

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF ST. THOMAS
THE EIGHTH MEETING OF THE MUNICIPAL HERITAGE COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE ROOM #304
CITY HALL

SEPTEMBER 6, 2018

5:39 p.m. The meeting convened with Russell Schnurr, Chair, presiding.

ATTENDANCE

Members

Russell Schnurr, Chair
Harrison Cole
Councillor Joan Rymal
Joe Docherty
Jennifer Childs
Craig Crane

City Officials

Melanie Knapp, Corporate Administrative and
Accessibility Clerk, Secretary

Absent

Lisa Kelly
Todd Noble
Tino Clarke

MINUTES

Motion by J. Childs - C. Crane:

THAT: The minutes of the meeting held on August 14, 2018 be confirmed.

Carried.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Alma College Redevelopment - Appendix "A"

The Chair gave an overview of the September 4th public meeting relating to Alma College and the OMB Order including the presentations from the developer, City Manager and himself.

The members discussed the new plans proposed from Patriot Properties including the locations for balconies, public spaces, parking requirements and potential CIP funding.

The members discussed a letter received from E.R.A. Architects Inc. giving clarification to the proposed plans.

The members discussed the OMB Order and ramifications if the OMB Order is not repealed.

The members agreed that the OMB order must be respected.

Motion by J. Docherty - J. Childs:

THAT: As per By-law 131-2011, given the advisory role of the Municipal Heritage Committee to create a future for our cultural and built heritage, the Committee has no choice but to respect the legally binding OMB Order that was executed by the City Council of the time and paid for by the taxpayer, as supporting the retraction of such an Order could be precedent setting.

Carried.

The Chair would draft a report to Council to be included on the September 17th Council agenda.

Food Basics Site Plan Review

The members discussed different options for the photos at the front of the Food Basics building.

Ms. Childs suggested explanations of each photo on the building as well.

CONFIRMED _____ CHAIRMAN

8th Meeting of the Municipal Heritage Committee - 2

The Committee members were asked to send the Chair other options that would be decided upon together.

NEXT MEETING

October 16, 2018 at 5:30 p.m. in Room #304

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by H. Cole - C. Crane:

THAT: We do now adjourn at 7:07 p.m.

Carried.

Appendix "A"

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 5, 2018

At the above-noted meeting, there were 3 very passionate and emotional presentations from Dawn Doty, Susan Fortin-Smith and Nancy Mayberry. These presentations were opposed to the rescinding of the O.M.B. ruling on the preservation of the Alma College facade. Ms Fortin-Smith indicated that in her view that this was a law that can't be overturned and she vowed to fight any attempt to do so.

However, the majority of the public speaking to the issue, indicated that the project should proceed and were seemingly in favour of the Patriot Properties proposal.

There were some questions raised that were unable to be answered at the meeting, including the cost of the restoration of the amphitheatre and of bringing it up to code under the Ontarians With Disabilities Act.

Several speakers highlighted the shortage of apartments in the City. For that reason, City Council was asked to consider voting to rescind the O.M.B. ruling on the inclusion of the facade in order to proceed with development of the site.

ALMA COLLEGE SQUARE PROPOSAL

Proponent: Patriot Properties

THE OMB ORDER

The Site is subject to OMB order PL06861, which requires the north-central entranceway to the Alma College Building to be retained and its north facade to be “accurately and faithfully” replicated.

Given the role of the Heritage Committee to create a future for our cultural and built heritage, we have no choice but to respect the OMB order that executed by the town council of the time and paid for by the taxpayer. Supporting the retraction of such an order would set a dangerous precedent, notably in trying to implement the new HCD approved by the current council.

We have a responsibility to demonstrate a strong and sustained commitment to the conservation of our historic places, wise use of community heritage, and guidance to new development. This seems most poignant given the comment made by David Winterton of ERA an open house in June in which he indicated that in his opinion St. Thomas has an “architectural pedigree of Victorian, Edwardian, and pre-War buildings second to none”

THE IDEA OF REPLICATION

Sanctioned by the Heritage Committee, students in Fanshawe College’s GIS and Urban Planning program created visualizations of what adhering to the OMB order might appear as. **In this regard, the question needs to be asked as to why ERA quickly dismissed a design approach that conforms to the OMB order especially since the firm has done numerous replications (evident on their website)**

Their scheme incorporates one multi-unit residential building, in the precise location of the original Alma College that incorporates a reproduced Alma College historicist veneer on a modern structure. **The scheme not only illustrates a possible outcome of the OMB order but refutes ERA’s position that in their opinion (letter of June 6, 2018) the “absence of critical architectural drawings and material remains” negates the possibility of recreation and that an interpretation is required.**

The student’s exploration is aligned with other known architectural replications such as the Adam Beck House in London, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Darwin Martin House loggia and studio in Buffalo, the L&PS train station replication in St. Thomas, and for that matter the replicated canopy on the CASO Station (albeit as an addition). It is important to note the precedent set by town council and civic leaders in supporting and undertaking a replication project for a new build. The question then becomes why, in the case of the Alma College situation would they not choose not support the OMB order facilitated by council in 2010. **It appears the current council’s assumed position has been crafted by the developer’s path-to-profit and not the importance of the project in the collective memory and psyche of the city.**

THE ERA PROPOSAL

The ERA Architects Inc. scheme, commissioned by Patriot Properties, proposes to erect high-density rental apartment buildings as contemporary interpretations of Victorian facades and the Alma College tower element, which is a subjective design exercise. The approach is aligned with generally held views within the spheres of architecture practice and academia. Refer to appendix A and B for context.

ERA has developed an alternate conservation strategy for the site based on best heritage practices to commemorate the cultural heritage value of the building by making its former building footprint visible as a landscape element, named the Alma College Square. This element will be made visible based on material evidence through the use of contrasting paving materials (inspired by the Woonerf, a Dutch landscaping precedent). The building, educational institution, and history of the site will be further commemorated in a series of heritage interpretative panels.

At the north end of the proposed Alma College Square a footprint of the original building's central tower element is proposed and an interpretive seating area and a commemoration of the institution in the form of a sculptural interpretation of the Alma College tower element. ERA made reference to Robert Venturi's Benjamin Franklin house precedent amongst others as example of commemorative architecture. Although such installations can be successful, they can also be ineffectual. Refer to the commemorative arch in Barrie Ontario illustrated in Appendix C.

If council supports and approves the proposal, the question as to whether the developer will actually construct this sculptural interpretation, for economic reasons, must be addressed. **Council should leverage Patriot Properties by instituting a letter of credit (or other device) to ensure its completion.**

Public Realm

The public realm in the ERA scheme (forecourt, heritage gardens, and the Woonerf) as designed portray an impersonal sense of scale and will be mostly in shadow due to the proximity of tall (8–10 storey) buildings. Public access is paramount if the idea of commemorating Alma College in the collective memory is to be sustained over time. **Therefore the proposed privately owned (officially?) public spaces need to be clearly defined as semi-public permanent by way of bureaucratic decree.**

The developers initial idea of restoring the amphitheater has been quashed due to environmental and accessibility concerns. It will be left as interpretive ruin which is appropriate.

Architectural Language

The composition of ERA's latest version of the new apartment building skins reads simply as a factual projection of the interior organization of the buildings function. **There is minimal visual connection to the articulated composition of former Alma College building or the historic heritage architectural aesthetics, scale and proportions of the neighbourhood (the direction given to new development on the newly council approved HCD).**

The proposed skins in the current designs lack 3D articulation and a level of detailing that render them as repetitive, flat, homogenous expressions. The initial ERA scheme included sketches that delineated a more articulated skin with projections that seem to have been stripped off, perhaps because the developer directed the architects to do so for construction efficiency and budgetary reasons.

Council, if they approve the project, should require the developer to revisit the building facade compositions that apply more rigor to the idea of designing contemporary versions of Victorian facades compatible with character of the former Alma College building. Homogenous, bulky, and unarticulated boxes should not be acceptable. **Although the site is not in the HCD district, the principles with this newly approved document should guide this new development, specifically the idea of incorporating sympathetic designs that support the character of the area and Alma College.**

Indigenous Roots

There is no evidence of a complete archaeological assessment on the site most notable the areas where there was previously no built forms. Historically, the area was populated by indigenous people.

The Economic Lense

If council approved the ERA interpretive scheme, there should be a value attached to the OMB order as the developer purchased the property with that covenant in place. By not building it they will have received an economic benefit. In this case, **the citizenry is entitled to that value in another form.** Although Section 37 of the Planning Act is not directly attributable to the scenario, its spirit could be applied to the benefit of the taxpayers.

The capacity of the builder needs to be scrutinized by council. Patriot Properties has only been registered since the spring of 2018 and the only project Michael Loewith has constructed is a building in Woodstock (he in fact stated that at the initial open house). There is a danger of this development on a significant site in the towns psyche morphing into an unanticipated outcome as it is very possible that Patriot properties is a land developer only.

That is, they up the zoned value of the land and flip it to a building developer (constructor) which is a very common practice. The danger lies in the fact that much of what is approved could be lost as the constructor may or will not have the same connections to the heritage values. They would build the cheapest version they can which may not include the interpretive elements designed by ERA.

If the above plays out, it is most likely that ERA will not be retained to finish the scheme as they will be too expensive. So again the danger is that the new consultant will be given directives to finish the project in a manner directed by the constructor.

The Political Domain

As stated at the September 4 2018 Public Meeting, members of the general public pan to launch an appeal if council decides to move forward with a motion to repeal the OMB order.

Appendix A

CONTEXT: FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL POSITION ON NEW AND OLD

As ERA describes in their letter of June 6, 2018, Parks Canada's *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*, states that "reconstruction, or reconstitution of a disappeared historic place, is not considered conservation" (page 15). Similarly, the provincial ministry has published guidelines for heritage conservancy in Ontario as illustrated below.

Eight Guiding Principles in the Conservation of Historic Properties

The following guiding principles are ministry statements in the conservation of historic properties and are based on international charters which have been established over the century. These principles provide the basis for all decisions concerning good practice in architectural conservation around the world. Principles explain the "why" of every conservation activity and apply to all heritage properties and their surroundings.

1. RESPECT FOR DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE:

Do not base restoration on conjecture.

Conservation work should be based on historic documentation such as historic photographs, drawings and physical evidence.

2. RESPECT FOR THE ORIGINAL LOCATION:

Do not move buildings unless there is no other means to save them.

Site is an integral component of a building. Change in site diminishes heritage value considerably.

3. RESPECT FOR HISTORIC MATERIAL:

Repair/conservate — rather than replace building materials and finishes, except where absolutely necessary.

Minimal intervention maintains the historical content of the resource.

4. RESPECT FOR ORIGINAL FABRIC:

Repair with like materials.

Repair to return the resource to its prior condition, without altering its integrity.

5. RESPECT FOR THE BUILDING'S HISTORY:

Do not restore to one period at the expense of another period.

Do not destroy later additions to a house solely to restore to a single time period.

6. REVERSIBILITY: Alterations should be able to be returned to original conditions. This conserves earlier building design and technique.

e.g. When a new door opening is put into a stone wall, the original stones are numbered, removed and stored, allowing for future restoration.

7. LEGIBILITY: New work should be distinguishable from old.

Buildings should be recognized as products of their own time, and new additions should not blur the distinction between old and new.

8. MAINTENANCE: With continuous care, future restoration will not be necessary.

With regular upkeep, major conservation projects and their high costs can be avoided.

For more information, please call the Heritage Properties Unit at (416) 314-7137.



Appendix B

CONTEXT: CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON HERITAGE INFILL STRATEGIES

Below are two precis' of examples of current discourse on new and old and the architectural community:

Contemporary Architecture in Historic Urban Environments (Susan Macdonald, 2011), The Getty Conservation Institute

A critical issue facing decision makers and conservation professionals is accommodating change to heritage places and adding new layers to the historic urban environment in ways that recognize, interpret, and sustain their heritage values. Over the last decade, a vigorous debate has ensued regarding the appropriateness of contemporary architectural insertions into historic urban areas. This debate has polarized sectors of the architectural community, pitting conservationists against planners and developers. It has positioned conservationists as antidevelopment and anti-progress, responsible for stifling the creativity of a new generation of architects and their perceived right to contemporary architectural expression.

Change, however, is inevitable. Buildings, streetscapes, and urban areas evolve and change according to the needs of their inhabitants. Therefore, it is important to determine the role of contemporary architecture in contributing to this change in ways that conserve and celebrate the special character and quality of the historic environment that communities have recognized as important and wish to conserve for future generations. One of the challenges in this debate on the role of contemporary architecture in historic contexts is that design quality can be seen as subjective.

Does History Matter? Perceptions and Attitudes toward Fake Historic Architecture and Historic Preservation (Daniel J. Levi, 2005)

The rising use of fake historic architecture (Disney World) may detract from important historical attributes of a city or diminish the importance of preservation – old should be old and new should be new. Design review boards may require or promote contemporary architecture to insure that new buildings in historic districts complement the surrounding architectural style.

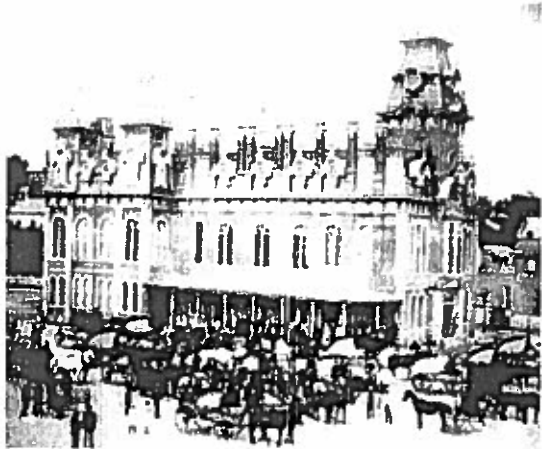
This last comment raises a question as to how the Heritage Committee might conduct itself in the future and whether it should consider the creation of a sub-committee of heritage architectural advisors who could guide the committee on matters pertaining to new development and the towns built heritage.

Appendix C

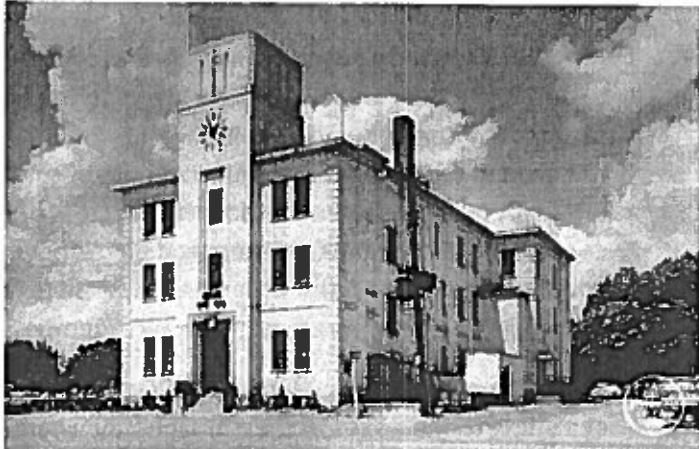
PRECEDENT: THE HAZARDS OF COMMEMORATING CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUES

The Plight of the Former Market Building, Barrie

The original Market Building was constructed in 1847, destroyed by fire in 1875 and rebuilt in 1877. It acted as City Hall from 1948 to 1985.

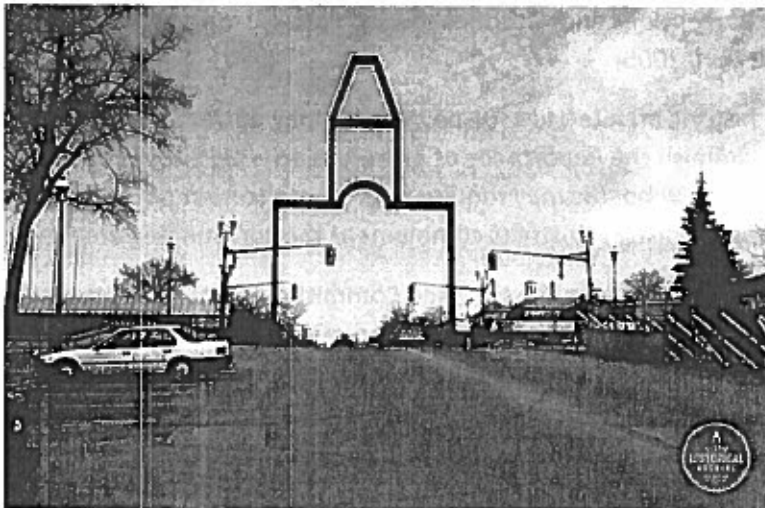


Source: <http://barriefarmersmarket.ca>



Source: <https://www.barriearchive.ca> (City Hall 1959)

It was demolished by the city in 1985 to make way for the new city hall. In its place the city erected a symbolic steel arch whose outline acted as a portrait of the historic building. The arch is often referred to as Archer's Arch named after the mayor of the time Ross Archer.



Source: <https://www.barriearchive.ca>

This architectural event is considered to have been the genesis of the heritage movement in Barrie as the backlash against it galvanized the community in reacting to protect its cultural and built heritage. To this day it is viewed by the citizenry as comical and its commemorative value is slowly being diminished as younger generations do not make the same connections as those who enacted it.



ERA Architects Inc.
#600-625 Church St
Toronto ON, M4Y 2G1

September 6, 2018

Sent by EMAIL

Members of the St Thomas Municipal Heritage Committee
St Thomas City Hall,
St Thomas ON

RE: Alma College Façade Replication

Dear Members of the Municipal Heritage Committee,

Thank you for your commitment to the conservation of St Thomas' heritage and for your advice to Council on Tuesday evening regarding the development of the site of the former Alma College. Clearly, the former Alma College evokes strong feelings and memories from alumnae and citizens alike, and the Gothic Revival building must have been a striking landmark in the urban landscape – its loss is deeply felt.

As you know, ERA Architects has been engaged to provide the property's owner, Patriot Properties, with architectural and heritage consulting services. We formally submit this letter of clarification for your consideration.

ERA has a proven track record of providing creative and contextually sensitive solutions to complex heritage sites. We are committed to conserving Ontario's cultural heritage resources, but our approach to the conservation of Alma College and its associations with its enduring educational community differs from that of some Committee members. It is ERA's opinion that the conservation of the former Alma College can be achieved through a range of approaches that are integrated with the residential development proposal, that reflect contemporary approaches to authenticity, and acknowledge the limits of contemporary masonry craftsmanship and materials.

In consultation with the project team and based on best practices, it is ERA's opinion that replication of the original Alma College facade is not appropriate in the context of the residential re-development of the site.

Reasons:

Appropriateness

- A contemporary replication of the lost, architecturally complex structure of a major but defunct 19th-century private institution is not an appropriate conservation strategy in response to the private residential redevelopment of the site.
- The rebuilt out-buildings of the Martin House in Buffalo presented by the Committee on Tuesday may have been an appropriate response to the completion of the significant existing cultural resources on that site, and no doubt the existing original working drawings of these modest structures aided their careful reconstruction. That said, each opportunity for historical reconstruction must be assessed on a case by case basis.

Continuity of Use

- There is a significant and meaning-altering break in the continuity of use and ownership on the site: the former Alma College has been defunct for 30 years and all of its buildings razed as a result of previous ownership. If Alma College was still operating as an educational institution then replication may be appropriate as a means of maintaining its institutional legacy.
- Mr. Schnurr referred to ERA's work on One Spadina Crescent in Toronto, the former Knox College. Unlike Alma College, the original University building is extant and was a continuously-maintained asset of the University of Toronto, whose vast fundraising capacity supported its well-funded restoration and its continued use as an institutional building.

Institutional scale vs Residential scale

- The incorporation of a Victorian institutional facade onto a medium density residential development in the southern Ontario tertiary city rental market is architecturally problematic: window and floors levels would not align (i.e. storey heights in the original building were higher than conventional residential floor to floor heights, so floor slabs would occur at odd (i.e. not original) locations in relation to windows), code conforming unit fenestration would require unique unit layouts, adding inefficiency and losing marketability.
- As demonstrated at the public meeting there is a desire for (and demonstrated lack of) new, modern housing in St Thomas. Tenants' style of life and identity are tied to the places they choose to live. Marketing a vibrant new community having as its centerpiece a 19th century facsimile reproduction of a private institution may pose a marketing challenge, hampering leasing opportunities, again making the project less viable.

"Accurate and Faithful" replica

- What authority would determine if the facsimile is 'faithfully and accurately' replicated? There could be a significant range in the quality of craftsmanship and authentic materials, the cost of which could make the project untenable.

Definitive archival resources

- Could ERA digitally reconstruct the architectural design of the façade from existing archival material? ERA has the expertise and knowledge to do this but, again, reconstruction was not determined to be the appropriate conservation strategy. We were and remain disappointed, however, that this drawing information which is in the Heritage Committee's possession was never shared with ERA or the project team.

Planning flexibility

- Not replicating the facade *in situ* allows better planning flexibility and a less constrained site plan, allowing freer disposition of buildings, improving the quasi-public park like spaces in-between. Overall this approach will allow a better quality residential living environment.

Urban Landmark status

- The careful siting of the proposed buildings and the design of Alma College Heritage Square conserve cultural heritage values of Alma College through interpretation and conservation of some extant elements, including a representation of the landmark status of the former College spire.

Student Work

- Although we applaud the enthusiasm and effort of Mr. Schnurr's Fanshawe College Planning Technology co-op student work, we find it confusing to present their work as a viable alternate scheme, since any alternate scheme requires a business plan and cost analysis, unit layouts and qualified, professional architectural and heritage supervision.

ERA and the project team remain open to continuing dialogue with Council, Committee members and stakeholder groups.

Sincerely,

David Winterton



David Winterton, Associate
E.R.A. Architects Inc.
Copies:
St Thomas City Council
Michael Loewith