

I am writing to request to appear before City Council at its January 23rd meeting. Attached is the script of my presentation. My request is in response to the decision of City Council meeting of December 19, 2011:

ITEM #: MN11-12

SUBJECT: Councillor F. Clipsham: Prevent Demolition of Apartment Block at 1755 Hamilton Street

DECISION:

That the Administration prepare a report, for the next Council meeting, setting out the options available to prevent the demolition of the 46 unit apartment block at 1755 Hamilton Street.

My presentation to City Council will consist of the following:

- The Apartment Block (Black Building) at 1755 Hamilton Street was built by Henry Black, former alderman, mayor, head of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission and real estate developer. In November 2004 a large collection of documents recording the business and political career of Mr. Black surfaced. Among the papers found in the 'Black Block' were purchase orders, bank statements, ledger orders, income tax forms, employee time sheets, blueprints etc. Somewhat ironically given the current situation, copies of eviction notices from the 1920s to tenants of this building were also among these papers.
- Westland Ventures Ltd. currently owns this particular property having purchased it from the Henry Black estate. The property contains 46 units of affordable rental accommodations. For example, a one bedroom apartment in the building can cost \$420 per month in rent.
- Media reports indicate that that city inspectors have determined that the building is unsafe and will require \$150,000 in repairs.
- Westland's CEO Jack Sharp, of Calgary, opinions that in light of repairs it no longer makes sense to keep it standing. According to a Leader Post article of December 14, 2011, "He [Jack Sharp] added that it would cost more to try correct the building's deficiencies than would be feasible."
- However, financial assistance programming is available to address situations such as the one faced by Westland Ventures Ltd.
- City Council is familiar with this programming (see CM11-8, November 08, 2011 wherein it states "In August 2010, Council considered item MN 10-09 and resolved to have Administration bring forward a report on the Provinces housing initiatives).
- Funding is available from the Investment in Affordable Housing 2011-2014 Framework Agreement signed by the province and the federal government on September 06, 2011. The agreement contains provisions to provide financial assistance for multi-unit projects. Specifically, the Agreement contains the Rental Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program – Rental RRAP, which provides financial assistance to pay for mandatory repairs to self-contained units occupied by low-income tenants. The eligibility criteria applicable to the Black Building are:

- the property must be owned by a private entrepreneur.
- it is a rental unit occupied by tenants who are income at or below established thresholds where pre and post RRAP rents are below established levels for the local area.
- the property is at least five years old and lacks basic facilities or requires major repairs in at least one of the following areas: heating, structural, electrical, plumbing and fire safety.
- a legitimate landlord and tenant relationship exists. Rents being charged can be confirmed.
- eligible repairs include mandatory repairs required to address needed repairs to the structure and systems. The quality of repairs should extend the useful life of the dwelling for at least 15 years.

Assistance in the form of fully forgivable loans of up to 100 percent of the cost of eligible repairs. Maximum available is \$24,000 for unit, therefore allowing a maximum of \$1,104,000 (\$24,000 x 46 units) of potential funding available to bring the building up to city code, with the actual costs estimated at \$150,000.

- There are also other options that the city of Regina can pursue. If the landlord is not willing to make the repairs, in spite of the official reason given for the eviction of the building's current tenants, then the city need not simply accept that a landlord can do what they wish with their property and lose the building to the wrecking ball. The city can move forward in creating its own Rental Incentives Program.
- The housing continuum ranges from government subsidized housing including emergency shelters, transitional housing and social housing, to non-market housing including affordable rental housing and affordable home ownership to finally market housing including rental housing and home ownership. A positive role for the city is to become involved in the non-market housing section, an area where the private market does not become involved – affordable rental housing and affordable home ownership. Other municipalities are involved in providing non-market housing, such as the City of Calgary (creation of the Calgary Housing Company in 2001 which has 7,700 subsidized units) and other cities mandate that affordable housing. In 1998 the city of Vancouver passed a law stating that 20 percent of all major residential developments must be dedicated to affordable housing. Municipalities can only operate within the authority granted them by the province, and although the Municipal Government Act of Alberta prevents cities in the province prescribing affordable housing policies to private builders; nothing in the The Planning and Development Act, 2007 in Saskatchewan prohibits municipal involvement in affordable housing. Models in other municipalities are available, the need exists, and financial investments that don't impact property taxes (such as interest on city held investment vehicles) are available to create an affordable housing policy for the city of Regina.
- I would be remiss not to mention that the Housing – Conversion Repair Program (Rental Development Program to convert non-residential properties into rental units or bed units) is available to municipalities to develop affordable rental units for low-to-moderate income households.
- In light of the current recommendation by the Regina Planning Commission to accelerate the condominium conversion process and now the proposed approval of the demolition of

the Black Building, the city is moving from a position of neglect of the needs of low-to-moderate income renters to a policy that intensifies this population's hardship. We need to see a Planning Commission program that protects the extreme shortage of current affordable properties and a zoning approval process that requires developers to include affordable housing and affordable rental development in their proposals. City Council exists to serve the needs of all its citizens.

- Perhaps 1755 Hamilton Street provides the catalyst for the city to explore its options. Doing so would be consistent with the intent of the Regina Revitalization Initiative detailed in CR11-99, August 22, 2011 Vision Statement reference the RRI initiative. I quote, "This initiative will realize a generational opportunity to revitalize the heart of our city by converting industrial and underused lands into a vibrant and energetic residential, commercial and retail development."

