



7 May 2018

Mayor & City Council  
City of Ottawa  
110 Laurier Ave W  
Ottawa, ON

### **Re: Demolition and Rezoning of 231 Cobourg Street**

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

Action Sandy Hill (ASH) is strongly opposed to the demolition of 231 Cobourg Street because, 1) it is a contributing building in a Heritage Conservation District (HCD); 2) as the City's own expert attests, the condition of the building is due to the current owner's neglect; and, 3) none of the experts have concluded that the building is beyond retention. We also oppose the proposed rezoning of the site to Commercial as it is unnecessary to permit an embassy and would undermine the residential nature of the HCD. Finally, should Council permit the demolition, we feel that the proposed replacement building is incompatible with the HCD.

#### **Demolition of Existing Building**

##### **1) Heritage Value**

The building at 231 Cobourg is located in the Wilbrod/Laurier Heritage Conservation District (HCD) and is a contributing building in the district. The HCD plan states that maintaining contributing buildings is, "important to maintaining the overall character of the HCD." The HCD Plan further states that, "Demolition of contributing buildings will not normally be supported."

As identified in the HCD Plan, "The Wilbrod/Laurier HCD is significant for its association with the development of Sandy Hill as an upper-middle class neighbourhood that was home to many politicians and senior civil servants. In particular, the HCD was the home of several Prime Ministers including Sir John A. MacDonald, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, William Lyon MacKenzie King and Lester B. Pearson."

Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson resided at 231 Cobourg. As John English's biography, *The Life of Lester Pearson*, Vol 2 (Knopf, 1992) notes, Pearson's wife purchased the duplex at 231 Cobourg Street in 1954. According to the *Ottawa Directory*, 1-231 Cobourg is listed as the home address of Lester B Pearson, MP for the years 1955-1958 inclusive. In 1958, he is listed as "leader of the Liberal Party", as well as an MP. It is also worth noting that Pearson won the

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Nobel Prize for Peace in 1957 while he was living at 231 Cobourg. It remains the only Nobel Peace Prize won by a Canadian.

Pearson's Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in recognition of his leadership of the United Nations' intervention in the Suez Crisis, which resulted in the invention of peacekeeping. It is also worth noting that the Suez Crisis was a contributing factor to the adoption of the Canadian flag. During the Suez Crisis Pearson was shocked and embarrassed when the Egyptian government refused to allow Canadian troops on their soil because the Canadian Red Ensign flag in use at that time included the Union Jack, the flag of Egypt's enemy, Britain. Pearson developed a strong belief that Canada needed a new symbol to represent its nationhood, and its independent voice. When he became Prime Minister six years later, he vowed to make a new flag a top priority, leading to the Canadian Maple Leaf flag being adopted in 1965.



*Lester B. Pearson and wife, Maryon, in their living room at 231 Cobourg Street. Photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt, 1957. Life Magazine © Time Inc.*

The experts, both City staff and the proponent's consultant, didn't know the above noted information about Pearson's ownership and residency in this building, nor the significant events associated with his time residing there. We now have this important information about the significant historical associations with the building thanks solely to the research of community members who had heard anecdotally that Pearson had lived here at one time, and to the research of an expert consultant hired by ASH.

## **2) Demolition by Neglect**

The current plight of 231 Cobourg is a classic example of demolition by neglect. John G. Cooke and Associates' Building Condition Report clearly identifies that this building "has stood vacant for four years and unheated through at least two winters." Even the proponents' own experts state clearly in their planning rationale that the current condition of the building is due to, "a combination of structural deficiencies and deferred or inadequate maintenance over the past few decades".

If the above isn't enough to demonstrate undeniably that this is a case of demolition by neglect, the Annual Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Uganda for the year ended 30 June 2015 details the neglect even more obviously. As you'll see in the excerpt from this report below, consultants had identified issues with the property at least as far back as 2012, and had warned that remedial work needed to be undertaken within one year. Furthermore, the government of Uganda budgeted significant funds, about \$1 million USD at the time, to carry-out this work. Yet as of July 2015 the Ugandan Auditor General found that none of the recommended work had been completed and that as a result the property was now being recommended for demolition.

## **79.0 UGANDA HIGH COMMISSION, OTTAWA**

### **a) Delayed construction of the Chancery**

The Chancery is a two storeyed building with a basement located at 231 Cobourg Street Sandy Hill, Ottawa, Ontario. It was acquired in 1987 and has been occupied until July 2013 when it was vacated due to extensive cracking and basement damage. Since 2012 various consultants have undertaken reviews and inspections on the property. In 2013 a consultant carried out various surveys which recommended the following;

- Remedial work to be undertaken within one year on installations and systems that were potentially unsafe otherwise significant escalation of costs would result if delayed.
- Trees located within 8 meters of the building be removed since they demand too much water leading to shrinkage of foundation.

At the time of inspection, in July 2015, all the above recommendations had not been undertaken despite the fact that the MoFPED had cumulatively released an amount of UGX.2,762,000,000 (approx. USD.1m) for that purpose. The trees were neither removed nor were the renovations undertaken within the recommended one year.

Besides, the delay in renovations causes further deterioration as earlier predicted by the Consultants. After two years without the renovations, the property has now been recommended for demolition by a Board of Survey (BoS) team from Uganda comprising MOFA, MoWT and MoFPED officials.

Management is advised to always undertake agreed construction works in a timely manner.

<http://www.oag.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Central-Government-and-Statutory-Authorities-30th-June-2015.pdf>

Failing to properly maintain the building over the three decades the Ugandan Government has owned it, then leaving the building vacant, unheated, and unmaintained for several years has compounded the problems. It is clear therefore that the current condition of the building is due to the neglect of the current owners, in other words, this is a case of demolition by neglect.

Indeed, demolition by neglect seems to be the modus operandi of the Ugandan High Commission to Canada. As you'll see in the excerpt below, in 2014 the Auditor General of Uganda identified in a report on the financial statements of their High Commission in Canada that, "work for the renovation and improved security at the official residence had not yet commenced despite the promise from the accounting Officer that civil works would commence during the year under review."

This same report went on to conclude that the Official residence of the Ugandan High Commissioner, located at 235 Mariposa Avenue in Rockcliffe Park, should be demolished and a new building constructed. The report concluded that, based on a cost-benefits analysis, it was their, "strong recommendation that it is in our strategic interest to demolish and redevelop the current official residence building to minimize on spending additional resources for renovation in the long-term."

## **6.2 Official Residence**

It was observed that work for the renovation and improved security at the official residence had not yet commenced despite the promise from the accounting Officer that civil works would commence during the year under review. This is an indication that the Mission activities may not have been under taken on schedule and according to work plans.

The Accounting Officer explained that the pre-renovation works did commence with the technical team undertaking necessary analysis/ measurements and preparing a report specifying the specific courses of action to guide the official renovation project. In accordance with the Canadian regulation, Peterson Group Inc. Consulting Engineers firm was contracted to undertake the detailed study to determine the presence of designated substances such as asbestos containing materials like lead paints which are harmful to human and the study report revealed presence of designated substances which are hazardous to humans. In addition, the land at 235 Mariposa Avenue was surveyed and the report submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate the preparation of the draft architectural drawings.

The draft architectural drawings prepared by Government of Uganda Technical Team were subsequently submitted to a Canadian Architectural firm for review in compliance with the Canadian building guidelines that require all architectural designs prepared by non-Canadian Architects to be endorsed by Canadian Architects before submission to relevant authorities for approval. This firm has advised Mission that the "working budget for renovation is Canadian Dollars CAD\$ 2.2 million and CAD\$ 3.0 Millions for construction of a new building including landscaping, fencing, hard surface, pool and pool house". This working budget estimate leaves a funding shortage of more than Canadian Dollars CAD\$ 1.8 Million for renovation and CAD \$ 2.7 million for construction of a new building for the official residence (see copy of the report Canadian Architectural firm attached as Annex B).

After analyzing Canadian laws and historical changes in construction industry, the three levels of laws that govern environment and standards of structures in Rockcliff Village Park as well as the structural state of the Official Residence, LineBox Studio recommended that demolition and reconstruction of the residence was more viable. The cost of demolition and construction of a new building is almost the same as that of renovation. Renovation could end up being even more costly because of the unknown conditions that may be discovered after renovation has started. Should renovation be chosen as the preferred option, there are high chances of ending up with an increment in the funds spent and loss of opportunity to build a residence where government shall save costs in the long term.

Given the preliminary technical advice on the cost-benefits analysis implications by the firm, the Mission is liaising with Ministries of Foreign Affairs and that of Finance, Planning and Economic Development with a strong recommendation that it is in our strategic interest to demolish and redevelop the current official residence building to minimize on spending additional resources for renovation in the long-term.

The matter requires urgent attention.

<http://www.oag.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/UGANDA-HIGH-COMMISSION-OTTAWA-REPORT-OF-THE-AUDITOR-GENERAL-2014.pdf>

### **3) Retention of Existing Building**

We are dismayed that despite the motion passed at the Built Heritage Sub-Committee meeting on February 8, 2018, to assess retention options there has been no apparent consideration of

this by staff. The Building Condition Report prepared by John G. Cooke & Associates does not speak to the possibility of retention of the building in whole or in part. In fact, we received this Report from City staff concurrently with a slightly altered design for a replacement building. That new design does not reflect the BHSC's direction despite the fact that, the Building Condition Report provides ample evidence to suggest that the building can indeed be retained.

According to experts with decades of experience in the preservation of historic buildings, these interventions would neither be cost prohibitive, nor represent 'heroic measures'. Rather they form part of a conservation strategy designed to render this intentionally neglected building serviceable for the immediate future and to preserve it and its important historical associations for future generations.

### **Proposed Rezoning**

ASH opposes the proposed rezoning of this site to Commercial. Most if not all foreign missions in Sandy Hill are zoned residential, and we would prefer this practice to continue. Generally speaking these missions are housed in former residences, many of them historic, buildings that could in theory be re-purposed for residential use again at some point in the future. The other advantage of keeping them zoned residential is that a full rezoning would be required in order to change to a commercial use. If we zone these properties commercial, but limit the use to an embassy, then it is just a minor rezoning to make them into other commercial uses in the future. In the long run, commercial zoning for these buildings could erode the residential nature of Sandy Hill and perhaps put our built heritage at greater risk.

Over the last few years two new foreign missions have setup office in Sandy Hill, the High Commission of St. Kitts and Nevis and the Embassy of Estonia. In both cases representatives from those foreign missions consulted with ASH and were responsive to our concerns. Working together, the foreign missions, City staff and ASH reached a solution that worked for all. That solution was to retain the residential zoning but add office, limited to an embassy as a permitted use. The permitted use was further limited to being located in a building existing at the time of passing of the bylaw. This would be the approach we would prefer to see taken with the Ugandan High Commission as well.

### **Proposed Replacement Building**

As we are strongly opposed to the demolition of the existing building at 231 Cobourg, we are hesitant to comment on the proposed replacement. However, as you are considering both the demolition permit and proposed replacement building concurrently, we offer the following comments.

Section 4.4.2 of the Wilbrod/Laurier HCD Plan, states that, "Where a building is approved for demolition, the building must be recorded at the direction of Heritage staff and the information should be deposited at the City of Ottawa Archives. In addition, consideration should be given to salvaging historic materials as the building is demolished." It is disappointing therefore that no effort has been proposed to salvage and incorporate historic materials into the new build.

With regard to the proposed replacement building, we feel strongly that the proposed new structure neither references stylistic elements of the existing Classical Federal building – a style



that is atypical of the District and which contributes to its architecturally-varied character – nor fits the character of the surrounding District. Moreover, it fails to conform with the requirements for infill in the District as outlined in the Wilbrod/Laurier HCD Plan. As the Cultural Heritage Impact Statement prepared for the Ugandan High Commission states, the proposed new building appears to be more institutional than residential in nature. The District Plan makes it clear that the character of the HCD is residential and that new buildings in the District should respect that residential character.

In particular, we are concerned that only complete demolition is being considered. If the City permits demolition of the existing structure, we would prefer to see efforts made to reuse original materials, and integrate stylistic elements that reference the existing structure. Other elements of the existing structure like symmetry, decorative brickwork, string courses or stone sills could easily be referenced. Other than its use of red brick and being of a scale more or less comparable to the existing structure, the new design is not sympathetic to or compatible with the District. It is especially important to reference the existing building given its atypical design within the Wilbrod/Laurier HCD. There is no doubt that the existing building at 231 Cobourg does indeed contribute to the District and that its demolition in favour of a structure that erases rather than references its heritage would have an appreciable negative impact on the District.

The fenestration pattern and treatment of the proposed replacement building, particularly the lack of symmetry, the windows that wrap the northwest corner, the two-storey window on the west wall, and the modern-style extended window frames, fail to reference the existing building and are inconsistent with the HCD. We would like to see an overall fenestration pattern and treatment that references the existing building and is more consistent with the area.

While the proposed replacement building is of brick, the brick is shown in a stacked bond pattern rather than the more traditional running bond pattern. Stacked bond pattern for brick is rarely seen in residential use and is more consistent with commercial buildings. The lack of detailing in the brickwork, such as quoins, lintels and a datum line at the parapet, are also inconsistent with the heritage context of the building.

We also feel that the alternating angles of each floor on the south half of the west façade of the building contributes to its institutional feel and detracts from the character of the HCD. We feel that this feature should be eliminated in favour of a more conventional uniform, symmetrical façade that references the existing building. As mentioned earlier, we would also like to see original materials from the existing building, such as the brick, salvaged and incorporated in any replacement building.

Finally, we have concerns about the proposed increase from two to four surface parking spots. Section 4.4.12 of the Wilbrod/Laurier HCD Plan, states that, "New driveways or widened driveways are discouraged." Parking spots adjacent to the building and parallel to the roadway are already inconsistent with the District.

## **Conclusion**

That 231 Cobourg Street is a contributing building in a designated heritage conservation district has been clearly established. This fact is not contested by the City of Ottawa nor the proponents. Furthermore, the building has important historical associations with former Prime

Minister Lester B. Pearson. Since the cultural heritage value of the Wilbrod/Laurier HCD lies in part in its historical associations with a number of former Prime Ministers, this building, as a former home of Pearson, serves to underscore the cultural heritage value of the HCD.

The engineering reports submitted as part of this application, along with the Annual Report of the Auditor General of Uganda, leave no doubt that the condition of the building is largely due to the neglect of the current owners. Numerous private citizens in close proximity to this building, including the owner of the building next door at 467 Wilbrod, have experienced similar foundation issues and have been able to remedy them, while in this instance a country is claiming that it will be too expensive. Further, multiple engineering assessments assert that restoration and rehabilitation is possible.

While this building may not be architecturally important, it is of significant cultural and historical value at both the Municipal and National level, and of contributing architectural value. It is a protected heritage building that should not be demolished. Furthermore, through the Sandy Hill Cultural Heritage Character Area, Council has recognized Sandy Hill as, "an important historic urban landscape in Ottawa" which is to be protected in accordance with Section 2.5.5 (3) of the Official Plan. This Section of the Official Plan is in response to Section 2.6 of the Provincial Policy Statement which states that, "Significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes shall be conserved."

To allow the demolition of 231 Cobourg would be to contravene every measure the City has put in place to protect Ottawa's significant built heritage resources and to reward the profound disrespect of our collective heritage that the deliberate neglect of this building reflects. Furthermore, the demolition of this building would irreparably harm a significant cultural heritage landscape. If the City of Ottawa issues a demolition permit it will be complicit in a clear case of demolition by neglect.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, we trust that our comments will be given serious consideration.

Best regards,



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President, Action Sandy Hill

Cc: Mélanie Joly, Minister – Canadian Heritage  
Mona Fortier, MP – Rideau-Vanier  
Nathalie des Rosiers, MPP – Rideau-Vanier  
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Peter Lewis, President – Rockcliffe Park Residents Association