

Outstanding Planning Item – Munro House

In early 2019, Michael Bonk, the previous owner of the Munro House at 5 Ormond Street South in Thorold, approached the Heritage Committee, then chaired by Craig Finlay, about removing three details included in the property's heritage designation from the bylaw. The three details are an old gas light fixture, five transom windows above the doors in the second-floor hallway, and a leaded-glass window on the north side of the drawing room. The Heritage Committee voted on the matter in mid 2019, agreeing that the three details should not be part of the designation bylaw. Both the light fixture and the transom windows are interior details which are commonly not included in municipal designations, and the drawing room window is a later addition at odds both with the aesthetics and the general workmanship on the rest of the house.

While later additions and alterations to the exterior structure can be worthy of protection as much as any original feature, this is dependent on whether the modifications are in keeping with the character and architectural integrity of the main structure. Sometimes an alteration can even be considered an enhancement of the original building and should be preserved. However, this is not the case with the north façade window in the drawing room of the Munro House.

While the interior aspect is simply a matter of taste and should therefore have no bearing on the decision, the exterior change to the north façade caused by this window is neither an enhancement, nor in any way preserving the architectural integrity or craftsmanship of the building. The house's original windows are tall, Georgian-style six-over-six sashes. Almost all are intact, including the original frames and the majority of the original glass panes. The original window on the north end of the drawing room was replaced by a horizontal neo-Tudor design with diamond panes some time in the early 20th century. Two other windows on the north façade were changed at that time, and one added, but the drawing room window is the only one that is specifically designated. Looking at the photos, the window in question is the one on the lower left. Not only is this window a clumsy oddity on a classic façade, but the close-ups also show clearly that the workmanship of the alteration is poor, leaving an obvious scar on the brick exterior. This window should not stand in the way of a possible future restoration of this bastardized façade. The Heritage Committee agreed to remove the afore-mentioned interior details as well as this window from the designation bylaw in 2019. A status update has been

requested by the committee during every session of the previous term, but so far, the removal has not happened, due to severe staffing shortages and recent staffing changes in the Planning Department. There is no immediate urgency either. (The present owners have no plans to change the window, or the transoms, and the light fixture is in storage, as it likely has been for well over a hundred years. The house was converted to electricity around the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, whereas the designated fixture never was). However, there is no justification for these details to be part of the designation, and they should be removed eventually. The reason that the matter is brought up in this way now, instead of the way it was over the past few years, is to avoid any possible conflict of interest, since the present Chair of the Heritage Committee and the present Council representative are also the present owners of the Munro House.