



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of October 22, 2020

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** October 16, 2020

From: Karen Hoese, Director, Sustainable Planning and Community Development

Subject: **Heritage Advisory Panel and South Jubilee Neighbourhood Association Feedback on the Potential Demolition of 1623-1625 Bank Street**

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

In accordance with section 611 and 613 of the *Local Government Act*, Council may designate real property, in whole or in part, as protected heritage property. If a Heritage Designation Bylaw causes, or will cause a reduction in the market value of the designated property, the local government must compensate an owner of the designated property who makes an application no later than one year after the Heritage Designation Bylaw is adopted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the October 8, 2020 Committee of the Whole Meeting, Council directed staff to refer the matter of the potential demolition of the heritage-registered Bank Street school at 1623-1625 Bank Street to the Heritage Advisory Panel (HAPL) for their opinion on the heritage values of the building and to report back to Council by October 22, 2020 for further consideration. This report includes a summary of the HAPL meeting, motions arising and an update on the community consultation that the South Jubilee Neighbourhood Association (SJNA) is currently undertaking.

BACKGROUND

On October 8, 2020, staff presented a report to Committee of the Whole regarding the potential demolition of the Bank Street School (report attached). As a result, Council made the following motions:

1. *That the matter be referred to the Heritage Advisory Panel for their opinion on the Heritage values of the Bank Street School and brought back to Committee of the Whole by October 22, 2020 for further consideration.*
2. *Authorize staff to retain qualified consultants to complete an independent building condition assessment and a market value assessment of the property.*

ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

Heritage Advisory Panel Motions and Feedback

HAPL considered the heritage values of the Bank Street School at its October 13, 2020 meeting (minutes attached) and made the following motions:

- 1. The building has high heritage value, as it is an excellent example of a small masonry school in a nearly original state and a neighbourhood landmark, therefore the Heritage Advisory Panel recommends that Council, working with School District 61 and the community association, develop a plan to conserve the building, given that other schools of similar scale and vintage have been successfully rehabilitated in the past.*
- 2. Recognizing the inadequacy of the information received to date, the Heritage Advisory Panel commends Council for authorizing staff to retain independent consultants to complete a building condition assessment and market value assessment.*
- 3. Given the building's architectural, social and historical significance, the Bank Street School is worthy of designation.*

In the Panel's opinion, the building is an integral part of the social and physical fabric of the neighbourhood. The panel believes it is in reasonable condition and could be creatively rehabilitated. Members believed that demolition would be inconsistent with the School District's stewardship of its other heritage-registered schools and that the accessibility issues, presence of hazardous materials, lack of seismic upgrades and old mechanical systems are common issues that numerous other heritage building owners have overcome. Members believed that the information that the School District provided on the building condition was inadequate and supported authorizing further study. Overall HAPL members felt that the collection of heritage buildings that SD61 maintains are all important and that none of them was expendable.

South Jubilee Neighbourhood Association Preliminary Survey Results

The SJNA prepared an electronic survey to measure neighbourhood opinion on the potential demolition of the Bank Street School. The survey has been widely shared online and is not restricted to neighbourhood residents. The deadline for responses is October 25. As of October 15, 174 surveys were filled out, with 71% of responses coming from neighbourhood residents and 29% from citizens outside the neighbourhood. Below are some of the results:

- 79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Bank Street School is an iconic element of the community and has pride of place in the South Jubilee Neighbourhood
- 78% agreed or strongly agreed that the demolition of the school would be a significant loss to the neighbourhood.
- 72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would support additional costs if rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Bank Street School costs more than new construction.
- 76% of residents preferred some form of adaptive reuse for the school compared with the 24% of respondents who preferred that the Bank Street School be demolished and replaced with a new building
- 89% of residents agreed that the School District should consult area residents before making changes to school property.

Supplemental comments attached to the survey indicate that there are strong opinions on both sides of the issue, with some respondents alleging that survey questions were biased in favour of heritage conservation.

While staff believe the survey indicates that the neighbourhood views the building as an important icon, it is clear from the survey comments that there is not enough information available on redevelopment options for respondents to have an informed opinion. For example, some respondents believe that preserving the Bank Street School will prevent the School District from building a brand new school that would include community facilities and meeting spaces. In reality, the School District is not planning to build a new school, and has only committed to renovating the existing 1960's era Sundance Elementary School and completing a modest expansion using modular buildings. They have not developed any architectural plans and are still waiting for funding. This makes it difficult for area residents to understand benefits and trade-offs of saving or demolishing the school.

OPTIONS

Option 1 – Take No Action (Staff recommendation)

That Council receive this report for information. Staff are currently working to retain consultants to provide City Council with accurate information regarding the implications of involuntary heritage designation.

Option 2 – Pursue Involuntary Designation

That Council:

1. Approve the designation of the property located at 1623-1625 Bank Street, pursuant to Section 611 of the *Local Government Act*, as a Municipal Heritage Site, and that first and second reading of the Heritage Designation Bylaw be considered by Council and a Public Hearing date be set; and
2. That staff, working with School District 61 and the community association, develop a plan to conserve the building.

The involuntary designation of the building would likely result in the City entering an arbitration process with SD61, which operates all public schools in Victoria. Until such time as the City has a clear understanding of the costs involved in designating the building, staff are not recommending further action.

CONCLUSIONS

The Heritage Advisory Panel has confirmed that the Bank Street School has significant heritage value and is eligible for heritage designation. Members believe that the City should work with the School District to find a creative means of adaptively reusing the building. They were in agreement with Council's commitment to commission a building condition assessment and market value assessment to determine the costs of rehabilitation more precisely.

Preliminary results from the South Jubilee Neighbourhood Association survey also indicate that the neighbourhood and broader community value the building; however, local residents need more information to develop an informed opinion about redevelopment options.

Respectfully submitted,


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Karen Hoese, Director
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Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:



Date: October 20, 2020

List of Attachments

- Attachment A: Heritage Advisory Panel Minutes- October 13, 2020
- Attachment B: Preliminary Survey Results- South Jubilee Neighbourhood Association Survey
- Attachment C: Staff Report and Attachments from October 8, 2020 Committee of the Whole on the Potential Heritage Designation of 1623-1625 Bank Street