

1841 Crooks Road

On Monday, November 13th, I met the Owners of this property on site along with Scott Cope, Director, City of Rochester Hills Building Department. The purpose of our visit was to take a closer look at the overall condition of the existing house structure and to gain access to the inside of the building to determine the level of deterioration that was present.

As you know, the house at 1841 Crooks is a standard “pre-1930’s” example of “balloon framing” construction. The exterior wall studs extend from the foundation to the roof structure. Interior floors attach to the inside of the studs and bear on interior walls as needed for room layout.

Support for the structural stability of the balloon framing comes from the roof boards attached to the roof rafters, from board attached to the tops of the floor framing, and boards attached to the inside of the exterior walls. As often was the case, the widest boards that could be found were used to make the support as strong as possible.

The wood siding on the exterior of the structure is fastened directly to the outside of the studs, and offers little structural support. The siding’s primary purpose is to protect the structure from the elements.

Basically, the balloon framing acts as the “skeleton” for the house structure. In this case, the skeleton has been weakened and the structural stability of the building has been compromised.

The primary purpose of the exterior surfaces, including roof coverings, windows and doors, siding and trim, and even the foundation, is to protect the skeleton from the elements. In this case, the exterior surfaces are failing their protection of the skeleton. For example:

- **Foundation** – The rubble stone foundation is crumbling in many areas and settling in others. This may not seem significant, but the unstable foundation is causing the building to shift, which in turn is opening gaps in siding, trimwork, etc., which then allows further damage to the structure by the elements. The shifting foundation further causes the skeleton to move to adjust, weakening connections and placing additional loads on members not originally intended to take the added loads.
- **Siding & Trim** – As mentioned above, loose siding and trim, along with missing siding (either that has been removed intentionally or has since fallen off), further aggravates the problem by allowing water, etc., to seep into recesses and freeze in colder weather, or deteriorate the wood structure through mold and decay in warmer weather. Case in point are several areas with rotted foundation sill members, which in turn cause further settling and shifting of the structure.
- **Roof & Roof Covering** – The roof on this building has ceased to serve it’s purpose. Multiple layers of shingles and missing shingles are allowing water to affect many of the roof areas, particularly along the edges. This is obvious at the front porch and the South side of the building where the chimney once stood. The roof is beginning to collapse in these areas and are allowing even more water into the structure to cause further damage.

All the above items, along with many structural members that have been further compromised by the cutting or complete removal add up rapidly to a building that is not longer safe.

As witnessed over the last couple of years, this building is failing at a faster and faster rate.

The stabilizing of the house in an effort to just stop any further damage, would require the building to be almost completely dismantled. All exterior and interior surfaces would need to be removed, and the remaining structure raised and supported. The existing foundation would need to be completely rebuilt. Rotted and missing bonds and sill plates would need to be replaced and the structure would then need to be anchored to the repaired foundation. Missing or damaged parts of the structure would then need to be replaced (headers, top plates, wall sections, etc.). Once this is completed the exterior and interior items could be reinstalled or replaced.

It is my opinion that this building is not a safe structure. I feel there is extensive damage to many of the structural elements of this house, both through deterioration and man-made, that could lead to partial, if not complete, collapse. The structure is not safe to enter, and all areas of the floor are questionable to walk on.

This structure has dramatically aged since the last time I was inside, approx. 8 years ago. As noted above, there is significant enough damage to virtually all elements that no one should be entering the building for any reason.

Kelly M. Winters

Deputy Director – City of Rochester Hills Building Department.