



Farhi shows plans for Elgin courthouse

PATRICK BRENNAN, Times-Journal

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Developer Shmuel Farhi presented his vision for the future of the Elgin county courthouse to a room full of St. Thomas residents Thursday.

He says an addition could turn the Wellington Street building into the comprehensive justice facility the province says the city needs -- and save the heritage landmark.

"A lot has happened since the summer," Farhi told a packed meeting at the St. Thomas Public Library.

"On the other hand, nothing has changed."

Farhi said with the renewal of a lease by the province, there is a five-year window to work toward the future of the 155-year-old courthouse. On the other hand, he reminded his audience he lost a valuable tenant when the provincial land registry office moved to new space on Talbot Street.

"So now, St. Thomas has another vacant property," he said.

Farhi said preserving heritage properties is not getting any easier.

"We need an end user," he said.

Paul Sapounzi, an architect with Ventin and Associates who has restored dozens of Ontario courthouses, supported Farhi's presentation with a slide show on similar projects.

Near the end of the 90-minute presentation, Farhi showed off drawings for an addition to the courthouse which would meet all the needs the province has set out, provide 100 spaces of parking and maintain the look of the courthouse from Wellington Street. The building's exterior has heritage designation.

Farhi said repeatedly he could build an addition at cheaper cost than a new building.

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To make it happen, Farhi and his associate Jim Chapman said letters to the province will be the most effective way of getting the government's attention.