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University Avenue Cultural Heritage Landscape Study

City Planning Presentation

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Origins of University Avenue until Today



1867 (TPL)



Vik Pawha, 2021

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Background

- The University Avenue Cultural Heritage Landscape Study was undertaken by City Planning to gain an understanding of the history and cultural heritage value of University Avenue, and in particular, the public realm between Adelaide Street West and Queen's Park Crescent. This included an evaluation of the twelve landscaped medians.
- Urban Design and Heritage staff with Consulting Team (Common Bond Collective with DTAH)
- The Study follows the cultural landscape approach and process set out in the National Capital Commission, *Working with Cultural Landscapes: A Guide for the National Capital Region* (2023).

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What is a Cultural Heritage Landscape

PROVINCIAL PLANNING STATEMENT, 2024 Under the Planning Act

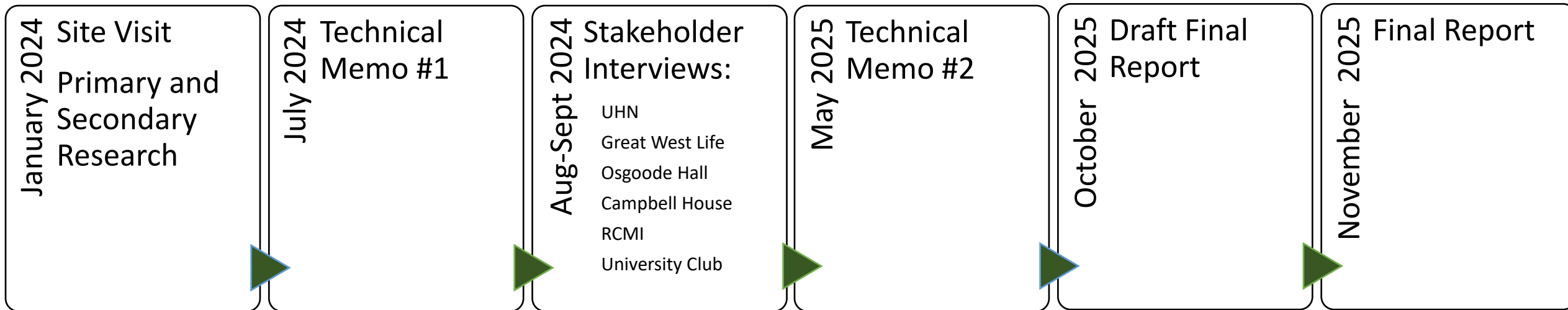
Cultural heritage landscape: Means a defined geographical area that may have been modified by human activity and is identified as having cultural heritage value or interest by a community, including an Indigenous community. The area may include features such as buildings, structures, spaces, views, archaeological sites or natural elements that are valued together for their interrelationship, meaning or association.

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Consultant Team and Methodology

Common Bond Collective: Ellen Kowalchuk and David Deo
DTAH: Brent Raymond, Peter Fletcher Smith, and Colin Berman

Assessment of the study area's heritage value was based on the **National Capital Commission's *Working with Cultural Landscapes: A Guide for the National Capital Region* (January 2023)**



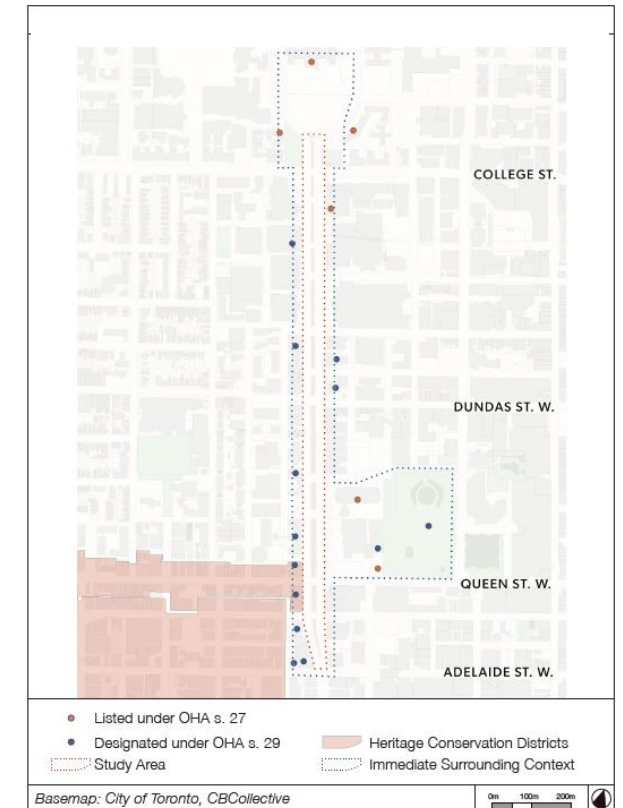
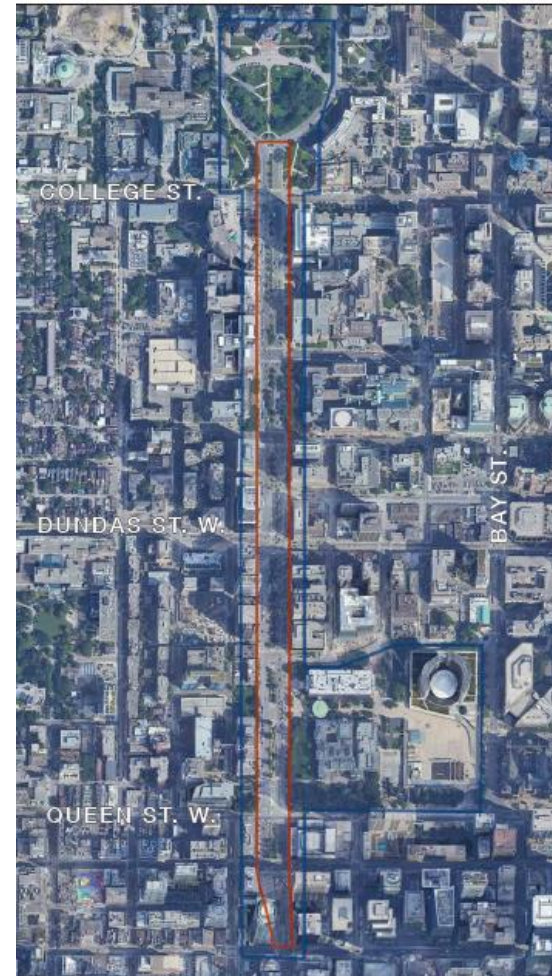
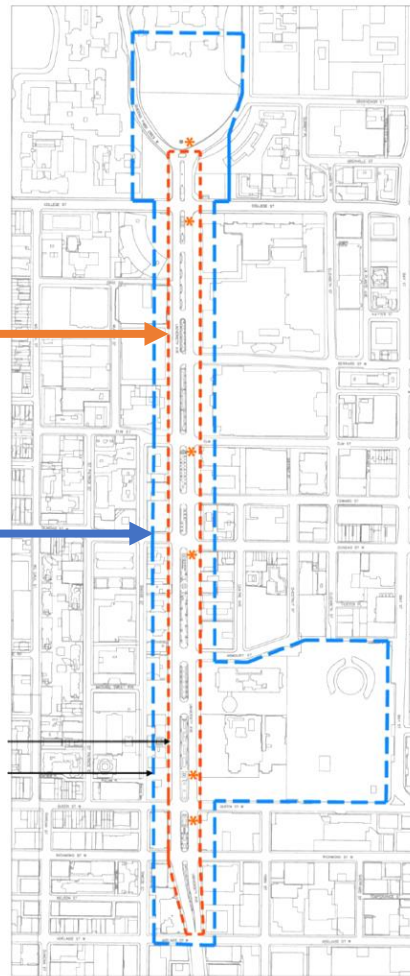
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Study Area & Description of Place

The Study Area is primarily the 12 medians, from Queens Park Crescent to Adelaide Street and includes areas in the public right-of-way, outlined in orange.

Outlined in blue is the immediate surrounding context.

The asterisk indicates the location of the public monuments.



Municipal Heritage Map

Immediate Surrounding Context
Study Area

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Key Views and Sections of University Avenue



One of the protected views in the Official Plan: Looking North on University Avenue at Queen Street West, from the northeast corner. (City of Toronto, 2012)



Ontario Legislative Building at the northern terminus of University Avenue (City of Toronto)

UHN – University Ave and Gerrard Street (Google Maps)



Courts – University Ave (Google Maps)



Finance – University Ave and Adelaide Street (City of Toronto, 2021)



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Medians designed by Dunington-Grubb & Stensson



Figure 53: Island B looking north, August 1964 (COTA, Fonds 220, Series 1736, File 486).



Figure 54: Island B looking south, August 1964 (COTA, Fonds 220, Series 1733, File 486).



Figure 59: Island F looking north, August 1964 (COTA, Fonds 220, Series 1736, File 486).



Figure 60: Island G looking north, 1964 (UOGA, XLMSA006003).



Figure 55: Island C looking north shortly after completion in 1964 (UOGA, XLMSA005003).



Figure 56: Island D looking north after completion, c1964 (COTA, Series 1465, File 606, Item 4).



Figure 61: Island G looking south, 1964 (UOGA, XLMSA001152).



Figure 62: Island H looking north, September 1964 (COTA, Fonds 220, Series 1736, File 486).



Figure 57: Island E looking south, c1964 (UOGA, XLMSA001152).



Figure 58: Island E looking south, c1964 (UOGA, XLMSA001152).



Figure 63: Island I looking south, August 1964 (COTA, Fonds 220, Series 1736, File 486).



Figure 64: Island J completed August 1964 (COTA, Fonds 220, Series 1736, File 486).

DUNINGTON-GRUBB & STENSSON

The 12 landscaped islands had designs started in 1948, delayed and completed in 1961-2, and constructed in 1964 (COTA).



Current condition of two of the islands: Island I (top) and Island G (bottom) (CBCollective, 2024)

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Criteria used for Methodology

The assessment of the heritage value of the study area was based on the National Capital Commission's *Working with Cultural Landscapes: A Guide for the National Capital Region* (January 2023).*

The assessment finds that the study area has heritage value related to a number of the criteria:

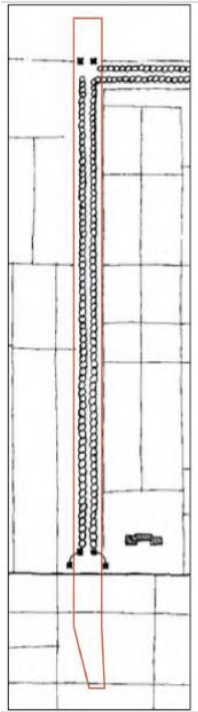
- **Historical Value:** is associated with important events, activities, people, or has meaningfully contributed to the development of a community, region, province, or nation
- **Scientific Value:** is an important source of knowledge for research and study
- **Cultural Value:** sustains cultural traditions or ways of life
- **Social Value:** contributes to a community's identity or sense of belonging

It did not meet the following criterion:

- **Aesthetic Value:** reflects defined, or otherwise notable architectural styles or landscape concepts

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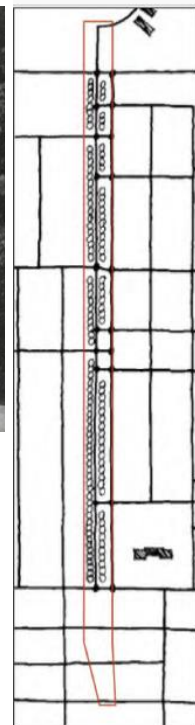
University Avenue is a Cultural Heritage Landscape: it is an evolved landscape whose various configurations over time reflect over 190 years of transformation while remaining a landmark civic avenue in Toronto



1830



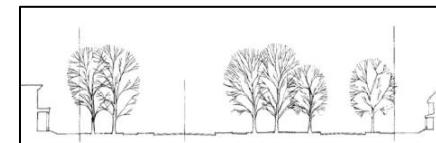
1867 (TPL)



1892



1890 (TPL)



1914



1914 (COTA)

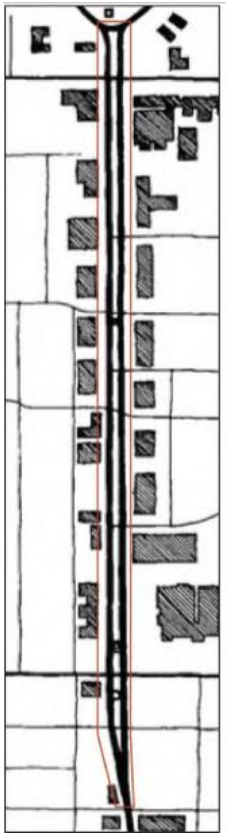


1930 (COTA)



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University Avenue is a Cultural Heritage Landscape: it is an evolved landscape whose various configurations over time reflect over 190 years of transformation while remaining a landmark civic avenue in Toronto



1947



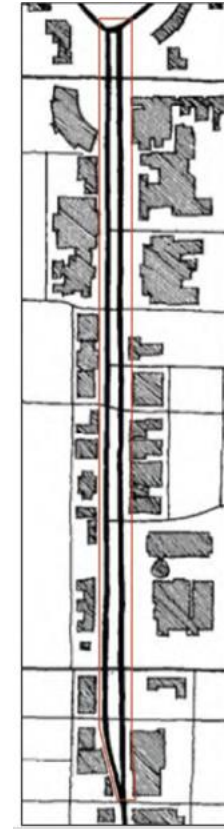
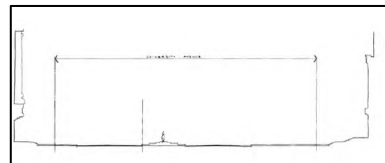
1948 (COTA)



1950 (COTA)



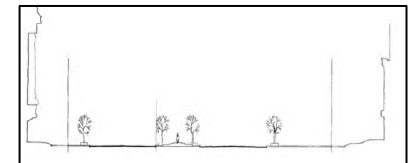
c.1960 (Ebay)



1963

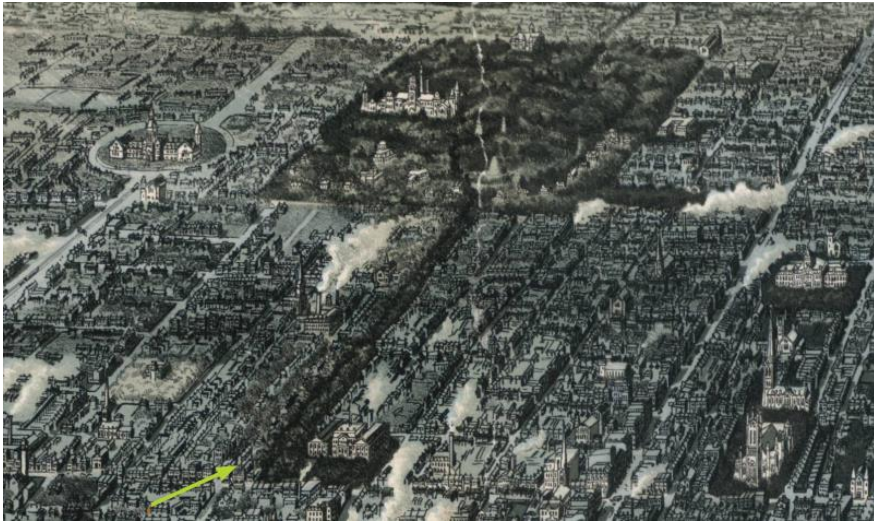


1964



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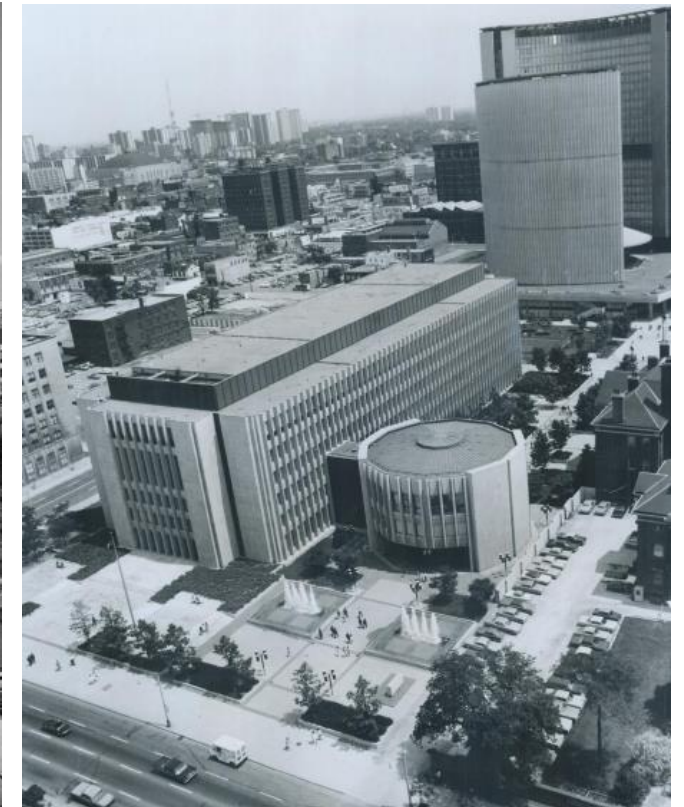
Historical Value for its role in the development of the city, the province, and the nation



1886 bird's eye illustration of Toronto, showing the treed areas of University Avenue (yellow arrow), College Street, and Queen's Park as an interconnected green space (UFFT)



The study area and immediate context reflects the influence of Beaux Arts design principles as a wide avenue, with a symmetrical layout, and strong axial relationship with the landmark Ontario Legislative site. (c.1965, Panda, CAA)



The Study Area and immediate context has played an important role in the development of Ontario as a civil society. Looking northeast is Michael Hough's landscape for the Superior Court of Justice at 361 University Avenue. (1969, TPL)

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Social Value for its contributions to the identity of Toronto and Canada – both as a city and as the provincial capital of Ontario



The study area is important to the identity of Toronto as an early public amenity space designed for public use. This use began as parkland in the 1830s before being formalized in 1859 by the City of Toronto as the first municipal park in British North America (c.1882)



The street's prominent profile in Toronto has resulted in consistent efforts over the years to cultivate a landscape of distinguished and high quality. (1914, COTA)



The study area also contributes to Toronto's identity as the provincial capital, as a ceremonial approach to the Ontario Legislative Building and Queen's Park. Its relationship to provincial governance is also reflected by nearby provincial institutions and public art. (c.1980s, COTA)



With its public art and commemoration, the study area and immediate context contributes to the sense of identity of the city, province and nation. (TPL)

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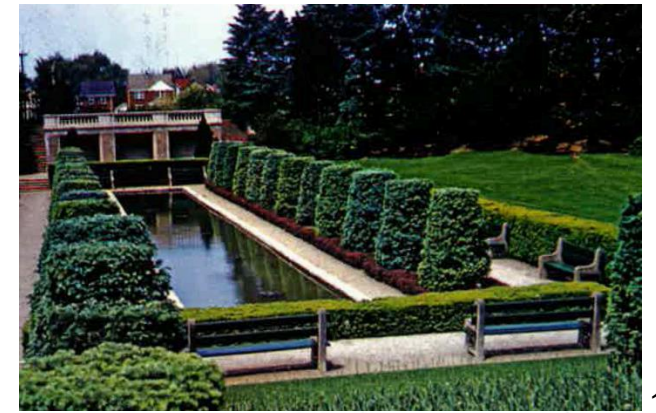
Historical Value as an important public work by Dunington-Grubb & Stensson



University Avenue, 1964



The landscape design of the 12 islands along University Avenue's central median was a large-scale public project for Dunington-Grubb & Stensson and reflects its move from private estate work to public projects, as well as the modernist influence of J.V. and Janina Stensson on the firm's design approach. Designed by Howard Dunington-Grubb, whose early work was rooted in Beaux Arts traditions, the islands reflect a shift in his practice toward the aesthetics of modernism that were emerging in mid-20th century landscape architecture, while remaining resistant to its overall ethos.



1929



1930



1944

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Aesthetic Value: The design of the 12 medians does not have 'aesthetic value' as it does not reflect defined or notable architectural styles or landscape concepts



The landscape does not reflect a single landscape concept, but a combination of approaches that are ideologically contradictory: the application of modernist aesthetics over a decorative Beaux Arts foundation. Additional conditions impeding the aesthetic value of the central median designs are its integrity and limited functionality.



The 1948 Dunington-Grubb design was delayed and restarted in 1961

After the 1964 installation of the medians, the Ontario Association of Architects response was not favourable, and recommended planting large and massive trees in an informal manner down the centre of the islands essentially ignoring the 'landscaping' which they hoped would eventually disappear.



Examples of landscapes with robust modernist approaches, include Nathan Phillips Square (1965) and the McMurtry Gardens of Justice (1966) (COTA, 1970)

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Scientific Value as a place where internationally significant discoveries have been made



1960 (Ebay)

Looking south on University Avenue, Toronto General Hospital is to the left. The Hospital for Sick Children, Canada's most research-intensive hospital and the largest children's health centre in the country, is just to the south at 555 University Ave. In 1995, Princess Margaret Hospital moved to 610 University Avenue. Mount Sinai Hospital has been at 600 University Ave since 1953.

Today, the network of hospitals and research institutes includes the University Health Network (UHN) (Toronto General Hospital, Ontario Cancer Care Institute/Princess Margaret Hospital and the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute) Sick Kids Hospital and Mount Sinai Hospital.

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Cultural Value for its cultural traditions of public assembly related to democratic and cultural expressions



Top left: 1915 showing a large military parade travelling south along University Avenue (TPL)

Centre: 1969 photograph showing trade unionists marching to Queen's Park (TPL)

Top right: 1972 photograph showing revelers in the 1972 Caribana Parade on University Avenue (TPL)

Bottom right: Protesters staging a die-in on University Avenue in front of the American Consulate in 1988 following the American attack on an Iranian airliner (TPL)



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Character Defining Elements of the Public Realm

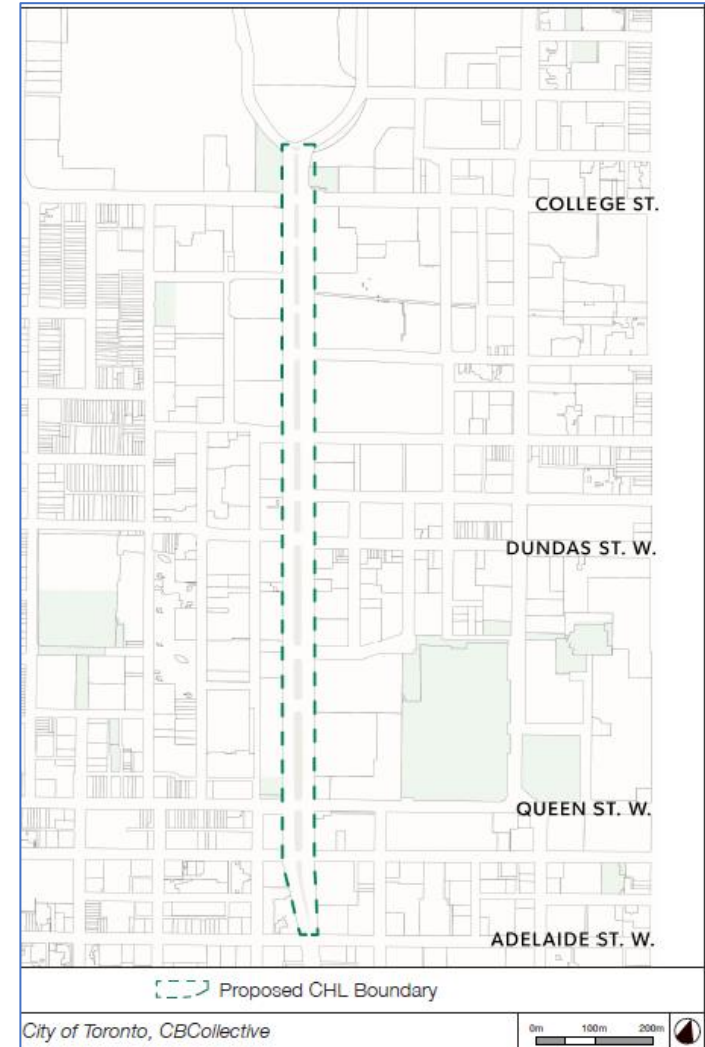
- The ongoing ability of the landscape to be used for large public assemblies reflecting democratic and cultural practices and the ability of the avenue to be used as a public amenity space
- Circulation system
- Spatial organization
- Beaux Arts features
- Public art and commemorative monuments
- Prominent context
- Visual relationships
- Relationship to adjacent institutions and landscapes

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Proposed Boundary of the University Avenue Cultural Heritage Landscape



(City of Toronto)



Proposed University Avenue CHL Boundary
(CB Collective, 2025)

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Recommendations

The Study recommends:

- Council to recognize University Avenue as a Cultural Heritage Landscape
- The City to develop a Conservation Strategy for the University Avenue
- The 1960s island medians designed by Dunington-Grubb & Stensson do not demonstrate design value as per the criteria, to merit conservation.

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For more information

The University Avenue Cultural Heritage Landscape Study is available online:

[Volume A](#)

[Volume B](#)

Planning Studies – City of Toronto
Under **Area Planning Studies**

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