



MEMORANDUM

TO: Heritage Markham Committee

FROM: Regan Hutcheson, Manager-Heritage Planning

DATE: July 14, 2021

SUBJECT: Heritage Permit Application
146 John St. Thornhill
Model Train Diorama
File: 21 125806 HE

Property/Building Description: 2 storey single detached dwelling constructed in 1998

Use: Residential

Heritage Status: Designated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act and classified as a Group C building, or contributing or non-contributing modern buildings within the Thornhill Heritage Conservation District.

Application/Proposal

- The applicant is seeking approval of a model train diorama on the front and west side yard of the private residential property.
- Originally the applicant was also seeking approval for the diorama and associated features on the public boulevard through a Heritage Permit application, however an owner can only apply for a Heritage Permit for their own property and must apply for a Road Occupancy Permit for works within the public right-of-way.

Background

- May 2021 – the issue of a model train diorama installed in the front yard of 146 John Street and on the adjacent public boulevard was brought to the City's attention. This feature (Blue Corner House Railroad) was attracting crowds and was being advertised on social media as a local attraction. This is a free display, although donations are accepted. No approval had been secured from the City.
- Most of the railway diorama on the private property was not readily visible due to the existing white picket fence and landscape hedging.
- The owner received a Notice of Obstruction from By-Laws, requiring that the display be removed.

- The owner applied for a Road Occupancy Permit to allow the “*placement of a miniature city/model train display at the front of the property along the boulevard on John St. As well as a chain acting as a visual barrier between the sidewalk and the boulevard grass to protect the grass, maintain safety and privacy.*” The request for a Road Occupancy Permit for the permanent display of the model and chain barricade was declined by the City of Markham. The City indicated that infrastructure within the Right-of-Way would impede with City maintenance and access to utility-related work on the boulevard.



- The owner also applied for a Heritage Permit. Staff contacted the applicant and confirmed that the application would only address the alteration to the private property.
- Based on feedback to date, there is some level of community support for this endeavour while at the same time concerns have been expressed primarily related to the safety of those attending the property especially in relation to the proximity of those visiting to the busy intersection/traffic; noise related to the train manoeuvres, and the operation of an ‘attraction’ in a residential area.
- In June, the owner modified the train set-up by removing the round diorama feature near the driveway and signage from the public boulevard, and instead installed the train track on a linear platform extended out from the top of the picket fence. The majority of the model train diorama is still hidden behind the picket fence and landscaping placed adjacent to the picket fence. Flower baskets now hang from the extended platform and the white chain link is still present. (see photos in Appendix ‘B’ and below). Technically, the features projecting off the picket fence (and white chain link fencing) still encroach upon the municipal boulevard.



Staff Comment

- **Thornhill Heritage Conservation District Plan** - this type of alteration to a property is not typical and is not specifically addressed in the policy/guidelines of the District Plan.
- The Heritage Permit Application is used for minor alterations to property in heritage conservation districts (that don't require other forms of approval such as building permits or applications for development). Typical Heritage Permit projects include painting, new or different wall cladding or roof treatments, changes to architectural decoration or features and new/extended fences in the front yard or parking areas/driveways, but also include projects such as front yard patios/lamp installations and permanent art installation (which could potentially include a railway diorama).
- **The consideration of this distinctive feature needs to be reviewed through a heritage lens – does this feature on private property negatively impact the heritage character of either 1) the subject property (a complementary new infill dwelling) or 2) the heritage conservation district as a whole.**
- According to the District Plan, the overall objective in designating the District is “*to ensure the retention and conservation of the District’s cultural heritage resources and heritage character, and to guide change so that it contributes to and does not detract from, the District’s architectural, historical , and contextual character*”.
- Due to the screening provided by the white picket fence and the landscape treatment adjacent to the fencing, the majority of the model railway diorama on the private property is not readily visible from the public realm, and does not appear to negatively impact the heritage character of the area.
- Although not part of this permit application which deals with private property, the City will require the portion of the railway diorama and related features that overhang the boulevard (City-property) to be removed due to a number of legal and operational issues.

Suggested Recommendation for Heritage Markham

THAT Heritage Markham has no objection from a heritage perspective to the Heritage Permit application in support of the model railway diorama on the front and side yards of the private property at 146 Main Street, Thornhill as this feature is generally screened from public views due to the existing picket fence and landscape hedging;

AND THAT Heritage Markham Committee's support for the Heritage Permit application is subject to the applicant obtaining any other necessary permits or approvals from the City or other authorities, and compliance with all municipal by-laws.

File: 146 John St.

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Location Map



Appendix 'A' – Previous Photographs

May 2021 – Model Train Diorama
Part of Diorama on Public Boulevard



Signage, fencing and model train on public ROW



Photograph during winter months



Visitors

Appendix 'B' – Current Photographs



Extending out from picket fence with flower baskets below and chain link barrier





Extending out from picket fence near driveway



View from the south side of John Street

Model Train Diorama (front yard of private property- behind the hedging)

