

## Literary landmark faces threat

Posted: 6:40 AM CST Tuesday, Nov. 25, 2008

It has also become part of local literary history, as the make-believe portal to a fantasy world in a series of books written for young people.

And yet, Kelly House could be torn down and turned into a parking lot.

The future of the tiny downtown building at 88 Adelaide St. that sits amid towering Exchange District warehouses will be the first subject of debate when members of the city's property and development committee meet this morning.



PHIL HOSSACK/ WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

A historic city house may be history. Rae Bridgman hopes not. The author has prominently featured Kelly House in her popular fantasy books. But the owner of the Adelaide Street building--which needs extensive repairs--wants the city to remove its heritage status to pave the way for a parking lot.

Advocates for the preservation of this city's architectural history will try to convince committee members to reject a demand that Kelly House be delisted from the city's list of protected heritage buildings. The owner of the house says it would cost too much to renovate it to meet city standards.

Among the arguments to save Kelly House will be an appeal that the house, built in the 1880s, has also become a part of Winnipeg's literary past.

"It's just a marvellous little house that stands out," author Rae Bridgman said Monday. "It's just a leftover from a bygone era, surrounded by parking lots, surrounded by warehouses. And I know that it certainly captured my imagination when I first saw it. I thought: What is this place and what is it doing here?"

Bridgman incorporated the house into a series of books for young people she wrote in recent years. The back brick wall of Kelly House is the portal to the magical city of MiddleGate, featured in Bridgman's works.

*The Serpent's Spell*, one book in the series, was a 2007

finalist for the McNally Robinson Book for Young People prize.

"For a children's author who is writing a fantasy book, you begin to imagine all kinds of things of what that house could have been," Bridgman said.

Engineers and other inspectors have looked at Kelly House, however, and imagined the building -- vacant since 2000 -- would need extensive repairs before it could comply with building codes and be suitable for reuse.

"The (exterior) brick is showing signs of severe deterioration," said an engineer's report that followed an inspection of the property last March. "The rear of the building, near the upper second-floor window, has brick that is failing and needs immediate replacement.

"The building's (interior) plaster is cracked in all areas due to structure movement and temperature-shrinkage cracking," the report went on to say. "The interior finishes, which include all ornate woodwork on the ceilings and walls, (are) cracked and would require replacement. All flooring throughout the building would have to be removed and the original floor sheathing and joists be inspected for damage."

Last January, the city ordered the building's owner, David Rich of Richlu Sportswear Ltd. at 85 Adelaide St., to make several repairs after finding him in violation of the Vacant and Derelict Buildings Bylaw.

Lorne Weiss, a real estate agent acting for Rich, said in a letter to the city's planning department that the extensive renovations combined with rental rates for Exchange District office space made "the economics of rehabbing 88 Adelaide... not viable."

Weiss declined comment Monday but Fort Rouge-East Fort Garry Coun. Jenny Gerbasi, chairwoman of the city's historical buildings committee, said the Kelly House owner wants to demolish the property and build a parking lot.

Her committee has recommended that Kelly House retain its historical status and that CentreVenture, the city's downtown business development agency, look at stabilizing the building and finding a tenant.

"If you start removing examples of 1880s architecture, we're going to start chipping

away at these wonderful treasures that we have," Gerbasi said.

[joe.paraskevas@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:joe.paraskevas@freepress.mb.ca)

The Winnipeg Free Press invites you to share your opinion on this story in a letter to the editor. A selection of letters to the editor are **published daily**.

**To submit a letter:**

- fill out the form **on this page**, or
- email [letters@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:letters@freepress.mb.ca), or
- mail *Letters to the Editor, 1355 Mountain Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2X 3B6*.

Letters must include the writer's full name, address, and a daytime phone number. Letters are edited for length and clarity.