

Group seeks heritage designation for St. Paul's

By Tim Foran
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

A portion of the congregation of St. Paul's United Church is attempting to have the Town of Milton designate the historic 1890 red-brick sanctuary as a heritage building, thereby preventing demolition of the edifice.

The group, Save the Sanctuary, submitted a petition to the Town's Heritage Milton sub-committee last week asking for the heritage designation. The group is concerned about the church's decision, formally approved this week by the United Church's Halton

Presbytery, to sign a letter of intent with a local developer to spend the next three months examining the feasibility of demolishing most of the existing building and rebuilding a smaller church along with an 80-unit seniors condominium at least six storeys high.

Following presentation of the petition, the Heritage Milton committee voted to pass a motion by Ward 4 Councillor Paul Scherer, saying it "supports in principle the designation of all or part of the church" with a dialogue to continue over the summer. The resolution isn't expected to come before Milton's council until the fall, said Town staff.

The wording of the motion allows for two very different outcomes for the property, located at the corner of Main and James streets.

Designating part of the church might involve simply retaining some stained-glass windows or other portions of the sanctuary such as a façade. The church's leadership has already indicated they are looking to do that.

By designating the complete sanctuary including the interior, the church's leadership would be forced back to the drawing table to figure out a different redevelopment. This is exactly what Save the Sanctuary said it wanted in its submission, as it believes the church leaders haven't explored all development possibilities.

Retaining the sanctuary would leave the church with less land to develop, including the lawn fronting on James Street, the existing 1960s-era building attached to the rear of the sanctuary as well as an adjacent Main Street house property the church purchased some years back. However, the church's leadership has said this isn't a viable option for its purposes.

Designating the entire sanctuary then would have to be done without the church's consent, something both Scherer and fellow

Heritage Milton member Councillor Jan Mowbray have said they prefer not to do.

"In the final analysis, (if) we could find some common ground or some sort of compromise that satisfies everybody's needs (that) would be what I'm after," said Scherer in an interview last month.

Under Ontario law, the municipality does have the right to designate a property of heritage value without the owner's consent. By identifying the church as having possible heritage value, the Heritage Milton committee will now have to undertake research and an evaluation of the property to determine if a designation is warranted, according to the Ontario Heritage Act.

The Milton Historical Society has recently started its own petition to designate St. Paul's and prevent its demolition. It has been gathering signatures from the greater Milton community through its website www.milton-historicalsociety.ca.

Ironically, the society came into existence in 1977 to help preserve Milton's Town Hall, which at that time was the abandoned former Halton County Courthouse and Jail.

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