

Dean Hickey  
<M.F.I.P.P.A Sec. 14(1)>  
Kitchener, ON  
<M.F.I.P.P.A Sec. 14(1)>  
Ph. <M.F.I.P.P.A Sec.  
14(1)>

May 15, 2023

Heritage Oshawa  
c/o Legislative Services  
Oshawa City Hall  
50 Centre St. S.  
Oshawa, ON L1H 3Z7

To Whom It May Concern:

**Re: Application for Demolition of 195 Simcoe Street North under Section 34, Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act (File 12-04-0319)**

Please see the attached drawings prepared by me with regard to the potential re-building/partial restoration of the McLaughlin House.


These design concepts reflect my personal preference as to what may be considered a more suitable architectural style than that which is represented on the drawings submitted for consideration by Nantuck Investments Inc.

It is my belief the entire structure, old and new, should blend as one. The mixture of modernist elements with the 19<sup>th</sup> century character of the original building is unsightly, and will diminish any attempts at heritage conservation.

I understand the limitations faced by Heritage Oshawa in matters such as this, and it is simply my hope that what I submit here will be of some assistance in your overall review.

I have also attached a copy of an article I wrote about this property in 2021, as well as selected photographs.

Regards,

  
Dean Hickey

THE ROBERT McLAUGHLIN HOUSE  
195 SIMCOE ST. N. OSHAWA

PROPOSED ELEVATIONS FOR REBUILDING



SIMCOE ST. N. ELEVATION

PREPARED BY: DEAN HICKEY  
APRIL 16, 2023



ELGIN ST. E. ELEVATION

THE PURPOSE OF THESE DRAWINGS IS TO HELP ENCOURAGE AN APPROPRIATE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN, BOTH IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE EXISTING STRUCTURE AND THE APPEARANCE OF ANY NEW ADDITION THAT IS APPROVED.



# The Robert McLaughlin House – Will it Survive?



*An article by freelance writer Dean Hickey.*

February 13, 2021

## The People...

Cathy Clarke is no stranger to the world of historic preservation, having been the chair of Heritage Oshawa, and she knows first-hand what it takes to save an older home, as she and her husband Michael re-built a three level, fire-damaged house due for possible demolition some years ago. Her efforts at raising public awareness of the need to preserve historic homes within the Windfields Farm estate are well known, both in the community and elsewhere, and she has now teamed up with a group of like-minded individuals that includes local councillor Rosemary McConkey, Heritage Oshawa member Jane Clark, Marg Wilkinson of the Historical Society, and others in a collective effort to save another piece of Oshawa's history from what seems like inevitable demolition.

## The Issue...

Visit any major American city and you'll very likely bear witness to what can only be described as the slow death of older neighbourhoods, where rows of dilapidated buildings offer only a fading glimpse of happier times. Hints of one-time elegant brick and stone houses, with their massive windows, arched front porches, and tall roof lines can still be seen, and the wonderment of so much quality workmanship and attention to detail remains, even in the face of decay. All of which amounts to the loss of much of America's heritage. Schools, churches, factories, and all manner of structures that no longer command the respect of the community or have faced the wrecking ball in the name of 'progress' are forever gone. The Canadian experience has thankfully been less severe, and although our loss of heritage buildings is a reality that pales in comparison with our southern neighbours, the willful neglect of much of our pre-1900 architecture is alarming.



The city of Oshawa has lost much of its historic homes through the years, and there are comparatively few 19th century houses still in existence. The 1950s saw the encroachment of commercial uses into residential areas, a proliferation of parking lots, and of course the wild speculation by investors seeking to maximize their return. "*Neighbourhoods in transition*" became a common phrase used to describe the unhealthy mix of large single family homes with neighbouring rooming houses, gas stations, and all manner of professional and retail uses. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, successful attempts were made by concerned citizens who sought to protect and preserve the heritage that defined their communities. Locally, the Regent Theatre was slated for demolition, however the building thankfully received heritage designation and is now a part of the Ontario Tech University. The impressive Georgian-styled building on Centre Street South that is part of the rehabilitation centre for Lakeridge Health is another example of successful adaptive reuse for an historic building, as is the Hotel Genosha, having been repurposed into modern apartments.

Another building that is currently threatened by the wrecking ball is the one-time home of Robert McLaughlin, a visionary community leader and businessman who founded the McLaughlin Carriage Company in the mid-1800s. Of the four Oshawa homes he lived in, it is the only one that remains. The “McLaughlin Motor Car Company Limited” was incorporated with his son, Sam, eventually leading to the founding of General Motors of Canada. Oshawa has benefited from their philanthropy ever since. An attempt to preserve the home was made by the advisory group to council, *Heritage Oshawa* in early 2018. They asked elected officials to consider using a heritage designation to protect the property located at 195 Simcoe Street North. In addition to Robert McLaughlin, who served as mayor, the house was also home to another former mayor, RH James. McLaughlin lived there from 1901 to 1919 with his wife Eleanor. It was converted into office space in the 1960s and has been vacant for some while. Cathy and her fellow activists lament the lack of success in taking care of this important legacy, but hope to change that by saving the one-time yellow brick house that has suffered so much willful damage in recent years.

A local newspaper report indicates the building’s owner raised the possibility of demolition at a Heritage Oshawa committee meeting in April 2017. The newspaper goes on to say the owner was considering applying for a demolition permit that would include the neighbouring house at 201 Simcoe St. N, telling the committee he wished to develop the lands as opposed to maintaining them as heritage sites.

In response, the committee passed a motion stating it was not in favour of pulling down these pieces of Oshawa’s history, and they requested a Heritage Report for the property. The issue was ultimately referred to city hall staff, with a condition they reach out to the owner about his overall plans for the property.



Then, in April 2019, an Oshawa stabbing suspect who barricaded himself inside the historic house was charged with arson after a fire heavily damaged the building. Newspaper reports indicate police had responded to the area around midnight on April 22 after a report of a stabbing had been received. Negotiators tried unsuccessfully to convince the suspect to emerge from the house, and after a couple of hours, the man fled through a window and was quickly apprehended.

The effect of the fire can be seen to this day, with charred brick, boarded up windows, and a portion of the roof gone. A tarp was placed over the gap, however it has since detached and the resultant exposure to the elements, through several seasons, has caused further damage to the historic home.

I asked Oshawa councillor Rosemary McConkey to discuss her concerns as to the status of this property, and she referenced a number of comments that have appeared on social media since the petition was launched. "Cities all around the world celebrate founders and innovators, those true pioneers of their time who made a difference in their community. It is for us to preserve structures that represent our collective heritage. As our city grows and develops, our history becomes even more important. Evidence of that past disappears when we are left with no physical structures to celebrate and connect with. The owner of 195 Simcoe who is requesting demolition has failed to comply with the City's Property Standards Orders. He has left the hole in the roof open and exposed the building to rain and snow. The property owner should not be rewarded for lack of maintenance. This is a dangerous precedent. The City does have authority to do repairs when an owner is not compliant with an Order, and it's important to note that any repairs or protective action performed by the City would be charged to the owner of the building. Unfortunately, when an owner is intent on making the case for a building being unfit, it is not uncommon for this kind of demolition by neglect to occur."

## The Solution...

A petition has been added by Cathy Clarke at Change.org in an effort to garner support for the restoration and potential adaptive reuse of this property. The possibilities include establishing a hospice location for palliative care, and accommodation for families and cancer patients during hospital treatment. In addition, the potential for municipal involvement to create a legacy project to celebrate the City's Centennial year in 2024 is being seen as a way to save this piece of local history. As of the publication of this article, the petition has received over 1150 signatures, and it is hoped by those seeking to protect this property that many more such signatures will be received.

On Monday, February 22, Oshawa Council will vote to either deny or approve the request for a demolition permit for this historic home. Cathy believes in the value of community activism, and sees the petition as an effective means of sending a powerful message to Oshawa councillors, that "demolition by neglect" is simply not acceptable.

*Dean Hickey lives in Kitchener Ontario and specializes in articles of human interest.*

