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**Item No. 9.1.4**  
**Heritage Advisory Committee**  
**June 25, 2020**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Heritage Advisory Committee

**SUBMITTED BY:** *-Original Signed-*  

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Kelly Denty, Director of Planning and Development  
*-Original Signed-*  

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Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** April 17, 2020

**SUBJECT:** **Case H00481: Request to Include 5988 University Avenue, Halifax in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality**

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**ORIGIN**

On August 13, 2019, Regional Council passed a motion directing staff to examine the potential for including 5988 University Avenue, Halifax, in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*The Heritage Property Act*

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Heritage Advisory Committee recommend that Regional Council:

1. Set a date for a heritage hearing to consider the inclusion of 5988 University Avenue, Halifax, as shown on Map 1, in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality; and
2. Approve the request to include 5988 University Avenue, Halifax, as shown on Map 1, in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality as a municipal heritage property.

## **BACKGROUND**

On August 13, 2019, Regional Council directed staff to examine the potential of including 5988 University Avenue in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality (see Figure 1). The subject property is located at the southeast quadrant of the University Avenue / Robie Street intersection and is the site of the historic Morris Street Engine House (now known as Fire Station #2). The construction of the two-storey structure began in 1907 and concluded the following year. The building was built by George B. Low (who was one of Halifax's pioneers in concrete building construction) and designed by William B. Fidler. Morris Street Engine House has served Canada's oldest fire service for over 110 years, and today it acts as a repository for many of the department's historic artifacts.



Figure 1: Morris Street Station  
Source: Woodford, Zane (1999), *Halifax Star*

This application is being considered in accordance with Sections 14 (Recommendation as municipal heritage property) and 15 (Registration as municipal heritage property) of the *Heritage Property Act*.

### ***HRM's Heritage Property Program***

The purpose of the HRM Heritage Property Program is to help protect and conserve significant heritage resources including buildings, streetscapes, sites, areas, and conservation districts that reflect the rich heritage found in local communities throughout HRM. One of the principal aims of the Heritage Property Program is to recognize significant heritage resources through the inclusion of properties into the Municipal Registry of Heritage Properties.

Under the Heritage Property Program, all registration applications for heritage buildings are evaluated by the Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) using "The Evaluation Criteria for Registration of Heritage Buildings in Halifax Regional Municipality" (Attachment A).

The Evaluation Criteria for scoring a property and building are broken down into six categories as follows:

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Highest Possible Score</b>
1. Age	25
2. Historical or Architectural Importance	20
3. Significance of Architect/Builder	10
4. Architectural Merit: Construction type and Style	20
5. Architectural Integrity	15
6. Relationship to Surrounding Area	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Should the HAC score a property with more than 50 points, a positive recommendation will be forwarded to Regional Council. If the property does not score more than 50 points, then the report will not be forwarded to Regional Council.

### ***Nova Scotia Heritage Property Act***

HRM's Heritage Property Program receives its authority from the *Heritage Property Act* which seeks:

*“...to provide for the identification, designation, preservation, conservation, protection and rehabilitation of buildings, public-building interiors, structures, streetscapes, cultural landscapes, areas and districts of historic, architectural or cultural value, in both urban and rural areas, and to encourage their continued use.”*

Sections 14(2) and 15(1) under the *Heritage Property Act* require that notice of recommendation is given to the property owner at least thirty (30) days prior to any Council decision to include the property in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality. The property owner is also given an opportunity to address Council before they make a decision on the registration request. Should a positive recommendation be forwarded to Council, heritage staff will ensure the required notices are sent to the owners and deposited at the Registry of Deeds. In this case, where the property is owned by HRM, notice shall be served to the Office of the Clerk.

## **DISCUSSION**

Heritage registration applications are evaluated by the HAC relative to six evaluation criteria as outlined previously, and described in greater detail in Attachment A. To assist the HAC in their evaluation and scoring, staff offer the following comments based on a historical research report (Attachment B). The historical research in support of this application has been undertaken by an experienced research consultant.

### **1. Age:**

The property at 5988 University Avenue was acquired in 1907 to house the Morris Street Engine House. After reviewing numerous construction bids, the City Works Office accepted a proposal spearheaded by George B. Low in April 1907. Low's proposal for a singular building made entirely of concrete was selected because it was unique and the most affordable option. Low partnered with William B. Fidler, who designed the building, and began construction in 1907.

Due to the age of the engine house, staff recommend a score of 9 points.

### **2. Historical OR Architectural Importance:**

#### **Relationship to Important Occasions, Institutions, Personages or Groups**

Halifax's Union Fire Club was founded in 1754, making it the oldest fire service in Canada. The service continued to operate relatively unchanged until the late-1800s when a dispute between the City and the volunteer force ultimately led to the creation of the Halifax Fire Department in 1896. The department's establishment led its transition from part-time to full-time firefighters by the end of 1919. Morris Street Engine House has provided local fire services for over 110 years. In recent years, it has also served as a tourist attraction, as a collection of the department's historical documents, photographs, and artifacts are stored and displayed there.

Due to the property's unique historic connection with the Halifax Fire Department (the oldest fire department in Canada), staff recommend a score between 11 and 15 points.

### **3. Significance of Architect or Builder:**

George B. Low was a Halifax-based contractor who immigrated from Scotland to Canada in 1885. Low was a local pioneer in reinforced concrete building construction; he constructed Halifax's first fully concrete building, the A.M. Bell building at 1861 Granville Street, in 1904 (see Figure 2). The A.M. Bell building was added to HRM's Registry of Heritage Property in 1981 (the Granville Mall Streetscape is also included in the Canadian Register of Historic Places). Low's resume also includes: the concrete Bengal Lancers

building on Bell Road (municipally registered in 2001); his Oakland Cottage on Cartaret Street, which he constructed out of concrete blocks (municipally registered in 2011); the Halifax Folklore Centre on Brunswick Street; and other concrete block homes near Carteret Street.

Morris Street Engine House was designed by William B. Fidler, a carpenter who partnered with Josiah Jordan in 1877 to form Jordan & Fidler, Builders. When the business closed a decade later, Fidler continued to work as a builder and contractor until 1895. Fidler then became an operator and engineer with the Halifax Fire Department, and simultaneously performed maintenance and carpentry duties for the department. Due to his previous experience, Fidler consulted on several departmental projects and in 1896, he designed the fire station at West and James Streets. After Fidler designed Morris Street Engine House, he continued to work as an architect and carpenter until his death in 1919.

Due to the importance of William B. Fidler and George B. Lowe in the local construction industry, staff recommend a score between 1 and 6 points.



Figure 2: A.M. Bell Building, 2009  
Source: HRM Property Files

#### 4. Architectural Merit:

##### Construction type or building technology

Concrete's prominence as a building material emerged during the early-twentieth century with the creation of reinforced concrete. In Halifax, George B. Low helped launch this trend with the construction of Halifax's first fully concrete building (the A.M. Building on Granville Street) in 1904. Not only were the building's walls and piers made from concrete and steel bars, but the face work and mouldings were also constructed entirely of concrete. Morris Street Engine House was another early example of this practice. While the City Works Office's decision to accept Low's concrete engine house seems to have been primarily motivated by cost, the resulting building was a part of a larger shift in the city's architectural history.

As a rare early example of concrete construction in Halifax, staff recommend a score between 7 and 10 points for architectural merit.

##### Style

Morris Street Engine House is a unique building that was constructed during the Edwardian Era, which spanned from approximately 1900 to 1914. Edwardian era buildings are characterized by symmetrical designs, simple and balanced massing, the prevalence of windows, and modest detailing. Morris Street Engine House embodies this style through its exterior design - which incorporates uniform bays, garage doors, windows, and concrete detailing along the building's exterior - and application of light colours.

While Low's buildings (including the A.M. Bell building and Bengal Lancers building) exemplify Edwardian traits, they stand out from most Edwardian structures due to his focus on early-concrete building construction and blending of architectural styles that were popular during the late-1800s. Morris Street Engine House incorporates a mansard roof and central projecting bay with pediment gable facing University Avenue; both are defining features of the Second Empire style, which was popular between 1855 and 1900. Additionally, the building shows influences of the Classical and Chicago architectural styles, including the

decorative cornice<sup>1</sup> and protruding curved arches (with a central keystone) above the garage doors and windows.

The building's character-defining elements include:

- Symmetrical and balanced building design;
- Concrete building construction with concrete exterior walls and detailing;
- University Avenue façade divided into three symmetrical bays with uniform arched windows and garage doors;
- Robie Street façade divided into four bays with uniform arched windows;
- A two-storey projecting bay with dormer and pediment gable on both the University Avenue and Robie Street façades;
- Decorative concrete arches with central keystones over windows, garage doors and the Robie Street entryway;
- Central string course that transverses the building and three interrupted string courses;
- Mansard roof and decorative cornice; and
- The hose tower at the southeastern portion of the building.

Due to the building's rare design features, staff recommend a score between 7 and 10 points for architectural style.

## 5. Architectural Integrity:

The Morris Street Engine House has a high degree of architectural integrity, as the building's appearance is largely unchanged since the building opened in 1908. Much of the building's character defining elements, including the original building façade, concrete construction, and window / door openings, have been preserved over time. Photographic evidence suggests that minimal-to-no modifications were made prior to the late-1940s; however, a variety of modifications have been carried out during the past 65 years:

- The Halifax Fire Historical Society indicates that a horse stable, which was originally constructed to the rear of engine house, was subsequently modified on several occasions. The stable, in its current form, can be seen at the building's rear.
- A series of alterations occurred between 1945 and 1950 (Figure 3):
  - The dormer roof facing University Avenue was lowered;
  - The original wooden doors with glass windows facing University Avenue, including the transom windows above, were replaced with garage doors; and
  - The hose tower's arched windows were replaced with modest rectangular windows.
- The second storey, single-hung windows facing both University Avenue and Robie Street were replaced with modernized windows (single-hung with projected bottom and transom above).
- The engine house is amid HRM approved renovations: Phase one focused on the replacement of front and rear stairs to meet the National Building Code; the roof was re-surfaced during phase two; and the final phase involves interior renovations.

Morris Street Engine House has been modified several times during its 110+ year lifespan, but overall, these modifications are relatively minor. Due to the building's high degree of integrity, staff recommend a score between 6 and 10 points.

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<sup>1</sup> Some Chicago style buildings contain a Chicago style copper cornice. While the subject property's cornice appears to be plaster and staff cannot find evidence that a copper cornice was installed on the engine house, a member of the Halifax Fire Historical Society speculates that the original downspouts may have been copper.

## 6. Relationship to Surrounding Area:

The property at 5988 University Avenue sits at the southeast corner of Robie Street and University Avenue within Halifax's South End neighbourhood. The building is complemented by the Dalhousie Dentistry building (constructed from 1956-1958) on the intersection's northeast quadrant. This concrete, brick-clad building was designed by prominent local architect Philip Dumaresq, and its original mass and three-storey height helped establish the area's unified streetwall height and institutional form. While the surrounding lands have redeveloped significantly during the past decades (e.g., IWK Health Centre, QEII Health Sciences Centre, Nova Scotia Archives, and additions to the Dentistry building) these two noteworthy institutions still define the intersection, as do a collection of late-Victorian homes on the Northwest quadrant.



Figure 3: Morris Street Station, late-1940s  
Source: Nova Scotia Archives, Places: Halifax, Halifax Co.:  
Fires & Fire Dept.: No. 201744113

Morris Street Engine House has maintained its historic appearance during the past 110+ years and due to its stability and strategic placement near modern-day institutions, the engine house illustrates how Halifax's institutional building design has evolved over time. The engine house also partners with several wooden residential buildings on the northwest portion of the intersection, including the municipally registered Louis Kaye House at 1328 Robie Street, are, to highlight the neighbourhood's unique uses, building styles, and typologies from the turn of the twenty-first century.

The building is an architectural asset that reflects the neighbourhood's historical character and changing trends in Halifax's building design. As such, staff recommend a score between 6 and 10 points.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The HRM costs associated with advertising and processing this application can be accommodated within the approved 2020/2021 operating budget for C340 - Social and Heritage Policy.

As an HRM-owned property and functioning fire station, the registration of the property may result in higher maintenance costs pertaining to the retention of the building's character defining elements (including stucco and masonry architectural elements). Any proposed substantial alterations to these elements would require Regional Council approval. Fire Station #2 is currently undergoing capital upgrades. HRM Corporate Facility Design and Construction staff have been working with heritage staff to ensure the proposed work can be supported if the property is successfully registered.

## **RISK CONSIDERATION**

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this Report.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The community engagement process for a heritage registration is consistent with the intent of the HRM Community Engagement Strategy. The level of community engagement was information sharing achieved



through public access to the required Heritage Advisory Committee meeting. As a provision of the *Heritage Property Act*, no registration of a municipal heritage property shall take place until Regional Council has given the owner of the property an opportunity to be heard.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no significant environmental implications associated with the recommendations in this Report.

### **ALTERNATIVE**

1. The Heritage Advisory Committee may choose to refuse the application to include 5988 University Avenue, Halifax in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality if the property does not score above 50 points based on the evaluation criteria. In doing so, the application will not proceed to Regional Council for evaluation.
2. The Heritage Advisory Committee may choose to forward the application to include 5988 University Avenue, Halifax in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality to Regional Council without a recommendation.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Map 1: Location Map

Attachment A: Evaluation Criteria

Attachment B: Historical Research Report

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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