

September 25, 2009

Lunenburg Town Council
c/o Bea Renton, Town Manager/Clerk
119 Cumberland Street, P.O. Box 129
Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, Canada B0J 2C0

Council:

Re: Request to Demolish 164 Cumberland Street

The Heritage Society received materials in relation to this matter in mid-August 2009 and met on September 14, 2009 to determine a recommendation. Guests at the outset of our meeting were Ms. Brenda Bachman (one of the new owners of 164 Cumberland Street) and her neighbour Ms. Kiloran German. Ms. German owns a home on a lot extending from Lincoln Street to Cumberland Street adjacent to the two lots now owned by Ms. Bachman.

Ms. Bachman and Ms. German provided reasons (in addition to those in the application) including that 164 Cumberland is an “ugly” building that blocks the view from and of 321 Lincoln; that water runs off the roof and causes difficulties for Ms. German; that 321 Lincoln’s sunlit hours are blocked by 164 Cumberland; and, that demolition of the building would make the streetscape more presentable.

We asked Ms. Bachman if she had received advice prior to the purchase of this property on the Heritage By-Law and the procedures/requirements thereunder. She advised that she had.

Ms. German extended congratulations to the Town of Lunenburg on its UNESCO achievement and said that other jurisdictions have studied Lunenburg for its success in acquiring and maintaining that achievement.

In closing her presentation to the Society, Ms. Bachman asked “what is historic about the building; just because it was built before 1940 does not mean it has historic significance”. We told Ms. Bachman that we would attempt to answer this question in our final recommendation to Council. Ms. Bachman and Ms. German left the meeting prior discussion and vote on the matter.

In addition to providing Ms. Bachman with an opportunity to be heard by the Heritage Society, we reviewed the application materials provided to us by Ms. Madelyn LeMay Planning/Development/Heritage Co-ordinator for the Town.

Recommendation:

After consideration, the Lunenburg Heritage Society does not support the request to demolish 164 Cumberland Street in accordance with the criteria identified in Old Town Lunenburg Heritage Conservation Plan August 2009 under 4.8 that says:

The physical condition, historical significance, architectural integrity, and uniqueness of the building, the extent to which it establishes or supports the

architectural character of the surrounding streetscape or area, and its visual prominence and value as a local or regional landmark;

Heritage Conservation Plan Criteria Analysis:

(a) Physical condition and architectural integrity

The external physical condition of this early commercial building occupying its own Town lot is remarkably good from a rehabilitation perspective given that it has been neglected in the last few years in terms of aesthetics. For example, the original storefront cornice remains visible immediately above the windows on the gable end. With the exception of the shed dormers on the roof and back shed that was mostly likely added some time after the original structure was built, the building remains otherwise intact. The architectural detail that this building retains is significant. The traditional double door commercial entrance, Ashlar siding, balanced and symmetrical windows and doors, hardware, gable ends are all in fair to good condition. There is evidence that the eave returns had integral gutters. We are prepared to recommend removal of a lean-to shed at the back of the building and the shed dormers as it would provide the Bachman's with further garden space and sunlight opportunities and the re-installation of gutters would resolve the rain issue with the neighbouring property.

It is likely that this is one of the last, if not *the last* intact commercial store building surviving from 1870s or that period. We recognize that a smaller commercial enterprise, the Knock shoe repair store, remains intact and in proximity to 164 Cumberland Street. The fact that so few commercial store buildings remain from this period is likely attributable to certain factors such as the "old" Academy fire and that with growing prosperity in the Town, there was a commercial shift onto Lincoln street at the turn of the century favouring larger commercial outlets. In Mahone Bay, for example, a Town that did not reach the level of prosperity of Lunenburg, there are a handful of similar older commercial buildings in current use as gift shops, homes, studios and offices.

The building represents an early era of commercial development in Lunenburg and contributes to the vernacular architecture of Lunenburg and is representative of the re-use of buildings common in the Lunenburg Old Town Heritage Conservation District in the second half of the 19th century.

While there may be a general understanding that it is the individual building rather than the whole that raises an historic significance, in Lunenburg it is quite the opposite. Lunenburg does not thrive on its individual historic importance but on its collective historic importance as recognized by UNESCO and, as such, is truly unique in Canada if not North America. It is the entirety that was recognized by UNESCO, and we note that 164 Cumberland is very much an important aspect of the entire or collective historic importance of the designation. The former Smith Grocery Store should not be overlooked because it represents a more "ordinary" era as opposed to the larger ornate buildings that signal prosperity as this does not provide accurate context. 164 Cumberland demonstrates the transition to prosperity and is representative of the working community in late 19th century Lunenburg. Ordinary Town residents shopped in this building, worshipped in this building, attended ceremonies and meetings in this building and

the history of Lunenburg would be distorted and incomplete if this building was removed from the historic landscape and only Lunenburg's later 19th century and early 20th century jewels remained.

The coveted UNESCO designation recognizes the Town because, among other things, the Town actually shows "*successive stages in human history*" and because it exists today as an "*outstanding example of a traditional human settlement which ... has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change*" (emphasis added). Irreversible change would occur if a permit to demolish were granted. As noted in the information provided by Ms. LeMay, the Statement of Significance from the World Heritage Designation is that 164 Cumberland Street is a part of the "*densely built nature of the townsite*" and is one of the "*comprehensive collection of 18th to 20th century buildings and works, including churches, institutional buildings, shops and wharves*". The demolition of 164 Cumberland Street would detract from the significance of the designation.

The Lunenburg Heritage Society considers this little gem on Cumberland Street as perhaps being the last representation of its era and stage in the human history/architectural evolution of Lunenburg.

Removal of this building may establish a precedent. When an "ordinary" building within Old Town Lunenburg is demolished, it becomes more difficult for Council to refuse permission to demolish in the future. This building is not merely "ordinary" but is a fine example of its genre if not the only example left in the Town and is integral in telling Lunenburg's story. On this note, we have heard the opinion expressed that buildings, such as the old Post Office, have previously been demolished and that the precedent is already established. As we understand it, the By-law we operate under post-dates any demolition that has been inconsistent with furthering the Town's Heritage Strategy overall and is, in part, responsible for the UNESCO designation that homeowners, residents, businesses and tourists alike enjoy the benefits of today. Those benefits do not need to be listed but include stable housing prices, viable commerce, a Town that attracts numerous visitors year round, and a place that people choose to call home. These benefits are envied by other towns in Nova Scotia and we can all point to towns we know that do not have these benefits and have ceased to thrive.

(b) Historical and social significance

From Bill Plaskett's Inventory, we understand that this building significantly pre-dates 1940. We understand its origin to be c. 1876 and in keeping with the commercial style of that day. As such, it has considerable heritage value as an expression of the Town's commercial, religious and institutional history and its vernacular architecture; all important factors in the "continuity of way of life" so valued as part of the town's World Heritage designation.

Mr. Charles Smith, previous owner of the Bachman residential property, is listed as grocer in the 1908 and 1914 McAlpine Business Directories. His grocery business operated out of 164 Cumberland. Of historical significance, Mr. Smith died in 1921 and was described in his obituary as follows:

...sailed as captain out of this port for many years. After returning from the sea he built up and successfully conducted the grocery business now owned and managed by his son Jessen.

Charles' son, Jessen Smith, died in 1964 at the age of 91. Jessen's brother, Moyle, worked for W. A. Zwicker Co. died in 1971. Jessen attended the old Academy which burned a short distance from the store in 1893. Jessen became Secretary Treasurer of the Fishermen's Mutual Relief Association and the Fishermen's Mutual Insurance Association until 1958 and was a Town Councillor for 19 years. He was also a Director of the Bluenose Schooner Company owners of the Bluenose. He had the ship's clock and truck (a.k.a. topmast ball) from the vessel. The clock is now on display at the Fisheries Museum. The same information that provided the current owner's personal residence with historical significance arises with respect to the building located at 164 Cumberland.

Charles Jessen Smith's going concern grocery business is reflected in the attached "grocery specials".

The memory of this store has not yet faded for some of our older residents. Ralph Getson, Curator at the Fisheries Museum, has advised the Lunenburg Heritage Society that he spoke with an individual who grew up near Jessen Smith's store who recalled going to Smith's store to buy a loaf of bread (a rare occasion as most was homemade) and paying 7 cents for a loaf. This individual recalls the "uproar" caused when the price of a loaf rose to 10 cents. Ralph Getson has also advised that he spoke to a woman who remembers going to the building when it was the Salvation Army where "the Band of Hope", a children's programme for all denominations, was held in the evenings.

Conclusion

We note that the adoption of the Heritage Conservation District Plan and By-law by Council many years ago was a signal that some values have been given priority over others in Old Town Lunenburg; the value over individual convenience or desire arguably yields to maintaining the District as a whole. With regard to the exterior appearance of buildings in Old Town Lunenburg, the By-law appears to favour public good rather than private rights. This is reflected in a commitment towards redemption and re-use of many buildings in the Town that could and probably were, at an earlier date, described as "ugly" or "junk" or as an "eyesore". Many of these buildings now proudly stand as part of the heritage landscape. We believe that both individual and collective rights can be balanced to achieve the goals of all parties and welcome further dialogue with the new owners on the merits involved in choosing exterior preservation over demolition.

In concluding, we believe that the UNESCO designation and unique heritage flavour that continues to thrive in Lunenburg is attributable to Council's recognition of the value of maintaining and preserving our past by giving life to the By-law many years ago. We attribute the By-law as playing a large role in enabling Lunenburg to achieve and maintain its UNESCO status and uniqueness that is the envy of other towns and cities with a strong heritage culture in North America. Our review of 164 Cumberland Street, based on the criteria set out in the By-

law as discussed above, leads us to recommend against the grant of a demolition permit.

All of which is submitted on behalf of the Lunenburg Heritage Society.

Alison Strachan
President

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