



Architectural Conservancy Ontario – London Region Branch
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Sunday, April 8, 2018

Members of the Planning and Environment Committee:

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Members of the London Advisory Committee on Heritage (LACH)
through the LACH Committee Secretary

**Re: REQUEST FOR DEMOLITION OF BARNES
LOCATED AT 660 SUNNINGDALE ROAD EAST**

Dear Councillors and Members of LACH,

The London Region Branch of Architectural Conservancy Ontario (ACO) wishes to state its views on the application to demolish three red clay barns situated on the property at 660 Sunningdale Road East. We recommend denying the demolition request of the two remaining barns.

Our reasons to oppose the proposed demolition are as follows:

- These two remaining barns are listed as Priority 2 in the City of London Inventory of Heritage Resources. According to information provided to us, the Stage 1 Archaeological and Built Heritage Assessment Uplands Area Plan, prepared in 2002, recommended that the barns be elevated to Priority 1 status. Although this did not occur, the recommendation serves as a reminder of the importance of these structures. We do not know why the change in classification was not implemented.
- The Stewardship sub-committee of the London Advisory Committee on Heritage (LACH) recommended in late June 2017 that the barns be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. We ask that PEC review and consider that recommendation prior to making its decision.
- According to the Heritage Inventory, the three barns were built circa 1925. They are built of hollow clay tile, a common building material for barns and silos at that time. It is our understanding that few such barns remain in Ontario. The barns in question are therefore rare representations of this early 20th century building technique. They are significant for that reason.

According to the March 30, 2017 edition of the Norwich Gazette, this is how clay tiles were manufactured:

“The clay was fed into a crusher which removed the rocks from the clay and worked it into a putty form. Water was added to achieve the right consistency. Then the clay was fed into an extruder pipe which forced the clay into the proper mold and an automatic cutter cut the tile into measured lengths. The tiles were put into sheds to dry for a week to 10 days. Then they were moved into kilns to burn at 1,840 degrees Fahrenheit for four days. It took an additional three days to cool the tiles, then they were stacked in the yard. The kilns were originally run by burning wood, then by burning coal.”

With regards to the city’s role in the ongoing stewardship of these barns, we note the following:

- The recommendation of city staff in advance of a July 22, 2014 PEC public participation meeting on the rezoning of 660 Sunningdale Road East noted the existence of the barns, and stated (incorrectly, we believe) that the above-mentioned Uplands Area Plan had recommended that the barns be listed as Priority 2. The 2014 staff recommendation notes the potential future demolition of the barns, but there is no recommendation that input (from the Heritage Planner and/or from LACH) be sought regarding the significance of the structures. Were city policies followed in this regard? It would have been preferable, in our opinion, for discussions regarding the value of these barns to have occurred at the time of the 2014 rezoning request.
- The largest of the three barns has already been completely demolished, without a demolition permit having been obtained prior to beginning work. It is unfortunate that such actions appear to carry no meaningful repercussions.

We recommend that the two remaining barns be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act so that they can be preserved.

We further recommend that the PEC and City Council direct city staff to write to the property owner to publicly express the city’s disappointment and disapproval of the property owner’s failure to preserve and protect the heritage resources under its control.

It is reasonable to question the practicality of preserving historic agricultural structures situated on the fringes of a growing city. A brief prepared by the Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the interior (<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/20-barns.htm>) addresses this issue. From that document (our emphasis):

“Unfortunately, historic barns are threatened by many factors. On farmland near cities, barns are often seen only in decay, as land is removed from active agricultural use. In some regions, barns are dismantled for lumber, their beams sold for reuse in living rooms. Barn raisings have given way to barn razings. Further threats to historic barns and other farm structures are posed by changes in farm technology, involving much larger machines and production facilities, and changes in the overall farm economy, including increasing farm size and declining rural populations.

Yet historic barns can be refitted for continued use in agriculture, often at great savings over the cost of new buildings. This Brief encourages the preservation of historic barns and other agricultural structures by encouraging their maintenance and use as agricultural buildings, and by advancing their sensitive rehabilitation for new uses when their historic use is no longer feasible.”

Where there's a will, there's a way. Under the London Plan, we are supposed to grow "up not out". The proposed subdivision is inconsistent with this vision. At the very least, why not require the developer to include the barns as a centerpiece of the development? There are a number of potential commercial, institutional, or residential uses for these historic structures.

According to the Autumn 2002 Heritage Ottawa newsletter (https://heritageottawa.org/sites/default/files/newsletter-pdfs/HerOttNews_2002_09.pdf), "old barns are seldom used for their original purposes. But, they were often built so sturdy, having a grace that is not often found in today's utilitarian agricultural structures, that they are being put to new uses. Some have been renovated into homes, often leaving the inner framing timbers visible to provide architectural interest. In the Ottawa Valley, a number of old barns have been turned into artist's studios, providing the high open spaces artists often require. And at least one in this region has been turned into a museum."

Inspiration for the potential adaptive reuse of the Sunningdale Road barns can be derived from the City of Oshawa's Fire Station 6, which was constructed in 2016. It was built on former farmland (Windfields Farm, the birthplace of Northern Dancer). Although the barn-like structure is new, it is conceivable that a historic barn could have been incorporated into the new fire station had one been available.



City of Oshawa Fire Station 6

Across the United States, there are many examples of historic barns that have been adapted to new uses. Round barns, considerably less practical than the rectangular barns on Sunningdale Road, have been converted to conference and banquet facilities. Examples of this can be found in Champaign, Illinois (Round Barn Banquet Center) and in Waitsfield, Vermont (Inn at Round Barn Farm).



Wedding/conference facility – Inn at Round Barn Farm, Waitsfield Vermont

The rectangular shape of the barns on Sunningdale Road make them amenable to more traditional retail conversion (stores, restaurants, etc.).

In the United Kingdom, old barns have been converted to homes – a trendy alternative to more traditional residential structures. The size and shape of the two smaller barns make this an attractive option. Examples of such residential conversions can be viewed at <http://www.homedit.com/11-amazing-old-barns-turned-into-beautiful-homes/>.

These are just a few examples of how these barns might be put to good use for the next 100 years. We respectfully ask the PEC and city staff to:

- Refuse the demolition application;
- Expedite the heritage designation process; and
- Make further approval related to this property conditional on integrating the barns into the proposed development.

Sincerely,

Mike Bloxam
President, London Region Branch
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CC:

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