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Condition Report – Holy Cross Caretaker’s House – South Park Street

Background

This report was commissioned by Dr. Brian O’Brien, M.D. and others to assess the condition of this dwelling located at the North west corner of Holy Cross Cemetery and fronting on the east side of South Park Street, Halifax.

It is understood that the Halifax Regional Municipality has designated this house as a Historic Property – not so much for the historical significance or architectural merit of the building but more for the preservation of the Victorian era streetscape of this part of South Park Street.

The house appears to have been constructed in the later part of the nineteenth century in a simple unadorned style usually associated with a working class dwelling. The original two storey building is approximately square in shape with a very low pitched roof – typical of construction practices at that time with many examples of similar construction in the surrounding neighbourhoods. The building rests on a stone foundation, is of timber frame construction originally sided with wooden shingles and subsequently covered with aluminum siding. The building has a small entry porch on the north side of the house and also a small side door porch on the south face of the building. It appears that an addition containing a kitchen was constructed at some period after the original construction.

Stages ?

The building is currently vacant and appears to have been vacant for some considerable time (perhaps a year or more) with minimal furniture and few household items.

Condition Report

General - The overall appearance of the building both from the exterior and interior perspective is one of severe neglect and disrepair and appears to be deteriorating with each passing season.

Exterior

Siding – The white aluminum siding is in poor condition, dirty and discoloured with a number of damaged areas. The wood trim around the windows requires cleaning and painting as well as repair in several places where some wood rot is evident.

Windows The majority of the building's windows are of wood construction, single glazed, with a number of broken lites. Aluminum storm windows have been installed on most windows at some point in the past. The condition of these windows is fair with some damaged frames, rusted fastening screws and discolored white frames.

Steps The front steps are in fair condition with evidence of rot/deterioration and in need of paint. The side porch is missing steps and railings completely making this exit unusable and unsafe in the event of a fire or other emergency requiring a quick exit from the building. This porch and missing steps face the main entrance to Holy Cross Cemetery .creating an eyesore. The concrete steps at the rear of the building are cracked and broken and their unevenness makes walking on these steps difficult and dangerous. → changed

Roof/ Skylight This inspection program did not permit examination of the roof and skylight. However, observations inside the second floor ceilings indicates evidence of past and/or present water entry and damage. Given the overall condition of the building, it is probably safe to assume the roof condition to be poor.

Landscaping All landscaping around the building is overgrown particularly on the front of the house – blocking light from entering the windows of the first floor rooms. Shrubs and bushes are in a very neglected state and the property is becoming an eyesore to the well maintained neighbours on South Park Street.

Stone Wall The property has a six to eight foot high stone wall running along the entire north property line and extending for some 150 feet or more along the northern property line of Holy Cross Cemetery. This wall is in excellent condition and should be preserved at all costs regardless of what becomes of the building.

Interior

Architectural

The original building consisting of wood lath and plastered walls and ceilings has been modified and renovated over the ensuing years. Many different wall types are currently evident including wood paneling, drywall, wallpaper in addition to severely cracked and damaged plaster walls and ceilings with large areas in a number of the rooms where the plaster has fallen off exposing the wood lath backing material.

Flooring consists of a variety of vinyl, laminate, carpeting, and painted softwood floors which were probably the original flooring material of the original house. Most floors are in poor condition with damaged/missing pieces, noticeable slopes and sags as well as unevenness between floor types.

The interior doors, trim, moldings and baseboards are generally in poor condition with missing /damaged elements, poor fitting doors (showing evidence of building movement or settlement). Most elements have several coats of paint which has been chipped and damaged over the years.

Kitchen cabinets are very basic wood shelves with some wood doors al in very poor condition.

The stairs leading from the first floor to the second are in fair condition with some damage to treads and risers. The wooden railing is a little loose in some locations and is entirely too low for current code requirements. The stairway to the basement is entirely unacceptable – no hand rails, very steep steps, very limited headroom, narrow stair treads and uneven risers.

The basement has a very low headroom clearance – less than six feet in most areas with many pipes and other obstructions further reducing headroom clearance. The basement walls are of stone construction with many areas showing past and/or present water damage. The basement has a definite damp and musty smell. The floor is of rough wooden boards, quite uneven and difficult to walk on. It is suspected that the boards cover the original dirt floor. There are a couple of small windows that admit natural light into the basement area. The basement houses an oil fired hot water furnace, the main electrical entrance (100 amp), and the water service entrance.

Structural

The central fireplace and chimney of the building makes the floor framing less straightforward and contributes to direction changes of the floor joists and somewhat shorter spans in some areas. The use of smaller (undersized) floor joists (2"x6") in some areas and poor connection practices has resulted in sags and settlements of the first floor. These deflections have been transferred to the second floor by the load-bearing walls which appear not to have been properly supported/reinforced at the main floor level. This structural deficiency has resulted in severely cracked plaster throughout, ill-fitting doors and trim and noticeable slopes and sags on the second floor. In some areas of the building, the floors appear to be "springy" due to excessive deflection from undersized floor joists and proper support systems. The overall structural condition is poor and may represent safety issues should the building be repurposed for the general public. The building would not be suitable for large groups of people wandering through the various rooms.



Mechanical

The original plumbing system including cast iron waste pipes, copper domestic water distribution piping has been extensively modified with ABS drainage piping and plastic water piping over the years. Evidence of past water leaks from past, joints, pipes etc. was observed in a number of locations in the building. The resulting "hodge-podge" plumbing system would require complete replacement to bring the system up to code.

The heating system consists of an oil-fired hot water boiler located in the basement and feeding both old style cast iron and more modern linear baseboard radiators in each room of the house. There appears to be a couple of heating zone valves connected to corresponding thermostats located on the first and second floors. The furnace and oil burner appear to have been replaced in the last several years and seem in reasonable condition. The heating piping arrangement is convoluted and obviously has been modified several times in the past. Water leaks (past or present) from the heating system appear in a number of locations and the overall heating system is poor requiring complete replacement if this building is to be renovated.

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Electrical

The wiring and 100 amp electrical entrance equipment is very old, not up the code, could present a safety hazard and would require complete replacement.

Summary

After completing the inspection of this building, one could easily argue that the overall building condition is POOR.

Restoration costs to address all of the building's shortcomings would be prohibitive.

From the inspection tour, there appear to be no architectural or historical features of the building worth preserving. The "bones" of the building are in such poor shape that restoration would essentially leave nothing original.

Thoughts of repurposing this building for use by the public entail serious fire and safety issues and requirements that the only rational course of action would be to tear the existing structure down and replace with a new building fully compliant with the latest codes and regulations