

Thoughts on the proposed Cherry-Court Historic District

The proposal to give this part of the village “landmark status” is an attempt to freeze it in amber when, in reality, the history of this area and a lot of the village has always been one of constant flux and change.

Even the recommendation that has been presented to the Village Board describes this.

“They show the evolution of the cultural, economic [and] social history of the village...”

This evolution is ongoing. Changes have been made to homes and buildings here for 200 years. There is no ‘established and familiar visual feature of the Village’ here as structures are being rebuilt every year.

It is the people’s willingness to invest their time, their ideas, their capital in these buildings and homes that has kept Aurora adapting, and surviving so many cultural and economic changes.

Again, in the words of the recommendation:

“The unifying and defining historic feature of this neighborhood is its role in housing and providing familial and social cohesion among working families who made the growth and sustenance of the community possible.”

These are still the important roles in this part of the village.

It is not a museum. It is a place where people and families live their day-to-day lives. How will their day-to-day lives be enriched by changing the status of the area?

There is nothing sacred about the historic construction of these buildings. Many were thrown together with minimal craftsmanship from parts of sheds and barns with little thought to firm foundations or proper load-bearing.

This has led to a good many of them being gutted and rebuilt to ensure continued viability. There will continue to be situations where major overhaul to the structure is required.

There are surely cases where the best path forward includes redesigning a structure from the foundation up.

There needs to be flexibility to re-imagine the best use of a property. That includes new construction that integrates with the existing neighborhood.

As the old maxim emphasizes, the most valuable part of a property is not the structure but the “location, location, location.”

A property could be worth considerably more with a new or different structure built on the location.

By declaring it a landmark district you are imposing a restrictive covenant on the property and adversely impacting its economic potential.

And why is this recommendation being proposed now, when the village faces a time of such uncertainty as it adapts to the closure of Wells College?

The village would be better served if the Board was doing its utmost to present Aurora as a great place to live rather than a restricted enclave.

Finally, please remember that history, for its own sake, is not the priority here.

As noted in the authorization granting permission to designate a district as having landmark status, it is to “promote the cultural, economic, educational and general welfare of the Village's residents”. The residents are what make this village not the buildings.

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