

WARD 15: KITCHISSIPPI

Heritage Ottawa posed the following five questions to each candidate running for Ottawa City Council. The following answers were received from winning candidate **Jeff Leiper** in Ward 15.

QUESTION 1

Demolition by neglect, in which designated heritage buildings are left to deteriorate, is an increasing problem in Ottawa. Should the City take a more active role in preventing the demolition by neglect of heritage buildings? Would you support the City's expropriation of Ottawa's most egregious example, Somerset House on Bank Street? Why or why not?

Jeff Leiper:

It is important for the City to take a more active (and proactive) role. Because action was not taken soon enough, we have just lost an important heritage building in my ward, the McGee House. There are too many examples of heritage by neglect in Ottawa, including Somerset House as well as Our Lady School in the Byward Market. The City needs to allocate more resources to inspections of heritage buildings that are at risk. Early action needs to be taken in cases of demolition by neglect, before it is too late. In these cases, I support three specific actions by the City. First, the City must step in and make necessary repairs in the event that the owner will not or cannot. The repairs should then be charged back as a lien on the property, which is within the City's power. Second, in cases like Somerset House and Our Lady School, where the owner is clearly uncooperative, the City must explore expropriation. In some cases this may be the only way to save important heritage buildings, and send an effective message that demolition by neglect will not be tolerated. Third, we must remove the motive for demolition by neglect. The City should make sure that the zoning on properties that are being subjected to demolition by neglect will not allow any increase in height or density if there were to be a replacement building, including by maintaining heritage overlays.

QUESTION 2

Since 2001, the Ontario Municipal Act has allowed the implementation of a Heritage Property Tax Relief Program to encourage the rehabilitation of Ontario's privately owned heritage resources, which has been used successfully by many municipalities in the province. Would you support implementing such a program in Ottawa that would provide important tax incentives for owners to invest in the repair/rehabilitation of their heritage properties? Why or why not?

Jeff Leiper:

Yes, I would support heritage property tax relief. This would help encourage maintenance of heritage properties. The heritage grant program should also be expanded and adequately

funded. These provide incentives for better stewardship of heritage properties, and make it less common for the city to have to step in and enforce maintenance. and Vancouver, have tax incentive programs in place that have been effective in encouraging building owners to make improvements to heritage assets.

QUESTION 3

In designated Heritage Conservation Districts, do you believe that local community opinion should influence City Staff recommendations to approve or reject heritage applications within the district? Why or why not?

Jeff Leiper:

Staff recommendations need to address the views of residents, when they raise valid heritage points. Heritage is defined in part through its importance to the community, and so the community's views must be taken seriously. Residents of the district, community associations, and Heritage Ottawa provide meaningful input. The heritage expertise of staff, however, must be respected in the process.

QUESTION 4

The City's Heritage Register is a list of buildings determined to contribute to the cultural heritage value of the city. (Please note: a listing on the Register is not a formal heritage designation; the only restriction is that property owners must provide a 60-day notice of intention to demolish.) Do you believe that properties should be exempt from inclusion on the Register at the owners' discretion? If not, how would you attempt to alleviate a property owner's concerns?

Jeff Leiper:

Owners should not have veto power. The Heritage Register is simply a list that flags properties which may be of heritage value. It does not serve anyone's interest to have possible heritage value concealed until a sale or redevelopment threaten the building. In practical terms, being on the Register just delays demolition to allow careful consideration, which is reasonable. The City should ensure that an adequate information campaign is carried out in areas where properties are being placed on the Register so owners are completely informed about the implications. However, it is important that all properties deemed worthy of being placed on the list after a professional assessment by heritage staff be placed on the list, and not removed because of pressure by a few owners.

QUESTION 5

What is your view on the proposed addition to the heritage-designated Château Laurier hotel? Do you agree with Council's decision to delegate final heritage and design approval of the addition to Ottawa City Staff, rather than requiring a revised heritage application to return to committees and Council for final approval, as per normal procedure under the Ontario Heritage Act? Why or why not?

Jeff Leiper:

I have been dismayed and frustrated that the architects for the Chateau Laurier addition kept returning with essentially the same inappropriate design. I believe that the clear direction now given to staff combined with continued leverage over the site plan process will result in a much better proposal. Staff are to work with the architect and Chateau owners to incorporate more Indiana limestone and better reference the existing building. Once staff are satisfied, the new design will go back to the BHSC for comment, and then the site plan will come to Planning Committee for approval. As the final motion was written, we will only pass the design if it meets the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places. I supported this approach both at Planning Committee and Council, confident that there will be significant expert and other public input into the design, and that we have the necessary leverage to stop the proposal if we're not satisfied that future design changes result in an appropriate addition.