



P.O. Box 3336, Vancouver, BC, V6B 3Y3, (604) 254-9411

The Very Reverend Peter G. Elliott,  
Dean of New Westminster,  
Rector of Christ Church Cathedral  
690 Burrard St. Vancouver, BC. V6C 2L1

February 22, 2002

Dear Reverend Elliott:

**Re: Proposed Alterations to Christ Church Cathedral**

Thank you for meeting with us in November to review the revised proposals for the Church interior spaces. We appreciate your willingness to keep us up to date on the process and to respond to heritage issues raised by all the involved parties. The comments which follow are based on the proposal as presented to us in November. We appreciate that the proposal may have changed somewhat since that time, and welcome any further information you can provide us.

We remain very concerned about many aspects of the proposed interior revisions, which, in our opinion, do not demonstrate a standard of heritage restoration commensurate with the importance of this landmark structure. Consequently, we regret we cannot support the current proposal and the requested heritage density bonus. Our outstanding concerns are as follows:

**1. Removal of Balcony**

From the outset, we have been extremely uncomfortable with the proposed removal of the original balcony. This is an extremely radical intervention that will significantly compromise the historic interior. The replacement of the balcony with a new organ loft represents a major *renovation*, rather than restoration, and can only be supportable if other aspects of the interior will not be compromised. Unfortunately, this seems not to be the case.

**2. Design of New Organ Loft and Associated Elements**

We are very concerned about the design and choice of materials for new interventions, including the organ, organ loft, new vestibules, and narthex screen. Christ Church Cathedral is a municipally designated Class A heritage resource, the oldest and most important ecclesiastical structure in the city, and one of city's most important heritage buildings. This status requires the highest standards of heritage conservation and a minimum intervention approach. Specifically, new additions should closely approximate existing features, both in design and construction, and all efforts should be made to retain existing character.

The primary interior finishing materials in the original church are *wood* and *plaster*. Wood is the predominant defining element, as expressed in the trusses and the existing balcony. There is very little glass or metal in the church, other than the steel bracing rods, organ pipes, suspended bronze lanterns, and exterior windows.

We believe Christ Church Cathedral is NOT a case where a major insertion of new fabric should stand out as a contemporary intervention. Therefore, we cannot support the intended use of uncharacteristic materials, such as metal and glass, proposed in a contemporary vocabulary, for railings and other details in the organ loft and adjacent narthex features. The new organ loft will be THE defining element in the renovated church. If not handled properly, it will radically alter the appearance of the interior and could seriously compromise its heritage character.

Finally, we are unable to support the addition of the proposed organ loft without drawings and/or renderings of both the proposed loft, *and* the intended organ in place. The drawings should be of sufficient detail to enable a frank determination of their visual impact on the church interior. Civic approval should be conditional on commitment to a final external design for the organ itself, or agreement to later design review.

### **Suggestions to minimize impact of organ and organ loft**

- organ finishes (other than the pipes) be *wood*, and compatible with original interior finishes in design and colour
- similarly, organ loft details such as stairs and railings should be redesigned to eliminate plate glass and metal elements. Alternative expressions in *wood* should be developed.
- if sound propagation is critical, consider openwork wood railings consistent with period design. One option might be to re-use or 'interpret' the existing balcony rail, deleting the solid inside portion of the repeating gothic arch motif to create the voids apparently desired for sound propagation.
- the design of other related elements, such as the proposed plate glass vestibule enclosures, and the plate glass railings separating the narthex from the nave, should similarly be re-considered.
- if glass enclosures are necessary (and we question this assumption), consider a closely divided screen employing wood mullions, as opposed to the more contemporary expression currently proposed.
  - avoid use of metal and plate glass in other areas where new material will be inserted, including the proposed peace chapel, regimental colours display area, contemplative area and transept galleries, particularly where visible from the nave.

### **3. Ceiling Trusses and Wood Finishes**

The hammer beam trusses and wood finishes are defining elements of the interior. We are not satisfied that the research regarding the colour and tone of original finishes has been sufficiently rigorous, and we question the suggestion that original finishes were radically lighter than present. The proposed stripping of the existing dark finish is unacceptable, as this will result in the loss of historic patina, further compromising heritage character. We suggest that, if the existing finishes are darker than desired, additional artificial lighting should be considered as an alternative to further lightening of the wood surfaces.

### **4. Sound Attenuation – Exterior Doors, Ceiling Finishes**

We are concerned the proposed interventions for sound attenuation will compromise historic fabric and erase patina. The current proposal includes dismantling of the wooden exit doors and insertion of a sound attenuation layer. A sound attenuation layer is also proposed for the ceiling. If the ceiling finishes are continuous, as was common for the period, their removal would likely require cutting each board in sections at the truss contact-points. We do not believe a compelling case for sound attenuation has been made; nor have all avenues for sound attenuation been explored. Finally, it is impossible to support the desired interventions without detailed working drawings.

We do wish to recognize there has been positive resolution of some contentious issues, such as retention of the stained glass window *in situ*, retention of majority of pews in original configuration, and deletion of the proposed glass vestibule doors. Also positive is the proposed restoration of the fir flooring, non-conjectural restoration of original stenciling, and the possible removal of applied ceiling panels to expose the original wood finish.

In summary, the overall approach toward this extremely important heritage resource must be *restoration*, rather than *renovation*. Unfortunately, this proposal still falls considerably short of the mark. We have provided suggestions we hope might help you address our outstanding concerns. We do appreciate the considerable cost involved to complete a full restoration of original fabric. Heritage Vancouver would support municipal allocation of sufficient transferable density and other incentives to complete a sensitive restoration of the existing interior. Let me know if we can be of any further assistance. We hope we can continue to work toward a positive resolution of the outstanding issues.

Sincerely,

Janet Leduc, President

cc. Yardley McNeill, Heritage Group, City of Vancouver  
Julie MacDonald, Chair, Heritage Commission