

FCA President's Report June 8, 2006

Last year I reported to you that the building renovation fund had exceeded the \$300,000 target and that our fundraising efforts meant that, " by the time of our next AGM we should be meeting in a refurbished, upgraded and attractive building."

As you can see, this did not happen.

In June of last year, after 5 1/2 years of planning, we were ready to proceed with the renovation. The City was to act as contractor and a city employee applied for the building permit. The building inspector notified the city that the building did not conform to the code requirements for a building used upstairs as offices and downstairs as community hall and meeting space.

Our archives showed that in the early 1980s the city approved the use of the upstairs as a group home run by Cool Aid for 8 mentally ill residents. We also found the paperwork and council minutes of City Council approval in 1993 and 1995 for a change of use from residential to office space for upstairs.

Over the years the FCA had done everything that it was asked to do to comply with fire, electrical, plumbing and other requirements. Building inspections have taken place and building permits have been issued.

What we didn't have in our possession until recently was an inter-departmental memo from 1992 outlining the seismic requirements to upgrade the building at an estimated cost of \$30,000. This was not an upgrade carried out by the city whose responsibility it was.

So, for 25 years, neither city councillors who had approved the change of usage, nor city staff nor the FCA realized that the way the building has been operating was improper.

Staff and council accepted responsibility for an internal city problem and we all committed to moving forward. Our only interest was that the building continue to function as it has – as a community hall and meeting space used for a multitude of FCA and non-FCA purposes, as well as a source of revenue to support the FCA's modest budget and its activities, one of which is the stewardship of the heritage building itself.

Staff decided that the only way to continue the building's current use was to do an extensive upgrade.

This was not our choice – we wanted the city to override the building inspector

and proceed with the previously approved renovation plan.

It is our understanding that the expanded renovations would cost \$720,000 – we have \$200,000 so the city cost would be \$520,000. Staff presented a worst-case scenario of \$1.1 million – the FCA's \$200,000 and \$900,000 from the city, and council unanimously approved this amount in principle on November 3, 2005.

A new council was elected in November and the chair of the budget committee was Councillor Geoff Young, who insisted that our request and the request for a similar amount from the Fernwood Community Centre and Day Care be viewed as one item. Media hysteria about \$2 million dollars going to Fernwood caused council to table this motion to fund our neighbourhood's plans to seismically upgrade a heritage building and expand day care spaces in Fernwood.

This combined motion remains tabled.

I am optimistic that we will see our renovations begin this fall. But I not promising that at next years AGM we will all be marvelling at the renovation changes.

I would like to thank Kevin Neish for his extraordinary commitment to unearthing the documentation we needed – it was his discoveries at city hall and in our own archives that made all the difference.

It has been a wonderful year for our resident theatre troupe Theatre Inconnu. We've been proud that they produced *The Ambassador*, the world's first English translation of the Polish play, the *Ectasy of Rita Joe* played to sell-out crowds, and *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* has just completed an extremely successful run. Congratulations Clayton Jevne and company.

And finally, I know that some members have been puzzled about the relations between the two community organizations in Fernwood. I have sent a letter to our city liaison members on council and to senior management at the Community Centre requesting a get-together to open up dialogue in a spirit of cooperation and communication. Councillors Dean Fortin and Helen Hughes are delighted and I'm expecting that we'll be meeting next week to begin that process. I've posted that letter on the bulletin board at the entrance to the building and you're welcome to take a look at it.

Joanne Murray
President