

Façade of last Doan house to be demolished, rebuilt in development

By Brock Weir

The final vestiges of Aurora's last-remaining house built by the once-prominent Doan family could soon meet the wrecking ball, pending a Council decision this week.

Last Tuesday, Council tentatively approved moving forward with an application from an area property owner to demolish the existing façade still standing on the property just east of Yonge and Wellington, which would subsequently be rebuilt to modern standards and incorporated into the entrance feature of a new apartment complex.

As The Auroran reported last month, Council voted to explore further options to see if the remnants of the building could be saved for incorporation into the new building, as originally approved by Council. The property owners applied to Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) for a reconsideration after their engineers determined it would not be feasible to move forward with the plan as it was.

But they were back to square one last Tuesday as the Committee recommended Council support the reconstruction of the façade, incorporating many of the original bricks and other salvageable material, such as windows and trims.

The recommendation also included a \$30,000 financial contribution from the developer to the Town's Heritage Reserve Fund.

‘It is the intention to recycle as much of the brick [as possible],’ said consultant Gary Templeton on behalf of the property owner. ‘There is bound to be some loss, but hopefully there is enough brick to be salvaged that can be applied to the front. Even if all the brick was just totally unsuitable, the intent is the front part of the building will look just like it looks today.’

Although Councillors ultimately supported the recommendation, they did so with a \$10,000 reduction to the proposed cash injection, as proposed by HAC.

‘I found the journey for the applicant and the developer to be a long one,’ said Councillor John Abel, putting forward the motion to reduce their contribution to \$20,000. ‘I truly believe [they were] going to follow through and he is going to in another way.’

Although the amendment carried, others were less enthusiastic about knocking the contribution down, stating the costs incurred by the developer for an additional engineers' report on maintaining the structure was to remedy the shortcomings in the first report.

‘The original engineering report said basically the reason they wanted to remove the building was because the masonry was over 140 years old and it wasn't to current code. I don't know who in their right mind would believe 142 year old masonry was built to today's code,’ said Councillor Jeff Thom, a member of HAC, adding the \$30,000 is to compensate for the loss of a ‘priceless’ heritage structure. ‘We were presented with a situation at the Heritage Committee where we had an engineering report and a peer review of that report suggesting it was not feasible to maintain the façade. The report didn't say it was unsafe.’

Added Councillor Sandra Humfries: ‘I feel this helps contribute to preserving heritage and salvage materials and we need all the help we can get. We're losing our buildings. Wellington is beautiful and this was one of the stars on Wellington. We're going to lose it, but it is going to look the same. I love that you're going to salvage every item you can with the reconstruction, but from my perspective I really think it is a great gesture to our town to all work together and keep our heritage going.’

From the perspective of Mayor Geoff Dawe, the \$30,000 contribution was, in the eyes of the developer, a ‘penalty’ for something that ‘may or may not have been foreseen’ in terms of the structural suitability of the building.

‘I am quite interested in putting money into the heritage fund, but at the same time I think we need to be fair for people who are coming in because that area sure needs a bit of a facelift. We need to be doing our bit to say we're willing to work with people,’ he said.

Others, such as Councillor Michael Thompson, argued all these costs would have had to be shouldered by the developer in any event as they were all integral in realising the original building of incorporating the façade into the new structure.