

Staff Report 2024-0238

Meeting Date: May 6, 2024

Subject: Notice of Intention to Designate – 20469 Willoughby Road, Ward 1

Submitted By: Sally Drummond, Senior Heritage Planner; Cassandra Jasinski, Heritage Planner, Strategic Policy Planning, Planning Department

RECOMMENDATION

That a Notice of Intention to Designate the property at 20469 Willoughby Road under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act be issued;

That should no objections be received during the mandatory 30-day public objection period following publication of the Notice of Intention to Designate, a by-law be enacted for the purpose of designating 20469 Willoughby Road pursuant to the Ontario Heritage Act;

That if there are any objections in accordance with the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act, the matter return to Council for further consideration; and,

That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this recommendation.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The property at 20469 Willoughby Road is listed as a non-designated property (the “Property”) on the Town of Caledon’s Heritage Register. It contains a unique English/Storybook cottage constructed circa 1933, known historically as “Riverholme”.
- Heritage staff recommend that Council issue a Notice of Intention to Designate for the Property under Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act (the “Act”).
- The owner has verbally supported heritage designation of the Property.
- This report serves as consultation with Heritage Caledon as required by Section 29 (2) of the Act.

DISCUSSION

Current Heritage Status – 20469 Willoughby Road

The property at 20469 Willoughby Road is a 2.2-acre rural residential parcel located on the east side of Willoughby Road approximately 200 metres north of Highpoint Sideroad in the settlement area of Melville (Schedule A).

Under Section 27(3) of the Act, Council may list non-designated properties that it believes to be of cultural heritage value or interest on the municipal Heritage Register. Council listed the Property by means of Council Resolution 2020-007. The Property's one-and-a-half storey frame house is considered to be of high cultural heritage value for its unique early 20th century dwelling associated with the Huston family of Hollywood fame and for its location overlooking the former Melville mill pond.

The evaluation process for 'listing' purposes was preliminary in nature. The cultural heritage value of a property may be evaluated in greater depth in response to a proposed development or demolition/removal application.

Owner Support for Designation

After recently purchasing the Property, the current owner approached Heritage staff requesting that the Property be considered for heritage designation. The owner intends to make use of the Town's Designated Heritage Property Grant Program to assist with conservation of the Property.

Designation Process

The Act enables municipalities to pass by-laws to designate properties of cultural heritage value or interest. Designation of individual properties under Section 29 of the Act is a way of publicly acknowledging a property's value to a community and ensures the conservation of important places for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. It also allows municipalities to conserve and manage properties through the Heritage Permit process enabled under Sections 33 (alterations) and 34 (demolition or removal) of the Act.

In determining whether a property is of cultural heritage value or interest, the municipality is required to evaluate the property against *Ontario Regulation 9/06 "Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest"* ("O. Reg. 9/06 Criteria"), prescribed under Section 29(1)(a) of the Act. A property may be designated if it meets two or more of the following criteria:

1. The property has design value or physical value because it is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method.
2. The property has design value or physical value because displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit.
3. The property has design value or physical value because demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.
4. The property has historical value or associative value because it has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community.

5. The property has historical value or associative value because it yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture.
6. The property has historical value or associative value because it demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community.
7. The property has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area.
8. The property has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings, or
9. The property has contextual value because it is a landmark.

Assessment of a property against the above criteria commonly takes the form of a heritage designation report/cultural heritage assessment report (Schedules B and C).

Designating a property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Act requires Council to issue a Notice of Intention to Designate (the “Notice”), which is served on the owner and the Ontario Heritage Trust and published in a local newspaper. The Notice to be served on the owner of the Property and the Ontario Heritage Trust shall include the following Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest based on information provided in the heritage designation report; an abbreviated version of the Notice will be published in the local newspapers.

The Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest includes a description of the cultural heritage significance of the property and a list of heritage attributes that embody this significance. This provides clarity to both the Town and the property owner as to which elements of the property should be conserved. Note that Part IV designation does not prevent future alterations to a property, but rather provides a guide to determine if alterations would adversely impact the heritage significance of the property.

Heritage Evaluation of the Subject Property

An assessment of the cultural heritage value of the Property determined that it meets six of the nine criteria set out in O. Reg 9/06 Criteria (criteria 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 and 9).

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest – 20469 Willoughby Road, ‘Riverholme’

The **design value or physical value** of the property at 20469 Willoughby Road, known historically as Riverholme, is linked to its 1.5-storey dwelling and several of its landscape features. Set on the banks of the Credit River, the house and garden were designed and built in stages by Arthur Huston, a well-known vaudevillian actor, dancer, musician, set designer and landscape architect, and his third wife Helen Huston, a furniture maker, professional classical singer, singing teacher, poet and published horticulturalist. The

house at Riverholme is a **rare example** of the English Cottage style with Craftsman, Tudor Revival influences, popular in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s and **displays a high degree of craftsmanship and artistic merit**. It is the only known example of the English Cottage style in Caledon. The additions and improvements the Hustons made to the house as reported in the local newspaper in 1933 created the building form that is seen today, including the complex 1.5-storey roofline with shed dormers, two large fieldstone chimneys, an enclosed front vestibule and a large, flat-roofed sunroom/conservatory.

The house exterior is partially clad in round fieldstone, rising from grade to roughly the bottom of the windowsills around the perimeter. At the conservatory, the fieldstone is used as a load bearing knee wall, executed to provide an exposed finished stone interior and exterior topped by multi-pane wood windows. The top of the stone wall curves down on the south and west elevations to allow for larger windows to let in more sunlight. The upper half of the house exterior is clad in squared butt wood shingles of varied widths applied in straight, parallel courses that flare out in a bellcast curve at the level of the upper floor plate, a common Craftsman style design element. The main (side) gable walls of the house face the road and the rear of the lot respectively and both have large, fieldstone chimneys. The enclosed vestibule sheltering the front entry, which faces the Credit River, is characterized by an asymmetrical curved gable roofline and arched Dutch style plank door with oversized, Tudor-inspired hardware. The principle windows in the house are horizontally coupled and tripled casement sashes with four and six pane arrangements. The conservatory windows are vertically oriented sashes with fifteen and nine pane arrangements.

Riverholme has **significant historical and associative value** due to its **direct and long-term association** with Arthur Huston. Huston's grandfather and parents (Moore Huston and Jennie Campbell) had settled in Caledon Township in the mid-19th century. Although Arthur was born in Michigan in 1882, his family returned to Canada shortly afterward. Much of Arthur's boyhood was spent in Caledon Township environs with family. By 1902 Huston had achieved success performing in American cities as a juggling vaudevillian comic with his first wife May McDonald as "Huston & Dallas". After May's death in 1907, Arthur continued developing his career creating and performing several shows, including Stanley in Africa (1908-1909); Roosevelt in Africa (1908-1915); A Night in the Jungle (1920); and The Bug Hunter (1921). Huston developed carpentry and other artistic skills from making all his own sets and also training animals for his shows. In 1909, Huston married a well-known Hungarian born musician Antoinette Dvorak, whose stage name was "Czinka Panna".

In 1910, Arthur Huston purchased 65 acres near Melville that included the subject property where he would live, farm and keep his animals when not travelling for performances until his death in 1961. In 1922, Arthur married his third wife, the widow Helen (Paterson) Qua. The 1931 Census indicated Arthur, Helen and Arthur Huston Jr. were living in a four-room house on the property. As performance work opportunities dwindled in the late 1920s,

Arthur and Helen Huston designed and built a nine-hole golf course north of the house, which opened in 1930 as the 'Riverholme Golf Club'. The course was supplied by a tree nursery and landscape gardening business also established by the Hustons on the property. Arthur renovated the old barn north of their home to become the golf course club house, and many visitors remarked over the years how its interior appeared like one of his stage sets.

Riverholme also has **historical value or associative value** because it **reflects the work and ideas** of Arthur and Helen Huston, who contributed significantly to the Melville and Orangeville communities. Helen published articles and lectured on horticulture and interior design many times over the years. Arthur volunteered his talents within the community, often playing the cello, tap dancing or designing and building sets for local theatrical productions. His writings were also published in the local Orangeville paper, often advocating for the maintenance of the natural landscape, hills and trees and for the protection of wild animals.

Collectively, Arthur and Helen Huston supported many local causes, raising funds and awareness through lectures and events hosted at Riverholme, including those of wounded war veterans, the Red Cross and local hospitals as well as horticultural events, local plays, concerts and golf tournaments. As farmer, landscape architect and nurseryman, Arthur impacted the community and surrounding landscape. Together, he and Helen designed and built the house at Riverholme as well as five acres of beautiful perennial gardens, which included ponds, a fountain, lawns, stone works, a tennis court and a tea house. The majority of these features are extant within the 2.46 acre subject property.

Arthur was the cousin of Hollywood film actor Walter Huston, second cousin to Hollywood director John Huston and third cousin to Angelica Huston, a current Hollywood actor. Close family ties brought the Hollywood Hustons to Riverholme, along with other notable Hollywood stars including Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Elizabeth Taylor, and Vivian Leigh, to relax and play in the beautiful country setting.

The property known as Riverholme has **contextual value** as it helps **define, maintain and support** the rural character of Willoughby Road in the rural community of Melville with its mature plantings and vestiges of former gardens; the unobstructed view of the house from the gate at Willoughby Road through mature trees and shrubs; and the proximity and orientation of the house front to the Credit River. The property is **visually and historically** linked to the adjacent golf course, owned and operated by the Hustons from 1930-1958, at which time it was sold to local members of the club and renamed the 'Orangeville Golf Club'. The Orangeville Golf Club continues to provide the community with recreational pursuits amid a landscape enjoyed and promoted by Arthur and Helen Huston.

Description of Heritage Attributes



The following heritage attributes of the property known historically as “Riverholme” at 20469 Willoughby Road in the Town of Caledon are recommended to be protected through a by-law under section 29, Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

*Heritage attributes that convey the **design value and physical value** of the house as a **representative example of the English Cottage style with Craftsman and Tudor Revival influences popular in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s:***

- Form, massing and height of the 1933 house built by Arthur Huston and Helen Huston
- Complex 1.5-storey roofline with shed dormers
- Two large fieldstone chimneys
- Large, single-storey, flat-roofed sunroom/conservatory with S curved rafter tails, concrete capped round fieldstone load bearing walls exposed both inside and out; stone mantel with niches, decorative cut logs within the stonework, stone floor, raised and curved stone hearth and steps into the main house
- Fieldstone foundation/basement walls
- Original exterior cladding materials of square butt wood shingles, horizontal wood/bark siding, and rounded fieldstone applied to the lower walls and to construct the chimneys
- Shingled bellcast curve at the upper floor plate on all elevations
- Metal, S-shaped brace/form on face of both chimneys
- Front vestibule with an asymmetrical gable roof design and arched, Dutch door with large strap hinges, door knocker, handle hardware, interior light, and built-in bench
- Location, size, scale of original exterior window and door openings
- Original wood window sashes and doors including their groupings, pane arrangements and associated hardware (whether installed or currently in storage)
- Stone fireplace mantles and hearths
- French doors in living room, including associated hardware
- Any original window or door openings or original exterior materials that may be concealed by additions or the wood board and batten

*Heritage attributes that convey the property’s **design value and physical value** by showing a **high degree of craftsmanship, artistic merit and reflecting the work and ideas** of the owners as landscape designers and builders, and that also convey the property’s **historical and associative value** for their **direct association** with Arthur Huston and Helen Huston as prominent residents and landscape designers significant to the Melville and Orangeville communities:*

- Loop wire gate with stone and concrete gate walls flanking the driveway, including the large globes and niches
- Stone and concrete circular pool with centre feature
- Stone and concrete patio in front of the front door enclosure of the house
- Low stone and concrete wall with steps as stage structure
- Stone and concrete curved pool with wooden bridge and guard rails
- Remnant stone and bottle walls of the small outbuilding
- Step location and lower landing at the river in front of the house
- Landscape of mature trees and shrubs, including any specimens that are unusual and likely intentionally planted by the Hustons as part of the landscape design

*Heritage attributes that convey the property's **contextual value** for its contribution to defining, maintaining and supporting the rural fabric and character of Willoughby Road in the small community of Melville and its visual and historical links to its surroundings:*

- Mature tree and shrub plantings and vestiges of Riverholme's former gardens
- Unobstructed views of the Huston house from the stone gate at Willoughby Road
- Setback of the house from Willoughby Road and its location adjacent and front-oriented to the Credit River
- Location adjacent to the Orangeville Golf Club, part of Arthur Huston's original property and which he and Helen Huston had designed, built, owned and operated from 1930 to 1958

Attributes of property that are **not** considered to be of cultural heritage value or interest include:

- The large flat roofed addition to the northwest elevation
- The shed roof lean-to style addition to the northeast elevation
- Exterior door openings converted from the original window openings on the northwest and southwest sides of the second floor
- Exterior wood stairs to flat roof of one-storey addition to the northwest elevation
- Tree and shrub specimens determined by an arborist to be in poor health, invasive or those that are too close to and risk damaging or block views to and from the house;
- Neglected shrub specimens meant to be kept pruned that are now oversized and cannot be pruned back around the perimeter of the house;
- Volunteer species that are not at risk (i.e. black raspberry thicket that has grown up off the northeast corner of the house).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If Council proceeds with designating the Property, the Notice of Intention to Designate and the subsequent Notice of Passing of By-law will be advertised on the Town Page and in local newspapers.

The advertising costs will be funded under the Corporate Communications advertising operating budget. Costs associated with the registration of the designation by-law will be funded by Legal Services' operating budget.

If a designation by-law is registered on the title of the Property, the owner will be eligible to apply for the annual Designated Heritage Property Grant (DHPG) program, which offers matching grants of up to \$6,000 for General Conservation projects and up to \$15,000 for Priority Stream projects subject to available funding.

COUNCIL WORK PLAN

Strategic Plan 2023-2035

This report is directly related to the following priority in Caledon's 2023-2035 Strategic Plan:

Community Vitality and Livability

Details about Caledon's 2023-2035 Strategic Plan can be found at caledon.ca/strategicplan.

ATTACHMENTS

Schedule A: Location Map

Schedule B: Statement of Significance – Riverholme

Schedule C: Cultural Heritage Assessment Background Report – 20469 Willoughby Road