

City gives \$75,000 to help preserve Marshall McLuhan's childhood home

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Photograph by: Rick MacWilliam

EDMONTON - Media philosopher Marshall McLuhan's childhood home will be preserved after city councillors voted Wednesday to give the Edmonton Arts Council \$75,000 to help buy the site.

The arts organization will take out a mortgage to cover the rest of the \$450,000 to \$475,000 purchase price, but expects to recover that money within five years through fundraising, executive director John Mahon said.

His group plans to use most of the main floor of the Highlands home, at 11342 64th St., for a library and public displays about McLuhan, whose family moved there when he was age one in 1912 and left for Winnipeg three years later.

The second floor, basement and garage will be turned into offices, suites for visiting artists and space for a writer in residence.

The arts council intends to have the home, already marked with a plaque, designated as a historic site to give it legal protection from demolition or major alterations.

"This is one-of-a-kind," Mayor Stephen Mandel said.

"It's an opportunity to celebrate someone who was a well-known Edmontonian, and I don't think we do enough of that."

Cheryl and Doug Toshack, who have owned the 1 1/2-storey home for 37 years, want to sell to the city to ensure the residence isn't torn down to make space for a large new home.

A council committee had recommended the city buy the property, then work with the arts council and other groups to help pay for it, but councillors were leery of the financial commitment involved.

Coun. Kerry Diotte hopes it becomes a popular attraction similar to homes he has visited of such novelists as Ernest Hemingway.

"It's a great idea. Marshall McLuhan is a rock star, and we should celebrate the fact that he spent a lot of time in Edmonton, but we should ensure the public can see it."

McLuhan, a communications theorist and literary critic who coined such phrases as "the medium is the message," worked most of his life at the University of Toronto, but often returned to Edmonton.

He died in 1980. An international conference to discuss his work was held in Edmonton last year to mark the centennial of his birth.

gkent@edmontonjournal.com

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