

DECISION/DIRECTION NOTE

Title: 50 Bonaventure Avenue, Heritage Designation

Date Prepared: October 6, 2020

Report To: Committee of the Whole

Councillor and Role: Councillor Maggie Burton, Planning & Development

Ward: Ward 2

Decision/Direction Required:

To seek approval to designate 50 Bonaventure Avenue as a Heritage Building.

Discussion – Background and Current Status:

The City received an application from Georgetown Inn Inc. to designate the building at 50 Bonaventure Avenue as a Heritage Building. The subject property is located within Heritage Area 2, is designated Residential Downtown under the St. John's Municipal Plan and is zoned Residential Medium Density (R2). Should Council designate the building as a Heritage Building, discretionary uses in the R2 Zone include Heritage Use.

Heritage Designation Review

50 Bonaventure Avenue was built in approximately 1905 when this area was the northern fringe of St. John's, with farmland on the other side of Bonaventure Avenue. It was built for the family of Charles O'Neill Conroy, K.C., O.B.E, a solicitor, and director and general counsel for the Reid Newfoundland Company Limited, which operated the Newfoundland Railway and the coastal boat service. Charles was born in Dublin, Ireland, on January 24, 1871, to Judge James G. and Elizabeth (O'Neill) Conroy. The family moved to Newfoundland when Charles was about 18 months old. He later studied in Manchester and London, returning to Newfoundland to be called to the bar in 1900. He married Mary Agnes Weathers in 1899. He was a member of the Bally Haly Golf Club and the Knights of Columbus. Their house was called "Raheen", an Irish word meaning "A People's Place".

Some of Charles and Mary's 8 children were prominent citizens.

- James O'Neill Conroy (born March 29, 1900) was a barrister and a solicitor to the City of St. John's. He opened a law office in Corner Brook, the only one in Newfoundland outside of St. John's at the time. James married Elizabeth Anne McGrath; after he died young in 1931, Elizabeth became Newfoundland's second female lawyer and took over her late husband's law practice.
- Louis O'Neill Conroy, M.D. (born September 24, 1902) was a physician and surgeon. Many St. John's directories note him as living at 50 Bonaventure Avenue. His doctor's office was in the Reid Building on Duckworth Street.
- Charles Henry Conroy (born October 23, 1905) was an electrical engineer who studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and worked with the Newfoundland

ST. JOHN'S

Department of Public Works from 1934 to 1970, retiring as Chief Engineer. He was the president of the Benevolent Irish Society from 1956 to 1972.

Charles O'Neill Conroy, the father, died in 1946. He willed 50 Bonaventure to the Presentation Sisters, however they did not acquire the property until 1976.

In 1950, D.R. Thistle was listed at the house. David Rudolph Thistle, M.B.E, was a printer and publisher. He became the King's Printer and founded the *Newfoundland Gazette* in 1924. He helped raise funds for the Rotary Sunshine Camp and a Community Centre for Unemployed. Throughout the 1950s the property is listed in ads for Ruggles Photographic House and J.G. Walker. In 1969 Margaret Dunn (of Margaret Dunn Cosmetics, Churchill Square) was listed at the property, which corresponds to the applicant's claim that the band April Wine got its start at 50 Bonaventure, practicing in the basement in 1969 before moving to Halifax.

When the Presentation Sisters moved into the house in the '70s, it was used as their residence as well as a place of worship, a meeting space for community leaders, and a refuge for families needing help and children needing respite. The Sisters sold the property to Georgestown Inn Inc. in 2019, who opened the building as a bed and breakfast.

While the house is in its original location, there have been additions. The clapboard was replaced with vinyl siding; in a photo from 1984, one can see that details like the corbels under the mansard roof have been removed. However, the character of the structure remains. It is a good surviving example of a large Second Empire style of architecture with distinctive mansard roof, peaked dormers and decorative trim, scoring 82 on our Heritage Designation Criteria. Background information from the applicant is attached for your review.

Via e-poll, the Built Heritage Experts Panel unanimously recommend 50 Bonaventure Avenue as a Heritage Building. Staff agree with this recommendation.

Heritage Use (café)

Should Council decide to designate the building, the owner will apply for a Heritage Use under the R2 Zone, to offer a "UK proper High Tea", serving scones, cucumber sandwiches, cakes, tarts, cookies, and tea. While an application has not been made yet, the owners would use the kitchen and back parlour as the dining room and can potentially host 24 people in 6 tables of 4. They would like to offer one scheduled sitting at 3 pm on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from October 1 to June 1 – a total of 33 weekends. Sittings will be by prior reservation only. The café would be opened off-season from the Inn, to complement the down time of the Inn. The owner intends to include an area in the café which describes the history of the building.

Under the St. John's Development Regulations, this would be a Café/Eating Establishment, which is not permitted in the R2 Zone. If the building is designated, Council could consider the café as a Discretionary Heritage Use. No exterior changes would be required.

In previous applications like this, our process was to wait until the Heritage Designation By-law was gazetted before the applicant could apply for a Discretionary Heritage Use. Following meetings among Planning, Development and Legal staff, we recommend that if Council agrees

to direct Legal to prepare a Heritage Designation By-law, then the Discretionary Heritage Use could be advertised. Staff would then bring the Heritage Designation By-law and the Discretionary Use back to the same Council meeting for decision. This would save between 4 and 6 weeks in the application process.

Key Considerations/Implications:

1. Budget/Financial Implications: Not applicable.
2. Partners or Other Stakeholders: Property owner; nearby property owners and residents; heritage organizations.
3. Alignment with Strategic Directions/Adopted Plans:
St. John's Strategic Plan 2019-2029 - A Sustainable City – Plan for land use and preserve and enhance the natural and built environment where we live.
4. Legal or Policy Implications: Should the designation proceed, the Legal Department will write a Heritage Designation By-law for 50 Bonaventure Avenue for Council's consideration.
5. Privacy Implications: Not applicable.
6. Engagement and Communications Considerations: Prior to designating the building, Council must issue a Notice of Motion at a regular Council meeting. Further, consideration of a Heritage Use will require public notice.
7. Human Resource Implications: Not applicable.
8. Procurement Implications: Not applicable.
9. Information Technology Implications: Not applicable.
10. Other Implications: Not applicable.

Recommendation:

That Council approve the proposed heritage designation of 50 Bonaventure Avenue and direct the Legal Department to undertake a Designation By-law for Council's consideration.

Further, subject to an application being made and approval of heritage designation, that Council advertise the Discretionary Use of a Heritage Use (Eating Establishment/café) at 50 Bonaventure Avenue.

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Approved by: Ken O'Brien, MCIP, Chief Municipal Planner

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	50 Bonaventure Avenue, Heritage Designation (COTW).docx
Attachments:	- 50 Bonaventure Avenue - Attachments(COTW).pdf
Final Approval Date:	Oct 7, 2020

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Ken O'Brien - Oct 7, 2020 - 10:08 AM

Jason Sinyard - Oct 7, 2020 - 10:33 AM