

Heritage home revitalization plan decried by North Vancouver neighbours

Advocates rally to save 1913 home in Carisbrooke

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An artist's rendering shows how the lot on East Windsor Road would look if council agrees to subdivide it to preserve the historic Thomson House (left) and allow the construction of a new home (right). image supplied

Can you have your heritage and keep neighbourhood character, too?

That's what District of North Vancouver council will be mulling until July 4, when they will likely vote on a plan to subdivide a 100-foot lot on 360 East Windsor Road.

The subdivision would allow the Thomson House – with its Craftsman architecture dating back to 1913 – to be retained. However, it would also allow for an approximately 3,200-square-foot home to be built on the adjoining lot, creating extra density that will “imperil this neighbourhood,” according to area resident Glen Robitaille.

Robitaille was one of several neighbours who packed council chambers during Tuesday's public hearing to speak against the subdivision and its worrisome precedent.

The subdivision is not a slippery slope, it's a path toward preserving history, argued heritage advocate Kyla Gardiner. “By demolishing heritage buildings, we erase the stories of our past,” she said.

Gardiner reminded the crowd that the heritage designation afforded to the Thomson House would be site specific, and only applied to other historically significant heritage homes through negotiations with the municipality.

“With property values soaring through the roof, heritage homes have little to no value compared to the land they sit on, and are at risk of being demolished,” she said.

A heritage revitalization agreement could not only save the Thomson House from the wrecking ball, it might persuade other heritage homeowners to think beyond the value of their lot, she said.

“If only the large lots are protected, Upper Lonsdale will eventually become like so many other neighbourhoods in the

Lower Mainland, with huge, brand new homes that are out of reach for many local buyers.”

Robitaille took issue with the notion the subdivision would provide affordability, noting **the two properties would likely each sell for more than \$2 million. “These are not starter homes,”** he said. “This is not a case of the working class versus the landed money class. Perhaps it would be better put as multimillionaires versus millionaires.”

Robitaille also jousting with Donato D’Amici, the owner of the Thomson House.

For D’Amici, the subdivision is about preserving the character that lured him to the neighbourhood in the first place. “Why save the Thomson house?” D’Amici asked. “Why not tear it down and build a big spec house for foreign buyers? I could’ve made a lot more money doing that and my neighbours couldn’t have done anything about it.”

D’Amici announced plans to remove the coach house from the new residence to address density concerns. While he would prefer to subdivide, D’Amici was adamant that if his application was denied, he would be forced to sell to developers.

Robitaille took issue with some of the language being used. “Monster house. Foreign investor. Absentee ownership. What is the point of comments like these? There’s a reason they call it dog-whistle politics,” he said.

“This is rhetoric disguised to get your emotions up and mask some truth.”

Should the Thomson House be levelled, Robitaille suggested the replacement home would likely have a maximum floor area of 5,940 square feet, not including the basement.

Neighbour Stan Feingold called on council to respect the community’s wishes. “We’re the neighbours. We’re here for the long-term, not the flip.”

District staff investigated moving the Thomson House and concluded there could be logistical challenges that might push the price of the haul to \$125,000.

While the house has been lifted, much of its heritage material has been retained, according to heritage consultant Donald Luxton.

“We have to be realistic about what it will require to preserve the Thomson house,” he said, calling the subdivision a very reasonable way to maintain heritage.

The issue is now closed to comment following the public hearing.

Couns. Roger Bassam and Doug MacKay-Dunn did not attend the meeting.