

**Conservation
Review Board**

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RE: THE TOWN OF RICHMOND HILL - INTENTION TO DESIGNATE
51 WRIGHT STREET (RICHMOND HILL HIGH SCHOOL)

Robert G. Bowes, Chair of Hearing
Gerald Killan, Member

October 1, 1997

This hearing was convened in the Ontario Municipal Board Room, Municipal Offices of the Town of Richmond Hill, on October 1, 1997, pursuant to Section 29(8) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Ch.O. 18, for the purpose of reporting to the Council of the Town of Richmond Hill whether the property known as 51 Wright Street (Richmond Hill High School) should be designated by by-law under the Act, an objection having been raised by the owner of the property, the York Region Board of Education.

Notice of the hearing was given under the Act in the Liberal, September 18, 1997, by the Conservation Review Board, hereafter referred to as the Board. The relevant affidavits by the Board were tabled as Exhibit 1.

The Board, in accordance with its custom, had the opportunity to view the site and the surrounding area prior to the hearing.

The Town was represented by Ms. Teresa Kowalishin, Counsel for the Town of Richmond Hill, who called one witness, Mr. George Duncan. The owner was represented by Mr. Bill Crothers, Chair, the York Region Board of Education. Two members of the public made statements: Ms. Jocelyn Proulx, representing The Association for the Future of the Richmond Hill High School; and Ms. Diane Giangrande, member of LACAC and the Village of Richmond Hill Core Task Force.

The Case for the Town of Richmond Hill

Presenter: Ms. Teresa Kowalishin

Ms. Kowalishin submitted several documents including an affidavit of the notice of intention to designate 51 Wright Street (Richmond Hill High School) (Exhibit 2), as well as a copy of the 1997 Assessment Rolls for the Town of Richmond Hill showing the owner of 51 Wright Street as being the York Region Board of Education. (Exhibit 3)

Witness: George Duncan, Heritage Co-ordinator for the Town of Richmond Hill

After establishing his credentials as an expert in heritage conservation (Exhibit 4), Mr. Duncan outlined the chronology of the Town of Richmond Hill's interest in 51 Wright Street as a heritage property. The Richmond Hill High School was listed in the Town of Richmond Hill Inventory of Buildings of Architectural and Historical Importance (rev. ed. 1992) (Exhibit 5). Correspondence in 1991 between Page and Steele Architects (the firm commissioned that year by the York Region Board of Education to undertake a feasibility study for 51 Wright Street, indicates that the High School building was listed on the inventory by 1991. The correspondence also establishes that LACAC's interest in 51 Wright Street dates back to 1991 and that the York Region Board of Education was informed of this interest at the time. (Exhibits 6 and 7)

In 1995, LACAC began the designation process for 51 Wright Street by instructing Mr. Duncan to prepare a "Heritage Structure Report for the Richmond Hill High School, 51 Wright Street 1924" (Exhibit 8) submitted in November 1995. The report concluded that the original exterior of the 1924 High School building possessed sufficient architectural and historical significance to warrant designation under the Ontario Heritage Act. Photographs of the original 1924 exterior were displayed at the hearing. Mr. Duncan acknowledged that changes in the building had taken place since the initial construction in 1924, and that LACAC had approached designation from the viewpoint that the Richmond Hill High School is an evolved structure, and that the additions and alterations visually tell the story of the changing educational needs in the community, and changing approaches to school architecture. Within the context of the alterations, the original 1924 building remains the centrepiece of the complex, and retains its significant architectural features and its relationship to Wright Street. (Exhibit 12)

Mr. Duncan also explained that the exterior alterations to the original 1924 building have left important architectural elements largely intact. For instance, the office and library addition constructed across the front of the original 1924 structure "touched the building very lightly" and merely concealed the original entrance porches which are now preserved within an interior landscaped courtyard. The changes to the original 1924 structure are not irreversible if there is a desire to restore it.

Mr. Duncan presented his opinion on the architectural, historical and contextual significance of the original 1924 Richmond Hill High School building. (Exhibit 9) The school is the fourth in a series of high school buildings to have been constructed in the village core of Richmond Hill. The origin of secondary level education in the community dates back to 1851, with the establishment of a grammar school in a store owned by Abraham Law on Yonge Street.

A grammar school building was erected in 1853, adjacent to the public school, on the present day site of the McConaghy Centre. This was replaced by a larger high school

in 1873 as Richmond Hill's first village council's major project. The second high school burned in 1896, and was replaced by a new building at the southwest corner of Yonge and Wright Streets the following year.

Increasing enrolment and changing educational policies following World War One, necessitated the building of another new high school in 1923-24. This structure forms the core of the existing building at 51 Wright Street. In 1948, the school was enlarged with the first of several additions three years later. Renowned author and environmentalist Farley Mowat is among the graduates of this village landmark. (Exhibit 14)

The architecture of Richmond Hill High School is a successful blend of the Neo-Gothic and Edwardian Classical styles. The Neo-Gothic is often locally referred to as "Collegiate Gothic" because of its widespread use for educational buildings in Ontario from 1900 to the 1940s.

The projecting centre bays, monochromatic brick walls, massive brick quoins and grouped, flat-headed, multi-paned windows belong to the Edwardian Classical style of building. Decorative limestone details provide a contrast with the smooth surface of the red-brown brick. The arrangement of door and window openings on the facade is balanced and ordered.

As an overlay to the basic Edwardian Classical form of Richmond Hill High School, details typical of the Collegiate Gothic style add decorative elements to enliven the prevailing simplicity of the composition. The Gothic trefoil niche, arrow slits, stone string course and treatment of the entrance porches are characteristic of the style.

The composite of two architectural styles - the Edwardian Classical and Neo-Gothic-while not unique in Ontario, is unique to the Town of Richmond Hill.

Historically, Richmond Hill High School (1924) is an important link in the chain of history of public education in the Village of Richmond Hill, representing the expansion period of the village in the early decades of the twentieth-century brought about by the arrival of the radial railway and the introduction of the rose-growing industry. According to historian Robert Stamp in Early Days in Richmond Hill (Exhibit 11), when the High School was built in 1924 - the only secondary school located between Toronto and Aurora - it "confirmed the village's strategic role in secondary education along Yonge Street," a position it held until the post World War Two era.

Two other historic schools, both designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, remain within visual range of each other - the McConaghy Public School (1914) (Exhibit 10), currently undergoing restoration, and the 1897 Richmond Hill High School, which served as the Town Hall until recently. The buildings, all in close proximity, serve as a

reminder of the progression of public education in the community, particularly in the original historic core village of Richmond Hill. Mr. Duncan noted that the historic village core is currently being studied by a Village Core Task Force. One of their tasks is to examine how heritage structures such as these help to define the character of the core area as a unique place. In Mr. Duncan's opinion, within the core village context, the Richmond Hill High School (1924) at 51 Wright Street is a community landmark, one of the largest public heritage buildings in the village core, and one held in affection by many people in the area.

Mr. Duncan completed outlining the chronology of the designation process from March 23, 1995, when LACAC directed staff to prepare a detailed Heritage Structure Report, to April 1, 1997, when Council voted to proceed with designation (Exhibit 13). It was noted that LACAC voted on January 23, 1997 to proceed with its recommendation for designation over the objection of the York Region Board of Education.

On September 3, 1997, the Board of Directors of The Richmond Hill Historical Society passed a motion in support of LACAC's recommendation that Richmond Hill High School at 51 Wright Street be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. (Exhibit 15)

A photocopy of a document entitled "A Page of History Turns" from the Richmond Hill High School archives (Exhibit 16), summarizing the history of education in Richmond Hill and containing the only photograph of the 1872 High School (burned down in 1896) was submitted by Ms. Kowalishin.

Mr. Duncan explained that a community group had been formed recently to lobby the York Region Board of Education to keep the Richmond Hill High School functioning.

To conclude the Town of Richmond Hill's case for designation, Ms. Kowalishin asked Mr. Duncan to refer to the September 13, 1996 Conservation Review Board Report Re: City of St. Thomas-- Intention to Designate 50 Wellington Street (Wellington Street Public School). He argued that the Conservation Review Board in that case addressed and rejected the utility argument made by the St. Thomas School Board officials. He cited the following statement: "The Conservation Review Board appreciates the Board of Education's focus on providing the best and most cost-effective educational programs and facilities. Yet it is in the context of the importance of education to the community that the conservation of educational heritage must be considered. In this challenging fiscal climate when social programs are under increasing scrutiny, a heritage school can be a symbol and a reminder of that importance and of the key role education has played in defining the character of the community." (Exhibit 17)

The Case for the Owner

Presenter: Mr. Bill Crothers, Chair of the York Region Board of Education

Mr. Crothers explained that on April 1, 1997 he had appeared before Council to express the opposition of The York Region Board of Education to the designation of Richmond Hill High School under the Ontario Heritage Act. Previously, he and Mr. Ralph Benson (Superintendent of Corporate Planning) had presented their reasons for opposing designation to both LACAC and Council.

The Board of Education had no desire to take an appeal to the Conservation Review Board and was quite prepared for the inevitability of Council's decision to move forward with designation. However, since non-appearance at the hearing might indicate approval of designation by the Board of Education, Mr. Crothers elected to present the Board's case against designation. (Exhibit 18)

The York Region Board of Education is concerned that designation of 51 Wright Street will be a significant barrier either to a continued or altered use of the building. Richmond Hill High School is the most deficient of all secondary school buildings operated by the The York Region Board of Education. During the past several years, the Board has replaced two elementary schools (one in Richmond Hill and one in Vaughan) by demolishing the existing buildings and erecting replacement structures. The Board has also replaced a secondary school in Newmarket by building on a different site, although the original school facility has been temporarily retained as an overflow elementary school building. The Board has also renovated or placed additions on more than thirty other buildings during the past ten years. Mr. Crothers explained that the York Region Board of Education is the fastest growing board of education in the province.

Preliminary studies have indicated that it would be extremely expensive to bring Richmond Hill High School up to the standards that prevail at other secondary schools in York Region. Renovation of 51 Wright Street will likely cost more than building a new school. Still, no decision will be made on this question until a comprehensive feasibility study has been undertaken.

Recent changes re capital funding for schools made by the Ministry of Education and Training suggest that it may be impossible for the Board to bring Richmond Hill High School to appropriate physical standards. Richmond Hill High School boasts an exemplary academic record, but the Board of Education must also be sensitive to students' needs for first-class school facilities.

Following notification of LACAC's intention to designate 51 Wright Street, the Board of Education engaged the services of Mr. William Greer, a heritage and preservation consultant, to review the "Reasons for Designation" provided by LACAC and to conduct a site visit. Mr. Greer's report concluded that "while the original school building on the site has some degree of heritage value, its significance is marginal at best and, in any case, the interior has lost its integrity substantially and should not be included in any proposed reasons for designation." (Exhibit 19)

Mr. Crother's opined that the Town of Richmond Hill is more concerned about the continued use of the existing high school building and/or location as a secondary school than about heritage conservation. To support his claim that the prime driving force behind the designation initiative was political - that is, to keep Richmond Hill High School in operation and to prevent the relocation of local students to a proposed new school - he submitted a copy of Council's January 20, 1997 minutes pertaining to the designation of 51 Wright Street (Exhibit 20) and letters from A. P. Crawford, Deputy Clerk, and Jane Robertson, Councillor, Ward 4. (Exhibit 21)

Mr. Crothers emphasized that the main concern of the York Region Board of Education is the welfare of its students. He reiterated that his Board is opposed on both practical and philosophical grounds to designation because it will narrow the Board's options re the future use of the building. The Board might have been more favourably disposed to designation if a strong case had been made in favour of the heritage values of the property. In light of the Greer report which described Richmond Hill High School's heritage significance as "marginal at best," the Board has concluded that the building is not worthy of designation. Accordingly, the Board will continue to take a practical approach which gives priority to facility and program requirements for its students.

Mr. Crothers challenged the relevancy of the Conservation Review Board report re City of St. Thomas-Intention to Designate 50 Wellington Street (Wellington Street Public School), September 13, 1996. The inadequacy of the building and the school site were not at issue in St. Thomas as they are in the case of the Richmond Hill High School at 51 Wright Street.

Following Mr. Crothers presentation, Ms. Kowalishin requested that Mr. George Duncan be allowed to return to the stand. Under questioning, Mr. Duncan pointed to the exhibit evidence indicating that LACAC's interest in designating 51 Wright Street dated back to March 1995 before the issue of school closure became a matter of political discussion in the Town of Richmond Hill. Mr. Duncan also challenged the conclusion in the Greer Report that the heritage significance of the Richmond Hill High School was "marginal at best." He observed that there is no evidence provided in the report to substantiate that claim.

Representations Supporting the Town of Richmond Hill

The Association for the Future of Richmond Hill High School - Ms. Jocelyn Proulx

The Association for the Future of Richmond Hill High School was formed in January 1997 when news of the proposal to construct a new high school became public. Some fifteen people comprise the active nucleus of the group which reaches out to many other people. Ms. Proulx explained that the group had contacted LACAC shortly after its creation, just as it had contacted other organizations. There has been no collaboration between the LACAC and the Association. Both groups work quite independently of each other.

Ms. Diane Giangrande

Ms. Giangrande is a member of LACAC and the Village Core Task Force. She has been involved with the McConaghy Building restoration, and owns a designated heritage building herself. Ms. Giangrande corroborated statements by previous witnesses that LACAC's interest in designating the Richmond Hill High School predated the emergence of the school closing issue as a matter of political discussion.

Ms. Giangrande noted that in the rapidly growing Region of York, too many heritage structures have been lost to development. In her opinion, there is an urgent need to preserve the few remaining heritage landmarks in the historic core of the Town of Richmond Hill such as the High School at 51 Wright Street.

The Richmond Hill LACAC looks forward to the continued use of the Richmond Hill High School (1924) building, but does not oppose adaptive re-use. The school represents something special to the community. LACAC's prime concern is to keep the building on the site for generations to come. The McConaghy Centre restoration indicates that the costs of renovation do not necessarily exceed the costs of building elsewhere. Ms. Giangrande hopes that the York Region Board of Education will now look more closely at its options for the high school. There is strong community support for heritage values.

FINDINGS

Based on the evidence presented by the witness for the Town of Richmond Hill, the Board finds Richmond Hill High School (1924), 51 Wright Street, to be of sufficient architectural and historical interest and value to merit designation.

Only one qualified heritage expert - Mr. George Duncan - testified at the hearing. He appeared for the Town of Richmond Hill. For its part, the owner, the York Region Board of Education, submitted a brief report by heritage consultant William N. Greer which

claimed that the heritage significance of 51 Wright Street was "marginal at best." The Board notes that the owner did not elect to call Mr. Greer as a witness.

The Chair of the York Region Board of Education, Mr. Crothers, claimed that the issue of designating the Richmond Hill High School as a heritage property has far less to do with the architectural and historical significance of the building than it does with the Town Council's effort to convince the Board of Education to keep the school in operation. All the same, the Board finds that a strong enough case has been made for the preservation of the exterior of the 1924 building.

RECOMMENDATIONS

it is the recommendation of the Board that Richmond Hill High School (1924), 51 Wright Street, be designated by by-law under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

The Conservation Review Board encourages the York Region Board of Education to take into consideration the heritage values of the original 1924 Richmond Hill High School building, and the importance of those values to the local community, when the options are weighed for the future disposition of the school.

(Original Signed by)

Robert Bowes, Chair

Gerald Killan, Member

List of Exhibits

1. Affidavit of Notice of Hearing, the Liberal, September 19, 1997.
2. Affidavits from Robert J. Douglas, Clerk, The Town of Richmond Hill, re notice of intention to designate 51 Wright Street (Richmond Hill High School), including: copy of registered letter dated May 6, 1997 from R.J. Douglas to Bill Crothers, Chair, York Region Board of Education, re notice of intention to designate; copy of notice of intention to designate in the Liberal, May 6, 1997; copy of letters from B. Crothers to R.J. Douglas, June 4, 1997 and B. Crothers to Mayor and Councillors, Town of Richmond Hill, April 1, 1997 objecting to designation.
3. Copy of the 1997 Assessment Rolls of the Town of Richmond Hill, p. 762 indicating owner of 51 Wright Street (Richmond Hill High School) as the York Region Board of Education.
4. Curriculum vitae of George W. J. Duncan.
5. Town of Richmond Hill LACAC, Inventory of Buildings of Architectural and Historical Importance, Revised February 1992.
6. Copy of Letter from Horst Theis, Page and Steele Architects, to Building Department, Town of Richmond Hill, October 21, 1991.
7. Copy of Letter from George Duncan, Heritage Planner, to Horst Theis, Page and Steel Architects, November 4, 1991.
8. Heritage Structure Report, Richmond Hill High School, 51 Wright Street 1924, by George Duncan, November 1995.
9. "Reasons for Designation", Richmond Hill High School.
10. Photographs of the McConaghy School (1914).
11. Copy of pp 291-1, Early Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community to 1930 by Robert M. Stamp.
12. Copy of Notes of George Duncan, Heritage Co-ordinator, entitled "High School Hearing."
13. "Chronology of the Designation Process for the Richmond Hill High School."

14. Copy of letter from Farley Mowat, April 29, 1997; copy of Farley Mowat's entry in The Tatler 1940; copy of poem entitled "Youth" written by Farley Mowat for The Tatler.
15. Copy of letter in support of designation of 51 Wright Street from Mary-Lou Griffin, President, The Richmond Hill Historical Society, September 14, 1997.
16. "A Page of History Turns" from the Richmond Hill High School archives.
17. Copy of Conservation Review Board Hearing Re: City of St. Thomas - intention to Designate 50 Wellington Street (Wellington Street Public School), September 13, 1996.
18. Copy of The York Region Board of Education, "Presentation to the Conservation Review Board, October 1, 1997" by Bill Crothers.
19. Copy of report by William N. Greer, Heritage and Preservation Consultant, re Richmond Hill High School, March 20, 1997.
20. Copy of Richmond Hill LACAC motion recommending designation of 51 Wright Street to Planning and Development Committee.
21. Copies of letters re process of designation: A.P. Crawford to Bill Hogarth, Director, York Region Board of Education, January 22, 1997; Jane Robertson, Councillor Ward 4, to B. Hogarth, February 14, 1997 and September 12, 1997.