

Niagara-on-the-Lake town council asking for more info regarding intent to demolish former Parliament Oak

The town received a demolition request and considering their options to best respond

By **Nick Fearn** Niagara-on-the-Lake Advance

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Niagara-on-the-Lake town council and staff need to work diligently to respond to a demolition request received for the former Parliament Oak school.

The demolition request was dated Feb. 10, kicking off a 60-day timeline.

The owners, Two Sisters Resorts Corp., [had proposed a 129-room boutique hotel for the site.](#)

The town's municipal heritage committee advised council that a heritage impact assessment will be prepared by Stantec Consulting that "assesses development alternatives or mitigative measures for the direct impacts to the 1948 school building as a result of demolition."

A commemoration plan for interpretation of the history and heritage value of the property will also need to be prepared by a qualified member of Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals (CAHP).

Clare Cameron, a former town councillor appeared as a delegate before council on behalf of the Niagara Foundation to discuss the committee's recommendations to council.

Cameron spoke about how the school, which operated from 1948 to 2015, had "valuable heritage attributes."

She urged preservation, telling council the school was one of the first public schools built in Ontario following the Second World War.

Cameron noted the commemoration plan had considered historical aspects of the site, such as its relation to the first parliament, but said nothing was included to commemorate the school itself.

She mentioned that former schools across Niagara had been developed into other uses such as Bench Brewing in Lincoln.

Heritage planner Denise Horne explained more about the timeline. She said the information the heritage committee asked for will return to them for review and then back to council.

She said the town had received Planning Act applications including an official zoning bylaw amendment and a zoning bylaw amendment and deemed them complete on March 3, 2023.

Under the new rules of the Heritage Act, said Horne, council has 90 days from that date to serve a notice of intent to designate. If not received within 90 days, a notice of intent must wait until the application is complete.

That means council has until June 1 to take action or not.

Kirsten McCauley, director of community and development services for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, told council the intent to demolish is separate from the planning applications and they are under different acts.

“They don’t have to go at the same time,” she noted.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita noted they didn’t have a lot of time to get everything complete. She asked staff if it was achievable to get everything finished.

McCauley said if council provided additional direction to go down the path of designation, staff would need to have something before the municipal heritage committee meeting for May 3. It would then need to come back before council to issue that intent to designate at the May council meeting.

In response to a question, Horne told council there were two previous times when the municipal heritage committee indicated they were not interested in pursuing Part 4 designation at that time. She said those decisions happened in 2019 and January 2022.

Coun. Sandra O’Connor put forward a motion to include the recommendations sought by Cameron and the Niagara Foundation.

The motion, which was approved unanimously, included the wording requested to ensure heritage assessment includes “preservation of the 1948 structure in whole or part in its original location.”

Attached to the motion were a number of specific heritage attributes related to the school that would be assessed as well such as acknowledging the 67 years use as a public school, salvaging original building materials including slate chalkboards, brick and hardware.

Horne said she considered the amendments requested to be considered “friendly” and they were able to be included.

Her comments addressed concerns from council that they would not be able to complete everything needed within the designated timeline.

Horne said they don't know when the applications will be submitted. June 1 is the deadline for considering designation.



Nick Fearn

Reporter/photographer for Niagara this Week covering communities in north Niagara.