

## Eight properties intended as heritage homes could be removed from designation

Area homeowners concerned about their houses receiving heritage designation, expressed their opposition to Council at last week's General Committee meeting, citing impacts to property values and insurance rates.

Council in 2020 directed staff to identify some properties as having heritage significance. About a month ago, 30 individual property owners received a Notice of Intent to Designate.

Of the 30 Notices of Intent to Designate, eight Notices of Objection have been received.

On April 18, Council, at the Committee level, removed the Notice of Intent to Designate for eight properties where objections were submitted including 16 Reuben Street, 31 Tyler Street, 33 Mosley Street, 41 Wellington Street East, 71 Tyler Street, 81 Tyler Street, 1978 Vandorf Sideroad, and 15800 Yonge Street. The decision is expected to be ratified this week.

Angela Daust, resident at 31 Tyler Street, noted that the design and physical value of the property is not of historical significance as it was rebuilt. She said she was concerned that the designation will significantly lower the resale value of the property after she had already invested in renovations and plans to retire soon.

Nothing was salvageable in the original house, Daust said, adding that every piece of lumber has been replaced and all the interior features are new.

"The majority of historical houses surrounding our houses have either been renovated beyond recognition from their original or had been torn down to accommodate a seven-storey building at the corner of Tyler and Yonge," she said.

Out of all the houses on her street, Daust questioned why her house was chosen for the designation as a heritage home where there were much older houses almost entirely in their original structure on the street.

Real estate agents have advised her that designated houses have lower resale values, higher renovation costs and higher insurance premiums, Daust said.

"When we purchased this house 26 years ago, nobody from the Town of Aurora, the Historical board or any other governing body cared whether we wanted to tear this house down or not. It was derelict, structurally unsound and unsightly. We decided to rebuild it to look historic, but could easily have torn it down and built something modern without objection from the Town," she said.

"After 26 years of committing our time and money to this house, the Town of Aurora now deems it worthy of designation despite never having offered financial or physical assistance in its rebuild."

Durst added that she felt "blindsided" by the designation and would have appreciated being included in prior discussions that began two years ago.

Christine and David Butler expressed concerns regarding the proposed designation of 81 Tyler Street and discussed the home's foundation, heating costs, as well as a designation's effects on property value.

Living in a home described as "gothic revival," David said he hoped that he and his partner would have the same rights and freedoms as other homeowners to choose what they want to do with their home in the future.

"We, unfortunately, are not interested in having our home designated heritage. It just reduces our options and I just don't feel that's fair," he said. "I feel that we want the same rights and freedoms as everybody else in the community. The ability to keep our options open. It appears that the Town and members of the community want to enjoy our heritage home while we carry the burden of

maintaining the home. It just doesn't sit well with me.?

Regarding the proposed designation of 33 Mosley Street, Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste Mission's Reverend Fr. Florian Ene questioned the reasoning behind the proposed designation.

The charity bought the property from the Lions Club in 2011. The building was constructed in the 1870s and has had several owners over the years. Although the original building has been preserved, little of the original design has been preserved.

Rev. Fr. Florian said he had heard from staff that the reason for the designation was to protect the building from demolition. In response, he noted that the church is unlikely to be demolished.

?We are not comfortable with the situation. And we are strongly opposed. If your intentions are purely to protect this building, come and see what we've done. Come and see if this building needs protection. Or if you decide that is in good hands, then please stop this process,? he said.

Alexander Papadimitropoulos bought his house on 71 Tyler Street two years ago, saying he and his wife bought it at the top of the market.

?It's all we can afford. We can't afford increased insurance payments,? he said.

The couple have spent over \$100,000 in renovations over the past two years, he said, adding that their insurance tripled around the same time and that the designation would make it more expensive to change things in the house.

?We think that our home is an asset sent to the community, we don't want to change it, demolish it, or get rid of it. But we do want to sort of protect our rights,? Papadimitropoulos said.

Numerous property owners have also indicated support for the heritage designation, with designation not intended to restrict renovations or complementary additions.

After removing the eight properties from the designation list, Council could follow up with heritage designation bylaws for the remaining 22 properties, said Director of Planning Marco Ramunno.

The process of following up will ensure that all individual property owners are on-board.

Ramunno noted that some may not be aware of the process yet, and may plan to object the designation as well.

Ramunno said a majority of the 22 remaining property owners have replied, but they have not agreed to the designation in writing, mainly inquiring about the process.

?At that point, those notices with the official notices would go into those 22 properties. And they would also have an opportunity to appeal that decision to the tribunal,? he said.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said she believes some homes are worth the heritage designation.

?There was a time when we lost a lot of heritage properties because nobody understood the value. People understand the value now. And I believe that the properties I mentioned should absolutely be protected by the Town of Aurora,? she said.

Properties that are important to designate include St. Andrew's College and the church at 33 Mosley, said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo.

?If one of those were a home and not in a public realm, perhaps I would be saying something different. Because the chances of changing that would be much more significant and probably would happen as opposed to a St Andrew's college or a church,? he said.

However, noting the changes entailed by the designation, Councillor Gallo emphasized the importance of written consent from each of the property owners saying that they accept the designation and understand the process.

?We're doing something pretty significant to their properties. I think there should be a failsafe that we get something in writing to them that they know exactly what we're doing to their property. It's spelt out. It's something signed from them saying they know exactly what we're doing to their property. I think we should be doing that, I suspect some of them aren't clear, and if we haven't heard from some of them, they need to know,? he said.

From prior conversations with St. Andrew's College, Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he has no doubt that the college will be stewards of heritage and take care of their history. However, Councillor Weese expressed his concern with the process of heritage designation.

?I'm just not comfortable with this process that we have here. We're dealing with people's lives and their livelihoods and their assets,? he said.

Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim said he is not in favor of designating any of the homes.

?I'd be pretty upset if someone designated my house one morning. I understand the value of preserving history. But preserving history is a partnership,? he said.

On the other hand, Councillor Kim said that market reports found that designating to a heritage home should not impact the market value of the property, however, he acknowledged the stress that homeowners must feel.

?I'm against designating these homes and any homes that come to this Council, and I think I'd be consistent with that, regardless of the circumstances,? he said.

Ramunno said he will reach out to the remaining 22 property owners to ensure that they understand the next steps, with written consent expressing confirmation by next week before decisions are made.

Mayor Tom Mrakas noted that moving forward with the intent to designate the 22 remaining properties does not hinder the 22 properties from objecting to the designation in the future.

?If there happens to be an objection or we happen to hear from one of the residents at that time, which would be closer to that June date, we could still remove it at that point as well. So, just because if we pass this next week, it doesn't mean that those 22 are automatically going to be designated. We still have an opportunity to still have conversations with the residents,? he said.

**By Elisa Nguyen**