

Decision Note

Title:	157-163 Water Street – DEM2600006 – Demolition Application
Date Prepared:	April 6, 2026
Report To:	Committee of the Whole
Councillor and Role:	Councillor Tom Davis, Heritage
Ward:	Ward 2

Decision/Direction Required:

To consider designating 157-163 Water Street to prevent demolition.

Discussion – Background and Current Status:

On March 13, 2026, the City received an application to demolish two buildings located at 157-163 Water Street from Howard Properties/AJNJ Holdings Ltd. These buildings are zoned Commercial Downtown Mixed (CDM), are in Heritage Area 2 and are not designated Heritage Buildings. Under section 355 of the City of St. John's Act, the City may withhold a demolition permit for not more than 90 days to seek designation. If the properties are not designated within that time, then the demolition permit may be issued. The 90-day timeline starts on the date the application is received by the City; in this case, March 13, 2026. These buildings may be designated by the City if they meet the minimum rating on our Heritage Building Designation Criteria Form.

Based on insurance maps, it appears that the building at 161-163 Water Street was built the year after the Great Fire of 1892, and 157-159 Water Street was under construction in 1914. The main level saw a variety of commercial tenants over the years; a noteworthy one was Martin Royal Stores Hardware Co. which is visible in the attached historical photo. An important feature to highlight is the outdoor passageway that connects Water Street and Harbour Drive and is situated between the two buildings at street level.

According to the structural condition assessment report submitted by the applicant, the exterior wall of 157-159 Water is built of brick and mortar up to the third floor and of concrete on the fourth (top) floor. The report states that the brick walls are in poor condition. The exterior wall of 161-163 Water is made of poured concrete and in fair condition. The report reviews the structural integrity of the two buildings and is attached for Council's review.

If heritage designation is considered, then a statement of significance would be prepared, outlining the historical importance and character-defining features of the buildings, and the City's Legal Department would prepare a heritage designation by-law for Council's approval. If Council designates the buildings within 90 days, the demolition application would be refused.

The City's Built Heritage Experts Panel (BHEP) discussed the demolition application at its March 25, 2026 meeting. The applicants attended and presented their request to demolish. After discussion, the BHEP recommend that Council not designate the buildings at 157-163 Water Street, provided that character-defining features of the buildings are identified, documented and recommended to incorporate into future development plans.

The character-defining features were primarily on the front façade along Water Street. They are on the second and third storeys, including arched windows and detailed window trims. It was noted that the top storey is not original and the first storey has been substantially altered over the years. The ground-level entrance was originally recessed, which is a feature that would be required for both properties at the time of redevelopment. Another important feature discussed was the passageway that connects Water Street to the rear of the property along Harbour Drive. Maintaining or reinstating this historical passageway is a critical design feature that would be required at the time of redevelopment. While the buildings did meet the minimum criteria for designation, staff agree with the Heritage Panel's recommendation to not designate the buildings but instead require the exterior form of the buildings to be documented, and character-defining features noted in detail, prior to demolition, if Council does not designate.

At the meeting of the Committee of the Whole held on April 14, 2026, Deputy Mayor Ellsworth moved to defer the item to a future meeting of Council, noting that additional information was required before a decision could be made.

Key Considerations/Implications:

1. Budget/Financial Implications: Not applicable.
2. Partners or Interested Parties: Property owners; heritage advocates; neighbouring property owners and businesses.
3. Is this a New Plan, Master Plan, Strategy, Report, or Framework: No
4. Alignment with Strategic Directions:

A Sustainable City: Plan for land use and preserve and enhance the natural and built environment where we live.

A Sustainable City: Facilitate and create the conditions that drive the economy by being business and industry friendly; and being a location of choice for residents, businesses and visitors.

5. Alignment with Adopted Plans: City of St. John's Act, 1990, as amended.
6. Accessibility and Inclusion: Not applicable at this time.
7. Legal or Policy Implications: Should Council decide to designate the properties, the Legal Department will prepare a heritage designation by-law for 157-163 Water Street for Council's consideration.
8. Privacy Implications: Not applicable.
9. Engagement and Communications Considerations: Should the designation process proceed, a notice of motion at a regular Council meeting is required prior to Council designating the buildings.
10. Human Resource Implications: Not applicable.
11. Procurement Implications: Not applicable.
12. Information Technology Implications: Not applicable.
13. Information Management Implications: Not applicable.
14. Other Implications: Not applicable.

Recommendation:

That Council agree to defer this item to a future meeting pending additional information and a meeting with the developer.

Prepared by: Lindsay Church, MCIP, Planner III – Urban Design and Heritage

Approved by: Ken O'Brien, MCIP, Chief Municipal Planner

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	157-163 Water Street - DEM2600006 - Demolition Application.docx
Attachments:	- 157-163 Water Street - Location Map.pdf - Historical Photo-Martin-Royal Harware and Butler-Withers.jpg - 157-163 Water Street Demolition Permit Submission-March-13-2026.pdf - Front_Rear_Photos.pdf - Post-Meeting Report - Built Heritage Experts Panel_Mar25_2026-English - Final.docx
Final Approval Date:	Apr 8, 2026

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Ken O'Brien - Apr 8, 2026 - 2:17 PM

Jason Sinyard - Apr 8, 2026 - 3:24 PM