

Delegation to City Council re Bill 23
November 22, 2022
Susan Ratcliffe

Mr. Mayor, City Councillors - especially those of you who recently joined this horseshoe.

I am here today to tell you that Bill 23 makes me cry with despair at its terrible desecration of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Let me introduce myself and show you why I feel this way. I am a strong advocate for our precious Guelph heritage through my volunteer work as a Historic Walking tour guide for 30 years, as Site Co-ordinator for Doors Open Guelph for six years, member of Heritage Guelph for ten years and member of the Yorklands Green Hub Board. I am President of the Guelph and Wellington Branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. I was Provincial President of ACO for two years and we have about 20 branches across Ontario.

Despite being one of the prime advocates for heritage in Ontario, Act was denied the opportunity to present a submission to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.

I AM NOT A NIMBY, however. I do not want to shrink wrap Guelph's old buildings. I am a CCC - a concerned and caring citizen of this city and of our province.

For many years, Guelph's heritage advocacy was provincially recognized in the work of Gordon Couling in the 1970s. He researched and documented almost 5000 buildings in Guelph in 13,000 photos that became our city's Couling inventory. He is credited as a significant contributor to Ontario's first heritage act in 1975. This bill will deny all the work he did, and Heritage Guelph's years worth of work in 2005 to create the Heritage Register.

The present proposals for changes to the Heritage Act will not only willfully lead to destruction of many of our city's heritage buildings and landscapes, but also will significantly diminish our environmental sustainability.

The preamble to the Act states:

The goal of the proposed changes is to renew and update heritage policies, to reduce red tape and remove barriers that are slowing down housing construction and other priority projects.

But in fact, these proposals will have NO DISCERNIBLE EFFECT ON HOUSING STARTS and will increase uncertainty and unpredictability in land use planning decisions. Heritage buildings and places provide a wealth of opportunities for use and development for housing and other purposes. To suggest that heritage inhibits housing misunderstands how our systems work. Heritage protections DO NOT RESTRICT USE.

An excellent recent example, 65 Delhi Street, a former 1911 isolation hospital, will become a 28-bedroom supportive housing centre.

The proposals will also cause great environmental damage. In Guelph, almost all of our heritage structures are made of limestone quarried from within the city limits. 75% of their windows were made by Stewart Lumber of old-growth wood cut from local forests. There is a negative climate impact to demolishing every type of heritage building and replacing it with a new, building whose raw materials and building components were manufactured overseas and transported thousands of miles to the site.

Further, uncontrolled inclusionary zoning will create mountains of construction debris that will overwhelm our landfills. Small, affordable bungalows will be replaced by expensive monster homes and apartments with huge environmental footprints. The demolition of one building creates more landfill than 3,000,000 pop cans. Conserving and retrofitting those houses would contribute to our city's net-zero goals.

I ask you to support the staff report recommendations that says, Bill 23 "could lead to the loss of significant heritage resources and alter the character of communities. This proposed regulation effectively ensures that the majority of the City of Guelph's significant built heritage resources will have no heritage protection by 2025".

I don't want that to happen - do you?