

25 August 2013

TO: London City Council for
Meeting – Tuesday, August 27, 2013

RE: Reports of the Planning and Environment Committee – Point 5 – Blackfriars Heritage Conservation Study
Impact on my home – 89 Wilson Avenue (London, Ontario)

I am the owner of 89 Wilson Ave. I don't know what more I can say to you that has not already been said in our myriad of letters, emails and phone calls. I will endeavor to appeal on the side of common sense one more time. No one loves Blackfriars more than me and my two children - I purchased the home for them to live in mainly because of the area. I noticed this when I began to look for roofers to re-do the roof on the house (very badly needed). The section where the dormer is roughed-in was built in 1928, one year before the stock market collapse. The dormer solved all issues relative to making the kitchen and bathroom much more comfortable for the second floor (where my son resides). The majority of homes on Wilson and surrounding streets all have dormers and in need of serious repairs and renovations. These homes were built pre-world war II, 50 years before there was a building code.

All this happened, unbeknownst to me, during the Neighborhood Heritage Conservation Study. My timing was ill conceived but my intentions were honorable. I did not need a permit for the roof and I roughed in the dormer. Yes, I should have got a permit BEFORE but everyone has a dormer and I never ever imagined my small slight up-grade would cause me and my children weeks or months of upset and aggravation. I had rotten joists and a hole in hole in the roof that needed to be fixed and closed in to prevent further damage.

I am not a 'box' builder; I am a "home owner". I don't wish to bulldoze my house or build a box filled with students. We are the very people the Blackfriars Residents Group apparently want living in the area – we are residents who plan to build a life here. When I first became aware of this Heritage study I believed the residents were concerned about the demise of heritage properties, now I am beginning to believe that the concern is more about the potential for more students to live in Blackfriars (disruption to this quiet neighborhood by supposed disorderly students). Whoever this Blackfriars Residents Group is – they certainly do not speak for me and I am sincerely starting to wonder if their intent isn't just so they can 'screen' who can and can't live in this area. Are they really concerned about the heritage architecture of the area or are they trying to avoid integration of tenants vs. homeowners. Blackfriars does not have a dome around it, yes it may be harder to get to without the beautiful Blackfriars bridge but as far as I know – it isn't a gated community – it doesn't belong to just the people that own homes there – does it?

The current By-Law L.S.P. 3431-177 (I believe this is the correct By-Law number) is not simply restricting the box style home builder – it is restricting innocent home owners from making minor improvements that are seriously required improvements to homes that are already part of the Blackfriars area and have been for over one hundred years, my particular home was built in 1903! You are forcing me to tear down a perfectly solid, well-built dormer, put the roof line back (to its original appearance) – only so I can ask to build it again when this moratorium is expired – and this somehow makes more sense to you than simply finding a way to let me go ahead with what is three quarters done. This is the quintessence example of people serving the process rather than the process serving the people. Is there really no shimmer of hope to allow for a review in urgent situations; are these by laws 'etched in stone'?

I feel this wording of By-Law L.S.P. 3431-177 is far too restrictive to owners wishing to complete smaller scaled renovation that require some form of structural modification. In addition, why do I have to wait a year or more to have a heritage study completed? Why can't I apply for the heritage committee to complete a study on my house and have them complete it in a week?

My recommendations are as follows:

1. Add a process that can fast track this Heritage study on a given property. A process where owners can prove that they have a need for a building permit by submitting a design and a statement explaining that need. Then submit an application to have the study expedited. Once the study is completed; owners would be able to submit for a building permit.
2. Add wording that allows owners to make improvements to the existing structure.

Sincerely,
Mike Horley