



Sharon Temple Museum Society,
18974 Leslie Street, Sharon ON L0G 1V0

September 26, 2008.

To: Town of East Gwillimbury

Subject: Official Plan Amendments, Village of Sharon

This letter responds to the June 16, 2008 report of the Development and Legal Services – Planning Branch. That report considers a number of amendments to the development area plan. We object to the proposed changes.

One amendment proposes to redesignate a 2.19 hectare parcel of land immediately south of the Temple property from Park to Mixed Use. Another proposes changes in density to areas to the west of the Temple property. We believe neither proposal constitutes good planning. The first needs to simply be rejected; the second needs to be rejected and rethought.

The reasons for these objections become clear in the context of the three levels of heritage recognition which the Temple had received.

1. National heritage designation

Sharon Temple is a nationally designated historical site of considerable importance. The Commemorative Integrity Statement of the federal Heritage ministry reads as follows:

The 1.8 ha. site was once part of a larger community of religious and domestic buildings in the village of Sharon associated with the Children of Peace. Today it is the only remaining location containing in situ and relocated buildings of the

sect. The present boundaries of the site correspond generally with the rail fence which surrounded the site.

The values of the designated place lie in:

Level 1 values

- *The unobstructed views of the site from Leslie St.*
- *the survival of most of the original property surrounding the Temple*
- *the open space undeveloped character of the site*
- *the location of the temple at the edge of the village of Sharon.*
- *the only remaining location of a building directly related to the faith and practices of the Children of Peace*

Level 2 values

- *the site of relocated buildings directly associated with two of the most prominent adherents of the Children of Peace - David Willson and Ebenezer Doan.*

The designated place will be unimpaired and not under threat when:

- *The boundaries of the site are retained*
- *The open-space, park-like and tranquil character is maintained*
- *Municipal planning policies, urban and transportation development activities surrounding the site respect its national historic and landmark value, as well as the tranquil character of the site experienced both inside and outside the Temple building*
- *The historic values of the place are communicated.*

Note the emphasis in the statement on open space and local planning policies. The proposed Official Plan Amendments will impair the Temple property, and do harm to it.

Local planning policies should ensure that the Temple property is recognized and respected. This will also help provide definition for the Village of Sharon, and it will add value to those wishing to build new homes in the area. This will not be done by simply surrounding the Temple property with normal subdivisions, as proposed. Ways must be found to enhance the Temple property, which in turn helps enhance surrounding properties.

We believe this is best done through judicious use and placement of open space. The Park designation of the land to the south is appropriate, particularly since it links the Temple property directly with the watercourse to the south. Retaining a 'natural' feel to this parcel will in the long run result in nearby housing having greater value because the Park designation better protects the heritage value of the Temple property: it is simply the right thing to do. By contrast, filling this parcel with buildings (and probably a roadway, extending F Street) would simply sink the Temple into a miasma of development providing no enhancement or recognition of the Temple's importance.

To the west, the proposal is to redesignate land for residential purposes, and install a road and a 10 meter road set-back (noted in the Amendment as 'Natural Heritage System'.) This is wrong. Better use should be made of the proposed park and school allocations so that the area to the west remains in an open state, setting off the Temple property from the west. We note that very substantial parcels have been set aside nearby for a neighbourhood park and an elementary school – Blocks 181 (1.31 hectares) and 180 (2.16 hectares). It would make more sense to combine these sites and to locate them immediately west of the Temple. (This would mean their former sites could be developed for housing.)

2. Provincial heritage recognition

The Sharon Temple property is also subject to a heritage conservation easement held by the Ontario Heritage Trust, and accordingly is considered a protected heritage property by provincial laws (particularly the Ontario Heritage Act) and policies.

The 2005 Provincial Policy Statement, issued under the Planning Act, specifically deals with designated properties in section 2.6.3, which reads:

Development and site alteration may be permitted on adjacent lands to protected heritage property where the proposed development and site alteration has been evaluated and it has been demonstrated that the heritage attributes of the protected heritage property will be conserved.

Mitigative measures and/or alternative development approaches may be required in order to conserve the heritage attributes of the protected heritage property affected by the adjacent development or site alteration.

Any planning proposal must evaluate its impact on the Sharon Temple property, and must be shown that it and subsequent development will not negatively impact the heritage attributes of the property. The Policy defines heritage attributes as '... the principal features, characteristics, context and appearance that contribute to the cultural heritage significance of a protected heritage property.' Placing mixed use property and medium density residential too close to the property will negatively impact the characteristics, context, and appearance of the Sharon Temple and the surrounding property, which is also of heritage importance, as seen in the Conservation Integrity Statement. Medium density buildings can include apartment buildings, duplexes, quadraplexes to a height of three storeys, which has a significant potential impact on the property. Mixed use zoning includes residential, retail and office uses in a variety of building forms.

The change in designation from parkland to mixed use negatively impacts the connectivity between the natural heritage and cultural heritage systems surrounding the Sharon Temple site and the other designated natural heritage systems, including the stream to the south west of the Sharon Temple site and the pedestrian/bike path indicated on the Sharon Community Plan.

3. Municipal designation

Sharon Temple is on the Council's list of important heritage structures. It is also recognized in the Sharon Community Plan, which states:

The Heritage District Area includes the Sharon Temple and a number of other heritage buildings and structures. This area is the focal point of the community and a major determinant of its unique character. Development in both public and private areas should be designed to enhance it's role as a focal point for Sharon, as well as allowing for the development of a "pedestrian friendly" shopping area which includes uses supportive of the existing heritage character. An important aspect of the Sharon Community is the Sharon Temple and the Civic Centre which will continue to develop into a vibrant and active Town square.

The key commitment of council in this statement is to enhance the Temple's role as a focal point for Sharon. The two proposed Official Plan Amendments have the effect of reducing the Temple's role as a focal point, and thus do not even meet the Town's existing policy as embodied in OPA 122.

General comments

We strongly oppose the proposed Official Plan Amendments and for the reasons stated we believe they represent bad planning. We want to work for good planning which makes the Temple property the focal point which many seem to agree is appropriate, and which will provide benefits to all parties.

We are prepared to sit down with local developers and the municipality's planners to work out good ways of achieving the changes we are proposing. We are confident that this collaboration will result in benefits for all parties, and ensure that the form of the development is economically attractive to the industry while enhancing the Temple property and providing an efficient development form for the municipality. These are discussions in which we are most anxious to engage.

Assuming that the appropriate changes can be made to the south and west of the Temple, the remaining challenge lies to the north, which is mostly municipal property. As Council knows, we have been eager to begin discussion about this precinct, and have been discouraged that our attempts to arrange a date for a charette have always been met with delay. We urge the town to immediately proceed with a charette so that the area to the north can be settled at the same time as the areas to the south and west.

Please be advised that I will be present to speak to the committee at the meeting on September 30. My office number is 416 977 5097.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Sewell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".

John Sewell,
Secretary,
Sharon Temple Museum Society.