

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: A new home for the PM

By Stephen Somerville

For many years we have been reading stories about how inadequate the Prime Minister's residence is at 24 Sussex Drive. According to Maclean's magazine story, it is a 34-room, 12,000-sq.-foot home with an indoor pool and sauna (famously installed by former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau). The 145-year-old, three-storey limestone house sits on a two-hectare property in the desirable New Edinburgh neighbourhood and backs onto the Ottawa River.

It's also an old home in urgent need of repair.

It is very cold in the winter and too hot in the summer.

It is so bad that the current PM, Justin Trudeau, does not live there with his family.

The home is a national embarrassment.

Just as the U.S. has their White House at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave and Britain has theirs at 10 Downing Street, Canada should have an internationally recognizable home for its first family.

According to Wikipedia, the house at 24 Sussex Drive was originally commissioned in 1866 by lumberman and Member of Parliament Joseph Merrill Currier as a wedding gift for his wife-to-be.

In 1943, the federal Crown-in-Council used its power of expropriation to divest the (then owner) of his title to the house, to consolidate public ownership of the lands along the Ottawa River. After several years of uncertainty, in 1950 the government decided to refurbish the property as a residence for the prime minister, the renovations costing just over \$500,000.

Louis St. Laurent was the first to take up residence in 1951. Since then, every Prime Minister except for Kim Campbell (who resided at Harrington Lake) and, to date, Justin Trudeau (who has opted to reside at Rideau Cottage pending a review of work needed to repair the house) has resided at 24 Sussex Drive for the duration of their mandates.

Previous prime ministers lived at a variety of locations around Ottawa: Sir Wilfrid Laurier and William Lyon Mackenzie King, for instance, lived at Laurier House in Sandy Hill. Laurier House was willed to the Crown upon Mackenzie King's death in 1950 and was thus also available for designation as the prime minister's official residence at the time.

I would like to see a new home for our Prime Minister. One that would reflect both our history and our culture.

According to Wikipedia, Unlike 10 Downing Street or the White House, 24 Sussex is used almost exclusively as a place of residence; the prime minister's work is carried out by the Office of the Prime Minister in Langevin Block, near Parliament Hill, though informal meetings between the Prime Minister and other government or foreign officials may take place in the residence (foreign heads of state on state visits are officially hosted by the monarch or Governor General of Canada at Rideau Hall). One consequence of the building's lack of official bureaucratic functions is that 24 Sussex Drive has never been widely used as a metonym for the Office of the Prime Minister.

The new home should be large enough so that the PM can have official meetings with other heads of state and also serve for official functions there.

It may be more practical to erect the residence on a different property. In November 2016 a new consultant report estimates renovation costs are now pegged at \$38 million to complete repairs to home and pool, as well as additional annex as residential space with the main building to be used for other usage.

The residence should also be a showpiece for Canadian art and house items of Canadian historical significance.

There should be a design competition open to Canadian architects.

It would also be a great idea if we could get Canadian children involved in some capacity in the process of building a new home for the Prime Minister.

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