

## Walter, Penny

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**Subject:** FW: Email - Communication - Norma Klassen - Knox United Church Heritage Designation Bylaw - File CK 710-49

Submitted on Tuesday, December 8, 2020 - 00:57

Submitted values are:

Date Tuesday, December 08, 2020

To His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

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Name of the organization or agency you are representing (if applicable)

Subject Opinion on Knox United Church Heritage Designation Bylaw

Meeting (if known) Dec 8, Plannin, Development and Community Service Committee Meeting

Comments

I am very concerned about the recommendation to amend the heritage designation of Knox United Church to enable the subdivision of the lot and clear the way for the proposed Knox Tower Development.

First of all, I want to make clear that I am sympathetic to the financial needs of the church and am very much in favour of development based on partnerships that benefit everyone. The long-term, mutually-beneficial relationship that the developer, Meridian, has established with the Knox Church community is commendable. A very interesting building, acceptable to both parties, has been proposed on what has been shown to be a particular difficult site. The City's recent Approval Report states that, "The proposed preliminary design would not impact the character defining elements outlined in the Heritage Designation Bylaws of either the Knox United Church or St John's Cathedral". However, many letters from the public express a different opinion, including a letter from St. John's Cathedral, which apparently had no prior knowledge of these development plans.

Please consider the following in your discussion and decision:

1) The proposed development does not appear to fit with the City's own Heritage Policy Plan  
The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, adopted by the City's Heritage Policy, contain a section relating to the importance of visual relationships in the cultural landscape, suggesting that historic designation includes "in context", not just the building. Direct quotes from the document include:  
- "Make the new work...subordinate to and distinguishable from the historic place",  
- "New construction must not obscure, readily change or have a negative impact on character-defining materials, forms, or spatial configurations".  
- Not recommended: "introducing a new feature that alters or obscures the visual relationships in the cultural landscape, such as constructing a new building as a focal point, when a character-defining vista was traditionally terminated by the sky".  
The Standards and Guidelines also refer to heritage value being embodied in not only physical attributes, but

also in cultural associations or meanings and in social or spiritual importance.

Saskatoon's City Heritage Policy states the City will look to current best practices of other places which have adopted the above Standards and Guidelines.

-Toronto's revised Official Heritage Plan (2015), added a section on adjacency, stating that "new construction on or adjacent to a property on the Heritage Register will be designed to protect the cultural heritage values, attributes and character of that property and to minimize visual and physical impact on it, including considerations such as scale, massing, materials, height, building orientation and location relative to the heritage property."

- Ontario's Heritage Places of Worship - A Guide to Conserving Heritage Places of Worship in Ontario Communities, states that if a property owner proposes to subdivide a heritage property for development purposes, key considerations should include: "Visual impact of the proposed subdivision and development on the heritage place of worship (e.g., setbacks, size, height)" and "Impact on views and sight lines to the heritage place of worship from the street and neighbouring properties".

The proposed Knox Tower project is quite striking, visually attention-grabbing, and definitely would not be subordinate to the historic churches on either side. It would alter the visual relationship in the cultural landscape by becoming the focal point and replacing the prominent riverbank landmark value of Knox Church's "character-defining Gothic architecture" and St. John's "salient spire...the tallest church spire in western Canada". Numerous letters make mention of the discordant nature of the development between the historic elements of the two churches. They mention the negative impacts of the views and sight lines to both historic churches from the street and from neighbouring properties. As for the development's impact on the historic value of the churches as religious landmarks, one wonders about the tall, overpowering building of luxury "elitist" condos, that building that obtrusively divides the two churches - how does it reflect the spiritual and social importance of "harmony, community, and accessibility for all", no doubt intrinsic values common to the two churches who have peacefully existed for more than a hundred years.

Note that the Standards and Guidelines recommend always obtaining the advice of qualified conservation professionals and specialists early in the planning stage of a conservation project.

2) It appears to me that an approval at this time to amend the Heritage Designation of Knox Church for division of property to allow for Knox Tower development could have unwanted repercussions on the City's long term plan for downtown.

- It sets a precedent for a series of other tall developments along Spadina, possibly with vastly differing and incongruous styles, thus completely changing the atmosphere and character-defining elements of the section of Spadina between the Broadway and University Bridges. This section arguably deserves a Heritage Conservation District designation in recognition of its 9 listings in the Saskatoon Register of Historic Places.

-Tall buildings like the proposed Knox Tower might initially fit into the City's Downtown Plan by providing infill and density along Spadina, but overall they could well have the opposite affect on residential buildings further back from the river, which may have lost much of their sunlight and views and no longer would be seen as desirable places to live. One only needs to a) read online articles such as Ottercroft Ltd v Scandia Care Ltd, 2016, where a court upheld a mandatory injunction against a developer who infringed upon an enjoining owners right to light or b) spend some time on the perpetually darkened streets amid the towers of Manhattan to realize the importance of sunlight or the effects of not having it.

3) Characteristics of Saskatoon's Downtown Plan could be much more easily integrated if desirable features were carefully planned for certain locations, and proposed developments were rated according to their incorporation of those features.

- For example, the City Plan proposes improving the public space along Spadina with new public spaces, and that new landscape frontage standards "should reflect its important role in the City" with cafes and outdoor seating areas might be in the front yards, "while new landscape edges of the front yards will add greater

definition of public space and grandeur.” The location between the churches, for instance, if rezoned according to City Plan, could potentially be an ideal gathering place, a stopping point for pedestrians and cyclists along City-targeted pedestrian and biking improvement routes, both the one along Spadina and the one connecting the U of S to downtown via University Bridge and 23rd. As a gathering place, it would meet the historical social value of the churches adjacent to it. The gathering place could include outdoor tables, food and beverages, be a venue for chamber choirs, chamber orchestras, and other live performances. It would enhance the historic churches, drawing in more tourists and residents to examine the exterior features and enjoy their “experience”. Vertical surfaces that reflect the historic features and “urban terraced forests” on the west side of the lot could house the shops, further enhancing the experience. The City’s plans for sustainability, green development, winter use, etc. could be incorporated.

- Issues like parking, if not left strictly to developers, arguable have the potential to better fit with the City’s Downtown Plan and be more serviceable by a greater number of residents.

- Planning involving the City, both Churches, the Historical Society, the Developer, community “fund-raisers” and other interested residents, while more cumbersome in the making, has the potential to lead to a more creative, acceptable development.

In conclusion, I am requesting that the recommendation to amend the Heritage Designation of Knox Church be paused until a consultation process as outlined in the City’s Heritage Policy, takes place, keeping to the fore:

- the needs of all parties involved,
- the Standard and Guidelines of Historic Places in Canada and the interpretation of these standards through best practices from other cities
- the City’s overall vision and plan for downtown Saskatoon.

Perhaps these steps will ensure that:

- Saskatoon does not make the mistakes regarding historic properties that have been regretted by some other cities,
- Saskatoon, as expressed in its Vision Statement of the City Centre Plan, “continues to be a leader in Canada for quality of life and sustainable planning, and
- Saskatoon continues to grow in the minds of residents and tourists alike as the “Paris of the Prairies”.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinions.

Sincerely,

Norma Klassen