

OLD SYDENHAM HERITAGE AREA HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT STUDY



Prepared for
The Corporation of the City of Kingston

Prepared by
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Executive Summary: April, 2009



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Study Purpose

The Old Sydenham Heritage Area (the Study Area) is one of the most desirable places to live in downtown Kingston. Its mix of owner-occupied and tenanted housing makes it attractive to a wide variety of people, and its beauty and convenient location are benefits to all.

The Old Sydenham Heritage Area is remarkable, even when compared with other designated districts in Kingston and elsewhere, for the following reasons:

- Significant historical associations;
- Historic views;
- Over 200 designated properties, with many more eligible for inclusion on the City Register;
- A major cultural landscape, and;
- Portions of a World Heritage Site.

The area's heritage value lies both in its collection of individually important properties and in its combination of these resources within a compact, interwoven urban form. The area has value because of properties that represent each stage of the area's development, because the area is relatively unspoiled, homogeneous and intact, and because it offers examples of some of the best buildings and streetscapes in Kingston.

This study is the culmination of over 40 years of municipal efforts to recognize and protect the evident character of the Old Sydenham Area from the twin pressures of growth and decay. The process began with comments in City-sponsored urban renewal studies in 1960 and 1970, in which were made initial assessments of the area's character and of properties that had special significance. Margaret Angus's pioneering book *The Old Stones of Kingston* and the subsequent City inventory of buildings of architectural and historical interest provided detailed assessments of many of the most important properties in the Study Area and led to a large proportion of them being designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. Since the 1980s the City's Official Plan has identified the Study Area as a priority for investigation as a potential Heritage Conservation District. But it has been the more recent efforts by the City to enhance its heritage planning and administration capacity, and by

Opposite: William Street carriage house and Rosemount

local residents to push for more control over development in the area, that galvanized the City into action.

Study Terms of Reference

The scope of work required the successful consultant to “investigate, review and document the cultural heritage resources” within the Study Area, and “to assess the potential for designation of the area as a Heritage Conservation District pursuant to the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The study process was to include “extensive stakeholder consultation” involving “at least four public meetings and a survey of Sydenham Ward property owners and all owners of designated properties in the City”. The consultant was also to examine the proposed district boundaries, review the capacity of City of Kingston staff and the Kingston Municipal Heritage Committee (KMHC) to support designation, and to examine alternative policy and planning tools.

Study Structure

The Study consists of the following components:

- an inventory and evaluation of cultural heritage resources (buildings and streetscapes primarily);
- an historical overview of the areas’ development;
- an assessment of the regulatory policies currently in place, and those available as alternative policy and planning tools;
- an assessment of the City’s staff and KMHC’s abilities to manage a potential district;
- extensive involvement of the public including public meetings and consultations with property owners, and;
- a rationale for designation, and a proposed District boundary.

Conclusions

The study has concluded that district designation is the most effective way for the City of Kingston to conserve and enhance the many heritage resources found in the Study Area. For over forty years, the City has identified the Old Sydenham Area as a distinct district within the historic downtown core. Measures to protect its heritage resources have included Official Plan policies and designation of individual properties under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. However, these initiatives alone are not sufficient to provide the level of protection for the area that local residents want. Lack of controls on non-designated properties could mean that these properties undergo unsympathetic changes that not only diminish the heritage character of the designated prop-

erties, but negatively affect the heritage character of the area as a whole. Only district designation can ensure that changes in the area are managed in ways that are compatible with area character.

In summary, this study has taken the first essential step in describing that character and identifying the various heritage resources that comprise it. The next step is to prepare a Heritage Conservation District Plan in which are contained the policies and guidelines required to properly manage conservation and development.

Recommendations

1. It is recognized that the Old Sydenham Heritage Area is remarkable, even when compared with other designated districts in Kingston and elsewhere, for the following reasons:

- Significant historical associations;
- Historic views;
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The area's heritage value lies both in its collection of individually important properties and in its combination of these resources within a compact, interwoven urban form. The area has value because of properties that represent each stage of the area's development, because the area is relatively unspoiled, homogeneous and intact, and because it offers examples of some of the best buildings and streetscapes in Kingston.

2. It is recognized that the character of the Study Area conforms to the characteristics of heritage conservation districts, as defined by the Ministry of Culture in the Ontario Heritage Tool Kit, in the following ways:

- A concentration of a wide range of heritage resources, linked by aesthetic, historical and socio-cultural contexts and use;
- A framework of structuring elements (a distinct block pattern on sloping ground, boundaries formed by major routes and changes in land use, many landmarks, a lake shore and major park);
- A sense of visual coherence (building scale, mass, height, proportion) within a varied setting, and;
- A distinctiveness that enables the area to be recognized and distinguishable from neighbouring areas (visually, culturally and historically).

3. It is recognized that the heritage character of the Old Sydenham Heritage Area is that of a mature downtown residential neighbourhood bounded by major institutions and by the lake shore. The area contains properties that represent over 200 years of Kingston's history and are some of the finest examples of 19th-century construction in Canada. Generous park space within the area contains many significant memorials and thus offers both a place of recreation and remembrance. The area remains one of mixed incomes and tenancies, built to a human scale that encourages exploration on foot.

4. It is recommended that the character defining elements of the Study Area be considered as being:

- Views down streets to the lake, to the park and to the downtown;
- Varied ages, styles and types of buildings;
- The presence of important civic buildings (school, courthouse/registry office, churches) integrated within a residential neighbourhood;
- A compact scale comprised of common street widths, building heights (2-3 residential storeys) and setbacks;
- Landmark public buildings dominating the skyline;
- Prominent buildings at street corners;
- Trees lining streets and dominating rear yards;
- Surviving examples of historic landscape elements (e.g. period planting layouts, walls, fences, and street furniture);
- An irregular street grid that offers continuously changing views;
- A predominance of stone and brick construction materials;
- A generally high standard of care for buildings and landscapes;
- Proximity to the downtown, major institutions and the lake, and;
- Physical evidence and historical associations with every stage of Kingston's history.

5. It is recommended that the Old Sydenham Heritage Area, as defined on the accompanying map, be designated as a Heritage Conservation District under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

6. It is recommended that Council authorize staff to proceed with the preparation of a District Plan and guidelines.

7. It is recommended that, during the preparation of the District Plan and beyond, properties in the Study Area, both those currently designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, and those currently listed on the City's Register, be re-assessed to bring the property inventories and evaluations into conformity with the requirements of the 2005 *Ontario Heritage Act* and the Historic Places Initiative national register of historic properties. The inventory should be expanded to include cultural landscapes and cross-referenced to the Archaeological Master Plan to include known archaeological resources (i.e. those able to be made public) and areas of archaeological potential.

8. It is recommended that the City initiate a parallel process to that of the current study to address issues of cultural heritage resource management. The proposed process should have a mandate to establish robust cultural heritage programs with sufficient capacity to address the current Provincial heritage policies and the resultant increased workload.

9. It is recommended that the City support the following initiatives to strengthen the ability of volunteers to assist in the inventory, evaluation and stewardship of cultural heritage resources within the Study Area:

- Training in research, inventory and evaluation of heritage properties, using the City's template, and in accordance with the Historic Places Initiative (extending the current Ministry of Culture/HPI project);
- Research and collection of information, including maps and personal documents, on the historical evolution of the Old Sydenham Area;
- In-kind donations, of time and materials, to projects aimed at improving the public realm (e.g. tree planting) that follow guidelines provided as part of any Heritage Conservation District Plan, and;
- Participation in issue-based sub-committees addressing such concerns as property maintenance, parking and access, and tree preservation.