
Offences Court, at 102 Wellington Square, cannot accommodate growth and presents some significant and costly challenges in terms of both technological updates and accessibility improvements. The relocation of the court to 220 Colborne Street is expected to facilitate improved access to justice as well as a modern and innovative court design that will remove barriers that the existing building currently has in place.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this report is to seek council approval of the Memorandum of Understanding between The Corporation of the City of Brantford and Wilfrid Laurier University in order to move forward with discussion of their mutual interest in exploring opportunities arising from the relocation of the Provincial Offences Court Office (POA) at the Laurier owned property located at 220 Colborne Street.

6.0 Background

The Provincial Offences Office is currently located at 102 Wellington Square. The building is in need of significant renovations in order to accommodate updated legislated changes, technological improvements, and to address the removal of barriers for built space under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA). The existing layout of the 9,151 square foot court facility does not lend itself to modifications due to the unique architecture and concrete design of the building. This unique design further creates challenges for expanding the physical size of the building as well as implementing and installing necessary technological enhancements required for the modernization of court services.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the POA courts were closed by order of the Province and, as of the date of this report, were not reopened for in person services. Court services have moved to an online platform, requiring significant technological advancements to the courts, including the physical court space where members of the judiciary and court staff still work and attend virtual court sessions. Additionally, as part of the City of Brantford's Accommodation Planning Process, staff from 100 Wellington Square and from 220 Market Street are in the process of relocating to the new City Hall building that has been renovated to accommodate more staff than originally expected. 100 Wellington Square will soon be vacated and eligible for disposition, should Council not wish to repurpose that building for another municipal use. 100 Wellington Square and 102 Wellington Square are physically connected by their infrastructure (HVAC,

etc.). Should Council wish to dispose of 100 Wellington Square, consideration would have to be given to either physically separated 100 and 102 Wellington (a costly endeavor) or relocating the courts and disposing of both properties as one package.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

Promoting and strengthening community partnerships.

Council Priority #4. There is a high trust in the City through demonstrated progress in taxpayer affordability and value for money.

8.0 Input From Other Sources

The Legal, Real Estate Services Department, specifically the Provincial Offences Court Division, as well as the Facilities Management and Security Department, were involved in the development of this report.

9.0 Analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated advancements in technology but also brought about a greater reliance on technology and emphasis on public health and safety. As part of this Government's response to the pandemic, the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Office of the Chief Justice have been moving forward with significant and long overdue modernizations to the operation of the courts both procedurally (with legislative amendments) and physically. With an increased importance on open space design, security, improved technology and safety in the POA courts, along with anticipated future changes to prosecutions and court administration the need to relocate the City's POA court is becoming increasingly critical to the functioning of this public service. The structural limitations of the current building located at 102 Wellington Street have and continue to limit the functionality of our court system. With the new procedures in place for court operations, the need for a space that is conducive to technological enhancements and improvement has become critical. The City must move forward with the modernization of the POA courts in order to continue to ensure access to justice for all those who face prosecution in this court.

The timing of the modernization changes by the Province to the courts coincides with the mutual interest between the City and Laurier to explore the benefits of creating an innovative court space along with unique programming and volunteer opportunities for Laurier Brantford students.

Creating and further fostering this relationship with Laurier has the potential to create a space driven by legislation, technology, diversity and backed by education to give the community a truly unique and innovative Provincial Offences Court facility.

The open space concept of 220 Colborne Street further adds to the potential to create multi-use, convertible spaces within the court to expand for future needs/changes in legislation or programs within Laurier or the court office.

The site at 220 Colborne Street is currently under lease by the City until 2024. By repurposing this site, the City would be acting in a fiscally responsible manner, though tenant improvements would necessarily be a part of the relocation process. Finally, courthouses are often a cornerstone of a City's downtown core. By relocating the POA courts to 220 Market Street, the court would remain central to the population it serves for the convenience of residents and visitors.

10.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications for this report as Council approval will provide the City the ability to establish a starting point for future discussions concerning the opportunities outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding.

11.0 Conclusion

With the need to expand and modernize the outdated POA court office, along with the challenges presented in doing so at its current location, this agreement between the City and Laurier will provide the framework necessary to explore new unique and innovative ways to create a modern, state-of-the-art courthouse. This has the potential to strengthen community partnerships, reuse existing leased space, and maintain a strong, centrally located court facility that serves the population while providing access to a new, modernized justice system.



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Attachments:

Appendix "A" – Brantford and Laurier MOU Re POA Relocation FINAL

Copy to:

N/A

By-law required yes no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk yes no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? yes no