

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE JUNE 4, 2001

J. E. H. MAC DONALD / THOREAU MAC DONALD HOUSE

Recommendation

The Director of Recreation and Culture, in consultation with the Manager of Urban Design, recommends:

That this report be received for information only.

Purpose

Following the deputation of Dr. John Sabean, staff were directed to bring forward a report respecting the restoration and preservation of the J.E.H. MacDonald/Thoreau MacDonald House in Thornhill.

Background - Analysis and Options

As a result of the deputation by Dr. John Sabean re the restoration and preservation of the J.E.H. MacDonald/Thoreau MacDonald House in Thornhill, a working committee consisting of the local Ward 5 Councillor, staff, Dr. Sabean and Susan MacDonald, niece of Thoreau MacDonald, was established. The committee was supported in principle by Heritage Vaughan and the Society for the Preservation of Old Thornhill. The role of the committee was to discuss the current condition of both the site and the house and to explore potential uses. In addition, impact on the community, budget considerations, sources of funding and potential revenue generation were also considered.

In considering the work plan, it was determined that the most effective way to achieve the revitalization of the property and house was to phase in the restoration ensuring that community consultation was included throughout the process.

The committee agreed that the first phase of the restoration should be the property rather than the house. Restoring the property is far less complex than the house. The necessary design work can be done "in house" by the Urban Design Department and the project would be funded through the Heritage Reserve Fund. Further, through the Friends of the Environment, grants are available for site restoration and revitalization.

Restoration of the house will require the expertise of a Heritage Consultant plus a significant expenditure in order to bring the house up to code if it is to be used for public gatherings. It is anticipated that restoration of the house will be included in the 2002 Capital Budget.

On May 10, 2001, a community meeting was held at the Garnet A. Williams Community Centre. The purpose of the meeting was to receive input from the community regarding their vision of potential uses for the house and the extent of restoration of the property. The meeting was well attended with participants providing not only historical information but viable and reasonable suggestions re potential uses, site maintenance and restoration.

The community wants to see moderate use of the house ensuring that its historical significance is maintained and respected. The majority of the participants want to see limited programmes related to the arts such as drawing/painting classes, school visits, artist in residence programme, etc.

The focus of the discussion re the actual site varied from leaving the site totally natural to cleaning up the site and doing some riparian planting. There was some discussion re how the site was originally maintained by both J. E. H. Macdonald and then his son, Thoreau. With the

assistance of original photos and input from Susan MacDonald, who often visited the home of Thoreau, it was agreed that the property was tidy and well maintained with a minimum of overgrowth. As a result of the discussion. Parks Operations staff will be evaluating the property to determine the viability of the plant life and the extent of the fragile, delicate clean-up that must be accomplished by hand in order to ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained.

Following the evaluation of the site by Parks Operations, Urban Design Department will prepare a plan for riparian planting and site upgrades. This phase has been approved in the Capital Budget with the source of funding being the Heritage Reserve Fund. In addition, it is anticipated that a \$10,000.00 grant will be received from the Friends of the Environment.

Conclusion

Using input from the community meeting of May 10, 2001, Parks Operations staff will assess the Thoreau MacDonald property to determine the extent of the required maintenance and, in co-operation with the Urban Design Department, will develop a riparian planting plan. These plans will be shared with the community before they are finalized. Further, staff will review the potential uses for the Thoreau MacDonald House in order to determine the impact on the 2001 Capital Budget.

Attachments

N/A

Report prepared by:

Joyce Epstein, Ext. 8528

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Epstein,
Director of Recreation and Culture.