

Authorization to Study Sunshine Valley as a Potential Heritage Conservation District

Date: May 4, 2017

To: Toronto Preservation Board

Toronto and East York Community Council

From: Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division

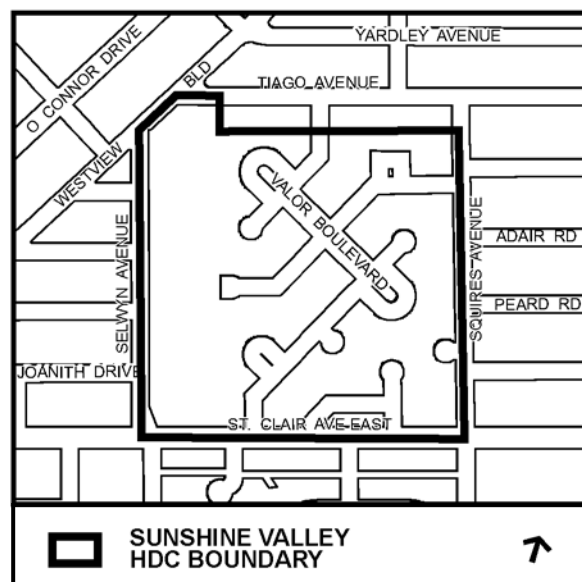
Wards: 31 - Beaches-East York

SUMMARY

This report recommends that City Council authorize the study of the Sunshine Valley area as a potential Heritage Conservation District (HCD) under Section 40.(1) of the Ontario Heritage Act.

The Sunshine Valley Nominated HCD Study Area, as indicated by the boundary in Attachment 1 of this report, is one of the 97 potential HCD study areas in Official Plan Amendment No. 38 (referred to as Topham Park). The area is located in the former borough of East York, northeast of the intersection of St. Clair Avenue East and O'Connor Drive.

Sunshine Valley is one of three identified neighbourhoods in Toronto designed and built by Wartime Housing Ltd., the others being Avon Park (Etobicoke) and Harding Park (North York).



Following City Staff review and community consultation, it has been determined that the nominated Sunshine Valley HCD study area merits authorization for study as a potential Heritage Conservation District

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, recommends that:

1. City Council authorize that a study be undertaken of the Sunshine Valley Area as a potential Heritage Conservation District under Section 40.(1) of the Ontario Heritage Act, as indicated by the boundary in Attachment 1 of the report (May 4, 2017) from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

City Council, at its meeting on March 5, 6 and 7, 2012, adopted the document titled, "Heritage Conservation Districts in Toronto: Procedures, Policies and Terms of Reference" (January 2012), and directed staff to develop a prioritization system to determine which potential heritage conservation district studies should be undertaken first. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.PG11.5>

On October 6, 2015, Toronto and East York Community Council adopted the nomination of the Topham Park neighbourhood for consideration as a Heritage Conservation District.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.TE11.84>

COMMENTS

The Sunshine Valley study area was nominated for study as a Heritage Conservation District (HCD) by the local Councillor on October 6, 2015. The nomination requested that the Manager, Heritage Preservation Services consider the nominated area and bring forward a study authorization report should the area demonstrate sufficient cultural heritage value.

The Sunshine Valley HCD nomination process was conducted in accordance with "Heritage Conservation Districts in Toronto - Procedures, Policies and Terms of Reference". Following staff review and community consultation, it has been determined that Sunshine Valley is an excellent candidate for study as a heritage conservation district under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. The area exhibits design, historical, associative, contextual and community values that warrant further study, analysis and evaluation.

In the past four years, 4 of the 197 wartime houses have been demolished. Many of the houses have had some form of alteration, including rear and side yard additions, new window openings and the addition of porches. Most of these alterations have been in keeping with the character of the neighbourhood, in particular by maintaining the distinctive clapboard siding and gabled roofs, however some have resulted in alterations or new development that do not reflect the neighbourhood's context through massing, material and setback.

The increased rate of demolition and alterations has put Sunshine Valley's heritage character at risk. Nonetheless, an evolved approach which permits additions is supported by many area residents, recognizing a need to permit the gradual expansion of houses to meet contemporary needs while still maintaining those aspects that make Sunshine Valley a unique and desirable community.

Sunshine Valley, if authorized for an HCD study, would be the first post-war suburban neighbourhood to be considered for designation under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act in Toronto. A number of jurisdictions outside of Toronto have sought protection and recognition of Victory Housing and post-war neighbourhoods, with increased attention paid to the long-term conservation of veteran neighbourhoods as places of cultural heritage value.

St. Mary's in Kitchener was designated under Part V of the OHA in 2002, and now has an HCD Plan to manage change within the district. In addition to its designation, the community and City have developed walking tours to promote the area's cultural heritage value for residents and visitors alike.

In 2016, Parks Canada designated Montgomery Place in Saskatoon a National Historic Site. The area was recommended for designation as it retains key elements of its original design, is an example of a veterans' postwar designed neighbourhood, and has a tight-knit community that values the area's origins and historic associations.

Nominated Study Area

Sunshine Valley is located northeast of St. Clair Avenue East and O'Connor Drive in the former borough of East York. The potential study area is primarily residential, defined by detached houses on large lots and a significant amount of recreational green space. The area includes Topham Park, a recreational playground and field, two public schools (Selwyn Elementary and Gordon A. Brown Middle School), and a church (Springdale Church).

The nomination for the area was under the name "Topham Park", however following community feedback and additional research it was determined that the name Sunshine Valley is commonly used for the nominated study area, with Topham Park referring to a larger geographic area.

General History and Heritage Character

The area known as Sunshine Valley was developed by Wartime Housing Ltd., a federal crown corporation, between 1944 and 1946 to provide housing to returning war veterans and their families. The designed neighbourhood included 197 modest houses that were 1-1.5 storeys, with clapboard siding, steep gable roofs and minimal

ornamentation. The houses were initially rented to returning war veterans with families that included two or more children, however by the late 1940s the properties were made available for purchase as Wartime Housing Ltd. scaled back its operations and its assets were transferred to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

The majority of houses in Sunshine Valley retain architectural characteristics typical of Victory Housing, an architectural style used to describe the Georgian-inspired and mass-produced houses built primarily for returning war veterans across Canada. These wood-framed houses are defined by a steeply-pitched roof, clapboard siding, and minimal ornamentation (Attachment 2). Their design and layout was oriented towards families with children, and could be readily expanded upon as families grew and needs changed. Although mass-produced from a limited number of templates, architectural and streetscape variety was achieved through the staggered placement of houses, as well as personalization of individual homes by paint colour, landscaping, and gradual modifications overtime, including additions.

Sunshine Valley was planned in accordance with the neighbourhood unit planning model developed in the early 20th century and which later came to define post-war suburban development in North America. The neighbourhood unit approach was family- and car-centric, advocating for the separation of uses to promote healthy and safe residential neighbourhoods for children. The core principles of this planning model were to have schools within a reasonable walking distance of all homes, locate arterial roads around the perimeter of the neighbourhood, differentiate local streets from arterials through their design to discourage through-traffic, place commercial and retail uses outside or on the periphery of the neighbourhood, and set aside at least 10% of the total land area for parks or open space. As a government project, the design of Sunshine Valley adhered to the core principles of this approach, making it one of the best examples of the neighbourhood planning unit design in Toronto.

Sunshine Valley is centered on a wide diagonal boulevard (Valour Boulevard), with a landscaped median separating traffic. No road within the area was designed to provide through access; each road terminates in a dead end or cul-de-sac, the four largest of which include extensive grassed areas towards which all surrounding houses are oriented (Attachment 3). This layout supported neighbourhood safety, providing ample space for recreation while providing views from each house towards recreational spaces.

The placement and orientation of houses, the unique street layout, the proximity of educational and recreational facilities and the substantial public open spaces are core principles of the neighbourhood unit planning model that were achieved in Sunshine Valley in large part due to its being a public sector project. Although aspects of the neighbourhood unit model were incorporated into private sector suburban development, Sunshine Valley is a rare and unique example of a complete design (Attachment 4). CMHC's shift away from directly undertaking residential development and towards the provision of financing to private developers in the late 1940s marked the conclusion of the development of such neighbourhoods by the public sector, with only a handful having been constructed in the 1940s.

Social and Community Identity

In addition to the living memory of many community members who are first, second and third generation residents with connections to World War II veterans, tangible elements that connect Sunshine Valley to its veteran history remain. This includes street names (Vicross Road, Warvet Crescent, Merrit Road, Valour Boulevard, Furnival Road, and Topham Road) as well as the design of the houses themselves, with Victory Housing being readily identifiable as a product of postwar CMHC housing development. The neighbourhood has a strong community identity, with residents taking pride in their neighbourhood and participating in community recreational activities and social events that benefit from the area's extensive public space. In addition, a number of research initiatives have sought to better understand and promote Sunshine Valley's history, including a poster project in partnership with Heritage Toronto, as well as a retrofit program that successfully converted a Victory House into a zero energy home while retaining its historic character.

Both long-term and new members of the community have expressed a strong sense of place that is reinforced by the area's built form and public realm, appreciative of the Victory Housing aesthetic, the area's connection to Canada's veterans, and the generally respectful rehabilitation of these homes by area residents through additions and alterations.

HCD Process and Community Engagement

The study of potential HCDs is a city-led process involving the community. Study areas may be nominated by community groups, elected officials or city staff. No matter how an area comes forward for nomination, community engagement and transparency is a critical part of the HCD study process.

Like all planning studies undertaken by the City, HCD studies are a collaborative process conducted by planning professionals and involving a combination of research, analysis and community engagement. The City believes that consultation with the community prior to Council considering the designation of an HCD is in the best interest of the City, community, and property owners. Procedures and mechanisms are in place to provide opportunities for meaningful public input, deputation and decisions as set by the Ontario Heritage Act and City Council.

On November 25, 2015 and October 29, 2016, the local Councillor held community meetings to inform the Sunshine Valley and Topham Park community about the HCD nomination. City staff were in attendance to inform the neighbourhood of the HCD nomination and to answer general questions about HCDs, their implications and benefits. These community meetings provided an opportunity to present historical research and for City staff to explain that the area is a good candidate for study. The Sunshine Valley HCD Study nomination received positive feedback from the participants and general support from area residents and owners.

Following the meeting, questionnaires were distributed to solicit feedback on the area's character and community values. A significant number of residents returned completed forms or followed up by email and telephone with City staff. Many residents identified the area's built form and public realm as being defining features of Sunshine Valley, and important in supporting a sense of place and community. Some residents raised

concerns that an HCD might limit their ability to re-build or construct additions to their property, or could have an impact on their ability to sell or alter their property.

On March 8th, the local Councillor hosted a stakeholder advisory committee meeting of residents who expressed interest in the HCD study. This meeting included representatives from the recently formed Topham Park Community Association. The purpose of this meeting was to confirm that City staff had accurately identified community values and the historical evolution of the neighbourhood in anticipation of bringing forward a staff report recommending authorization for study.

Should the area be authorized and subsequently prioritized for an HCD study, City staff will continue to undertake extensive community consultation in accordance with the City Council adopted "Heritage Conservation Districts in Toronto: Procedures, Policies and Terms of Reference."

CONCLUSION

City Staff have concluded that the nominated Sunshine Valley HCD study area merits authorization for study as a potential Heritage Conservation District, with a built form and public realm that reflects a distinct period in Toronto's history.

CONTACT

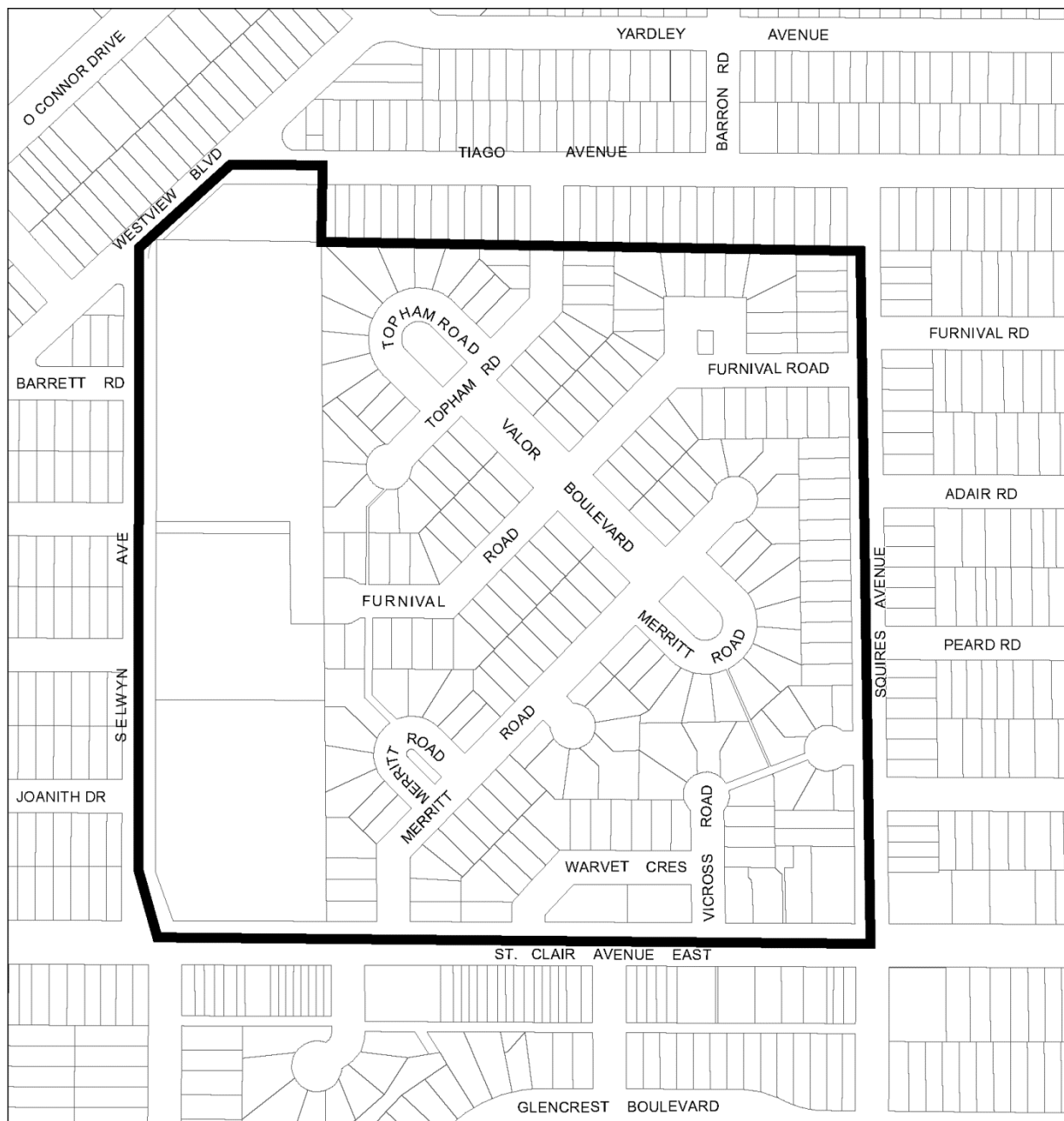
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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Proposed Sunshine Valley HCD Study Area Boundary
Attachment 2 - Photographs



Toronto City Planning
Study Area

Sunshine Valley
Heritage Conservation District

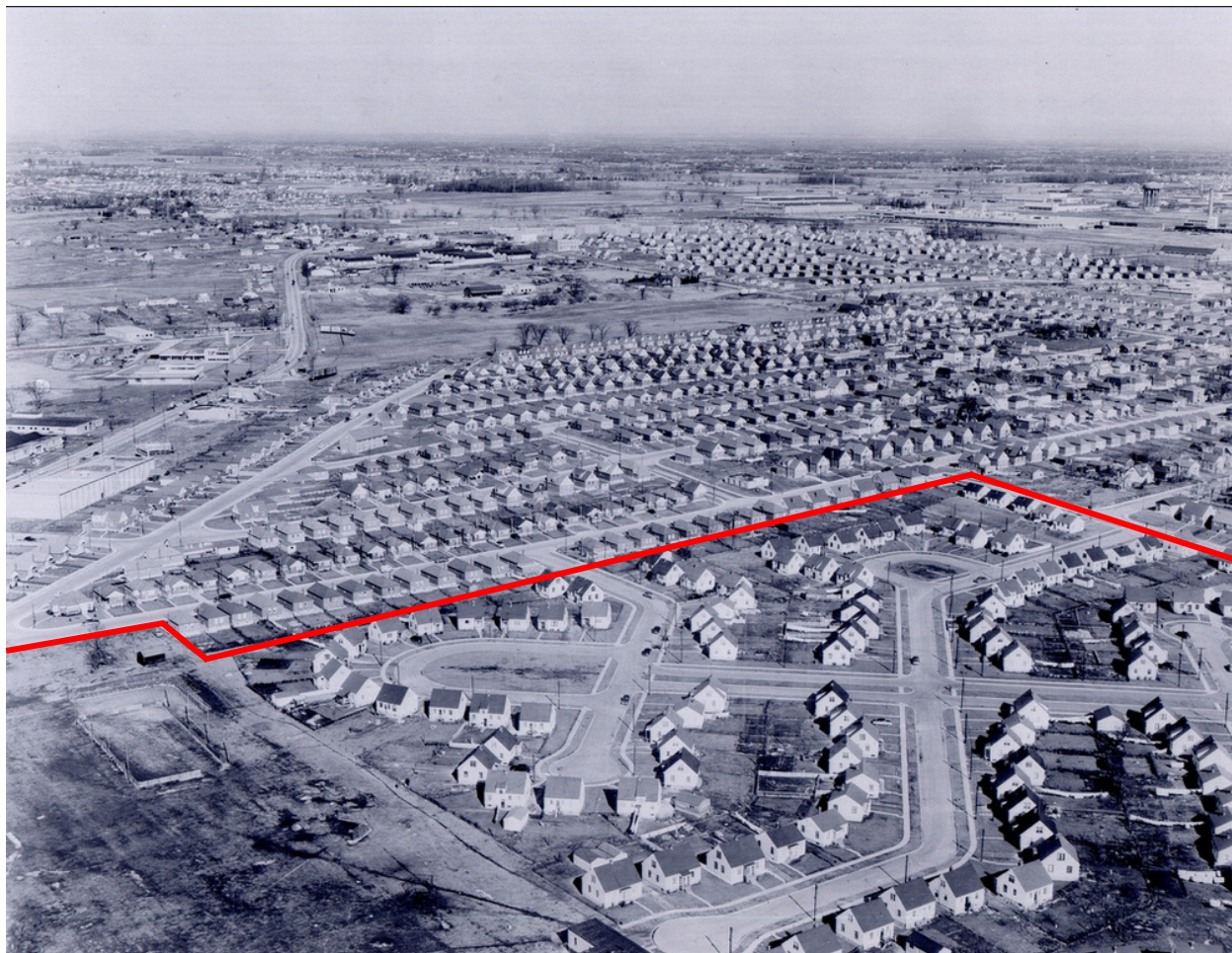




Example of victory housing in Sunshine Valley [October, 2016]



Example of open space cul-de-sac in Sunshine Valley [October, 2016]



Aerial view of Sunshine Valley and Topham Park [1946]

*Note: Sunshine Valley is located below the red line, Topham Park above