

Pier pressure building in Port Hope

January 23, 2009

PORT HOPE - A local heritage study that concluded the pier factories are an asset to Port Hope was presented to council on Tuesday, Jan. 20.

"The Pier Group is really thrilled at this time to present this report," said Rod Stewart, co-chair of The Pier Group. "It is the first, and only to date, heritage assessment of the waterfront."

The Pier Group is hoping the Heritage Assessment of the Port Hope Central Pier will change the municipality's decision to demolish the industrial buildings as part of a revised waterfront.

"It's not too late to re-evaluate the heritage value of that site," Mr. Stewart told council.

A standing-room-only crowd filled Port Hope council chambers to hear about the study and broke into applause at the end of Mr. Stewart's presentation. The Pier Group formed this summer to save the industrial buildings on the pier and has quickly grown to more than 300 members.

"It's really critical that we preserve our industrial and commercial history, not just our residential history," said Chris Wallace, co-chair of The Pier Group.

The Port Hope chapter of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO) is also backing the group in its effort to save the old factories.

"Port Hope has an extensive industrial history, most of those buildings are now gone," Phil Carter, of the Port Hope ACO, told council.

The study was funded by a grant from the Port Hope ACO, which is also funding a second study of potential economic opportunities for the restored pier buildings. The economic study will ask residents what they would like to see done with the buildings and then study the economic potential of the suggestions.

"We at the ACO have a long standing history of supporting heritage buildings in Port Hope," said Mr. Carter.

Council's decision to demolish the pier buildings was made in the 1990's. The buildings have been used for years to store low-level radioactive waste (LLRW) and that was likely part of the rationale for demolishing the old factories.

That was before the federal government committed funding to clean up LLRW in the community. The Pier Group is hoping the funding will make council reconsider the decision. Mr. Wallace said the buildings will need to be decontaminated even to be demolished.



Peg McCarthy/Northumberland News

Christopher Wallace is the chairman of The Pier Group, a newly-formed citizens' group that wants to see the old buildings on Port Hope's central pier restored.

The Pier Group asked council to send the heritage assessment to all committees involved in the waterfront.

"I'm open to looking at that resolution and giving some additional thought to the process," said Councillor Cal Morgan.

Without Coun. Morgan's support, council instead passed the original motion to send the report on to the Harbour Commission, which owns the waterfront property. The Harbour Commission is a private organization made up of council members and two citizens. The minutes from the closed meetings come to Port Hope council for approval.

"We predicted that council would bury it in the Harbour Commission and they have done precisely that," said Mr. Wallace. "We still have every intention of speaking to every committee and every department and we'll look forward to their honest feedback."

Copies of the Heritage Assessment of the Port Hope Central Pier are available at the Port Hope Public Library and at Furby House Books.