

3.2 Lowther Avenue

3.2.1 The Historical Development of Lowther Avenue

*Lowther: The origin of the street name is not known at this time.*⁵⁷

Lowther was laid out on the Worthington Estate⁵⁸ in 1874 by Wadsworth, Unwin & Browne for James Metcalfe. Twenty regular lots were planned on Lowther, all 47'7" wide and 135' deep except the westerly lots, which were 50'5", perhaps as an inducement to occupy the far end of the street.

Construction of permanent dwellings began around 1875, and quickly shifted to the more speculative builder's semidetached houses that are so characteristic of the 1880s. Significant construction occurred between 1885 and 1890, raising the number of dwellings from fourteen to thirty-one. Early occupants were employed in the building trades as painters, builders, and contractors, or not employed as "gentlemen". As well, one man traveled to Osgoode Hall for a caretaker position, and long-time resident John Heighton, who lived at #29 from its construction around 1878 until after 1925, was a stereotyper. Robert Parker, who owned a dying company, lived at #26 from its construction around 1880 until after 1940, one of the longest occupations recorded in the area. His control of the adjacent lot (# 22-24) kept it out of development until after his death.

The most prominent resident on Lowther was Henry St. George Baldwin, who lived outside the boundaries of Yorkville, but whose house was eventually attached to an extension of Lowther as #50. St. George Baldwin appeared in the directories between 1890 and 1915; Harold Baldwin lived on in the house until after 1940, when it was substantially altered by Mackenzie Waters. Isabella Baldwin lived at 36 with her son Robert Russell Baldwin, and the family occupied that building, one of the larger detached dwellings on the street, until after 1915.

⁵⁷ While the Toronto connection for the name is not known it was used in London England for two prominent projects during the 1870s. Lowther Arcade was constructed in Charing Cross in 1875 (demolished 1903), and, more significantly, Norman Shaw designed Lowther Lodge for William Lowther MP. Lowther Lodge is recognized as a major landmark for the Queen Anne Revival style, an architectural style much promoted during the later development of the Annex.

⁵⁸ Another architectural legacy of John Worthington were monuments to his memory and for the family by W. G. Storm in St. James Cemetery. (Horwood Collection, Ontario Archives)

When Bedford Road was surveyed for the Annex, Lowther and Prince Arthur were the only streets that were intended to be continued west; Prince Arthur was part of a Baldwin subdivision, not the S. H. Janes Co. project. An interesting result of the connection was that the Lowther road allowance measured 60' at the intersection with Avenue Road, but was widened to 66' at Bedford. The street was first paved in 1885, improved in 1888, and upgraded to asphalt in 1900.

3.2.2 Lowther Precinct Boundaries

Settlement on Lowther provided a mix of fine grain residential on the south side and rather larger buildings on the north side, with a wide spectrum of architectural periods and styles represented. With Elgin Avenue, it represents the second major subdivision of land within the study area.

The buildings facing onto Lowther within this block between Avenue Road and Bedford are: 6, 8, 10, 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 30, 32, 36, 40, 46 (46a, 46b), 48, and 50 on the north side and 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, 43, 45, 47, 49, and 51 on the south side. It is recommended that all of these properties be included in the Lowther precinct for the proposed District.

At the east end the buildings facing onto Avenue Road are distinct and relate primarily to Avenue Road. At the west end the Henry St. George Baldwin House at #50 is a corner building which is important, in terms of context, for both Lowther and for Bedford Road. Set back from the southwest corner of the street is the low-rise apartment building at 25 Bedford Road. This building is not representative of the single or semidetached houses of Lowther and is not recommended for inclusion in the precinct. On its open space, which dominates the corner of Bedford and Lowther, a proposal has been made which would continue the residential built-form character of Lowther with the construction of a row of townhouses. It would be appropriate to include these townhouses as part of the Lowther precinct.

3.2.3 The Buildings on Lowther

Overview

Of the buildings in the Lowther precinct twelve are already included on the City of Toronto's Inventory of Heritage Properties. Thirty-one of the buildings pre-date 1900. These have been evaluated during this study as buildings which are intact and which contribute to the heritage character of the area. Only the buildings at #21, which is a major alteration to an earlier building, and #40, which dates from the 1950s, are uncharacteristic of the street.

Roughcast dwellings predominated on the street in 1880, and many survive on the south side, contributing to the distinctive character of the street.

The pair of two-storey brick attached houses at #32-34 were built by the Toronto architectural firm of Grant and Dick in 1875. Among D.B.Dick's later public buildings were Wycliffe College, the reconstruction of University College after the fire of 1890; the former University of Toronto Library, of 1891; and the Consumers' Gas offices on Toronto Street. These Lowther houses represent a prototypical use of the massing scheme that typifies so much of the builder's work of the 1880s, with end gables and paired entrances, as well as the parlour oriels, but these houses have additional details, such as the bracketed shed roof and considered chimney details that separate them from later progeny.

This same massing for the semidetached house can also be seen in #17-19, originally roughcast, and bricked over in 1889; in the McMurrans' #35-37 (1888); in #10-12 and #11-13; and even in the much later #6-8, which keeps the essential components of the design. The infill houses of 1985 adjacent to the Robert Parker house at #26 are based on the same massing principles.

There are a number of individually significant buildings on Lowther, both for their historic importance and for their architectural quality. The homes of Robert Parker and the two homes of the Baldwin family (#36 and #50) are the most prominent.

The most recent buildings have attempted to replicate the context of the street but with substantial modifications including, at #48, the introduction of a ramp for underground parking.

Issue of Density

The permissible planning density on Lowther is 1 times coverage but twenty of the buildings are below 0.8 times coverage and eleven of the buildings are at a coverage of 0.6 times or less. The existing densities which are substantially lower than the coverage which is permitted are of concern for the long term retention of the present buildings and for the neighbourhood environment they support. Of the older buildings only the semidetached houses at #9 - 11 were built in excess of the present permissible density, while all of the most recent buildings are over the 1 times coverage. It is recommended that the Department of Planning and Development report on changes to the zoning by-law which would bring the permitted density into closer conformity with existing developed densities on Lowther.

*Interpreting the Guidelines for
Buildings on Lowther*

The general guidelines for the District (page 8) are appropriate for Lowther with the following comments:

On Lowther the variety of building sizes is part of the character of the street, especially the smaller rough cast buildings on the south side. Every effort should be made to retain these early small East Annex buildings.

The woodwork on the earliest buildings tends to be simple but very elegant. The fine treillage of the bellcast porch at 33 Lowther is a good example.

*31 Lowther
constructed circa 1876
first resident:
John Leighton, stereotyper.
33 Lowther
constructed circa 1875
first resident:
Robert Bailey,
gold and silver plater.*



The later buildings on Lowther have elaborate brickwork and robust wood trim. Care should be taken with alterations to match details appropriately to the character of the building.

The quality and fine detailing of the brickwork on the historic buildings on Lowther are difficult to replicate. If it is attempted on additions or alterations attention should be paid to detail, the size of the brick, its colour and quality, and its incorporation into the design of the building.

*26 Lowther
constructed circa 1877
first resident:
Donald Gordon, banker.*



3.2.4 Streetscape Character

Description

Lowther Avenue has a boulevard only on the north side of the street. The north sidewalk is about 4 metres from the curb and the boulevard is lined with street trees, giving a character similar to Elgin. The south side walk is at the curb and front yard properties have combined the boulevard with their front yards. There is on-street parking with metres on the north side of the road and traffic moves one way in a westerly direction. Since residents on the south side do not have to contend with street parking in front of their homes and do not have a boulevard condition (foreshortening their front yard), front yard parking is more common than on the north side. As a result of all these factors the visual character of the streetscape is different on either side of the street.

The south side appears to have far less soft landscaping and far more hard landscaping than the north side. About half of the homes have paving as the dominant landscape material. The street, with twenty-six street trees, has fewer trees than on Elgin Avenue. The south side has considerably fewer mature trees on private property which significantly changes the character from the north side. Norway Maple and Ash make up slightly less than half the trees.

While the north side has slightly more trees than the south, their impact, combined with the grass boulevard is more substantial, creating a welcoming pedestrian environment. However, there are many gaps between street trees and the street could use additional planting. A few properties have paved boulevards. As on Elgin, many homes, particularly on the north side, have metal fences, either of mild steel or cast iron, lining the sidewalk. The most common type of front yard landscaping consists of foundation planting, hedges along the property line and grass lawns. Many of the homes grow vines on the front facade.

The building line is more consistent on this street than on Elgin. The roof line or skyline is very distinctive and irregular due to the variety of building types found on the street. Overhead wiring lines both sides of the street.

All the general guidelines for streetscape (page 12) apply here, with the following comments on street trees:

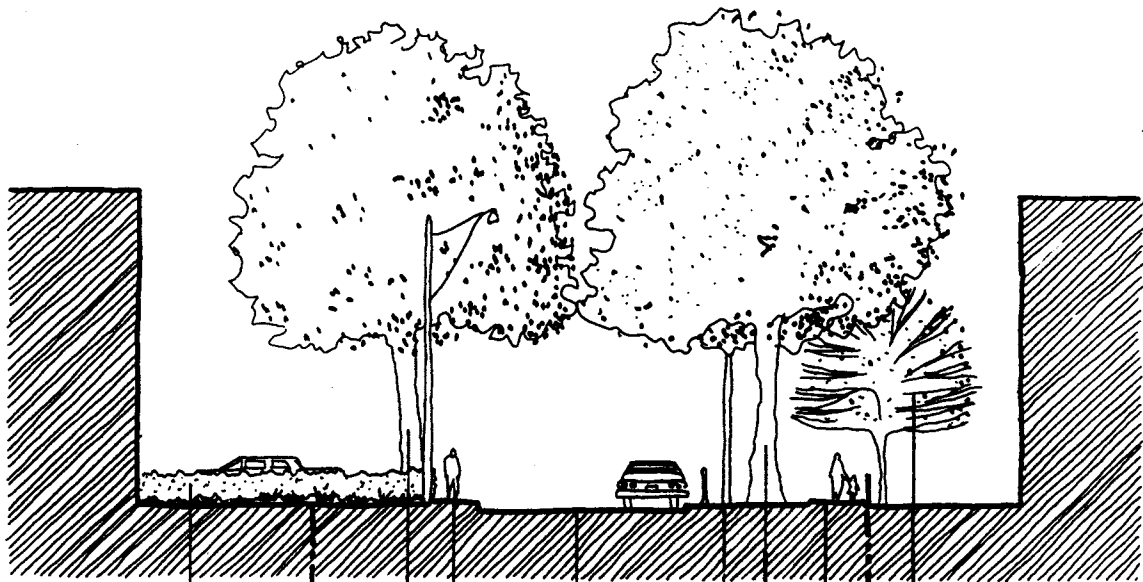
Lowther Avenue requires about twenty-four trees to complete the street tree planting on the municipal right-of-way. Four of the locations listed on the following drawing will require the removal of paving in order to open a tree well. About ten of these trees are to be planted on the sideyards of the buildings on Bedford and Avenue Roads. It is recommended in these locations to plant a more ornamental, flowering tree, that is of interest through many seasons. These trees will serve to provide an entry portal to the street. For this purpose, the Ornamental Bradford Pear is recommended. It has profuse white flowers in the spring that looks like a white cloud. This is followed by small russet coloured fruit. The leaf colour is an outstanding glossy dark green in the summer followed by a scarlet fall colour. This variety is very resistant to disease. While this is an outstanding tree, it is a relatively small tree and is not suitable for the shade tree planting within the block. For the remaining ten trees, Sugar and Red Maple should be used to complement the existing Silver and Norway Maple.

As with Elgin, it is suggested that on the north boulevard side of the street a secondary pattern of trees be planted by individual homeowners on the private side of the sidewalk, offset from the City tree. A smaller, flowering tree is suggested such as the Bradford Pear, Shubert Choke Cherry, Crabapples and Tree Lilacs. This northern sidewalk would be framed by trees as illustrated in the typical cross-section.

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The following pages illustrate the existing and proposed street tree locations, in addition to the age and heritage evaluation for buildings on Lowther.

LOWTHER AVENUE



HEDGE SCREEN

PROPERTY LINE

LARGE CANOPY
SHADE TREE

SIDEWALK

ROAD

BOULEVARD

LARGE CANOPY
SHADE TREE

SIDEWALK

PROPERTY LINE

SMALL FLOWERING
TREE

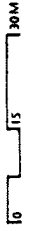
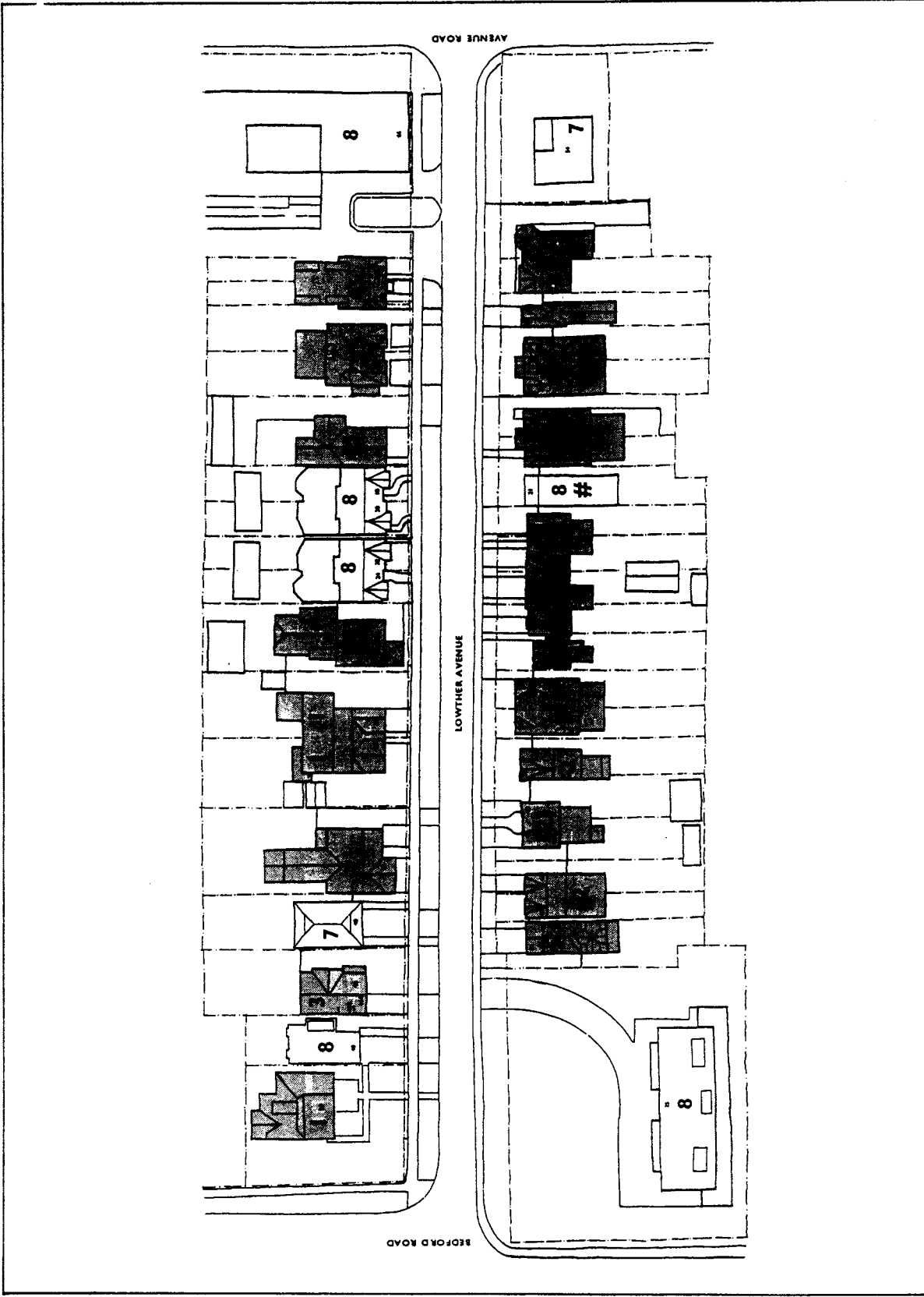
METRES

LOWTHER AVENUE

AGE OF BUILDINGS

NO.	PERIOD OF CONSTRUCTION
1	PRE 1883
2	1884 TO 1889
3	1890 TO 1899
4	1900 TO 1909
5	1910 TO 1919
6	1920 TO 1939
7	1940 TO 1959
8	1960 -

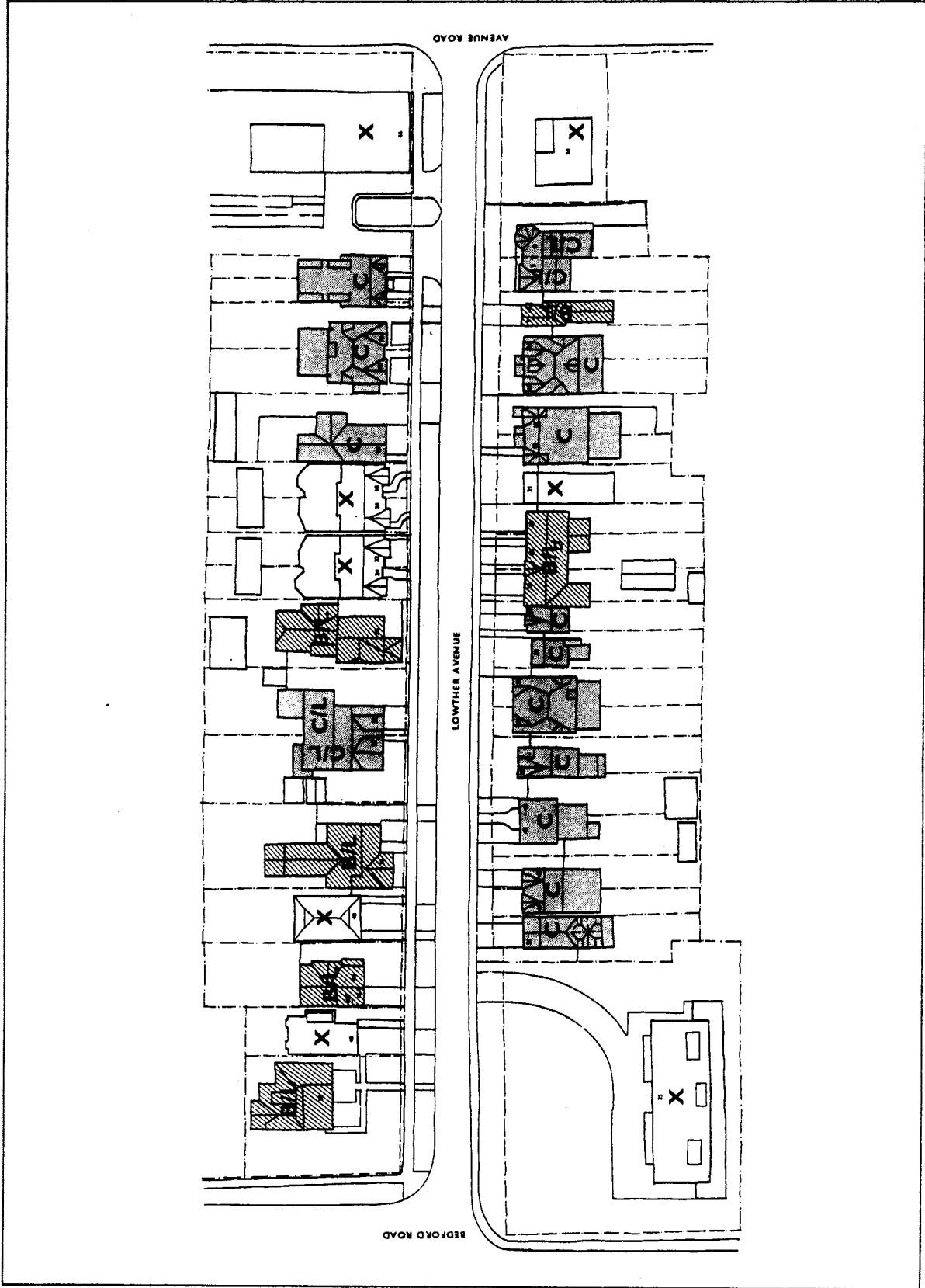
renovation of an earlier building



LOWTHER AVENUE

EVALUATION OF HERITAGE BUILDINGS

KEY	DESCRIPTION
	PROPERTIES WHICH ARE INDIVIDUALLY OUTSTANDING AND HAVE NATIONAL OR PROVINCIAL SIGNIFICANCE
B	PROPERTIES WHICH ARE NOTEWORTHY FOR THEIR OVERALL QUALITY AND HAVE CITY WIDE IMPORTANCE.
C	PROPERTIES WHICH RETAIN MUCH OF THEIR ORIGINAL CHARACTER AND ARE VITAL REMINDERS OF A COMMUNITY'S PAST.
X	PROPERTIES WHICH ARE NOT IN THE ORIGINAL CHARACTER.
/L	PROPERTIES WHICH ARE LISTED BY THE TORONTO HISTORICAL BOARD ON THE INVENTORY OF HERITAGE PROPERTIES.



LOWTHER AVENUE

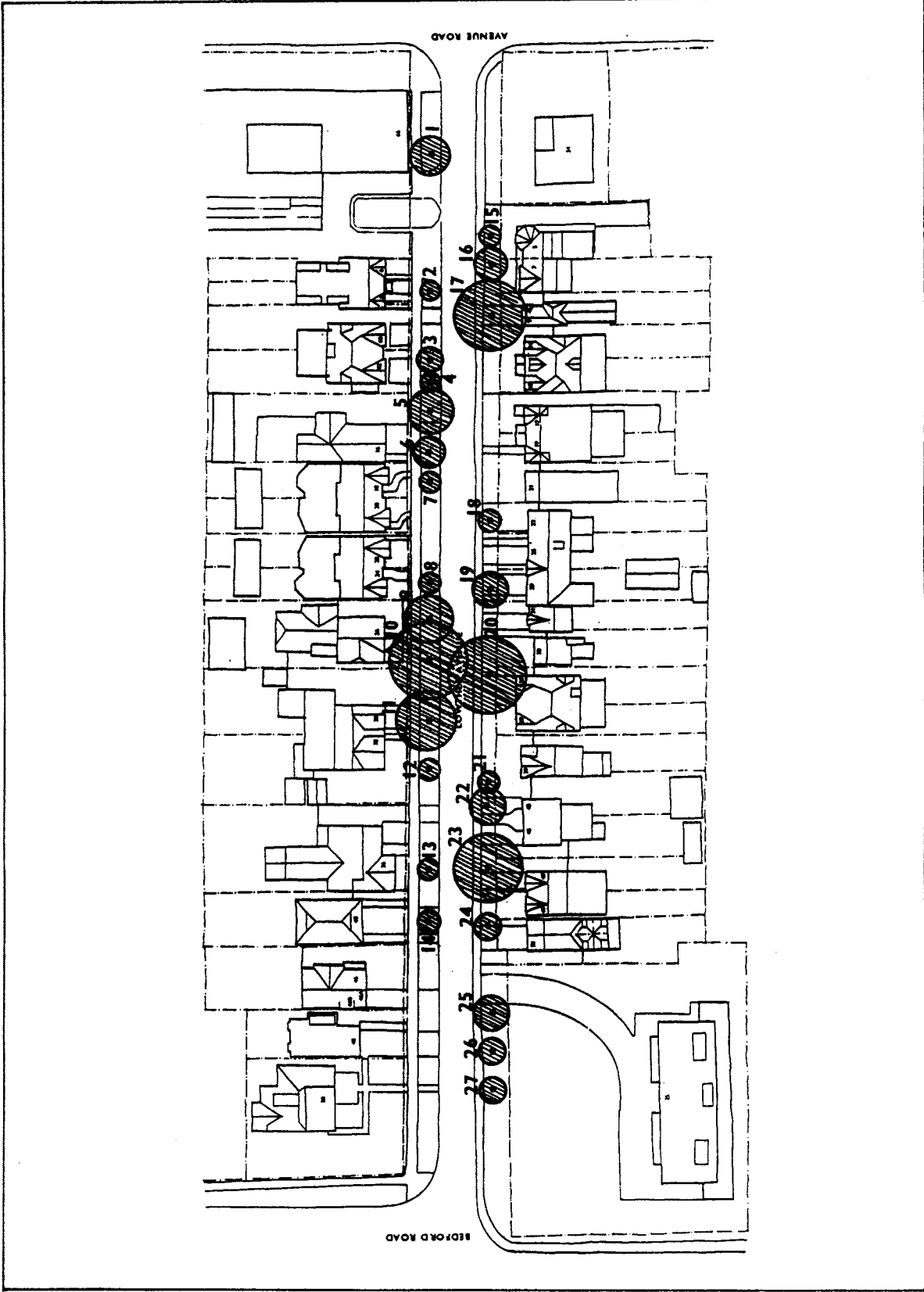
EXISTING STREET TREES

#	TREE NAME	dbh
1	NORWAY MAPLE	20
2	NORWAY MAPLE	4
3	SIBERIAN ELM	15
4	NORWAY MAPLE	5
5	SIBERIAN ELM	30
6	NORWAY MAPLE	15
7	WHITE ASH	4
8	PEAR	4
9	MULBERRY	30
10	HORSECHESTNUT	88
11	HORSECHESTNUT	40
12	NORWAY MAPLE	5
13	LINDEN	5
14	LINDEN	5
15	ASH	10
16	ASH	20
17	HORSECHESTNUT	71
18	TREE OF HEAVEN	5
19	CHERRY	10
20	SILVER MAPLE	81
21	ASH	5
22	SUGAR MAPLE	20
23	SILVER MAPLE	56
24	NORWAY MAPLE	8
25		
26		
27		

dbh refers to the diameter of the tree trunk at breast height in centimetres.



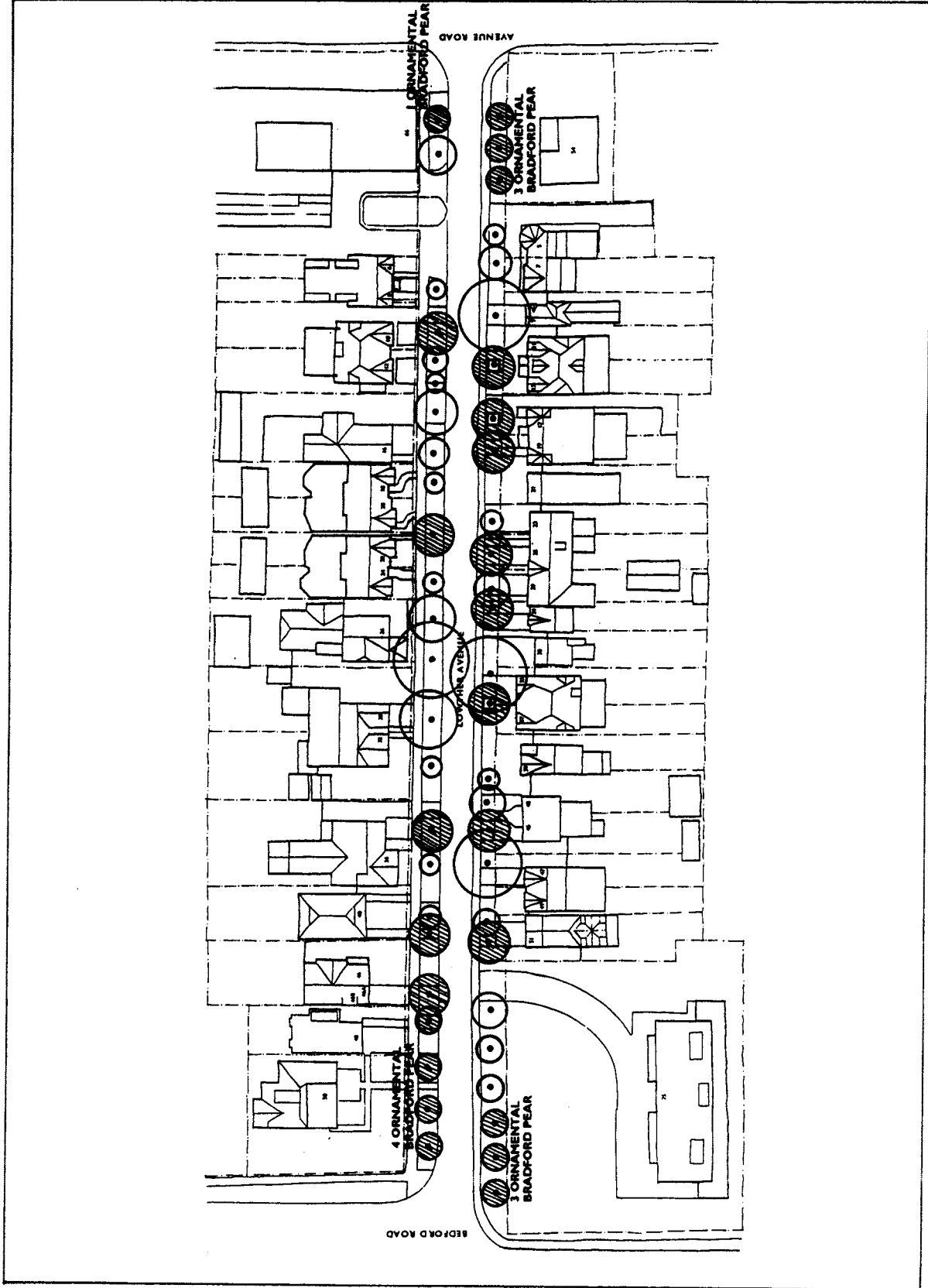
16 15 30M



LOWTHER AVENUE

PROPOSED STREET TREES

FOR LOWTHER AVENUE, ORNAMENTAL BRADFORD PEAR IS PROPOSED FOR THE ENDS OF THE STREET AS NOTED ON THE PLAN. FOR THE REMAINING STREET TREES, SUGAR MAPLE AND/OR RED MAPLE ARE PROPOSED.



0 15 30 M