

## **Chinese Christian Church of Ottawa:** 116 and 118 Empress Avenue Ottawa

The following is a brief summary of some of the major issues and possible solutions for the upgrading of the existing church facilities.

### **Proposed Concept for Church Upgrade and Expansion**

DRAFT: January 16, 2023

The church has been considering how the existing building(s) could be upgraded and expanded to better suit its needs. The current facility is quite dated and falls short of current building code and accessibility standards.

The church expressed a desire for the provision of larger and/or reorganization of spaces, but is also conscious of budget limitations and potential challenges in dealing with the City - primarily regarding parking and heritage status.

The associated concept plans primarily address existing shortcomings for providing life safety (specifically regarding fire exits), wheelchair accessibility to all floors, and the lack of gathering/fellowship space.

#### **Building Exits:**

The Ontario Building Code requires two fire-rated exits from each floor level to permit occupants to safely get out of the building in the event of an emergency (ex. fire). Furthermore, for a church (an "assembly occupancy") there can be no dead-end corridors. These exits must provide a fire-rated path directly to the exterior without passing through another floor space.

The basement of 116 Empress currently only has one. The small stair at the north-east corner does not conform for requirements of width, rise/run, headroom, guards, etc. Similarly, the main floor level only has one proper exit since the existing fire-escapes leave a large dead-end condition for almost half of the floor space. The existing stairs at the east end of the church only lead up to the floor above. The upper floor has a second exit via the existing fire-escape but still leaves some dead-end conditions at the stage stair areas.

The former residence at 118 Empress relies on the existing central stair and the fire-escapes at the rear for exiting. These stairs do not meet current requirements, but may be acceptable under Part 11 of the code ("grandfathered") which deals with existing/heritage buildings.

#### **Wheelchair Accessibility:**

The buildings do not currently provide accessibility for people in wheelchairs. Elderly people, or anyone with physical mobility challenges, experience difficulty navigating the various floor levels. Current regulations for new and renovated "places of assembly" require accessibility to all floor levels as well as the provision for washroom accommodations suitable for those with physical limitations.

#### **Gathering/Fellowship:**

For visitors to a church event there is no convenient lobby or sizable assembly space to gather before or after for welcoming, mingling or fellowship. The buildings are completely separated from each other and do not currently permit ease of circulation between two.

#### **Concept Description:**

Anticipating cost and approval challenges with the City, a new addition is proposed behind 118 Empress with a new at-grade entry between the two buildings. The proposed improvements include:

- Wheelchair access throughout: a new elevator, with front and rear access is proposed. This will connect all floors of both buildings - with the exception of the church basement which is accessed by a lift from the new construction.
- A new exit stair is provided at the rear of both buildings to eliminate the existing fire escapes and ensure safe exiting from all floors.
- A new Gathering/Fellowship space is provided in the rear yard of 118 Empress. Depending on the footprint size of this space, an exterior landscaped area is still achievable - especially if the existing garage is removed.
- A new Universal Washroom is provided by relocating the existing Men's basement level washroom.
- Additional minor renovations will be required to provide new openings through existing walls, and for new/modified corridors

### **Building Code:**

This concept development does not review, establish or address all Building Code shortcomings of the existing buildings. Nor does it guarantee what is illustrated satisfies all Code requirements. The renovation of two separate buildings plus a new construction between the two, will require a careful review of the Code, especially Part 11 (renovations) and will likely involve discussions with the city with respect to the extent of remedial work required. This may require special code considerations or compensating measures.

Mechanical and electrical systems should be reviewed in light of the proposed changes as well as new Code requirements. Upgrading of the existing mechanical system to provide fresh air, air-conditioning, ventilation, etc. will also greatly improve the air quality.

Connecting the two buildings (without constructing firewalls) essentially results in the combining of a three-storey building (the former house) with a two-storey + basement church building. Depending on the average existing grade relative to the lowest level ceiling, the church may end up being classified as a three-storey building. This may trigger the need to install sprinklers throughout.

### **Thoughts/Options:**

Below are comments and thoughts for consideration:

- Parking is an issue that will have to be discussed with the City. The church's best approach may be to state that the existing use has long been established, and propose the argument that the proposed building renovation/expansion does not increase the occupant load of the worship/classroom/office spaces, but rather simply provides a larger Lobby while facilitating wheelchair accessibility
- The heritage value of the buildings is also a potential issue. The concept as shown preserves both, but perhaps a better option may be to tear down the former house and replace it with an addition to the existing church with matching floor levels. This new addition has the potential for a better entry and improved floor plan layouts that better suit the uses required
- Another option is to provide an elevator adjacent to the north-west corner entrance of the church building thereby providing wheelchair access to the three levels of the church. The existing office area could be relocated to the former house thereby providing space for a larger entry foyer. The proposed new rear exit would remain. A "bridge" could still provide an enclosed link between the two buildings via a stair (rather than another elevator).