

To: Heritage Markham Committee  
Regan Hutcheson, Manager-Heritage Planning  
City of Markham

Subject: Response to Demolition Proposal for Munshaw House, 10 Ruggles Avenue, Thornhill  
(Langstaff)

Dear Members of Heritage Markham Committee,

### Executive Summary Page

This letter opposes the demolition of the Munshaw House at 10 Ruggles Avenue, arguing that its loss would severely impact Langstaff's cultural heritage. Despite fire damage, *significant portions of the building are viable for restoration*. Our Society has the experience to explain and illustrate how this restoration can be achieved. Replicating the house would lead to inauthentic "foe heritage." The letter frames this demolition as part of a broader cultural erosion and calls for action to preserve Langstaff's identity.



Conceptual Restoration Drawing- Heritage Section staff

The owner's proposal for the Munshaw House relocation potentially violates four key conditions and obligations outlined in the January 10, 2024, memorandum and the Heritage Agreement: <https://pub-markham.escrimemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=82444> Please Review ←

If the owner now wishes to demolish the Munshaw House, the following are potential violations of the established agreements and heritage preservation obligations that can be identified:

1. Ontario Heritage Act (Part IV): The Act mandates preservation, and demolition without exhausting all preservation options, violates this mandate.
2. 2014 Heritage Agreement: The agreement explicitly prohibits demolition and requires relocation and restoration of the house within the Langstaff Secondary Plan.
3. Neglect of Maintenance Obligations: The owner is failing to maintain and secure the house as required under the Keep Markham Beautiful By-law.
4. Conservation Plan: No comprehensive restoration and relocation plan has been implemented, breaching the obligation to preserve the structure.

These potential violations fundamentally undermine the legal and heritage preservation frameworks that govern this historically significant property. Please take the time now to review our careful assessments within this letter.

### Formal Letter Begins:

We wrote to you in June and also spoke to you about the value of this Built-Heritage Asset. Our assessment and conclusions about preservation of the structure remain unchanged. **Key:** The staff report and agent photos by our observation, show the worst damage within approximately 35% of the building and many studs are actually 4x2's that can sustain significant damage yet still be viable after sand blasting (four other char removal techniques could apply as well) and then stabilization reinforcement, where 65% of *other sectors of the asset are still viable, but not shown pictorially, or objectively considered*. I am writing again here as the Heritage Advocate member of the Thornhill Historical Society to address the demolition proposal outcomes and application for the Munshaw House at 10 Ruggles

Avenue. The latest staff report outlines significant challenges regarding the restoration of the building following the June 2024 fire, but our society believes that it is critical that we include now the larger, slow-moving, and progressive forces that are contributing to the erosion of Langstaff's cultural heritage and identity.

### **Cultural Preservation of the Munshaw House within the Municipal Act**

The **Ontario Heritage Act** places a clear responsibility on municipalities to protect heritage-designated properties such as the Munshaw House. Under **Part IV** of the Act, the City of Markham has a legal duty to ensure that heritage properties are not subject to demolition unless all feasible preservation efforts have been thoroughly exhausted and they are not in our opinion. The Act prioritizes **restoration and conservation**, and only in exceptional cases, where no other options remain, should demolition be permitted.



In this case, the deterioration of the Munshaw House must be viewed not only in the context of the recent fire damage but as part of a longer-term process of neglect. The **Municipal Act** and its planning frameworks charge municipalities with upholding cultural and historical preservation as central components of urban development. Allowing the demolition of the Munshaw House would set a dangerous precedent, undermining the City's legal obligations under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Furthermore, the **concept of demolition by neglect** must be considered. The staff report highlights that the property was left unsecured, even after the owner had committed to ensuring its protection. This failure to act responsibly should not be rewarded with permission for demolition. As outlined in the Ontario Heritage Act, it is the municipality's duty to enforce conservation standards, and in this instance, the owner's negligence should be addressed through **legal remedies** aimed at restoration, not destruction.

### **Réplication as a Non-Viable Solution**

We express our concern with the suggestion of replicating the Munshaw House. Replication, by its very nature, leads to the creation of "foe heritage"—a heritage structure that may outwardly resemble the original but lacks the authenticity and integrity of the original asset. By the time such a resource is completed by 2035-3040, its significance and connection to the past are diluted, as interpretative design suggestions often evolve over time, reducing the structure to a mere imitation. As a whole community, we must resist this erosion of authenticity.

The slow dismantling of a culture happens in stages, as recognized within international laws. In the case of Langstaff, we are seeing the removal of community members, the loss of historical continuity, and the gradual undermining of the cultural environment that has made Langstaff unique.

### **The Cultural and Historical Importance of the Munshaw House**

As detailed in the staff report, the Munshaw House is not merely a structure; it is one of the last remaining physical links to Langstaff's pioneering past. The loss of this building represents a broader cultural erosion that threatens the community's historical identity. As we previously discussed in our work around the concept of *cultural loss*, slow and deliberate destruction of cultural heritage can have long-lasting impacts on the people tied to that history.

This concept is especially relevant here. Within the United Nations the loss of entire cultures were first addressed by Raphael Lemkin. The underlying process of cultural destruction includes the phased and systematic destruction of traditions, values, language, and cultural markers that make a community distinct (Cadmus). This is what we are witnessing in Langstaff, as its identity slowly disintegrates in front of our eyes, with each heritage asset loss. The Munshaw House would be the final loss with a Part IV designation.



Degradation over time leads to people moving away by overt or subtle methods. In Langstaff, we have seen the slow erosion of the cultural landscape, and the proposed demolition is a tragic symbol of this larger phenomenon.

This destruction continues today and this final proposed loss of the oldest, designated and revered dwelling is emblematic of how communities are progressively stripped of their cultural and human elements, making the area increasingly inhospitable to families and thereby extinguishing its future prospects that are rooted in past culture. Last year we witnessed the loss of the last place of community worship due to the cities failure to enforce simple maintenance upon the building that the city could have indeed paid for with relative ease and now this.

The slow removal of these cultural markers—whether they are the homes, community buildings, public spaces, or elements of family life—reflects what Lemkin and others have turned into laws that protect entire cultures and your research will help you to identify the international laws that are relevant. This destruction is not overt, nor does it happen overnight, but it is no less real or harmful.

**Call to Action – This should be our goal!**



*Conceptual Restoration Drawing- Heritage Section staff*

In light of these factors, our Society urges Heritage Markham to reject the proposal for demolition and instead take bold steps to preserve what remains of Langstaff’s heritage. We also urge the municipal and provincial governments to recognize the ongoing cultural destruction in this community, and to implement measures that ensure families can continue to live and thrive in this historic area.

Heritage is not just about buildings—it is about people, stories, and continuity. Once we allow this cultural chain to be broken, it is almost impossible to restore.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We hope we can work together to protect Langstaff’s historical identity and future as a thriving community.

Sincerely,

Barry Nelson Heritage Advocate and Treasurer, Thornhill Historical Society

Approved by:  
Duessa Du Plooy  
President  
Thornhill Historical Society