

Plan to save city park house scuttled

Developer says home 'a mess'

BY JASON WARICK, THE STARPHOENIX DECEMBER 26, 2011



The house at 802 Queen St. will likely be demolished.

Photograph by: Greg Pender, The Starphoenix, The StarPhoenix

Plans to preserve a 99-year-old City Park house by moving it off the site of a proposed condominium development have been scrapped after its oak interior was pilfered.

The house will now likely be demolished, owner Tim Ryan says.

"It's become quite a mess. (Saving the house) is a pretty remote possibility now," said Ryan, a developer who purchased the property at 802 Queen St. at the beginning of November.

The large house sits on a 19,000-square-foot lot roughly four times the size of the average residential property, Ryan said.

It was built in 1912 by William (Billy) Silverwood, according to the City Park local area plan. An addition was made in the 1940s. For years, it was owned by the Salvation Army as a home for troubled youth known as Bethany Home. A group recently made an unsuccessful attempt to purchase the property and use it as a hospice, as Saskatoon City Hospital sits across the street.

When the building went up for sale by public tender this fall, Ryan bought it.

He was impressed by the excellent condition of the interior oak doors, banisters and other fixtures.

"It just needed some light sanding and a coat of lacquer and it would have been perfect," Ryan said.

Ryan plans to build an 18-unit high-end condominium complex on the site, as it's in a prime location close to downtown, the riverbank and just a block from Kinsmen Park.

"We're not going to cheap out. This will be a prime property," he said.

Ryan also wanted to preserve the house somehow. He said he offered to donate the house to the City of Saskatoon to use in its remodelled Kinsmen Park.

Ryan thought it could be used perhaps as a ski chalet or other facility. City officials said "great idea, but no thanks," Ryan said.

Ryan explored other possibilities. Given the home's size, it could only be shipped south over the University Bridge, as narrow streets and old trees prevent movement in other directions.

He found a developer with two vacant lots on University Drive just over the University Bridge, and the pair worked out a deal to move the house there.

Around this time, Ryan said a woman approached him after she heard a condominium was planned for the property. He said she asked Ryan if she could take some antique cribs out of the home and donate them to charity.

Ryan agreed and gave the woman a house key. Several days later, Ryan returned to find a moving crew took the cribs, but also gutted the home's interior.

Ryan said it's likely too expensive or impractical to save the house now, so he acquired a demolition permit. The house will likely be knocked down at some point in the next year, he said.

The Saskatoon Heritage Society is concerned the house could face demolition. Although it has no official heritage designation, it is a valuable piece of the neighbourhood and the city's history, chair Adam Pollock said.

"It's an important house and has played a big role in the community," Pollock said.

Pollock also questioned how city officials could allow a condominium to be built on the site, contrary to the City Park local area plan. He said many in the neighbourhood feel they are being ignored by city planners.

"It's how it feels to us," he said. Ryan said he appreciated the desire to preserve the city's heritage, but doesn't understand the resistance to condominium development.

He said citizens and the city should be encouraging more density in central neighbourhoods - now, instead of one large house, the property can house 18 couples or families. Ryan added he wishes the property would have been zoned to build even higher.

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