

Heritage District would guide change not restrict it, say supporters



By Brock Weir

A Heritage Conservation District would protect the integrity of a neighbourhood, while also giving its residents a chance to write the book on their shared values, according to proponents of the plan.

Although those opposing the proposed district (HCD) had the numbers, proponents of the plan had an equal amount of passion for the plan as they appealed to Council to take things to the next level.

Discussions in favour of the plan were led at the start of the meeting by Heritage Consultant Carl Bray, who has been working with several neighbours to advocate for the district.

In his view, it goes a long way to ensure the values of a neighbourhood beyond planning legislation already on the books.

‘If you truly want to retain and enhance the character of the area, it is the Heritage Act that allows you to do that and the Heritage Conservation District is the vehicle for doing so,’ he said. ‘It is change management. It is not an attempt to set something in stone.’

‘In a way, it anticipates the types of change that are likely to happen but it allows you to determine in what way that change happens. The level of regulation is about the same as you would have to do for a building permit or those types of things.’

Listening to the opposition, some of those in favour of the plan were able to find some common ground but remained firm in their resolve that the HCD was the right way forward.

‘No one wants to be overregulated,’ said realtor Linda Stephens. ‘No one wants to see further restrictions placed upon them. Some people jokingly say that we live in a free dictatorship with rules upon us, but on this issue I feel a little bit differently. We have a distinct, unique and historical neighbourhood. We want to maintain that character and the flavour of that neighbourhood. I believe we have something valuable to offer.’

These were similar sentiments shared by residents such as Erina Kelly and Anna Kroeplin who have been working to get their neighbours on board with the plan. For Ms. Kelly, heritage homes are ‘a non-renewable resource’ and once they are gone, they are gone. Some insurers take Heritage Homes into consideration while others back away, but residents should take it upon themselves to ‘shop around’ for an ‘enlightened’ broker.

‘Those brokers that will offer you guaranteed replacement insurance do that because they understand that under the Ontario Heritage Act, a designated building that is damaged accidentally is not required to be restored to its former style and fashion,’ she said.

?Heritage homes are a non-renewable resource and some insurance companies get that.

?I am asking you to move us to phase two where our residents can work together to write our own guidelines to preserve what we have in our neighbourhood and focus on the opportunities that lie ahead.?

Responding to some of the opposition's concerns, Dave Pressley said he was ?dismayed? when residents had their first chance to speak out about the HCD this winter armed with information he said he believes was untrue. He also added that as a member of the Town Park Area Residents' Association (formerly HEAT) they believe a Heritage Study poses no threats and going to the next phase is a positive step.

?We understand we are part of a community and we hold our homes in trust for the next owner,? he said. ?We will provide all of our neighbours with facts, not rhetoric. We will petition our neighbours, not pressure them. Our neighbours have good heads on their shoulders and they can figure it out for themselves. We are motivated by our love of the area and not the profit we can make from our homes.?

Others, including Lenore Pressley, said their concerns stemmed from this stewardship. While homes that have replaced older dwellings in the neighbourhood have, so far, been in keeping with the area, that might not always be the case. She said she becomes concerned when homes are turned into multiunit dwellings because demolition and redevelopment is often at the end of that road.

?This seems to be an ongoing theme,? she said.

Added Darryl Moore: ?Yes, the regulations are a bit more, but I don't think they are that onerous and I think it is important to show you are recognizing the value of your own property and the value of your neighbourhood.?

Speaking from his perspective on the opposite side of Wellington Street, which has been a HCD for nearly a decade, former councillor Bob McRoberts questioned what all the fuss was about.

?Over the last four years of your term, how many complaints have each of you received from residents in the northeast district due to the Heritage Conservation Guidelines?? he asked Councillors. ?Whether you share the answer or not, I would ask Council to think of that number in deliberations.?