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July 5, 2023

The Very Rev. Doug Michael
Dean of Ontario
Rector Ontario
Box 475
Kingston, ON K7L 4W5

Re: Development Proposal at St. George's Cathedral

Dear Sir:

The Frontenac Heritage Foundation is a not-for-profit charitable organization dedicated to the preservation of structures and sites of cultural and historical interest across the Kingston region. The group was founded in 1972, and over the past year we celebrated our fiftieth year of advocacy work: holding educational events, providing input on various proposals and development applications, and recognizing significant renovations through our annual awards program. In particular, the Foundation makes efforts to protect our treasured architecturally significant downtown.

Nearly everything written about the historic core of the City of Kingston mentions the iconic presence of St. George's Cathedral which dates from 1825 and before. The board of the Frontenac Heritage Foundation considers it the pre-eminent church in our downtown. Much has been written about St. George's over the years by Dr. Jennifer McKendry, Donald Swainson, and others, so you are aware of the importance of the church in our city's midst. As one example, in his 1991 book 'St. George's Cathedral – Two Hundred Years of Community', Swainson commences the book with: "*The historical significance of St. George's Cathedral cannot be disputed. This venerable institution has not only been influential in the course of local Kingston history but also in the course of provincial, if not national, ecclesiastical and political history...*"

In March of this year, the FHF board was contacted about a Visioning Exercise that had been held in January about the future of St. George's. The details were sparse, but it appeared that new multi-storey construction was being contemplated on the property. No details were provided.

As an organization, we are aware of the dilemma that many churches find themselves in – decreasing congregations and therefore ever smaller funds to carry out the important work they do. In 2019, the FHF conducted a one-day session 'Re-Imagining Places of

Faith'. This was a fulsome gathering of faith groups, heritage and community organizations from across Eastern Ontario region who shared their experiences, creative solutions and hopes for churches in the future. People came away with the conviction to continue using our historic structures as places of faith, and where necessary, adapt the structures for more profitable means.

As we understand the situation, changes at the Church have resulted in a smaller congregation. This has led to the creation of a Property Redevelopment Committee (PRC) which would examine options for the Church. Funds have been allocated for hiring planning, heritage, and legal experts. To date, no pre-consultation has taken place with the Kingston Heritage Properties Committee or the Roundtable which the City has established to review preliminary development applications. We would strongly encourage the PRC to do so to obtain early commentary from City staff, Committee members and the general public on any proposals. Any alterations will also require the approval of the City and, we believe, the Ontario Heritage Trust.

And what can be permitted? On this point, our board is unclear. In our reading of the January 1981 Easement Agreement, there are protections for the exterior (limestone) facades of the buildings on the site, including both the Cathedral and the Church Hall. In addition, the easement protects the interior of the Cathedral. This leaves the interior of the (limestone) Church Hall, which has much potential for adaptive re-use. The open space adjoining the Hall is relatively small and appears also to be protected by the heritage easement.

The work of the Committee appears to be influenced by the work done in Ottawa at Christ Church Cathedral and in Toronto at the St. James Cathedral. We would caution against the use of such examples as precedents: Kingston has taken great pride in its cultural heritage since its early days, and it is challenging to find equitable comparisons. Our experience at hearings by the Ontario Land Tribunal is that proposals must stand on their own merit within their individual communities.

Again, and with great respect, we strongly encourage you to make this process open and transparent. Already we have heard from many community members who are concerned about plans to alter the St. George's Cathedral building complex.

Regards,



S. Bailey, President on behalf of the FHF board

cc. E. Fleming via email