



Staff Report for Heritage Richmond Hill Meeting

Date of Meeting: December 10, 2019

Report Number: SRPRS.19.199

Department: Planning and Regulatory Services

Division: Policy Planning

Subject: **SRPRS.19.199 – Demolition Request for 11575 Yonge Street, the Former Jefferson Schoolhouse (D12-07486)**

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to seek Heritage Richmond Hill's recommendation regarding a request to demolish the former Jefferson Schoolhouse located at 11575 Yonge Street, which has been designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* since 1982.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Staff Report SRPRS.19.199 be received;
- b) That Heritage Richmond Hill recommends to Council that the application to demolish the heritage designated former Jefferson Schoolhouse, located at 11575 Yonge Street, be denied; and
- c) That Heritage Richmond Hill recommends to Council that the City Clerk provides notice of its decision to the owner, to the Ontario Heritage Trust, and be published in a local newspaper.

Contact Person:

Pamela Vega, Heritage / Urban Design Planner, phone number 905-771-5529 and/or Joanne Leung, Manager of Heritage and Urban Design, phone number 905-771-5498

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Kelvin Kwan, Commissioner of Planning and Regulatory Services

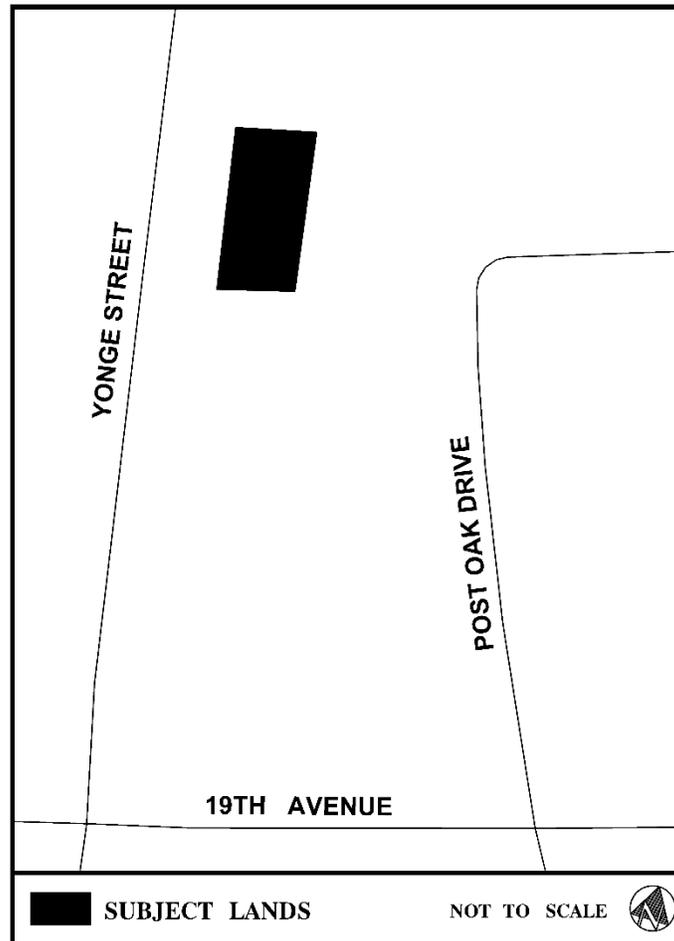
Approved by: Neil Garbe, Chief Administrative Officer

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), Town Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and Chief Administrative Officer. Details of the report's approval are attached.

Page 2

Location Map:

Below is a map illustrating the location of the subject property. Should you require an alternative format, call the person listed as “Contact”, above.



Background:

11575 Yonge Street is located on the east side of Yonge Street, north of 19th Avenue. It contains a one storey dichromatic brick structure known as the former Jefferson Schoolhouse. Used continuously as a one-room school from 1868 to 1951, it provided education to the early settlement communities of Richmond Hill, and it played a significant role in the formation, growth, and evolution of the City. Its historical importance as one of the oldest surviving school structures in Richmond Hill was formally identified in 1982, when it was designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* by By-Law 149-82.

The owner of the property, who has been operating a sign shop out of the heritage structure, submitted an application for a Zoning By-law Amendment, Site Plan Approval,

Page 3

and Official Plan Amendment to develop the subject property in 2009 to replace the heritage structure with a four-storey mixed use building. It was resubmitted in 2011 and further revised in 2012 to comprise of a three-storey building with commercial uses on the ground floor and residential apartments on the upper two floors and the existing Jefferson Schoolhouse to be relocated to the southern portion of the property for commercial uses. Heritage and Urban Design staff were supportive of this development pending the submission of all required documents for the conservation of the heritage resources as part of the Site Plan application.

At its June 25, 2012 meeting, Council approved the Zoning application pending Site Plan approval. Prior to receiving Site Plan approval, the owner was required to enter into a Heritage Restoration Agreement for the relocation of the former Jefferson Schoolhouse. However, there were no municipal services available at the property, and the owner sought to delay the application until the Yonge Street municipal services were extended to the subject lands. The municipal service extension was completed in 2017.

In 2018, the City received resubmitted drawings of the proposal, which still included the retention of the schoolhouse. On November 8, 2018, the applicant was advised that a number of required documents remain outstanding, including a Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment, a Heritage Restoration Agreement, and a Conservation Management Plan. To date, these documents remain outstanding.

On October 29, 2019, contrary to the proposed development submitted in 2018, the owner of the subject property requested to demolish the former Jefferson Schoolhouse and submitted a Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (CHIA) prepared by MW Hall Corporation. This demolition application was deemed complete on November 27, 2019.

The owner has not formally withdrawn the 2018 development applications that propose the retention of the former Jefferson Schoolhouse, and there have not been any formally submitted proposals to indicate what would replace the removed heritage structure on the subject property.

Staff note that the development diagrams provided in the CHIA are possible scenarios of redevelopment for the lands prepared by the consultants for the owner and are not actual planning applications. Heritage & Urban Design staff has not been approached to discuss future development of the subject lands.

Discussion:

As per section 34 of the *Ontario Heritage Act* (the “Act”), the owner of a designated property may not demolish a structure on the property unless they apply to Council and receive consent in writing to the demolition.

The *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (the “Standards and Guidelines”) provides national standards that promote responsible conservation practices to protect Canada’s historic places. A federal document, these

Page 4

standards and guidelines provide consistency to decisions relating to the conservation of historic places.

The first standard identified in the Standards and Guidelines is:

Conserve the heritage value of an historic place. Do not remove, replace or substantially alter its intact or repairable character-defining elements. Do not move a part of an historic place if its current location is a character-defining element.

With its long history as a school and its original one-room schoolhouse structure existing *in situ*, 11575 Yonge Street has physical value, historical value, and contextual value, and is attested by the designation By-law 149-82.

It should also be noted that designation does not preclude development potential, the Schoolhouse may be incorporated into the development of the property either in whole or in part, and the City has established a heritage permit process to help manage appropriate changes to Richmond Hill's heritage resources.

The following provides staff's consideration of the CHIA report for the subject property (MW Hall Corporation, 27 November 2019), attached as Appendix A.

Impact of Demolition on the Property's Cultural Heritage Value

Impact on Design or Physical Cultural Heritage Value

The CHIA indicated that, *"the design/physical value of the property will be changed, likely never operating as a school again. Should the schoolhouse be demolished, historical evidence of the school would be limited to archival materials, retained artifacts or perhaps an onsite heritage plaque describing former use of the property."* (page 6)

In staff's opinion, the CHIA considerably understates the design/physical value of the structure. The former Jefferson Schoolhouse is a rare example in Richmond Hill of a mid-19th century brick schoolhouse. Its dichromatic brick exterior, three-bay side walls and simple gable roof remain largely unchanged and are representative of the architectural style for schools from this era. As the oldest remnant of the Jefferson hamlet, the recent contextual changes in the area have further emphasized the property's design/physical cultural heritage value as its traditional architecture contrasts with the surrounding contemporary architecture.

By removing the Jefferson Schoolhouse, the applicant would be removing the only tangible aspect of the property's history and the history associated with the Jefferson community, and would destroy elements that cannot be recreated. Such elements include graffiti dating back to 1876 that were written on the walls of the Schoolhouse by students. It is details such as this that make history more tangible and relatable to the present. A plaque erected on site nor photographs of the structure would not provide the same experience to the community as having the Schoolhouse remain on the property.

Page 5

Demolishing the Jefferson Schoolhouse would destroy the design/physical cultural heritage value of the property, and thus would contravene the federal Standards and Guidelines.

Impact on Historical or Associative Value

The CHIA indicated that, *“the earlier character of these heritage buildings which were at that time surrounded by relatively undeveloped farmlands has been totally transformed such that these buildings are perceived as insignificant to Richmond Hill today.”* (page 3)

“The historical/associative value will be changed as the existing schoolhouse building is a reminder of this central community facility to the former Jefferson settlement and perhaps to this generation of ancestors that attended the school prior to amalgamation of the property into the Town of Richmond Hill.” (page 6)

The subject property was used as a school for approximately 83 years, being the location where multiple generations of Jefferson children received their education. As a one-room schoolhouse, it is associated with the theme of education in a rural area from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century.

Staff agrees with the CHIA in that the Schoolhouse serves as a reminder of the Jefferson settlement. It provides a physical link to the property’s history, and it provides information on the area’s community during a time when it was a rural hamlet, and contributed significantly to the growth of Richmond Hill from rural hamlets to a town.

Staff disagrees, however, that the surrounding recent developments have caused the Jefferson Schoolhouse to become insignificant, as the property’s history and historical value is not erased by changes to the surrounding area.

Demolishing the Jefferson Schoolhouse would severely diminish the historical/associative cultural heritage value of the property, and thus would contravene the federal Standards and Guidelines.

Impact on Contextual Value

The CHIA indicated that, *“the remnant schoolhouse is barely recognized and is no longer significant to the present community other than as an historical artifact.”* (page 4)

“As a remnant, designated heritage building in the Richmond Hill Inventory, the building clearly has heritage value, but little interest by the community at large currently.” (page 4)

“The contextual value of the property has already significantly changed from a small hamlet and farmlands to more intensive suburban and residential uses, leaving only this remaining isolated, historical artifact with minor rather than major impact on surrounding

Page 6

residents or commuters travelling on a much expanded and higher speed Yonge Street, now with transit.” (page 6)

As one of the only remaining remnants of the Jefferson hamlet, this c. 1868 schoolhouse continues to be a local landmark and is a reminder of the rapidly changing area’s rural history.

Staff disagrees with the CHIA’s argument that the changing context of the subject property has diminished its presence and significance to the community. Prominently located on Yonge Street, the former Jefferson Schoolhouse continues to be a local landmark, with its historic architecture being a sharp contrast to its neighbouring contemporary structures. It also continues to be valued by the community, as it is not uncommon for staff to receive inquiries from concerned residents about the future of this schoolhouse.

Demolishing the Jefferson Schoolhouse would negatively impact the contextual cultural heritage value of the property, and thus would contravene the federal Standards and Guidelines.

The Value of Heritage

Properties that have been identified by the community as being of cultural heritage significance may be designated by Council under the *Ontario Heritage Act*. This designation is a means through which a community can publicly recognize the significance of these resources and protect the structures that provide tangible links to its past. Not only do these cultural heritage resources help to define the City’s identity, they also create a sense of memory and place.

Retaining the City’s heritage structures as a whole, or by incorporating key attributes of the heritage structure, does not impede development. Indeed, retaining such structures can provide benefits to development applications as they maintain or strengthen the historic landmarks of an area.

Next Steps:

Council may recommend one of three options:

- i) Consent to the demolition application,
- ii) Consent to the demolition application with conditions, or
- iii) Refuse the demolition application.

Council must make this decision within 90 days after the notice of receipt has been served on the applicant. As the application was received on November 27, 2019, the end of the 90-day review period is February 25, 2020. Should Council not provide its decision in writing to the applicant by this date, Council is deemed to have consented to the demolition application.

Page 7

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

The recommendations in this report will have no financial or staffing implications.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan:

The recommendations in this report relate to the Strategic Plan Goal of “wise management of resources in Richmond Hill” and the objective of being responsible by serving as a role model for municipal management. Retaining the historic schoolhouse on the subject property is in keeping with Goal 3 – Outcome 1 of the Strategic Plan, which is to “Respect the past through promoting the awareness of the Town’s heritage.” Retaining the former Jefferson Schoolhouse also aligns with the direction to “steward Richmond Hill’s heritage resources”, and implements Outcome 2 of Goal 3 which is the promotion of a sense of identity and place through “the celebration, promotion and enhancement of the Town’s unique places.”

Conclusion:

The former Jefferson Schoolhouse continues to be a landmark to the community and to visitors alike. With many of its original architectural features still intact, the demolition of this 151 year old structure would destroy the tangible aspect of the property’s cultural heritage value. This would be in contravention of the federal *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*, and therefore the request to demolish the structure should be refused.

Attachments:

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendices, maps and photographs. If you require an alternative format please call contact person listed in this document.

- Appendix A Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment, 11575 Yonge Street, prepared by MW Hall Corporation (25 November 2019)

Page 8

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPRS.19.199.docx
Attachments:	- SRPRS.19.199 - Appendix A.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Dec 3, 2019

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Patrick Lee - Dec 2, 2019 - 4:52 PM

Kelvin Kwan - Dec 2, 2019 - 5:24 PM

Neil Garbe - Dec 3, 2019 - 3:21 PM