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Artists may fill vacant Riverdale mansion

Reported by [Janet Money](#) on Thursday, August 26, 2010



The city could put up \$1.9 million to buy the former rooming house at 450 Pape Ave.
Credit: Patrick Cain



Built in 1901, the building at 450 Pape Ave. received heritage designation this week.
Credit: Patrick Cain



The house in 1902, a year after it was built at what is now 450 Pape Ave.
Credit: <http://www.harris-history.com/450%20Pape%20Avenue/1902-1912.html>



The house on a winter day in 1908.
Credit: <http://www.harris-history.com/450%20Pape%20Avenue/1902-1912.html>



A field on what is now Riverdale Ave. is plowed before the First World War.
Credit: <http://www.harris-history.com/450%20Pape%20Avenue/1902-1912.html>

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Opened date: Thursday, August 26, 2010

Opened by Janet Money

The Riverdale home of a prominent industrialist of a bygone era may soon not only receive heritage designation but also become Toronto's newest affordable housing project, targeted for the arts community.

The Riverdale home of a prominent industrialist of a bygone era has received heritage designation and could become affordable housing for the arts community.

At their marathon final meeting before this fall's election, councillors this week approved a recommendation that the city make an offer to buy [450 Pape Ave.](#) from the [Salvation Army](#). The landmark property would be turned over to [Toronto Community Housing](#) to run in partnership with the [Cooperative Housing Federation of Toronto](#) and an organization such as the [Toronto Arts Council](#).

A representative of the Salvation Army reacted to the move with cautious optimism.

"I'm kind of glad it might still be used for a social purpose type of application," said Ken Rawlins, area director for public relations and development. The property almost sold last year to a developer, he said, but the offer was withdrawn when the prospective buyer learned there was a push underway for heritage designation.

Rawlins said he is waiting to hear more from the city, which has yet to appraise the property.

"We'll see what the offer is," he said. "It would be great to work with the city but it would be another thing to lose money."

Rawlins noted that a real estate agent who appeared at a community council meeting last week suggested there might be individuals interested in buying the vacant rooming house if it were listed as a residential property.

The city's land acquisition reserve fund could supply up to \$1.9 million for an offer to purchase the property, and another \$274,000 for closing costs, city staff said in a report to council. The money would be provided as a loan to be repaid by other levels of government as funding for affordable housing becomes available.

Councillor Doug Holyday reacted with disdain to the funding proposal. "If you wonder why [mayoral candidate] Rob Ford is so high in the polls, it's these kinds of things that cause it," said Holyday (Ward 3, Etobicoke Centre).

In presenting the motion Thursday, Ward 30 councillor [Paula Fletcher](#) said the century-old mansion had been transferred to the Salvation Army by the Harris family in 1930 with a view to doing a social good. She described the potential city purchase as carrying on that goal, by helping the Salvation Army unload surplus real estate and pay down the mortgage on its new Harbour Light Centre, and by providing affordable housing for artists, "some of the lowest-paid workers in this city."

The property at the northwest corner of Pape and Riverdale Ave. in Fletcher's Ward 30 (Toronto-Danforth) includes a 1960s addition.

Earlier this week, council added the older part of 450 Pape to the city's inventory of [heritage properties](#). The designation means that any future owner would have to apply to the city to demolish or make alterations to the building.

The designation recognizes the 2 1/2-storey house as "an excellent and well-crafted example" of the Queen Anne Revival and Edwardian Classical styles. Its "hipped roof with Flemish gables, hipped dormers and tall brick chimneys" and its "red brick cladding with brick, sandstone, wood and glass details" were also [cited](#) as heritage attributes.

The impressive structure was designed by architect Henry Simpson and completed in 1901. It was commissioned by William Harris, who emigrated from England in the 19th century to establish a rendering business and went on to found an abattoir, a coal company and Canada Packers, which has become part of Maple Leaf Foods.

Backers of the heritage designation say they knew nothing of the city's proposal to buy and convert the mansion into a housing project.

"I'm very pleased," said Jim Harris, who spoke at community council about his family's ancestral home and who has been pushing to get it designated. Although he has not been inside in several years, Harris once led tours of his great-great-grandfather's house for the Riverdale Historical Society. Photos of the interior and exterior may be found on his [website](#).

But when he learned about the plans for housing, he expressed confusion.

"If it is such a good thing, why wouldn't they have made me aware of it?" he asked, referring to city heritage officials and councillor Fletcher. Harris, who lives in Oshawa, conceded that as a non-resident of the area, he might not be in a position to influence the use of the property.

Nick Shcherban, however, has no such reservations. He lives nearby, at 456 Pape, in a house also built by the Harris family.

"I'm not against affordable housing," Shcherban said. "The thing about affordable housing is you don't want it all in one area. There are wards that have very little affordable housing."

Shcherban said he felt Ward 30 "definitely" has more than its share but "anything to help artists out would be great." In fact, he added, he knows of a potential buyer who is interested in using the home as an art museum.

After the heirs of William Harris handed over the property to the Salvation Army, the building served as a home for unwed mothers. In more recent years, it housed participants in drug and alcohol programs while the Harbour Light shelter was being rebuilt. Since the new facility opened on Jarvis St. in 2009, the Pape property has been vacant.

Should the city buy 450 Pape Ave.? Tell us what you think in the comments below.

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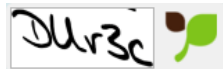
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