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

SUBJECT: Heritage Conservation District Study Volunteer Group – Summary of Findings and Next Steps

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REPORT #: CDS-24-164

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DEPARTMENT: Community & Development Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Town is seeking consultant support through a Request for Proposals (“RFP”) for the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District Study (the “HCD Study”).
- In advance of the commencement of the formal HCD Study, Town Heritage Staff established the HCD Study Working Group (the “Working Group”), including members of the Municipal Heritage Committee (“MHC”), to conduct fieldwork and complete Built Heritage Survey Forms (“BHS Form”, **Appendix II**) for properties located within Old Town that may be considered for inclusion in the updated HCD Plan.
- Town Heritage Staff worked with volunteers from the MHC, Niagara-on-the-Lake (“NOTL”) Museum/Town Historian, and the Niagara Foundation to complete the BHS Forms between mid-August and September 30.
- Town Heritage Staff led twelve separate two-hour fieldwork sessions touring Old Town with volunteers, gathering data on the built heritage, cultural heritage landscapes, streetscapes, and treescapes that characterize Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Old Town Village in relation to and beyond the existing boundaries Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 (the “Old Town”). 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. Updating the HCD Plan was also indicated as a priority through the Town’s Planning for Progress directives (2021) and Council’s Strategic Plan (2022-2027).

The Town is seeking consultant support through a Request for Proposals (“RFP”) for the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District Study (the “HCD Study”). Staff are currently finalizing the details of the contract and will be providing an update to Council and the MHC on the successful submission soon.

In advance of the commencement of the formal HCD Study, Staff established the HCD Study Working Groups to collect baseline data using a Built Heritage Survey Form (“BHS Form”, **Appendix II**) and findings to share with the successful consulting team for the Review and Expansion of the Heritage Conservation District Study project.

Onboarding & Fieldwork Structure

The HCD Study Working Group was comprised of 18 volunteers, associated with the MHC, the Town Historian/NOTL Museum, and the Niagara Foundation. The group offered expertise in architectural history, the historical settlement of NOTL’s Old Town Village, military history, genealogy, archaeology, cultural landscape studies, landscape architecture, restoration, and arborist studies, among other specializations. The Working Group represents local members of the community who are committed to preserving and celebrating the historical fabric of Old Town. The exercise provided an opportunity for varied perspectives to assist with shaping the HCD Study with insight into priorities, concerns, and feedback.

The volunteers joined Town Heritage Staff for twelve two-hour long fieldwork sessions, during which the small groups were tasked with reviewing an assigned set of addresses. To guide the fieldwork, each group was provided with available digital data from the Town, which offered initial information about a building’s date, alterations, and potential cultural heritage value or interest (“CHVI”) as recognized by the Town but not included on the Heritage Register, along with details on properties listed and/or designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

The preliminary study area focused on properties located outside of the current boundaries of the Queen-Picton HCD. Primarily, this took the groups into the residential areas surrounding the HCD, many of which were linked in style, date, and character to their surrounding area. The overarching focus of this phase of the project was to consider the ways in which a property, individually or as part of a group of properties, contributed meaningfully to our understanding of the evolution of both the existing HCD and of Old Town Village as a whole. Using previous studies such as the National Historic District (2004), the Secondary Plan Character Study (2009), the Dock Area Secondary Plan (2010), and the Downtown Character Area Study (2019) as a base, the working groups surveyed properties within the fieldwork boundaries.

Fieldwork Findings

Led by Town Heritage Staff, fieldwork groups digitally completed a BHS Form (**Appendix II**) for each property along their assigned route. Completing this form digitally allowed for an opportunity to add to, and updated where necessary, the Town’s data, and to consider key character-defining elements that might add CHVI to properties individually and collectively along a particular streetscape.

Using the varied expertise and specialized knowledgebases of the volunteers, these surveys also allowed for data collection to include considerations of streetscapes, landscapes, natural elements, and settlement patterns to inform assessments of potential CHVI as it relates to a potential expansion of the Queen-Picton HCD boundaries.

Where properties were well-documented and/or designated under Part IV of the OHA, certain groups made decisions to allow Town Heritage Staff to complete the BHS Forms for those properties to maximize the ground covered and utilize the expertise of the various groups to the greatest extent.

While the data remains confidential, completing the forms using the Microsoft Form program will allow for the successful consultant team to visualize the data set in different ways, generating visual graphs, and data synthesis to inform their desktop and on-site analysis of NOTL's Old Town area.

Additionally, specific opinions and points of view were collected both during and after each fieldwork session. At the conclusion of the fieldwork sessions, an email was sent to each volunteer to thank them for their participation and solicit any further feedback. All written feedback will be provided directly to the consultant team.

Value Add

As part of Council's Strategic Plan, the review and expansion of the Queen-Picton HCD was delineated as a priority action item under the Town's 'Planning for Progress' directives.

Under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, subsections 40 and 41 outline the process by which a HCD study and Plan must proceed, including consultation with the Town's MHC, property owners, and community. Upcoming work for the HCD Study will include presentations to the MHC, and community engagement sessions; however, this engagement typically occurs later in the study process. As a result of the HCD Working Groups, the HCD Study will benefit from this early engagement with the MHC and local heritage enthusiasts, each with an interest in the celebration and preservation of Old Town's historical character, as the starting point of the project. Further, lines of communication have been opened to allow for these volunteers to continue to contribute meaningfully to the HCD Study process.

Future opportunities to attend public meetings will be publicized as the HCD Study continues.

NEXT STEPS / CONCLUSION

Town Heritage Staff have compiled a significant amount of data through the fieldwork sessions, as well as digital records of the surveys. This information will be provided to the successful consultant team as part of their desktop and site visit research process for the HCD Study. Taken into consideration alongside further surveys, analyses, and policy framework review, the successful consultant team will have current data with local input, that reflects the current condition of Old Town's built heritage and cultural heritage landscapes.

It is expected that the HCD Study contract will be awarded as soon as possible. The formal Study will kick-off and continue through the end of the year, with an expected conclusion in Q4 2025.

APPENDICES

- **Appendix I** - Heritage Conservation District Study – Information and Status Update – CDS-24-131
- **Appendix II** – Built Heritage Survey Form – Blank Example