



DATE: 14 February 2023

RE: **POSITION PAPER:** Demolish Avon Crest or Repurpose it for the Environment?
TO: Mayor Martin Ritsma and Stratford City Council
Heritage Stratford
Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance

FROM: Save Avon Crest Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Huron Perth Health Alliance intends to demolish Avon Crest, Stratford's first hospital, and has issued a tender call to this effect. We propose that instead of demolition, the HPHA issue an RFP expressly aimed at retaining and repurposing Avon Crest as the centrepiece of the redevelopment of the five-acre site. This would achieve a win-win solution, preserving a landmark while burnishing HPHA's reputation for innovation and demonstrated commitment to the environment and the citizens of Stratford.

Today was the originally closing date for Tender T-435, requesting bids to demolish Avon Crest, but the deadline has been extended. Perhaps no firm was qualified, interested or brave enough to submit a bid – based on a 600-page specification (prepared with public health-care dollars) to demolish a building that holds significant heritage value to the community. A change.org petition shows that over 1,500 people think it should not be demolished.

The delay gives Stratford City Council time to reboot the process for heritage designation so that an application to demolish can be refused. Demolishing this building would be a waste of a building with outstanding heritage value, a threat to the environment caused by the waste being hauled to the landfill and a wasted opportunity for a repurposing that reflects community values.

There are 247,000 bricks in the original 1891 part of Avon Crest. The buff, locally-made masonry was specified by George Durand, the building's architect. Those 132-year-old bricks contain 131,100 kg. of embedded carbon, all of which will be released into the atmosphere if the building is demolished. Those old bricks are superior in quality to any newly-made bricks and are better left in place, rather than the costly process of dismantling, cleaning and storing them. Add to the bricks the other building materials - foundation stones, timber floor joists and rafters, lath and plaster, metal and glass - and then multiple that by three times for the rest of the building and there would be a staggering amount of material to be sent to the landfill.

There are just three elements to be salvaged in the tender specification: the ornamental fireplace surrounds, the "Stratford Hospital" sign and five pallets of yellow bricks.

In 2020 the City of Stratford declared a Climate Emergency and hired a Climate Change Program Manager. The Save Avon Crest Committee urges the City to direct her to assess the

environmental impact that the demolition of Avon Crest will have on the City of Stratford, the Avon River and the Upper Thames Valley watershed.

The HPHA is intent on having the building demolished, primarily for not wanting to maintain or consider its repurposing. Council and the public should know that the cost for demolition will be in the millions of dollars, all to be paid for with public health-care dollars. That includes the cost to remove hazardous materials before demolition. But, if the building was repurposed by a development partner, the hazmat removal costs would be borne by them.

The ad hoc Save Avon Crest committee opposes the loss of this building for three main reasons:

1. Heritage: Avon Crest is recognized as one of Stratford's most important buildings and a work of nationally significant hospital architecture.
2. Environment: There is conclusive evidence that demolishing the building will have a significantly negative environmental impact.
3. Wasted opportunity for urban and economic development: Stratford doesn't need another empty lot. Repurposing and redeveloping the Avon Crest site will allow HPHA to obtain revenues from additional healthcare facilities (or other uses).

Heritage:

Stratford's first hospital, has exceptional architectural, historical and contextual heritage values, as identified in an application for designation by Heritage Stratford last year (which the City opposed and "filed"). Since then we found evidence of its technological innovation in health care which the HPHA should celebrate. The land was sold by the City to the Stratford General Hospital Corp. in 1961 for \$1. The City still has an interest in the future of the land and building.

Environment:

The environmental consequences of demolition, let alone the benefits of repurposing, have not been explored by the building's custodian, the HPHA. Save Avon Crest challenges every argument the HPHA has put forward publicly which proffer the "need" for demolition. A new roof? No accessible access? These are shameful excuses from a public health agency, claimed to scare the public about demolition. The costs of the refurbishment work has already been tallied by the HPHA in a report, costs they never intended to carry out.

Wasted opportunity for urban and economic development:

There are examples around the world of examples of the repurposing of historic institutional buildings, but one need not look further than London where the original Victoria Hospital (1874) is being repurposed to add 685 housing units, including 416 affordable units. Stratford citizens are alarmed City Council is not equally imaginative, resourceful and farsighted for a building like Avon Crest to have a similar future. It needs a zoning amendment to allow for residential uses, something the Stratford should support - or even initiate.

Our Position Paper states reasons why the HPHA should think again before Avon Crest meets the wrecking ball. This would achieve a win-win solution, preserving a landmark while burnishing HPHA's reputation for innovation and demonstrated commitment to the environment and the citizens of Stratford. And avoid so much waste.

Respectfully submitted,

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