

Property Commission Report 2023-24

The commission members are Ken Thomas (Chair), Keith McFarlane, Chuck Ross, and Wayne Sanderson, with Dwight Rutherford as a corresponding member.

The commission meets at the call of the chair by conference call in order to respond quickly to requests. So far 2024 has been the busiest year since establishing the commission and it appears to be getting even busier.

This report covers the time from March 31, 2023, the date of our last report, until August 31, 2024. Our last report was from April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023. We reported we had met 8 times and passed fifteen motions regarding church property in the Region, in a period of twelve months. Since April 1 2023 we have met 23 times in 17 months, and have approved 33 motions pertaining directly to property transactions. In our last report, we noted we hand-cleaned up transactions going back to 2004. This year we are working on actions remaining from 1999.

We approved 11 requests to list or seek to sell. 4 properties have since been sold and the other 7 are still pending. As well, 16 consent-to-sell motions were passed pertaining to 13 individual properties, 7 of which were churches, and the rest were other buildings, vacant land, and one cemetery. The commission also approved 4 major renovations, 4 financing plans, a Hydro easement, and a lease for a cell phone relay.

We are currently aware of 6 Winnipeg churches each independently working on future plans for their buildings, and at least one pending amalgamation that will require commission action.

It is obvious to the commission, and many others within the church, that the various urban congregations are holding millions of dollars of valuable property, but each in its own silo. There is a clear need for some form of unified approach to make the best use of our urban buildings in order to meet the ongoing worshiping and pastoral needs of the urban church, and also to maximize the legacy of our property to serve our faithful commitment to justice and reconciliation. Although the need is clear, such a conversation may be difficult to have. The Regional Council is currently working on establishing a Regional Trust that will be able to hold properties on behalf of the region.

The Regional Council continues to have three permanent regional trustees available when dealing with properties that are still in the name of the church, but no longer have congregational trustees.

The commission wishes to remind everyone that all United Church properties are governed by the United Church of Canada Act. Proper procedures must be followed and proper documentation completed for transactions to be registered by Provincial registries. The processes are not difficult and can be completed quickly if followed properly. We recommend consultation with the commission prior to proceeding with any property-related transactions, major renovations, or financing.

The commission continues to recommend that all communities of faith who anticipate selling or renovating property in the future ensure that the title is brought up to date.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Ken Thomas, Chair