

No Heritage designation for ca. 1850s home on 6th Line

The long-awaited Heritage Assessment of the Armstrong-Van Voorst home on the 6th Line was presented to Bradford West Gwillimbury Council, in Committee of the Whole on May 2nd. Prepared by Su Murdoch Historical Consulting of Barrie, the Assessment was carried out as a condition of draft approval for Christina Homes Ltd.'s proposed 66 unit subdivision on the 10 acre property.

The consultant concluded that the one-and-a-half storey Georgian-style house was likely built prior to 1860, and has associations with both the Walker and

Armstrong pioneering families. Although the Town has not set local heritage evaluation criteria and does not have an inventory of heritage properties, the author concluded that the home "has cultural heritage value or interest to the Town, and that heritage conservation options should be considered."

The Town was advised to "consider the property as a candidate for long-term protection" through designation as a heritage building, with the preferred option being its preservation *in situ*, incorporated into the subdivision in an "appropriate manner."

Alternatives were relocation to a "suitable off-site setting"; or Town incentives to the developer to preserve and re-use the building. Finally, "if through further analysis, it is determined that retention on site and relocation are not reasonable options," the consultant suggested documenting the dwelling before demolition, and salvaging any historical materials.

Marvin Geist, lawyer for Christina Homes Ltd., appeared as a delegation before Committee of the Whole to oppose the preservation of the house, and a staff recommendation to designate and maintain



The Armstrong-Van Voorst home, for sale for \$1 - to anyone who will move it.

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the house "in a safe manner" until a building permit has been issued for its restoration.

"We do not support the property for heritage preservation," Geist told Council, noting that a report by Architects Rasch Exckler Associates Ltd. estimated the cost of bringing the home up to Building Code at \$177,000 - and the cost of full restoration at \$212,00 to \$228,000.

He argued that retention of the home within the subdivision would require reconfiguration of the street layout, and a reduction in the number or size of other lots. "We promised our adjacent neighbours that lots would be consistent with their lots (sizes). We would not be able to live up to our commitment."

Geist also argued that the retained property and house would be cost-prohibitive for any prospective buyer, resulting in the home being left vacant - becoming "an invitation to trespassers" and a firetrap.

He reiterated Christina Homes' earlier offer to sell the home for only \$1, on the condition that it be moved off the property. Relocation costs were estimated at about \$62,500.

If the home is not purchased within 60 days,

the developer would then provide the municipality with \$20,000 toward the cost of relocation, he said - and if the Town declines to undertake to move the house, the developer would allow access to the home "for the purpose of recognizing its attributes" and salvaging historical materials prior to demolition.

Councillor Duncan Page objected. Noting that the Armstrong-Van Voorst home sits on the equivalent of 3 subdivision lots, each valued at \$150,000, Page said, "They've just saved half a million on property... Wouldn't Christina Homes offer at least \$62,000? This developer should come out and say, 'We'll move it for you... What you're talking about is our heritage. We've got to save this house, and I think Christina Homes has got to help us save this house.'"

Page pointed out that subdivisions in other municipalities have successfully incorporated heritage buildings - and that "you need 90 days to sell a home, not 60 days."

Councillor Mikki Nanowski concurred. "There is a value to saving what we have... We are reaching an age where we can look back to move forward." She acknowledged that the Town is changing, "but if we can keep those little bits... there's great beauty in that, and it speaks to what we've done as a nation and as a People."

Councillor Duncan White, while agreeing with Page and Nanowski on the need for heritage preservation, argued it was too late for the 6th line house. "I can't see anybody putting up that kind of money," to preserve

and restore the Armstrong-Van Voorst home, he said, urging the new Heritage Committee to designate significant buildings before they fall into disrepair. He expressed his support for "Appendix B" - which requires Christina Homes to offer the house for sale "at a nominal amount", and contribute \$20,000 toward the cost of relocation.

Councillors Ron Simpson and Peter Dykie Jr. also supported option B, with Dykie warning of potential further damage to the structure, if the house is moved.

Committee of the Whole approved option B, a recommendation that was confirmed without debate in Council on May 9th.

"For Sale: 19th Century Georgian style dwelling, building only, to be removed from site and relocated elsewhere. Contact Joe at 1-705-434-2100." - ad that appeared in May 6th edition of The BWG Times.

End of an era

Jim and Diane Van Voorst had 23 enjoyable years at the farmhouse on the 6th Line, operating the Scotch Settlement Apple Orchard.

Over the past few years, they attempted to win Town approval for a proposed Seniors' Retirement Enclave on the property - but after struggling to meet the planning requirements and escalating costs, they finally sold to Christina Homes. The new owner plans to build a standard subdivision, with 26 detached and 40 semi-detached homes.

The Van Voorsts are now moving out - and today, May 13th, are holding a Yard Sale, starting at 8 a.m.

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