

Comment to the Hamilton City Planning Committee

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

Regarding Relocation of 398 Wilson Street East

Dr. Bob Maton, President, Ancaster Village Heritage Community, Inc.

My submission today is respecting 398 Wilson Street East, Ancaster, referred to in these discussions as the 1840 Marr House, but referred to in other documentation - by the Ancaster Historical Society, for example - as the John Phillip House.

What is known historically as the Marr House, which was similarly built around 1840 by Adam Marr, is not the building that concerns us today, but stood close by it. Adam Marr was a skilled cabinet maker who conducted a furniture and undertaking business from his home. His workshop stood next door to the Phillip House, at 400 Wilson Street East, and it is now gone as is the Marr House itself. Even though it was in pristine condition and was an operating business until its demolition, the Marr House was not designated and was demolished by these developers with no warning or consultation with local residents.

Another building from the same era has been demolished on this property as well, though not by these developers. Close by the 1840 Marr House and workshop, at 406 Wilson, was the Egleston House, also built around 1840 by Alonzo Egleston. This dynamic and enterprising gentleman arrived from New York State in 1832, when tensions with the US were rising high once again. He became a prominent mill, factory, and foundry owner in Ancaster and Mineral Springs, and had a profound influence on the social and economic development of Ancaster. His house is gone too.

The building at 398 Wilson under discussion today, puzzlingly now called the Marr House, was built for James Phillip who arrived from England around 1840. His son John, who lived in the house for years, was a stonemason and village constable. It isn't clear why the name of this building has been changed. But to me it is another indication among many that the historical base of Ancaster, primarily in the Village Core, is being lost.

These buildings were main elements in the streetscape of the Ancaster Village Core on Wilson Street, and now they are gone, except for the Phillip House. And we are sure that the Phillip House itself would be gone too except for its heritage designation. What is left now is this wonderful stone building standing in isolation on a huge, rather unkempt vacant lot on the streetscape.

Further down Wilson Street, Brandon House, a pristine 1862 stone home, was demolished in the spring of 2020 because it had not been designated. That demolition, which shocked many in the town and beyond, has left another shabby vacant lot at the corner of Wilson and Rousseaux Streets, the historic gateway to Ancaster.

AVHC and town residents see the possible removal of the Marr-Phillip House from the streetscape on Wilson Street as one of the final events in the destruction of the Ancaster Village Core. We remind the Committee that the Village Core is designated as a Cultural Heritage

Landscape, and that it received special recognition as being in need of protection by the Ancaster Wilson Street Secondary Plan, the current bylaw which governs development along Wilson Street.

We recognize as well that if the building is moved from its current siting, under the legislation it will be deemed to have been demolished, and will lose its heritage designation and all its protections under the Ontario Heritage Act. It would be left completely at the mercy of the developers, whose record concerning preservation of heritage buildings is poor.

AVHC deeply appreciates acknowledgment by City staff of the importance of preserving Marr House in its current location, and accordingly urges this Committee to accept the recommendation of the staff report against relocating this heritage gem.

Thank you,

Dr. Bob Maton, President, Ancaster Village Heritage Community