



CASE-IN-POINT 2020

HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT: LESSONS LEARNED FROM QUEEN STREET WEST, TORONTO

Figure 1: Queen Street West
(Source: Canva)

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ABSTRACT

There is significant value in the preservation of a city's historic buildings, structures, and landscapes. Historic preservation protects the heritage and cultural context of a city and could potentially contribute to the economy of a city. Heritage areas and the memories associated with them are the reference points from which communities can look to their past, understand the present, and plan for the future. Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) are a planning tool used around the world to regulate change in historic districts, to maintain their heritage character, and to manage change in historic areas. Queen Street West is a vibrant commercial district in downtown Toronto and is the City's first commercial retail HCD. This case-in-point examines Queen Street West's HCD designation process, and the lessons learned from the designation process.



Figure 2: Frontage of stores on Queen Street West (Source: Canva)

1.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) are a planning tool that provides a framework to guide change in areas of Toronto that possess a cultural heritage value and reflect significant periods of the City’s history and development.¹ An HCD is an area that is protected by a municipal by-law passed under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act by City Council.² Within the boundary of an HCD, every property is subject to the HCD by-law.³

An HCD Plan directs how to manage change and conservation for each district. Each HCD may contain multiple properties, landowners, resource types, and cultural heritage values.⁴ Therefore, an HCD will require particular policies or guidelines to ensure its conservation and careful management.⁵ HCDs provide place-based policies that enable the council of a municipality to manage and guide future change in the district, through the adoption of a district plan with policies and guidelines for conservation, protection, and enhancement of the area’s unique character.⁶



The cultural heritage value of individual sites can be expressed in terms of their design or physical, historical, or associative or contextual values.⁷

A GUIDE TO DISTRICT DESIGNATION
Under the Ontario Heritage Act

Characteristics of HCDs include:⁸

- A **concentration** of heritage buildings, sites, and structures, or landscapes that are tied with specific aesthetic, historical, and socio-cultural contexts or use.
- A series of **structured physical elements** that create a framework for other heritage features in the district
- **Consistency** in visual elements throughout the district, including scale or built form that give the impression of a distinct time period, or define the uniqueness of the area
- A level of **distinctiveness** that makes the district unique from surrounding areas.



Figure 3: Osgoode Hall -Heritage Building at the corner of Queen Street West and University Avenue (Source: Flickr)

QUEEN STREET WEST, TORONTO

Queen Street West, also formerly named as Lot Street, is one of the streets that reflect early evidence of European settlement in Toronto.⁹ In the late 1700s, the street established as the baseline for Toronto by Royal Engineers.¹⁰ The street initially developed as a main street, and this continues until the present day. The street is divided between a commercial/industrial base to the south and residential neighbourhoods to the north.¹¹



Figure 4: The Queen Street West Heritage Conservation District (between University Avenue and Bathurst Street) is only a segment of Queen Street, which is a lengthy pedestrian-oriented mixed-use strip that stretches from Roncesvalles to The Beaches. (Source: Queen Street West HCD Plan)

Today, Queen Street West remains a main street. One of the main characteristics of Queen Street West, Toronto, as HCD includes a concentration of municipally listed heritage buildings.¹² Other prominent features of Queen Street West include the Queen Streetcar, many buildings that are local landmarks, distinctive architecture, and unique street features including human-scaled buildings, repetitive façade patterns and features, and a pedestrian-oriented public realm.¹³ Furthermore, the animated mixed-use corridor function as a local and regional destination drawing people from the residential neighborhoods that surround it and extensively from all over the city and beyond.¹⁴ The collective memories of Queen Street West community members and visitors also contribute to the street's value as an HCD.¹⁵



Figure 5: Queen Streetcar, longest streetcar route operating in Canada (Source: Canva)

2.0 BASIC FACTS

QUEEN STREET WEST HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT STUDY

In 2005, the City of Toronto authorized a study of Queen Street West between University Avenue and Bathurst Street to determine whether an HCD would be approved.¹⁶ The study focused on understanding the elements that gave Queen Street West its heritage character.

Architects, Architectural Heritage Consultant, and Architectural Historians lead by a consultant firm, Office for Urbanism, provided an invaluable holistic overview of Queen Street West.¹⁷ In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the HCD study, residents, businesses, property owners, and other interested people were also engaged in the HCD study process.

Queen Street West officially designated as an HCD in 2007.¹⁸ The following will show the two phases of designating Queen Street West as an HCD:

- Phase I: Study Phase
- Phase II: Implementation Phase

PHASE I: STUDY PHASE

Request to Designate Queen Street West as an HCD

Proposal approved

**STEP
1.0**

Consultation with the Municipal Heritage Committee (MHC)

**STEP
2.0**

MHC consulted and approved the study area

Refer to the City of Toronto Official Plan

Check if the Official Plan policies contain the necessary provisions to allow an HCD designation.

**STEP
3.0**

Study Process of Queen Street West as an HCD

**STEP
4.0**

- Stakeholder interviews
- Public Open Houses
- Local Advisory Committee (LAC) to review the objectives, guidelines, and opportunity sites

Heritage Evaluation

**STEP
5.0**

- Generating HCD guidelines
- Defining District Boundaries

5.1 HERITAGE CHARACTER

A distinct cultural corridor, the neighbourhood is a main street, and city-wide destination, which provides a mix of uses for residences and visitors.²⁰



Figure 6: Old City Hall - at the corner of Queen and Bay Street. It was the largest civic building in North America upon completion in 1899. (Photo: Thomas)

5.2 BUILDING INVENTORY

An inventory of buildings was made to identify building styles, heights, façade materials and composition, contribution to the neighbourhood, and history.²¹



Figure 7: The diverse street-level retail on QSW allows continuous interaction of pedestrians (Source: gettyimages)



Figure 8: Map of contributing buildings and non-contributing buildings on Queen Street West
(Source: Queen Street West HCD Plan)

Contributing buildings	62%
Non-contributing buildings	38%

Table 1: Percentage of contributing and non-contributing buildings on Queen Street West

The heritage character of Queen Street West reflects in the diverse architectural styles of its buildings. These styles include 19th century Vernacular, late 19th century buildings of Italianate or Second Empire style with rich architectural detail, and 20th century Vernacular, Modern, Post-modern and Contemporary buildings.²²

5.3 CONTRIBUTING VS NON-CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

Contributing buildings were selected based on the period of construction, architectural style, the rhythm of the storefront, shop entrances, mixed-used elements, building height, building materials, fenestration, and heritage value.²³

5.4 SUMMARY OF BUILDING INVENTORY

The results of the building inventory were mapped out along Queen Street West to identify areas where certain aspects of the built form were consistent and clustered, and distinguish the attributes that form an integral part of the character of Queen Street West. The maps included:²⁴

- Contributing and non-Contributing Building
- Number of floors in Contributing Buildings
- Widths of storefronts in Contributing Building
- Architectural styles
- Roof types in Contributing Buildings
- Road and access lanes
- Upper storey glazing in Contributing Buildings
- Ground-level glazing in Contributing Buildings



Public Notification & Meeting to consider HCD Plan and Designation bylaw

Ontario Heritage Act requires one public meeting before passing a bylaw to designate an HCD.²⁵

PHASE II: IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

Begin phase II, after Council designated Queen Street West as HCD.

Preparation of the HCD Plan and Guidelines



7.1 HCD OBJECTIVES

Preserve and enhance the unique heritage character of Queen Street West, including identity, buildings, building features, and pedestrian amenities.²⁶ Besides, HCD aims to encourage the redevelopment and revitalization of underutilized sites by involving area residents, property and business owners, and interested individuals.²⁷

7.3 BOUNDARY OF HCD

The Queen Street West Heritage Conservation District boundary extends along Queen Street West from University Avenue to Bathurst Street, and it includes all properties facing Queen Street West.³⁰ This boundary established upon finalizing the Heritage Character Statement and receiving public input.³¹ Also, a distinguishing factor of Queen Street West is the grid pattern of its blocks.

The north of the Queen Street West boundary is mostly low and mid-rise residential neighbourhoods.³² The south of Queen Street West boundary is larger-scale buildings of a commercial and industrial heritage, as well as residential apartments and condominiums.³³

7.2 HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Queen Street West is an important part of the City of Toronto. The significant history and identity of Queen Street West results from the distinct connections and relative location of the street within the downtown and adjacent neighbourhoods.²⁸ Queen street has a welcoming pedestrian quality of street environment, and also from the scale, rhythm and composition of buildings that line the street. Queen Street West stands out as a district through its cultural heritage and concentration of heritage buildings.²⁹

The east and west of the Queen Street West boundary include significant heritage buildings that have a unique character.³⁴



Figure 9: The Boundary of Queen Street West Heritage Conservation District (between University Avenue and Bathurst Street). (Source: Google Maps)

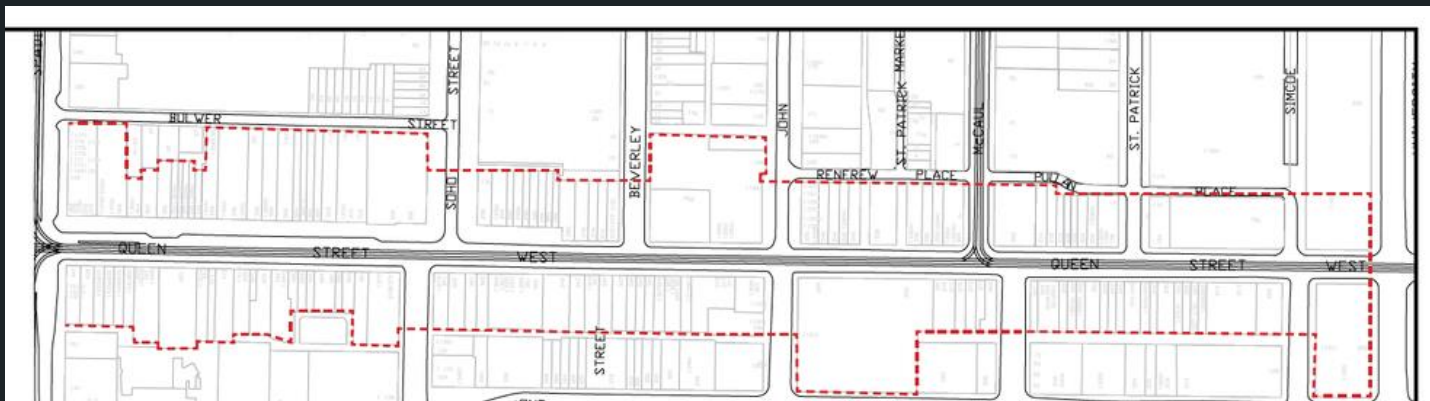


Figure 10: Queen Street West Heritage Conservation District Boundary (Source: Queen Street West HCD Plan)

7.4 HERITAGE ATTRIBUTES AND GUIDELINES

The Queen Street Heritage Conservation District plan includes specific guidelines to protect and enhance significant heritage attributes of Queen Street West. These Heritage Conservation District guidelines for alterations and new construction only apply to the parts of the building or property that can be seen from the street.³⁵ These guidelines established to preserve prominent architecture and landmark buildings, street walls, street wall elements, building heights, façade patterns, and features, the public realm, and circulation areas.³⁶

Also, new and renovated buildings designs should be sympathetic to the district heritage attributes, through massing, roof styles, windows, façade patterns and features, materials used, and other significant design features.³⁷



Figure 11: Cornices are employed to add definitions to buildings and to add a level of architectural interest when the building meets the sky. As a horizontal projection, they often cast a shadow, which adds a dynamic effect to the building. (Source: Sunnyside Historical Society)



Figure 12: Widened sidewalk in Queen Street West, which provides a unique environment for pedestrians. Wide sidewalks are preserved to encourage more pedestrian activity. (Photo: Dumitru Onceanu)

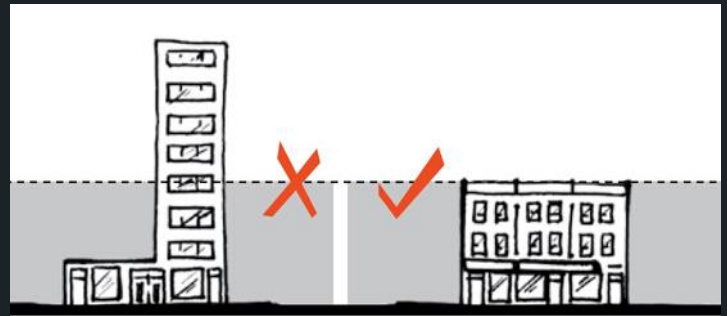


Figure 13: New and renovated buildings must be designed to be sympathetic to the district heritage attributes. For example, a one-storey podium with a high rise building is not part of the street character, whereas a continuous street wall of 3 to 5 storeys is. (Source: Queen Street West HCD Plan)



Figure 14: Windows in QSW have a vertical orientation, a 3-dimensional component (are recessed in the wall), and use decorative frame elements. (Source: Pinterest)

**STEP
8.0**

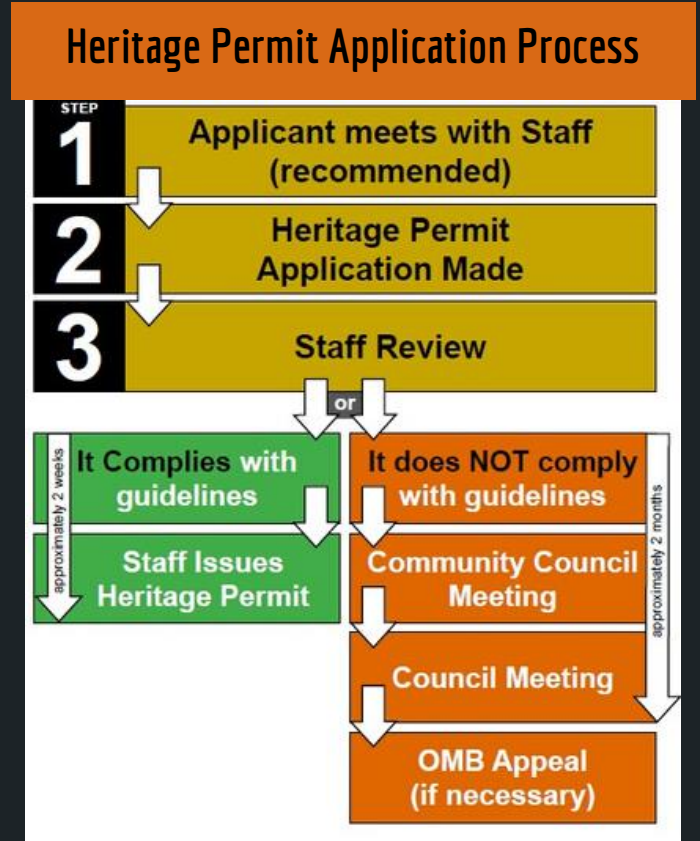
8.1 HERITAGE PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESS

The Queen Street West Heritage Conservation District plan affirms the City of Toronto as the district's steward.³⁸ The City of Toronto Planning Division is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the Queen Street West Heritage Conservation District.³⁹ Any Property owner wanting to demolish or remove buildings or structures on their property, or make alterations to the exterior portions of their property visible from the street, must apply to the City of Toronto for a heritage permit.⁴⁰

All applications are reviewed by Heritage Preservation Service staff to determine whether or not they comply with the Guidelines. Property owners could also consult with City Staff to discuss options, while still conforming to the HCD guidelines.⁴¹ The heritage permit is not needed for interior alterations or minor exterior alterations. This permit ensures the preservation and protection of heritage buildings and historical features in Queen Street West.⁴²

8.2 INCENTIVES FOR CONSERVATION

The City of Toronto provides incentives for the conservation of heritage buildings and features in Queen Street West or other HCDs in Toronto. These incentives include grants up to \$25,000 to property owners in HCDs for heritage restoration work.⁴³ Property owners in HCDs receive notifications of the grant program conditions and application deadlines on an annual basis.



By-law 1005-2001
 Provides an exemption for maintenance & repair using same materials & alterations not visible from the street including interiors.
 Delegates permit approval to City staff for work consistent with district guidelines.
 No separate application is required:
 • building permit application is also heritage permit application; and
 • building permit is the heritage permit.
 Council retains approval for demolitions and work not conforming to guidelines.

Figure 15: Heritage Permit Application Process (Source: Queen Street West HCD Plan)



Figure 16: Buildings on Queen Street West - Attached and continuous street wall with consistency in the height of buildings (2-4 storeys). (Source: Canva)

3.0 LESSONS LEARNED

Heritage Conservation Districts are an essential planning tool to guide change in neighbourhoods or areas that represent Canadian cities rich cultural, social, and architectural history. HCDs also provide place specific policies or guidelines to conserve and enhance historic neighbourhoods or areas, while accommodating contextually appropriate growth and change. HCDs are areas whose cultural heritage value contributes to a sense of place extending beyond their individual buildings, structures, and landscapes.

Queen Street West HCD plan presents a detailed guide to designate an area as HCD, which is by-law approved. Queen Street West HCD plan is an important example of mixed-use streets in Canada that were designated as an HCD. The process to designate an area or neighbourhood as a Heritage Conservation District could be a long process, yet essential to ensure the preservation of these heritage and historical areas to reflect the rich history of our cities.

The Queen Street West HCD plan includes guidelines to protect and provide stability to a street that has a rich cultural heritage and value. The guidelines established to reflect and protect the existing architectural heritage of the street, and to guide future building renovation or new constructions.

HCDs restrict future alterations by property owners in Heritage Conservation districts by ensuring that any major alteration of their properties fits with the district's guidelines. HCDs also protect the demolition of heritage buildings and ensure that new construction or renovations reflect the architectural style in the district. In short, HCDs provide a long-term strategy to achieve heritage conservation and protect cities' histories.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND OUTCOMES

The process of undertaking an HCD study for Queen street West, and eventually creating an HCD had many benefits and positive impacts. These benefits and positive impacts include:⁴⁴

- Ensuring that members of the community participated in the planning process.
- Developing an understanding and appreciation of the heritage resources along Queen Street West
- Recognizing and commemorating the values that can sustain a sense of place in Queen Street West into the future
- Contributing to the development of a rich physical and cultural environment through enhanced awareness and defined policy
- providing clarity and certainty into the future for property owners, businesses and residents
- providing a framework to manage change

5.0 ENDNOTES

1. City of Toronto, "Queen Street West Heritage Conservation District Plan", City of Toronto, 2016, <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/te/bgrd/ba ckgroundfile-5172.pdf>
2. S. Barnett, "Heritage Conservation Districts in Toronto, Procedures, Policies and Terms of Reference", City of Toronto, 2012, <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/pg/bgrd/ba ckgroundfile-44992.pdf>.
3. Barnett, 2012
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6. Ministry of Culture, "Heritage Conservation Districts: Ontario Heritage Toolkit", Government of Ontario, 2006, http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca/en/publications/Heritage_Tool Kit_HCD_English.pdf
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