Not exactly as delivered

Notes for Preservation Board short talk on Scarborough

Scarborough – that big area to the east in Toronto, everything east of Victoria Park Avenue - in fact has largest land area of any of the communities of the city. Lake Ontario on the south, Steeles Avenue on the north and Durham Region to the east. A current estimate for the population of the City of Toronto is about 2,650,000 and for Scarborough, 645,000. Scarborough is named after the English town on the coast of the North Sea, named by Mrs. Simcoe because the bluffs as seen from the lake reminded her of the Yorkshire town with its bluffs overlooking the sea.

Scarborough remained essentially a rural farming township until the 1940's. Three communities grew among the farms, West Hill/Highland Creek in the east, Scarborough Village at what is now Markham and Kingston Roads and Agincourt in the north along Sheppard Avenue east of Kennedy Road.

With the construction of the radial electric rail line in the early 1920's –what we would now call an LRT – along Kingston Road from the end of the Kingston Road street car line at Victoria Park Avenue to West Hill -- housing development began in the southwest area of the township out to the Cliffcrest neighbourhood. Alas that line was ripped up in 1936 although people still refer to "stops" where the railcars had their stops along Kingston Road. Housing development was such that by 1950, it was impossible to tell East York from Scarborough as you went east along the Danforth or Kingston Road.

It was largely residential because of the development history as a suburban dormitory community There was some industry in the southwest In 1950's, in an effort to get more assessed property to pay for growth, the township encouraged industrial development along the "Golden Mile", Eglinton from Victoria Park to Warden Avenue, but in the last twenty years the industries have largely left and been replaced by commercial retail and some office development.

The township council used zoning controls to segregate residential and commercial/industrial areas. Industry has been zoned into certain tracts – some south of Eglinton on Pharmacy off the Golden Mile, north of Finch to Steeles between Kennedy and Midland, a big area east of Middlefield north of Finch. Between Hwy 401 and Ellesmere Road there is also a strip of land from Kennedy to Markham Road.

Most of the Scarborough is therefore residential. Scarborough became known for its tracts of small bungalows and very affordable house prices. Indeed in the 1960's, the Council adopted a by-law to set a minimum square footage for new housing in order to try to increase the assessed value of residential properties. There is very little land left fdor subdivision large development now There are, however, some upmarket areas along the Scarborough bluffs with streets like Hill Crescent, Pine Ridge and Meadowcliffe Crescent.

Northeast Scarborough is still rural and will continue to be so because it is part of the watershed of the Rouge River and therefore part of the Rouge Park. Scattered through the park area are a number of nineteenth century farmhouses, some with very interesting craftsmanship. But because the ownership rests with the crown, the local preservation committee worries about their future.

The former City of Scarborough established its Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee in 1975, the very first to do so after the provincial legislature had adopted the Ontario Heritage Act. The Scarborough Historical Society had had a preservation committee for several years and the township council was very conscious of the history of the township as a farming community and made special efforts to protect the nineteenth century farm houses across the area. Probably Scarborough has protected more of its nineteenth century farmhouses than the other old suburban communities of Toronto. They also protected the nineteenth century churches, three First World War era schools and a fire station which now serves as a museum and has a jail cell in its basement. Just as a curiosity note, driving along Lawrence Avenue East between Warden and Birchmount you will see one of those efforts: notice that the road has a southward bend around the former Zion Methodist Church in order to preserve the entrance. Scarborough was also the first municipality to designate a heritage landscape because of the black walnuts and Carolinean character of the property.

72 properties in the area have been designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, but only 4 of those since the amalgamation in 1997. And those four were at risk. Because of this fact, there is some frustration in the Preservation Panel because they have identified, researched and recommended several other properties for designation. But as we know, the heritage preservation process has become a development-driven one where HPS is under constant pressure to react to applications for alterations and demolitions and undesignated or unlisted properties under threat of redevelopment.

There are also another 120 properties, if memory serves me, listed on the heritage register.

The one task where preserving properties not at immediate risk is the identification and establishment of heritage conservation districts.

There a couple of possible districts in Scarborough. Old Agincourt village is one, but the local community is divided because many houses sit on large lots which are valuable for redevelopment. As one woman put it when there was a public discussion, “Our home is going to provide a nest egg for us when we retire. I do not want it lost.” Another area is the Midland Park subdivision, a housing estate developed in the ‘50’s by the Curran Hall group where the houses were designed in mid-century modern style with planned streetscapes. They are not big houses, but there was a consistency of style and care in locating the various house models tocreate attractive streetscapes. The same planning people who had done Don Mills also designed the Midland Park estate. While I am not sure that Guildwood Village is a candidate for an HCD, it was the second largest planned development in Canada at the time after Don Mills.

What will we be doing in the coming year? First, working with the Midland Park community to assist them in the plans for an HCD. Second, we will be watching the developments around the Guild Inn, that long-running tale of failed plans for restoration of the Bickford House and establishment of a viable business on the site. Third, we are wondering about whether one or more the brutalist concrete schools, one designed by Raymond Morayama, as part of an innovative schools design project by the former Metropolitan School Board may considered for listing.

I hope that this will have given you some introduction to Scarborough.

Questions?