

**Conservation
Review Board**

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**RE: CITY OF ST. THOMAS - INTENTION TO DESIGNATE
50 WELLINGTON STREET (WELLINGTON STREET PUBLIC SCHOOL)**

Gerald Killan, Chair of Hearing
Robert Bowes, Chair of Conservation Review Board

September 13, 1996

This hearing was convened in the Council Chambers of the City of St. Thomas on September 13, 1996, pursuant to Section 29(8) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Ch.O.18, for the purpose of reporting to the Council of the City of St. Thomas whether the property known as Wellington Street Public School, 50 Wellington Street, should be designated by by-law under the Act, an objection having been raised by the owner of the property, the Elgin County Board of Education.

Notice of the hearing was given under the Act in the St. Thomas Times-Journal on August 23, 1996, by the Conservation Review Board, hereafter referred to as the Board. The relevant affidavits by the Board were tabled as Exhibit 1.

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

The City was represented by Jeffrey Booth, Chairman of the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC). The owner was represented by Karl Buczkowski, Vice-Chair of the Elgin County Board of Education. He was accompanied by Demra Walker, Director of Education and Secretary of the Elgin County Board of Education, and by T.R. Veenstra, a senior official with the School Board. No witnesses were called by either party.

The Case for the City of St. Thomas

After referring to information on the designation process and on ownership, already provided to the Board (Exhibit 2), Mr. Booth presented copies of original architectural drawings (Exhibit 3) and historic (Exhibit 5) and contemporary (Exhibit 4) photographs to show how little the building had changed over the years. His evidence indicated that the school was designed by the architect, N.R. Darrach and built by B. Jewell in 1898 (Exhibit 6). It is the best preserved of three similar three storey red brick schools in the

City. It follows a Romanesque style with four large rectangular portions around a central square. Original architectural details remaining include: cut stone sills on windows with lintels above; a molded label surround and dentil moldings above entrances which have corbelled masonry arches; decorative lettering over the front entrance; and interior features such as tin-tiled ceilings and crafted newel posts on the stairwells. The school was built in response to rapid growth in enrolment and had the most advanced building components of the day. (Exhibit 7)

Mr. Booth complimented the Board of Education on how well they had maintained the building and noted that the modern additions are compatible with the building's character, though not part of the Reasons for Designation.

Mr. Booth informed the Board that St. Thomas had been a thriving railway town. The population had quadrupled between the 1870's and 1900. After the turn of the century growth slowed and the City has been left with a wonderful array of Victorian architecture. The property in question is the best example of a school from that period.

Council and LACAC take a planned approach to research and designation. They have designated municipal structures such as City Hall and the Engineers Building and now they want to move to other institutional buildings like churches and schools in the process of representing a cross-section of the heritage of the community. As is their practice, LACAC had consulted with the Board of Education before recommending designation and twice the Board of Education had refused to support it. LACAC had given the matter considerable thought before taking a recommendation for designation to Council, undertaking considerable research and consulting widely both within and outside of the community. Council endorsed the recommendation unanimously.

Mr. Booth tabled information from the Official Plan (Exhibits 8, 9 and 10) indicating that the property is zoned R-4, which allows for multiple uses. The Board of Education has said that it is possible that the property could be transferred to another owner or see a change of use. LACAC is concerned that such changes could be to the detriment of the heritage character of the building.

Mr. Buczkowski of the Board of Education declined to cross-examine, stating that the Board of Education had never questioned the heritage evaluation.

In response to a Conservation Review Board request for more information on the other two similar schools in the City, Mr. Booth replied that the Myrtle Street School, which had the same architect and was of a similar design, had a bad fire on the roof, while much of the woodwork had been removed in the Balaclava Street School.

In summation, in asking the Conservation Review Board to support the designation, Mr. Booth stated that heritage conservation is one of the responsibilities of the City in maintaining a good quality of life in the community. Council did not want to cause

serious problems for the Board of Education. Procedures for consideration of proposed alterations to the School as a designated property could be expedited. He pointed out that the School Board is not autonomous without designation. Zoning considerations and other regulations still apply. The position of LACAC and Council was that examples of heritage structures need to be conserved to educate future generations about the character of the community.

The Case for the Owner

Karl Buczkowski, Vice-Chair of the Elgin County Board of Education, tabled his report to the Board (Exhibit 11). He confirmed that the Board of Education had twice rejected the idea of designation when approached by the LACAC. The School Board did this because it feels designation: provides no advantage to the School Board; could affect the future use of the building if it is no longer used as a school; and would mean that structural changes could not be made without prior approval of Council. He went on to say that although LACAC had written to the School Board that obtaining consent for alterations would be a simple matter, the School Board knows that that is not always the case. The process could result in delays, in cost overruns on projects and in the loss of provincial dollars which are often tied to short time frames. He felt Council and LACAC had not been clear in their communications on the matter of demolition control under designation. Is it prevention or merely delay? Mr. Buczkowski stated that the School Board currently had no changes planned for the building and did not wish to be uncooperative, but wanted to conduct its own business within its own time frames.

Under cross-examination Mr. Buczkowski reiterated that the School Board needed flexibility to deal with changing circumstances. He postulated that at some point in the future a potential purchaser might be put off by the need to preserve interior items such as newel posts and pressed metal ceilings. The School Board was also concerned about the effect of designation on changes to the exterior.

In summation he stated that the School Board's position was one of autonomy. It wanted to provide the best education possible in the best facilities in a timely and cost-effective way. He asked for the support of the Conservation Review Board in opposing designation.

Findings

Based on the evidence presented, the Board finds Wellington Street Public School to be of sufficient architectural interest and value to merit designation.

The Conservation Review Board appreciates the Board of Education's focus on providing the best and most cost-effective educational programs and facilities. Yet it is in the context of the importance of education to the community that the conservation of educational heritage must be considered. In this challenging fiscal climate when social

programs are under increasing scrutiny, a heritage school can be a symbol and a reminder of that importance and of the key role education has played in defining the character of the community.

The Board would also like to point out, for clarification, that under the Ontario Heritage Act, alterations which may affect the reasons for designation must have the approval of Council, while demolition may be delayed but not prevented.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is the recommendation of the Board that Wellington Street Public School, 50 Wellington Street, St. Thomas, be designated by by-law under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

The Board commends the municipality for its policy of consultation with owners prior to designation but urges it to strive for clarity concerning the provisions of the Act, in its communications.

The Conservation Review Board further urges the municipality and the Board of Education to work closely and expeditiously together on any future changes to the structure to ensure that they respect the heritage character of the building as well as meet educational needs.

The Conservation Review Board encourages the Board of Education to see the heritage value of Wellington Street Public School as an asset and, in this spirit, encourages both parties to learn more of how the design of the School at the turn of the century, reflected the changing approaches to education of the day.

(Original Signed by)

Robert Bowes, Chair

Gerald Killan, Member

List of Exhibits

1. Affidavit of Notice of Hearing
2. Information Package from the City of St. Thomas including:
 - Affidavit of Service of Notice of Intention to Designate, from City Clerk, August 12, 1996
 - Council Resolution of Notice of Intention to Designate, February 19, 1996
 - LACAC Report to Council including Reasons for Designation, January 30, 1996
 - Copy of Deed for the Property
 - Letter of Objection from Owner to City, April 17, 1996
3. Original Architectural Drawings of School
4. Contemporary Photographs of School
5. Side View Photographs of School taken in 1920's
6. LACAC Brochure on Churches and Schools
7. Excerpt on Heritage Resources from Official Plan
8. City Land Use Policies
9. Excerpt from Official Plan on Permitted Uses for Fourth Residential Zone - R4
10. Zoning Map
11. Presentation by Owner to Conservation Review Board