

Staff Report



To	City Council
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Tuesday, June 10, 2025
Subject	Ward West Heritage Conservation District Study

Recommendation

1. That the recommendations of the Ward West Heritage Conservation District Study Report (prepared by ASI and dated April 2025) be approved.
 2. That the proposed heritage conservation district be named, "The Ward Heritage Conservation District"
 3. That staff be directed to prepare a plan and guideline for the Ward Heritage Conservation District in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act.
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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 Ward West study area and to outline the findings and recommendations of the study (Attachment-1).

Key Findings

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

At the May 31, 2023, [Committee of the Whole meeting](#), Council passed a motion to expedite the timing of the Ward West Cultural Heritage Study and assist with heritage initiatives tied to changes to the Heritage Act and the associated deadlines contained in Bill 23.

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 Ward West 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 western portion of the Ward neighbourhood. 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 Ward West Working Group, and two public information centers for the general public hosted at the Italian Canadian Club.

Based on the results of research, survey activities, character analysis, heritage evaluation, and engagement, the Ward West 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 Ward 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 under \$320,000 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 Ward West, which was identified as a priority candidate cultural heritage landscape.

In March 2024, the City of Guelph retained A.S.I. to conduct a Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study for the Ward West HCD Study Area shown in Figure 1 below. 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 Ward West 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

Current archaeological evidence indicates humans were present in southern Ontario approximately 13,000 years before present day. The Guelph area was home to the Hatiwendaronk, 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.

Early maps of Guelph show a downtown core expanding from the west bank of the Speed River. By the late 1840s, development extended to the east side of the river, with surveyed lots going to present-day Huron Street. Despite being located adjacent to the historic downtown core, the area was slower to develop due to frequent flooding in the low-lying lands. The introduction of a connection to the Grand Trunk Railway through Guelph led to land speculation along the proposed route. While serving on the Grand Trunk Railway Board, Sir John A. Macdonald acquired a large swath of land

in this area and conducted a survey that divided the area into residential lots to form a subdivision. Others also saw opportunity with the introduction of a rail line to the Town and subdivided land in the same year. During this period of subdivision beginning in 1855, a road network of angled streets was laid out in the area. This irregular street network maximized available lots relating to the river and made connections to earlier established streets. These roadways remain largely intact today and contribute to the distinguishing streetscapes and lotting pattern in the area.

The first industry in the Ward was an expansion of Allan's Mill, one of Guelph's earliest industries that utilized hydro power from the Speed River from its location on the west bank. In 1835, the owner of the mill, William Allan, purchased the land on the east side of the river to expand operations, including constructing a wooden structure to be a distillery. The industrial complex spanning the river offered milling, a distillery, cooperage shop, textile production and livestock feed – a byproduct of the distillery. The construction of the Guelph Junction Railway in 1888, which cut through the centre of the Ward slowly attracted industries to move into the Ward near the new rail line and its various spur lines.

The majority of industries established in the Ward during the twentieth century were based in manufacturing. These plants and factories were a major source of employment for local residents, who typically lived within walking distance. Industrial operations in the Ward were at their height from the 1930s to the 1960s. A decline in rail traffic in the 1950s as road networks improved and shipment by truck became more popular resulted in changes to industrial growth in the Ward. The Canadian Pacific Railway (operating on the Junction line) ended passenger service in the 1960s and closed its freight and express sheds in 1969. Industrial activity in the Ward, particularly in the west portion of the neighbourhood, steadily declined following suit.

During the early to mid-nineteenth century, people arriving in the Guelph area were primarily of British, Scottish, and Irish origin, though other communities are known to have lived and worked in the neighbourhood. For instance, some of Guelph's first Black residents lived in chattel houses located on Alice Street, as well as in houses on Toronto Street and Sackville Street along the Guelph Junction Railway line. As the city grew and expanded in the twentieth century, newcomers were looking to establish themselves in the area, with many settling in the Ward neighbourhood. The Ward was a popular choice for newcomers to the city because it was not viewed as desirable by the residents already living in Guelph in the nineteenth century due to its low-lying topography which was prone to flooding and close in proximity to industrial operations along the Speed River. As a result, residential development was incremental through the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. The area's combination of available lots located within a historically flood-prone area and surrounded by industrial operations provided opportunities

for newcomers to purchase and build a home in the area. Many newcomers found work at the various industries located in the Ward.

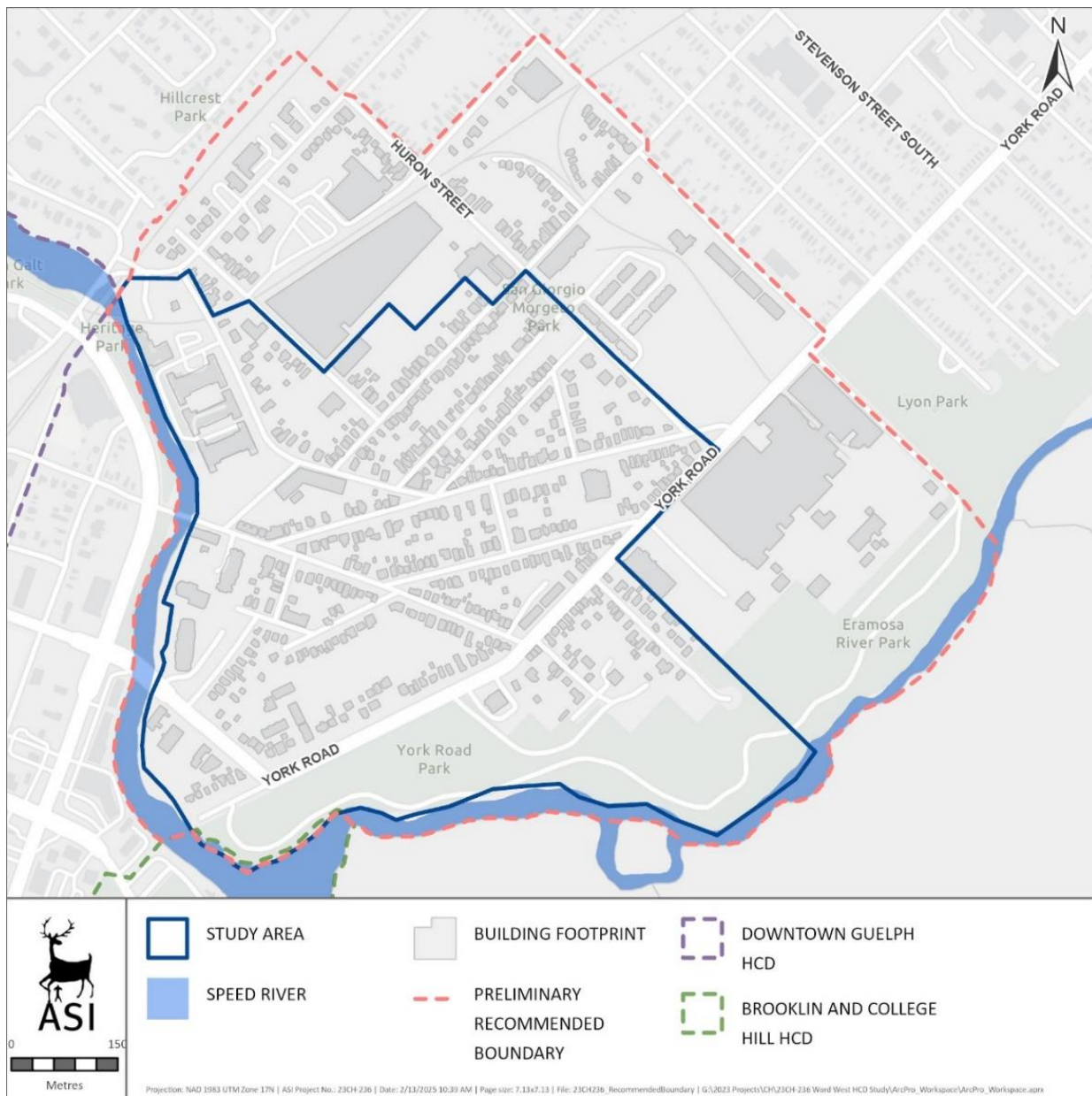
The local economy and contained community of the Ward developed because of newcomers creating a place of belonging. The community that developed over successive generations meeting and cohabitating formed a culture of traditions and daily practices that occurred in private and public spaces in the neighbourhood. Due to the tight-knit nature of the community, credit was often provided to shoppers within the local establishments (Tersigni, 2020), a courtesy that was unlikely to be granted elsewhere. These factors contributed to a strong sense of local and community pride and identity for those that were living in the Ward. Festivals and events, which often occurred in the streets of the Ward, also served to foster the sense of community and belonging valued by residents of the neighbourhood.

Recommended Boundary

Generally, the Study Area is visually distinct from its surroundings and encompasses the area first developed east of the Speed River in the neighbourhood that has historically been known as St. Patrick's Ward or the Ward. It presents an interconnected collection of buildings, streetscapes and landscape features that together reflect the area's long-standing working-class communities and the industrial operations that supported and were supported by the residents of the neighbourhood. Based on the results of research, analysis, consideration of cultural heritage evaluation criteria, and public engagement, an extended boundary has been recommended to include the following additional areas:

- The east boundary be extended from Huron Street to Morris Street, inclusive of the public right-of-way.
- The north boundary be extended to follow along Ferguson Street, to Huron Street northwards to include the 100 Steps and the south slope of the drumlin. This boundary includes the Ward Industrial Cultural Heritage Landscape and a portion of the Ward North Cultural Heritage Landscape, as defined in the Cultural Heritage Action Plan (2020).
- The Speed and Eramosa rivers abutting the Brooklyn and College Hill H.C.D. and the potential Downtown Guelph H.C.D. The two rivers are part of the Riverscape Cultural Heritage Landscape defined in the Cultural Heritage Action Plan (2020).

Figure 1 Recommended boundary indicated by the pink dashed line



Description of Historic Place

The recommended Ward West Heritage Conservation District is generally bound by the Speed and Eramosa Rivers to the west and south. The northern boundary follows Ferguson Street to Huron Street northwards, including the 100 Steps and the south slope of the drumlin. The District retains a distinct nineteenth-century road network and lotting pattern that contributed to the formation of a contained community within the neighbourhood of the historical St. Patrick’s Ward. The combination of residential, industrial, commercial, and institutional buildings that intermingle within the H.C.D. reflect the area’s history and development as a working-class neighbourhood established in 1855 and continuing until there

was a decline in industrial operations in the 1980s. The majority of the buildings within the District were constructed between the 1880s and 1920s and have a brick exterior. They are typically vernacular in their design. Many of the extant buildings constructed during the building boom of the 1880s to the 1920s in the Study Area maintain their historical uses. Others, however, have been adapted or converted to complimentary or additional uses to suit changing social, cultural, and economic needs of the community. For example, commercial storefronts have been added to residential buildings and several former industrial buildings have been converted to multi-unit residences. These adaptations allow for new uses while the original building forms continue to be expressed within the streetscape. The physical and historical conditions that shaped the development of the District contribute to the social and cultural context of the neighbourhood. The diverse population and communities that were formed within the District beginning in the early twentieth century shaped the built environment and understanding of the neighbourhood – an evolutionary process that continues today.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

Cultural heritage values associated with the physiography and landscape include:

- The presence of the Speed and Eramosa Rivers and their confluence, as well as remnant streams are important in defining the area, establishing a long history of use for inhabitants, bringing early industry to the area, and influencing residential development patterns.
- Drumlins that surround the area provide a natural container or barrier that physically divides the low-lying lands of the District from the adjacent highlands.
- The drumlin north of the District limited north-south access between the St. Patrick's and St. George's neighbourhoods.
- Spillways located within the lowlands that define the District are floodplains that were prone to flooding, deterring development and growth in the area compared to nearby neighbourhoods.
- The distinct rear yard tree canopy that is a result of long lots with shallow front yards.

Cultural heritage values associated with the 1855 Registered Plans include:

- Speculative surveys and registered plans within the District in 1855 led to development in the area.
- The road network laid in 1855 is largely extant today and forms a distinct pattern of angled streets that create irregular street and lotting patterns, as well as intersections that forms nodes with a "sense of place" within the neighbourhood.

Cultural heritage values associated with the industrial development and railway infrastructure include:

- The area has a concentration of the largest and earliest water and rail-based industries.
- Early industry was located along the Speed River, utilizing hydro power for operations and in proximity to other industries on the west side and downtown.
- The introduction of the Guelph Junction Railway brought industrial operations inland and development was furthered by several key factors:
- The physiography and topography of the low-lying, flat land lent itself to the construction of large buildings and/or sprawling industrial complexes, which require space and relatively flat terrain to accommodate the large floor plates.
- In the early twentieth century, large plots of land were offered for free for those willing to open or move their operations to the area.
- An influx in the immigrant population to Guelph, many of whom settled in the District, provided the necessary labour to support operations.
- The location of spur lines for the Guelph Junction Railway directed the location of industrial properties, which were built adjacent to the residential areas that were already established in the district, forming a distinct co-mingling of land uses.

Cultural heritage values associated with the built form and character include:

- The earliest modest houses built with readily available materials on small, affordable lots and set within an irregular street pattern. This pattern distinguishes the feel of the area in combination with its proximity to the Speed and Eramosa rivers and their confluence.
- The street and lot pattern set up a concentration of T- and Y-intersection which limit passage through the area, restricting vehicular traffic and creating a pedestrian friendly environment.
- The District contains a concentration of residential properties constructed between 1880 and 1920. These buildings are typically vernacular expressions with a brick exterior. The vernacular designs, scale, and density of buildings as a result of narrow lots results in a 'cheek by jowl' streetscape pattern.
- Industrial properties contrast the fine-grain residential properties through their larger scale and built form. They are typically found in groupings or within a particular area rather than dispersed throughout the District and serve to frame the residential area located in the centre of the District.
- Commercial storefronts and institutional buildings are integrated throughout the District, demonstrating their role in providing services and supporting the local community.
- A distinct pattern of storefronts being added to residential properties, and/or the use of residential properties for commercial uses or cottage industries was prevalent in the District. This can be tied to the long history of working-class residents who were seeking ways to supplement their income, as well as the large immigrant population that settled in the District in the first half of the twentieth century.

- Open space and parks are limited in the District, but provide a variety of recreational, social, and environmental roles in the community.
- The parks allow for recreational activities and wetland protections along the Eramosa River.
- The community garden is an important location for social connection and community building.
- Continuous mixed-use character of the neighbourhood.

Cultural heritage values associated with walkability and community include:

- The communities built by those who were moving into the District and calling the neighbourhood home brought with them traditions and lifestyles from home that were incorporated into the community and how the built environment was used. Many of the grocery stores, bakeries, and restaurants became social hubs within the District, deepening the connection of neighbours within the neighbourhood. This also contributed to the self-sufficient nature of the neighbourhood as all the goods and services residents needed were within the neighbourhood and in walking distance.
- Walkability and proximity were also important for the many residents that were living in the District and working at one of the nearby industrial manufacturers in the neighbourhood. The opportunities available for work through the large-scale industrial operations in the area as well as their close distance to affordable housing within the neighbourhood was an important draw for newcomers in Guelph and was a major factor that contributed to the high immigrant population in the District.
- The adaptation of buildings and open spaces to accommodate changing social, cultural, and economic needs of the communities living in the District are an important aspect of the evolution and diversity of the place. Examples include converting a vacant lot to a community garden, adapting residential properties to have a commercial storefront, and utilizing open areas like the yard of a public school for community activities, festivals, markets, and events.
- The identity and sense of place, centered on creating community and creativity and evidenced through community activities, festivals, markets, and events.

Recommendations

The results of research, survey activities, analysis of the area's existing character, engagement sessions, and heritage evaluation confirm that the Ward West retains a rich collection of buildings, streetscapes, and landscape features that together tell the story of the area's history of industry, immigration, and community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Ward's historical buildings, streetscapes, and landscape features convey important stories about the neighborhood's past and actively create a sense of place and ambience that is valued by the 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 the Ward's development and growth. The technical work recommends a district bounded by the Eramosa River to the east, the Speed River to the west, the railway tracks and drumlin to the north, and Huron and Morris Streets to the north. The Ward functions as a unique area with a rich and eclectic mix 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: 673 letters sent June 6, 2024
- Heritage Guelph Workshop 1: October 15, 2024
- Public Open House 1: June 27, 2024
- Have Your Say Survey 1: June 27, 2024 - July 26, 2024
- Ward West Working Group Meeting 1: October 28, 2024
- Heritage Guelph Workshop 2: January 29, 2024
- Ward West Working Group Meeting 2: January 21, 2025
- Public Notice 2: 929 letters sent January 27, 2025
- Public Open House 2: February 20, 2025
- Have Your Say Survey 2: February 21, 2025 to March 13, 2025

Indigenous Engagement

Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

- Notice of Project Commencement: July 16, 2024
- Project Update: January 21, 2025
- Draft HCD Study sent: March 21, 2025
- Comments received on Draft HCD Study: March 28, 2025

Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation

- Notice of Project Commencement: July 16, 2024
- Project Update: January 21, 2025
- Draft HCD Study sent: March 21, 2025
- Comments received on draft HCD Study: April 10, 2025

Attachments

Attachment-1 Ward West Heritage Conservation District Study

Departmental Approval

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