



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council
From: Harry Olivieri, Commissioner and Fire Chief
Mem No. MEM-FIRE-2019-0001
Subject: McGibbon Update
Date: January 13, 2019

PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Members of Council with an update on the building condition and steps taken to address fire safety issues and to minimize the risk of fire at the vacant McGibbon building. Other matters related primarily to heritage preservation are also included.

BACKGROUND:

Fire Department staff has been actively engaged with Silver Creek Commercial Builders (SCCB) who has had control of the McGibbon building on behalf of the owners since the structure was vacated; the structure was being used as a sales centre for the future condominium building.

Since the building was still partially occupied, it was important that minimum fire safety standards were maintained. This included maintaining an operational sprinkler system and fire alarm system. As the colder weather approached in the fall of 2018, fire staff was notified that the heating system was no longer operational, which would eventually impact the operation of the sprinkler system should the system freeze. Freezing of the system could lead to burst pipes and flooding of the structure. At this point, the sales office was no longer operating and no other persons were in the building.

COMMENTS:

When notified of the heating issue, Fire Department staff was approached by SCCB staff requesting permission for a complete shutdown of the sprinkler and fire alarm systems since the building was now empty. Concerned with fire safety, possible structural degradation as well as risk to other downtown structures should a fire occur, fire staff coordinated a meeting on October 30, 2018. The meeting was attended by a

senior representative of SCCB, the Chief Building Official (CBO), the Fire Chief and staff.

In this meeting, the SCCB representative made a case for a complete shutdown of the fire safety provisions citing that there were no lives at risk in the building and that in other municipalities this was allowed in vacant buildings. Town staff explained that there was a concern for not only the existing McGibbon structure but should a fire start, it might place adjacent buildings at risk too. The meeting concluded with an agreement for the CBO and Fire Chief to do a full building tour to determine its actual status and then report back to SCCB with their findings and recommendations.

On November 7, 2018, the building tour was conducted and the following issues were identified by Building and Fire Department staff:

- Not occupied
- Fire alarm panel indicating trouble and past due for annual maintenance
- Unable to confirm monitoring status of sprinkler water flow signal.
- Gas to building boiler disconnected - no heat.
- Several roof leaks
- Building unsecured at various levels, with potential for unauthorized access.

Based on these findings, Fire Department staff consulted with senior staff from other municipal fire prevention divisions, members of the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, and Fire Safety Specialists from the Office of the Ontario Fire Marshal and Emergency Management to determine best practices to deal with the issues at the McGibbon.

Various solutions were discussed but in the end, it was agreed that the Fire Department staff should maintain the fire safety provisions and this should be done through an Inspection Order. In addition, the order should consider the option of alternative solutions as permitted by the Ontario Fire Code that could include the shutting down of the sprinkler and fire alarm systems if the fire risk was reduced as well as other strategies that could be implemented.

On November 8, 2018 a subsequent inspection was undertaken by the CBO and the Town's Heritage Engineer (Neil Puype) who was previously involved in the file. While there were no immediate heritage-related issues identified, one stone arch was recommended to be either repaired or braced.

On December 4, 2018 the Fire Department issued an Inspection Order to SCCB and the owners requesting:

- Repair and maintenance of the fire alarm panel;
- Maintenance of the sprinkler system;
- Steps to prevent freezing of the sprinkler system;
- Work to secure the building from unauthorized entry;
- A fire watch while deficiencies were corrected.

In addition, the Inspection Order gave the owner alternate solutions for consideration; these included but were not limited to:

- Disconnection of all utilities;
- Removal of interior combustibles;
- Repair of any fire separations between buildings;
- Insurer advisement of actions to be taken;
- Provision of a fire watch

On December 10, 2018, information was received by SCCB that they were unable to comply with the Order, had appealed the Order and that we should deal with the owner directly.

On December 18, 2018, in a surprise move, a SCCB site supervisor advised the Fire Department that they would be beginning work on the suggested alternative solutions. It should be noted that no Fire Department approval had been given.

On December 19, 2018, a meeting to discuss the current building status was held with Commissioner of Transportation and Public Works, the CBO and the Fire Chief. A letter was subsequently sent from the Commissioner of Transportation and Public Works to the owners of the McGibbon properties to remind them of their agreed upon obligations to maintain the building. In addition to the Fire-related matters discussed in this memo, the letter also addressed ongoing monitoring and mitigation of water penetration, preservation of the heritage features are required by the Section 37 agreement and submission of insurance documentation.

On December 21, 2018, SCCB re-engaged in the matter through phone discussions and e-mail with agreement to implement the alternative solutions which would begin immediately. A walk-through was also conducted of the building with senior Fire Department staff, who found that work to remove combustibles and secure the windows had begun. While waiting for the completion of work, the Fire Department began conducting twice a day fire watch to ensure the building was secure from entry. By the end of day on December 22, 2018, the majority of combustibles had been removed and openings secured.

As of January 3, 2019 the following work was confirmed complete:

- Removal of combustibles from the building
- All utilities disabled including water, hydro and natural gas
- Sprinkler disabled and drained
- Fire alarm and signal monitoring disabled
- Confirmation that insurer was advised of the building condition
- Twice daily security checks
- Access points doors and windows secured from entry
- Keybox and entry keys maintained

CONCLUSION:

The actions taken by the SCCB have greatly reduced the risk of a fire in the building. There are now no sources of ignition that exist inside the structure and fuel load has been reduced by the removal of combustibles in the building. The additional steps of eliminating points of entry followed by day and evening security checks will also prevent unauthorized entry and actions that may increase fire risk.

Fire Department staff will also continue to monitor the status of the building and conduct late evening drive-bys to ensure the building is secure and no new concerns are identified.

An additional issue currently being managed by Transportation and Public Works is the recent fencing of the McGibbon parking area. A further update will be provided at a later date.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brent Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brent Marshall, CAO