

**Hamilton Chamber of Commerce
Presentation to City Council
Committee of the Whole**

**Re: LISTER Building Project
June 12, 2006**

Good afternoon, my name is Len Falco, and I am the President of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce. Even though I am here today representing the Chamber of Commerce, I think that it is equally important that you understand that I am also a small business owner and operate my business in the downtown core. I have been in business here going on 20 years.

In addition to my business, as an HR Consulting and training company, and operating a staffing and employment agency, I am also a commercial property owner. As a landlord, I rent out office space and personally pay a significant amount of property taxes each year to the City of Hamilton. (\$20,000 annually) As a matter of fact, my building is just a few blocks south of the Lister building on James Street south between Hunter and Bold.

Let me tell you, I have lived most of my life in Hamilton. I love this city and especially the downtown. I want to see it become the vibrant hub of activity that it once was when I was a child and a young man. I am in the "people business" and that's why I located my business in downtown Hamilton because I wanted to do my small part to create people traffic and activity. My business is one that I could really locate anywhere, but I chose downtown because that's where I wanted to be. And after all this time, I am still here.

I value the historic buildings and tremendous architectural stamp that Hamilton has. In fact, my own office building is one that is circa 1850's and I truly appreciate and enjoy the historical character and ambiance that it provides.

And I truly appreciate the character and history of the Lister. I have personal fond memories of the Lister. As a young boy in the late 50's and early 60's twice a week, I used to go down to the Lister Building and walk through the arcade on my way to my

piano and drama lessons. My teacher had a studio on the second floor. I always marveled at the hustle and bustle of people at work and the building that housed them. I used to take the stairs to the second floor right by Ann Foster's Music Store. Later, as a young man, I lived in the downtown core, that's where I had my first apartment and I used to pay my monthly rent to the folks at Moore and Davis Real Estate, with their offices located in the Lister Block. Yes, I did spend a lot of time in the Lister Building. What great memories I have and now I am truly saddened that this once fabulous structure has deteriorated into the state that it now is.

Yes, there is a lot of history and I am sure there are many other personal memories that people have of the Lister Building. However, we are here today to make a decision about the Lister Building and indeed the whole block. This property is now not only an eyesore but is quickly becoming a safety hazard.

Let me tell you another quick story. As recent as one month ago, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce hosted the annual conference of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. We had 200 business leaders and senior management from major organizations across the province visiting Hamilton. It was a great success and the comments were extremely positive about our City, our convention facilities and all of the amenities.

However, on the Thursday night before the convention officially got started (the next day), I was invited to attend a private dinner with the Board of Directors and Ontario Chamber Senior staff. They had arranged dinner at the Room 41 Restaurant on King William Street. They had all walked over from the Sheraton Hotel to the restaurant and in doing so had explored the area. At dinner the comments came out....." what a lovely area!"... "This street is so quaint with all of its shops and restaurants!" "What a very nice theatre down the street".....BUT (here it comes)... "What on earth is that building on the corner that looks like a bomb hit it?"

I tell you, I was speechless for a few minutes, and then all of a sudden I was EMBARRASSED! You know, I travel by the Lister everyday sometimes twice and

strangely enough, you become conditioned and eventually don't take notice. But it **is** there, and suddenly I was seeing our downtown through the eyes of our visitors. When I recovered from the comment I quickly responded, "Well that's one of our major projects". I really did not know what else to say, I was so embarrassed!

The Lister represents the future of our revitalization of the downtown core. The LIUNA proposal is the best one on the table. LIUNA have a tremendous track record in this City and have demonstrated a conscientious effort to always do the right thing in dealing with their historic property re-development. If the experts are telling us that it is not economically feasible to restore the Lister, then what's wrong with replication? What's wrong with re-building the Lister from the ground up? That is what they did in post-war Europe; they replicated all of those buildings and structures that were damaged by the bombing and the ravages of War.

We can trust LIUNA to re-create a NEW Lister that we can all be proud of. We need to move forward with redevelopment of the Lister in order to bring more business and commercial investment to the downtown.

A new Lister means more people activity and more business opportunities that will naturally migrate to the Hamilton's downtown Core. This will encourage more merchants and shopkeepers and more jobs.

That means opportunities for my children and grandchildren. I want them to live here and work here!

We at the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce are committed to economic growth in this community. The Lister is a wonderful cornerstone for the downtown, to build on the future prosperity of our City. It's about making things happen for Hamilton. Are we going to wait another 15 - 20 years? As a community we cannot afford that.

We do not want the legacy of our City to be one of continually letting opportunities slip by. If we do, sooner or later we'll run out of opportunities.

So, let's get on with it! We urge Council to approve the LIUNA plan to make this happen. I am convinced that in 24 months, what a difference your decision will make!

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by

Len Falco

President

Hamilton Chamber of Commerce