

Executive Summary

Older church buildings are central features of Canadian urban landscapes. These buildings are very important to both religious and secular communities as they have many socio-cultural values with which people associate and because they serve as physical markers of place and focal points for community gatherings. Church buildings are originally built to function specifically as places of worship. However, changes in the demographic make-up and social values of Canadian urban communities have made some of these buildings redundant and inappropriate for their original purposes. As a result, an increasing number of these buildings are now being adaptively reused for other purposes.

The adaptive reuse of old church buildings is by no way a new concept. Over the years, many unused church buildings that were structurally secure have been adapted to fit changed needs or new functions. The adaptive reuse of old church buildings generally involves repurposing these historic buildings for economically viable new uses while at the same time preserving the heritage elements of the buildings. Adaptive reuse therefore offers a creative and sustainable solution for economically revitalizing neighbourhoods and preserving the heritage of old church buildings once they stop functioning as places of worship. However, undertaking a successful adaptive reuse of an old church building is a complex process as it is influenced by several planning policies and regulatory requirements.

The purpose of this report is to explain how the existing planning policy framework, both at the provincial and municipal level, influences the adaptive reuse of old church buildings. This is achieved by examining how clauses within primary policy and regulatory documents create both

opportunities and barriers for developers undertaking adaptive reuse projects. A multiple-case study approach, which consisted of two church adaptive reuse projects in the City of Kingston, was adopted to undertake the study. The two adaptive reuse projects studied were the former Queen Street United Church and the former Congregational Church. The examination of the effects of the planning policy framework was also based on four provincial and municipal documents: the Provincial Policy Statement, the Ontario Heritage Act, the City of Kingston Official Plan and the City of Kingston Downtown and Harbour Zoning Bylaw. Additionally, interviews and discussions were conducted with key informants.

The results of the study are generally consistent with the literature. They indicate that the existing planning policy framework creates both opportunities and barriers in various ways for developers undertaking church adaptive reuse projects. The major opportunity created for developers was the presence of a general policy support for adaptive reuse initiatives both at the provincial and municipal levels. There are several clauses and provisions within the planning documents that support intensification and heritage conservation. Other opportunities that existed for developers were primarily realized through the facilitation of procedural issues that hindered adaptive reuse projects. On the other hand, the major barriers that were identified related to issues such as limited financial incentives for developers and a lack of similar zonings for church buildings in the Zoning Bylaws. The presence of bureaucratic hurdles during project approval by the Heritage Approval Committee and a lack of policies and regulations that explicitly speak to the issues faced by adaptive reuse projects were also identified as barriers.

Based on the findings of the study, four recommendations were made. These recommendations are areas that should be further explored by the municipality to enhance the repurposing process of old unused church buildings.

- The City should take a more proactive role in facilitating church adaptive reuse projects.
- The City should develop new funding initiatives aimed at encouraging adaptive reuse projects.
- The City should streamline the existing Zoning Bylaws and provide more flexibility in meeting zoning requirements.
- The City should develop specific designation criteria.