



COBOURG & EAST NORTHUMBERLAND

To: Graham Andrews, Chair of Cobourg Heritage Committee
From: Diane Chin, Past Chair of ACO Cobourg & East Northumberland
Barb Robins, Co-Chair of ACO Cobourg & East Northumberland
Date: October 8, 2020
Re: Opposition to the demolition of the house at 144 King St. West, Cobourg

Introduction:

144 King St. West has two component structures. The front comprises currently, three storefronts which were subdivided from a Canadian Tire built in the 1950's. From the architect's preliminary proposal, it appears that the plan is to demolish this structure. The back structure is a house which we will refer to going forward as the "house" had the front façade removed to accommodate the construction of the Canadian Tire store. The proposal is to also demolish this house. Apart from the removal of the façade, in the 1950's, all of the original interior of the house is still intact as far as we know. From all appearances this house has been allowed to deteriorate by the owners.

Architecture:

This house is only one of two remaining Second Empire houses left in Cobourg. Many were built in the 1870's. The other one is at 428 John St. named Greenbank. One commercial example exists at King and Durham St. and the other is the Fire Hall Theatre downtown. So, if one is to preserve the architectural legacy throughout the Town's history, this house is very significant. This Second Empire style is sometimes referred to as the "French Villa" style. Its defining features are its mansard roof (still intact). This roof style was done in the 19th century renovations of the Louvre and was popularised in the US, coming thereafter to Canada. On the ground floor, the house contained a double drawing room, sitting room, dining room, kitchen and scullery. I refer you to Rob Mikel's book, "Cobourg, The Spirit of the Place," p. 138 for a photo. Many of the original features include fine exterior details, paired bracketed eaves, leaded glass and mansard roof.

Historical:

This home was built by William Battell, a leading Cobourg builder who was later Mayor of Cobourg and for that reason alone, this building should be retained. The Battell household was large, housing five of his unmarried daughters and the Presbyterian Minister William Beattie. After Battell's death, Beattie bought the house. At the outbreak of WW I, Beattie enlisted as

Chaplain and Honorary Major of the 40th regiment of the Cobourg Battalion. He rose to become Chaplain of the second division and Assistant Director of the Canadian Chaplain Service. Beattie's letters from the front were often published in local papers. In 1955, as I mentioned previously the owner received permission to add the addition of a Canadian Tire store on the front and remove the façade.

Environmental & Economic

We are in an environmental crisis of climate change eclipsed currently by our global pandemic. Greenhouse gases continue to spew into the air thus increasing the level of carbon dioxide. The buildings on King St. already have embodied energy that is, the carbon produced in the original construction. Carbon is produced during demolition and construction. Carbon is produced to transport the debris to a local landfill. Currently in Ont. estimates are that up to 20% of landfill is debris from demolition and construction. Restoration and repurposing produces minimal landfill and minimal carbon.

The pandemic has caused a loss of jobs. Studies have shown that new construction creates 21% less jobs than restoration. New constructions tends to use products created offshore. Restoration uses products that are locally produced or at least produced in Ontario. All indications are that heritage tourism from inhabitants who are local (the GTA) will continue to grow once communities open up, as the vast majority of people eschew airline travel especially in the older demographic. This group tends to spend more than other kinds of tourists such as beach goers. Maintaining an inventory of interesting architectural styles and repurposing them into modern day uses adds to the appeal of a Town such as Cobourg.

Commercial Heritage District and Zoning.

144 King St. W is in the Commercial Heritage District. As such, this district has already lost some of its significant buildings. Part V of the Ont. Heritage Act, Section (1) 3. defines a heritage district as encompassing," Heritage attributes described in the Heritage Conservation District By-law."

Our by-law states some of the following goals relevant to this situation,

1. "Protect and conserve significant cultural heritage resources over the long term
2. The small-town character of Cobourg, typified by the commercial core, low rise development, comfortable streetscapes, and a mix of land uses, is important to maintain and enhance
3. Retaining the broader character of the streetscape and neighbourhoods is equally important to conserving individual buildings
4. Investment and new development that is compatible with the character of the surrounding area should be encouraged and facilitated."

Zoning is Main Central Commercial.



COBOURG & EAST NORTHUMBERLAND

Conclusion:

A travesty was committed on this house in the 1950's when the façade was removed and Canadian Tire was placed on the front. Let's not perpetuate that by demolishing the house on this site. We have a chance to reverse what was done during times when there was no understanding of having a historic streetscape that can facilitate economic activity and heritage tourism. To be clear, ACO Cobourg & EN opposes the demolition of this house.