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Supports Item No. 7
P&E Committee Agenda
November 3, 2005



CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: October 31, 2005
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Meeting Date: November 3, 2005

TO: Standing Committee on Planning and Environment

FROM: Director of Current Planning

SUBJECT: Demolition of Kogawa House - 1450 West 64th Avenue

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT Council considers the property, known as the Kogawa House, at 1450 West 64th Avenue, to have heritage value meriting conservation.
- B. THAT pursuant to section 589 of the Vancouver Charter, Council orders that the property and the apple and cherry trees at 1450 West 64th Avenue be subject to temporary protection in accordance with the provision of section 591 of the Vancouver Charter for a period of 120 days.
- C. THAT Council agrees that the form of this Order shall be satisfactory to the City's Director of Legal Services and THAT the Order shall be executed on behalf of Council by the Director of Legal Services.
- D. THAT Council commends the property owners for their collaboration in the preservation effort.

GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

General Manager of Community Services Group recommends A, B, C and D.

COUNCIL POLICY

Heritage Policies and Guidelines

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek a Council order to protect the Kogawa House property at 1450 West 64th Avenue for 120 days. This action has the support of both the property owners, as reported by their architect Wilson Cheng, and the Save Kogawa House Committee.

BACKGROUND

The house at 1450 West 64th Avenue was the home of Joy Kogawa and her family until 1942 when they were relocated to the interior of British Columbia at Slocan, as part of the Second World War internment of Japanese Canadians. Over 20,000 Canadians of Japanese descent, 75 per cent of whom were Canadian-born or naturalized citizens, had their citizenship rights revoked and their properties, businesses, assets and personal belongings seized and sold without their consent. Canadians of Japanese descent were not allowed to return to the West Coast until April 1, 1949 and a federally supported dispersal policy encouraged resettlement in Alberta and Ontario. When Joy Kogawa returned to Vancouver in September 2003 and visited the house, she discovered it was for sale. This raised the issue of the potential demolition of the house and prompted the Kogawa Homestead Committee (now known as the Save Kogawa House Committee) to be formed with the goal of preserving the historic place ideally through purchase. In November 2003, while the Committee was preparing to raise funds, the house was purchased by Su Ying Shen and Wei-Lan Chi. They invested in fixing the house in order to rent it.

As previously noted in staff's December 2, 2003 and September 14, 2005 memos to Council, staff explored the following two retention options. First, heritage incentives under existing heritage policy were explored including varying the zoning to allow infill development or duplex use. The analysis and past experiences concluded that these variances do not add sufficient economic value to offset the cost of heritage retention in the RS-1 zone where the market is almost exclusively single-family dwellings. Furthermore, infill and duplex options would impact the heritage character of the site. Notwithstanding these preliminary conclusions, staff advised the owners they could access zoning variances if the site were added to the Heritage Register.

The second option explored was to relocate the house to the City-owned land at 8743 SW Marine Drive or some other City- owned site. Staff advised this option has very limited heritage merit. The heritage value of the site does not lie in the architecture of the house, but rather in the symbolic value of the site and neighbourhood from which the Kogawa family was uprooted. Preserving the house on another site would be akin to relocating the Anne Frank house to another site in Amsterdam. The authenticity and the social/cultural context of the historic place would be dramatically lost. Furthermore, relocating the house is reminiscent of the initial, tragic relocation of the Kogawa Family. Relocating the house would require the Save Kogawa House Committee to raise \$100,000 to move the house and another minimum of \$100,000 to pay for new foundations and upgrading.

Heritage staff also worked with the Vancouver Heritage Foundation, the Heritage Commission, Real Estate Services and the Office of Cultural Affairs, to determine what action, if any, the City should take regarding this site. Apart from the heritage incentives discussed, there is neither a policy direction nor funding source for the City to become financially involved with the effort to protect and conserve the property.

On September 14, 2005, Council passed a resolution that the City of Vancouver plant a cutting of Joy Kogawa's cherry tree on the City hall campus in the fall of 2005 as a way to commemorate the experience of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War.

Recently, the owners have had difficulty renting the house and have decided to construct a new house in its place for their own use. On November 2, 2005, their architect is scheduled to submit a development building permit application proposing a replacement house along with a demolition application. The zoning for the site is RS-1, an outright zone. If the application meets all the regulations, staff are required to issue the permit at the earliest appointment date which is likely to be November 23, 2005. If no Council action is taken, the owners can then proceed to demolish the house and begin new construction.

DISCUSSION

Heritage Value

This site has heritage value as it symbolizes and is historic evidence of an episode in Canadian history, the Japanese-Canadian internment. Joy Kogawa lived with her family at 1450 West 64th Avenue until she was 6 years old. In 1942, under the War Measures Act, Joy, her parents and brother were removed from their bungalow and deported to Slocan City, an abandoned ghost town in Slocan Valley. *Obasan*, Joy Kogawa's novel published in 1981, recalls this episode in Canadian history through the eyes of a child. Her childhood home and the cherry tree in the back yard figure prominently in the novel and therefore are not only evidences of the Japanese Canadian experience but have become symbols of racial discrimination that occurred in Canada as a consequence of the Second World War

The site also has heritage value for its association with Joy Kogawa. Her work and particularly the novel *Obasan* are recognized as significant works internationally. In 2001, Joy Kogawa's four volumes of poetry and three novels have been recognized with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Asian American Studies, a group representing the author's peers in Asian Studies departments at universities across the United States. In 1986, Kogawa was made a member of the Order of Canada. In 1981 the novel *Obasan* won the Books in Canada First Novel Award and the Canadian Authors' Association Book of the Year Award.

If Council supports the period of temporary protection, staff will have a Statement of Significance prepared and arrange for the site to be added to the Vancouver Heritage Register and the Canadian Register of Historic Places. This will assist the Save Kogawa House Committee's campaign to raise the profile of the site.

Temporary Protection

Section 589 of the Vancouver Charter permits Council to order temporary protection of property for up to 120 days if it considers the property has or may have sufficient heritage value to justify conservation. The owners, as reported by their architect, are in support of staff's recommendation for a Council order of temporary protection. Their support is on the premise that there will be closure for them at the end of the 120 days. When purchasing the house, the owners' realtor did not inform them of the significant heritage interest in the site. The public attention together with some negative media attention have made their lives very stressful. The owners are prepared to sell the property to the Kogawa House Committee at market value as determined by a licensed appraiser. They are also prepared to preserve the

cherry tree at the rear of the site if the Committee fails to purchase the site and they redevelop.

The Save Kogawa House Committee does not currently have the funds to purchase the property. They began fundraising when the property was for sale in 2003, but this effort subsided when the owners advised they were not going to demolish the house, but rather rent it out. Now that the house is at risk the Committee has restarted its fundraising efforts. It has been successful in raising public awareness nationally and there is strong political support from the writers' community in Canada. The challenge facing the Committee is to translate this political support into financial support. For fundraising purposes the Committee has made arrangements for the Vancouver Heritage Foundation to receive and hold Kogawa house donations in trust. The Committee's long term goal is to preserve the house for use as a writers-in-residence retreat similar to the Pierre Burton House in Dawson City, Yukon. For the Committee to achieve its medium and long term goals, staff and the Foundation are urging the Committee to establish itself as an incorporated charitable organization.

Both the owners and the House Committee have endorsed staff's recommendations for the 120 days of protection, the maximum period permitted under the Vancouver Charter. While staff has the agreement of both parties, 120 days constitutes a mutually agreed compromise. The owners would prefer closure even sooner, while the Committee prefers six months to a year, the time typically associated with such fund raising campaigns.

If Council approves the order for 120 days of temporary protection, the Save Kogawa House Committee will pursue raising the funds to purchase the property. If the Committee secures ownership, it will seek heritage designation of the house and rent the house out until it raises operating funds to support a writers-in-residence program or another use compatible to the heritage values of the site.

Additional Option to be Explored

In the event that the Save Kogawa House Committee raises substantive funds, but insufficient to purchase and hold the property, it could pursue long term ownership in two steps. The Committee could combine the funds raised with a short term loan to purchase the site and then resale it with designation and a right-of-first-refusal on title in its favour. The target market would be heritage home buyers looking to access the single-family house market at a discounted price. This would provide time for the Committee to raise additional funds for purchasing and holding the property, when it comes back on the market.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations put forward in this report have no financial implications to the City.

CONCLUSION

The Kogawa House, at 1450 West 64th Avenue, is of national historic significance and merits conservation. As an interim measure staff recommend that Council order temporary protection for 120 days to provide time for the Save Kogawa House Committee to raise funds to purchase and protect the site. As advised by Wilson Cheng, their architect, the owners support the 120 day order, on the premise that there will be closure at the end of the temporary protection period.

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