

ST. JOHN'S

Report of Built Heritage Experts Panel

March 25, 2026

2:00 p.m.

Virtual

Present: Megan Webb, Chair, Historian/Archival Expert
Tyler Stapleton, Other
William Simms, Other
Brian Marler, Contractor
Anika Bursey, Planner
Aaron Terry, Other

Regrets: Matt C. Reynolds, Architect

Staff: Lindsay Church, Planner III - Urban Design and Heritage
Jennifer Squires, Legislative Assistant

Others: Randy Carew, Manager of Regulatory Services
Glen Rose, Howard Properties/AJNJ Holdings Ltd.
Matt Kelland, Howard Properties/AJNJ Holdings Ltd.

1. 157-163 Water Street – Demolition Application

Staff provided the Built Heritage Experts Panel (BHEP) with background information on the Demolition Application for 157-163 Water Street. As the property is currently undesignated, the City has 90 days from receipt of the application to designate the building, should it meet the threshold of the Designation Criteria Review. The building was built after the great fire in 1892 and includes a tunnel/breezeway connecting Water Street to the parking lot on Harbour Drive. A Structural Condition Assessment Report has been provided, indicating that the building is in poor structural condition overall. Should Council decide to designate the building, a Statement of Significance would be written, outlining the buildings historical importance and defining features, and a By-Law would be prepared for Council's approval. If the building is not designated by

Council, then approval of the application to demolish can take place at the Staff level. No development application has been received to date, and should a development application be received, the building must adhere to the regulations of the Heritage By-Law and Heritage Design Standards.

The delegation then joined the panel to discuss their application. The building has been damaged by fire, the rear of the building has deteriorated, the masonry is crumbling, and there is floor rot from water damage and neglect. While there are some character-defining elements on the front façade of the building, interior and exterior renovation work has taken place without City approval by previous property owners. The owners have also received a letter from the City requiring remediation of the site in the interest of public safety. It is felt that the cost to secure the building and repair the interior is infeasible and that the best path forward would be demolition. They would like to improve the area, while appreciating the existing heritage, and provide something that is congruent with the landscape of the City. They are in the process of engaging an architectural firm for the project and wish to work with the City and other entities in the area to create a long-term project that works for everyone to revitalize the block. The importance of the tunnel between the buildings was noted and they would like to maintain and improve the existing passageway.

Clarity was requested on the need for demolition. Originally, the plan was to save the building and repurpose as is, but once the interior was stripped out for renovations, the true condition of the building was revealed, and it would be difficult to save. It was asked if consideration has been given to the preservation of the façade and to demolish the rear of the building. The delegation responded that the fourth level of the building was an extension, and the second and third floor of 157 Water Street is the only section of value. The character-defining features of this section could be considered for inclusion in the new design of the building. It was then asked how high the new building would be. The developer would like to increase the height of the building by at least two stories should they be permitted to do so and should it be financially sustainable. The delegation then left the meeting and the BHEP continued their discussion of the application.

The timeline of the application was questioned, as it was indicated that the developer did not intend to demolish the building until the Fall. Staff advised that demolishing the buildings would require resources and planning. To begin demolition in a timely manner approval would be

required in advance of the winter season. Complaints are also received concerning the condition of the buildings on an annual basis, and action is now required from a public safety perspective to mitigate risk. Other properties on the block owned by the developer appear to be in good condition.

It was asked what the requirements would be should a new development be proposed for the site. Should an application for a new development be received, this would trigger a Heritage Report, and depending on the proposal, it may trigger a Land Use Report as well. The City is also in the process of finalizing the Downtown Neighbourhood Plan, which would also have to be considered as part of the application. The Terms of Reference for the Heritage Report would come to the BHEP for recommendation to Council. All character defining elements of the building would be documented in advance of demolition and then could be referenced in the Heritage Terms of Reference for consideration for inclusion.

Façadism was discussed, which would see the designation applied to the front exterior of the building, allowing the remainder to be demolished. It was felt that should the front façade of 157 Water Street be preserved, there would be no concerns about proceeding with the demolition of the building. While Council has not yet considered the approval of a façade of a building, it is within their discretion to do so. Additional consideration can be given to façadism by the Panel if requested.

While members of the Panel would like to see the façade of 157 Water Street preserved, it was recognized that this would come at a substantial cost and may not be feasible due to the structural condition of the building. Interest was shown in the development of guidelines for façade preservation. It was agreed that as character defining elements, such as the curved windows, recessed doorways, and tunnel should be included as part of the requirements for new development, that designation would not be recommended.

Recommendation

Moved By Megan Webb

Seconded By William Simms

Noting that character defining features of the buildings will be identified and documented and recommended for incorporation into future development plans, the Built Heritage Experts Panel does not recommend the designation of 157-163 Water Street at this time.

CARRIED WITH DISSENT