

Meeting Summary

West Queen West HCD Plan

West Queen West BIA Board Meeting



West Queen West Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plan

August 12, 2024, 7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Online via Zoom

Overview

On Monday, August 12, 2024, the City of Toronto (the City) hosted a meeting for the West Queen West Business Improvement Area (BIA) focused on the West Queen West Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plan. The purpose of the meeting was to recap the HCD Plan purpose, process, and district resources, and to review and discuss draft key policies and guidelines for contributing and non-contributing properties as well as the public realm (see Appendix A for agenda). The meeting was held online via Zoom.

Nine (9) BIA board members were invited to attend the meeting, with three (3) members attending the meeting. A fourth BIA member, who was unable to attend the meeting, followed up with City staff after the meeting and submitted their feedback that has been incorporated into this summary and is attached in *Attachment 1*. Other participants included City of Toronto staff from Heritage Planning, Community Planning, and Urban Design.

Following the Land Acknowledgement and African Ancestral Acknowledgment, Matthew Wheatley from the independent facilitation team, Third Party Public, facilitated a round of introductions and reviewed the agenda. Pourya Nazemi and Emma Doedens from the City Planning Division then presented the West Queen West HCD Plan background, process, district resources, review of key policies & guidelines for contributing & non-contributing properties as well as the public realm. Questions of clarification and a plenary discussion followed the presentation.

Participants were encouraged to send any additional feedback to the Third Party Public or the City by August 19th. This draft summary written by Third Party Public 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 as a verbatim transcript. Third Party Public shared this summary in draft with participants before finalizing it.

Detailed summary of feedback

The discussion in the meeting covered three discussion topics:

1. Discussion on restoration of heritage properties
2. Feedback on draft key policies and guidelines for the public realm
3. Other feedback

The summary below is organized under these three topics. Participant feedback and suggestions are included first. Responses from the project team, where provided, follow in *italicized text*.

Discussion on restoration of heritage properties

Interest in programs and financial support for maintaining heritage properties. BIA members were interested in understanding how the HCD Plan would provide financial for restoring their heritage buildings/façade when they are damaged. They said it is expensive to maintain, improve, or repair buildings in the heritage conservation area and that there should be financial assistance from the City to maintain it. Additionally, there are challenges with insurance companies when insuring heritage properties, and there is a high cost associated with covering hydro lines when making façade repairs. One member suggested that the City create a list of resources that can be shared with the BIA to help them find businesses that fix/maintain heritage facades. *The city explained that there are two financial assistance programs for heritage properties, that property owners can tap into, including:*

1. *The **Heritage Grant Program** provides matching grant funds for eligible heritage conservation work undertaken by owners of residential and tax-exempt properties. It assists property owners in repairing and retaining defining heritage attributes, including masonry, windows, doors, wood detailing, and slate roofs. More information on the program can be found here, <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/heritage-preservation/tax-rebates-grants/heritage-grant-program/>.*
2. *The **Heritage Tax Rebate Program** calculates rebates to provide matching funds for eligible conservation work on commercial and industrial properties. Unlike the Heritage Grant Program, the Heritage Tax Rebate Program does not have to go through Council for a decision. More information on this program can be found here, <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/heritage-preservation/tax-rebates-grants/heritage-tax-rebate/>.*

The City explained that they are not able to recommend specific heritage conservation/repair firms as doing so would create an unfair advantage. However, residents' associations often maintain a standing list of such firms.

Suggestions and advice for the team on how to ensure Heritage Designation preserves and enhances the West Queen West community. Following the meeting one of the WQW BIA Co-Chairs shared additional feedback with the city by phone and email. The feedback included

suggestions and factors to consider on different strategies for effective restoration and utilization of heritage buildings. The full list of suggestions can be found in Attachment 1.

Feedback on draft key policies and guidelines for the public realm

The City provided a summary of the draft key policies and guidelines for contributing and non-contributing properties, as well as for enhancing the public realm. The City asked BIA members to share any initial thoughts or reactions to the draft policies and to provide feedback on which elements of the public realm should be conserved or enhanced.

The following are the comments and suggestions shared by BIA members:

Interest in improvements to laneways and lighting. A BIA member said they are happy to see that special attention is being given to laneways. They suggested the City continue to animate the laneways to encourage use by more people. They noted that having more people use the laneways on a regular basis could discourage nefarious behaviour and improve safety. BIA members also emphasized the need for more lighting, both in the laneways and along the main street. As West Queen West is a tourist area, they believe that continuous improvements to the public realm could attract more visitors. At night, they noted, the area lacks appeal and that better lighting is necessary not only for safety but also for events (such as Christmas or Diwali), to create intrigue, and to draw more tourists. *The City acknowledged that one of the objectives of the HCD Plan is to enhance the public realm, including both properties and on the main street, and confirmed that lighting will be addressed the Plan. Since laneways fall within the boundaries of the HCD Plan, policies and guidelines can be developed to reanimate the area through appropriate pavement, art installation and other enhancements to improve these public spaces.*

Other feedback

Concerns about limited parking. One participant shared concerns about limited parking on Queen Street West. *The City Heritage Planning team explained that Heritage Planning and the HCD Plan do not have controls over parking. The local community planner for the area offered to connect offline with the participant; their contact information was provided the following day.*

Next steps

City staff thanked BIA members for attending the meeting and sharing their feedback. The City committed to sharing the presentation with BIA members the next day. Third Party Public reminded BIA members to share any additional feedback by email by August 19th and explained that a draft summary of the meeting would be shared with participating BIA members before posting on the website for their review. The City encouraged the BIA members to attend and promote the upcoming Community Meeting on September 10th from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. at the Theatre Centre.

Appendix A: Agenda

West Queen West HCD Plan

West Queen West BIA Board Meeting

August 12, 2024

7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Online and by phone

Meeting purpose:

To recap the West Queen West HCD Plan purpose, process, and District resources. To review and discuss draft key policies and guidelines for: contributing and non-contributing properties; and public realm

Proposed Agenda

7:00 Welcome, introductions, land acknowledgement, and agenda review

City staff and Third Party Public

7:10 Presentation: Draft HCD Plan: Process, District Resources, Review of Key Policies & Guidelines for Contributing & Non-Contributing Properties and the Public Realm

City Planning (Heritage Planning)

7:35 Q&A and Discussion

Questions of clarification

Discussion Questions:

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

1. What are your thoughts on the HCD Plan and its policy direction? Do you have any suggestions on how we could improve it?
2. Based on your knowledge of the area and your direct experience with businesses, what aspects of the District need special attention that can be addressed in the HCD Plan (such as signage, storefronts, streetscape, laneways, etc.)?

7:55 Wrap up and next steps

- Please share any additional comments with Stephanie (stephanie@thirdpartypublic.ca) by Monday, August 19th.
- Comment period to collect public feedback on the draft HCD Plan following the Community Meeting (September 24th).

8:00 Adjourn

Attachment 1: Feedback received after the meeting via email

Submission 1 of 1: email from Djanka Gajdel, Co-chair WQW BIA

Dear Pourya,

To follow up on our phone conversation, we must adopt a clear and concise mandate regarding areas of cultural interest, particularly those recognized for their architecture. If a region holds cultural significance due to its architectural features, it should uniformly fall under the same heritage designation. Ambiguity in classification leads to unnecessary debates and delays in decision-making, which can hinder progress and preservation efforts.

The suggestions I've included are to help our members and ensure that the Heritage Designation preserves and enhances our community. As we continue exploring strategies for the effective restoration and utilization of heritage buildings, several factors must be considered to ensure compliance and functionality.

An area should be recognized for contributing to the local economy, tourism vitality, architecture, and history without wavering. Establishing separate categories for what could be covered under a comprehensive heritage designation complicates the process and can dilute the focus and resources needed for preservation.

All culturally significant areas should be integrated into a broad cultural heritage framework to ensure effectiveness and clarity. This approach would allow for some flexibility in managing these areas but would avoid the fragmentation that comes with creating entirely separate subsets. This streamlined method will support more straightforward governance and enhance the preservation and celebration of our architectural heritage recommendations to consider for the Heritage Designation you are currently developing.

- 1. Building Audit:** The city should conduct a preliminary audit of century-old buildings to ensure that the brick structures, at a bare minimum, are safe and in good repair. This initiative would enhance safety and significantly improve the facade aesthetics from one side of Queen Street to the other.
- 2. Hydro Wires:** The city should internally assume responsibility for hydro wires. Currently, the 8-foot coverage, primarily for visual purposes, costs our members close to \$20,000 - a significant discouragement to timely maintenance. The city could manage this internally, outside of Hydro One, at a fraction of the cost, encouraging property owners to undertake necessary maintenance without the burden of exorbitant wire covering costs.
- 3. Materials Approval:** The Insurance Board of Canada should approve all materials mandated by the city under the Heritage designation. This ensures that improvements made with these materials will be eligible for insurance coverage. Our members must not be left negotiating coverage for materials they did not choose but were mandated by the city.
- 4. Tax Deductions:** Offering tax deductions for work on heritage properties is a positive step. However, extending eligibility to include work completed up to two years prior would reward early adopters who have contributed to enhancing the block's appeal and encouraged others to follow suit.
- 5. Contractor Recommendation:** Small business owners who have had success with contractors for historical repairs should be able to share this information freely. This is vital as many contractors have previously performed subpar work on critical streetscape projects for several BIAs. Those with a track record of high-quality, cost-

effective work should be encouraged to participate in future projects, improving the overall quality and attractiveness for the local economy and tourism.

6. Sustainable Energy Solutions: To reduce the carbon footprint, we suggest installing geothermal systems in the laneways behind blocks of the buildings. This initiative could be amortized over several years, helping districts reduce their reliance on inefficient gas furnaces and air conditioners and decreasing their environmental impact.

7. Adaptive Reuse Flexibility: Given these buildings' age and unique architectural features, standardized solutions for modifications such as fire exits and elevators are not feasible in a cookie-cutter design. Each building must be assessed individually, allowing for modifications that respect the existing footprint and structure while optimizing the space for residential or small commercial use. The focus should be maximizing usable space while fully adhering to fire safety regulations.

8. Financial Responsibilities: While community input is valuable, the financial burden of restoration and compliance with heritage mandates falls on the property owners. Those who bear the cost must have the primary say in the restoration details, particularly when suggestions from non-investing community members may lead to unnecessary and costly additions irrelevant to the project's focus.

9. Innovative Restoration Practice: Investigating international restoration materials and techniques could provide cost-effective and environmentally conscious solutions. Adopting such practices could enhance our restoration project both aesthetically and functionally.

10. Taxation Adjustments: Proposing that commercial taxes on heritage buildings be levied at a residential rate could significantly alleviate financial pressures on owners, facilitating necessary restorations. The slight increase in community tax, potentially around 2%, would be a minor contribution compared to the benefits: revitalizing the neighbourhood, attracting tourism, and preserving the local heritage.

11. Economic and Cultural Benefits: Supporting these buildings preserves their historical significance, such as the iconic structures of Trinity Buildings on Crawford and Queen and the Gladstone Hotel, amongst others, promotes economic vitality. Transforming these areas into vibrant destinations that enhance property values creates job opportunities and increases municipal revenue.

12. Fair Assessments: Another crucial point to consider is the capability and expertise of MPAC assessors in fairly evaluating heritage areas. Assessors must understand the financial implications of maintaining and restoring heritage properties. The assessment process must be conducted with a deep knowledge of the specific challenges and costs associated with heritage conservation. This is not an opportunity for subjective interpretation or embellishments but requires a measured and informed approach to ensure fair and accurate assessments. Ensuring that assessors are adequately trained and equipped to handle these unique properties is critical for maintaining our heritage sites' integrity and financial viability. Anything less would be incongruent with stimulating the restorations.

By adopting these approaches, we can ensure that our heritage buildings are preserved and made functional, financially viable for their owners, and beneficial to the community.

Thank you for considering these points. I look forward to our collective efforts to maintain and enrich our city's historical legacy.

Djanka Gajdel
Co-chair
WQW BIA

MEETING SUMMARY: WEST QUEEN WEST HCD – BIA Meeting