

KING STREET WEST, COBOURG

A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

This document is intended to highlight the key issues affecting any redevelopment options for the above property. It is admittedly a high-level view; All considerations affecting the property will be addressed in greater detail when the project enters the Site Plan Approval stage and a Heritage Impact Assessment is prepared. The key question is whether the original house on the property, known as the Battell House, should be retained and restored, or whether it may be demolished to make way for new development which is fully compatible with Heritage and Downtown Guidelines.

The original Battell House was a handsome building; this is not in dispute. It would certainly have qualified for heritage protection under Part 5 guidelines, and arguably may have qualified for Part 4 designation. But that was then; where are we now?

HISTORY OF OWNERSHIP:

I'm assuming that the property remained in residential use from its construction until the late 1950's, when it was acquired by the Canadian Tire Corporation for use as a retail outlet. They added a single store addition out to the sidewalk line. After Canadian Tire relocated, this commercial frontage was renovated and converted to 3 separate retail units. The rear of the ground floor was added to and converted to apartments, while the upper floors continued in residential use.

James Burnett acquired this property in the early 1970's and maintained ownership until his death in 2017. He did not make significant changes to the building, and it is true that he did not carry out the necessary maintenance and repair work to his residential properties during his last years. His daughter, Paige Burnett inherited this building in 2017, along with three other residential properties in Cobourg. The others, on George Street, Jane Street and Division Street, all need upgrading, and this work is being carried out, with the input of the Heritage Advisory Committee where this is appropriate.

CURRENT OCCUPANCY:

The building has three commercial tenants in the single storey addition along King Street. In the original ground floor, plus single storey additions to the rear and the west, there are five residential units. The second floor of the original house has two residential units and the third floor has a single large unit. Six of the eight residential units are now occupied at a rent of around \$400. The third floor unit and one of the ground floor units are currently vacant, and are deemed unfit for habitation.

CURRENT CONDITION:

The building is in exceptionally bad condition. The original damage was done when Canadian Tire built the front addition, and subsequent single storey side and rear additions were added. As a result, the entire ground floor features were lost beyond repair; porches, verandas, bays, doors and windows, all gone. In later years, lack of maintenance accelerated the decline. In many places on the third floor, you can see the sky through the walls and roof. Birds and squirrels are regular occupants.

Restoration would mean a virtually complete interior gut, as original partitioning has irreparably changed. It would mean removal of the entire mansard roof and dormers, too badly water damaged. It would mean complete replacement of all mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. And of course complete replication of the entire ground floor exterior. The only element of the existing house to remain would be some of the second floor exterior brickwork, and even this would entail extensive work.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The property is now operating at a loss. The exceptionally low rental income does not cover the cost of taxes, insurance, utilities, maintenance and management.

Restoration of the existing house would carry a crippling cost. Renovation often run 1 ½ to 2 times as expensive as new construction. Renovation of a structure this badly deteriorated, and restoring it to acceptable heritage standards could run to well over 3 times the cost of new construction. As well, the configuration of the building and its placement on the site seriously limit the amount of new development that could occur on the property. Higher costs, less return equals a guaranteed loss. It's too early in the process to quantify the dollars, but I would speculate that heritage restoration of the exiting dwelling, to generate saleable residential units, would result in a least a half million dollar loss.

On the other hand, building with all new construction, to quality standards, and creating a site plan that would maximize positive development, could create a positive regeneration of this now derelict part of King Street; one that is fully compliant with the best of the downtown and heritage guidelines

COMPLIANCE WITH ZONING:

The property is currently zoned MC (Main Central Commercial). If the original house was restored as a house, it would technically fail to comply; residential uses are permitted only in a commercial building. However, as a legal non-conforming use it would be quite acceptable, particularly give the heritage status of the original house.

A redeveloped property would have even greater compliance. The King Street ground floor frontage would be strictly commercial, with the residential component above and behind. The development would comply with the three storey height limit and would be well within the floor space index and site coverage limits. The by-law contains reduced parking standards for the downtown core, and we would comply with those standards. It is possible that we may require minor variances with regard to side yard set-backs, but no more so than the current structure on the site.

COMPLIANCE WITH GUIDELINES:

There are two well written documents that guide the future of downtown Cobourg; the Downtown Cobourg Master Plan and the Heritage Master Plan. It is our commitment that if we are granted permission the demolish and rebuild, we will comply in full with the policies and guidelines of these documents.

Section 9.1 of the Heritage Master Plan permits demolition in a heritage district A) if it is in the public interest to do so and B), if it can be demonstrated that the building does not contribute to the heritage character of the District. Regardless of the heritage qualities that this building may have had 60 years ago, it certainly does not contribute to the Heritage character of the District now. Preserving it in its current state is most certainly not in the public interest. It is our intention that the new development will comply with the full requirements of Section 8.1 – new freestanding construction and of Section 8.2 - construction within the commercial street wall.

The Downtown Master Plan has even more comprehensive guidelines, and we will fully comply with these requirements in all respects. The King Street West – Main Street Character area calls for new development to address the street with grade level retail and parking at the rear. It should support a historic main street character and serve as a gateway into the downtown area. We will comply with these requirements all respects.

Admittedly, this section of the Downtown master plans calls for the preservation of the historic building at 144 King Street West. An admirable goal, if this was a viable option. Regrettably, it is not.

Our proposal will not only reflect the guidelines for new development in the downtown area. It will relate to its immediate context and to its predecessor. We propose a mansard, bell curve roof like the original house, with dormers reflecting the original. We will restore and re-use the significant eave brackets. Exterior walls will be red clay bricks, the dominant material on King Street . We will maintain a two-storey principal eave line to relate to the historic house to our west. In all respects, this development will be a thoughtful and respectful member of its downtown heritage community.

CONCLUSION:

In general terms, there are three possible scenarios for the of 144 King Street West.

- 1: demolish the existing buildings on site and redevelop the property
- 2: preserve and restore the existing 'heritage' house.
- 3: maintain the status quo.

Of course the present owner, my client, could simply sell the property as is right now. But then the new purchaser would be faced with the same three scenarios.

Scenario Three, permanently maintaining the status quo, is the least desirable to all stakeholders. The building as it stands right now is an eyesore. Its single storey commercial frontage is contrary to all guidelines and the residential component to the rear and above is derelict and partially condemned.

Scenario Two, preserving and restoring the existing heritage building, may seem desirable in theory, but in reality it will never happen. The original house is too badly deteriorated, and the early additions are too damaging to that original structure. There is no hope of an economically viable restoration project.

Scenario One, demolition and redevelopment of the site, is in our opinion the only viable option which makes economic sense and which can satisfy the demanding Heritage and Downtown guidelines. We put it before the Cobourg Heritage Advisory Committee that such redevelopment is the highest and best use of this property, conditional of course on full compliance with the guidelines of the Downtown Master Plan and the Heritage Master Plan.

It is my firm belief that if the Cobourg Heritage Committee and Council insist on Scenario Two, they will likely end up with Scenario Three for the foreseeable future. Certainly, my client is not able to undertake such a restoration project, and has been unable to find a purchaser of the property to do so. A sensitive redevelopment, respectful of all the Heritage and Downtown Guidelines, is clearly the highest and best outcome for Downtown Cobourg.

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Port Hope October 8, 2010