

## LONDON CITY COUNCIL

## Owner can't raze low-rent building

Councillors balked at losing 42 affordable apartment units.

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*The London Free Press*

City council has narrowly decided that a 42-unit apartment building with affordable rents should not be demolished.

The demolition application was turned down Tuesday because the owner, Mutual Life of Canada, had no immediate plans to develop the property at 301 St. George Street once the tenants were evicted and the property levelled.

Councillors opposed to demolition said the city should protect its stock of affordable housing. One-bedroom apartments in the building rent for \$254-\$306, well below the average neighborhood rent of \$424 for the same type unit.

"Taking 42 units out of the market is sinful," said Controller Art Cartier.

Company lawyer Joe Hoffer argued the 37-year-old building needs major renovations, including asbestos removal, which would result in substantial rent increases.

Hoffer said the company has offered the tenants a generous compensation package involving an average lump sum payment of

\$2,300 per unit and two months free rent. City officials supported demolition because the neighborhood has a high vacancy rate of 5.2 per cent.

But Rocky Cerminara, the city's director of building controls, also indicated that health officials have not expressed any concern about the asbestos material in the building.

Mutual Life spokesman Randy Colwell said the company will consider appealing to the Ontario Municipal Board. Several years ago the company proposed a high-rise development on the site, but Colwell said the only immediate plans involve demolition and landscaping.

Concerns about affordable housing did not prevent council from approving the conversion of 154 townhouses on Westminster Avenue to condominiums earlier in the evening.

Some councillors objected because the developer was given an interest-free provincial loan in 1982 to develop the townhouses as affordable housing.

But Gary Williams, a councillor for the area, said many tenants were interested in buying the units and the rest have been offered long-term leases. The developer also indicated the provincial loan would be paid before the conversion.

**CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL:** In other council developments, a \$1,500 startup grant was approved for

the London International Children's Festival, despite concerns the event could be a financial burden.

Festival organizers are planning a four-day event next June with a \$450,000 budget, including \$60,000 from the government. The \$1,500 approved by council will allow the organizers to hire staff and begin promotion of the event.

Councillor Grant Hopcroft said the festival's plan to raise \$100,000 in ticket revenue was unrealistic since many of the events were free. Controller Janet McEwen said she was concerned festival organizers would have to ask for a much larger operating grant when council considers its 1991 budget next year.

**VIDEO ARCADES:** Council approved a bylaw that restricts the location of video arcades in the Centretown business district.

The bylaw does not affect existing arcades but restricts new arcades to shopping malls and hotels. It affects the area of Dundas Street between Adelaide and Elizabeth streets. Council passed a similar bylaw for the downtown area earlier this year.

**SNOW REMOVAL:** London's engineering department was told to investigate improvements in its snow-removal policy sought by Councillor Pat O'Brien.

The Ward 3 councillor, an outspoken critic of London's winter road maintenance operations, re-



jected as "not enough" a planned \$140,000 increase in the city's snow-removal budget next year. The plan provides for six more street plows, one sander and two extra sidewalk

plows.

Instead, O'Brien said the city should beef up its policy to ensure side streets and sidewalks are cleared as bare as possible within 24 hours of a snowfall, the same priority given major streets.

Councillor Paul Yorke, chairman of the city's transportation committee, estimated the added cost of the improvements at \$900,000.

**SEWER APPROVED:** A proposed trunk sewer was approved through a large stretch of the Thames River valley in northeast London, despite opposition by area residents who want the area saved for parkland.

The \$1-million sewer line, needed for future housing on nearby land would cut half a kilometre through open fields and wooded areas in the valley between Highbury Avenue and Adelaide Street.

Council's decision is subject to approval by Ontario's municipal affairs ministry, which can order a full environmental assessment if it chooses.

Project engineers have said steps will be taken to reduce environmental damage from the line's construction, including a tree planting program.