

Architectural Conservancy Ontario – Hamilton Region Branch

AUTUMN 2024 NEWSLETTER – YEAR - END REVIEW

December 19, 2024

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Gore Buildings

6:20AM, November 11 – Remembrance Day 2024: 24 and 28 King Street East facing Hamilton's Gore Park, collapse. Their neighbours, 22 and 18-20 King E, originally owned by Archibald and Thomas Kerr, by William Thomas, Architect, remain standing.

But, according to Steve Robichaud, Acting General Manager of Planning and Economic Development, quoted in the Hamilton Spectator: The walls of 22 King St. E were bowing, making the building 'no longer safe'. Another pending engineering report via Hughson Business Space Corporation consultants will suggest whether No. 18, another pre-Confederation building, must also come down.

November 12: the City of Hamilton issued a Statement on the Collapse which included:

Before this incident, the City was actively monitoring these properties to uphold safety and maintenance standards that follow the typical protocol when a building is vacant, including quarterly inspections. The City's Municipal Law Enforcement team (MLE) addresses property maintenance, and the Building Division oversees building code compliance. They have been conducting regular inspections to ensure compliance with property maintenance and building code requirements.

An Order to comply, from the Building Division, was issued on July 22, 2024, to the building owner to address specific concerns; however, compliance had not yet been achieved. Last week, the City initiated further enforcement actions to hold the property owner accountable to meet their obligations to maintain the safety and integrity of the building.

No mention of the Kerr buildings in the City's Statement but by November 19, both were demolished. Was the prompt destruction of works by one of Canada's (and England's) most eminent architects justified, by "bulging walls" in one building and a report provided by the buildings' owners regarding the other? Will we ever know? There was concern for public safety. November 10, one day before the collapse, the Hamilton Garrison Remembrance Day parade marched past the Gore buildings, on its way to the city's cenotaph. Two weeks earlier, on October 25, the local BIA hosted a "Halloween Spooktacular" with face-painting and a children's hay maze on Gore Park. But the November 11 collapse could have been no shock. Warnings that it might happen date back to at least April 2015, two years after the Gore buildings were vacated by their last tenants.

The struggle to prevent that outcome has been agonizing for all who defended them from the beginning, when the local conservation community, including ACO Hamilton, backed by a succession of ACO presidents, launched a defense that would be long dogged, punctuated by moments of hope, disappointment and ultimately – when the future of the buildings seemed assured - despair. Frustrating too, considering letters sent by ACO presidents to the province are not answered.

The Tivoli Theatre

The Tivoli Theatre was once one of the grandest theatres in Hamilton and has deteriorated beyond repair and must be demolished, says the developer/owner.

An "exhaustive assessment" by its heritage architect, structural engineer and environmental consultant, has determined that demolition is the only option for the vacant property.

Aventus Developments bought the Tivoli Theatre Auditorium — a designated heritage building — in 2022 along with the neighbouring **Centre Point Plaza, with plans to eventually erect three towers on the site.**

The developer has promised to create a museum of sorts in the lobby of the proposed tower that will feature artifacts and decorative moldings salvaged from the auditorium. The plan also discusses an architectural feature that would pay tribute to the Second Empire styling of the Tivoli.

The former Tivoli Theatre is in an awful condition and will be expensive to restore, but that doesn't mean it should be demolished, says a panel of heritage advocates.

Members of Hamilton's heritage permit review subcommittee voted against a developer's request to tear down the heritage building to make way for condos and an event space.

The building was first constructed in 1875 as a carriage factory between James Street North and Hughson Street North, then transformed into a theatre in 1908. It began showing motion pictures in 1924 and became known as the Tivoli.

It was considered one of seven grand theatres in Hamilton with its elliptical ceiling, decorative moulding and frieze, and colonnade with five round arches and statues.

The theatre was eventually closed in 1989 and passed through several different owners.

The heritage permit review subcommittee's recommendation will be considered by the heritage committee at an upcoming meeting. The Heritage committee will then pass its decision on to the planning committee.

City Council will have the final say.

2 Hatt Street, Dundas

The building at 2 Hatt Street is the oldest building in town, having been built by Richard Hatt II, considered the 'Father of Dundas' c.1805, at first as a general store, later as a blacksmith shop, a business, and even a private residence.

On the way to his fate in Queenston Heights at the onset of the War of 1812, Sir Isaac Brock and his regiment stopped and rested here briefly before continuing on to Niagara.

It was designated Dundas' first post office and the eighth in Upper Canada (Hamilton did not get one until 1825). Most recently, 2 Hatt was the home of the Cairn Gorm Art Gallery, but it has remained vacant and neglected since 2000.

Heritage designation has been pending since 2017.

Good News

Heritage designations were applied to an 1852 Hess Street building, the former Cannon Knitting Mills, and the Cummer House in Waterdown.

Earlier this fall, Hamilton City Council approved the staff and Heritage Committee recommendations on the final Melville Street Heritage Conservation District Study findings in Dundas and directed staff to proceed with preparing a Plan for the proposed District. Staff will be reaching out to affected property owners in the coming months with next steps in the heritage district designation process. The new Heritage District would abut the existing Cross-Melville Heritage District just to the east.

Doors Open 2025

A Committee has been formed to run Doors Open 2025. The theme this year will be "Old Buildings, New Lives". The event is sponsored by the City of Hamilton. It will take place on the weekend of May 3-4, 2025 between 10:00 am. and 4:00 pm.

If you would like to be a volunteer at this event, please let us know. If you would like us to consider a building that is 'adaptive reuse', we would like to hear from you.

Finally, if you know anyone who might like to sponsor this event, please let us know. doh2024@yahoo.com

Thank you for your continuing support.

**We appreciate your efforts in helping us to save historic buildings and places in the Hamilton region.
Our heritage buildings must not become history through demolition by neglect!**