

**MEMO**

TO: Toronto and East York Community Council  
FOR: Meeting of April 14, 2015, Committee Room 1  
c/o Ulli S. Watkiss, City Clerk  
FROM: Rev. Lynn J. Marsh, Pastor, Danforth Church  
DATE: April 13, 2015  
RE: **Item TES.18 Intention To Designate 285-297 Danforth Ave.**

***Introduction***

The purpose of this memo is to address the issue of the City potentially designating our property at 285-297 Danforth Ave. (also known as 60 Bowden St.) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act and Inclusion on the Heritage Register. We believe this will be a retrograde step that will prevent us from carrying out our mission of service to the neighbourhood and will probably result in the Church closing down permanently. We understand the matter of the designation is being brought before The Toronto And East York Community Council. We would respectfully request that the Council not accept the recommendation of the Preservation Board.

***Background:***

Danforth Church has had a presence in the neighbourhood for over 80 years. Over that time, many of the church's activities have evolved, but in every situation we believe we are called to be living witnesses to Christ. At the present time, although our worship community is relatively small by historical standards, it is vibrant. We also carry out a thriving community Suppers program throughout the year, a program that brings together people of many backgrounds, faiths and housing and income groups. In addition, we make our space available to other organizations providing services to the neighbourhood. These include: head office and Riverdale program location for Sportplay, providing multi-sports activities and camps for kids year round; Dancing with Carolyn (ballet for kids age 1-10); Shawn's Archery (several classes a week); Club Milonga Tango classes; Dance Cafe ballroom dancing; and often hosting various other organizations holding children's, arts, and recreational programming.

***Condition of Building***

Over the past 10 years, we have consulted with architects, engineers and developers about what could be done to preserve the building. Among the architects we met with were John van Nostrand and Joe Lobko. Both of them concluded it would be prohibitively expensive to renovate the building to meet reasonable standards of accessibility and energy efficiency.

In 2006, we commissioned Yolles engineering firm to carry out an investigation of the medium-term cost of repairing the building. Not including code issues regarding fire-separating the furnace area from the rest of the building, the sum of money involved in their report was beyond our means. Over the ensuing years, the condition of the building has worsened since we have not been able to do much of the basic maintenance work to prevent further deterioration.

## ***Discussion with Options for Homes, the Private Sector and with Others***

At that time, we also held discussions with Mike Labbé of Options for Homes regarding redeveloping the site as affordable housing. His conclusion was that, given the small size of the site, Options could not build enough units to be able to afford to pay the Church a purchase price sufficient for its needs.

We also have explored converting the space to other uses that could allow for retention of much of the building. These included an exploration with Tonya Surman of Centre of Social Innovation about the possibility of establishing a “CSI-Danforth” location. Unfortunately, she deemed the site too small. We also explored the possibility of adapting our worship space to make it more suitable for dance, theatre or music performances. Again we were stymied by a number of factors, including the acoustical properties of the space and the prohibitive cost of making both any performance hall and associated washrooms accessible. At that point, we reluctantly turned to the private sector.

In 2012, we signed a conditional purchase and sale agreement with Lancer Developments, a small private developer with experience with development of housing in both the non-profit (including churches) and the condo markets. Unfortunately, Lancer was not able to raise sufficient funds to close the deal.

## ***Current Proposal from Developer***

We have a conditional agreement of purchase and sale with a developer named Joe Santos, whose earlier projects included conversion of a church space near High Park into residential. Under the terms of this agreement, Joe and his partners would purchase the property and build a mixed-use development that would include approx. 12,000 sq. ft. of worship and community space for the church, approximately 62 units of condo housing and some retail space on the ground floor.

## ***Preliminary Design***

Under this proposal, the church’s space would be on the second floor, and we would basically occupy that entire floor in the new building. The worship space would be accessible by an elevator, and would work efficiently with our community/meeting space. There would also be ample space for hosting other community-based activities.

The architect hired by the developer is mindful of the guidelines for mid-rise buildings on main streets and also for buildings with laneways at the rear. There would be retail space on the ground floor to promote everyday interaction between the building and the street. Also, through designing some ground-floor units on the east side as a more town-house style, there would also be a meaningful transition down the Bowden St. side of the property from retail at the front to the full residential uses in the neighborhood south of the laneway. Parking would be underground and there would be ample bicycle parking for both residents and visitors.

## ***Affordable Units***

We have discussed with the developer the possibility of his making some units affordable. He indicated he was planning that at least 10% of the units (i.e. six) would be affordable. We understand the Provincial affordability guidelines that the City uses for purchasers to be eligible for assistance is that the units can be no higher than the average sale price for similar units in the City and that the price would be affordable for a household with an annual income of no more than approx. \$85,000 a year. Although we do not anticipate the City will be able to free up any

assistance money for this project, our intention is to work with the developer to encourage him to do better than the minimum target. If some assistance should become available, this would improve affordability.

### ***Concern about Historical Designation***

As we understand it, the current proposal for historical designation would mean we would not be able to use the site for our intended future service to the community. It would be impossible to save the building envelope, and the existing stairwells are not located in any positions that would allow them to be incorporated into any new building.

We understand the City places great value on preserving artifacts of our history and culture. However, we believe the insistence on preserving this particular vision clashes with our own values as Christians. Jesus called on us to build the Kingdom not monuments to the past, a Kingdom that is all about people, community, and caring for the poor, rather than maintaining historical artifacts. He makes several references in scripture to the lesser importance of places of worship compared with the type of worship he wanted to see. We would hate to see our own cultural values of service and community involvement compromised by a rigid insistence that a particular building from a particular time in history override our current and future mission.

### ***Community Support***

We understand the matter of the designation is being brought before Community Council. We would respectfully request that the Council not accept the recommendation of the Preservation Board. Many of our neighbours have told us they'd actually like to see a new condo building on the Danforth. At the present time, as households in the streets nearby are looking to downsize, they have no place to go in the neighbourhood, so a new development at 60 Bowden would give them an attractive option. For this reason, we believe we could garner a lot of support, even apart from local support for our Wednesday Suppers outreach.

We would greatly value your assistance resolving this issue in a way that will allow us to continue to work and pray in the community.

Please call me at any time to discuss situation. My number is (416) 466-5658, you can email me at [ljmarsh@bellnet.ca](mailto:ljmarsh@bellnet.ca).

Thank you for your consideration of our request that 285-297 Danforth Ave. (60 Bowden St.) not be designated as historically significant nor listed on the Heritage Register.

Sincerely,

Rev. Lynn J. Marsh, Pastor  
Danforth Church  
60 Bowden St.  
Toronto, ON  
M4K 2X4