

Pickering council gives up on controversial waterfront property

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PICKERING -- A former residence on Pickering's western spit will likely be demolished after a feasibility report concluded turning the building into a public facility would be too costly.

At a council meeting on Oct. 17, council received a memo from the Waterfront Coordinating Committee recommending it consider demolishing the former Norman Scudellari residence at 1089 Beachpoint Promenade, which was purchased jointly by Pickering and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority in 1999.

Upon learning that the TRCA had applied for a demolition permit for the property in May 2010, councillors quickly moved to stall any action in the hopes of repurposing the facility for community use. A feasibility report on the proposal was conducted and concluded the cost to rehabilitate the structure would be more than \$600,000. In response, staff recommended council not pursue any rehabilitation of the building. Councillor Jennifer O'Connell disagreed with the conclusions, calling the demolition a waste of taxpayers' money.

"I have serious concerns with this," Coun. O'Connell said. "We could be passing up and tearing down a building that the taxpayers of this city paid for in 1999."

The property was purchased in an attempt to complete acquisition of the western spit in order to preserve the environmentally sensitive heritage lands located there. When the property was purchased, the current resident, Mr. Scudellari, was allowed to remain on the property, which he eventually vacated in July 2010.

"We paid \$200,000 for a resident to live in this facility and now when we finally take ownership we're going to tear it down," Coun. O'Connell continued. "I am adamantly opposed, this is a waste of taxpayer money."

Mayor Dave Ryan cautioned that the building was not the purpose of the joint purchase, which was aimed at preserving the land.

"We did not spend \$200,000 for this building, we spent \$200,000 for a piece of property that happened to have a building on it," Mayor Ryan explained.

"The purpose of this purchase was to complete the acquisition of the western spit, and the resident was allowed to stay there out of compassion. We've had numerous reports from staff that it would not be reasonable to invest \$600,000, that it would in fact be cheaper to knock it down and put something else up."

Councillor Doug Dickerson, who was initially opposed to any demolition when the information came before council in 2010, explained that while he still held reservations, he was willing to concur with the Waterfront Co-ordinating Committee in order to move on to more significant projects such as the possibility of a new harbour entrance.

"Prior to purchase I thought it was abundantly clear that there would be an opportunity for the building to go into public usage," he explained.

"If the TRCA had said at that time they were never going to support it, I wouldn't have supported the City expenditure at that time. But having said that, it's time to move ahead. We want to do the harbour entrance and we can't allow the property here to stand in the way, if we can do harbour entrance improvements then that gives us an opportunity to have maybe some more necessities in the area such as washrooms or meeting rooms."

Council voted to endorse the motion from the Waterfront Co-ordinating Committee, which listed several reasons council should consider demolition, including the cost to bring municipal water to the property, problems with access to the current location, additional harbour costs if docking is required, high renovation costs, lack of interest from outside agencies for use of the facility, and vandalism concerns due to the remote location of the building.