

NOTL Duff Heritage Committee Remarks

I wish to thank the Municipal Heritage Committee for agreeing to hear me tonight. That permission was accompanied with the warm and welcoming admonition, and I quote: As you are aware, any comments not relating to the staff report will not be tolerated by the chair (unquote). So, tonight, I will be specific, very specific.

I'm here as part of SORE, the core team for Save Our Randwood Estate - a residents group representing over 600 active and engaged citizens who are (here and are) SORE about the Marotta hotel proposal

Specifically, I am requesting, on their behalf, that this Heritage Committee require the Town, in the strongest possible terms, to obtain a proper and thorough peer review of the heritage impact assessment done by Leah Wallace for the Marotta Group.

In the brief time I have available, let me make a number of points in support of my request:

1. It is common knowledge that the property and buildings within the full extent of the former Rand Estate are significant cultural heritage resources. Even Ms. Wallace, who used to work for the Town and is now employed by the Marotta Group states in her recent heritage impact report that the Rand Estate buildings and property as well as the adjacent Brunswick Place property which contains some of the Dunnington-Grubb landscape plan I will be talking about momentarily should be designated under the Heritage Act.
2. The Heritage Impact Assessment done in May of 2010 for the Romance hotel proposal notes that the designed landscape and buildings within the Rand Estate property are associated with several significant historical persons, events and movements that influenced local and national history
3. Next I want to touch on the landscaping at the Rand Estate. It is extremely important. The 2010 report for the Romance proposal placed significant emphasis on the Dunnington-Grubb landscape plan for the entire Rand Estate (which is the large area encompassed by the walls on John and Charlotte Streets)
4. As most of this committee will, or should, know, the husband and wife Dunnington-Grubb team founded the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects and were responsible for introducing the Beaux-Arts style of landscaping to Canada
5. The Rand Estate is considered one of their significant achievements: the 2010 Heritage report done for the Romance proposal noted that, and I quote "The significance of the Randwood landscape exists not only in the design of the space; the exemplification of the Beaux-Arts style and the 'make believe' world that it belongs to; but it also exists within the larger context of Canadian garden design and the birth of professional landscape architecture in Canada."

6. That 2010 report also noted that (and again I quote) "It is a testament to the landscape design of the Randwood Estate that its gardens have so effortlessly endured the passing of time and their sense of romance and fantasy have only been heightened as so very few examples of Beaux-Arts landscape architecture remain in Canada."
7. The 2010 Heritage report also stated that the landscape features of the Randwood estate were, for the most part, in "excellent condition"
8. Moving on from the Dunnington-Grubb landscape plan to the 2011 Romance hotel proposal, the heritage consultants for Mr. Paterson and Ms Romance noted that because it was NOTL and because this is the Rand Estate, it was important that the hotel be complementary to the existing buildings and therefore the Romance hotel was designed with prominent Mansard roofs as an elaboration of the original roof of the main Rand Estate house
9. The original design of the Romance hotel was not acceptable to the 2011 version of this committee, which recommended at the time that the design (and I quote) "should be simplified to allow the landscape and the existing structures to remain prominent features of the site."
10. Given the controversy associated with the Romance proposal, the Town commissioned a peer review by an independent firm. That firm recommended that the Romance hotel should be of **compatible height and mass** with the existing buildings on the Rand Estate. That firm also recommended that the architectural quality of the hotel be of high standard in keeping with the period style of the Rand Estate buildings
11. Enter Leah Wallace, who in 2011 was the heritage planner for the Town. In her report to Council on the Romance proposal, she states that "any buildings on the Rand Estate must be compatible with the existing buildings in terms of scale, mass, height and design."
12. Ms Wallace further stated in her report to Council that (and I quote) "the size and design of the hotel must be carefully considered to ensure that the new construction does not dominate and overwhelm the existing buildings."
13. Let's now fast forward to 2017. Ms Wallace now has a new employer, Mr. Marotta. Her views seem to have evolved a bit.
14. In fairness, she does concede in her 2017 Heritage Impact report for the Marotta Group, that the Romance hotel proposal was (and I quote) "less intrusive".
15. However she goes on in her report to reach some astonishing conclusions that seem at odds with her views in the 2011 report she wrote to Town Council. Here's a sample:

On page 41 of the report- she states that the impact of the Marotta hotel on the existing buildings on the Rand Estate is not as great as the Romance proposal. She says that the Coach House in particular would have been dwarfed by the Romance hotel, while conveniently ignoring the inelegant 6 storey slab that her new client wants to put up right beside the Coach House

On page 42, she states that the Marotta hotel (and I quote) has been designed to "complement" rather than copy the existing building styles on the site." As the Chair of the

Town's Urban Design Committee said at their last meeting, "complement" is perhaps not the right word to use.

On page 42, she states that (and I quote) "the simple shape of the hotel will help to ensure that its potential impact on the site will be minimized." What?

On page 43 she states that the trees and wall at the Rand Estate "will successfully screen the hotel" from the Commons across the street. Really?

I could go on but you get the point.

How can the heritage impact assessment done for the Marotta hotel proposal have any credibility when its author was saying such very different things 6 years ago when the Town was her employer?

What I am saying to you is that you need to require the Town to get a proper, and thorough, peer review done of all heritage impact aspects of this proposal. A third party independent peer review was obtained by the Town in 2011 for a much less intrusive proposal, with the support and encouragement of this committee. We should have nothing less now.

The new peer review should include a detailed assessment of the full extent of the Dunnington-Grubb landscape plan on all properties that comprised the Rand Estate. According to Ms Wallace's 2017 report on page 25, the Rand Estate included 144 and 176 John Street as well as 200 John Street and 588 Charlotte. There was a Dunnington-Grubb landscape plan for most of that estate and it should all be assessed now before the Marotta Group plows it under, which could have been happening today. Ms Wallace's report notes that there are significant components of the Dunnington-Grubb landscape plan on the 200 John Street property for example, where the Marotta Group plans to put in a subdivision, but then writes them off as incompatible with the subdivision and so they will go. We were told at the public meeting here less than two weeks ago that Ms Wallace included the subdivision in her heritage impact report so that the cumulative impacts of the hotel and the subdivision were considered together. That's good planning. Now the town should get a proper peer review done and do the same thing. Examine the entire Dunnington Grubb landscape plan on the properties owned or controlled by the Marotta Group and let's get a proper cumulative impact heritage assessment done and on the table for all of us to consider.

Two final points. There are only four or five firms in the province that are really qualified to do a proper peer review. SORE has done our research and we will provide those names to you and to Denise Horne at the Town. Second, the peer review will only be as good as the terms of reference. We request that this committee be fully engaged in developing the terms of reference for the peer review.

In closing, I say to the Marotta Group, you can do better, much better. This is not the legacy you want to be known by in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

With that, I thank you for your time.