

STAIRS HOUSE

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

DRAFT



20.04.30

INTRODUCTION

Architecture49 and WSP have been retained by Southwest Properties Limited to develop a preliminary design for the property of the Stairs House and adjoining lands and structures spanning between South and Harvey Streets in south end Halifax, for a residential redevelopment of the site. This report will outline a Heritage Management Plan (HMP) for the property and is to be read in conjunction with the Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) for the project and the related larger Development Agreement design submittal, both prepared by this office. Please refer to the Heritage Impact Statement for a history of the property, full statements of Heritage Value and Character Defining Elements, and current and historical images and maps of the site. The HIS report is appended to this plan.

Based on the HIS, this report will generally focus on the Stairs House proper and its site, and will focus on the exterior alterations to the building.

Plan Objectives:

- Outline the current condition of the building and site investigations to date on which this report is based.
- Describe the proposed work to the site, and the underlining information and assumptions guiding the scope of work.
- Illustrate the proposed scope of work through existing and proposed elevations of the building, appended to this document.
- Schedule future site investigations and reviews and describe a methodology for recording of findings and their incorporation into the proposed work.
- Provide Order of Magnitude Cost estimates for work proposed to the exterior of the Building.
- Provide a CMP summary.

BUILDING CONDITION AND INVESTIGATIONS

At the time of this plan, the buildings on the Stairs House property all remain as fully occupied rental units and as such access to the unit interiors has been limited. The exterior of the buildings have been reviewed on multiple occasions principally for this plan during the first weeks of March 2020. Assumptions based on observations will be presented later in this plan when discussing individual building systems. On March 11th an opening was made in the vinyl siding on the eastern ear wall of the Stairs house, exposing 1 ½" of extruded polystyrene insulation lying between the vinyl cladding and wood shingles below. Exposed shingles were in good condition with minimal paint layers, though thick enough for thin cracking to form. Note Charcoal colour.



Based on inspection of sills around the building, this insulation layer exists around the building.

Other investigations were considered in areas of high interest, particularly the front entry porch, but due to the occupied nature of the building and the pending approval of the project, further destructive investigations are not proposed until approvals have been given to the overall project.

PROPOSED WORK

The intent of the proposed work is to return the Stairs House to a sound and durable condition in keeping with its stated heritage values and characteristics. It will involve *preservation* of existing contributing materials and elements, with many elements known to exist, and much also presumed to remain buried under modern over-claddings. It will involve *restoration* with the reinstatement of previously removed contributing elements and the removal of additions not in keeping with the character of the building and property. The work will also involve *re-habilitation*; alterations to the building to address its proposed new context as part of a larger development.

PROPOSED USE

The proposed future use of the Stairs House will maintain the residential nature of the home. At present, the owner is considering either apartments, or common areas for the larger complex. While the decision will have implications for the interior design of the project, impacts on the exterior of the building are minimal and will be discussed late in this report.

ADDITIONS, REMOVALS, RESTORATIONS

REAR WEST WING The west wing of the home will be removed back to the main north wall of the home. Removal will facilitate the new development on the remainder of the property and allow for new non-combustible construction to bridge between the non-combustible new building and the combustible house. Portions of the wing will remain as part of the existing west wall, with upper portions of the wing shortened back to the previously two-storeys with truncated hipped roof. This will involve re-instatement of a hipped main roof over the principle arched western window. Strong photographic evidence existing for this configuration. Photos also indicate eave trim work on this area of the west wall differed from the original home. The two storey roof form will be modified in the extent it extends above the main roof ridgeline, where the original roof extended higher than the main house. Additionally the point of connection to the rear of the home has been extended approximately 10 feet to the east to accommodate alignment with the central corridor of the new building. The eastern extent of this connection may revert to the existing line of the rear wing based on final use of the home and final life-safety design of the lower portion of the new building immediately adjacent the home.

EASTERN 20TH C. ADDITIONS AND PORCH The one storey brick and wood clad 20th century additions will be removed for the re-instatement of the earlier open eastern porch. The additions are 20th century efforts to provide for additional office space when the home was leased to the RCAF and are generally not in keeping with the overall style, materiality, or form of the home. Removal allows for re-instatement of a portion of the original eastern lawn and the porch facing it. The porch appears in two photographs with sufficient detail for its re-creation including hipped form, scrolled eave, column design and arrangement, screen and trellises and railing height and pickets. Porch access from the home and access to the garden are not known at this time and will be determined based on interior layout of the adjoining rooms and intended use of the rooms and porch.

NORTH RAISED ROOF AND DORMER The work proposes returning the rear north roof of the house to its original sloped roof profile, complete with the re-instatement of one of the two dormers once occupying this roof. This work is done on the basis that the current raised north wall, while facilitating better apartment layout, it obscures the overall form of the building and is not in keeping with the character of the home. One element that will be lost in the work is the current small second floor eastern bay window which will be removed to allow the lowering of the eave. While the bay window is in keeping with the design of the home, its loss is outweighed by the benefit of re-instating the original gable profile of the home. Bay relocation is a considered alternative to complete removal, though a suitable location has not been identified.

SOUTH ENTRY PORCH Site investigations indicate that the existing south entry porch may have a shingle cladding under its vinyl wrapper. This is in contrast to the classical design of the porch known from very good photographic evidence. Surviving material and design is to be confirmed with the removal of the vinyl cladding, but at present the work proposes the re-instatement of the classical detailing on the porch, its eastern door, and the curved stairs accessing both doors. It should be noted that the proposed design of the porch and its decorative iron railings and fences is likely the work of the Stairs family, with the 1865 Rogers photo of the south façade from the east indicating a single south window, wooden fencing, and likely a lower roof line. Close inspection upon the state of work may confirm some of the history of the porch.

INDIVIDUAL TRADE ELEMENTS

The following provides commentary on individual trade elements of work based on the current understanding of the building, and anticipated work and the assumptions upon which they are based.

SITE WORKS As the site is identified as an area of high archeological concern, oversight in accordance with the provincial regulations is anticipated through removals of the other buildings on the property and excavation of the site. Proper shoring design will also be required where excavating next to the home and along the remaining field stone wall on the western edge of the property. Prior to larger site excavations the damaged portions of this stone wall are to be re-laid, and the wall protected through the work with plywood coverings.

STAIRS HOUSE PROTECTION Hoardings, barriers, temporary closures and enclosures are to be provided through the construction to prevent damage to the original building from adjacent work, work to the home, and from the elements.

STAIRS HOUSE SELECTIVE DEMOLITIONS Prior to removal of the west wing, over-claddings will be removed so that the wing can be photographically documented before for removal. Demolition will first involve review of existing constructions to determine the best methods for removals without damaging remaining portions of the building. Particular care will be required with removal of stone foundations, depending of the degree of masonry interlock between the main building and the wing. Eastern additions will require similar review for similar reasons, and for any remaining evidence of the previously removed east porch and ground floor openings on the east wall.

FOUNDATIONS Portions of the removed west rear addition ironstone foundations are to be retained for possible repair material for any required re-instatement of the north wall of the original home where the wing is removed. Openings in the original foundation wall where the rear addition will be removed are to be closed along with the eastern basement exit door and where basement window wells are removed. These closures will be in-filled with like material in such a manner that the location of the original openings remain legible.

Other foundation repair will include investigation of contemporary concrete foundation extensions applied outward to the front south foundation wall of the home. At minimum, these extensions are to be removed to below grade.

MASONRY WORK Stone masonry work will include the minor replacement of select overly weathered and damaged smooth-cut sandstone stones forming the piers of the front entry porch, and the re-instatement of the main south entry steps based on very good photographic evidence.

Bick masonry will involve the re-instatement of the central and western chimneys of the main body of the home for which good photographic evidence exists and which existing interior layouts suggest still remain to the roof line. The nethermost chimney in the rear wing will be removed. The status of the chimney located at the north wall of the home where the rear wing attached will require further investigation for both impact on interior layout, and the practicality of its shoring and support.

FOUNDATION PARGING The existing south foundation wall of the original home is principally of ironstone slate construction with brick framing the jambs of window openings. This wall is parged smooth and faux lined to mimick the stone coursings of the porch. We believe this effect to be original, and it is to be made good where missing or damaged across the front of the south wall of the house with a lime based render, matching the original line patterning. Texture of render requires further investigation.

METALWORK Original front entry railings, pickets and newels are proposed to be re-instated based on very good photographic evidence. Whether these elements will be custom castings, stick assembled or welded, or catalogue selections, or a combination of these methods, is to be determined through design development and confirmed through permit submissions.

WOOD FRAMING AND SHEATHING With the re-instatement of the western hipped gable and the northern sloped roof, inspection of the current assemblies will be required during selective demolition for evidence of prior framing methods and to confirm rough framing assemblies. Existing ground floor east wall openings to the one storey additions will require examination for closure, and for evidence of previous opening configuration.

Wood sill deterioration is anticipated along the western side of the building where the driveway has been raise above the level of the foundation. Extent and scope of repair is to be determined though construction. No obvious settlement noted at present. Final grading will return grade to a lower level along west side of the building.

WOOD CLADDINGS With the removal of the over-claddings the design and conditions of the presumed underlying shingle work and wood trims can be documented and accessed. Should original trim work not exist under the existing claddings, good photographic evidence exists such that coupled with standard profiles of the day, overall molding design and profiles can be developed in keeping with the character of the building.

Photographic evidence shows good views of the south elevation porch columns, paneling, and entablature, ground floor window trims, second floor pediment, Palladian Window and dormers, roof ridgeline, eastern porch, and driveway gate. The photographic evidence will serve as the basis of design, to be confirmed through site review upon removal of the over-claddings.

ROOFING Current photographic evidence suggest either slate or wood shingle original roofing. The building is currently roofed with modern non-fiberglass asphalt shingles for sloped surfaces, and presumably poured asphalt or built up roofing for low sloped roofed. Roofing is intended to be replaced in kind with the existing, with a simple straight 'traditional' three tab design without raised profiles.

FLASHINGS Most existing flashings are modern painted metal with some existing lead observed. New flashings are to be lead or lead-coated copper where exposed to view. Modern membrane flashings may be employed where obscured from view. New gutters will be provided in keeping with the existing photographic evidence.

INSULATION Based on text records the original exterior walls are insulated with a concrete and straw dawk material. The intention is to leave this material in place. Where new construction permits new breathable batt insulation will be added. Otherwise efforts to improve thermal comfort of the building will focus on reducing air infiltration to the building and improved mechanical heating design where warranted. The intent is to not change the thermal conditions acting on the original wood cladding assembly.

WOOD WINDOWS Many of the original wood windows appear to remain today and though partially hidden behind modern aluminum storm windows, they appear to be in reasonable conservable condition. With removal of the modern storms, windows can be individually accessed. The intent at this time is to restore original windows and provide new storms; either of the magnetic interior, or wood exterior variety depending on the suitability of interior and exterior trimwork. Original windows are notable for slender sash and muntin profiles making them likely unsuitable for double glazed upgrades.

Existing original windows include:

South Elevation: eastern basement windows, three of four main floor windows, dormer windows, Palladian pediment window, entry porch south windows and west door transom.

East Elevation: One ground floor window and two upper floor windows. One second floor window of the rear west wing. Window is to reviewed for suitability as match for other windows to be replaced, notably southern and eastern ground floor windows.

North Elevation: Two second floor rear wing windows, one of which should be reviewed similar to window noted above.

Western Elevation: Two second floor rear wing windows, one of which should be reviewed similar to window noted above. Main building basement stair window, and two southern-most windows.

The remainder of the windows appear to be wood or vinyl replacements not in keeping with the character of the home. Remaining windows requiring replacement include the large arched western stair window for which good photographic evidence exists, the remaining west wall bay windows, the west wall window north of the side entry door, one main floor south window to match surviving, basement porch windows to match surviving, one ground floor east window to match surviving, reinstated north dormer window to match surviving, and two north ground floor windows to match surviving.

Exterior trim condition, design, and scope of work to be determined upon removal of over-claddings.

WOOD DOORS Original exterior wood doors do not remain, either on the front porch or at the west side entry. Original main entry door(s) are to be confirmed. Existing photographic evidence suggests a half-light screen porch door with double or single paneled bottom. Many original interior doors survive in currently publicly accessible areas of the home which support the double lower panel design and may generally serve as guidance in the design of new exterior doors, including for eastern porch access.

PAINTING AND COLOUR The building is a painted wood structure. A building exterior colour paint scheme will be developed based on photographic evidence, and analyses paint samples retrieved from surviving original material. Despite the dark charcoal colour uncovered at the rear of the building. The final colour scheme is anticipated to be a light colour for walls and trimwork, with darker colour(s) for window sashes, doors, exterior stairs metalwork, driveway entry gate, and porch rose trellises. A 1970's photo of the porch indicates a blue colour scheme.

LANDSCAPING Grass lawns will be maintained along the front of the building and along its eastern porch. A short eastern concrete wall running in line with the front face of the building and end in a re-built east site stair. This wall will be obscured with soft planting and will manage the grade change along the east side of the building allowing for a relatively flat east lawn. Climbing roses will be planted at the porch trellises. Photographs show several roses climbing the south wall of the home.

ACCESSIBILITY AND LIFE SAFETY Egress requirements are to be confirmed through the final intended use of the original building. It is assumed at this time that barrier free-access to the home will be gained through the proposed new apartment structure.

SCHEDULING AND DESIGN CONFIRMATION.

Note that the design to date represents a schematic level of development based on the available information to date. The intent is that larger scale design decisions are generally agreed to with the approval of the Development Agreement with finer scale items resolved through construction document development. We anticipate that upon issuing of a development agreement, further selective destructive site investigations and review and documenting of interiors will be made to inform the production of construction and building permit documents. Any existing site information remaining to be determined by larger deconstruction will be identified in the permit documents with instructions for the incorporation of the investigations into the schedule and scope of work.

ESTIMATION ORDER-OF-MAGNITUDE COST

Omitted at this time.
To be included with final draft

SUMMARY

Stair House is good example of earl 19th century sub-urban development to the south of the original town grid. It has experienced change and adaptation though out its 182 year history, with some of those changes challenging the historic form and value of the building, particularly with the more intensive use brought on by its conversion to apartments. The proposed work to Stair House intends to *conserve* remaining historically important defining characteristics and elements, *restore* known important historic characteristics and elements to represent the home s it was prior t o intensive apartment use, and finally to *re-habilitate* portions of the home adapting it to its proposed larger site development.

Strong photographic evidence exists depicting the home over several time periods giving us insight to prior forms, materials and detailing, and today the home survives with overall retained exterior building form and materiality, and with original interiors sub-divided but generally intact. We believe that the interventions to the home are based on current evidence and educated assumptions to be substantiated though further investigations, and not on conjecture. Additionally the design does not propose to return the building to a set period in time but rather it re-enforces the adaptive history of the building.

The proposed design is not a finished product. There are several remaining decisions including interior use and configuration, adapted openings, wood window conditions, and individual element design and detailing. The design will be refined through further investigation, namely removal of over-claddings, and confirmed as work proceeds through construction documentation, permitting, selective demolition, and construction.

Appendices:

Existing and Proposed Stairs House Elevations, dated March 27, 2020

Stairs House Heritage Impact Statement dated November 6th, 2019.