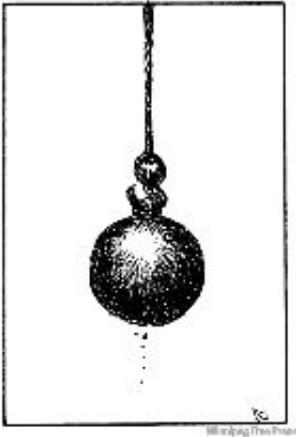


 [Click to Print](#)[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

## Save the last house

By: Staff Writer

27/11/2008 12:00 AM | [Comments \(0\)](#)



[Enlarge Image](#) 

November 27 2008 dinky Cummings ()

**THE** city should not allow the owner of the last intact house in the Exchange District to tear it down. David Rich says he wants to demolish the 126-year-old home known as Kelly House because it's in terrible shape and it would cost too much to refurbish. There's no question the house on Adelaide Street has seen better days, but it is not beyond redemption and its loss would be a stain on the community's commitment to the integrity of the national historic site.

Mr. Rich acquired the heritage property about 15 years ago, apparently with the intent of turning it into a parking lot as part of a consolidation of other empty lots around his nearby business, Richlu Sportwear Ltd., 85 Adelaide. When the last tenants moved out in 1999, he rebuffed attempts by other parties who wanted to renovate and rent the house because he appeared to have no interest in protecting the structure from the wrecking ball. Alan Shepard, co-owner of Step'n Out restaurant, now located in St. Boniface, wanted to move his business into the home in 2002, but Mr. Rich told him he was only interested in tearing it down to make way for a parking lot.

The businessman has asked the city to eliminate the home's heritage designation so it can be demolished. Failing that, he wants the city to rescind an order that he renovate the home to make it comply with current building codes, a job he says could cost as much as \$400,000. But that is not an acceptable solution, either, because it would merely allow the home to decay even further, effectively demolishing it by neglect.

A civic committee has given the owner 90 days to work with CentreVenture, the city's downtown development agency, to find a solution. Tax credits and special grants are available, but they are useless if Mr. Rich has no interest in restoring the 2,100-square-foot home. Ross McGowan, CEO of CentreVenture, said the agency is committed to saving Kelly House because of its significance as the area's last house. The agency could offer to purchase the home, or it could try to solve Mr. Rich's parking problems by finding other lots in the area, he said.

The controversy once again highlights the toothless nature of civic bylaws, which cannot prevent the owner of a heritage building from allowing it to rot, often to a point where it truly is beyond repair.

The home is in violation of the city's Vacant and Derelict Buildings Bylaw, which doesn't give the city the power to force Mr. Rich to overhaul the building. Instead, he has been ordered to spend about \$42,000 to stabilize the structure and fix the roof. If he does, he can allow the building to remain empty for eternity. There are other buildings in the Exchange District in exactly that condition, vacant shells that meet minimum standards, but which are growing weaker and more vulnerable with each passing year.

The city needs a new bylaw that would compel the owners of designated heritage properties to maintain their properties to a higher standard. Such a bylaw should be tempered in such a way that it cannot be used arbitrarily and should include financial incentives to help owners meet their obligations.

The Exchange District is nationally important because it includes a collection of both significant and insignificant buildings, which illustrate the urban environment of a warehouse city 100 years ago. There may be good arguments for demolishing the most forlorn and hopeless structures, but Kelly House is not one of them, not yet anyway.

### Links referenced within this article

Comments (0)

[#comments](#)

Enlarge Image

<http://media.winnipegfreepress.com/images/750979.jpg>

### Find this article at:

[http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/editorials/Save\\_the\\_last\\_house.html](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/editorials/Save_the_last_house.html)

 Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Uncheck the box to remove the list of links referenced in the article.