

Move to list properties without telling owners

By Bill Rea

Properties in Caledon could soon find themselves on the Town's Heritage Register without the owners' knowledge.

There were a few reservations, but Town councillors, sitting in committee Tuesday night, decided to accept the recommendation of Heritage Caledon and agree that pre-notification of owners will no longer be required prior to listing the property on the Register. Listing a property does not mean it has a heritage designation. It means if an owner wishes to demolish or remove a building on the site, there would have to be a 60-day delay to give the municipality the chance to do further checking to see if it has heritage value that should be preserved.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy likened it to hitting a 'pause button' on the process.

Heritage Caledon made the recommendation after receiving a delegation earlier this month from Alton resident Betty Starr, in which she suggested it.

'I have to say I am truly in awe of this committee,' Starr told councillors Tuesday night.

As she pointed out there are a number of unique features in Caledon. 'But with these blessings comes a huge responsibility, as good stewards, to protect and preserve for future generations that makes us special and unique,' she said.

Starr reminded councillors the Ontario Heritage Act requires municipalities to maintain a heritage register, which would include properties that have been designated for their heritage or cultural value, as well as those that have not been designated, but which the local council believes has cultural or heritage value. They are included in the register by council resolution, and such listing is not listed on title of the property, she said.

Starr also pointed out there are other municipalities that are not in the habit of advising property owners about additions to the register. She said in Brampton, they are notified after council has made a the decision to include it. She added no notification is given in Dufferin or Wellington Counties.

The current protocol in Caledon, she said, is for staff to send a report to Heritage Caledon, which makes a recommendation to the Planning and Development Committee of Council. Notices are sent to the property owner. But Starr observed there might be a delay before the matter goes to Council for ratification, which could provide more time for the owner to proceed with demolition.

Listing a property with no notification means the Town would have 60 days before demolition could take place to see if it should be protected.

Starr pointed out the current protocol has resulted in significant buildings in Bolton and Alton being demolished.

Councillors also heard from Belfountain resident Judy Mabey, who was supporting Starr's position. She observed that listing a property on the Register provides interim protection. She also pointed out the Register contains information that is accessible to planners, developers and the public.

'I really do believe it's nothing more than a time-out,' Shaughnessy observed. 'I think it's about time.'

She added the changes will provide time for properties to be evaluated to see if there really is heritage value.

General Manager of Community Services Peggy Tollett told Mayor Allan Thompson there would be no legal ramifications resulting from the change.

Thompson said he understood the value of preserving heritage, but he also stressed the need to be open and transparent, and he was concerned the changes might be contrary to that.

'In my gut, it tells me you just don't do this to people,' he remarked.

Councillor Johanna Downey commented that heritage buildings are 'non-renewable.'

'I believe we owe those buildings another 60 days,' she added.