

CONSERVATION REVIEW BOARD

RE: THE TOWN OF MARKHAM INTENTION TO DESIGNATE THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS 7265 HIGHWAY #7, THE ABRAHAM REESOR HOUSE IN MARKHAM, ONTARIO

Stuart Henderson, Chair
Stuart Kidd, Co-Chair

June 6, 2007

This hearing was convened under section 29(8) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter O.18, as amended, for the purpose of reporting to the Council of the Town of Markham, whether, in the opinion of the Conservation Review Board, on the basis of the evidence it heard, the subject property should be designated by bylaw under the Act.

Participant List:

- Conservation Review Board Members:
 - Chair - Stuart Henderson
 - Co-Chair - Stuart Kidd
- Corporation of the Town of Markham:
 - Bob Boxma, City Solicitor
 - George Duncan, Senior Heritage Planner
- Current Owner:
 - Michael Savas

The Objectors, previous owners Sharon and Glenn Russell, were not present.

Both panel members visited the property in advance of the 26 April hearing.

The original hearing of 26 April 2007 was adjourned to 6 June 2007 at the request of Sharon Russell due to her mother-in-law's sudden illness. Notwithstanding the consent adjournment of 26 April 2007, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Russell was in attendance to present their objection at this current hearing. Mr. Boxma was asked and confirmed for the Board that he had not been contacted by the Russells' prior to this hearing since 26 April 2007. The Notice of Hearing was tabled by the Chair as "Exhibit # 1".

Mr. Boxma proceeded with the Municipality's evidence.

Case for the Town of Markham

Mr. Boxma introduced a spine bound binder titled “Town of Markham Book of Evidence”, which was taken into evidence as “Exhibit # 2”, which included all relevant staff reports, Committee and Council resolutions, planning and heritage documents, correspondence with and letter of objection by the past owners, Mr. and Mrs. Russell and a CV for Mr. Duncan. The “Proof of Ownership” was entered as Exhibit # 3.

Mr. Boxma then introduced Mr. Duncan, who was sworn in as a witness to present the Municipality’s position. Mr. Boxma offered Mr. Duncan as an expert witness in heritage issues and referred the Board to his CV under tab 15 of “Exhibit 2”. Based on that information and Mr. Duncan’s references to past experience as an expert witness in and around the area of Richmond Hill, the Board accepted him as an expert witness in this hearing.

Witness – George Duncan

Mr. Duncan indicated that this house had been listed in the Municipal Heritage Inventory since 1982 (see Exhibit 2, Tab 8) and that it was listed as a “Group 1” property. “Group 1” is the highest rating of heritage significance in Markham and as such the property should be protected by formal heritage designation. This house was stated to be one of 22 residences listed as “Group 1” properties in Markham. Mr. Duncan referred the Board to tab 9 of Exhibit # 2, being an extract from the Markham Official Plan, particularly section 2.5 dealing with “Heritage Conservation” policies. The Official Plan was noted to have been in place since 1986. Section 2.5 outlines the inherent process of identification, research, evaluation and designation of heritage properties, all of which Mr. Duncan said were applied in this case. He went on to describe how the identified heritage significance was further recognized within the Cornell Secondary Plan in 1992; see Exhibit 2, Tab 3, pg. 2, para. 2.

This area of Markham, described as the Cornell community, has been primarily rural in character, although it is under significant development pressures as Markham expands in this direction. The subject property is positioned within an area planned for a transportation terminal and is near proposed new residential development areas. Mr. Duncan outlined that while the Official Plan policies gave first priority to retaining and preserving such buildings in their original locations, the second priority was to allow relocation and protection; see Exhibit # 2, Tab 9, pg 2-35, section 2.5.1 (g) iii).

Mr. Duncan traced the origins of this residence to the early settlement history of the area by Mennonites of German extraction who emigrated from Pennsylvania. Apparently German was the main language in the area at the time the property was purchased by a Mr. Christian Reesor in 1804. The land was apparently vacant at the time and purchased from a private party, not from the Crown as an original land grant. The Reesors were one of the many early Pennsylvania families to settle in the southeast section of what is now Markham. Mr. Christian Reesor’s great grandson, Abraham Reesor, a carpenter by trade, built the subject home in 1875. The home is apparently one of a few in the area with the date stone intact. His widow lived in the house until her death in 1923.

The house is reported to be a unique remaining example of a vernacular “L” shaped design popular between 1860 and 1900 with dramatic Gothic Revival detailing. It is a red brick with buff accent brick structure on a fieldstone foundation. Architectural details are of quality workmanship and are still in excellent condition including round headed windows, curvilinear bargeboards, brick patterns and quoining.

The house is one of three Reesor family homes still standing in this Lot/Concession. Prominence of the five generations of this family in this immediate area as well as the involvement of Mennonite communities in the early history of Markham was noted to lend significant supporting value to the proposed designation.

Owner's Position

Mr. Savas supports the designation but declined to provide any evidence.

Objectors' Position

The written objection from Mr. and Mrs. Russell dated 5 April 2006 was included in the Municipality's evidence as "Exhibit # 2", Tab 6. In that document Mr. Russell wrote his "Reasons for Objection" to be:

"I want to either move the house or sell for salvage."

As noted above, the objectors were not in attendance to provide the Board with any evidence of their objection. The Board therefore relied on the written statement of objection.

Findings and Recommendations of the Board

The Board finds that the quality, condition and attributes of the residence are worthy of protection, as is the surrounding property associated with the residence. The design and associative values as put forward by the Municipality were significant.

The Board recommends that Council proceed with the designation of the Abraham Reesor House, 7265 Highway # 7, Markham, under Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, as a property of cultural heritage value or interest. Given the time lapse between the 1 May 2006 referral date of this file to the CRB, this Board recommends an expedient approval of the proposed designation.

The Board recognizes the significant architectural and historic value of the subject property. The relationship of this residence to other heritage homes in the area, including those of this family, and the settlement history by Mennonite families is also worthy of heritage recognition.

The Board recognizes and commends the Municipality for its open and public planning process and documentary evidence as exemplified in the consideration of this property.

The objectors' interests have been well accommodated throughout the process by the Municipality and the Board, including the April hearing adjournment based on the objectors' family health concerns. However, their lack of attendance at this hearing, lack of contact with the participants or the CRB and the limited written reason for objection reflect an objection of no substance.

(original signed by):

Stuart Henderson, Chair

(original signed by):

Stuart Kidd, Co-Chair

Exhibit List:

- Exhibit # 1: Affidavit of Notice of Hearing in the Markham Economist & Sun Newspaper on Saturday May 26, 2007, as required under Ontario Heritage Act.
- Exhibit # 2: “Town of Markham Book of Documents” complete submission of documents (includes 15 tabbed sections) tabled by Mr. Boxma.
- Exhibit # 3: Affidavit of proof of ownership with Land Registry Office certificate dated 26 April 2007, 4 pages, tabled by Mr. Boxma.
- Exhibit # 4: “Abraham Reesor House 1875” cover page over eight colour photographs each on 8 ½” x 11” pages, 9 pages total, tabled by Mr. Boxma.
- Exhibit # 5: Evidence Outline titled “Abraham Reesor House – 7265 Highway 7”, 3 pages, tabled by Mr. Boxma.