

# Staff Report



---

To	<b>Committee of the Whole</b>
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Wednesday, September 4, 2024
Subject	<b>Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District Study</b>

---

## Recommendation

1. That the recommendations of the Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District Study Report (prepared by ASI and dated June 2024) be approved.
  2. That staff be directed to prepare a plan and guideline for the Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act.
- 

## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the Phase 1 Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study for the Downtown Guelph study area and to outline the findings and recommendations of the study (Attachment-1).

This report should be considered in conjunction with the following reports:

Solid Waste Resources Recycling Program Transition Audit  
Downtown Collection Area Update  
Improving Access to Public Washrooms in Guelph  
Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program – Streetscaping Level-of-Service and Construction Mitigation

These reports outline key elements of the Downtown Renewal Program, a comprehensive vision to transform how Downtown Guelph looks, feels, and functions, while also preserving its unique cultural heritage.

### Key Findings

In June 2021, Council approved the recommendations of the [Cultural Heritage Action Plan](#) which included this priority: “For Old Downtown, undertake a comprehensive strategy, including community consultation, to direct future cultural heritage conservation efforts and planned change” (Page E-7).

The provincial government’s [More Homes Built Faster Act](#), 2022, significantly changed the structure of municipal heritage registers in Ontario. As a result, all properties currently listed on the Municipal Register of Cultural Heritage Properties must be removed by January 1, 2027. Approximately 1,700 properties will lose their heritage status and the associated protections, representing over 80 per cent of Guelph cultural heritage resources.

To ensure the Downtown cultural heritage landscape is conserved, the City retained Archaeological Services Inc. (A.S.I.) to conduct a study to determine the suitability for a heritage conservation district in the commercial core of Downtown Guelph. The Study provides an assessment of the historical, design, and contextual value of the study area, a character analysis, a statement of cultural heritage value or interest, and identifies a boundary for the proposed heritage conservation district. The Study included a community engagement process to understand the unique character of the area and to inform recommendations for the boundary. Engagement included two workshops with Heritage Guelph, two meetings with the Downtown Guelph Heritage Focus Group, and two public information centers for the general public.

Based on the results of research, survey activities, character analysis, heritage evaluation, and engagement, the Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study finds that the area meets the legislative requirements for district designation under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. The Study recommends that the City of Guelph proceed to protect this area as a Heritage Conservation District, and that a Heritage Conservation District plan and guidelines be prepared (see recommended boundary in Attachment-2).

Next steps would include preparing a Heritage Conservation District Plan for the recommended area that will describe District objectives and the policies and guidelines that will support sensitively adapting the Downtown as it continues to grow while maintaining its historical sense of place and character.

### **Strategic Plan Alignment**

The key findings and recommendations of this report align with 2024-2027 Strategic Plan priority 6.1.4 to conserve our cultural heritage resources

### **Future Guelph Theme**

City Building

### **Future Guelph Objectives**

City Building: Grow and care for our community space and places

### **Financial Implications**

No financial implications are associated with a decision to proceed with the staff recommendation. The total combined cost of Phase 1 (the HCD Study) and Phase 2 (the HCD Plan) is just over \$200,000 and this is funded through the capital budget.

---

## **Report**

### **Study Background**

The Cultural Heritage Action Plan (CHAP) was approved by City Council on January 25, 2021. The CHAP recommended that heritage staff undertake a heritage district study of the Old Downtown, which was identified as a priority candidate cultural heritage landscape.

In May 2023, the City of Guelph retained A.S.I. to conduct a Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study for the Downtown Guelph HCD Study Area shown in Map 1 of the Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District Study (Attachment-1, page 19). An HCD is a geographically defined area within a municipality that is noted for

its distinct heritage character. Within an HCD, heritage attributes are buildings, structures, and landscape features that contribute to the cultural heritage value of the properties involved and the district as a whole.

An HCD is used as a planning tool for recognizing and protecting these areas and managing and guiding future change in the district. The heritage conservation district designation process has two phases. Phase 1 is the HCD Study. The purpose of the Phase 1 Study is to determine if the Downtown Guelph Study Area merits designation as an HCD in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act, provincial guidelines, and municipal policies. This study assessed the historical, design, and contextual value of the Study Area; reviewed the existing policy framework in the area; provided a character analysis and statement of cultural heritage value or interest; and delineates a boundary for the proposed HCD.

### **Historical Background and Heritage Evaluation**

Current archaeological evidence indicates humans were present in southern Ontario approximately 13,000 years before present day. The Guelph area was home to the Hattiwendaronk, the Anishinaabe, and the Haudenosaunee, who continue to reside in Guelph today. Throughout the period of initial European settlement, First Nations continued to inhabit Southern Ontario, and continued to fish, gather, and hunt within their traditional and treaty territories, albeit often with legal and informal restrictions imposed by colonial authorities and settlers. The Study Area is located within Treaty 3 – the Between the Lakes Purchase, negotiated between the Mississaugas of the Credit and the British crown in 1784.

The plan for the town of Guelph was designed by John Galt, a Scottish novelist, who was the first Superintendent of the Canada Company. Galt laid out a plan for the town with the downtown streets in the shape of a fan, radiating out from the location of the town's founding, believed to be the location of where the first tree was felled (Attachment-1, Map 14, page 70). This was intended to be the focal point or *centre* of town, though it was not located at the geographic centre of the downtown, which would be approximately at the intersection of Wyndham and Quebec Streets. The plan was intended to provide easy access to the centre of the town from all directions. As part of Galt's plan, the radial plan connected to a grid, resulting in a range of different road intersection typologies where streets converged. Other features of Galt's plan included a large triangular Market Square (another focal point of the town), sites reserved for three churches, and a burying ground.

The subject Study Area and some immediately adjacent properties together constitute an intact composition of Galt's radial plan as it would have been developed as early as 1827 and evolving to approximately 1935. The radial plan also distinguishes the Study Area from its surroundings, particularly the neighbourhoods to the south and west which are arranged in a typical grid pattern of streets and blocks. John Galt's town plan layout intended that it resemble a European city centre, complete with squares, broad main streets, and narrow side streets, resulting in a variety of block sizes and shapes which are still in place today. The street layout from Galt's 1827 plan is largely intact today.

The Study Area contains a concentration of commercial and civic buildings and some former industrial buildings which have continuity from as early as the 1840s and through to the present. The area is characterized by grand civic buildings and commercial buildings which form complete street walls set at the sidewalk and are

typically two to three storeys in height. The Study Area has a cohesive assemblage of buildings and streetscapes, unified by the consistency of the architectural design, scale of buildings and material aesthetic and common commercial, civic, and institutional building typologies.

The downtown area has a cohesive and interconnected collection of historically significant and finely executed buildings, streetscapes, open spaces, landmark buildings, and landscape features that together demonstrate how Guelph became a thriving community in the mid to late nineteenth century, and eventually a centre for industry and commerce in the heart of a highly productive agricultural region. They are interconnected at a scale and with a level of authenticity that allows the area to be experienced as a distinct historical place that reflects on the community's nineteenth-century development patterns.

### **Statement of Cultural Heritage Value**

Cultural heritage values associated with the radial plan include:

- The downtown is laid out in a rare and unique manner and is an early example of employing a radial plan in the layout of streets. The radial plan in Guelph is unique in Ontario, particularly as it extends from the natural bend in the Speed River, is sited on a plateau above the river, and is contained by the drumlins which characterize the city.
  - The clarity and integrity of this original layout and survey concept for Guelph continues to be effectively expressed.
  - The focal point of the radius is situated at the intersection of Macdonell Street and Woolwich Street, extending from this point are five radial streets: Woolwich Street, Quebec Street, Macdonell Street, Market Street (through Market Square and from 1855 the Grand Trunk Railway line), and Fountain Street East.
  - The radial streets generally end on the west side of the downtown at their intersection with Norfolk Street and Gordon Street and where the land rises steeply at the drumlin known as Catholic Hill. The exception to this is Market Street which continues as Waterloo Street and Fountain Street West.
- The radial plan naturally results in the creation of triangular block patterns. This condition resulted in irregular parcel shapes which continue to be defining lotting patterns today. Near to the apex of some blocks, parcels extend through the block. In other cases, irregular spaces are created between neighbouring properties and resulting in courtyards.
- Within Galt's 1827 Plan of the Town of Guelph and contained between the Speed River and Norfolk Street, land was set aside for public functions: Market Square as the location for St. Andrew's Church, St. George's Square for the location of St. George's Church, and the Burial Grounds.
- For the community of Guelph, the radial plan provides an identity with a strong oral history around the site of the ceremonial tree felling by John Galt as the focal point of the radial plan and the five radial streets extending from this location being likened to fingers extending from the palm of a hand.
- The plan is associated with John Galt who laid out the plan for Guelph in 1827. Galt was a Scottish writer who was Superintendent of the Canada Company which sought to develop the Huron Tract.

The approach to town planning used by Galt and the Canada Company is an early and rare example of streets and blocks designed and initiated prior to any development of industry, agriculture, or commerce.

The town developed in a particular manner due to the ways in which the Canada Company promoted the area and attracted settlers. Attractive church sites were intended to entice monied British Protestants as well as skilled people (St. Andrew's Church originally located at Market Square and St. George's Church original located within St. George's Square). The site was located amidst prime agricultural lands, allowing the company to charge considerably high prices.

Cultural heritage values associated with Market Square, the Railway and civic functions include:

- The significant civic functions of the City of Guelph are situated within the lands which comprise the original Market Square. This began with the siting of the Town Hall for Guelph in 1856, continued with the Provincial Winter Fairgrounds in 1899, and has been reinforced through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
- The narrow blocks along the north and south edges of Market Square that result in primary building frontages responding to Market Square and buildings backing onto the neighbouring streets of Macdonell Street and Fountain Street East.
- The bisection of Market Square by the 1856 railway which, while having negative impacts on the design of the square, ultimately benefitted the economy of the town.

Cultural heritage values associated with downtown Guelph as a regional centre include:

- Guelph's selection as the District town for the District of Wellington in 1837 and with that selection the construction of the District courthouse and jail which in turn led to the opening of Douglas Street and a concentration of legal offices in this area.
- The railway's broader significance related to being a major stop on an early railway network in the province as well as attracting large industries and exporting goods and resources such as limestone. Guelph Central Station continues to function as a major transportation node in the downtown.
- The large quantity of hotel building demonstrates Guelph's regional role as a stopping place for people traveling to and through the area.

Cultural heritage values associated with the economy, commercial and industrial composition of downtown Guelph include:

- Limestone as a key natural resource and resulting collection of commercial and industrial buildings with a visual unity based on materiality and the consistency of cornice heights.
- The nineteenth century aspirations for the City which led to architect designed buildings and architectural features such as rounded or chamfered features at street corners.
- Wyndham Street as a commercial spine along with Quebec, Douglas, Carden and Wilson streets.
- The evolved quality of the south side of Macdonell Street as the street became more prominent over time and building rears took on frontages.

- The bank uses which edge St. George’s Square and have maintained the dimensions of the Square as laid out in 1827.
- The remnant industrial sites such as the buildings associated with Raymond Sewing Machine Company and Bell Organ and Piano Company.

## **Recommendations**

The results of research, survey activities, analysis of the area’s existing character, engagement sessions, and heritage evaluation confirm that Downtown Guelph retains a rich collection of buildings, streetscapes, and landscape features that together tell the story of the community’s settler beginnings alongside the Speed River in the nineteenth century. Downtown historical buildings, streetscapes, and landscape features convey important stories about the community’s past and actively create a sense of place and ambience. These qualities are valued by the Guelph community.

Based on the results of technical work, the study has found that the Study Area retains a distinct, visually cohesive, and interconnected set of features that together express the story of Guelph’s development and growth. The technical work recommends a boundary that extends to the gateway intersection of Norfolk, Woolwich and Norwich Streets and the Speed River between Eramosa Road and Macdonell Street, and south to include the full extent of the original layout of Market Square. These extents include the full area of John Galt’s unique radial town plan that was laid out in 1827 in response to the surrounding natural environment. Downtown Guelph functions as a unique area with a rich collection of heritage resources that merit careful guidance.

## **Consultations and Engagement**

Community and stakeholder engagement is integral to the success of a Heritage Conservation District Study. The study’s engagement program encouraged active discussions with community members and property owners and provided various opportunities to participate in the process and provide comments and feedback. A range of engagement and outreach activities have been held throughout the study and are summarized below.

### **Community and Interest Holder Consultation**

- Public Notice 1: 265 letters sent September 30, 2023
- Heritage Guelph Workshop 1: September 18, 2023
- Public Open House 1: October 8, 2023
- Have Your Say Survey 1: October 18, 2023 – November 8, 2023
- Downtown Guelph Heritage Focus Group Meeting 1: November 6, 2023
- Heritage Guelph Workshop 2: January 29, 2024
- Downtown Guelph Heritage Focus Group Meeting 2: February 5, 2024
- Public Notice 2: 497 letters sent January 29, 2024
- Public Open House 2: February 20, 2024
- Have Your Say Survey 2: February 21, 2024 – March 17, 2024
- Downtown Guelph Business Association Meeting: February 28, 2024

### **Indigenous Engagement**

Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

- Notice of Project Commencement: October 5, 2023
- HCD Study introduction meeting: November 27, 2023

- Draft HCD Study feedback meeting: April 24, 2024

Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation

- Notice of Project Commencement: October 16, 2023
- Comments received on draft HCD Study: April 19, 2024

### **Attachments**

Attachment-1 Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District Study

Attachment-2 Recommended Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District Boundary

### **Departmental Approval**

Krista Walkey, MCIP, RPP, General Manager, Planning and Building Services

Stacey Laughlin, MCIP, RPP, Downtown Revitalization Advisor, Economic Development and Tourism

### **Report Author**

Jack Mallon, Heritage Planner I, Policy Planning

### **This report was approved by:**

Krista Walkey, MCIP, RPP

General Manager, Planning and Building Services

Infrastructure, Development and Environment

519-822-1260 extension 2395

krista.walkey@guelph.ca

### **This report was recommended by:**

Antti Vilkkö, P. Eng., MBA

Acting Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

Infrastructure, Development and Environment

519-822-1260 extension 2490

antti.vilkko@guelph.ca