

# Staff Report



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To	<b>Heritage Guelph</b>
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Thursday, February 6, 2025
Subject	<b>328 Victoria Road South (G. M. Frost Building) – Draft Council Designation Report</b>

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## Recommendation

1. That Heritage Guelph advises City Council that the G. M. Frost Building at 328 Victoria Road South merits designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act; and
2. That Heritage Guelph advises City Council that the committee supports the heritage attributes for the G. M. Frost Building at 328 Victoria Road South as outlined in the Heritage Planning staff report dated February 6, 2025.

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

In November 2022, the Government of the Province of Ontario passed Bill 23 (amended by Bill 185), which made changes to the Ontario Heritage Act that will remove all non-designated properties from the Municipal Heritage Register on January 1, 2027. Heritage planning staff and the Heritage Advisory Committee have been reviewing properties on the Municipal Heritage Register for designation under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

The purpose of this report is to recommend that Council publish its intention to designate 328 Victoria Road South pursuant to Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. The cultural heritage significance and heritage attributes of the property are described in this report.

### Key Findings

The building formerly known as the Turfgrass Institute Building or G. M. Frost Centre at 328 Victoria Road South (Figures 3 and 4) is listed as a non-designated built heritage resource on the City of Guelph's Municipal Register of Cultural Heritage Properties under Part IV, Section 27 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Planning staff are currently working with Fusion Homes as the proponent in the development of a Block Plan for Block 1 of the Guelph Innovation District (GID) Secondary Plan area. The GID Secondary Plan objectives for cultural heritage (11.2.2.2) state that the retention and integration of the Turfgrass Institute Building (G. M. Frost Centre) into the GID community is encouraged.

MHBC has been retained by Fusion Homes to undertake a [Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report for Block Plan Areas 1, 2 and 3](#) which is currently in production.

A property may be designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act if it meets at two or more of the criteria used to determine cultural heritage value or interest as set out in Ontario Regulation 9/06 (as amended by Ontario Regulation 569/22).

Heritage Planning staff have evaluated the G. M. Frost building located at 328 Victoria Road South in accordance with the requirements of the Ontario Heritage Act and find that the building meets five of the nine prescribed criteria for defining cultural heritage value or interest under Regulation 9/06. It is therefore recommended that the property be designated under section 29, Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

## **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**

None.

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# **Report**

## **Location**

The address of 328 Victoria Road South currently identifies a large property bounded by the northeast side of Victoria Road South, the Eramosa River, the West side of the Guelph Junction Railway tracks and Stone Road East (Figure 1).

The legal description of the subject property is PART BROKEN FRONT LOTS 10, 11 AND 12 CONCESSION 1 DIVISION G GUELPH TOWNSHIP, PARTS 1 TO 13 AND 16 TO 19 INCLUSIVE 61R10430, SAVE AND EXCEPT PARTS 1, 2, 4 AND 7 61R11036 AND PARTS 1, 2 AND 3 61R21861 TOGETHER WITH AN EASEMENT AS IN ROS651254.

The subject building is located in the northern section of the property (Figures 2 and 3) with access by a long driveway from Victoria Road South roughly halfway between College Avenue East and the Eramosa River.

The subject property is owned by Fusion Homes.

Figure 1 – Location and extent of property known as 328 Victoria Road South. G. M. Frost building location indicated with a yellow star. (City of Guelph GIS)

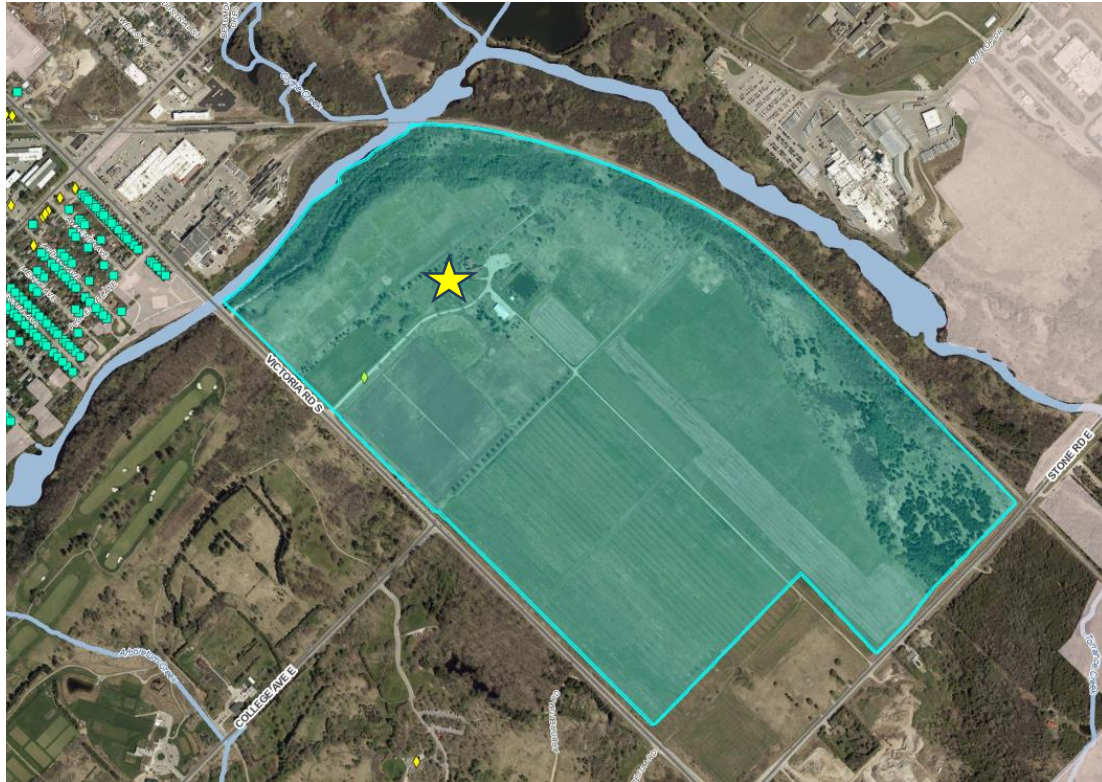


Figure 2 - Subject property seen from Victoria Road South at College Avenue East. (Google Street View, September 2023)



## Background

Block 1 of the Guelph Innovation District contains the former G. M. Frost Research and Information Centre, also known simply as the “Turfgrass Institute” (Figures 3, 4 and 5)

Figure 3 - G. M. Frost Research and Information Centre (Heritage Planning, 2010)



Figure 4 - G. M. Frost Centre (Heritage Planning, 2013)



Figure 5 - View of Basilica of Our Lady from main hall. (Heritage Planning, 2013)





According to information posted on the University of Guelph Turfgrass Institute website, the funds to construct and equip the G. M. Frost Research and Information Centre were raised by the Ontario Turfgrass Research Foundation through the support of many associations, companies, and individuals with an interest and understanding of the role turfgrass plays in modern society. Mac and Beth Frost of Stouffville, Ontario provided the founding donation for construction. The G. M. Frost Centre included office space for industry organizations as well as conference, lecture and meeting rooms, and a field laboratory equipped to facilitate the research that took place on the surrounding fields. For thirty years after its opening in 1992, the G.M. Frost Research and Information Centre has been the research, education, and information hub for the Canadian turfgrass industry. The Guelph Turfgrass Institute moved from the historical property (328 Victoria Road South) to the current location on the University of Guelph campus (364 College Ave East) which officially opened in 2022.

Following the death of Guelph architect Karl Briestensky in 2004, Gil Stelter (Professor Emeritus in History at the University of Guelph) published in the Guelph Historical Society's "Historic Guelph" a study of the architect's forty-five year career. In his study, "Karl Briestensky and The Look of Modern Guelph", Dr. Stelter pointed out that "much of the city that we know today owes its appearance to Briestensky's work". Stelter conducted interviews with Briestensky, other contemporary Guelph architects (including Richard Pagani and Allan Sage) as well as family, friends and business associates. Stelter described the more significant Briestensky designs as follows (illustrated Heritage Planning's photos in Figure 5):

- St. John the Baptist Catholic Church with its dramatic bell tower and triangular shape - 45 Victoria Road North (1968)
- Wellington Hotel restoration at Wyndham and Woolwich Streets (1978)
- Royal Plaza renovation at Paisley and Norfolk Streets (1985)
- National Trust Building on St. George's Square (1989)
- G. M. Frost Building (formerly Guelph Turfgrass Institute) - 328 Victoria Road South (1990-1992)
- Walker Building renovation - 111 Farquhar Street (1990)

Figure 6 - Guelph buildings designed by Karl Briestensky. (Heritage Planning)



Gil Stelter stated that the G. M. Frost Building at 328 Victoria Road South was one of the architect's favorite projects. The Frost Building was built in 1990-1992 as a joint venture of the University of Guelph, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the private turfgrass industry. The Turfgrass Institute building had two functions: research for drought and pest control in turfgrass; and to provide rental meeting rooms.

Stelter's research interviews reveal "[Briestensky] and the clients chose a knoll overlooking the city, at some distance from Victoria Road. He consciously oriented the building's central hall to look toward the city's major landmark, the Church of Our Lady." (Figures 7 and 8)

Figure 7 - View downtown from trail near Frost Building; view of Frost Building from top of steps at the Basilica of Our Lady. (Heritage Planning, 2024)

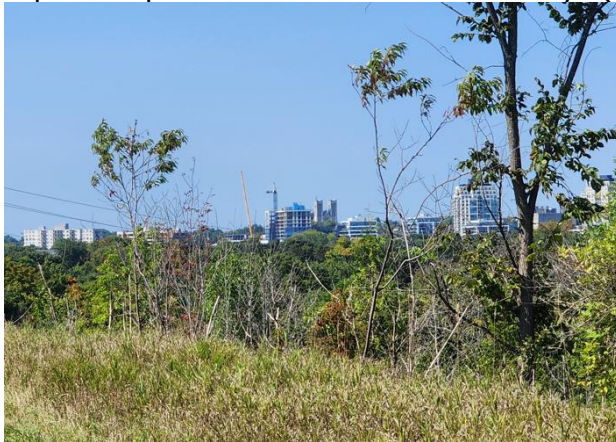


Figure 8 - view of Frost Building from top of steps at the Basilica of Our Lady. (Heritage Planning, 2024)



Briestensky told Gil Stelter "he wanted the building, with its dormers and barn-like look to evoke the spirit of traditional agricultural buildings in the area. [...] The

imposing setting and the architectural form of the building have become, as Karl hoped, fitting symbols of Guelph's historic close connection with a progressive and advanced form of agriculture."

## **Statement of Significance**

Heritage Planning recommends that the G. M. Frost Building at 328 Victoria Road South has design/physical value, historical/associative and contextual value and thus meets five of the nine criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest under Ontario Regulation 9/06.

### **Design and Physical Value**

The building has physical/design value as it meets Criteria 1 being a good representative example of a late-20<sup>th</sup> century Post-Modernist building designed by Guelph architect Karl Briestensky.

### **Historical Associative Value**

The building has historical/associative value as it meets Criteria 4 in that it has direct associations with the theme of Guelph's historically close connection with a progressive and advanced form of agriculture.

The building has historical value or associative value as it meets Criteria 5 in that it demonstrates the work of an architect who is significant to the Guelph community and the city's later 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural history.

### **Contextual Value**

The building has contextual value as it meets Criteria 8 being visually linked to its surroundings - its location on a knoll overlooking the city, at some distance from Victoria Road was intentionally oriented so that the building's central hall looks toward the city's major landmark, the Basilica of Our Lady.

The building has contextual value as it meets Criteria 9 as it has become a landmark that is seen from Victoria Road South and from the Ontario Reformatory property to east.

## **Heritage Attributes**

The following elements of the G. M. Frost Building at 328 Victoria Road South should be considered as heritage attributes in a designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act:

- original building form and massing including the large, steep-sloped main gable roof with similar smaller transverse gables
- walls of glass facing the downtown of the city
- gable roof lantern at the centre of the main roof ridge
- tubular steel exterior structural supports

### **Financial Implications**

None.

## **Consultations and Engagement**

None.

## **Attachments**

None.

## **Departmental Approval**

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

## **Report Author**

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