

Meeting Summary

West Queen West HCD Plan LAC Meeting #2



West Queen West Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plan
August 1, 2024, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Online and by phone via Zoom

Overview

On Thursday, August 1, 2024, the City of Toronto (the City) hosted the second Local Advisory Committee (LAC) meeting focused on the West Queen West Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plan. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the HCD Plan project timeline and activities, provide a briefing and get initial reactions to the draft key policies and guidelines of the HCD Plan, and discuss a planned approach to upcoming Community Engagement. The meeting was held online via Zoom.

12 organizations were invited to join the LAC. Eight (8) out of 12 organizations invited agreed to be part of the Local Advisory Committee, and three (3) of those organizations participated (see Appendix B for the participant list). Other participants included City of Toronto staff from Heritage Planning, Community Planning, and Urban Design.

Following the land acknowledgement and African Ancestral Acknowledgment, Ian Malczewski from the independent facilitation team, Third Party Public, facilitated a round of introductions and reviewed the meeting agenda. Pourya Nazemi and Emma Doedens from Heritage Planning then presented the HCD Plan’s draft key policies and guidelines for contributing properties, non-contributing properties, and the public realm. Finally, Pourya provided an update on the planned approach for upcoming Community Consultation Meeting. Following each presentation Ian facilitated questions of clarification and feedback in a plenary discussion.

Participants were encouraged to send any additional feedback to the Third Party Public team and/or the City by August 16th. This summary written by Third Party Public and shared with participants in draft for review before being finalized. The report summarizes feedback shared during the meeting — both during the discussions and through the chat box — as well as feedback shared afterwards. It is not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript.

What we heard overall

This section summarizes key themes from the feedback shared. They are high-level takeaways only – detailed feedback follows in the rest of the report.

No major concerns about the draft policies and guidelines in the Draft HCD Plan. While LAC members expressed concerns about the overall state of heritage protection in Toronto and Ontario, they did not raise major objections to the draft policies and guidelines in the HCD Plan. They said there were many things to like in it, adding that the Plan could help conserve the physical, social, and cultural heritage of West Queen West. A few members singled out the policies about laneways as particularly good, recognizing their potential to support businesses and enable creative animations in these importance spaces.

Strong desire for meaningful, enforceable heritage protection. While LAC members had varying perspectives on how much change the City should encourage or accommodate in the District, they generally agreed that the HCD Plan should include strong, legally binding language that the City could use to enforce heritage protection. Concerns such as demolition by neglect, decisions made by quasi-public bodies like the Committee of Adjustment, and precedents set by development applications were identified as risks to heritage that members would like to see considered and mitigated in the HCD Plan.

Detailed summary of feedback

LAC members' feedback covered four topics:

1. General feedback about the HCD Plan and West Queen West
2. Feedback on policies and guidelines for contributing and non-contributing properties
3. Feedback on policies and guidelines for public realm
4. Other feedback and process-related feedback

The summary is organized under these topics. Participant feedback and suggestions are presented first, followed by responses from the project team, which are provided in *italicized text*.

General feedback about the HCD Plan and West Queen West

LAC members shared high-level feedback about HCD Plan and the West Queen West area. Themes in this feedback included:

Support for the social and cultural components of the HCD Plan. These components are viewed as highly important — one LAC member mentioned that they had previous tried, unsuccessfully, to use social and cultural significance as an argument to preserve heritage. They believe that policies like those in the HCD Plan could better help support such

arguments in the future. It was also suggested to provide more detail on why certain spaces hold cultural value and attract community gatherings.

Interest in understanding the power and impact of the HCD Plan and its policies. LAC members were keen to understand how legally binding the HCD Plan will be and what will be different or better because of this HCD Plan. They were concerned about:

- The potential for bodies like the Committee of Adjustment and the Ontario Land Tribunal to overrule and undermine the Plan;
- Whether the Plan would strengthen protection for heritage buildings such as Canada Postal Station ‘C’ at 1117 Queen Street West; and
- If or how the heights and densities in recent development applications (including the Parkdale Hub and the Postal Station) would set a precedent for future developments, and whether the HCD Plan would limit similar applications in the future.

The City explained that once the Plan is adopted and in-force, it will have legal status like other City by-laws. HCD Plans do not regulate overall building height since it is regulated by other provincial and municipal policies, but they do regulate the height and shape of the streetwall portion of a new building.

Differing opinions about the degree of change that the Plan should support. Some felt that development — especially modern development — should be very limited in the District, suggesting that the HCD Plan should enable people to “go back in time and understand what the past was like 100 or 200 years ago.” Others, while supporting heritage protection, did not want to see the Plan limit creativity or freeze the District in the 1880s. They pointed to impressive examples of infill on West Queen West that support and complement the area’s character, such as the infill on the former Duke’s Cycle site.

Desire to see the West Queen West HCD Plan complement efforts in neighbouring HCD Plans. The West Queen West HCD Plan area is between two other Heritage Conservation Districts (Queen Street West and Parkdale) — this Plan should build off the heritage preservation efforts in those districts to create a cohesive, larger area that benefits from all three.

Concerns about specific properties in and near the HCD Plan boundaries. Some LAC members expressed concern and disappointment regarding the future redevelopment of specific properties. They suggested the City apply any lessons learned from those proposed redevelopments to the HCD Plan to prevent similar losses. They also suggested the City add a special provision for the Postal Station site in the Plan to ensure that more than just the façade is protected.

Feedback about contributing and non-contributing properties

LAC members expressed that there were several aspects of the policies for contributing and non-contributing properties that they liked. They also shared concerns and suggested ways to strengthen these policies. Themes in this feedback included:

Suggestions to address demolition by neglect (Policy 6.6). LAC members were generally concerned about demolition by neglect, expressing doubt the HCD Plan could effectively prevent it. They said that if the Plan has any loopholes, some developers will find ways to exploit them. Suggestions to strengthen this policy included:

- Using stronger language
- Increasing enforcement and fines for neglecting heritage buildings
- Adding a policy requiring that, if a building must be torn down, it must be rebuilt to the exact specifications of the original building
- Removing Policy 6.6.1.a from the Plan (which allows the City to re-classify a property as non-contributing if a landowner receives a demolition permit).

Mixed opinions about allowing balconies (Policy 6.11.10 & Policy 7.6.8). LAC members shared different perspectives about policies allowing balconies in West Queen West. Some disagreed with the policies, saying “there were no balconies 100 years ago” and that new buildings or additions should be consistent with this character. Others disagreed, expressing that balconies are a nice amenity and that some heritage buildings in West Queen West do have balconies. *The City clarified that balconies will only be permitted within a building’s stepback — they will not be permitted along Queen Street West or side street frontages.*

Suggestions about alterations to non-contributing properties (Policies 6.1.3 & 7.5.1). One LAC member suggested that there should be a statement requiring non-contributing buildings to adhere to the historical characteristics of the neighbourhoods, essentially making new buildings contributing properties (and subject to contributing property policies).

Suggestions about merging different architectural styles (Policy 6.11.5). One LAC member suggested that there should be a requirement that any new building or addition should conform to the historical architectural framework of the original building and there should not be any merging of different architectural styles.

Advice to increase setbacks to remove visibility of additions from the street (Policies 6.11.6 & 7.6.5). A LAC member suggested increasing the stepback on side elevations to more than 1.5 metres to ensure that new additions are not visible from the street.

Suggestion to list unacceptable materials for new developments (Policy 6.11.2). One LAC member proposed that the HCD Plan include a list of materials that are not acceptable for new developments (such as glass), as these materials are inconsistent with the heritage character of the District.

Suggestion to require new development to conform to the surrounding heritage characteristics (Policies 7.7.3 & 7.7.4). One LAC member suggested that the City include a requirement for new developments to conform to the surrounding heritage characteristics. They also suggested that the Plan provide a list of examples for developers to reference in order to conform to the heritage characteristics.

Preserving the fine grained nature of storefronts along Queen Street (Policy 6.15). A LAC member shared that the fine grained nature of shops along Queen Street is what draws people to the neighbourhood and that actual fine grain should be supported and protected. They said that the example of the Rexall building is an example not to follow, stating that it simply articulated windows externally, and then covered the windows with posters. Fine grain retail is the only way that small businesses and shops can remain active – when scale of the building is affordable.

Feedback about the public realm

LAC members generally raised no objections to the draft policies and guidelines about the public realm. Themes in their feedback included:

Support for the streetscape and laneways policies and guidelines (Policy 8.2). LAC members emphasize the importance of laneways to West Queen West and appreciated that the HCD Plan encourages creative uses and activities within them. They said they would like to see this policy allow for or encourage entrances to Queen Street West businesses from laneways, as this would help increase foot traffic and further animate the laneways.

Suggestions to list or map specific laneways in the HCD Plan (Policy 8.2). The community has a lot of interest in the laneways, including the one south of Queen Street West between Dovercourt Road and Lisgar Park. The City should consider listing or mapping this and other laneways in the Plan to ensure their protection and continued animation.

Suggested addition to historic nodes (Policy 8.1). Consider adding the intersection at 1117 Queen Street West as a historic node (similar to other T-intersections in the Plan).

Other feedback and process-related feedback

LAC members shared broader comments on heritage conservation in Toronto and Ontario, as well as feedback on the process for the upcoming Community Consultation Meeting (Open House).

Concern over the state of heritage conservation in Ontario. Compared to other places (like Europe and San Francisco), Ontario needs much stronger guardrails to protect its history and allow people to experience and know the past.

Concern about change and growth in Heritage Conservation Districts. One LAC member was generally concerned that the “West Queen West HCD Plan is diluted and delayed”, citing the lengthy consultation process. They argued that this process with participants from various perspectives and agendas, “is watering down the protections” sought by “those who really care about protecting the unique heritage attributes of West Queen West.” *The City noted that HCD Plans and other heritage planning tools strive to balance heritage protection with broader City objectives (such as accommodating growth and change). The City noted that HCD Plans help maintain the character and identity of an*

area, particularly because they confer a degree of protection on all properties within the boundary (whether contributing or non-contributing).

Suggestions about the upcoming Community Meeting:

- Use graphics and colours to help convey key messages about what is being proposed.
- Clearly explain the difference between a policy and a guideline.
- Include a large map that clearly shows the boundary of the HCD Plan area and identifies the contributing and non-contributing properties.
- Create opportunities for participants to come together to hear from and riff off each other.
- Consider offering a hybrid meeting so people can join online or in-person.

Next steps

The City thanked LAC members for attending and sharing feedback, reminding them to review the presentation and submit any additional comments by August 16th. Third Party Public mentioned that it would share a draft summary with participants for their review after the date. Finally, the City encouraged LAC members to inform their organizations about the Community Consultation Meeting (Open House) on September 10th.

Appendix A: Agenda

West Queen West HCD Plan

Local Advisory Committee (LAC) Meeting #2 of 2

August 1, 2024

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Online and by phone

Meeting purpose:

To provide an update on the HCD Plan project timeline and activities, provide a briefing and get initial reactions to the draft key policies and guidelines of the HCD Plan, and share and seek feedback on the Community Engagement approach.

Proposed Agenda

6:00 Welcome, introductions, land acknowledgement, and agenda review

City staff and Third Party Public

6:10 HCD Plan update & Recap of feedback received at LAC Meeting 1

City Planning (Heritage Planning)

6:25 Review of draft contributing and non-contributing properties key policies and guidelines

City Planning (Heritage Planning)

6:45 Discussion: draft contributing and non-contributing properties policies and guidelines

Questions of clarification

Discussion Questions:

Thinking of the draft contributing and non-contributing properties policies and guidelines:

1. Are there any parts of the draft policies and guidelines that you believe are particularly effective or well-articulated? If so, what are they, and why do you think they work well?
2. Do you have any suggested changes or additions to the proposed language in the draft policies and guidelines around contributing and non-contributing properties?

7:10 Review of draft public realm key policies and guidelines

City Planning (Heritage Planning)

7:20 Discussion: draft public realm policies and guidelines (draft)

Questions of clarification

Discussion Questions:

Thinking of the draft public realm policies and guidelines:

- 1. Which specific policies and guidelines in the draft do you feel are well-written or particularly effective? Please identify them and share your thoughts on why they stand out to you.**
- 2. Do you have any suggested changes and/or additions to the proposed language for the public realm draft policies and guidelines?**

7:40 Update & Discussion: Community Consultation Meeting

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Do you have any advice on what topic(s) from the HCD Plan would be most relevant / interesting to the broader West Queen West community and should be presented for feedback at the Community Meeting?**
- 2. Do you have any advice on how to present the material at the Community Meeting in a way that is accessible to the broader community?**

7:55 Wrap up and next steps

- Please share any additional comments with Matthew (matthew@thirdpartypublic.ca) by Friday, August 16th.**
- Comment period to collect public feedback on the draft HCD Plan following the Community Meeting (September 24th).**

8:00 Adjourn

Appendix B: Participant List

The following organizations were invited to be part of the Local Advisory Committee. Eight (8) out of 12 organizations invited agreed to be part of the Local Advisory Committee, and three (3) of those organizations participated in the second LAC meeting, identified below in bold.

Beaconsfield Village Residents Association

CAMH

Drake Hotel

Gladstone Hotel

Ossington Community Association

Philip Carter Architects

Theatre Centre

Trinity Bellwoods Community Association

West Neighbourhood House

West Queen West BIA

West Queen West Community Post

West Side Community Council