

Owners to be informed after properties on Register

By Bill Rea

Caledon Council is going ahead with the idea of including properties on the Town's Heritage Register without first informing the owners.

Councillors Tuesday night ratified the decision made a couple of weeks ago at committee, although there was a last-minute adjustment. Councillor Barb Shaughnessy successfully got her colleagues to go along with the provision requiring that owners be informed once their properties are listed on the Register. She had been assured that would be the practice, but she insisted that be taken by staff as direction.

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.

Shaughnessy, speaking at committee a couple of weeks ago, likened it to hitting a "pause button" on the process.

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

But it still came in for lengthy discussion Tuesday night.

Councillor Nick deBoer made an unsuccessful attempt to have the matter referred back to Town staff, so they could develop a protocol or procedures for dealing with such issues.

"We need to allow people to know," he argued, accepting the need to protect heritage in town, along with protecting people's rights to know what's being done with their properties. "It's just a matter of principle."

DeBoer added he lives in a very old house, and if it were listed on the Register without his knowledge, "I wouldn't be very happy." He added he bought his house for a reason, as did other people who purchase old homes, and he said it's important to work with these people.

Councillor Doug Beffort, who said he was on the Heritage committee when it decided to set up an inventory of properties to be considered for the Register, believed staff would have thought the matter through carefully before the idea was suggested. His main concern was with people who might buy properties not realizing they are on the Register.

General Manager of Community Services Peggy Tollett said the current practice is to tell the owner the plan to add their property to the Register before it comes to council. The new plan is to tell them after.

She added there are some 1,600 properties on the inventory, and none of the owners were told ahead of time.

"I think the protocol is simple," Shaughnessy said, adding not all of those 1,600 properties are going to receive heritage designations. But she said there are about 40 properties on the White Belt or near aggregate operations that could be at risk. She said these owners should be informed after their properties are listed on the Register.

"All we really need to do is send a letter," she observed.

She added it might be onerous to put such a listing on title, pointing out there are buildings that are currently at risk.

"This is about protecting our history; our culture," she argued.

But deBoer argued that if someone has a house and it gets out that it's on the Register, its value could drop, unless the people involved understand what being included on the Register means.

"We need to notify people," he declared. "We need to work with them."

Councillor Johanna Downey said she agreed with that in principle, but argued putting a property on the Register is not a first step toward designation. It just gives heritage staff the chance to study the property. Telling the owners the property is being considered for the Register could prompt some to quickly seek demolition permits, she said. She said it's important to close the gap in that scenario.

"That's the bottom-line goal," she said.

Shaughnessy wondered what the point was of sending this back to staff.

"What more can be done?" she asked.

Shaughnessy also said there are no statistics to support the contention that properties lose value if they are on the Register.

"Who says it has a negative value?" she wondered.