

**Conservation  
Review Board**

Ministry of Citizenship,  
Culture and Recreation  
4th floor  
400 University Ave  
Toronto ON M7A 2R9  
Tel (416) 314-7137  
Fax (416) 314-7175

**Commission des  
biens culturels**

Ministère des Affaires civiques.  
de la Culture et des Loisirs  
4e étage  
400 avenue University  
Toronto ON M7A 2R9  
Tél (416) 314-7137  
Télééc (416) 314-7175



**RE: THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF OSHAWA – INTENTION TO  
DESIGNATE THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE “FORMER REGENT  
THEATRE”, 44-50 KING STREET EAST, OSHAWA**

Stuart W. Henderson, Vice-Chair  
Jill D. Taylor, Member  
Conservation Review Board

November 2, 2000

This hearing was convened under Section 29(8) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Ch.O.18 (as amended) for the purpose of reporting to the Council of the City of Oshawa whether the property known as the “Former Regent Theatre”, 44-50 King Street East, the City of Oshawa, Ontario, hereinafter referred to as the Former Regent Theatre, should be designated by By-Law, under the Act, an objection having been raised by the owner of the property, 870682 Ontario Ltd.

Notice of this hearing was given under the Act in the “Oshawa this Week” on October 22, 2000 by the Board. The relevant Affidavit by a member of the Board’s staff is Exhibit 1.

The Board, in accordance with its customary practice, had the opportunity to view the site and the surrounding area prior to the hearing.

Present: Rosalie Evans, Solicitor for the City of Oshawa  
Regan J. Hutcheson, Heritage Planner  
Nancy Diamond, Mayor of the City of Oshawa

The Corporation of the City of Oshawa was represented by Rosalie Evans, Solicitor who called two witnesses: Regan J. Hutcheson, Heritage Planner and Nancy Diamond, Mayor of the City of Oshawa. The owner was not represented at the hearing.

**Case for the City of Oshawa:**

The City provided the Board with a copy of the Transfer/Deed of Land certified by Land Registrar Durham (No. 40) (dated 2000/11/01) confirming ownership by 870682 Ontario Limited. The City also provided ten exhibits that contained a comprehensive summary of the relevant documents with respect to the matter, including a copy of the Designation Proposal.

Ms. Rosalie Evans introduced the exhibits and described the location of the Former Regent Theatre on the through block at the corners of King Street East, Victoria Street and Bond Street West. She indicated that the owner had applied for a demolition permit. Ms. Evans advised the Board that, in the recent past, the building had been operated as a nightclub, but that it is currently closed and has no tenant. She indicated that City Council is presently investigating options for the re-use of the Regent Theatre as a result of the request for demolition by the Owner.

**Witness – Regan Hutcheson:**

The Board was satisfied that Mr. Hutcheson could give evidence as an expert and was qualified to give expert testimony with respect to matters in the heritage field.

The witness indicated that he was the current chair of the Oshawa LACAC. In his testimony, Mr. Hutcheson reviewed various aspects of the Reasons for Designation described in the Proposal for Designation. He stated that the theatre was constructed in 1919 and designed by a well-known Canadian theatre designer. Its unique architectural features included an air conditioning system, tremendous acoustic properties and ‘perfect vision’ without the blocking of views by columns. Two commercial enterprises were designed on either side of the on-grade entry to the theatre, including a barbershop (in continuous operation for 70 years), and a candy shop.

Mr. Hutcheson stated that the 1919 building was designed in the Georgian style. The structure is steel with brick exterior, which is currently painted. Archival evidence shows the building’s original signage and marquee with decorative display panels. The “Regent Theatre” signage is still in evidence on the front façade of the building. Although some changes to the exterior front façade have been made, many of the original distinguishing details exist, including the stone quoins and the voussoirs over the windows.

The witness described the distinctive original and extant features of the interior. The renovation for nightclub use had resulted in the theatre seats being removed, however, many aspects of the original plan, fixtures and decorative finishes remain. The original building had a domed ceiling, a large stage and an orchestra pit. The decorative wall plaster is somewhat damaged, however significant ornate plasterwork remains on the ceiling. The ceiling treatment features mythological subjects. Fixtures such as lights and original chandeliers are located throughout. There is a significant body of historic documentation relating to the building in the form of post cards.

The witness indicated that the social significance of the Former Regent Theatre was due to its extensive use in the staging of vaudeville, local community productions, amateur theatre and motion picture screenings. He testified that it was one of the largest and oldest social gathering places in Oshawa, and reviewed evidence indicating that the opening of the theatre was a

momentous occasion for the community. It was the opinion of the witness that the Former Regent Theatre had maintained its importance in the community throughout its almost 80 years of operation.

Mr. Hutcheson indicated that, from a contextual perspective, the Regent Theatre is an integral part of a section of King Street that also features the historic Alger Building. The theatre's arcade is mirrored in the facade of the Alger Building across the street.

He summarized that he had no doubt that the Former Regent Theatre should be designated for historical, architectural and cultural reasons.

Mr. Hutcheson was asked by the Board to identify other historic buildings in Oshawa, which had provided a venue for community assembly or entertainment. He testified that the Marks Theatre, west of the Regent, was an earlier building, but that it had burned down in the 1980s; the Armoury and the Former Town Hall had also provided historic assembly locations. The Board asked Mr. Hutcheson to elaborate on the contextual significance of the building. He responded that the Theatre had been built as part of the emerging City, during a time when a great deal of housing was being constructed; the neighbouring Genosha Hotel and the Alger Building were also components of this part of 1920s King Street East. The witness expressed the opinion that the removal of the Regent Theatre would be detrimental to the historical context of the downtown district.

**Witness: Nancy Diamond, Mayor of Oshawa**

Mayor Diamond reviewed for the Board a chronology of events leading up to the meeting of Council, at which time Heritage Oshawa requested the designation of the Former Regent Theatre. She stated her views on the importance of the Former Regent Theatre to the social history of Oshawa, indicating that the frequent occurrence of local activities, youth orchestra performances and movie screenings created an important focus for downtown Oshawa during the 1960s. In her opinion, Oshawa has struggled to keep activity within the downtown area, and the preservation of the Former Regent Theatre represented a chance for renewal, perhaps as a building for the use of the performing arts. The Board asked the Mayor if there had been dialogue with the owner regarding the reuse of the Former Regent Theatre. The witness indicated that discussions had taken place, but that to date the only alternate use had been as a nightclub/bar. The late hours of operation and noisy closings of the bar had caused distress within the neighbourhood. She indicated that City staff were investigating options to prevent the loss of the building, including a land exchange option.

**FINDINGS:**

The Board finds the Former Regent Theatre, 44-50 King Street East, Oshawa, Ontario to be of sufficient architectural and historical interest and value to merit designation for a number of reasons. These include:

- its location on a through block;
- its key location at the center of a portion of King Street East distinguished by other fine

- 1920s buildings;
- its distinctive front façade with intact heritage features;
- its distinctive interior architectural features; and,
- its importance to the social history of Oshawa.

The architecture, historic systems and decorative character present a largely intact example of the type of moving picture theatre design and streetscape that was vital to the life of cities and towns during the first part of the twentieth century. The Former Regent Theatre is of obvious importance to the history of the people of Oshawa, and it is the type of building that is valued by enthusiasts of urbanism, architecture, history and movie houses across North America.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is the recommendation of the Board that 44-50 King Street East (the Former Regent Theatre), City of Oshawa, Ontario be designated by By-Law under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

It is regretful that the Owner was not represented at the hearing. It is the Board's experience that a party's participation in the hearing process often results in perpetuating the dialogue between the parties, and related interest groups, that can then result in a satisfactory outcome for all.

The Board strongly urges the City to renew its contact with the owner in order to reach a resolution that respects the significance of the property. To lose one of three buildings of historic merit and contextual significance within the streetscape of King Street East would significantly devalue the overall heritage interpretation of the area. The Board strongly recommends that the City explore the implementation of area specific legislation as is found in other Ontario jurisdictions, as well as considering the viability of Heritage Conservation District designation under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

The 1920s was an extremely important time of development in the history of Oshawa. In the foreseeable future, the presence of a few good buildings from the past could spark a new type of business growth in this neighborhood. The property was an architectural and social beacon for the community, and the Board would hope that such a role could be achieved again. The City should continue to pursue alternatives to demolition that include suitable use, preservation and maintenance of this important heritage resource in downtown Oshawa.

(Original Signed By)

---

Stuart W. Henderson, Vice-Chair

---

Jill D. Taylor, Member

**LIST OF EXHIBITS**

1. Affidavit of Notice of Hearing
2. Certified true copy of Transfer/ Deed of Land
3. Corporation Profile Report for 870682 Ontario Ltd.
4. Corporation Profile Report for Olico Inc.
5. Certified copy of Section 5.10 of Oshawa's Official Plan
6. Certified copy of Development Services Report Dated may 4, 2000
7. Designation Proposal prepared by Regan Hutcheson for Heritage Oshawa
8. Certified copy of the City of Oshawa's adoption of the recommendation to designate the Regent Theatre as per the Report of the Development Services Committee
9. Statutory Declaration regarding Notice of Intention to Designate
10. Map of Oshawa (part)
11. Curriculum Vitae of Regan J. Hutcheson