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April 14, 2009

Mayor Gregor Robertson and Vancouver City Council
Vancouver City Hall
453 W. 12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC, V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor Robertson and City Council Members;

Re: Firehall #15

On behalf of the membership of Heritage Vancouver, I am writing to strongly support the retention of Firehall #15, as outlined in Option #4 (b) of the Staff Report. This historic structure, a landmark since 1913 in the Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood, is of great heritage significance and deserves to be preserved and restored. Its restoration is strongly supported by the local neighbourhood as well as the heritage community. This is one of Vancouver's last Edwardian-era firehalls and this is a unique opportunity to retain it as part of a working facility.

Despite our support of this initiative, we wish to express grave concerns about the potential approach to this restoration as described in the Staff Report. The description of the exterior work indicates a serious disregard of Heritage Standards & Guidelines, specifically the destruction of exterior features and their replication through the application of a new rain screen façade. As there is no change in use, these building code upgrades may be unnecessary, and there is an opportunity to retain existing materials in a way that would not only be preferable from a heritage point of view but could also be much less costly than wholesale rebuilding.

It is too early in the project to make sweeping decisions about the approach to restoration. We strongly suggest that before any decisions are made, that there be sufficient investigation of the condition of exterior materials, and that every effort be made to retain, rather than replace, the historic exterior fabric. The City of Vancouver regularly requires heritage restoration projects undertaken by the private sector to have a qualified professional heritage consultant as part of the restoration team. We recommend that this successful practice be extended to include City of Vancouver projects. With this type of professional expertise, the City can ensure maximum cost-effectiveness and a superior final result.

Given these qualifications about how to achieve the end result, we strongly support Council's initiative in preserving this historic landmark. Heritage Vancouver welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively with the City throughout the restoration of Firehall #15.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "don luxton".

Donald Luxton, President

Cc. Penny Ballem, City Manager
Marco D'Agostini, Senior Planner, Heritage Group
Yardley McNeil, Heritage Planner
Brent Toderian, Director of Planning
Heritage Commission