

We are writing to comment on the proposed Heritage Conservation District for downtown.

We wrote to staff back in February 2024 as follows:

"I'm writing to comment on the public open house held on Feb 20th.

While we are generally supportive of preserving our historic buildings and structures, we are hesitant to support the project at this time. While the proposed policies of a downtown heritage district are not yet known in full at this point, we don't want to discourage intensification and redevelopment of housing in the downtown.

The province's More Homes Built Faster Act will require all properties on the municipal register to be removed as of 2025 in an attempt to spur and incentivize more housing to get built without having to face delays or denials because of heritage protection. While we aren't convinced this legislation is good or bad, it was done because we are in a housing crisis and need to do whatever is required to get more housing built and sacrifices will have to be made. After all, housing people should take precedence to structures (with limited exceptions). We understand that the intent of the bill is to streamline and reduce the approval and administrative hurdles to get housing built. It is therefore counterintuitive for the City to try to override the province by trying to add heritage protection policies back on, which would defeat the purpose of the provincial legislation.

If and when housing becomes more plentiful and put back into balance, that may be the time for the City to consider a downtown heritage district.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. "

We've met again with staff earlier this year and attended the May 7th public open house. We've also reviewed the "95% draft guidelines".

We have serious concerns over the burden being placed on property owners and businesses even for simple maintenance and repairs on contributory buildings – for example, painting, replacement of non-original building components such as windows and doors, eaves and downspouts. These minor things will not affect the heritage district as a whole and even if a property is contributory, these elements are not what the City should be aiming to govern and protect. If the intent of this whole heritage conservation district was to override the provincial removal of controls for demolition, it goes far beyond that. If the City wants to circumvent demolition, it can put reasonable policies in place to do so, but the addition of the proposed guidelines are onerous, unnecessary, and add more time and costs for simple renovations or construction, adding another layer of unnecessary bureaucracy. Council needs to be working to take more burden off business, not increase them, and the downtown is already being overwhelmed with City projects that will cause undue hardship to businesses and property owners. We encourage the City to reject or defer any decision on this proposed heritage conservation district. At least we should see how many businesses are remaining after the two year closing and reconstruction of Wyndham Street and assess at that time whether adding more regulatory burden on downtown properties is a wise choice if the goal is to keep or encourage business investment in the downtown.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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