

FILM REVIEW

Who Needs Church?

Reviewed by Tony Wohlfarth

Southminster United Church has been a fixture in Old Ottawa South for over eighty-five years. Now it's the subject of a compelling thirty-minute documentary produced by a well-known resident of OOS, and OSCAR contributor, Ed Kucerak.

The film's director is Danielle Rolfe, and she captures the story from behind the camera without intruding.



Who Needs Church? tells the story of what happened when church leaders developed a redevelopment plan for the property. The plan, approved by the City of Ottawa, provides for a residential addition to the rear of the church overlooking the canal. The developer, Windmill Developments, proposed the six-storey condominium addition. The application pits the proponent against local residents and community activists.

The film looks beyond Southminster to explore the underlying issues – including declining church attendance and rising maintenance costs for aging buildings. The



film incorporates interviews with journalist Patrick Langston and the Reverend Tom Sherwood, author of *Listening to the Echo*, along with the Reverend Trisha Elliott, the minister at Southminster United. I found the interviews added greatly to the film – especially the one with Reverend Elliott. Southminster United Church clearly plays a major role in the community, and the film captures this aspect very well. Former City Councillor David Chernushenko appears in the film speaking before City Council about the divisions within the community over the redevelopment plan.

A special screening of *Who Needs Church?* on March 29 sold out quickly. As part of its participation in this year's Doors Open Ottawa over the June 1-2 weekend, Southminster United Church will feature an encore free screening of the film on Sunday, June 2 at 12:15 pm and 2.15 pm.

A trailer for the film is currently available at: www.whoneedschurch.ca

Tony Wohlfarth is an Ottawa based freelance film writer. He recently returned from covering the 2019 Hot Docs Film Festival in Toronto.