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GTA

# Residents face uphill battle to save heritage post office on Queen Street for public space

By **Francine Kopun** City Hall BureauMon., July 26, 2021 |  3 min. read

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The loading dock behind the old Canada Post station at 1117 Queen St. W., has become a gathering place for residents who want to save the building, in the process of being sold by the Crown corporation as it tries to raise money to stem a growing deficit.

“We’ve dubbed it the back porch,” says Aislinn Rose, the artistic director of The Theatre Centre across the street, and part of a community effort to put the building to public use, instead of private interests.

The loading dock would make a great outdoor stage, Rose points out.

“The value that is going to come from the sale of the land, potentially it’s going to be a value that we, the community, created. And yet we’re being left out of the discussions for the future,” says Rose.

“We’ve had in recent years a massive explosion in population and a massive decrease in public space. And what we need is public space.”

The community is backed by their city councillor, Ana Bailão (Davenport, Ward 9), and by their local MP, Liberal Julie Dzerowicz.

They’re facing an uphill battle.

The deadline for bids on the site was originally set for June 14. Canada Post extended the deadline to July 23 to allow for more bids, but there is no indication that deadline will be further extended.

“The process has closed to bidding and we are evaluating the offers received at this time,” said Canada Post on Monday.

Last week, in response to questions from the Star, Canada Post had this to say: “When selling property, Canada Post conducts an open and competitive process seeking fair market value as part of our long-standing mandate to remain financially viable.”

Canada Post has been selling historic properties across Canada as it struggles with declines in revenue from letters, bills, statements and direct mail. In 2019, the Canada Post Group of Companies reported a loss before tax of \$23 million.

Losses deepened in 2020 to \$626 million. An estimated \$174 million was due to the impact of COVID-19. Even record profit in the parcels division, driven by online shopping, failed to fully offset the ongoing decline in revenue from regular mail and direct marketing.

The decommissioned post office at Queen Street West and Ossington Avenue was designed by Canadian architect Samuel George Curry, who, together with architect Frank Darling, designed the Bank of Montreal that is home to the Hockey Hall of Fame, and the Victoria Hospital for Sick Children, the first hospital in the world built specifically for children, according to Bailão’s office.

It was built in 1902 and is listed with the city's heritage register. Whoever does buy the building will have to conduct a heritage impact study, Bailão said. The assessment will ensure the significance of the historic asset is taken into account when developing a proposal for change.

At 11,354 square feet and two storeys tall, she thinks it would make a great site for an arts and cultural hub for the surrounding neighbourhoods and the city as a whole.

"I think it would be very appropriate to have some space for arts organizations and then we could definitely add affordable housing for artists, and it could be a great project," she said.

Bailão's motion, that the city petition federal officials to step in to stop the sale of the site and establish a culture and arts hub there instead, passed with ease. Only Coun. Denzil Minnan-Wong (Ward 16 Don Valley East) voted against it. Coun. Nick Mantas (Ward 22 Scarborough Agincourt) was absent for the vote.

Dzerowicz feels certain she could come up with a solution if she had six more months. She believes the COVID pandemic has profoundly changed the way people think, and selling off publicly owned assets that could be put toward affordable housing or other community purposes is no longer acceptable.

"I think we're all kind of wondering what kind of world we want to live in. And I think that decisions and things that I think we found acceptable before are no longer acceptable. And for me, this is not acceptable."



**Francine Kopun** is a Toronto-based reporter covering city hall and municipal politics for the Star. Follow her on Twitter: [@KopunF](#)

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