

November 27, 2017

Dear Mayor and Council,

On November 9th, 2017, RNA Land-Use Chair Bob June and RNA Director Art Hamilton met with Merinda Conley, Alec Johnston, Andrea Hudson, and Alison Meyer to discuss Planning's report on 1525 Shasta Place and its implications for heritage preservation in Rockland.

The Association is extremely disappointed with the ineffectualness of this meeting.

Planning's report stated that the option to relocate the building "would not be supportable from a staff perspective." However, when asked to explain their rationale, Planning responded with "The owner had no desire to move it." This is a completely inadequate response, which doesn't address staff's reasons or perspective.

When asked why being behind a hedge was a factor in their decision, Planning replied that the house "was being demolished anyway." The hedge should not be used as an excuse for demolition. It has nothing to do with the heritage value of the house. This response utterly failed to address the issue.

When asked why the building's value as a "layered" historical restoration was not a factor in retention, Planning claimed that such value was "a matter of interpretation." That came as a real surprise to us, having heard Pam Madoff - with all of her expertise in the field of heritage preservation - explain exactly why this type of historical restoration has merit.

We were also dismayed to hear Ms. Meyer claim that the practice of not notifying a neighbourhood when there is an application for demolition will continue. We had been told by our community engagement liaison that work on remediating that lack of transparency is currently underway.

We were also surprised to hear that the sole heritage planner on staff is a part of the Technical Team in all developments. There are 43 FTE's in Planning. Over 800 site-specific zones have been created. How can one heritage planner be expected to address heritage concerns adequately? According to the website, the City is committed to the preservation of its heritage. The allocation of resources would indicate otherwise.

At the end of this extremely unsatisfying meeting, we expressed our concern about losing increasing numbers of historic buildings in Rockland, and asked what support we could expect from the City during the LAP process in the new year.

We were told that we were “on our own.”

The words on the City website are inspiring:

Much of Victoria's lasting charm and character stems from its unique collection of well- preserved historic buildings, many of which date back to the earliest days of settlement in British Columbia.

Our superb examples of turn-of-the-century architecture create a sense of pride among their owners and throughout the community. These heritage buildings are symbols of permanence and stability in an ever-changing world.

However, when citizens take the initiative to meet with staff in an attempt to advance this vision and are rewarded with superficial answers that leave them with a sense of futility, the cause of citizen engagement is definitely not well served.

Sincerely,

Janet Simpson, President