

288 St. James Street
London, Ontario N6A 1X3

City of London
300 Dufferin Avenue
London, Ontario

RE: Proposal for 40-Storey Building on Ridout St.

To the Mayor and Members of the London City Council:

I am writing to urge you to reject the application by Fahri Holding Corporation to erect a high rise behind the existing historic buildings at 435-451 Ridout Street North. There seemed to be a conviction among most members of PEC, on May 31, that intensification should occur here at all costs, in keeping with the ideals of *The London Plan*. I am arguing that the cost is much too high, especially since *The London Plan* also advocates the retention of and respect for London's heritage.

The subject buildings at 435-451 Ridout Street are part of a larger group of historic structures along Ridout Street that together represent the founding of London and the formation of the early town. the Court House, designed as the administrative centre for all of Canada (in Gov. Simcoe's initial plans for London as the country's capital), London's first bank at Ridout Street, and the home of one of its earliest and most prominent artists, James Hamilton; a row of fine townhouses that housed a variety of businesses before eventually becoming known as Banker's Row; the home at Ridout St. of the town's most prominent early doctor; and, finally, Eldon House, the oldest standing residence in London, built for John Harris, Treasurer of the London District, and long the centre of the city's social life. While these buildings complement each other in style, they are each architecturally distinctive, illustrating different aspects of late Georgian and Neoclassical form.

Also important is the fact that each of these buildings has an integral relationship with the River immediately below them. Gov. Lieut. Simcoe seized on this site for his new town on maps even before arriving in Canada, because of the convergence of the rivers and the then need for river transportation. His wife chose the site where Eldon House was eventually built as the site for her new home, with its fine, elevated view of the Forks. James Hamilton used his home and other sites along the Thames as the base for wonderful paintings of early London. Ridout became London's main street because the earliest route across the Thames was at Blackfriars Bridge. Meanwhile, from the late nineteenth century on, the landscape below these buildings increasingly became a centre for public enjoyment, early horse races. the Sulphur Spring, picnic grounds, river trails, boat houses, what is now the the world's oldest baseball diamond in continuous use, and, increasingly, a series of well-attended festivals.

Together, and with their riverside setting, these buildings constitute what is undoubtedly London's most important historic complex – one that has been recognized not only by London through designation of the individual structures under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, but also at higher government levels. The Court House and the buildings at 435 to 451 Ridout Street have been designated as National Historic Sites; Eldon House has Provincial recognition. The value of Eldon House and the buildings between 435 and 451 Ridout Street will be greatly diminished in appearance by a towering 40-storey structure that looms over them like a giant playing with toy blocks, whether it has somewhat complementary podium or not, and the connection between the buildings and the river will be broken by the ponderous visual obstacle between them. The Downtown HCD Plan acknowledges the importance of important views and vistas: "Protect the foregrounds, backgrounds and frames of these views and vistas from incongruent elements such as buildings . . . that may impact the setting" (6.2.7).

It is important that the rare complex of early building along Ridout Street, important to the City, the Province, and the Nation, retain their scale, their relationship with each other, and their relationship with the river. We were told at the PEC meeting that Mr. Fahri wanted to make the proposed high rise his legacy. Mr. Fahri's legacy should not come at the cost of the more important legacies of London's founders and of John Labatt Ltd., which undertook the former restoration of the subject buildings. Mr Fahri has shown that he can restore buildings very sensitively at, for example, Idylwyld. Why not display the same sensitivity with these structures, elaborating on the legacies they already represent rather than imposing a new legacy that undermines those bequeathed before?

Thank you for considering this long letter, its length reflecting its complex subject.

Sincerely,

Nancy Tausky