



Staff Report for Heritage Richmond Hill Meeting

Date of Meeting: November 7, 2024

Report Number: SRPBS.24.109

Department: Planning and Building Services

Division: Policy Planning

Subject: **SRPBS.24.109 – Request to Demolish the Robert Hewison House at 26 Church Street South – File Number D12-0750**

Purpose:

To seek Heritage Richmond Hill's recommendation that Council approve the demolition of the Part IV heritage designated Robert Hewison House at 26 Church Street South.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That staff report SRPBS.24.109 – Request to Demolish the Robert Hewison House at 26 Church Street South be received; and,
- b) That Council approve the request to demolish the Robert Hewison House at 26 Church Street South.

Contact Person(s):

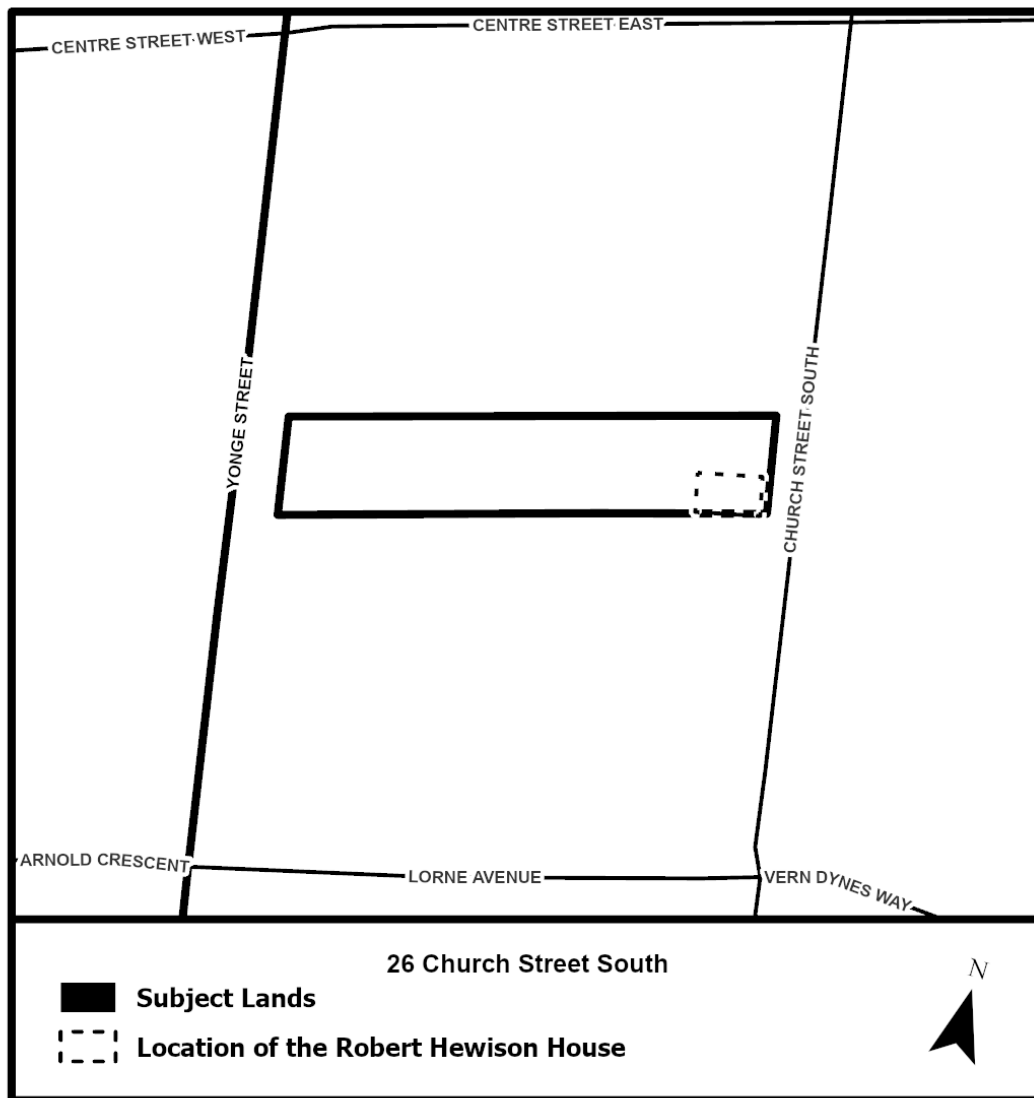
- Pamela Vega, Urban Design/Heritage Planner, extension 5529
- Kunal Chaudhry, Manager of Heritage and Urban Design, extension 5562
- Gus Galanis, Commissioner of Planning and Building Services, extension 2465

Report Approval:

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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Location Map:



Key Messages:

- The Part IV heritage designated building at 26 Church Street South (the Robert Hewison House) has been damaged by fire. The property owner is requesting demolition and has provided a Structural Assessment Report that confirms the building is structurally unstable and not repairable. Heritage staff agree with the findings of the Structural Assessment Report;
- The property is a rare through-lot and contains two buildings, both of which are protected by the same heritage designation by-law. Even with the removal of the Robert Hewison House, the property will still meet provincial criteria for heritage designation.

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Background:

The building located at and municipally referred to as 26 Church Street South is designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* by By-law 26-11. The subject address is part of a larger property identified as PLAN 7032 LOT 9, a rare through-lot that stretches from Church Street South to Yonge Street and also includes municipal addresses 10155 and 10157 Yonge Street. The property was designated for the c.1840s Hewison-Skeele House and Shop on Yonge Street, as well as for the c.1840s Robert Hewison House on Church Street South. Both of the buildings, identified by the three separate addresses, contribute to the cultural heritage significance of the subject property. The combination of these two buildings on the same site helps to interpret the historical continuity of this property's uses as shops and as residences. This is integral to the cultural heritage value of the subject property as it strongly represents the evolution of Richmond Hill's urban development, particularly in the Village Core where the duality of uses, one mixed-use and the other solely residential, was common. The property containing 26 Church Street South and 10155 and 10157 Yonge Street is a rare example of this dual-use type development; both of the buildings identified by these three addresses contribute to the property's cultural heritage value.

The subject property has been the focus of several denied applications in the past. In 2004, following an illegal clearing of vegetated area for parking, Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-law Amendment applications were submitted by the then-property owner. The City denied these applications because the proposed use and associated parking did not conform to the Official Plan nor did they account for impacts to adjacent properties.

In 2008, in response to a demolition application submitted by the then-property owner, Council directed that the subject property be designated and a Notice of Intention to Designate was published. The owner objected to the designation, and the objection was taken to the Conservation Review Board. The property was then sold and the owner withdrew their objection.

In 2010, the new owners of 26 Church Street South stated their intention to demolish the Robert Hewison House. Council refused the demolition application. Given that a Notice of Intention to Designate had already been published, Council was in the position to immediately enact the heritage designation by-law. However, at the request of the owner's solicitor, Council directed staff to postpone the enactment of the designation by-law until the property owner returned to Canada so that the owner may have the opportunity to discuss the future of the property with municipal staff.

The following month, the owner filed an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) regarding Council's refusal to permit the demolition of the heritage house. Council continued to pursue the designation of the property, enacting By-law 26-2011 on March 28, 2011.

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The appeal was considered by the OMB (now known as the Ontario Land Tribunal) in 2012, and the owner stated that they wished to demolish the heritage building to construct a new residential building. The OMB found that the demolition application was premature, stating that no firm redevelopment proposal had yet been received and, as such, they were unable to determine whether the development would have regard for the conservation of historic features as required by the City's Official Plan (the "OP"). Accordingly, the OMB dismissed the appeal. This dismissal was made without prejudice to any future demolition application that is submitted in conjunction with a complete, OP conforming development application. The property has since been sold to a new owner.

In June 2021, Heritage Planning staff met with the current property owner to discuss staff's concerns with the maintenance of the building. The building has been vacant since at least 2007, and its exterior was showing signs of disrepair. The owner advised that they planned to replace the Robert Hewison House with a new residential building. No application has yet been received by the City. Incidentally, that same year, the owner was approved for a Community Improvement Plan grant and a Heritage Permit to improve the façade and signage of 10157 Yonge Street, which is the heritage building on the westernmost portion of this heritage designated through-lot property. However, the project has not yet been started.

On the evening of September 5, 2024, the Robert Hewison House at 26 Church Street South caught fire. At the time of writing this report, the cause of the fire was under investigation. As a result of this fire, the owner has requested that the building be demolished. Accompanying this request was a Structural Assessment Report, which recommended that the building be demolished because it was unstable and not able to be repaired (see Attachment A).

Under section 34 of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, no owner shall demolish or remove any of the heritage attributes of a property designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* unless they receive consent from municipal Council and Council must make its decision within 90 days of the demolition request being received. As the demolition request was received on September 16, 2024, Council must make its decision by December 15, 2024.

Discussion:

Council has confirmed multiple times that the Robert Hewison House holds significant cultural heritage value, having twice denied demolition requests for the building. The significance of its cultural heritage value was also confirmed by the OMB's decision to dismiss the owner's objection to the denied demolition request.

Staff note that the Structural Assessment Report mentions that the deterioration of the foundation was noted as being a pre-existing condition, and that some of the damage to the building's wooden structure was related to decay and not to the fire. While staff agree that the Robert Hewison House is unsalvageable and support the request for demolition, staff are of the opinion that the property's historical value still remains. As a

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rare through-lot, 26 Church Street South yields information that contributes to the understanding of Richmond Hill's development, where multiple uses existed within the same lot—mixed commercial and residential along Yonge Street, and solely residential along Church Street. Both of the buildings on this property contribute to the cultural heritage value of the site.

Next Steps

Section 7 of Ontario Regulation 385/21 directs Council to determine whether a heritage designation by-law shall be repealed, amended, or remain unchanged after a building has been demolished.

Through the Hewison-Skeele House and Shop on Yonge Street and the property's multi-use history, the subject property will continue to have cultural heritage value and continue to meet the criteria for heritage designation. Staff will recommend that By-law 26-11 be amended to remove mention of the Robert Hewison House's physical attributes, and that the description of the Robert Hewison House's historical value be retained. The by-law should also be amended to be in compliance with current legislative requirements.

An amending by-law will be brought forward to Council after the Robert Hewison House has been demolished. This amending by-law will help to ensure the long-term protection and recognition of the subject property's cultural heritage value.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications at this time.

Relationship to Strategic Plan 2024-2027:

Commemorating the City's history supports Pillar 1 of the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, "Growing a Livable, Sustainable Community"; specifically, it supports Priority 3, "to build and implement a land-use planning vision and regulatory framework while conserving the city's unique cultural heritage."

Attachments:

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. All attachments have been reviewed and made accessible. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

- Attachment A – Structural Assessment Report of the Two-Storey House at 26 Church Street South, Richmond Hill, Ontario

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPBS.24.109 Demolition Request for 26 Church St S.docx
Attachments:	- Attachment A SRPBS.24.109 - AODA.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Oct 15, 2024

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

Maria Flores - Oct 15, 2024 - 1:24 PM

Gus Galanis - Oct 15, 2024 - 1:38 PM

Darlene Joslin - Oct 15, 2024 - 2:01 PM