Advisory Committee on Heritage at its meeting on April 11, 2018, **at which our community-based Fugitive Slave Chapel Preservation Project steering committee, now dissolved, requested designation for the historic fugitive slave chapel building because of its significant heritage value.** After close study of a subsequent public letter from the trustees of Beth Emanuel Church, we see the need to clarify several aspects of our report for the public record.

There has clearly been a problem in communications between the church and the community-led FSCPP during the period from April 24, 2015 to January 27, 2018, when our committee was dissolved without forewarning and in an undemocratic way contrary to good governance. This communications gap happened despite the fact that two trustees from Beth Emanuel Church were on the FSCPP steering committee. **I cannot stress enough that during this time meetings were open for anyone to attend, that agendas and minutes were sent to every participating person, and that there was open communication and dialogue among those who attended.** As soon as other pastors started coming to meetings from time to time, they were welcomed and kept informed through agendas and minutes. The Rev. Dr. Chester Searles, head of the BMEC Conference in Toronto, was sent all agendas, minutes and reports.

It should be clarified that the FSCPP steering committee is not an arm of the London Advisory Committee on Heritage (LACH), a volunteer advisory committee for the city. We applied to LACH for the opportunity to bring, for the public record, a committee report of our accomplishments up until the time of dissolution.

In response to specific reasons stated by Beth Emanuel Trustees for dissolving the community-led FSCPP steering committee:

1) **The 'neglect of the chapel' by not replacing the tarpaulin sooner.** The need to have it re-tarped and the delegation of responsibility to Nancy Tausky was recorded in minutes of FSCPP meetings starting in October 16, 2017, again in November 8, 2017 (at a meeting with Rev. Dr. Searles), on November 12 when a motion was made and passed that 'a new tarp be obtained and installed with the cost not to exceed \$5,000.00.' Through this period, there were questions regarding whether access to the property would be granted for the installation of new tarps. In the FSCPP meeting of January 9, 2018, Nancy Tausky reported that a company in Seaforth had been engaged to install a high-grade tarp, as recommended by heritage architect John Rutledge. This was delayed by the heavy snow and extreme cold which, in any event, reduced the chance of more damage to the Chapel as a result of dampness and rot. The tarp replacement was rescheduled for the week following the church's wrapping; however the church trustees took action despite their knowledge that this installation had been arranged.

2) **The need for some separation of the FSCPP committee from the church** during the restoration and construction phase of the project, as well as for fund raising purposes, has been questioned. For more than a year, a draft document, submitted by the community-led FSCPP for establishing roles, responsibilities and trust between the church and the committee went unanswered by the church trustees. **As proposed, this memorandum of understanding would be in effect through the restoration/construction part of the project, and would protect both the property owner and the project management body, i.e. both parties to the contract.** This draft agreement was an adaptation of a tested agreement around the historic Old St. Thomas Church in St. Thomas, Ontario between a governance body (managing the property) and a church (owner of the property). It was a workable document, created with much effort and legal advice, and tested over time. Thanks to Joe O'Neil's efforts, we were extremely fortunate that they would share this with us.

3. **Bank Accounts.** The decision by the committee to move the FSCPP account to a separate bank was the result of the bank's one-time misplacement of funds at a TD Canada Trust branch where separate accounts were held for the church and the FSCPP. The bank arbitrarily went into the FSCPP Bank account, without prior authorization, to deal with insufficient funds in the Beth Emanuel BME Church account to cover an outstanding cheque that was deposited. Once this was brought to our attention we were alarmed, as we had a fiduciary responsibility to the public that had donated to this preservation project. **The need for a new FSCPP account in a different bank was referenced in the minutes of June 13, 2016. A new FSCPP account at Libro was opened in the summer of 2016, an action reported in the minutes of August, 2016.** Signatories were Genet Hodder, Norm Steele, and Elizabeth Kolevnischenko, treasurer of both Beth Emanuel Church and the FSCPP at the time. This action was taken with full knowledge of the church trustees.

Our committee has always acknowledged the significant relationship between Beth Emanuel Church and the Fugitive Slave Chapel. We have been respectful of the chapel's history and have worked with passion and dedication toward the goal of restoring and repurposing, for the greater community, this treasured building as a learning centre about slavery, the Underground Railroad, and London's Black history.

We would be more than happy to meet with the Board of Trustees under the guidance of an independent and mutually agreed upon mediator.

With sincere regards,

Genet Hodder
Former FSCPP chair
April 27, 2018

On behalf of former committee members: Joseph O'Neil, Carolyn Cameron, Nancy Tausky, Hilary Neary, Ariel Webster, Norman Steele, Maggie Whalley, and Janet Hunten