

Knox United Church Heritage Designation Bylaw No 8232 Amendment
To be Considered at Planning, Development and Community Services Standing
Committee

Tuesday December 8th 2020

Submission by Peggy Sarjeant on behalf of the Saskatoon Heritage Society

The site under consideration for subdivision is one of the most sensitive sites in Saskatoon from an architectural, heritage and cultural perspective. Any development will have an impact, not only on the two historic churches abutting the site and on their cultural setting, but also on the pedestrian experience along Spadina Crescent. It will set a precedent for development along the Spadina corridor.

Although any development should be considered in this wider context, we shall restrict our remarks to the narrower focus of the proposed Bylaw amendment.

Agreement to this Bylaw Amendment will clear the way for the proposed development to go ahead, provided zoning requirements are met. It is impossible, therefore, to regard subdivision of the property as a mere technicality and separate it from consideration of the development itself. There is tacit acknowledgment of this fact in the City's report.

Let's be clear, the Saskatoon Heritage Society is not opposed to development on this site. We recognize the financial needs of the Knox congregation and we recognize the City's desire for increased residential density downtown. The Society's concerns lie in the placement of the tower on the site, its relationship to the two heritage churches and in how this massive structure fits within the site. Surely, a building with a smaller footprint would be more appropriate. It would remove the sense of overcrowding which is very evident with the current proposal.

We disagree with both the City and the developer in their assertion that there would be no impact on the heritage value of Knox United Church and St John's Cathedral. It is stated quite clearly in the designation Bylaws and elsewhere that a key heritage value lies in the churches' significance as Saskatoon landmarks. The proposed tower would overwhelm and diminish the status of both buildings. The impact would be the greater on Knox Church whose south façade would be significantly obscured by the tower and its south - facing stained glass window, one of its character-defining elements, unable to be appreciated.

We are still worried about the proximity of the proposed development to the walls and foundation of Knox, despite the developer's verbal assurance that there shouldn't be a problem. Other concerns relate to our winter climate. The shadow from the tower will fall over the south side of the church roof – this can be seen in the renderings provided by the

developer. Will this lead to ice-damming in the winter? Will lack of winter sunlight lead to freeze-thaw within the masonry assemblies of the church? Will the change of airflow, brought about by such a tall structure, lead to snow build - up between the two buildings?

The Heritage Society is calling for a development that respects and complements Knox United Church and St John's Cathedral. Toronto has implemented *Tall Building Design Guidelines*, which it would be useful to consider. (<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/96ea-cityplanning-tall-buildings-may2013-final-AODA.pdf>)

Principles include:

- *promote harmonious fit and compatibility with the existing and planned context, emphasizing relationships to lower-scale buildings, parks and open space;*
- *conserve and integrate adjacent and on-site heritage properties so that new tall buildings are sympathetic to, and compatible with, the heritage property;*

In more detail, the guidelines state that when a tall building abuts a heritage property, it must

“respect and complement the scale, character, form and setting of on-site and adjacent properties”.

Toronto also uses extensive public consultation when sensitive sites with an impact on the public realm are involved.

Unfortunately, Saskatoon has no such guidelines but does have a Heritage Policy in which it states that the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* must be followed when assessing interventions on heritage sites – and we need to remember that the Knox Church property is a heritage site. The Standards talk about visual relationships and context and the need to ensure that new construction does not have a negative impact on character defining materials and forms. We would suggest that, in this instance, the *Standards and Guidelines* are not being followed.

The proposed development will have a huge impact on much loved heritage buildings and also on the ambience of the public realm. It is causing much controversy and heartache. Sadly, there was no public engagement process which could have helped guide the development in its early stages. It is not too late, however, to bring the parties together to voice their concerns and to discuss other options and opportunities for the site. The City, in its Civic Heritage Policy, has already suggested this approach to resolve difficult situations, when looking at heritage landscapes. Section 4.6 (c) of the Policy states that “The City will work to achieve a balance between competing needs ... The City will involve other interested parties in the process ... “.

- **In a spirit of cooperation, we request that the City convene a meeting of interested parties at the earliest opportunity and a minimum of six weeks prior to the Bylaw Amendment being brought before City Council, thereby allowing time for additional discussion**

With open minds and some creative thinking, we believe that a development is possible that will be more sensitive to the two heritage churches and their cultural setting and will not overcrowd Knox United Church, while, at the same time, contributing to the vitality of downtown and to the financial security of the church.

What happens on this site is of interest to a wide spectrum of the Saskatoon population and will set a pattern for the future. I am sure that we can all agree that we need to get it right.