

AN OPEN LETTER TO BRUCE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 January, 2019

To the Warden and Members of Bruce County Council:

RE: PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF THE FORMER ANGLICAN RECTORY
LOCATED AT 254 HIGH STREET, SOUTHAMPTON

From a legal standpoint, the issuing of the RFP is problematic in a number of respects.

1. HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FORMER ANGLICAN RECTORY

The outstanding architectural and cultural heritage significance of this sound and well maintained building has been clearly outlined in the architect's report which advised preservation and restoration *in situ*.

"No other collection of historic architectural and landscape features is as intact as this collection of structures, and no other more prominent", the report said.

Even if it were feasible to move such a large brick building without damaging it, these outstanding heritage features of High Street would be forever lost.

The writer of the report, professional heritage conservation architect Jill Taylor, a former chair of the Conservation Review Board of Ontario and a former president of the Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals has also commented in the *Sun Times* (18 January, 2019):

"It's totally contrary to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation policy that a museum would demolish or be part of a scheme to demolish a heritage resource . . . that has had an importance to the community and the townscape since the 19th century".

The decisions of councillors, both municipal and county, must conform to the legislated requirements of conduct for elected representatives in lower tier government as laid out in the *Municipal Act*. Bruce County's Code of Conduct reminds councillors that:

"4.2 Members are responsible for complying with all applicable legislation".

The RFP ignores the architect's 111 page report which defined the rectory as part of a significant built heritage landscape. Residents are perplexed at being back to square one after loudly and clearly expressing their objection to removing the rectory at the October 16 open house, through widely supported social media campaigns and in letters to the editor.

2. THE LEGISLATION

Both county and municipal councils are required under Section 2.0 of *The Planning Act*, the *Provincial Policy Statement*, to exercise wise use and management of resources. Subsection 2.6 refers specifically to "Cultural Heritage and Archaeology":

"2.6.1 Significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes shall be conserved".

For a council itself to order the demolition of a critical part of a significant cultural heritage landscape in its own possession, contravenes the *Act*.

Under the council's own code as well as the requirements of the Municipal Act (2001) (Part V1, S 223) council members are committed to performing their functions with integrity, accountability and transparency.

*"It is part of the role of a municipal council to ensure the accountability and transparency of municipal operations. A municipality must adopt and maintain policies to try to ensure accountability and transparency to the public".*¹

Transparency requires that governments operate in an accessible and visible manner and that their activities and decision making are open and clear to the public. Such is not the perception of the public on this issue.

The County's failure to consult with residents before issuing the RFP for removal or salvage of the rectory could not be considered transparency or accountability.

Mayor Charbonneau's comments in the *Sun Times* on 18 January 2019 could not be considered an example of transparency or accountability. He "couldn't say what the property was needed for exactly. But he said

¹ A Guide to Municipal Accountability, Transparency and Confidentiality in Ontario, Municipal Affairs and Housing (2016).

that it will require the removal of that house”—giving the impression that the nuclear institute project was to go ahead after all.

3. LACK OF DILIGENCE

The County does not seem to have been diligent in considering the special needs of the Southampton community where its heritage architecture attracts visitors and shoppers to its tourism based businesses. Similarly the County does not appear to have explored the many possibilities through restoration of the house as an addition to the museum’s collection of pioneer structures.

In his interview, Mayor Charbonneau said he did not have the information on where the money came from to purchase the rectory property. As Chair of the Bruce County Museum Committee, why doesn’t he?

The RFP document issued by the County is frivolous. Its midwinter timing and very restrictive deadline suggest lack of diligence or deliberate deception.

4. CONCLUSIONS

We expect our councils to do the jobs they have been elected to do, one of which is to protect the long established interests and irreplaceable assets of our community.

We expect council decisions to comply with legislation.

The RFP must be cancelled immediately.

A way must be found to include meaningful public input. The County must think long term and build a project for the Bruce County Museum that respects the existing architectural heritage including the rectory and its neighbours. There is no place for another brick wall or a four storey “pile of shipping containers”.

With respect,

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