

Historic Yonge Street HCD Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

Description of Historic Place

Historic Yonge Street Heritage Conservation District (HYHCD) is a distinct mixed-use neighbourhood located in downtown Toronto. It runs north-south for nine city blocks around a portion of Yonge Street and serves important civic and commercial functions in the city. It includes St. Nicholas Village, a historic residential area associated with Yonge Street, and portions of a historic network of service laneways. HYHCD contains a cohesive grouping of built heritage resources that provide a distinct sense of place and represent Toronto's early and mid-century architectural vernacular.

HYHCD's northern boundary is south of Bloor Street at 780 Yonge Street on the west side of Yonge Street, and Hayden Street on the east side of Yonge Street. College/Carlton streets mark the southern boundary. Its western and eastern boundaries generally run parallel to Yonge Street along a historic network of service laneways, except along its western edge where it includes St. Nicholas Street and parts of St. Joseph Street and Irwin Avenue—an area referred to as St. Nicholas Village.

Cultural Heritage Value

HYHCD started to develop in 1860 as a pastoral landscape of large private estates that were gradually subdivided and sold-off, laying the foundation for a densely developed urban neighbourhood. Development in the area was encouraged by Yonge Street itself, which was planned as a key transportation route by Lt. Governor John Graves Simcoe.

Yonge Street's importance as a transportation route was reinforced by successive waves of transportation investment that culminated in the construction of Canada's first subway line, which opened in 1954 and runs beneath HYHCD. Public investment in transportation helped to ensure a constant flow of people through the neighbourhood, and HYHCD evolved as a commercial main street that served neighbouring residential areas and commuters who passed through it.

HYHCD is valued for its commercial main street character which is expressed, in part, by mixed-use and commercial buildings that housed the services, amenities, and employment opportunities to support daily life in neighbouring residential areas. St. Nicholas Village, and the residential

buildings within it, reflects this historic relationship and reinforces HYHCD's sense of place.

Historical development of Yonge Street in the early 20th century added entertainment venues to its role as a commercial destination. The former His Majesty's Theatre at 780 Yonge Street, for instance, later became a dance studio and drama school for the emerging Canadian ballet and theatre scene, from the post-war period until the 1960s.

Once the subway opened in 1954, building technology and development patterns changed. This change is reflected in the scale of many modern buildings surrounding HYHCD. Buildings that contribute to HYHCD's character share certain characteristics in terms of their scale, height, orientation, and frontage width. They display a range of architectural styles that are appropriate to the time they were built. The historic network of laneways also contribute to HYHCD's character and are a valued element of its landscape. Together, these buildings, and the laneways that connect them, give HYHCD the feeling of being an enclave within Toronto's downtown. Approximately 90% of its buildings were built between 1860 and 1954, a period when HYHCD's commercial main street character was established and flourished.

During this period Yonge Street also developed an important civic purpose within Toronto, coming to serve as its Main Street, a role which is evidenced by the numerous parades, demonstrations, and spontaneous celebrations and gatherings that have taken place along the strip. These events, many of which are annual and ongoing, are associated with HYHCD for having passed through it. The civic importance of Yonge Street is recognized as an important component of HYHCD's character, but one that is primarily associative, and not material, in nature.

As HYHCD developed it attracted a number of important fraternal and professional organizations, including: the Masons (601-613 Yonge Street); the Oddfellows' fraternal organization (450 Yonge Street); and, the Canadian Order of Foresters (22 College Street). A number of buildings in HYHCD are also associated with important architects, including: Samuel G. Curry, Richard Ough, Mathers & Haldenby, Wickson & Gregg, George Gouinlock, Dick & Wickson, J. Gibbs Morton and E.J. Lennox.

District Heritage Attributes

The cultural heritage value of HYHCD is expressed by the following heritage attributes:

- The height of buildings, which typically range between 2-4 storeys
- The three dimensional character of buildings, as articulated by their height, massing, and frontage width, which varies between character areas
- Buildings within St. Nicholas Village have small setbacks from the front lot line, creating small front yards that contribute to a more open residential character
- Buildings fronting onto Yonge Street and College/Carlton streets are typically built to the lot line, without setbacks, which creates a consistent streetwall
- The fine grain of narrow building frontages, generally between 3-7 metres, at regular intervals along Yonge Street, and along some side streets intersecting with Yonge Street
- Frontages of larger historic buildings that are divided into bays, maintaining the rhythm of narrow storefronts and giving the appearance of more buildings
- Recessed shop entrances, which in some cases include flanking showcase windows
- Building façades that are generally constructed with brick, stone, and wood detailing
- Building façades that display a variety of architectural details and features including, but not limited to cornices, entablatures, pilasters, soffits, punched windows, and their surrounds
- High-quality design and craftsmanship exhibited in contributing resources
- The higher percentage of glazing on ground floor façades along Yonge Street, relative to upper floors, that demarcates a retail use at-grade and residential and/or commercial uses in upper floors

The consistent percentage of glazing between ground and upper floors on residential buildings, showing a consistent use and function between ground and upper floors

- Mixed-use and commercial buildings that typically have flat roofs, or roofs sloped towards the street that the building fronts onto
- House-form buildings typically have sloped roofs, which includes a combination of roofs sloped towards the street, and roofs sloped parallel to the street in the case of a dormer or central gable
- House-form buildings that display a range of architectural styles, most commonly: Gothic Revival, Second Empire, and Queen Anne

- Apartment-form buildings within St. Nicholas Village that display Art Deco and Edwardian Architectural styles
- Mixed-use and commercial buildings that display a range of architectural styles, most commonly: Georgian, Italianate, Romanesque, and Second Empire
- Warehouses and commercial buildings fronting onto service laneways and side streets, such as those along St. Nicholas Street and Gloucester Lane
- Views toward prominent buildings, such as the Firehall Clock Tower (484 Yonge Street), the Mason's Hall (601-613 Yonge Street), Postal Station F (675 Yonge Street), Oddfellows Hall (450 Yonge Street), and College Park (444 Yonge Street)
- Narrow public laneways that support commercial operations along Yonge Street, and are used by pedestrians as a circulation network