

Staff Report



To	City Council
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Tuesday, February 10, 2026
Subject	Designation of Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District

Recommendation

1. That City Council, in accordance with Section 41 of the Ontario Heritage Act, designate by by-law the area shown in Attachment-1 of this report, as the Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District.
 2. That City Council adopt by by-law the Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines (Attachment-2) as the district plan for the Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with staff's recommendations on the proposed designation of the Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District (OR HCD) and that the Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines (OR HCD Plan) be approved. The report provides background on the work completed to date, a summary of consultation and engagement activities, the feedback received and action taken in response to comments and concerns raised.

The designation of the Ontario Reformatory as a heritage conservation district will support the protection, conservation, and management of its heritage attributes. It will offer clear direction and guide prescribed and anticipated future growth of the area so the district's cultural heritage value is enhanced and sustained in the long term.

Key Facts and Findings

For designation as a heritage conservation district, 25% of properties within a proposed heritage conservation district boundary must meet at least two of the criteria prescribed in Ontario Regulation 9/06 for section 41 (1) (b) of the Ontario Heritage Act. The OR HCD Study (Phase 1) found that four of the five parcels of land included within the OR HCD (approximately 80%) met at least two of the criteria.

On March 21, 2023, City Council approved the recommendations from the OR HCD Study as well as the proposed OR HCD boundary (Attachment-1) and directed that a heritage conservation district plan and guidelines be prepared for the lands within the OR HCD boundary in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act.

A draft OR HCD Plan and Guidelines was released for Council and public review and comment on November 1, 2024. The OR HCD Plan and Guidelines were considered at the City Council Planning meeting held November 13, 2024, which continued on November 26, 2024. The meeting served as the statutory public meeting for the project under the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Council heard delegations from the public, addressed questions for clarification, and recessed the meeting to continue discussions ensuring that all feedback was considered before moving forward with the receipt of the draft plan. Council supported unanimously the recommendation from staff to receive the draft OR HCD Plan and Guidelines.

At the public meeting Council considered the petition for the establishment of a national urban park within the OR HCD boundary and indicated support in principle. Staff continue to hold the position that although the national urban park initiative has received support in principle from Council and subsequently from the Heritage Advisory Committee, the urban park is not a City-led project. The urban park would be subject to a Federal application process that is separate from the OR HCD Plan and project.

The drafting of a plan for the OR HCD has included a robust consultation and engagement program and a multi-phase draft process. The comments and feedback from Guelph City Council's public meeting in November 2024, the Heritage Advisory Committee's workshop session in January 2025 and the public through the May 2025 public open house and online engagement have been considered by staff and the consultant in the preparation of the revised and final OR HCD Plan. The revisions include the following:

- The final OR HCD Plan has been updated to include stronger language throughout. Words like "should" and "seek to" have been replaced with "shall" where appropriate.
- Plain language summaries were added throughout the OR HCD Plan to help readers understand the intent of policy and guideline-heavy sections.
- The community value placed on greenspace and recreational use has been noted and the recommended land use for Adaptive Re-use Area A (AR-A) in Section 5.1 has been updated to better align with the presence of landscape heritage attributes in this portion of the OR HCD.
- The policy statements presented in Section 5.1 and associated guidelines presented in Section 6 still include parameters for development so that City staff have the ability to contemplate and control residential or other **use if a proposal of this type were to arise**.

In order to provide time for the public to review the final draft of the OR HCD Plan and Guidelines, the release of the final draft was announced at the [January 15, 2026 meeting of the Heritage Advisory Committee](#) and was made available on the [OR HCD project engagement page](#) on Have Your Say and on the City's [OR HCD webpage](#).

Strategic Plan Alignment

The key findings and recommendations of this report align with the 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 (Study Phase) and Phase 2 (Plan Phase) is just over \$210,000 and this is funded through the capital budget.

Report

The conservation and celebration of cultural heritage resources is important to sustainable development and can contribute to the social, environmental and economic health of the city. A heritage conservation district (HCD) plan is used as a planning tool for recognizing and protecting HCD areas and managing and guiding future change in an HCD. The designation of the Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District and adoption of the associated plan and guidelines has multiple benefits including:

- The identification of heritage attributes, buildings, structures, and landscape features that contribute to the cultural heritage value or interest of the OR HCD as a whole;
- Recognizing, celebrating and enhancing the aspects of the Ontario Reformatory lands that contribute to and can sustain a strong sense of place;
- Enabling City Council to manage and guide prescribed growth and change within the OR HCD boundary;
- Council approval is required to proceed with the passing of the designating by-law and adoption of the heritage conservation district plan.

The Ontario Reformatory HCD Plan and Guidelines will provide information for City staff, the Heritage Advisory Committee, Council and potential users to understand the cultural heritage value or interest of heritage resources within the OR HCD. It also provides policies and guidelines to achieve the stated objectives. It is suggested that the OR HCD Plan be read as follows:

Section 1 – Introduction provides high-level background on Phase 1 (OR HCD Study) and Phase 2 (OR HCD Plan) of the project. The location of the Study area, the purpose of the OR HCD Plan, and the approved HCD boundary are identified.

Section 2 – Provides a summary of the OR HCD Study and Plan process, including community engagement, Indigenous Nations engagement, legislative and policy framework. An overview of applicable policy and supporting guidelines as they relate to heritage conservation are also provided.

Section 3 – The cultural heritage value or interest of the OR HCD is described, as presented in the OR HCD Study. Character areas are described.

Section 4 – The statement of objectives and guiding principles for the OR HCD Plan are described.

Section 5 – Recommended policies to meet the objectives and guiding principles are presented.

Section 6 – Design guidelines for managing change within the OR HCD are presented.

Section 7 – Planning and implementation measures to manage cultural heritage landscapes and built heritage resources are presented. The implementation of the OR HCD Plan is outlined, including, the heritage permit process, and the types of work that do not require review against the OR HCD Plan, and heritage easement agreement requirements.

Section 8 – Recommendations are presented to direct amendments to the Official Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw and to reinforce the objectives of the OR HCD Plan as well as any further reports that are needed in the future including periodic review.

Terms throughout the document have been defined in Appendix A: Definitions.

Consultation and Engagement

The OR HCD project has included community consultation and key audience engagement to better understand community association and other connections with the site and to identify key considerations and priorities for the OR HCD Plan. The following audiences were involved in the engagement:

- Heritage Advisory Committee
- Community and Landowner Group: made up of key community groups and owners of property within the HCD Study Area who have a special interest or involvement with the Study Area
- Members of the public: people who live in, work in, and visit Guelph and people from other communities with a connection to or interest in the Study Area
- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council

The following meetings and engagement meetings were conducted as part of the OR HCD Study and Plan:

- Heritage Advisory Committee Meeting #1 (May 6, 2022)
- Public Open House #1 (June 8, 2022)
- Public Open House #2 (September 29, 2022)
- Community and Landowner Group Meeting #1 (October 3, 2022)
- Heritage Advisory Committee Meeting #2 (October 11, 2022)
- Heritage Advisory Committee Meeting #3 (August 14, 2023)
- Community and Landowner Group Meeting #2 (August 21, 2023)
- Council Meetings (November 16 and November 26, 2024)
- Heritage Advisory Committee Meeting #4 (January 27, 2025)
- Public Open House #3 (May 8, 2025)

In addition, virtual engagement tools were used throughout the OR HCD Study and Plan to gather feedback on the HCD process. The virtual engagement tools were hosted on the [City's engagement website](#). The community engagement feedback received as part of the OR HCD Study informed the development of the OR HCD Plan.

Responding to Feedback

The following summarizes the core and frequently shared comments from the public, residents, property owners, business owners, staff and advisory committee

members on the proposed OR HCD Plan. Feedback was received throughout the project consultation and through delegates and written submissions to the Statutory Public Meeting on November 13 and 26, 2024. The feedback was focused on the following:

- Stronger language: There were comments and discussion that stressed the language in the OR HCD Plan must be stronger so that the heritage attributes are conserved.
- Plain Language: Members of the public expressed that the OR HCD Plan is a dense, technical document and that the policy and guidelines are difficult to understand. It was suggested that plain language summaries should be added throughout the OR HCD Plan to help readers understand the intent of policy- and guideline-heavy sections.
- The proposed land use within the HCD requires public feedback.
- Recreational uses of the Ontario Reformatory lands are highly valued by the community.
- Members of the public are interested in pursuing a National Urban Park designation for the OR HCD.

A summary of feedback and responses is presented below.

To address comments received, the final OR HCD Plan has been updated to include stronger language throughout. Words like “should” and “seek to” have been replaced with “shall” where appropriate.

The final OR HCD Plan also includes a more robust analysis and discussion of the proposed land use within the Adaptive Re-use area identified in the GID Secondary Plan and discussed in Section 5.1 of this plan. The Adaptive Re-use discussion presented in Section 5.1 now includes information on the presence of heritage attributes and preferred land designations from a heritage conservation perspective.

It is acknowledged that members of the public are interested in pursuing a National Urban Park designation for the Ontario Reformatory lands. However, this is a formal federal process that must follow Parks Canada’s National Urban Parks Policy. The National Urban Park designation process is separate from the OR HCD designation under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act and is not part of the municipal heritage process. Approval of the OR HCD does not preclude interested parties from further pursuing the National Urban Park initiative, which has received support in principle from Council, but it is not a City-led project. It is recognized, however, that the community highly values natural heritage character and landscape heritage attributes within the OR HCD. The final OR HCD takes this feedback into account by providing more heritage conservation detail in Section 5.1 of this plan.

Provincially-owned Property

- The Province of Ontario is currently the owner of 785 York Road - the largest property within the OR HCD boundary which contains most of the existing built heritage resources.
- The Province of Ontario identified part of 785 York Road as a Provincial Heritage Property of Provincial Significance (PHPPS) in 2008.
- Heritage designation by-laws (under Part IV or V) are not in force and effect on property that is under Provincial ownership.

Individual Property Designation

- The portion of the OR HCD within 785 York Road has pending protection by the City of Guelph in its approval of heritage designation By-law (2021)-20631 for the entire property under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act in October 2021.
- An appeal to Council's approval of heritage designation By-law (2022)-20689 for 919 York Road has been settled through Ontario Land Tribunal Case Number OLT22-003943 with direction to amend the list of heritage attributes and to carry out the approved Conservation Plan to stabilize the Matthews farmhouse building.

Next Steps

The designation of the Ontario Reformatory as a heritage conservation district will support the protection, conservation, and management of its heritage attributes. It will offer clear direction and guide prescribed and anticipated future growth of the area so the district's cultural heritage value is enhanced and sustained in the long term.

If Council passes the associated Ontario Reformatory District by-law, notice will be served on each property owner located within the proposed heritage conservation district, on the Ontario Heritage Trust and will be published in a municipal newspaper. Once the notice is published, a 30-day appeal period begins.

If no notice of appeal is received, the by-law comes into force the day following the last day of the appeal period.

Attachments

Attachment-1 Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District boundary

Attachment-2 Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines

Attachment-3 Draft By-law Number (2026)-21192 Ontario Reformatory Heritage Conservation District

Departmental Approval

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