
The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Information Report to Council

SUBJECT: Heritage Conservation District Study – Information and Status Update
DATE: 2024-07-26
REPORT #: CDS-24-131
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District (“HCD”) was enacted in 1986 to protect the commercial core of Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Old Town area (“Old Town”).
2. As early as 1990, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake (“Town”) revisited ways to protect, preserve, and celebrate Old Town with proposed policy updates and studies aimed at updating the HCD Plan. Most recently, updating the HCD Plan was indicated as a priority through the Town’s Planning for Progress initiative (2021).
3. In March 2024, the Request for Proposals (“RFP”) for the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District Study (the “Study”) was issued but was not awarded. The RFP is being prepared for reissue in early August 2024.
4. To mitigate overall costs, and in recognition of the sheer volume of properties to be reviewed, Heritage Staff are seeking volunteers from the Municipal Heritage Committee (“MHC”) to establish the HCD Study Working Group. The “Working Group” will be tasked with conducting fieldwork to complete Built Heritage Survey Forms for properties within Old Town that may be considered for inclusion in the updated HCD Plan. These forms are proposed to be included as part of a desktop information package that will be provided to the successful consultant team.
5. Concurrent with the release of the RFP, review of proposals, and awarding the project, Heritage Staff will work with volunteers to complete the survey forms between mid-August and September 30.
6. Staff request that MHC members provide availability for the internal study launch between August 12 and August 23, and commit to a minimum of two (2) fieldwork dates, which will take place between August 26 and September 20. A timeline will be circulated during the August 7, 2024 MHC meeting to provide preferred availability.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, 1986

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is a vibrant, growing community defined by its cultural

heritage, agricultural setting and location at the mouth of the Niagara River. Niagara-on-the-Lake contains five urban areas, each with their own unique heritage character. The “Old Town” urban area contains the Town’s only Heritage Conservation District, the “Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District” (the “Queen-Picton HCD” or “HCD”), designated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act in 1986 (by-law 1667-86, approved by the Ontario Municipal Board in February of 1987).

Heritage Conservation Districts recognize the collective heritage value of an area or neighbourhood that has common elements or themes. Through designation under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, municipalities can identify and preserve these areas with unique heritage character through guidelines for managing future development and alteration of existing heritage structures.

The Queen-Picton HCD is recognized for its collection of residential and commercial buildings that were constructed as early as 1815, the rebuilding period after the former Town of “Niagara” was burned in 1813.

The War of 1812 devastated the buildings located in the Town, as American forces burned the Town in 1813 before withdrawing across the river. As such, the built form of Old Town, as it is seen today, is largely the result of the reorganization that took place during the subsequent reconstruction period. Most businesses were located on Queen Street and many fine residences were constructed between Queen Street and the waterfront, and up toward King Street.

Council endorsed the Queen-Picton HCD plan in 1986 via By-law 1667-86, and readopted the plan through by-law 4362-10 in 2010.

2.2 Expansion Era – 1990 To 1997

In 1990, a sub-committee of the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committees (“LACAC”, now MHC) was formed to consider revisions and expansions of the policies within the HCD.

In 1991, By-law 2279-91 defined an expansion study area extending towards and along the lakefront, and encircling the District boundaries, identifying an additional 336 properties for potential inclusion in the HCD Plan. The study included evaluation of the potential properties per the ranking system detailed in the existing HCD Plan, and questionnaires were distributed to the owners of each property. Details of this long-term study were summarized in a Recommendation Report. Length of tenancy, planned alterations and the permitting process, vulnerability, the loss of extant resources, and protection of streetscapes were among the topics included in this survey. Although the Expansion Study produced four options in response to their findings, the HCD Plan policies and guidelines have not been updated since its creation.

2.3 National Historic District – 2004

In 2004, a portion of the Old Town urban area was recognized as the Niagara-on-the-Lake National Historic Site of Canada (the “National Historic District”). The National Historic District contains similar heritage value and character-defining elements to those identified within the Queen-Picton HCD; however, the National Historic District is focused primarily on built heritage constructed between 1815 and 1859 during the Loyalist reconstruction period.

2.4 Secondary Plan Character Study – 2009

In 2009, the Town initiated a study of two of the areas identified as having potential cultural heritage value or interest in the early 1990s, that is, the Dock Area, and the Old Town. The resulting document, “Toward a Vision for the Old Town,” produced by Urban Strategies (July 16, 2009), was recommended to Council for adoption as part of Planning Report PDS-09-069. The amended recommendations included using the document to guide future policy development for Old Town, and commencement of the study for the Dock Area Secondary Plan, which came into force and effect in July 2010.

2.5 Downtown Character Area, Official Plan 2019

In 2019, Council adopted a new Niagara-on-the-Lake Official Plan (the “2019 adopted OP,” not yet in force and effect), which identified the “Downtown Heritage Character Area” in the Old Town urban area. The heritage value of the Downtown Heritage Character Area was evaluated through a study undertaken by Bray Heritage in 2018, and incorporates heritage attributes and character-defining elements from the Queen-Picton HCD and the National Historic District.

2.6 Planning For Progress, 2021

In 2021, Town Council approved a number of planning initiatives through its ‘Planning for Progress’ direction. The review and expansion of the Queen-Picton HCD was ranked as a priority action item.

2.7 HCD Study, 2024-2025

The National Historic District and Downtown Heritage Character Area, which were evaluated after the adoption of the Queen-Picton HCD, alongside the earlier expansion study area provide the basis for further review of the boundaries of an expanded or new HCD. A buffer area has been added to these boundaries, which will form the basis of the fieldwork assessments to be conducted by HCD Internal Working Group. The final expansion area will be determined by the successful consultant through the HCD work plan and award of the RFP.

3. HCD Study Working Group

3.1 The HCD Study will be led by an external consultant team, and will follow due process to revise, update, and submit a new HCD Plan. It is expected that the HCD Plan will continue to include those properties already identified in the existing District Plan, and these properties will continue to be designated under Part V of the OHA. Rather than the current ranking system, properties will be identified as “contributing” or “non-contributing”, with guidelines and policies designed to preserve, conserve, and celebrate Old Town’s heritage while also providing a framework to accommodate change and sensitive infill. As part of the HCD Study process, there will be opportunities for the MHC to provide feedback.

3.2 Taking into account the properties included in the current HCD boundaries, alongside those found within the 1990s Expansion Area, the National Historic Site District, the Downtown Character Area, and accounting for a buffer zone, there may be over 1000 potential properties to be considered for inclusion in the revised District area. While many of these properties have been previously studied, several are missing key data points regarding date, style, attributes, and characteristics that are needed as part of the overall documentation. The HCD Study Working Group will, over the course of four weeks, conduct fieldwork to fill some of these gaps in our knowledge of Old Town’s key built heritage and cultural landscapes.

3.3 This undertaking is not only significant in terms of volume, but also as part of the culmination of decades of studies aiming to address how best to conserve the heritage character of Niagara-on-the-Lake's Old Town village, but also for the sheer volume of work required to prepare an updated HCD Plan with new guidelines and policies. As such, Staff are requesting that members of the MHC consider committing to volunteering their time to support this important initiative to support the study of the Town's only HCD.

3.3.1 Process:

A kick-off meeting will be held to discuss the fieldwork process and preparation.

Volunteers will be organized into fieldwork groups, and will be assigned a list of buildings along a particular thoroughfare and/or around a defined block. An information package with available details about each property, where available, will be provided; this will help to speed up the evaluation process in the field. Fieldwork will be conducted in 2-3 hour blocks, with the expectation that volunteers can complete between 25-40 buildings in one session.

The goal is to have sufficient volunteers over a four-week period to conduct two fieldworks sessions per week, with two fieldwork groups per session. A final schedule will be circulated by the end of day on Thursday, August 8th.

Once the fieldwork is completed, a summary report will be provided by Staff at the October 2, 2024 MHC meeting. Alongside the raw data of the forms themselves, this summary report will be provided to the consultant team as part of their desktop research stage in Phase 1 of the HCD Study.

3.3.2 Volunteers are requested for the following dates:

Please indicate, in the circulating calendar, your general availability for a Project Launch meeting, to be held at Town Hall, between Monday, August 12th, and Friday, August 23rd. If necessary, two identical Project Launch meetings will be held to accommodate as many volunteers as possible.

Please indicate, in the circulating calendar, your availability and preference for AM/PM fieldwork sessions on the following dates:

August 26, 28, 30

September 4, 6

September 9, 11, 13

September 16, 18, 20

3.3.3 Request for Proposal Timing

Staff are refining the details of the Request for Proposal for the Consulting Services for the Heritage Conservation Review and District Study. The intent is to have the RFP issued while Staff undertake the fieldwork. The fieldwork will be provided as part of the package of information to the successful consultant for their consideration in defining the boundary and advancing the preparation of the District Plan itself. The expectation is that, although the consultant will have received this information, it will be fully reviewed and vetted via their own study work.

4. NEXT STEP / CONCLUSION

Staff have developed a Draft Workplan to structure the tasks, timeline, and progress for the HCD Internal Working Group. Once Staff has received the preferred availability of volunteers, the Work Plan will be finalized and distributed accordingly. Staff request that MHC members provide availability for a project launch meeting between August 12 and August 23, and indicate availability for a minimum of two (2) fieldwork building assessment dates.

Staff will provide an update on the findings of the HCD Internal Working Group at the MHC meeting on October 2, 2024.

Additional opportunities for involvement and to provide feedback throughout the HCD Study will be facilitated by Staff and the successful external consultant team.