

The Demolition of Renner-Carney House and Other Heritage Properties

by Joel Zemel © 2016

On 12/10/16, in response to the question on his views regarding development in the city of Halifax, Mayor Mike Savage's response was as follows:

"The answer to development is not that all development is good or all development is bad. Good development is good and bad development is bad." - Halifax Metro

Even outside the context of a complete interview this type of non-response is one can only be expected from a politician.

Recently, a registered Heritage property, a one and a half story brick mansion known as the Renner-Carney House at 1349-51-53 Barrington Street, has been earmarked for demolition. In 2015, a report entitled "Case H00410: Background Study toward the Establishment of a Heritage Conservation District in Barrington South" was presented to Halifax Regional Council. Other Heritage properties such as the Jeffrey House, Stoddard House, St. Mathew's Manse and Lithgow House are also in jepopardy.

On p. 159 of the report, dated March 24 2015, the following statement appears in the Renner-Carney House's description (with the names reversed):

"Carney-Renner House is clearly an asset to the surrounding area and proposed district. It is compatible with the buildings in the area (in terms of building material and elevation) and gives the area a bit of flavor [sic] with its eclectic style of architecture."

A year and a half later, a developer has applied to have this building destroyed. No one would contest the fact that progress is inevitable and that positive results can come from growth and development. However, the wanton destruction of historically viable and important Heritage properties should not be considered positive or inevitable.

The face of Halifax has changed drastically as a result of the recent, relentless spate of over-development; with virtually no public input considered at crucial decision points. On the face of it, comments from the general public may occasionally be solicited, but in the end, all decisions of import regarding Heritage properties are made unilaterally by Council with little or no regard paid to this public input.

This is evidenced by Council's approval of the construction of Nova Centre, the construction, against public and City Staff's wishes on the corner of Oxford Street and Chebucto Road. An inappropriate 29 story building to be built on Robie Street and the continued destruction of old properties (though not Heritage) on Young Avenue are also a few examples that raise red flags.

The source of Council's power regarding Heritage Properties comes from Section 71/2 of the "Halifax Regional Municipality, Land Use By-law, Halifax Mainland" which states:

Section 71(2) Heritage Property states:

Council may, by development agreement, pursuant to Section II of the Policies of the Municipal Planning Strategy, permit any development on a lot which is a city registered heritage property in accordance with Policy 6.8. [Municipal Planning Strategy]

Section II Policy 6.8 states:

In any building, part of a building, or on any lot on which a registered heritage building is situated, the owner may apply to the City for a development agreement for any development or change in use not otherwise permitted by the land use designation and zone subject to the following considerations:

- (i) that any registered heritage building covered by the agreement shall not be altered in any way to diminish its heritage value;
- (ii) that any development must maintain the integrity of any registered heritage property, streetscape or conservation area of which it is part;
- (iii) that any adjacent uses, particularly residential use are not unduly disrupted as a result of traffic generation, noise, hours of operation, parking requirements and such other land use impacts as may be required as part of a development;
- (iv) that any development substantially complies with the policies of this plan and in particular the objectives and policies as they relate to heritage resources.

On page 2 of the Heritage Advisory Committee proposal it states the following regarding concerns of a rush to develop during the process:

“The Committee was informed that Regional Council does not have the legislative power to prevent any development from occurring during this process.”

According to Section 71(2) in the Land Use By-Law, the Council’s assertion that they have no power to stop development is an outright lie. They obviously have the power to dole out Heritage properties for development and to prevent same.

Yet here we are once again faced with the impending destruction of Halifax's historical and architecturally interesting properties with no consideration by Council for the preservation of our city's heritage.

Regional Council has too much power in these matters. The Land-Use Bylaw should include provisions for transparency and public input at all stages. It is imperative that the bylaw be rewritten to end Council's power to make unilateral decisions on Heritage Properties and others. As well, provisions should be made to put a stop to Council’s penchant for kowtowing to developers by arbitrarily changing long-established zoning codes.

In previous years, when it suited Council to pander to public opinion, they have demonstrated self-induced flexibility. The establishment of the Skating Oval and the preservation of the Halifax Forum being perfect examples. However, Regional Council has proven time and again that it cannot be trusted to make important unilateral decisions that best suit the city as a whole, especially, when a large groundswell of opposition is not present.

Decisions regarding possible destruction and/or development of properties vital to the importance of our heritage and architectural well-being should be made by public consensus - opinions perhaps best represented by a strong committee comprised of concerned citizens with the power to work in tandem with Council. The cultural and architectural direction of the city should not be determined by one small group of people whose decisions more often than not favour developers, their own constituencies and/or personal agendas.

As an appropriate first step, the city might best be served by diverting a portion of the \$9,000,000 allocated to an ill-conceived refurbishment of Needham Hill Park to the restoration and maintenance of our Heritage properties.

Without drastic changes in policies having to do with the preservation of non-heritage and heritage properties in Halifax, the needless destruction of such valuable social and historically important structures will persist.

To that end, Section 71 (2) of the Land Use By-law must be addressed and rewritten. The longer Case H00410 remains unresolved and Barrington Street South not declared a Heritage Conservation District, our Heritage properties will be at the mercy of developers. Eventually, there will be nothing worthwhile left to save.

A city that attempts to move blindly forward in the name of progress, without due recognition and preservation of its built heritage, is doomed to failure. It is in all of our best interests to ensure that clear minds prevail when it comes to solving this on-going dilemma. Otherwise, it is the developers, special interest groups and privileged individuals who will prevail and benefit while the majority of the people of Halifax will continue to lose more of the essential icons which reflect our collective cultural and architectural history.

The complete report can be found at the following URL:

<https://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/documents/150324ca1131.pdf>

HRM Land Use By-law:

http://www.halifax.ca/planning/documents/halifaxmainland_lub.pdf

Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy:

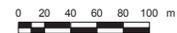
http://www.halifax.ca/planning/documents/halifaxmainland_lub.pdf



**Map 3 - Heritage Properties and Resources
Old South Suburb Heritage Conservation District**

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- | | |
|---|---|
|  Proposed heritage district boundary |  Registered heritage property |
|  Downtown Halifax plan boundary |  Contributing resources/buildings |
|  Barrington Street Heritage Conservation and Barrington Street South Precinct boundaries |  Provincially registered heritage building |



Downtown Halifax Plan Area

The accuracy of any representation on this plan is not guaranteed.