

Staff Report



To	City Council
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Wednesday, October 15, 2025
Subject	Downtown Heritage Conservation District – Draft Plan and Guidelines – 2025-443

Recommendation

1. That Report 2025-443 from Planning and Building Services, dated October 15, 2025, regarding the draft Downtown Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines be received.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to summarize the key components of the draft Downtown HCD Plan and Guidelines (DT HCD Plan) and to describe the next steps in the HCD designation process. This report presents the draft Downtown Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines for review and comment by Council and the public. The October 15 Council Planning meeting is the statutory public meeting in the Heritage Conservation District (HCD) designation process required under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. The meeting will allow Council the opportunity to hear public delegations on the draft Downtown Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines, ask questions for clarification and provide comments. The recommendation is that draft Downtown HCD Plan and Guidelines is to be received, and no decisions are to be made at this time.

Key Findings

- The establishment of heritage conservation districts is a proven approach to determining and conserving areas of municipalities with distinctive and cohesive cultural heritage characteristics and has been used successfully throughout Ontario and by Guelph in the Brooklyn and College Hill Heritage Conservation District approved in 2014.
- Initiation of a Heritage Conservation District Study for the City's downtown core was identified as a priority in the Cultural Heritage Action Plan due to the desire of the local community to maintain the heritage character of the area and manage change in a heritage-sensitive manner.
- Implementation of the Cultural Heritage Action Plan to conserve our cultural heritage resources is an action in the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan

If established for the Downtown area, a Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines would have multiple benefits, including:

- developing an understanding and appreciation of the cultural heritage resources within the HCD area;
- recognizing and commemorating the values that can sustain a strong sense of place for Guelph's downtown area into the future;
- establishing clear objectives, direction and guidelines regarding the conservation of cultural heritage resources within the HCD; and,
- providing certainty and guidance regarding future change in the area to property owners, businesses, and residents.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This report's key findings and recommendations align with the Future Guelph Strategic Plan themes and objectives as it conserves and celebrates cultural heritage resources as a part of City Building.

Future Guelph Theme

City Building

Future Guelph Objectives

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

Supporting action 6.1.4 - Implement the Cultural Heritage Action Plan to conserve our cultural heritage resources

Financial Implications

Report

Project Phases

The City of Guelph retained Archaeological Services Inc. (ASI) as consultants to conduct a Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study and Plan for Guelph's commercial downtown core. The Downtown HCD (DT HCD) project has two phases.

Phase 1 – The DT HCD Study assessed the historical, design, and contextual value of the initial study area; reviewed the existing policy framework for the area; provided a character analysis and statement of cultural heritage value or interest; and delineated a proposed boundary for the proposed HCD. The DT HCD Study also included community engagement to obtain community input that resulted in a better understanding of the unique character of the area, and to inform the proposed HCD boundary. On September 4, 2024, City Council approved the recommendations from the DT HCD Study as well as the proposed DT HCD boundary (Attachment-1) and directed that the project move to Phase 2 to prepare a HCD Plan and Guidelines for the lands within the Downtown Heritage Conservation District boundary in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act.

Phase 2 – A draft Downtown Heritage Conservation District DT HCD Plan and Guidelines document (Attachment-2) has been produced . The DT HCD Plan document includes policies and guidelines to manage change and conserve the distinct heritage character of the Downtown HCD. The Plan provides policy direction, strategies, design guidelines, and conservation standards that support and enhance the cultural heritage value or interest and unique character of the Downtown Heritage Conservation District. The DT HCD, if approved, would be used to implement a potential heritage conservation district designation by-law.

The DT HCD Plan will:

- describe the DT HCD's cultural heritage value and interest including the statement of objectives for the HCD Plan;
- identify every building, site and landscape feature within the boundary as contributing or not contributing based on whether or not they're determined to express the cultural heritage value of the area; and,
- provide policies and guidelines based on the statement of objectives and the recommendations of the Study that will provide a consistent approach to managing change, alterations, and maintenance of the built heritage attributes and landscape heritage attributes that comprise the DT HCD.

Public Meeting

Before Council can pass a by-law to designate a Heritage Conservation District area or to adopt a HCD Plan, a statutory public meeting must be held to give opportunity for persons who may wish to raise objection or make oral representations or written submissions regarding the HCD Plan.

The October 15, 2025, meeting of Council functions as the statutory meeting required under Section 41.1 of Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. Public notice of the statutory meeting to discuss the proposed heritage conservation district plan must be given at least 20 days before the date of the meeting. Planning staff advertised the statutory meeting online in Guelph Today on Thursday, September 18, 2024 and on the City of Guelph website (guelph.ca) on the same day. The Draft HCD Plan and Guideline was made available to the public on the City's website on Thursday, September 18, 2025, and published with the agenda for the October 15, 2025, Council meeting. Notice of the October 15 Council Meeting were mailed to property owners within the proposed district on September 23, 2025.

Structure of the Downtown Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines

Part A – Understanding the District

Provides several sections to assist in understanding the significance of the District and the overall objectives of the Heritage Conservation District Plan. Part A introduces the District, provides the Statement of District Significance and the cultural heritage values and attributes of the District. Understanding the District states the overall objective for the HCD and identifies the properties in the plan including built as well as park and public realm features.

Part B – Planning for Change

Planning for Change presents the procedures, policies and guidelines for the City and property owners to follow when making changes to properties within the Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District. Procedures include the Heritage Permit Application Process and when a *Cultural Heritage Resource Impact Assessment* may be required. Policies and guidelines are set out in three sections: Contributing Properties, Non-Contributing Properties, and Parks and Public Realm. Finally, Part B provides recommendations for the City regarding implementation, financial incentives, and periodic review.

Consultations and Engagement

Once the draft Downtown Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines have been presented at the statutory meeting on October 15, commentary and feedback on the draft is welcomed from Council, the public and the commenting groups that have been assisting the HCD designation process.

Resulting comments and feedback will be considered and may influence revisions to the Plan's content before the final DT HCD Plan and Guidelines is brought back to Council for approval. A proposed by-law to designate the Downtown Heritage Conservation District area and a related by-law to adopt the accompanying DT HCD Plan and Guidelines will be presented with the final DT HCD.

Attachments

Attachment-1 Downtown Heritage Conservation District Boundary

Attachment-2 Downtown Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines (Draft, September 2025)

Attachment-3 Staff Presentation

Departmental Approval

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

Report Author

Imogen Goldie, Project Manager, Heritage 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:

Jayne Holmes, P.Eng., PMP
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Infrastructure, Development and Environment
519-822-1260 extension 2248
jayne.holmes@guelph.ca