

Resolution expected to go before town council Monday

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 tory of heritage artifacts the church council proposes will be retained.

The committee's decision to delay its recommendation wasn't made public until Friday morning; residents and the media were asked to leave the meeting after delegates finished, leaving the group — which includes Town staff, citizens and councillors Jan Mowbray and Paul Scherer — to discuss and make their recommendation behind closed doors.

The resolution is expected to go before town council Monday next week.

Delegate Judy Chartrand spoke representing the St. Paul's church council. She said the current church no longer meets the needs of attendees; it isn't multi-functional and presents barriers to accessibility. And while the 1890 sanctuary seats 500, only about 120 people generally attend Sunday services.

Members are tired of pouring resources into the old building, she said.

"If the problem with the roof is solved, next year it'll be something else."

It would cost \$2 million to fix the building's current issues, she said, and the congregation is tired of the constant fundraising for repairs.

"We must either move forward or move out," she said, adding the new building would incorporate heritage elements.

John Hurst, treasurer of the Halton Presbytery, to which St. Paul's belongs, said it fully supports the church's efforts to "revitalize itself."

"St. Paul's has to change in order to survive, in order to grow and in order to serve the community," he said.

Rounding out the pro-demolition delegates, mechanical engineer and church member Don Mahony spoke to "set the record straight" on the structure's current safety concerns, which he said include asbestos, falling tiles, electrical problems and — most importantly — a distressed roof.

"A heritage designation will affect the safety of our congregation," he told the committee.

Twice so far roof tiles have fallen outside the erected safety fence, he said.

"We cannot or will not put any more money into the (current) building," he said. "By designating this as a heritage building, you're issuing a demolition order for our congregation."

A preliminary concept drawing he showed of a new church alongside a nine-storey condominium drew snickers from some members of the audience, who seemed to think the condos dwarfed the church and any remaining heritage elements.

Nancy Cuttle spoke on behalf of the Preserving Milton's Heritage committee, which is made up of members of the Milton Historical Society and St. Paul's, as well as area neighbours.

She said all the options for the church haven't been considered and demolishing the church would go against the Town's Official Plan.

"Our religious and public buildings form

an integral part of our architectural heritage. As a community, we have to come to terms with the challenges facing owners of religious heritage buildings."

Tory Handford, a member of St. Paul's group Save The Sanctuary, said a recent engineers' assessment found although there are structural issues that need to be addressed, the church isn't unsafe.

"Is this heritage building savable? Yes," she said, adding it would take some money, but so would tearing it down.

St. Paul's member Laura Jeffrey said the old church should be saved for numerous reasons, including that it represents over a century's worth of service to the community

and that it has a big part to play in downtown Milton's look and feel.

She spoke about the craftsmanship that makes St. Paul's distinctive, including its blending of architectural styles, detailed masonry and brick cornices, the square bell-tower — unusual in a church of its type — and the 18-foot-diameter rose window.

As a singer and musician, Jeffrey added no new sound system could equal the warm acoustics of the current sanctuary. "A building that can withstand tornado, earthquake and now fire deserves to go on serving Milton for another 120 years."

Stephanie Hounsell can be reached at shounsell@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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