



MEMORANDUM

TO: Heritage Markham Committee

FROM: Peter Wokral, Senior Heritage Planner

DATE: January 10, 2024

SUBJECT: Request for Feedback
141 Main Street, Unionville,
The Robert Harrington House
Installation of black metal railings on verandas
NH 23 114972

Property/Building Description: Historic former residence constructed 1873

Use: Medical Office

Heritage Status: Designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act and identified as a Class 'A' in the Unionville Heritage Conservation District (building or buildings that define the heritage character of the district).

Background

- Recently, simple black painted metal railings were installed on the front and side verandas at 141 Main St. Unionville (see photographs of the new railings);
- Although both verandas of the house did not historically have railings (See archival photograph of the house), reconstruction of the veranda floor deck triggered the requirement to install railings compliant with the Ontario Building Code (OBC). Railings, were also desirable for the new, owners of the property who operate a Medical Office, because some of their patients are elderly, or have mobility issues, and they want to make the building as safe as possible for its users;
- Heritage Planning Staff reviewed and signed-off on the building permit application required for the re-construction of the one storey tail of the building approved through a site plan application, but did not note the railings which were added to the verandas in the same drawing (See approved Building Permit elevations);
- By-signing off on the Building Permit Drawing which included the railings, they were effectively approved from a Building Permit perspective, but technically, not from a heritage perspective through the required heritage permitting process of the Ontario Heritage Act;
- Therefore, Heritage Planning Staff wants to obtain input from the Heritage Committee on the appropriateness of the railings that have already been installed.

Staff Comment

Building Code Requirements

- Because the veranda floor decks were re-constructed, and therefore deemed to be new construction, code compliant railings are required by the Ontario Building Code (OBC) and there is no opportunity to return the veranda to its original appearance not having railings;
- OBC compliant railings or guards are a minimum of 42” (1.07m) high, cannot have openings between balusters greater than 20cm (7.9”) and cannot be easily climbable. These requirements make code compliant railings look significantly different from historic veranda railing designs, and on certain buildings they can negatively impact the appearance of a historic dwelling due to their resemblance to a baby crib (see examples of code compliant wooden railings on historic homes in Appendix ‘F’).

Unionville Heritage Conservation District Plan guidance

- Section 9.4.6. “Porches” of the Unionville Heritage Conservation District Plan does not contain policies or guidelines for the introduction of railings on homes where they historically did not exist, but the Plan generally requires the use of traditional building materials (which in the case of railings in the district was wood). However, Section 9.4.9. “Accessibility Considerations” of the District Plan states that *“The general goal is to provide the highest level of access for individuals with disabilities, with the lowest level of impact on the heritage structure. Barrier free access should be provided to promote independence for the disabled person to the highest degree practicable, while preserving the significant historical features.”*
- The applicant and their architect specified the simple metal railings that were installed on the verandas at 141 Main St. to make the property safer for people with disabilities, and because they felt that a simple, black, metal, code compliant railing would be less visible, while clearly not pretending to be a historic railing, and would have less of a negative impact on the appearance of the building, than a code compliant wooden railing composed of thicker components;

Approach can be supported due to OBC requirements

- Heritage Section Staff support maintaining open verandas which traditionally did not have railings. However, in this specific case where the OBC requires the introduction of a railing due to the reconstruction of the veranda decks, staff agree with the owner’s and architect’s rationale for selecting the railing they did, and share the opinion that a code compliant wooden railing painted either the same white colour as the historic veranda trims, or in black would be more detrimental than the look of the metal railing that was installed. Therefore it is recommend that the simple metal railing remain in place.

Suggested Recommendation for Heritage Markham

THAT Heritage Markham has no objection to the simple black railings installed on the verandas of 141 Main St. because they are required by the Ontario Building Code, and because they have less of a negative impact on the historic appearance of the building than a comparable, code compliant, wooden, railing of thicker material, painted either white or black.

Attachments

Appendix A- Location & Aerial Map

Appendix B- Google Street View of 141 Main Street Unionville

Appendix C- Photograph of the new metal railings

Appendix D- Archival photograph of the house

Appendix E- Approved Building Permit Drawings

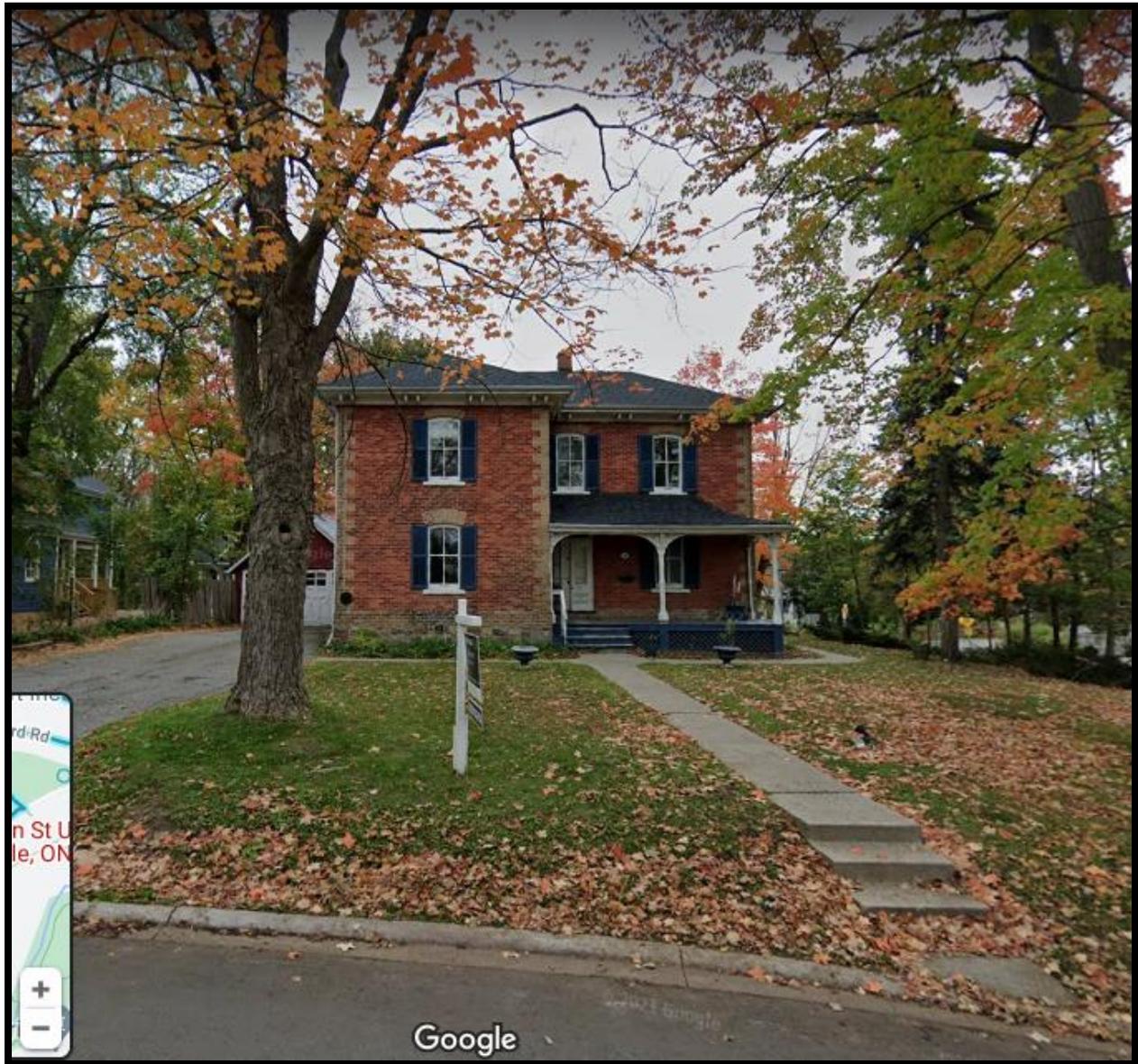
Appendix F- Photographs of code compliant wooden railings on other heritage buildings

File: 141 Main Street Unionville

APPENDIX A- LOCATION & AERIAL MAP



APPENDIX B- GOOGLE STREETVIEW OF 141 MAIN STREET UNIONVILLE



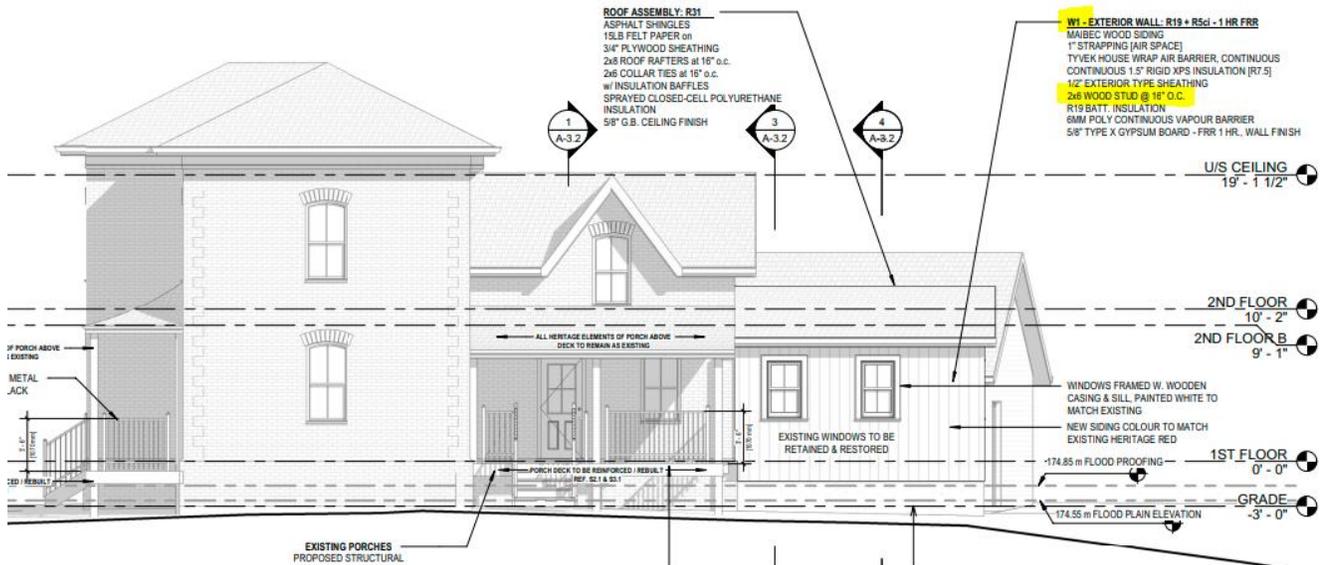
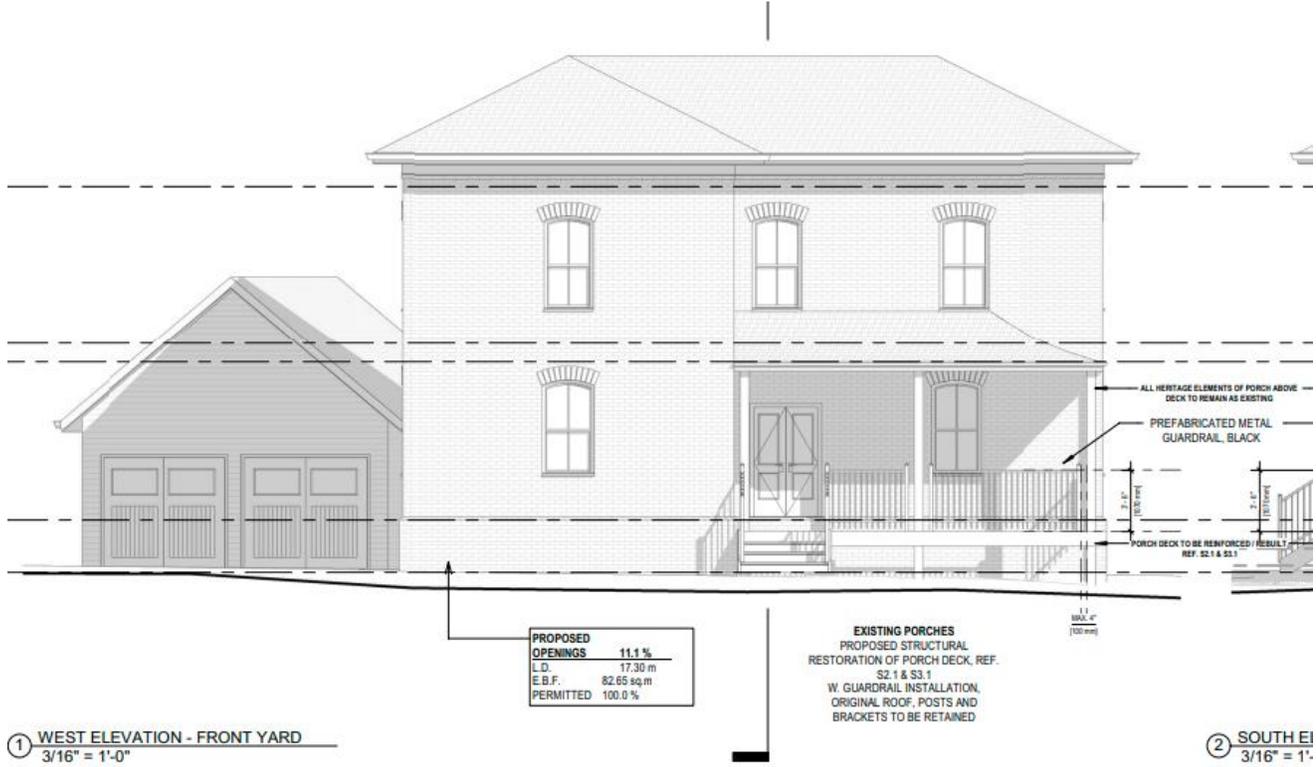
APPENDIX C – Photograph of the new metal railings



APPENDIX D – Archival photograph of the house



APPENDIX E – Approved Building Permit Drawings



APPENDIX F – Photographs of code compliant wooden railings



Archival and contemporary photo of the same house with original historic railings and code compliant wooden railing.



The same house before and after a wooden code compliant railing added to roof of veranda