

Centre Street home set for demolition, but replacement raised questions

By Brock Weir

A small home on Centre Street, part of Aurora's Heritage Conservation District, is set for demolition, but a new heritage-style home to replace it nearly hit a speedbump amid concerns the surrounding neighbourhood had not been adequately consulted.

The house, located at 74 Centre Street, is set to be hit by the wrecking ball after Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee deemed the 1873 dwelling of little historical significance due to extensive renovations done to it over the years.

Owners of the property plan to replace the building with a new two storey home built in the Second Empire architectural style, a style of home found in other parts of the Heritage Conservation District (HCD), but not necessarily on Centre Street.

While Councillors were pleased the owners plan to retain and preserve two heritage trees on the property, they were poised to hit the brakes on the plan last week until they received further input from the property owner.

Originally, Council members raised several objections to the plan, including architectural style and a perceived lack of consultation with neighbouring landowners.

Mayor Geoff Dawe, for instance, said he was not in favour of trying to restructure the motion on the table on the fly, particularly because certain members did not like the style of the building.

"I don't think procedurally it is a good way for us to go," he said. "I don't have a problem with the style, but few people come to me with design choices to start."

Councillors Paul Pirri and Jeff Thom also indicated they were fine with the style as presented.

"It falls in line with the general themes, it adds a little bit of variety to the street, so let's be clear what we are doing: we are dictating the style of a home that meets the period that we will be allowing or disallowing based on our own preference on how the homes on the street should mesh with one another," said Councillor Pirri. "In my view, it falls in line with the right time period. There are other examples within the district. I think a little variety would be appreciated."

Added Councillor Thom: "Aren't these all examples of 19th century architectural style that don't have anything to do with each other anyway? To me, this looks fine."

At the end of the day, however, it all boiled down to public consultation. The deadline for demolition approached and neighbouring residents had not been specifically notified on what is planned for the site.

"There is a chance the neighbours in the area might not be aware of this. No notification has been sent out similar to what we do with the public planning process to make them aware," said Councillor Thompson.

Added Councillor Pirri: "What I don't like is the lack of engagement from neighbours. What we have seen time and time again is that if you don't let the neighbours know what is going on, without a doubt there will be anger and we need to set a higher standard when it comes to this type of development. I am disappointed we haven't gone over and above."

Councillor Gaertner said she agreed, saying the last thing they want is "angry residents" coming to Town Hall after the fact.

"I just want to know that the public was happy with the design," she said. "I don't particularly want to change it, but I want to know the residents believe it conforms with their idea on what the plan should bring to the neighbourhood."

By the time last week's Council meeting rolled around, this concern remained but Councillors were more comfortable with the proposal, particularly when landowners noted this build would take advantage of local contractors and suppliers to make things happen.