

Council backs off on heritage district review

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Public opposition has shelved the idea of creating a Heritage Conservation District for Schomberg. More than a dozen residents spoke at the recent council meeting, the bulk of which opposed the idea. And they didn't even want to proceed with a study, something staff pegged at costing \$300,000 over three years. Instead, councillors and staff said they will offer residents more information regarding heritage conservation. As well, there are a number of heritage conservation education workshops in November, which are being held by the Heritage Advisory Committee in partnership with the Township's heritage planning staff. After the delegations, Councillor Mary Asselstine, who brought the idea to council, noted changes to the Ontario Heritage Act, brought about by Bill 23, requires that all listed properties, which have some recognition under the Act, be designated by January 2025 or the properties would lose their protection completely for five years. The Township OP recognizes the value of heritage and the Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) is charged with making recommendations to Council on the matter of heritage. Because of Bill 23 HAC began looking for ways to identify and care for heritage in King with the deadline in mind. Most of the discussion has been focused on designating properties. The problem, she said, is there are 166 listed properties in King Township and each would take several months to review and if appropriate recommend for designation ? an impossible task. During the review by HAC, it was identified that the older part of Schomberg, including Main and Church Street, had 27 listed properties under the Heritage Act, and 66 inventoried properties that are recognized by the Township of King as having some possible intrinsic heritage value. This represents a full 18% of the heritage properties in the Township in this little area. ?This is when there was the first discussion on the opportunity for a HCD for Schomberg. With support from the HAC a small working group began to compile the existing background information on the possible heritage properties in Schomberg. ?In June of this year I was privileged to attend the Ontario Heritage Conference, and I went with a load of questions: I had questions about the nuances of Bill 23; about what other communities are doing; about how designation impacts property owners; and about what kinds of motivations and supports there may be for property owners. What municipalities, homeowners and developers were doing was exciting and inspiring. ?She discussed with staff the best way to care for the character and identity of Schomberg. Together they looked at Village Design Guidelines, Block Planning, Community Planning Permit System and Heritage Conservation Districts. ?Each has its strengths and weaknesses but staff came to the conclusion that a Heritage Conservation District process would be the most effective approach, ? she said. Asselstine noted that given the staff report, consideration of an HCD for Schomberg is ?appropriate, ??but ?there are not sufficient resources to support the process at this time. ?What I am hearing from residents is that there has not been a sufficient chance to discuss the best approach to care for the character and identity of Schomberg. ?She pointed to the loss of little villages across the province and still believes ?if we care about Schomberg we should at least discuss what we want the future to look like. ?The most enlightened, pro-HCD argument ?came from Kettleby resident Rick Sikorski. Coincidentally, a similar proposal for that quaint, historic hamlet failed several years ago. He said an HCD is the only tool left in the municipality's arsenal to protect heritage, one that deserves to be fully considered. The study into an HCD would have provided a lot of pertinent information that the Township could have utilized. The ?incredibly valuable information? would have seen wide-spread benefits, he noted. Charles Cooper, another supporter of an HCD, noted a customized plan would build on what Schomberg already has. Most of the opposition came from residents in the core, many of whom believed their property values would be negatively impacted. They worried about hurdles the HCD would create, such as renegotiating mortgages and high insurance rates. Few saw the benefit of an HCD and argued that heritage designation should be done on an individual basis. Louise Augé noted she respects all of the Main Street stewards of Schomberg. She collected a petition of those against the move, with more than 220 signatures, of many of the stewards who currently live on Main Street. This includes people who have been here a long time and whose families have been here for generations, people who currently own and or rent, and or run businesses. She stressed homeowners deserve respect and don't need a bylaw forcing them to adhere to HCD ?guidelines. Jadelayne DeSouza, 17, also brought forward a petition signed by roughly 36 of her peers. ?This may briefly affect your generation but this by law will have a huge impact on my generation. The council should not be thinking only of how this will affect the present, but how it will affect the future residents of my generation. This bylaw will prevent adding and expanding housing in the future which will cause that my generation will have nowhere to live. We will be the ones to upkeep the town in the future and creating a heritage district will only lead Schomberg to fall apart as the building age and their infrastructure

starts to fail and no one will want to go through the hassle that the heritage bylaw causes. Former councillor Jakob Schneider asked whether there's any merit to a widespread historical designation. Councillor Debbie Schaefer noted that many don't really understand what a heritage designation means, and their opposition was based on misleading information. Mayor Steve Pellegrini was in favour of the move, noting everyone agrees that Schomberg is a special place. He lauded Councillor Asselstine's efforts to get the most correct information for the betterment of the village. He pointed out the Official Plan review took five years and all high-level planning documents are designed to improve all of King Township. Councillors Jordan Cescolini and David Boyd weren't convinced the HCD study was the right vehicle. In the staff report, it was noted that a Heritage Conservation District for the Village of Schomberg would allow for the review of existing and potential cultural heritage interest or value of properties, generally clustered around the Main Street and Church Street corridors. There are currently 27 non-Designated (Listed) properties and approximately 66 properties identified as Built Heritage Inventory, for a total of approximately 93 total heritage properties. A large collection of the buildings and structures were built in the 19th century in the Main Street corridor and surrounding area and, represent a variety of different architectural styles featuring Gothic Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne style buildings and structures in the area. These properties remain standing today and are used for a variety of land uses to support and serve the local community. The creation of a Heritage Conservation District under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act would enable the Township to manage and guide future change in the District through the adoption of a plan with policies and guidelines for conservation, protection and enhancement of the area's unique characteristics and heritage assets demonstrated through the group of properties sharing common or similar themes, collection of buildings, streets, vistas, views, and open spaces that are determined to be of special significance to the community. The primary purpose of an HCD Plan is to encourage heritage conservation in a specific area through controls on demolition and alteration of buildings. Criteria for regulating design for new buildings, structures, and landscapes to ensure that change and growth are compatible with the area's special character. The development of the regulation criteria is done with extensive public and resident collaboration and consultation, which is essential in understanding the values and principles informing the guidelines to manage change within the HCD. Staff did point out that designation does not freeze or prohibit change or development to occur. It is not 'if' change can happen, it is 'how' or 'how best.' The report explained that when a property is designated individually or as part of a Heritage Conservation District Plan, it will be required to go through the Heritage Permit process with the Township. The Heritage Permit process allows a municipality to guide the change that happens in a HCD by reviewing the proposal against the policies and guidelines established by the community for the future of the area.