

The Planning and Environment Committee
Committee Secretary H. Lysynski

Planning Department
City of London
Current Planning
Michael Davis, Planner

Re: 581 - 585 Waterloo & 321 Central Ave Application

Dear Mr. Davis and Ms. Lysynski,

This is a rather long email, please read it to the end and circulate it in full, thank you. I'm hoping to be at the meeting on September 23rd, but given possible time conflicts I thought it best to deliver my thoughts this way.

In my opinion this is the last line of defence against a potential project that should have not even reached this point.

It is in blatant violation of the recommendations of West Woodfield Heritage District Plan as adopted by Council and also conveniently ignores the actual reasoning behind the development of Part V of Ontario Heritage Act.

Based on discussion with neighbours and potential future Councillors, I believe I am not alone in this opinion.

Let me say I am not against new development and sensitive development of the current empty lot, which formerly held one of the Supertest "Cottage" Gas Stations and prior to that a Grocery/General Store and Residence.

I am strongly against the demolition of existing, largely original, substantially sound residences. I feel demolition of these buildings would set a precedent that devalues the effective protection of the use of the Part V Heritage District in London, if not effectively nullifying it where structures are listed as types "C" or "D". Expect it to start a cascade of similar approaches elsewhere.

The Gas Station was demolished by the Dr. Hardick, the father of the current Owner 25 years ago, thereby heading off an attempt at having it declared as a Heritage Structure. That is all water long under the bridge, but the ironic thing is, that is what sparked the "test" of the Heritage District in the City of London, the East Woodfield Heritage District and ultimately the West Woodfield Heritage District.

I think there has been support for the development from people wishing to see better use of the empty lot, I understand the need to embrace progress but is it progress when it tramples history and radically changes the flavour of the Neighbourhood, which is after all the attraction of the neighbourhood and why it was designated in the first place. Yeah I know "intensification" is a popular buzz word, but does it trump "Heritage"?

When examining both the proposed development and the surroundings I think it is important to look at the streetscape on both sides of the street and the approaches from each of the ordinal points.

I think one can notice quite quickly that the two adjacent houses proposed for demolition actually fit well within the overall picture with the Granite House apartment tower being, in retrospect a poorly conceived anomaly. The Granite House and its effective abuse/misuse of the two adjacent properties is now being used as a lever to bias the size of potential development.

Other than the Granite House the nearest building approaching this intense level of development and maybe even visual style is the Ford Canada Assembly Plant (Siskind Building).

But as I said, the big problem for me is the demolition of the two buildings 581 Waterloo Street and 321 Central Avenue.

Some how both of these are classified as type "C", but I'd say they are in fact not, but fundamentally it should not make a difference, they belong and a development that turns them into an entrance driveway and side yard clearance doesn't.

The bias shown and conclusions in the Heritage Impact Study is not surprising given it was paid for by the Developer/Property Owner and is a typical wordy, "gun for hire", "tell me what I want without lying" document.

It devalues the area post military pull out, the development that has taken place since the turn of the 20th Century and plays a game of false logic with the A,B,C building valuations to try to temper the perceived demolition cost..

There are no blatant lies and I agree with a lot of it, just not the twist. Plainly attempts were made to devalue the houses slated for Demolition.

581 Waterloo Street was constructed between 1887 and 1888.

The two, what appear to be, extensions to the west that are visible from the empty lot were in place by the Fire Insurance Plan Survey for the 1888 publication.

So this gives some indication of the growth that the area was seeing at that time.

On the 1888 Fire Insurance Plan the majority of the block was still under Militia use with the Artillery Field forming the greatest part.

The large Late Victorian / Queen Anne Houses were not there yet.

The house at 581 Waterloo is probably the oldest remaining structure on that particular block.

The Italianate details facing the Street are interesting, while commonly fashionable for the time, the facade is unusual, take a look, it is not repeated over and over throughout the area.

It definitely is a fairly large house, It would appear that the exterior has been largely unaltered since the rapid changes occurring in 1888.

An interesting thing about this house is that the Owner, Burton the grocer from the corner grocery store didn't live in it, he rented it.

A fashionable area of the City, not your usual rental cabin!

I have only only briefly examined some of the tenants over the years, there were some interesting names, some moved on, some became residents elsewhere in the City. I expect more investigative work would bring more historical fruit.

There is no question in my mind that if this house was in almost any other Ontario community, with almost any other Owner it would carry a Part IV Designation.

It is sad that in London consideration is being given to knocking it down for an access driveway.

Has the City consulted the Ontario Heritage Trust for advice?

The house at 321 Central is newer "turn of the Century" Edwardian, a fashionable, large, 2 1/2 Storey home, the sign of a successful business man.

I have had the pleasure of actually being in this home before it fell into its current state of neglect, at that time it was largely intact internally with all finishes and trim in good shape. After the ornate fashions that had gone before, this Edwardian building said "solid". It would not surprise me that despite the overgrowth of vegetation the collapse of the second floor, screened sunroom over the entrance and the deterioration of the roofing, that this building is largely intact.

As far as additions go that detract from the original design, I seem to recall a small garage, and the fore mentioned sunroom, other than that I think it is pretty much as built. As to the heritage value of it? It is not Victorian or Queen Anne, but rather the revolt against those styles, it is 110 years old or thereabouts. There are other buildings in the Style nearby, but the actual layout seems to be one-off.

It should be remembered that the West Woodfield Heritage District was celebrated as an unusual blend of Italianate, Late Victorian, Queen Anne and Edwardian styles. Here behind the weeds and saplings is a largely intact Edwardian house complete with original details and chimneys. It ties in to the rest of the streetscape with the exception of the Granite House and the adjacent empty lot.

Don't just drive by this house, get out, wander round and take a look.

To sum it up demolition of these houses would be a cultural crime and once they are demolished they are gone forever.

Demolition of these houses would set a precedent, a dangerous precedent that effectively enables selective demolition to poke holes in Part V Heritage District protection, at least in the City of London.



Something to think about.

Yours sincerely,

Marcus Coles

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London, Ontario.