

Hart House salvation?

By **BILL MITCHELL**

THE HART HOUSE IS ONE step closer to salvation.

The Halifax heritage advisory committee re-evaluated the property Dec. 20 at a rating that gives the Victorian heritage designation. Pervious to the decision by the committee the house was only one point short of heritage designation.

United Equities, the private investment group which owns the property, still plans to demolish the Hart House and other houses on Summer Street and replace them with luxury condominiums.

Keith Allan, United Equities vice-president and chief

executive, says that the site is not as attractive as the Friends of the Public Gardens believe, and of questionable historical value.

"It is like a row of teeth with the two middle ones knocked out," says Allan. He says that the condominium development would improve the site.

Betty Moore, the most recent occupant of the Hart House, says Halifax city council approval of the heritage advisory committee evaluation may be difficult. She said that because of the time involved with the administration and committees, the council have only officially made 150 properties in Halifax of heritage value, out of 3000 that have scored above the minimum heritage point level.

Moore says that despite this she is not totally pessimistic since she says that the Hart House issue has brought together many people and has been a focal point for local politics. Local residents, university professors, and prominent people such as Brenda Shannon, former Halifax deputy mayor, have been helping the Friends of the Public Gardens.

Moore insists the Hart House is of great historical importance. She says that the house is visually attractive and has not changed much since its construction in 1898. The row of houses also under threat from demolition in Summer Street are a rare example of a row of Victorian properties, says Moore.

The friends of the Public Gardens have other concerns besides the historic value of the Hart House.

"The United Equities plan

would harm the public gardens as well," says Moore. They fear that the new building may create a domino effect, with several more multi-story buildings going up in the area.

"I can see whole blocks of these constructions going up. I can see this area turning into a ghetto for the very rich," says Moor. She argued that it would destroy the character of the neighbourhood.

Allan says that fears for other sites in the area is conjecture and a red herring.

"The surrounding sites are fully developed already," he says. Allan argues that the precedent he is setting is one of open space, not of high-rise development.

Dr. Don Patton, professor of the Business Administration Department at Dalhousie is troubled by the lack of business ethics of United Equities over the acquisition of the Hart House.

"The Company seems to have noted whatever is legal and market requirement. That is OK, but ethics in business should exist beyond these requirements," says Patton.

"Other individuals should be respected," he says. Patton says that United Equities have not gone through this process.

Allan denied comment on the accusation of unethical tactics.

"We have gone to extreme lengths to consider the consequences of the development. We carried out a wind tunnel study with a company in Ontario, and have had a scientist in on the question of shadows affecting the plant life in the public gardens." He says that it is the intention of United Equities to make the place look attractive with a substantial garden area.

"It would be far more attractive than the present parking lot."

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