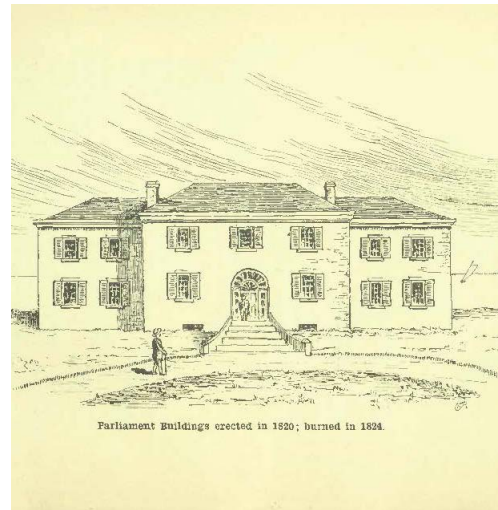
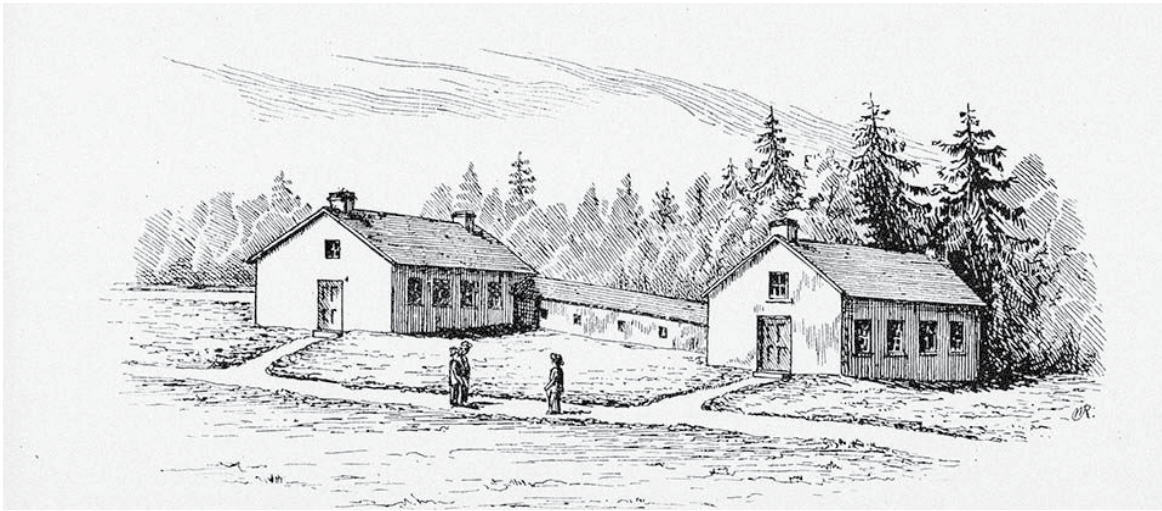


# First Parliament Heritage Interpretation Strategy and Master Plan

## Heritage Interpretation Strategy



Prepared for the **City of Toronto**

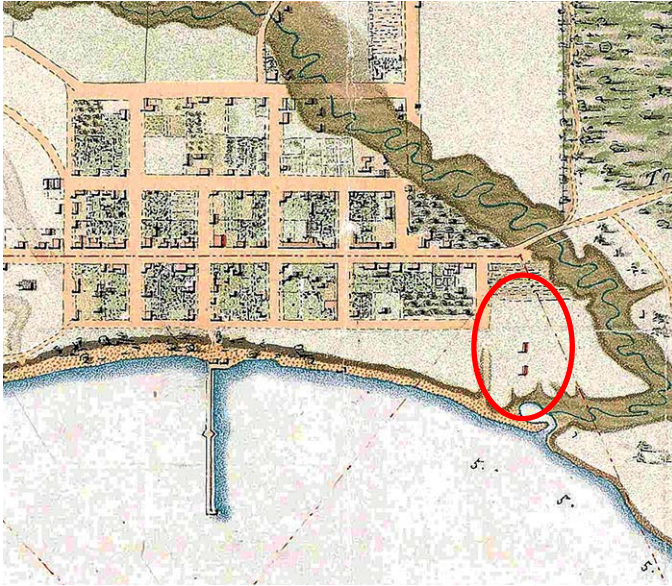
Prepared by **DTAH** Project Lead, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design

with EVOQ Architecture, Lord Cultural Services, MASS LBP, Gladki Planning Associates, ASI,  
A.W. Hooker Associates

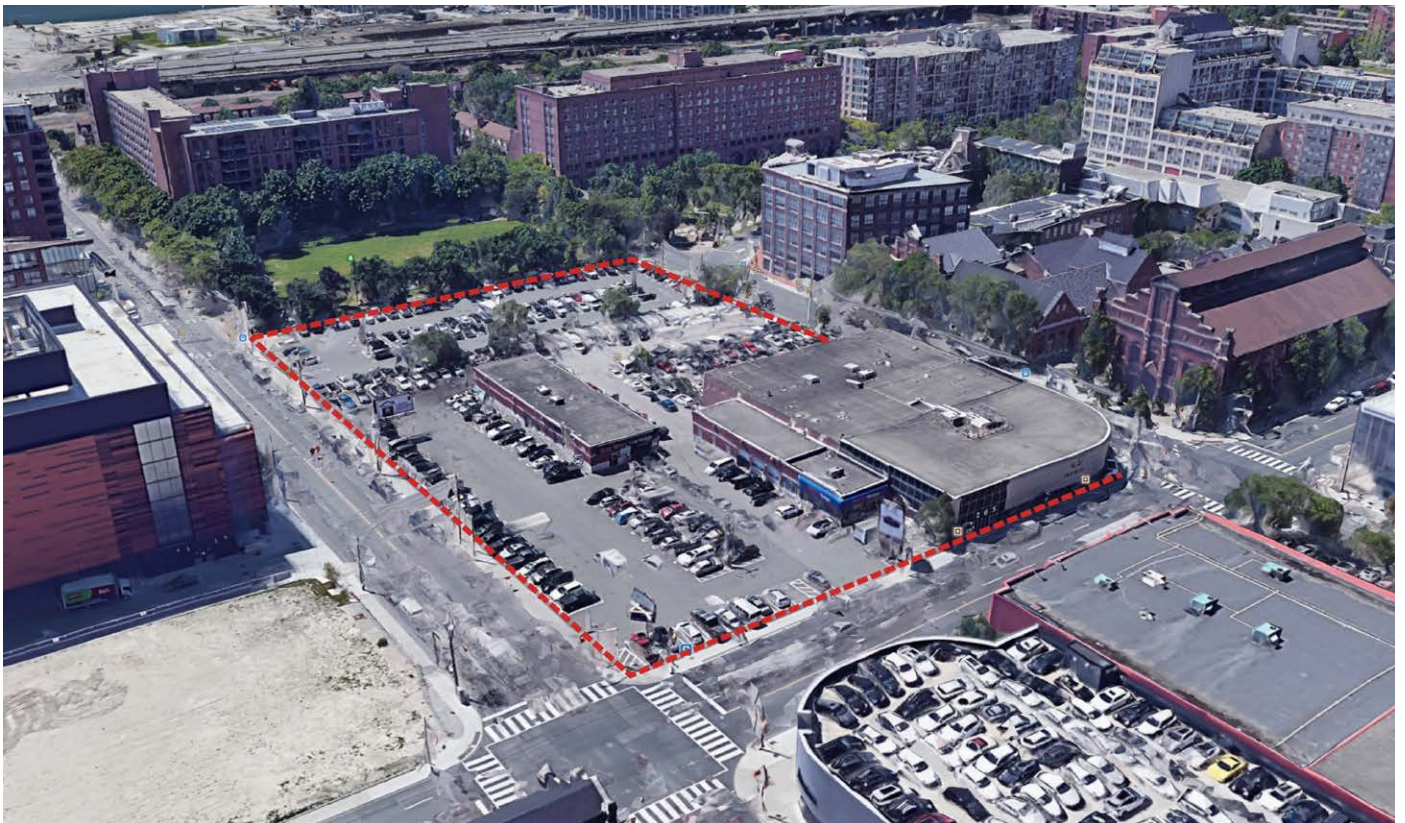
**February 6, 2020**

# Overview





1. First Parliament and the Town of York (Philpotts, 1818)



2. First Parliament Site in Downtown Toronto (Google)

## The Heritage Interpretation Strategy

This Heritage Interpretation Strategy is the first step in imagining a new future for the First Parliament site. Before the site can be planned, the site's history and its evolution over time, including its Indigenous history needs to be explored. What happened at the site? Why is the site important and to whom? What are the stories that people want to hear when they come to the site and how will the stories be told? These are just some of the questions that, when answered, will help shape and inform a heritage interpretative strategy and a master plan.

The First Parliament site is a unique heritage interpretative project because it has no visible historic artifacts (buildings or other structures) to help illuminate its past. The known and suspected archaeological resources from the First Parliament era are fragile and embedded in contaminated soil. The key objective of this Strategy is to bring the site's history to light and ensure that people who visit, work or live near the site have compelling and meaningful interpretation experiences.

The First Parliament site is located in downtown Toronto, in the heart of the former Town of York. The entire site has been brought under public ownership through the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto. It is currently occupied by an auto dealership, a car wash and parking lots.

The Heritage Interpretation Strategy is the first stage in planning for heritage interpretation. Built on research and public engagement, it clarifies the stories and narrative themes to be presented, identifies the primary audiences, develops an interpretation framework, and suggests possible interpretation tools. The Strategy sets the stage for site master planning and for future detailed interpretation planning and design.

## A Brief History

Through historical and archaeological research and consultations with subject matter experts, stakeholders, representatives from Indigenous Nations and the general public, the Heritage Interpretation Strategy identifies four primary chapters in the history of the First Parliament site:

- 1. Indigenous Peoples** in the area and region bring past and continuing stories, roles, and contributions, which constitute a fundamental chapter in the history of the First Parliament site.
- 2. The Parliamentary Era** saw the construction on this site of Upper Canada's first purpose-built parliament buildings. From 1797 to 1824, the First Parliament site was the centre of governance for Upper Canada, a place where legislation was passed that would determine the future of Upper Canada and, eventually, the Province of Ontario. During this time, the site was also the focus of many cultural and religious activities associated with the rapid growth of the Town of York (Toronto).
- 3. The Home District Gaol** occupied the site after the second parliament building was destroyed by fire. In service for over 20 years, the Gaol was a large, imposing structure that housed a diverse population of people including criminals, debtors and the mentally ill. Reflecting the harsh penal system of early Upper Canada, the Gaol's resident population included men and women of all ages, and even children.
- 4. The Consumers' Gas Company** occupied the site from about 1880 to the 1950s. Consumers' Gas built massive industrial structures on the site to convert coal to coal gas. It was this coal gas that literally fueled the development of the Town of York (Toronto) from a little hamlet into a major focus of commerce, finance and culture.

This multi-layered and complex history produces many stories that need to be communicated. Recognizing, celebrating and promoting our collective histories helps us forge a meaningful connection with the past, making it a relevant part of our present and a formative dimension of our future.

## Interpretation Framework

The interpretation framework is the intellectual organization of the story that underpins the interpretation of the First Parliament site. This interpretation framework employs a thematic approach using a series of key themes, sub-themes and connecting themes to tell the story and reinforce the core message. The interpretation framework uses a series of key themes to deliver the core message and tell the central story across the site. These themes represent the foundational elements for building a capital city and by extension, building a province and nation.

The interpretation framework is a device to help people understand potentially vast amounts of information and data. The framework helps future curators and program co-ordinators to organize content and guides designers in making decisions about how the experience is laid out in physical space.

The diagram opposite illustrates the interpretation framework for the First Parliament site, together with the key themes and cross-cutting themes (connectors).

## Core Message

This site and its evolution helped establish Toronto (York) as a founding capital city and directly impacted the formation, development and growth of the Province of Ontario and Canada. Toronto

became the home of Upper Canada's first dedicated parliament buildings. The diverse people, decisions and events associated with the site link the past with the present. The core message recognizes that:

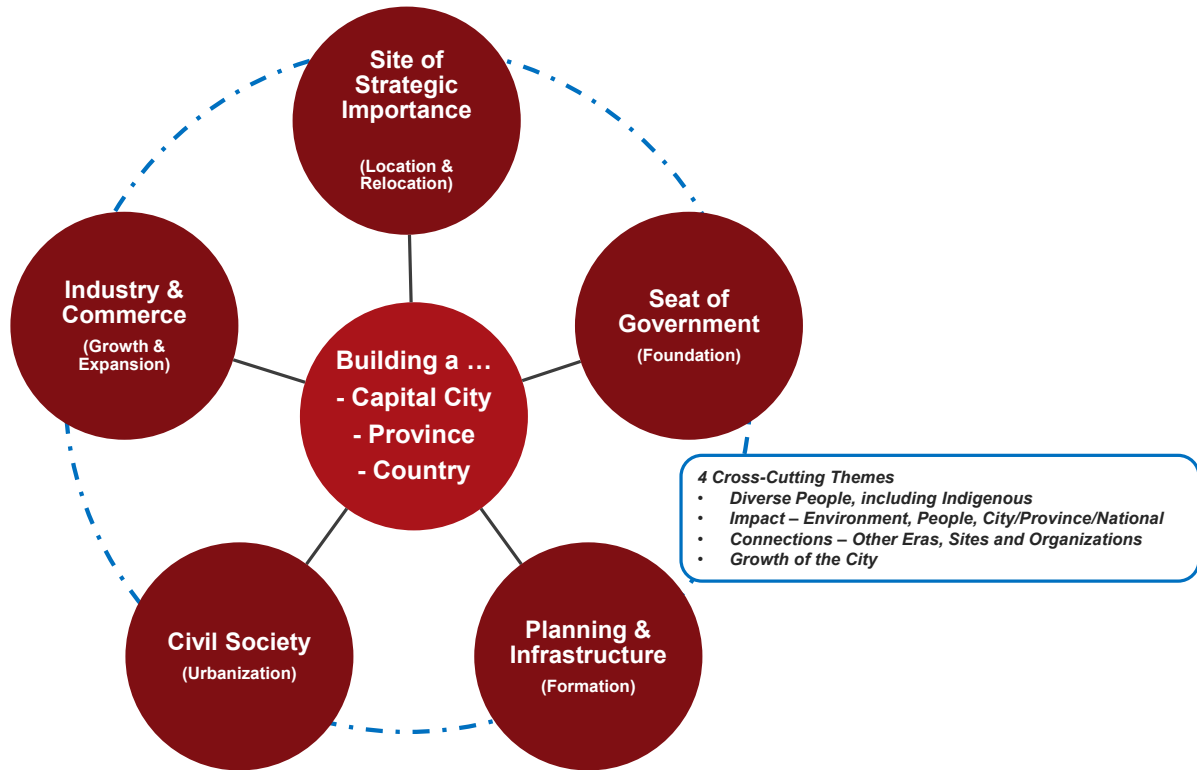
- The history of this site and Canada begins with Indigenous Nations;
- Formalizing and establishing Upper Canada's administrative headquarters at this strategic site was the first step in building York (Toronto) as an early capital city in what would become Canada;
- While the Parliament era is significant, other eras of occupation, both before and after, have supported the site's role in supporting the development of a capital city, province and nation;
- People, their impact and connections, are central to the story.

## The Future of the Strategy

The Heritage Interpretation Strategy will help in the development and interpretation of the First Parliament site well into the future. In the short term, the Strategy will serve as one key footing for the Master Plan, guiding decisions at all levels and scales. In the longer term, the Strategy will inform the detailed planning and design of exhibits and other interpretation media and strategies.

It is expected that both documents - the Strategy and the Master Plan - will evolve as living documents that will continue to support ongoing planning and design. They will be used by architects and designers, heritage interpretation planners, City and Provincial staff, and community partners including Indigenous Nations, to guide the interpretation and communication of First Parliament's heritage as the site is developed over time.

## Interpretation Framework - Building a Capital City, Province, Country



### 3. Interpretive Framework (Lord)

**A Site of Strategic Importance** - This theme would examine the strategic importance of this site including its early history as a gathering place, its significance as the location for the capital of Upper Canada, and the competition for the capital in the lead up to a united Province of Canada and Confederation.

**Seat of Government** - This theme interprets how the Parliament for Upper Canada was established as a legal entity and the seat of government, what early proceedings took place, who made the decisions, how those decisions came about, and the impact they had then and continue to have now.

**Planning and Infrastructure** - This theme would interpret construction of the first and second parliament buildings, how this was part of the wider urban planning of York (Toronto), how its presence

made the city a target for attack and how several founding decisions regarding land use and tenure made here impacted the development of the rest of the province (and the country).

**Civil Society** - This theme would interpret how capital city status began to attract people to York (Toronto), who these immigrants were, how they lived, and how Toronto (York) has become one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world.

**Industry and Commerce** - This theme would interpret how the site became an important centre of industry and commerce. During the First Parliament era, legislation enacted here helped establish the Province's first banking structure. The site later became a hub of industry as the home to Consumers' Gas Company, the railway and the automotive sector.