

Caledon updates bylaw governing maintenance of heritage properties

Minimum standards for heritage properties being brought into effect

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Council wants to see Caledon's heritage buildings protected.

At Caledon Council's October 10 General Committee meeting, an amendment to Caledon's Property Standards Bylaw was passed and recommended for adoption at Council's October 24 meeting.

The amendment prescribes minimum maintenance standards for designated heritage properties in Caledon.

Regional Councillor Christina Early and Ward 4 Councillor Nick de Boer were opposed to the amendment's passing.

Catherine McLean, Caledon's Director of Community Service, said the Town is going to create a communication strategy to let heritage property owners know about the updated bylaw. She said a guide will be made in plain language so people will know their responsibilities as a heritage property owner.

Every heritage property in Caledon is designated as such by a bylaw, which contains a description of the heritage attributes of the property. These attributes form the premise on which any requirement for repairs or maintenance will be based.

Ward 4 Councillor Nick de Boer asked what would happen if someone is living in a heritage property but doesn't have the money to do the work required to maintain it to the Town's standards.

Town staff said there are grants available for heritage property owners, and de Boer replied the grants may not always be enough.

Staff said the bylaw update is particularly pointed at vacant heritage properties, not lived-in heritage properties, which they said the majority of are well-maintained. Staff said the bylaw's goal is to enforce some minimum property standards so a heritage property does not fall into disrepair.

'If the bylaw was directed primarily to vacant heritage homes, I would have a lot more comfort,' said de Boer. 'I think that to address one problem, we've actually opened up a potential for the people that are doing the best that they can getting caught up in something.'

Staff said the bylaw is meant to be reactive, and it will be complaint-driven. This means the Town won't actively go out looking to enforce the bylaw. Instead, it gives the Town authority to take action if there are complaints about a property from residents, not unlike it would for any non-heritage property in Caledon.

Ward 1 Councillor Lynn Kiernan said the intention of the bylaw is not to put anyone in financial hardship, rather it's about protecting the integrity of heritage buildings while under growth pressure from the Province.

Ontario's Heritage Act allows municipalities with a property standards bylaw to prescribe minimum standards for designated heritage properties.

Town staff looked at best practices from other municipalities that have their own standards to guide its new minimum standards.

According to a report by Joe Assaly, Municipal Law Enforcement Analyst at the Town, the minimum standards are "a valuable tool to protect against "demolition by neglect" and a conservation initiative for the ongoing care and maintenance of designated heritage properties."

There are currently 140 designated heritage properties in Caledon, and another 185 in the Village of Bolton Heritage Conservation District.

Assaly's report has identified eight heritage properties in Town that are vacant and subject to minimal or no maintenance.

The two approaches to avoiding demolition by neglect in the updated bylaw are: requiring proper maintenance of a property's heritage attributes; and preventing damage to, and deterioration of, heritage attributes and super structures of vacant designated buildings to ensure that they remain viable for future use.

Assaly's report said key provisions in the updated bylaw include: repair rather than replacement of heritage attributes; where necessary, using appropriate replacement materials that replicate a property's original look; requiring minimal utilities in vacant heritage buildings to maintain heat and ventilation; and eliminating the demolition option for heritage buildings, except as allowed under Ontario's Heritage Act.