

**Municipality of Chatham-Kent**

**Community Development**

**Planning Services**

**To:** Mayor and Members of Council

**From:** Anthony Jas  
Planner I, Planning Services

**Date:** October 26, 2020

**Subject:** Ontario Heritage Act – Request to Remove Property from Municipal Heritage Register  
49 George Street, Community of Blenheim

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**Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

1. The Intention to Designate the former Blenheim United Church building ca. 1895, located at 49 George Street, described as Lot 2 and Part of Lots 3 & 4, Plan 88, in the Community of Blenheim, under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* for its cultural heritage value or interest, be approved.
2. Consent to demolish or remove the former Blenheim United Church buildings ca. 1940, 1965 & 1990 additions, located at 49 George Street, described as Lot 2 and Part of Lots 3 & 4, Plan 88, in the Community of Blenheim, be given, without conditions.

**Background**

The Blenheim United Church property is a corner lot located at 49 George Street in the Community of Blenheim. The property is designated Downtown/Main Street Area in the Chatham-Kent Official Plan and zoned Urban Commercial (Central Business District) (UC(CBD)). A Key Map showing the location of this property is attached as Appendix A.

The property contains the Blenheim United Church, which is a large Queen Anne/Romanesque Revival style brick structure built in 1895 under the design of architect James L. Wilson, a prominent architect of his time and former resident of Chatham. Serving the community as an important social, recreational and entertainment hub for over a century, the original church structure saw enlargements that included:

- A gymnasium and Sunday School wing added in 1940

- A Christian Education wing added in 1965
- Another addition addressing accessibility issues added in 1990

Today, the original church structure visually dominates the corner of McGregor and George Streets and is an important contextual component along McGregor Street, where a well preserved collection of architecture dating from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century exists.

The following pictures demonstrate the built characteristics of the Blenheim United Church and surrounding area, as exists today:



Figure 1: Blenheim United Church from George Street



Figure 2: Blenheim United Church from the corner of George Street and McGregor Street.



Figure 3: Dwelling along George Street across from Blenheim United Church property.



Figure 4: Dwellings along McGregor Street across from Blenheim United Church property.

### Ontario Heritage Act

In January 2010, Council added the Blenheim United Church property to the Municipal Heritage Register as the property was believed to be of cultural value or interest to Chatham-Kent. This is based on its historical, architectural and contextual significance,

as outlined in the excerpt from the Register, containing the entry for 49 George Street, which is attached as Appendix B.

Section 27 of the Ontario Heritage Act (OHA) requires the Municipality to keep a current, publicly accessible Municipal Heritage Register (Register) of properties of cultural heritage value or interest. Listing identifies these properties as having heritage significance and requires that owners who intend to remove or demolish any buildings or structures from a listed property give Council 60 days notice of their intention in writing. The 60-day period provides municipalities time to evaluate whether the property merits protection through designation under the OHA. If so, a separate decision-making process is followed.

### Current Proposal

On September 21, 2020, the new owners of the Blenheim United Church property submitted the following request to Council:

*We request to have the building on 49 George Street in Blenheim De-listed from the Chatham Kent Municipal Heritage Register.*

*Our intent is to construct 6 senior citizen dwellings of 1200 sq. ft. each, with ample parking.*

*We choose this location because of it's proximity to the down town core, medical & dental clinics, drug stores, post office, banks, churches, etc. Ideal for seniors.*

*The existing structure cannot be used as is.*

*There is no parking on the property, therefore cannot be converted into anything useful.*

In support of this proposal, the owners submitted a corresponding sketch that generally depicts the proposed lot development and lot characteristics. This sketch is attached as Appendix C for review. As the sketch demonstrates, the proposal is for the existing structure to be removed from the property. This would allow for the development of row house dwellings with associated off-street parking.

In accordance with Section 27 of the OHA, the 60-day notice period for Council to consider whether to remove 49 George Street from the Municipal Heritage Register has commenced with the above noted request. The notice period will end November 20, 2020.

### Administrative Review

From a land use planning perspective, the proposal put forth by the owners of the Blenheim United Church property will require the following Planning Act applications and infrastructure considerations:

- Zoning By-law Amendment  
To rezone the lands to permit row houses
  
- Site Plan Control  
Standard site plan requirements including, but not limited to:
  - Archaeological Assessment
  - Detailed site plan
  - Stormwater management plan and report
  - Ontario Building Code data matrix
  - Lighting plan and photometric data
  - Infrastructure servicing brief to address lack of storm sewer services along George Street or McGregor Street

It should be noted that there has been no formal Planning Act submission made by the owners of the Blenheim United Church Property beyond the request to remove the property from the Municipal Heritage Register.

### Comments

Staff have assessed the request together with the context provided above. The Recommendations are based on the following summary of analysis:

Redevelopment is encouraged throughout Chatham-Kent. This does not exclude sites of cultural/historical significance.

The Blenheim United Church is a significant built heritage resource that contributes positively to the character and identity of the Blenheim community and Chatham-Kent. It contains historical, architectural and contextual significance. This significance is detailed in the Designation Report that has been prepared for this property and attached as Appendix D. The Designation Report includes a *Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest* that outlines how the Blenheim United Church meets the standard designation criteria under the OHA (Ontario Regulation 9/06) – specifically its design and physical value, historical and associative value, and its contextual value.

It should be noted that the Designation Report is specific only to the 1895 church structure. The subsequent additions not included as it is determined they are not locally significant historically, architecturally or contextually.

The request to remove this property from the Register will allow the entire Blenheim United Church building and all additions to be demolished and/or removed from the property. This request is based on a development plan that is preliminary in nature and one that has not been properly vetted to determine its viability. Therefore, an action in favour of this request would be premature as the consequences of removing this property from the Register are not fully known at this time.

As such, in view of the future of the Blenheim community, the recommendation is for the interim protection of the Blenheim United Church building ca. 1895, by serving Notice of Intention to Designate. This motion does not bind Council to eventually designate the property; rather, it provides Council the opportunity to consider more information prior to the next step in the designation process, which requires Council to approve a Designation By-law at a later date – as described in Option 1 below.

If Council serves Notice of Intent to Designate the property, the property is given the protection under the Ontario Heritage Act as if it is designated. Therefore, under the Act, Council must subsequently consent, consent with conditions, or refuse the request to demolish the newer structures, not subject to the proposed designation.

As part of the demolition permit application for buildings and structures of this size, an engineer's report is required at the time of application. This report will inform the safe removal of the buildings and consider any impacts to the buildings and structures to remain.

This approach is deemed the more equitable direction to take at this time, considering the perspective of the community and owner of the property.

### Options for Council

Council has the following options regarding this request, which are as follows:

- 1) Proceed with designating the property under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. To initiate the designation process, Council must direct that Notice of Intention to Designate be given. If there are no objection(s), the final request to designate comes back before Council for a vote on the passing on the final Designation By-law. Should there be an objection(s), there is an appeal process to the Conservation Review Board before the final request comes back to Council for final decision.
- 2) Proceed with the removal of the subject property from the Municipal Heritage Register to allow the owners to facilitate the removal of all structures, if they so choose, for the redevelopment of the property.

### **Areas of Strategic Focus and Critical Success Factors**

The recommendations in this report support the following areas of strategic focus:

- Economic Prosperity:  
Chatham-Kent is an innovative and thriving community with a diversified economy
- A Healthy and Safe Community:  
Chatham-Kent is a healthy and safe community with sustainable population growth
- People and Culture:  
Chatham-Kent is recognized as a culturally vibrant, dynamic, and creative community
- Environmental Sustainability:  
Chatham-Kent is a community that is environmentally sustainable and promotes stewardship of our natural resources

The recommendations in this report support the following critical success factors:

- Financial Sustainability:  
The Corporation of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent is financially sustainable
- Open, Transparent and Effective Governance:  
The Corporation of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent is open, transparent and effectively governed with efficient and bold, visionary leadership
- Has the potential to support all areas of strategic focus & critical success factors
- Neutral issues (does not support negatively or positively)

### **Consultation**

#### **Municipal Heritage Committee**

The Municipal Heritage Committee was consulted in accordance with Section 27(1.3) of the Ontario Heritage Act for the request to remove 49 George Street from the Municipal Heritage Register. At its meeting on October 21, 2020, the Committee passed the following motion:

“That the Designation Report for 49 George Street, Community of Blenheim, be forwarded to Council with the recommendation that the property be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act based on its historical, architectural and contextual significance.”

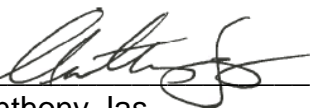
The Committee's motion includes reference to the attached Designation Report.

**Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations.

Prepared by:

Reviewed by:




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Attachments: Appendix A – Key Map  
Appendix B – Municipal Heritage Register, Excerpt of 49 George Street  
Appendix C - Proposed Redevelopment  
Appendix D – Designation Report for 49 George Street

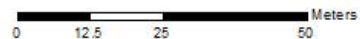
c Municipal Heritage Committee

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Appendix A – Key Map



This is not a plan of survey.  
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# Community of Blenheim

## 49 George Street

**Date Added to Registry:** 18-Jan-2010

**Historic Period and/or Date of Erection:** Circa 1895

**Historical Significance:** Blenheim United Church is one of the oldest religious structures in the community. It was originally the Erskine Presbyterian Church from 1895-1925. It did not become the Blenheim United Church until 1932. The architects/contractors for the project were J.L. Wilson and W.C. Craddock. Joseph J. Cookson was the builder and Rev. Waddell was the pastor for over 36 years. A stained glass window stands in the pastor's memory.



**Architectural Significance/Description:** The architectural design of this building is extremely rare and eclectic. The building's most dominant influences appear to come from Queen Anne architectural features. The asymmetrical layout, bell tower, and large turret are distinct elements of this structure.

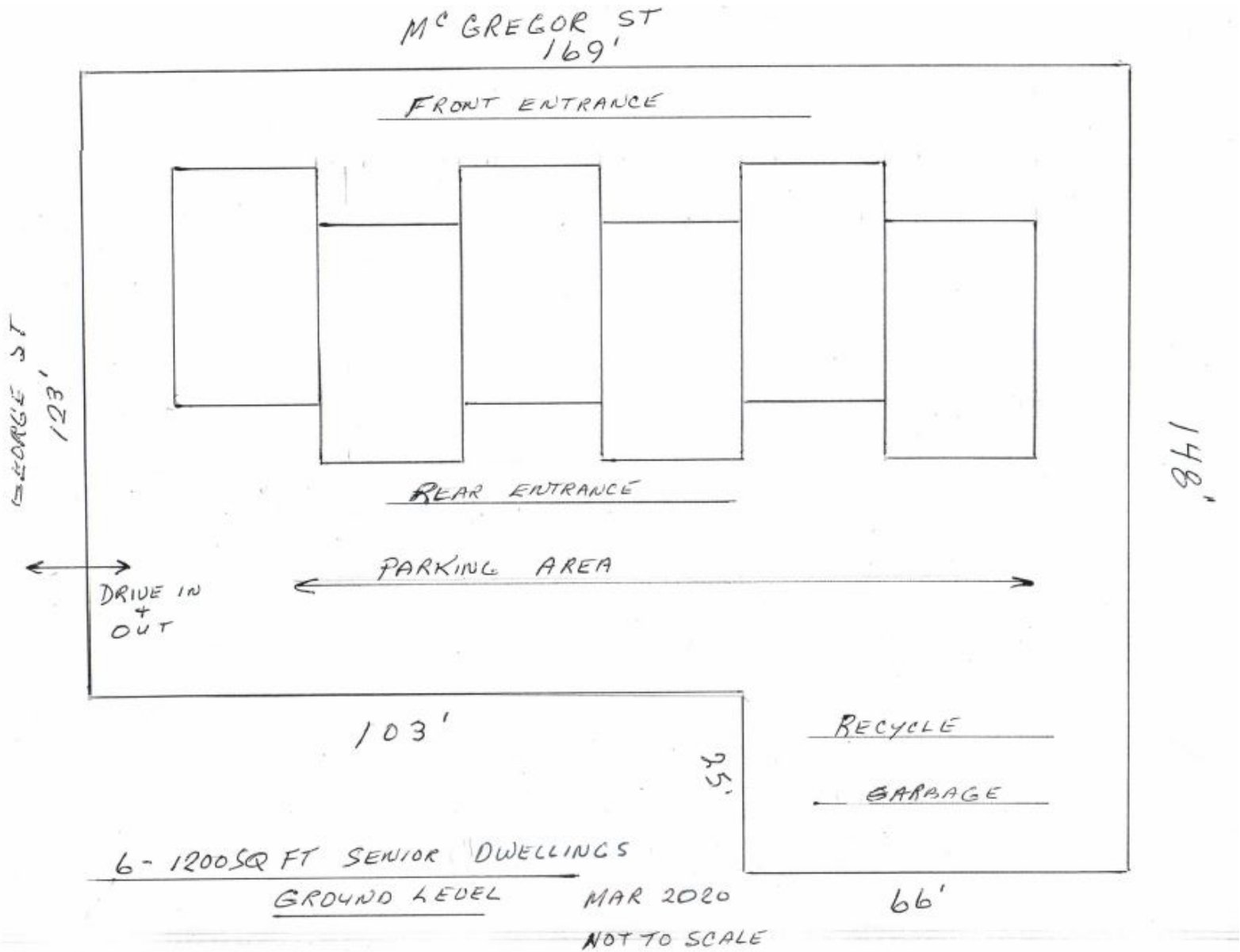
**Contextual Significance:** The residence is located on an extremely visible corner lot in Blenheim: George & McGregor streets.

**Legal Description:** LOT 2 & PT LOTS 3 & 4, SOUTH OF MCGREGOR STREET PLAN 88 AS IN BL3454, BL 3455, BL10443 BLENHEIM

**Additional Notes:** Photos and information courtesy of Mary Lou Little



Appendix C – Proposed Redevelopment



Appendix D – Designation Report for 49 George Street

## Designation Report

### **Blenheim United Church**

#### **Preamble:**

The original 1895 J.L. Wilson - designed part of the Blenheim United Church is located on the northwest corner of the property. In addition to its role as a spiritual centre, this church, over the years, also served as an important social, recreational, and entertainment hub for the community of Blenheim. Because of this, the building saw enlargements that included:

- A gymnasium and Sunday School wing added in 1940
- A Christian Education wing added in 1965
- Another addition addressing accessibility issues added in 1990

The entire structure received a new metal roof in 2001.

For the purposes of this report, the designation encompasses only the original 1895 portion of the church which is identifiable by its Romanesque Revival architecture and stone foundation.

#### **Description of Property**

The Blenheim United Church property is located at 47 George Street in Blenheim, legally described as **Lot 2 & Pt. Lots 3 & 4 south of McGregor Street, Plan 88 as in BL 3454, BL 3455 & BL 10443 in the Town of Blenheim, Municipality of Chatham-Kent.**

The property consists of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century brick church built in the Queen Anne/Romanesque Revival style with later additions.

#### **Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest**

##### **Historical/Associative (OHA Reg. 9/06):**

The principal structure was built in 1895 as Erskine Presbyterian Church. It was built on land initially granted to the church by early Blenheim pioneers Joseph Laird and Eliza Burk. It replaced an earlier frame church that was built on the site in 1866. The church was designed by architect James L. Wilson while the contractor was W. Craddock and the builder was Joseph J. Cookson.

In 1925, as a result of the amalgamation of Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Canada, the church was re-named Erskine United Church. The congregation of Chatham Street (Methodist) Church, however, did not officially merge with Erskine until 1932 at which time the church was re-named Blenheim United Church.

The property has cultural heritage value for several reasons:

1. It has served as a spiritual, as well as a recreational, social, and entertainment hub for Blenheim and the surrounding community for almost 125 years. The church hosted concerts, special events, and even had its own hockey team in 1920s and 30s.
2. It was designed by one of Ontario's "most successful and prolific architects"\*: James L. Wilson. Wilson was born in 1848 in Waterloo County but moved to Chatham at an early age and attended Chatham Collegiate Institute and Canada Business College. After gaining experience as a builder, he opened an architecture office in Chatham and over several decades, was responsible for the design of many of the most significant structures in Chatham-Kent.

His work, however, was not limited to this community. Wilson designed landmark structures (many of which are now designated) in London, Goderich, Windsor, Amherstburg, Leamington, Kingsville, and as far afield as Winnipeg.

He worked primarily in the Queen Anne Revival style for his residential designs while his institutional work mixes Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival style. James L. Wilson should certainly be considered one of the important late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century architects in Ontario.

Wilson moved to Fairgrove Michigan to live with his son in 1909 and he died in 1930.

### **Design/Physical (OHA Reg. 9/06):**

#### **Church:**

The Blenheim United Church Property contains an excellent surviving example of a Romanesque/Queen Anne Revival institutional building. The large brick structure with complex footprint and roofline, large arched stained-glass windows, bell tower and decorative brick and stone elements is iconic work of the architect James L. Wilson.

### **Contextual (OHA Reg. 9/06):**

The church visually dominates the corner of McGregor and George Streets and is an important contextual component along McGregor, the entire street of which is a perfectly preserved collection of architecture dating from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As well, Blenheim United Church is one of three churches, all within 100 meters of each other, that form a church district. The other neighbouring churches are Trinity Anglican Church (built in 1882) and a former 19<sup>th</sup> century Baptist church (now the Blenheim Freedom Library & Museum).

## Description of Heritage Attributes/Character Defining Elements:

### Church: Exterior

1895 Structure

- Roof line
- Stone foundation
- Window placement
- Window casements and trim
- Door placement
- Door casements and trim
- Stained glass transoms over doorways
- Window sash including stained glass windows and glazing patterns
- Decorative stone arches over windows and doors
- Multi-panelled wood entry doors
- Stretcher bond brick construction
- Bell tower
- Sheet metal finial surmounting bell tower
- C. 1920 light fixtures over entryways
- Stepped brick frieze
- Decorating brick/terra cotta rope twist quarter round below frieze
- Stone banding
- Three-panel stone tablet bearing the inscription “Presbyterian Church 1895” below window, west side.
- Stone tablet with designer/builder information, east side.
- Stone window sills

### Contextual:

Key elements of the Blenheim United Church that support its contextual significance are:

- Prominence and massing on the corner of George and McGregor Streets
- Positioning in a well-preserved late 19<sup>th</sup> century streetscape (McGregor Street)
- Location in proximity to two other 19<sup>th</sup> century churches creating an historic church “cluster”.

### Sources:

- Blenheim & District Historical Society files
- \*Dictionary of Architects In Canada [www.dictionaryofarchitects in Canada.org/mode/1285](http://www.dictionaryofarchitects.inCanada.org/mode/1285)
- Blenheim News Tribune, March 4, 2020