



### **Save Heritage Sandbanks Homes**

#### **SANDBANKS PARK OFFICIALS COMMITTED TO DEMOLITION OF HISTORIC HOMES**

August, 29, 2021, Picton, ON – A community group seeking to preserve two heritage homes at the Sandbanks Provincial Park in Prince Edward County, Ontario says it is “deeply disappointed” with the latest statement from park officials on their plans to demolish the properties in the near future.

Liz Driver of Save Heritage Sandbanks Homes (SHSH) says the Park’s longstanding determination to demolish the Hyatt and MacDonald homes as early as September 1 – despite the views of the local Council, the County’s Heritage Advisory Committee, other heritage groups including the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, the private sector, park visitors, and the community – belongs to a bygone age – “the Dark Ages of the 1960s and ‘70s when many significant properties in this historic area were lost.”

In a statement late last week to Global News Kingston, Lindsay Davidson, a media spokesperson for the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks, said, “Proposals by local individuals with an interest in the two houses were carefully reviewed and considered by the ministry. Detailed heritage assessments recommend tearing down the buildings as soon as possible in the interest of public health and safety. They are no longer safe to maintain or access. The ministry has since amended the park management plan for Sandbanks Provincial Park to allow for the demolition of the two buildings after consultation with the Indigenous community and the public.”

“The Hyatt house (c. 1869) and MacDonald house (c. 1878) were built to last and can be readily preserved despite the Park’s neglect of the buildings over the last 40 years,” says Driver. “They are interesting architecturally, and were owned by families with an enduring legacy as farmers, fishermen, and tourism entrepreneurs who operated them as resorts attracting visitors for decades in the early 1900s. They were expropriated by Ontario Parks in the 1970s with plans to restore them. But they never did. Now they argue the two historic homes are beyond repair. We strongly disagree. We’ve had a highly-qualified heritage architect assess the buildings and declare them structurally sound, and ready to be repurposed to meet defined Park needs such as added accommodation, restaurants, cafes, shops, galleries and interpretive centres to add to the experience of visitors and local residents. But the Park isn’t open to these opportunities. They seem stuck in another time when we didn’t safeguard our heritage assets. That era has passed and we have many examples today of private developments here that have successfully restored heritage properties for new lives as hotels, wineries, and vibrant businesses. Today in Prince Edward County, demolition has been replaced by restoration.”

One such building that has been restored in recent years is Picton's iconic Royal Hotel built in the 1880s. After decades of neglect, it has been recently restored by former Ontario finance minister Greg Sorbara and his family. The building will soon open as a boutique hotel, restaurant and spa.

"The Royal Hotel was in desperate circumstances when we took it over and the renovations were very significant right down to the foundations," says Sorbara. "We believe in heritage here and in preserving buildings. I think we should do that with these two buildings. There is no downside here."

The fate of the Hyatt and MacDonald homes has hung in the balance for several years. But in 2021, the province amended its management plan for Sandbanks Provincial Park to allow for demolition following their own heritage assessment of the buildings. They claim the buildings are a health & safety hazard and beyond repair and that they do not have the financial resources required to undertake restoration.

But Driver says the ministry's consultations ignored the recommendations of local Council and the community's Heritage Advisory Committee, and never engaged directly with residents and visitors about their wishes for the future of the houses. The demolition also contradicts a new \$6 million provincial program announced in May 2021 to encourage projects in partnership with communities and the private sector – which Driver says is a perfect fit for Prince Edward County's creative entrepreneurs. A current project in Minister David Piccini's riding of Northumberland -Peterborough South to re-imagine the former Brookside Youth Detention Centre in Cobourg is an example of provincial leadership in conservation; and Driver would like to see the Minister bring the same approach to the Sandbanks heritage homes.

Driver adds the group is still awaiting a response from the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks following a phone conversation with him on August 17<sup>th</sup> indicating he would review the file and get back to the citizen's group. Save Heritage Sandbanks Homes has consistently asked Park officials to delay demolition to allow time for the details of the new Ontario Park program and \$6 million fund to be finalized and to seek proposals from developers for re-purposing the properties.

"This is a very reasonable request," says Driver. "Our local Council, heritage groups, and community agree. Our survey of nearly 500 visitors and residents overwhelmingly supported re-purposing the buildings to meet Park needs for more accommodation and visitor experiences. There is a unique opportunity here to harness the collective imagination of Park officials, private sector investors and the community in a collaborative process to develop a pilot project focused on the adaptive re-use of these heritage properties. This has been a tragically flawed process. Not surprisingly, it is resulting in a demolition and a lost opportunity. This really is a decision from the Dark Ages."

For [further information](#), a [video](#), and images, visit the website <https://saveheritagesandbankshomes.com/> or email [heritagesandbankshomes@gmail.com](mailto:heritagesandbankshomes@gmail.com)  
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