

October 21, 2021

President Bill Flanagan
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta

Dear President Flanagan:

Re: Announcement on removal of historic University of Alberta Ring Houses

Thank you for your email of October 1, 2021. On behalf of the larger community represented by the volunteer-driven Ring House Coalition, [we have responded with a public statement](#) that indicates our disappointment with the University of Alberta's decision to sell and remove the Ring Houses from the historic campus environment where they were architected and built more than a century ago. This decision fails to preserve a unique and invaluable historic place within its original cultural landscape that is significant part of the public legacy of Alberta's first public university.

All four Ring Houses merit conservation as listed on the [City of Edmonton Inventory of Historic Resources](#). Further the National Trust of Canada placed them on its [Endangered Places list](#). Significant to Canadian heritage, Ring House 1 was the home of Dr. Henry Marshall Tory who is a Historic Person formally designated by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and whose former home in situ is unique and valuable. Despite strong community and public support demonstrated since February 2021, the University of Alberta's failure to recognize and retain a public heritage legacy does not meet a basic standard in stewardship for the public interest.

Our request for a moratorium on demolition based on the importance of retaining these heritage structures in situ received no reply. Our repeated requests to raise the University's practices to the minimum level of standard historic resource impact assessment received no reply. The buildings have still not been documented through a valid Historic Resource Impact Assessment (HRIA), which is most concerning given these assets are slated to be dismantled soon.

We urge the University and new owner Primavera to ensure a HRIA is completed before the buildings are cleared from the original site. We have repeatedly drawn attention to the need for the University to recognize the historic value of the Ring Houses and to [review its own heritage policy that highlights the importance of "endeavours to safeguard, maintain, and integrate" elements of architectural and intrinsic value](#). We asked for a University of Alberta Senate task force to review this heritage policy, a request which has been turned down by Senate Executive and, as we understand from Chancellor Garritty, will be redirected to your administration. Finally, our request that you and the Chancellor consider the renewal proposal "Reimagine" provided by expert community members has received no formal reply after our meeting with you and your colleagues on July 14.

The University's process and the decision announced on October 1, 2021, indicate that the community call for a moratorium and standard historic resource impact assessment was in no way heeded. Given this, a significant gap exists with respect to applying heritage protection of university and college buildings in Alberta under the Post-Secondary Learning Act and the Heritage Resources Act. This gap needs to be addressed as soon as possible and we will bring this matter to the attention of the provincial Ministers responsible.

Additionally, we draw it to the attention of the City of Edmonton specifically about protection of historic resources within this municipality, and to the attention of the federal Department of Canadian Heritage and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada as an opportunity arising with respect to improvement of heritage site protection and preservation. We are further highly concerned that the loss of the Ring Houses as a historic cultural landscape, built in 1911-1914, presages more losses to come as the University fails to meet the basic standards of heritage protection and preservation for its architectural heritage.

As indicated in our conversation with Vice-President Elan Macdonald before your announcement, we will continue to press the University through community and governmental channels to raise its standards and practices of heritage conservation in keeping with municipal, provincial, and national professional standards. Based on media reports, the sale agreement does not seem to include any obligation for reconstruction of the houses within the City of Edmonton proper or as part of a proposed arts and culture hub. This is a concern for heritage conservation and the cultural sector in our city as well as the broader University community and alumni.

The decision of the University of Alberta to sell and remove the Ring Houses from its historic campus does not "save" them. We again emphasize that this endangered place must, and may yet be, conserved on its existing site at the University of Alberta. We call on you as President of the University of Alberta, in a spirit of cooperation, to act urgently in the interests of a timely intervention and collaboration working with the Province, the City, and the Federal governments, and the new owner Primavera, in efforts and partnerships to preserve the Ring Houses where they stand today.

Sincerely,

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