

Another heritage home could be demolished to make way for two

By Brock Weir

The future of another piece of Aurora's residential heritage could be in question over the next few months.

Councillors signed off last month on a request from a local couple to remove 83 George Street from the Town's Register of Properties of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest. Going into discussions, Council came to the table facing a recommendation from Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) to do the opposite.

In June, the homeowners appeared before HAC, asking that their property be delisted in order to allow the demolition of the home and subdivision of their lot into two to maximise the value of the land.

Although they have kept up with regular maintenance, they argued that bringing the property entirely up to snuff, including the removal of radiators and the installation of air conditioning, would not be cost effective in the end. Due to move, they said removing the restrictions on the property would allow them to ensure they could realise as much potential from their investment as possible.

The home in question was owned by one of the early founders of nearby Collis Leather. As such, the Committee agreed that the house was worthy of preservation. They asked that the owner work with Town Staff to look at relocating the building and ensuring that whatever is built on the land be in 'harmony' with the neighbourhood.

Homeowner Stephen Meldrum appeared before Councillors last month to once again state his case. He said the 1915 home reached the lower end of the heritage evaluation spectrum and underscored the size of the lot. The home is on the only double lot in the neighbourhood, which could be used more effectively.

'We have owned the lot since 2006 and have strived to significantly upgrade the property, preserve its heritage, and have done so with some significant funds invested,' he said, noting he had accepted a new job in Arizona. 'Significant funds are required going forward for the house, be it for ourselves or a new owner. We are looking to sell the property and would like to maximize our return on our only tax-free investment. This is definitely an area that is in transition and we would like to have the flexibility to be able to sever our lot at a later date.'

Although Councillor Evelyn Buck said requests for severance should ultimately go to the Committee of Adjustment rather than the Heritage Advisory Committee, she said she was not going to stand in their way, noting she had no problem with homeowners recognizing ways to maximise their potential value.

'I don't see the Town's role as to hinder anyone, and I think this recommendation of the Heritage Advisory Committee does that,' she said.

At the last Council meeting of June, Council followed through with their previous decision to de-list the property, but added a proviso to ensure that whether the house is maintained by the new owners, or whether the lot is severed and reconfigured into two new homes, the character of the surrounding George Street community is maintained.

This amendment requiring that the property owners 'be encouraged to ensure that any new structure on a newly severed lot should be in harmony with the established context of the neighbourhood in scale, design, rhythm and massing' in their letter of undertaking, was brought back to the table by Councillor Wendy Gaertner, following HAC's original recommendation.

'I have a concern that this property might be severed by the Committee of Adjustment and the property may be torn down,' said Councillor Gaertner, noting she believed HAC's original recommendation should be part of the public record. 'When staff goes to give their advice to the Committee of Adjustment, it is on record that this Council would like to see heritage neighbourhoods at least be protected in character 'not in a heritage district or any specific parameters 'but to respect the character of the neighbourhood. I

want Council to put on record that this is what we are hoping for when older homes are torn down in established neighbourhoods.?

The motion received the support of Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, but Councillor Buck said the opportunity to sound off on any possible restrictions was to come.

?If [the new owners] make an application for a severance, the Committee of Adjustment is a quasi-judicial body for that application and decide whether or not they want to grant it,? she said. ?Before they do, they will ask all agencies to send in their comments about this application. That is when we would have a legal opportunity to comment on [the potential severance] and as the Committee to impose conditions on the approval.

?Then it is the judgement of the Committee to decide whether or not those conditions will be imposed. You can put anything into the record, but whether or not they have any substance to enforce is another question.?