

Neighbours rebuff North Vancouver heritage proposal

Carisbrooke subdivision to go to public hearing

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A rendering of the 1913 Thomson House on East Windsor Road (left) and a new home proposed if the lot is subdivided. Neighbours are unhappy with the heritage proposal. image supplied

District of North Vancouver residents are being asked to weigh in on a proposal that pits retention of a heritage home against a neighbourhood's affinity for large lot sizes.

The owner of the Thomson House at 360 East Windsor Rd., was set to have the 1913 cottage bungalow demolished and replaced with an almost 10,000-square foot home. ← ~ 5900 sq-ft is likely correct. -cjk

But, at the district's request, the owner considered a new proposal that would see the original home restored and given permanent heritage protection in exchange for allowing the 100-foot lot to be subdivided and a new 3,200-square foot home be built on the new property. Similar heritage revitalization agreements have been used to protect character homes across the North Shore in recent years.

The original home's heritage value is based on its connection to pre-First World War growth on the North Shore and its Craftsman style architecture, according to an assessment from heritage consultant Donald Luxton.

Heritage advocates, including members of the North Shore Heritage Preservation Society, turned out to council Monday to speak in favour of the project but so too did a large contingent of Queensdale neighbours who argued that any subdivision of the lot would be an assault on a much cherished community.

Large lots create a "park-like setting" and subdividing the lot would mean increased population density without the amenities to accommodate more families, more traffic on side streets with no sidewalks, neighbours told council. There was also concern that subdividing the lot could set a precedent for the rest of the area.

"It's a neighbourhood, as everyone has said, Mr. Mayor and council, that we're trying to protect here. This is preservation of a neighbourhood as-is, where-is," said Scott Sweatman. "We appreciate that we're in an era of densification. It's a reality but not in this neighbourhood. And that sounds like NIMBYism and I don't apologize for it," he

said.

The current owner Donato D'Amici, urged council to follow through on the heritage preservation agreement, lest something else even more disruptive to the community take the Thomson House's place.

"The truth at hand here is if the HRA proposal does not work, I'll be forced to sell to foreign developers who could care less about our heritage and our community. The new home they build will have no design guidelines, no landscape plan. It will be allowed to be 80 feet wide and up to 9,100 square feet," he said. "This new home will be unaffordable to anybody in the community."

Coun. Roger Bassam moved to send the proposal to a formal public hearing so council could solicit the entire community's comments before making a decision.

"Clearly there's lot of interest in this – a divided community who is looking for lots of ways forward to preserve heritage, to preserve neighbourhood character," he said.

Coun. Robin Hicks too supported sending the proposal to a public hearing but warned that keeping the status quo may not be an option.

"Generally speaking, it would be nice to have these homes and lots protected as-is but our heritage protection bylaw doesn't have the teeth to do that and we're subject to the vapours of the marketplace and the investors and the builders," he said. "So, however much we'd like to preserve our environment in perpetuity, that's not going to happen. So when things change, we have to see that they change in the best way possible."

Coun. Lisa Muri attempted to have the plan tossed out but citing "significant, overwhelming opposition," couldn't find anyone else on council to support her motion.

Instead, Muri pushed council to find other incentives that would preserve the home and lot and others like them in "our little Shaughnessy in North Vancouver."

The public hearing is scheduled for June 21.

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