Letter: Save Carleton Villa first

By CHRISTINE MARTIN, Carleton Island

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The Villa on Carleton Island has seen no work since the developer announced plans to restore it nearly four years ago.

From my home on the bluff above South Bay, I have watched the restoration of Riverhead, one of two neighboring historic homes at the head of Carleton Island. Riverhead, built in 1880, and Carleton Villa, built in 1894, were both originally owned by the Wyckoff family, but their present-day outcomes could not be more different.

Riverhead's new owners purchased the 3,650-square-foot house on October 6, 2025, for $400,000 and immediately began addressing its failing roof, damaged windows, peeling paint, unfinished kitchen, and deteriorating addition. In less than a year, crews have removed layers of roofing, installed a metal roof, replaced forty windows, added a temporary kitchen, removed the derelict addition, barged away debris, and begun installing new siding. Substantial private funds have been invested to preserve its historic character and prevent further damage.

The contrast is stark. Carleton Villa, an approximately 15,000-square-foot landmark, sold on July 26, 2022, for $300,000—$100,000 less than Riverhead would sell for more than three years later. Yet the Villa's roof remains open to the sky, many floors have collapsed, and visible stabilization has not kept pace with its deterioration.

Neighbors welcomed reports that the Villa might be restored as a bed-and-breakfast or restaurant, but later learned that plans for a campground had already been filed. That proposal raises concerns about safety, security,

and the quiet enjoyment of nearby homes. Residents have consistently opposed a campground on the island and have spent considerable time and money examining the regulatory process.

When purchasing a run-down home, stabilization must be the priority. Riverhead's owners have made that investment; the Villa project has not. Instead, the apparent focus has been obtaining permission for a campground rather than preserving the Villa.

Two applications for taxpayer-funded stabilization grants to fund the project were unsuccessful, but denial of public funding does not eliminate the responsibility to close the roof, stabilize the floors, and prevent further ruin. Before any related development proposal receives serious consideration, a substantial, visible investment needs to be made in securing the Villa.

Riverhead shows what commitment looks like: plans followed by crews, materials, and measurable progress. Carleton Villa deserves the same. Save the Villa first.

Christine Martin

Carleton Island