

# Advisory Committee of Council Staff Report



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To Accessibility Advisory Committee  
Date Tuesday, February 18, 2025  
Subject **Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District – update and introduction to Phase 2**

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## Recommendation

1. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee receive and review the staff report 'Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District – update and introduction to Phase 2'
  2. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee offers preliminary feedback and insight to help inform the heritage district's Plan and Guideline development
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## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District project including the results of Phase 1 (Study) and start of Phase 2 (Plan and Guidelines). This high-level introduction is an opportunity to begin discussing the intersections between accessibility and built heritage in Guelph's downtown core; and how to address and reduce barriers found in the historic downtown.

### Key Findings

The Downtown Heritage Conservation District is an ongoing project to protect built and cultural landscapes, and to guide change in Guelph's historic downtown core through designation (via bylaw) under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. Phase 2 will include the creation of a plan that outlines the features to be preserved, the objectives of the preservation strategy, and the guidelines to achieve these objectives.

### Strategic Plan Alignment

The Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines align with the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan priority 6.1.4., to implement the Cultural Heritage Action Plan to conserve our cultural heritage resources.

### Financial Implications

None

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## Report

On November 28, 2022 the Government of Ontario passed Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act*, which made significant changes to the Ontario Heritage Act. Bill 23 requires that all non-designated properties must be removed from the Municipal Register of Cultural Heritage Properties by January 1, 2025 (deadline now updated to January 1, 2027). Approximately 80% of the built heritage resources in Guelph have some protection currently through their listing on the Municipal Register. These properties become increasingly vulnerable to demolition once the register is removed unless they are designated through bylaw under Part IV (Individual) or Part V (Heritage District) of the Ontario Heritage Act.

The designation of a heritage district happens in two phases. Phase 1 is the study phase which researches the historical, cultural and architectural aspects of an area. At the end of Phase 1 a boundary for the district is proposed and both the study and boundary are brought to council for approval. The Downtown Guelph Heritage District Study was presented to council September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Council unanimously approved the study and boundary as presented and instructed staff to begin phase 2.

The purpose of Phase 2 is to provide a framework and guidance for the management and preservation of the area’s heritage resources. This includes guidelines for alteration and demolition, as well as for infill and new construction or development. In this phase, Heritage Staff are committed to ensuring the Downtown Heritage Conservation District is not an additional barrier to improving accessibility in the City of Guelph. Heritage Staff also believe there are opportunities in this phase to assist in reducing some of the existing barriers.

Preliminary goals in the development of phase two include making sure a broader understanding of accessibility is considered and making clear that many interventions and improvements can be done with limited or no permitting. Also, looking to best practices in both accessibility and heritage preservation to make the experience and use of downtown Guelph more inclusive. Heritage Staff are looking forward to having the Accessibility Advisory Committee provide high-level recommendations early in the development of Phase 2 so that they may be ingrained in the creation of the guidelines.

The next public open house is scheduled for April 2025 with the date to be announced. A draft version of the Plan and Guidelines should be complete in Q2 2025, the Accessibility Advisory Committee will have the opportunity to review them and offer feedback at that time. The final Plan and Guidelines will be presented to council in Q4 2025. If approved, the final step in the process is the creation of a bylaw to protect the downtown district.

### Financial Implications

None

## **Consultations**

Phase 1 included two public open houses, each connected to a 'Have Your Say' online survey. Phase 2 also includes two public open houses and surveys. Each phase also includes meetings and consultations with varied rights and stakeholder groups.

## **Attachments**

None

## **Departmental Approval**

Krista Walkey, General Manager, Policy Planning

## **Report Author**

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

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