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Time to preserve heritage buildings

Once you knock a building over, it's physically gone forever.

And that's precisely why Innisfil council needs to start taking action to preserve the town's heritage buildings. Last week, a developer demolished the Ness-Adair home, a building that was constructed in the 1860s, to make way for a new subdivision and retail store.

And tonight, council will host a public meeting to discuss the future of another century building, the Roderick-McConkey homestead. The current homeowner is attempting to sell his land to a developer, and advocates say that without protection, it's only a matter of time before the homestead is torn down.

Council is making progress, albeit slowly. The town's heritage committee will be presenting council with a list of at least 31 places of historical interest within the municipality. The locations will not be released publicly until council approves the list. Thus, whether the Roderick-McConkey homestead is on the list remains unclear.

Once the list is approved by council, affected property owners must give two months of notice before they can destroy a house, allowing plenty of time for investigators to see if the property holds historical significance.

The need to approve that list is becoming more urgent, especially with significant development in the town already underway. And while concerned residents should be cautious when grouping all developers into one pool, there is precedence to the theory that more of



Comment

by Chris Simon

these buildings will fall. For developers, it's clearly easier to demolish a building without heritage protection, rather than wait for the site to be designated. And once that building is knocked down, without protection, there's not much that can be done to punish a developer.

Town staff and members of council can take an active role in preserving these structures, aside from designating these sites. They can work with developers to ensure the buildings remain safe, at least until heritage investigations can be completed.

And maybe it's time for a little foresight and ingenuity. At last week's heritage committee meeting, there were rumblings of designating a specific area with the town as a historical village, similar to Niagara-on-the-Lake. While that is likely years away, Cookstown, would be a perfect site for this, and would certainly draw tourists on their way to cottages each weekend. Located just minutes from Highway 400, it would be closer to the Greater Toronto Area than Niagara, and easily accessible. Although certain buildings may be difficult and costly to move, some of Innisfil's old jewels could be relocated and revamped in Cookstown, far away from the planned large-scale development.

Or perhaps developers just need to embrace some of these sites, with encouragement from town council, and plan their construction accordingly. Businesses hate bad press, and most developers would likely be willing to work with council towards a resolution, once they realize there could be public outcry for an old building. In the case of the Roderick-McConkey homestead, should it be found to have enough historical significance to warrant saving, the building could have a number of uses.

All across Ireland, for example, historical churches and sites have been converted into tourist information centres. Although Innisfil is far from being a powerhouse tourism hub, it could feature information on many of the town's events and places of interest.

Perhaps even Simcoe County and the provincial government would have an interest in the building, using it to promote upcoming events across the region.

A historical village in Cookstown, coupled with the Big Bay Point Resort, could send the tourism industry in Innisfil into a boon. The town, along with the Innisfil Community Events Corporation, could also work towards creating more special events and festivals, which would bring in more tourism dollars and justify the expense of converting the historical homestead.

Innisfil is at a crossroads. While development is necessary and ultimately beneficial, the preservation of the town's historical sites could have a long term positive impact on the community.

Town to blame for building's destruction

Letters From Our Readers

Innisfil Beach Road and the 20th Sideroad. Why?

Shame on the developer who obviously has no vision and doesn't care about what is important to our community. He will be here today and gone tomorrow. He just wants to make his money and get out.

Shame, shame, shame, who is to blame? Let's make sure it doesn't happen again!

In this age of recycling, a perfectly lovely old historic home, made of stone from the area and built in the 1860s was demolished last week. It was the Ness-Adair home on the corner of

Shame on the Innisfil council who didn't take the time to warn the developer of the importance of the historic value that the old

place had in our community.

Shame on the Innisfil Heritage Committee that has been in existence since 2004 and still does not have a list of historic landmarks important to the town. There are no excuses. It wasn't a mistake, it is inexcusable.

We all are aware that Innisfil is growing by leaps and bounds, but I do hope that it is not at the expense of our heritage.

The Innisfil Historical

Society has published a wonderful book on the Farms of Innisfil. They have preserved Knock School for future generations.

Surely to goodness from now on our council and their committees can prevent the loss of our heritage buildings in Innisfil with some vision. The new entrance to Alcona will be a Canadian Tire, No Frills and some big box stores. Big deal; this at the expense of

our heritage.

I suggest strongly that council set aside a piece of land in Innisfil for the purpose of moving old buildings onto it. This can be done and has been done in other communities.

Let's stand up to the developers. If they want to come to Innisfil they'd better care about what we value, our heritage.

Marj Mossman,
Innisfil

Residents of Innisfil are being spoken for

Letters From Our Readers

Recently, some people of Innisfil were referred to publicly as the "citizens of Innisfil."

So are we, The Residents of Innisfil Association. We've been supporters of the Big Bay Point Resort since 2002, and are very much in favour of this resort. It will mean jobs, roads, tax dollars, public transportation and a new fire hall to name but a few of the benefits for our town.

The identified citizens are for the most part, very wealthy owners of land and homes in the Big Bay Point area of Innisfil. Their sole reason for opposing this

development is their unwilling approach to change, especially in their own, until now, exclusive backyard.

Make no mistake, these citizens are very used to their money buying them what they want in their neighbourhood.

Big Bay Point has, for over 100 years, been the exclusive playground of wealthy Toronto university graduates, who could afford to get away from the grimy city.

They didn't go to the cottage, they went to the lake. They played in a BBP park area still known locally as The Campus.

This group has continually tried to block the building of this world class resort, planned by Andres

Duany, a famous New Urbanism architect. They have tried every method, including dragging the poor Huron Wendat Nation in Quebec into the fray. To make matters worse, they force the taxpayers of Ontario pay the bill.

Where do you think the money comes from to pay the Wendat lawyers? The government and our tax dollars.

Where do you think the money comes from to pay Environmental Defence Canada's bills? The government and our tax dollars.

Where does the money come from to pay the Ontario Municipal Board's bills? The Ontario government and our tax dollars again. These citizens

are costing us a fortune.

But Queen's Park is not to blame. The government has the right to intervene in this dispute. One of their lawyers, Ken Hare of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's legal services branch, attended meetings of the OMB facilitator's branch regarding this matter. In June 2007, all parties, including our group, were at the facilitator's hearing, and signed a memorandum of settlement regarding the BBP project. Hare signed for the ministry.

The opponents did not sign but chose to appeal. The appeal started, and continues to this day, with no agreement in sight. Nor do the opponents wish to agree — they continue to

cause delay and now Environmental Defence has been given intervenor status (by the grace of Geranium Corporation, which did not oppose their request).

Our group is very much in favour of this resort community being allowed to proceed.

We were granted party status for the hearings and have attended every meeting, municipal, public and OMB included. We have watched the opponents use every tactic to slow the process down. We have watched their behaviour at every turn. Please, as the saying goes, give them some more rope. We await the traditional result.

Nola Wale,
Residents of Innisfil
Association President