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HAMILTON REGION

Indwell vows to bring creepy, crumbling Century Manor 'back to life'

Decaying remnant of the Hamilton Asylum for the Insane on the Mountain brow now expected to be restored and turned into supportive housing

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Indwell plans to restore Century Manor for affordable supportive housing.

John Rennison Spectator file photo

By Matthew Van Dongen Reporter

Non-profit Indwell says it can restore crumbling, creepy Century Manor for affordable housing despite years of neglect and a [haunted heritage of trespass tourism](#).

The striking Victorian Gothic manor — a remnant of the Hamilton Asylum for the Insane on the Mountain brow — closed to the public in 1995, more than 130 years after it was built.

Heritage advocates, fearing demolition by neglect, have [long lobbied the province](#) to restore the designated-but-decaying building. A proposal by Mohawk College to do just that was axed in 2018 when Ontario [controversially pulled out of an agreed sale](#) that also involved the city.

But last week, The Spectator exclusively reported on a [provincial deal to sell the coveted Fennell Avenue West land](#) to long-term care home developer Schlegel Villages — with Indwell on board as a partner to redevelop Century Manor into roughly 40 supportive housing apartments.



Photos inside Century Manor posted by urban explorers at Freaktography.com.

Freaktography.com

“The building can certainly be brought back to life,” said Indwell development director Graham Cubitt, who confirmed the agency has had access to the inside of the otherwise shuttered and bolted building to do initial due diligence.

The province has not yet officially announced details about the complicated land sale — that involves plans for a college expansion, long-term care and retirement homes and affordable housing — so it’s not yet clear how much each element of the project will cost, or how they will be funded. But as far back as 2018, Mohawk College estimated restoring Century Manor for educational uses would cost [around \\$9 million](#).

Indwell’s commitment to resurrecting the circa 1884 manor is welcome news for heritage advocates, many of whom worried that a parade of trespassers — combined with mould, asbestos and flaking lead paint issues identified by Infrastructure Ontario — would eventually make the building unsalvageable.

In 2020, The Spectator reported the dilapidated manor was seeing [routine break-ins](#) — and occasional plundering — by urban explorers drawn to the history of a gothic asylum once featured in the horror movie, “Skinwalkers.” (The province later beefed up security at the site.)



HAMILTON REGION

Trespass tourism ‘out of control’ at decaying Hamilton asylum wing Century Manor

“It’s just terrible that they let vandals basically ruin the inside of that beautiful building,” said longtime Mountain heritage advocate Diane Dent.

But Dent said Monday she was “delighted” to learn of plans to resurrect the heritage manor. “I think that it is just brilliant ... Indwell is going to be the saviour of that building, that history,” she said, pointing to the housing provider’s “track record” of heritage adaptation.

“They do good work, so I think we can breathe a sigh of relief,” added Shannon Kyles, who heads the local branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, which alongside local New Democrat MPP Sandy Shaw has formally lobbied the province in recent years to do more to preserve Century Manor.

“There was a real danger that nothing would be done.”



Workers cover a window to secure it at trespass-prone Century Manor.

John Rennison Spectator file photo

Over time, both heritage advocates and urban explorers have suggested rescuing the crumbling asylum will be a big job.

In 2020, photos shared with The Spectator showed years of satanic-themed graffiti, collapsing floors and ceilings and spreading mould that prompted at least one illicit adventurer to wear a N95 respirator for his visit.



Photos of graffiti inside Century Manor posted by urban explorers.

Freaktography.com

By email, Indwell CEO Jeff Neven noted Indwell has amassed “significant experience” working on 10 major heritage-preserving redevelopments over the last decade.

“During this time, we have developed an incredible team of experts and consultants who have experience in how best to carry out this work, in the most cost-effective way possible,” he said.

He pointed as an example to Harvey Woods Loft, a former textile mill in Woodstock “left abandoned for decades” before being successfully converted to affordable housing. “It is a much bigger scale compared to Century Manor, at more than double the size,” he said.

More information on the Century Manor project — and other apparent affordable housing destined for the lower city — will likely have to wait for a formal announcement. Via email last week, the province said it will say more about the deal “in due course.”



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