

Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO) Port Hope

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News Release

For immediate release

ACO Port Hope in Uphill Battle to Save Historic Hospital That Treated WW1 Soldiers

Port Hope, Ontario (May 31, 2018) –Port Hope is well known for its beautiful heritage buildings that dedicated residents have worked hard to conserve and revitalize to be functional for proper and practical use in the years to come.

Now the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO) Port Hope is advocating to restore the grouping of heritage buildings at 65 Ward St. Those buildings include the first hospital of 1913, the second larger hospital of 1916, a service pavilion dating to 1916 and the hospital addition of 1921.

ACO Port Hope publicly stood up for those buildings and applauds Port Hope Council's unanimous motion on April 11 to initiate heritage designation of the property.

The first hospital, formerly a private dwelling, treated more than 200 WWI soldiers during 1915 alone and the second hospital, constructed for the most part with funds raised by residents of Port Hope, served as a significant recuperative centre for wounded soldiers and veterans during and after the war.

“Both buildings display a high degree of craftsmanship and architectural merit and were later adapted for use as a nursing home,” said Bruce Bowden, chair of ACO Port Hope's advocacy committee. Unfortunately, the current and previous owners have allowed these buildings to sit empty for years.

“Once these buildings are gone they are lost forever. Remember the old post office. Please don't let these buildings have the same fate.”

Local heritage architects, including ACO Port Hope past president Phil Goldsmith, have brought several concept drawings to the current property owners, Southbridge Care Homes Inc., to propose ways to repurpose the property for use as their planned long-term care home with 160 beds, in keeping with the site's heritage designation.

Southbridge Care Homes Inc., which is a for-profit company in Cambridge in the business of long-term care, has not been receptive to ACO Port Hope efforts.

“The company wants to demolish the larger old hospital building and proceed with its plan to build the long-term care facility – despite the fact that our proposed concepts for the site we believe with some internal flexibility from Southbridge could both meet provincial guidelines and preserve the building,” said Mr. Goldsmith who has worked on hundreds of restoration, intensification and adaptive reuse projects.

Port Hope Council plans to vote June 19 on Southbridge property rights to develop the site with “certain conditions” by reversing the site’s heritage designation.

Council can approve the demolition of a heritage building under the Ontario Heritage Act, but to try to deny the building is worthy of designation doesn’t make sense, especially as we understand there has been no site plan approval application to assess the proposal from Southbridge, Mr. Goldsmith said.

“Sadly, Southbridge, even if they could make it work, and they could, as a business and owner they do not have to. They do or should, however, have a moral responsibility to preserve our heritage. It is destructive to the cultural history of Port Hope that they would insist there is no flexibility in their model to create a win-win project for the whole community.”

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ACO Port Hope has donated more than \$500,000 in recent years to help revitalize the historic buildings which house the many businesses in the downtown core. Should the 65 Ward St. site be designated, Southbridge would be entitled to apply to ACO Port Hope for grants and low-interest loans to help defray the costs of preserving and maintaining the heritage features of this remarkable property.

In Port Hope, Southbridge owns Regency Manor, which has 60 long-term care beds, and Hope Street Terrace, which has 97 beds. Southbridge has stated that the new long-term care home will be a consolidation to make the existing facilities more efficient as one new facility.

Southbridge also has threatened to leave Port Hope altogether should designation of the site take place. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), however, have a legal process in place for public hearings and consultation to protect residents before closing long-term care homes or moving beds out of the local area.

“We don’t want Southbridge to leave our town, but we do believe that Southbridge should build the new facility without resorting to demolishing the old hospital building,” said Julie Mavis, ACO Port Hope president. “We want to help and offer our support.”