

3 Old George Place, Refusal of Alterations to a Designated Heritage Property

Date:	September 3, 2008
To:	Toronto Preservation Board Toronto and East York Community Council
From:	Director, Policy and Research, City Planning Division
Wards:	Ward 27 - Toronto Centre-Rosedale
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report recommends refusal of an application to alter a property in the North Rosedale Heritage Conservation District (NRHCD) at 3 Old George Place. The property was designated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act, enacted by City Council on Sept. 30, 2004, and is identified as a “Category A” building. Category A buildings have the highest level of significance in the HCD, have been determined to be of national or provincial heritage significance, and contribute to the heritage character of the NRHCD.

No. 3 Old George Place was designed by prominent Canadian architect John B. Parkin and is an excellent example of the 1960s modernist movement in Canada. The property makes a significant contribution to the unique streetscape character of this part of the NRHCD ravine lands.

The applicant proposes to build additions on the front of the property that will block views to the existing front of the house and connect to the garage at the front of the property. The garage will also have a partial second storey addition.

This application does not meet the intent of the Official Plan in protecting heritage resources. The proposed alterations would damage the heritage character of the property and significantly alter the streetscape of Old George Place.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. City Council refuse the application to alter 3 Old George Place made August 18, 2008 by the applicant, Moriyama and Teshima Architects
2. City Council authorize the City Solicitor and City Staff to attend the Ontario Municipal Board hearing, should Council refuse this application and the refusal be appealed to the Board.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

City Council designated the property at 3 Old George Place at its meeting of September 30, 2004, as part of the NRHCD under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2004/agendas/council/cc040720/ts6rpt/cl034.pdf>).

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Heritage Preservation Services (HPS) issued a heritage permit, February 21, 2007, to Altius Architecture Ltd., for an application to alter the property. The plans were to add a second storey to the existing house which would be set back from the front edge of the house and clad in glass, leaving the front façade of the house still visible from the street. There were no plans to add to the garage, a prominent feature at the front of the property. The applicant proposed to re-clad the buildings to make them energy efficient.

In February 2008, HPS staff met with the applicant, Moriyama and Teshima Architects, to review proposed revised plans and met again with the applicant's heritage consultant, ERA Architects, in April 2008. HPS proposals for changing the revised plans were not accepted by the applicant.

HPS received an application for a heritage permit from Moriyama and Teshima Architects to alter the property in May 2008. The application was completed on June 5, 2008 and withdrawn immediately prior to the Toronto Preservation Board meeting on June 19, 2008. A revised application was submitted on August 18, 2008.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to add a large, two storey addition joining the front of the house to the garage. The addition is divided into three spaces; a one storey "formal dining room" to the east of the existing main entrance; a two storey block joining the front façade of the house to the garage and extending over the back half of the garage; and a two storey block on the west of the front façade which extends beyond it to create a new entrance area (Attachment No. 5). More space will be added over the back of the house

with an expanded second storey. The cladding on the house will be removed and replaced with a different cladding material. The cladding on the garage will remain as is. The revised application is essentially the same as the earlier one, except that the second storey garage addition has been pulled back from the front of the garage and now covers about a half of the garage roof (Attachment No. 9).

The alteration application includes a Heritage Impact Report (HIR) prepared by ERA Architects, revised August 15, 2008. ERA Architects also prepared the original NRHCD Plan.

Policy Framework

Official Plan

Section 3.1.5 of the City of Toronto Official Plan directs that significant heritage resources will be conserved by listing properties of architectural and/or historic interest on the City's Inventory of Heritage Properties; designating properties; entering into conservation agreements with owners of heritage properties; and designating areas with a concentration of heritage resources as heritage conservation districts. The Plan directs the adoption of guidelines to maintain and improve the character of such districts.

Ontario Heritage Act

Under Section 42 of the Ontario Heritage Act, an owner must obtain a permit from the municipality to alter a designated property in a HCD. If Council fails to give a decision to the owner within 90 days from the receipt of a complete application for alteration, the permit is deemed to be granted. If Council refuses the application the owner may appeal the decision to the Ontario Municipal Board.

North Rosedale Heritage Conservation District Plan (NRHCD Plan)

The NRHCD Plan was adopted by City Council to be used as a guide to manage property alteration and development with a view to the preservation of the existing architectural character of the district and its streetscape. The Architectural and Streetscape Character Statements of the NRHCD Plan define the qualities of buildings and neighbourhoods in order to provide guidance to new development that will complement the existing character.

The NRHCD Plan focuses primarily on reviewing alterations that are visible from a public vantage point. All exterior alteration and development visible from the street within the district will require prior approval of Heritage Preservation Services, and in some cases City Council (NRHCD Plan, Section 7).

Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (HP Guidelines)

On March 3, 4 and 5, 2008, City Council adopted Parks Canada's "Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada" (HP Guidelines) as the official document guiding planning, stewardship and conservation approach for all listed and designated heritage resources within the City (Decision Document Item PG 13.5 <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cc/decisions/2008-03-03-cc17-dd.pdf>).

Community Consultation

A formal community consultation meeting has not been held. However, the North Rosedale Ratepayers Association Heritage Committee was consulted separately by HPS staff and ERA Architects, on behalf of the applicant at the time of the first application. The Committee serves as the heritage advisory committee for the district. The Committee provided comments on the first application and indicated that while some aspects of the alterations could be acceptable, in its entirety, the proposal was not supportive of the streetscape or architectural character of the property (Attachment No 10).

COMMENTS

Description of Heritage Value

Architectural Character

No. 3 Old George Place was designed by prominent Canadian architect John B. Parkin and is an excellent example of the 1960s modernist movement in Canada. The Architectural Character Statement in the NRHCD Plan (Section 5.1) indicates some very fine modern and post-modern homes were constructed in this period which was dominated by renovation and rebuilding. The following well-known architects built in North Rosedale: Barton Myers, Ron Thom, John Parkin and Eberhard Zeidler. A photo of 3 Old George Place is used as the illustration provided for the “Dominion Modern” style in the NRHCD Plan (Section 8). The description reads: “Dominion Modern refers to a strand of orthodox Canadian International style modernism which allows only understated and subtle expressions of individuality. Rather than wilful flamboyant display, good architecture presents a discrete anonymous public face”.

The house at 3 Old George Place, was designed as a house for a bachelor, and was completed in 1965. It was built for J. Douglas Crashley an accomplished Toronto entrepreneur and philanthropist, president of the Art Gallery of Ontario (1972-74) and a member of the Order of Canada (1978). The house is characterized by the use of modern materials and building techniques as well as clear, orthogonal massing.

The property presents a private, discrete face to the street. The garage is the most visible feature on the property and is set in front of the house with its rear wall facing the street. The driveway loops around the garage to provide a private drop off at the front entrance. The garage is connected to the main entrance of the house by a straight open sided canopy.

The main house is “T” shaped with the stem of the “T” projecting over the ravine in a dramatic fashion, affording beautiful views from the interior. (Attachment No. 3) Originally the house appeared to be one storey at the front, with the lower floor at the ravine level below.

The prominent garage is one storey and is clad in its original materials; coursed light grey brick surmounted by a horizontal pebbled pre-cast concrete band. This cladding carries around the house setting a strong contrast to the sloping ravine site and reflecting the horizontality of the original structure design. Some of the cladding has been removed or damaged by recent renovations.

Beyond the garage is the private realm of the main house, almost invisible from the street. This discrete, private appearance is characteristic of the “Dominion Modern” style. Only a very small portion of the main house wall is visible to the west of the garage. The front door is not visible and remains hidden behind the garage. An earlier photograph shows that the garage itself was once partially hidden by large pine trees. This “evidently worked with the Architects original design intent of having the house recede into the forest” (HIR Section 1.3).

Streetscape Character

Old George Place was one of the last developed areas in North Rosedale. The George Estate was subdivided into five properties, four of which are located on Old George Place which is a cul-de-sac (Attachment No. 2). The street was developed in the 1960s and has a unique modernist heritage character and value in the NRHCD (Attachment No. 4). Firstly the houses were all completed in a modern or post-modern architectural style (as defined in the NRHCD Plan). Secondly the houses are all designed with their primary façade facing the ravine. Conversely, the street façade reinforces the private character of this street, displaying garages, landscaping walls and largely blank walls to the local pedestrian (HIR Section 3.1).

The NRHCD Plan Streetscape Character Statements (Section 5.2) for the ravine lands includes statements of important heritage character that apply directly to this streetscape and property. For example:

“This zone’s relationship to the ravines is definitive of the genius locus (spirit of the place). The steep slopes and dense vegetation can be described as the chief characteristic of the local terrain. Although not evident from the street, entry to North Rosedale is through or across the ravines, so their presence is palpable....

As mentioned, many of these lots have striking aspects on the ravines, and are designed to maximize the ravine topography (modern houses... are good examples of this). This topography presented an opportunity for architectural drama that the modernist architects of the 1960’s and after pursued with aplomb.”

Directly adjacent, on the east side of the property is 4 Old George Place, “the Fraser House” designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act in 1991. Built in 1968, the house was designed by architect Ron Thom. It is also situated over the ravine and has a similar siting, set into a hillside away from the street to emphasize the natural setting. These two adjacent modernist houses reinforce each other’s design with their private, understated character and architecture that recedes into the natural landscape.

Heritage Comments

Proposed alterations to structures

The original house at 3 Old George Place was approximately 6,523 square feet (all figures in this paragraph are approximate) and the approved “Altius” addition added another 1,980 square feet or 30% more space over the original (Attachment No. 6). The applicant now proposes to add an additional 2,225 square feet. The additional space in the Altius permit plus the new application would increase the original space by 4,205 square feet, a 64% increase over the original. This additional square footage would not require a variance under the current zoning. HPS is willing to approve approximately 1,534 additional square feet over the Altius permit for a total of 3,514 square feet, 54% over the original square footage.

The Altius plans approved in 2007 allowed a second storey to be added to the house (Attachment No.11). The addition was to be set back from the original wall plane and clad in glass to differentiate from, but complement, the original forms and materials. This second floor addition is partially built, and is set back far enough from the street to not obscure views into the property (Attachment No. 5).

The revised application proposes to add a large addition to the front of the house, in three rectangular spaces (Attachment No.6). The “formal dining room” is a smaller one storey addition to the east set back from the garage and should not be visible from the street. A second two storey block would join the front façade to the garage and extend partway over the garage so that it would no longer appear to be a separate element. This addition would enclose the original entrance inside the house. A third two storey block to the west would contain the new entrance area set in front of the house and back slightly from the garage (Attachment No. 9). This addition completely covers the visible portion of the existing front façade, extends west of the original plane of the house and radically alters the entrance which is currently private and hidden. The new entrance will be visible and much closer to the street (Attachment No. 5). More space would also be added over the back of the house with an expanded second storey. This additional space would not be visible from the street.

HPS is willing to approve adding a full second storey to the main house (including extending the living space over back stem of the “T” shaped plan), the dining room addition and a smaller two storey addition between the house and the garage, however, the owner requests more GFA to be built on the front west side of the house where it will have the most impact on the heritage character of the property and on the streetscape.

Impacts to Built Heritage Character

The proposal to put a large storey addition on the northwest side of the front of the building and building over half of the garage would have unacceptable impacts on the heritage character of the property by:

- completely obscuring the remaining visible front façade of the house
- adding dramatically to the massing of the front of the house
- altering the spatial character of the front of the property by pushing the taller portions forward
- adding to the massing of the garage, and
- replacing the hidden entrance with a new visible front entrance very close to the street

These additions are not in keeping with the architecture, do not enhance its heritage character and are specifically not recommended in the NRHCD Plan. The Plan states that no alteration or addition should visually overwhelm the building in question. Alterations should preferably be at the rear of the building (Section 7.2).

The Parks Canada “Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada” (HP Guidelines) approved by City Council in March 2008 for application to all designated and listed properties in Toronto, indicate it is not recommended to put on additions that obscure character defining features, or diminish the historic character of the heritage resource. Rooftop additions should be set back from the front wall plane and be as inconspicuous as possible.

The as-built cladding used by Parkin, is grey brick surmounted by a pebble coated pre-cast fascia band. The horizontal coursing of the brick and horizontal fascia band complement the horizontal planes of the architecture. The cladding is an important heritage attribute of the property.

The applicant proposes to keep the existing cladding on the single story of the garage where it is now. However the applicant is requesting to demolish the as-built cladding on the main house and replace it with vertical rectangular stone or concrete panels and stone or concrete fascia banding, to recall the cladding on the original John Parkin design plans. The HP Guidelines specifically recommend against changing cladding if it is an important heritage attribute. They recommend repairing, reusing or replacing masonry that contributes to the character of the resource. In this instance if the cladding must be removed to insert insulation, it could be reused or replaced with like materials. The HP Guidelines specifically recommend against constructing a masonry feature that was part of the original design of a building but was never actually built.

Impacts to Heritage Streetscape

The proposed entrance and partial second floor garage addition would radically alter the existing significant Old George Place streetscape with its unique modernist heritage character and value in the NRHCD. The discrete character of the street would be impacted by the addition of a new front entrance facing the street. The spatial organization of the streetscape would also be altered by the insertion of a much larger, taller volume closer to the street which would add glazed areas overlooking the street instead of the current condition with discrete volumes that are low, horizontal, partially hidden and receding into nature.

Moriyama and Teshima Architects note in their application that the austere façade needs to interact more congenially with the street, in support of the creation of the new entrance area. However, this is precisely what the character of the street was not meant to be. The character was meant to be private and discrete and the existing entrance demonstrates that distinctive heritage character. The HP Guidelines specifically recommend against altering important spatial organization and views into a property and recommend against removing or radically changing the entrances of heritage buildings.

Conclusion

The scale and nature of the proposed alterations are not appropriate and will damage the heritage character of the property and streetscape character of Old George Place. Heritage Preservation Services staff recommends that City Council refuse the application.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment No. 1 – Location Map
Attachment No. 2 – Aerial Photograph
Attachment No. 3 – Photographs of South Elevation
Attachment No. 4 – Photographs of Neighbouring Properties
Attachment No. 5 – Photographs, Existing and Proposed
Attachment No. 6 – Existing and Proposed Site Plan
Attachment No. 7 – South and North Elevations
Attachment No. 8 – West and East Elevations
Attachment No. 9 – Main and Second Floor Plans
Attachment No. 10 – North Rosedale Ratepayers Association Heritage Committee
Comment on first application
Attachment No. 11 – Altius Building Permit