

BUENA VISTA/SIR WILFRID LAURIER PARK MASTER PLAN

Yorath House Information Brief

Yorath Context

The Yorath Residence is a two-story single-family residence in the River Valley Capitol Hill neighbourhood in southwest Edmonton. The house occupies a 12-acre lot in Buena Vista/Sir Wilfred Laurier Park in the North Saskatchewan River Valley. This house is believed to be one of few remaining single family homes located on the river valley flats outside of established neighbourhoods.



The house was built in 1949 for Dennis K. Yorath MBE, an Alberta business man and outstanding citizen, and his family. The single-family home was designed by the renowned architectural firm of Rule, Wynn & Rule and is of Early Modern style clad with horizontal wood siding and field stone reminiscent of the firm's work at the Petroleum Club and Royal Glenora Club. A small 2 story addition was constructed in 1985 to create a suite at second floor level with independent entrance. The second floor interior was re-configured for the suite.

The house remained occupied by the Yorath family until 1992 when it was sold to the City of Edmonton.

Historical Significance of the Yorath Property and House

The Yorath Residence is significant for its association with the theme of urban resource development in post-war Edmonton. The Laurier Heights area, once subdivided down to the North Saskatchewan River was quickly scaled back in the 1980s under municipal plans to preserve the river valley in its natural state and serve as public recreational space. The Yorath residence is one of the last buildings purchased by the city under its conservation policies and thus remains in its original location and condition when it was purchased.

from the Yorath family. The building serves as a symbol to the changing use of the river valley from mining homesteads, residential subdivision and then to public park as the city developed.

The Yorath Residence is significant for its association with Dennis Kestal Yorath MBE, a prominent Alberta businessman. In Edmonton he was active on numerous committees and boards until 1972. Further, D.K. The Yorath Residence retains the name of its only owner/occupant during its use as a single-family dwelling during the period of significance.



View Photo Circa 1951 above and current condition below



The building is also an early residential design by Rule Wynn and Rule, an architecture firm that would grow into one of western Canada's most influential firms.

Another contributing member to the building's significance is architect Rick Wilkin. His company R.L Wilkin Architects Ltd. built the 1985 addition. Rick Wilkin is a prominent contributor to Edmonton's architecture, assisting on projects like the Citadel Theatre and HUB at the University of Alberta.

Wilkin is also a relation to the Yorath family, connected through Dennis's wife Bette Wilkin. The property on which the residence stands was given to D.K Yorath and Bette by Bette's father William Wilkin a land speculator, and real estate agent who owned a large parcel of land in today's Laurier/Buena Vista Park.

Previous Development Concepts

Previous documents that are supported by public participation have identified alternative uses for Yorath house ranging from a small public recreation amenity facility to a private café or restaurant¹. The new River Valley Zoo Master plan addresses some of these desires for additional amenity in the Buena Vista Laurier Park area by introducing a café and education facility that are open to the general public without requiring admission to the zoo. The Zoo's Education facility mandate is to inspire the Love and learning about animals and nature. They anticipate they will be able to meet the demand of currently oversubscribed programs with their new facility.

In 2009 the City explored potential interest for public and private redevelopment of Yorath House through a Request for Expression of Interest process.

- Kids on track, office space, Summer Day Camp program, small community café,
- Laurier Community Arts Centre , café, community garden centre, environmental education centre
- Yorath House Animal Hospice (palliative care, respite care, euthanasian centre, bereavement and group support, limited service kiosk, community outreach programs)

Yorath House Constraints

Condition Assessment

- The house is generally in good condition given its age and that it has remained unoccupied for 20 years
- There are some immediate concerns that should be addressed with the eaves troughs and downspouts to prevent further deterioration of the cladding
- The roof likely needs replacement
- The deck coverings are failing causing water ingress to the property
- Supports for balcony / canopy are possibly subject to frost heave

Operational Requirements

- Minimize duplication of services with the Zoo Master Plan
- Find a use compatible with the original function to minimize amendments to the property
- Revisions are required to the sanitary system.
- Upgrade to mechanical and electrical systems are required to support alternative uses
- Site grading surrounding property needs to be modified for barrier free accessibility and to improve site drainage

Alberta Building Code Considerations

- Provision of adequate water supply for sprinkler system.
- Structural Upgrades are necessary to support second floor use in new functions.
- Upgrade to interior load bearing assemblies to meet building code for fire resistance - meet fire rating of 45minutes

¹ Previous studies on the House include;

Yorath Estate Redevelopment – Conceptual Redevelopment Plan – RL Wilkin Architects Ltd 1996
Yorath House facility Analysis – Submitted to Edmonton Rowing Club – Barr Ryder Architects 2003

Other Regulatory Considerations

- Yorath House is currently on the City of Edmonton's Inventory of Historic Resources.
- Removal of Yorath House will only be considered if costs for redevelopment / renovation are disproportionately high
- Work on the house should follow the Standards and Guidelines for Conservation of Historic Places in Canada
- Application of Code to existing building may be waived if the level of life safety and building performance proposed are acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction. – Can develop a life and building safety plan that uses alternative solutions to satisfy any concerns with use of building.
- City may choose to Designate the property as a Municipal Historic Resource. Depending on the proposed approach to the adaptive re-use this may limit the level of intervention on the property. We may choose to retain more of the interior features and apply for exemption under the Code.

Site constraints

- Rare wild flowers in the Yorath Lawn will be protected
- Strong visual connection to the river is maintained

Opportunities

Existing Floor Plans



Main Floor

More information about the Buena Vista/Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park Master Plan is available at www.edmonton.ca/buenavistalaurierplan.



Second Floor

Building code classification that can be accommodated within a building of this type include:

Group A, Division 2

- Art galleries
- Clubs, non-residential
- Community halls
- Lecture halls
- Licensed beverage establishments
- Restaurants

Group C

- Clubs, residential
- Colleges, residential

Group D

- Offices

Group E

- Shops
- Stores

General considerations

- Improved access and parking are required, size will depend on intended use.
- Restore / enhance landscape surrounding the house to increase opportunities for additional uses
- Can be private or a public facility.