

## HERITAGE COMMITTEE MEETING.

Delegation re. 116 Gordon St (Boathouse): Rehabilitation of Retaining Wall.

Date: June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023

Chair, Heritage committee, city staff,

I am Past President of the Guelph Hiking Trail Club and a member of the Tourism Advisory Committee. I am talking to you as a concerned citizen.

***116 Gordon Street (Boathouse): Rehabilitation of Retaining Wall*** – Repairs need to be effected on the retaining wall along the Speed River near the Boathouse. The Building Code requires that a guard rail be installed on top of the wall, and since this is a prominent change to a property inside the Brooklyn and College Hill Heritage Conservation District it needs to go through the committee.

The area around the Boathouse has been a magnet for residents and tourists alike, to gather and relax, looking out over the retaining wall at the confluence of the Speed and Eramosa Rivers. Recreational canoers and wildlife habituate this area. It is a bucolic setting with a European vibe in the centre of the city.

The city began planning work to repair the retaining wall several years ago. At the time I learned from the engineers that there was a plan to add a fence to the top of the retaining wall because they insisted there was a need to comply with the building code once new work was completed.

I was alarmed. There was no thought to the aesthetics of the barrier. For budgetary reasons the city would simply put up a utilitarian fence to satisfy code, but the view and setting would be irreparably harmed to the detriment of the enjoyment of its citizens. (It would be nice to share the length and extent of the proposed fence).

I have since learned that it does not have to be so.

Section 4.7.8 of the Brooklyn and College Hill Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines states that views of the river shall remain unobstructed by buildings and structures. For me that proposed fence is most definitely “an obstruction”

Also there is an exception to strict adherence to the Building Code. Part 11 of the code makes specific exemptions to retain heritage features of heritage properties without having to bring them up to current code and it takes precedence.

These retaining walls flanking the Speed River for nearly 100 years have never had fences on top of the walls so it's hard to understand that there is a compelling reason to add a fence now.

Staff suggests a fence like the one at River Walk might be installed. This fence is 53” high. The walkway corridor edge is 28ft from the fence. The professionally designed pathway is buffered by a designed garden, running between the fence and the pathway. Vegetation fills that buffer on both sides of the fence softening and disguising its presence.

The River Walk has a completely different function than the area surrounding the Boathouse.

An isolated skeleton fence sitting atop the retaining wall in the Boathouse location would in my opinion be ugly and inappropriate.

I urge the committee to use their Heritage authority and tools to protect the Boathouse view and unique setting and pursue the Section 11 exemption which would eliminate any kind of fence on the retaining wall. If the walls need further designation as Part IV to permit this then please do it. Don't let a fence be your Heritage legacy. Above all let's not succumb to an engineering and legal opinion that sucks the joy out of eating an ice cream overlooking the confluence of the Speed and Eramosa Rivers.

Thanks

John Fisher