

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

August 7, 2003

To: Toronto Preservation Board
Toronto East York Community Council

From: Joe Halstead, Commissioner Economic Development, Culture and Tourism

Subject: 56 Queen Street East and 51 Bond Street - Metropolitan United Church
Authority to Enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement
Toronto Centre-Rosedale- Ward 27

Purpose:

To obtain Council authority to enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement to provide for the permanent protection of the heritage buildings known as Metropolitan United Church and Parsonage, 56 Queen Street East and 51 Bond Street.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement :

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations :

It is recommended that:

- (1) the owner enter into and register a Heritage Easement Agreement for the Metropolitan United Church and Parsonage with the City prior to the introduction of Bills in Council;
- (2) the owner provide Heritage Preservation Services with two (2) copies of the required photographs for inclusion in the Heritage Easement Agreement;
- (3) the owner provide a condition assessment and a Conservation Strategy that describes the overall approach to the heritage features prior to Site Plan Approval and a detailed Conservation Plan that specifies the details of the Conservation Strategy for the existing church and parsonage buildings prior to the issuance of a building permit, all to the satisfaction of the Manager, Heritage Preservation Services;

- (4) the owner provide financial security in an amount and form satisfactory to the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, to implement the Conservation Strategy, prior to the issuance of any building permit;
- (5) the owner enter into an agreement with the City of Toronto under Section 37 of the *Planning Act*, before the introduction of Bills in Council, to the effect that, prior to the approval of a Site Plan, all elements of exterior architectural treatment, including but not limited to finishes, materials and colours on the building to be constructed on site will be subject to the approval of the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism;
- (6) authority be granted by City Council for the execution of a Heritage Easement Agreement under Section 37 of the *Ontario Heritage Act* with the owner of 56 Queen Street East and 51 Bond Street (Metropolitan United Church and Parsonage) using substantially the form of easement agreement prepared in February 1987 by the City Solicitor and on file with the City Clerk, subject to such amendments as may be deemed necessary by the City Solicitor in consultation with the Manager, Heritage Preservation Services; and
- (7) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

The site fills the city block bounded by Queen Street East, Bond Street, Shuter Street and Church Street (Attachment No. 1). It includes the Metropolitan United Church, Parsonage and Community House (Attachment No. 2).

Metropolitan Methodist Church, known as Metropolitan United Church since 1925, was originally built in 1870-1872 according to the designs of the notable Toronto architect, Henry Langley. In 1905-1906, the architectural firm of Curry, Sproatt and Rolph designed the Parsonage, located at the north end of the church precinct. Following a fire in 1928 that nearly destroyed the church, it was rebuilt from the plans of architect J. Gibb Morton that preserved much of the original south façade and tower. At the same time, Morton designed the Community House, attached to the east end of the Parsonage.

Metropolitan United Church is an important example of Gothic Revival styling. Complemented by the neighbouring Parsonage and Community House, Metropolitan United Church is a landmark in the City of Toronto. These buildings have been listed on the City's Inventory of Heritage Buildings since 1973.

In 2002, Lancer Metropolitan Corporation, on behalf of Metropolitan United Church, submitted an application (TE CMB 2002 0020) to the City of Toronto to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law. The applicant proposes to construct a 36 storey, 112 metre tower containing 340 residential units, commercial space and 815 underground parking spaces with frontages on Shuter Street and Church Street. This building would be to the north of the existing

Metropolitan United Church (Attachment No.3). The new building would occupy the current site of the Parsonage and the Community House, also listed structures. The project would involve the demolition of the Community House and the move of the Parsonage to a different location on site.

This proposal is the product of years of discussion between the church and City staff, both before and after the submission of the formal planning applications. These discussions have included such topics as density transfers, location and amount of underground parking to be provided, the inclusion of commercial parking, height, bulk and location of proposed new buildings. Staff of the Culture Division have been involved in these discussions from the beginning.

The current planning application is for an Official Plan Amendment and Zone Change. As such, Council is being asked at this time to consider matters of concern from a heritage preservation perspective, such as height, density, setbacks, and underground parking accesses. The inherent demolition of the Community Hall and move of the Parsonage are also significant impacts on the heritage resources of the site.

No application for site plan approval has yet been filed. A further report will be made regarding the detailed restoration, architectural and landscaping plans once the site plan application has been reviewed.

Comments:

The Metropolitan United Church is a landmark of national significance and has been a familiar structure to generations of Torontonians, both as an active place of worship and a distinctive building in a prominent downtown location. Although the proposed development will not affect the fabric of the existing church building, it will significantly alter the setting of the historic church and its grounds. Views of the building will be affected, in that it will not be visible from the north and will be superimposed upon the backdrop of the new structure from the south (Attachment 3). In addition, the Community Hall will be demolished and the Parsonage moved, thereby altering the historic relationship of these buildings to each other and the surrounding neighbourhood. For all of these reasons, it is appropriate to comment upon the project from a heritage conservation perspective.

Culture Division staff have been involved in the negotiations surrounding this proposal from the beginning. Two heritage architects were added to the applicant's team to assist with preservation and conservation issues. The Church also has engaged a heritage architect who is working with Culture Division staff on renovations to the Church.

To address concerns expressed by City staff and neighbouring residents regarding height and density, Urban Design and City Planning staff hosted a design charette in March 2003. The charette was convened as a way solving complex design and planning issues, especially in areas subject to development pressures such as this one. Heritage Preservation Service staff were involved in the charette.

The original design of the development included two towers (30 and 19 storeys) with the lower building overlapping the back wall of the church along Church Street. There were concerns that this proposal overcrowded the heritage buildings. The design charette was particularly mindful of the historic nature of the Bond Street streetscape and the view of the building from Queen Street East. As laid out in the Shuter Street Design Initiative Report, three major recommendations came out of the charette:

- Introduce a continuous east-west lane at the northern edge of the church to delineate the development site from the church site. This would maintain the historic concept of the church located within a park setting;
- Relocate the historic parsonage to the south of the east-west lane and reinforce the campus-like atmosphere around the church; and
- Develop a single point tower located centrally on axis with the church with a four storey podium to complete the Shuter Street (north) elevation.

All of these suggestions were subsequently incorporated into the revised plan submitted by the applicant, which is the subject of the Official Plan Amendment and rezoning applications.

Considerable progress has been made, as well, on mitigating the negative impacts of the location of the underground parking access ramps. One ramp from Bond Street located to the west of the church, just to the rear of the front wall, will impact negatively upon the landscaping and heritage streetscaping in this area. The applicant submits that, for operational reasons, the ramp cannot be moved any further to the north. It is a significant improvement over the existing degraded surface parking lot in this area and it will be possible to design the elevator pavilion and ramp in such a way as to mitigate the impact.

Due to the large amount of open space surrounding the heritage buildings on the east, south and west, considerable attention has been paid to landscaping. The era in the church's life that the landscaping should reflect is currently under consideration with input from the applicant's landscape architect, the heritage architects involved in the project and City staff. These matters will be resolved at the site plan approval stage.

The design charette addressed the massing, height and placement of the new building in order to mitigate its impact on the heritage buildings. Culture Division staff are of the opinion that additional controls are needed regarding all elements of exterior architectural treatment, including finishes, materials and colours on the building to be constructed in order to ensure the new building provides a sympathetic context for the heritage buildings.

For these reasons, staff recommends that the applicant agree, through an agreement under Section 37 of the *Planning Act*, to satisfy the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, on matters of "elevation control" matters, as detailed above, which are not generally part of the planning approval process. Section 37 of the *Planning Act* is suggested as the tool to secure this agreement, as the *Planning Act* allows applicants to provide public benefits in return for increased height and density.

Heritage Easement Agreement and Conservation Strategy

The applicant has agreed to execute and register on title a Heritage Easement Agreement for both the church and parsonage buildings. These agreements will permit the City to control alteration and demolition of the buildings to a greater extent than that provided by designation under the *Ontario Heritage Act*. Designation is not being pursued due to the applicant's agreement to provide a Heritage Easement Agreement and the church's tax-free status. It should be noted, however, that ultimately the parsonage will be part of the new development and will be managed and maintained by the corporation operating the new building. If any tax advantages arise through the proposed tax-incentive program the owner may wish to pursue designation for the parsonage at that time.

The Heritage Easement Agreements will cover heritage aspects on both the exterior and interior of the two buildings.

A Conservation Strategy and the financial security to enforce it are required, particularly for the parsonage, as it will be moved. A professional opinion has already been received that it is possible to move the parsonage. The structural integrity of the church may also be affected by the construction of underground parking.

Public Benefits

Metropolitan United Church currently runs or sponsors a number of outreach and social service programs for the local and wider community. It uses the facilities in the Community House and Parsonage for these purposes. The basement of the church building is basically unexcavated and not useable for such activities.

The current financial resources of the church do not permit the congregation to undertake much needed heritage restoration and maintenance work. Also beyond reach would be the remodelling of the church basement to accommodate the programs and facilities that will be lost when the Community Hall is demolished and the Parsonage is transferred to the development corporation.

Under Section 37 of the *Planning Act*, the applicant is proposing to make significant cash contributions to the church to be used for these purposes. The church has already identified a multi-year plan of ongoing renovation and restoration projects, including a significant amount of deferred maintenance that will be financed with these Section 37 contributions from the applicant. With the Heritage Easement Agreement in place, the City will be involved in reviewing any projects that affect the identified heritage features of the buildings.

Conclusions:

A major development is proposed for the Metropolitan United Church site that will have an impact on the heritage resources of this nationally significant and listed site. The context of the church building and the historic streetscapes in the area will be altered. The Community House, also a listed building, will be demolished and the Parsonage moved.

The design charette convened to address the impacts of the proposed building reported, with the participation of Culture Division staff, a number of recommendations that would have the effect of mitigating the negative impacts of the building. These recommendations have been incorporated into the revised plans. With the added protection of “elevation control” as a public benefit under Section 37 of the *Planning Act* and finalization of landscaping and other design details through a future site plan approval process, Culture Division staff are of the opinion that the project can be realized in such a way that an intolerable level of negative impact on the heritage resources of the site will not be created.

The recommended Conservation Strategy and financial assurances are necessary to ensure the heritage buildings are not damaged during construction. Heritage Easement Agreements have been agreed to by the applicant to provide permanent protection to the remaining heritage buildings, including demolition control.

Although the site will suffer through the loss of the Community House and the relocation of the Parsonage, the public benefits that will flow to the church to restore, maintain and renovate its important heritage buildings are a compensation.

Culture staff do not object to the Official Plan and Zone Change applications provided that all the recommendations listed above are included as conditions of approval.

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List of Attachments:

Attachment No. 1 – Location Map
Attachment No. 2 – Photographs
Attachment No. 3 - Applicant’s Proposal