



Meeting Summary

West Queen West HCD Plan

Community Consultation Open House

West Queen West Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plan

September 10, 2024, 6:00 – 8:00 pm

The Theatre Centre, 1115 Queen Street West

Meeting Overview

On Tuesday, September 10, 2024, City of Toronto Planning Division held a Community Consultation Open House to gather community input and feedback on the draft West Queen West Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plan in advance of a staff report proceeding to the Toronto Preservation Board in November and City Council in December.

Community members were made aware of the event through various channels, including a Public Notice mailed to all the addresses within the District, an email to an interested parties list, members of the Local Advisory Committee, updates on the project and Theatre Centre websites, and newsletters from Councillors. The event was a “drop-in” format that featured display boards explaining the draft HCD Plan, including the district’s cultural heritage value and objectives, draft policies, guidelines, and the permit process. Participants had the opportunity to meet City staff and the project team, ask questions, and provide input. The Open House was held at the Theatre Centre, with approximately 50 attendees. Also in attendance were Deputy Mayor Ausma Malik, staff from Councillor Bravo’s office, staff from City Planning, and staff from Third Party Public (independent facilitators retained by City of Toronto to support community engagement for the West Queen West HCD Plan).

Alongside receiving general feedback and questions from participants, the City team asked participants the following questions:

1. Has the West Queen West HCD Plan adequately identified and described the area’s cultural heritage values and heritage resources? Do the HCD Plan’s objectives effectively protect these values and resources? Do you have any suggestions to improve these sections?
2. Overall, to what degree do you support the draft key policies and guidelines in the HCD Plan? Are there any specific policies that you think will be particularly helpful in protecting heritage? What suggested refinements, if any, do you have to the draft key policies and guidelines?
3. Do you have any other comments or advice for the team?

Participants were also encouraged to send any additional feedback to the City team by September 24.

About this Summary

This summary synthesizes the discussions held at the Community Consultation Open House, including feedback received in person, via feedback forms and 3 emails sent to the team after the Open House. It includes the following sections:

- What we heard overall
- Detailed summary

The summary was prepared by Third Party Public, the engagement team retained by the City to support community consultation on the HCD Plan.

What we Heard Overall

There was support and appreciation for the HCD Plan and its draft policies and guidelines.

Many participants were happy with what was shown and encouraged the team to move it along faster. They liked that the objectives were clear and will protect the area's unique character. Some attendees even indicated they are ready to depute in support of the HCD Plan at Council to help move it along.

There are some concerns that the HCD Plan's draft policies and guidelines are too onerous for small business owners.

Some participants noted that, unlike other districts, many small business owners also own the buildings from which they operate. This unique aspect means they believe they should have a say in their property decisions. Repairing and maintaining heritage buildings is too expensive for them, even with the rebate and incentive program. Some were also concerned that the HCD Plan will contribute to the housing crisis if tall buildings can't be built in the area.

Interest in activating and improving the laneways as part of the HCD Plan. Participants said laneways are an important part of the public realm that should be paid attention to.

Cultural heritage value is also about the people, not just buildings. It is important to remember that a community of artists live and work in the neighbourhood. The HCD Plan should ensure artists are able to stay and create art for the area and are not priced out. They should be celebrated as part of the West Queen West heritage.

Detailed Feedback Summary

General feedback and questions

Overall, there was support for the draft key policies and guidelines in the HCD Plan.

Participants said they were happy with the work shown and wanted it to move along faster. They particularly appreciated the attention to detail and care taken in developing the HCD Plan. Some were concerned that pressure from developers might undermine the HCD Plan before its final approval. Others said they would depute at either Toronto East York Community Council or City Council to show their support for the HCD Plan. Another participant expressed they were glad to see the West Queen West HCD connecting to the other two adjacent HCDs along Queen Street West.

Yes, the HCD Plan's objectives are clear and protect the HCD's cultural heritage values and resources.

Participants said the objectives are tangible and clear and do identify the cultural heritage values and resources. One participant raised the concern that the HCD Plan over-identified heritage resources, doubting that more than 200 properties merit historic conservation. On the other hand, another participant emphasized the need for strong, strict protections to safeguard the area's heritage.

Glad to see the HCD Plan is advancing to protect the unique character of West Queen West, but ensure long-term residents are able to stay or find affordable housing in their community.

Concern that the HCD is an "overreach and unnecessary" because it will be too onerous on small business owners to make changes to their buildings.

A few participants said that an HCD Plan is counter-intuitive when there is a housing crisis in the city. They questioned that why the government would regulate/limit heights when this could be an opportunity to build higher density. There was also concern that the HCD Plan's polices would decrease their property values. One participant mentioned that the Plan might turn West Queen West into a "museum", where things can't change. They added, "the people are the heritage, not the buildings". Vacant storefronts were also highlighted as an issue. In addition, there were strong concerns that heritage regulations should not

undermine the health and safety of property owners, tenants, and the businesses operating within the district.

Participants questions included:

- Can the HCD Plan stop development?
- What is the timeline for the HCD Plan approval?
- Is the Heartbreak Hotel sign identified as a heritage feature in the HCD Plan?
- How long does it take to get designated if a property is outside/adjacent the district?

What we heard about draft policies and guidelines for contributing and non-contributing properties

There was some interest in understanding the strength of policies and guidelines (including what must be followed versus what is a suggestion). One participant also wanted to understand what the difference between a policy and guideline is. Another suggested the team improve the readability of the HCD Plan in general to make it easier to follow.

The draft policy 6.10.3 should be revised to replace the term “preservation” with “conservation”. Preservation is a narrower concept than conservation. The plan should require “conservation” of heritage attributes, which can be achieved in many ways (including preservation).

Reconsider prescriptive massing policies for contributing and non-contributing policies. These policies enforce a singular built form, omitting an important step in the heritage conservation decision-making process.

There was positive feedback on the policies and guidelines regarding articulation and proportion for non-contributing properties. These policies would encourage developments to enhance the area’s heritage character. New development, especially their windows and materials, should be consistent with the heritage buildings. Participants said they are glad that the policies prohibit false historic features, as new buildings should not mimic heritage buildings.

Concerned that new buildings already in progress will not have to adhere to the policies and guidelines in the HCD Plan. This includes concern that tall buildings being planned in the area will set a precedent for future developments. One participant cited the CAMH building as an example of something that should not be allowed because it is tall and overpowering and does not fit with the character of the neighbourhood. They suggested that the guidelines include more specific details on acceptable building materials for new constructions to ensure compliance with heritage standards.

More flexibility should be built into the language concerning massing policies for non-contributing development, particularly around stepbacks. The team should consider using “should” instead of “shall” in massing policies so that new development applications can be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to allow for more innovative design suggestions. For example, innovative solutions might be possible if a developer does not have to conform to the precise stepbacks in the draft policies.

Concern that the stepback policies affect the interior livability of the units, with suggestions the City focus instead on materiality. While interiors are not covered by the plan, requiring the exterior of buildings to include a stepback impacts the interior’s living space by making units narrow. In lieu of stepbacks, materiality should be added as a guideline, so that changes in

material of the façade visually break up the massing to acknowledge the existing streetwall. Another solution could be to remove the specific number requirements of the stepbacks; that way they're still required but may allow more flexibility on how they are incorporated within the new design. Rather than stepbacks, another approach to protect the streetwall and pedestrian scale of the district would be to include zoning recommendations within the HCD.

There was concern that conserving only the façade of heritage buildings is insufficient and that entire buildings should be preserved. One participant would also like the heights on contributing properties to be limited in order to see blue skies and sunlight.

There are several buildings that are listed as non-contributing that should be contributing. For example, 628-630, and 972 Queen Street West.

What we heard about draft policies and guidelines related to improving the public realm

The following are specific suggestions for and questions about the language in the HCD Plan's policies and guidelines around public realm:

- There was some confusion on what "encourage the interpretation of the laneway network" meant. Does it mean to make it more visible, highlight it as a way to get around it, or remember that they were used for other reasons?
- This statement contradicts itself: "coherent set of street furniture is encouraged to be selected from existing City guidelines or may follow a unique design...". As phrased, the policy is difficult to satisfy as it encourages a unique design but also expresses a need to blend with an existing character. Consider using "complementary" instead of "coherent".

Activating laneways to improve activity and safety in the West Queen West community is important to many. Participants suggested the team focus on improving the conditions of laneways and encouraging activation and landscaping to accommodate and support growth. There was a suggestion to create independent commercial units at the rear end of properties (accessible by laneways) to activate and increase safety and security of laneways. There was also a suggestion to improve safety in Trinity Bellwoods laneways by creating a gateway to the park or converting the laneways—such as Logie Place and Trinity Park Lane—into public space.

Participants encouraged the team to pay more attention to the public realm. They said it is important to emphasize appropriate street pavement and furniture to enhance West Queen West as a visitor destination. This also includes enhancing lighting fixtures for laneways and for the street, adding more art/paintings to the space, and adding street art and sculptures to maintain the spirit of the community. There was also a suggestion to create two gateways that enhance and celebrate the social, cultural, and community values that make West Queen West such a vibrant and distinct neighbourhood.

What we heard about cultural heritage value in West Queen West

It is important to maintain and celebrate the artistic character of West Queen West and honor the role artists play in the area. There are few artist studios in the city, and West Queen West hosts many of them. Artists want to contribute to the heritage of West Queen West but need affordable maker spaces. Artists were particularly concerned with the HCD Plan leading to increased rents for artists, particularly given the condition of the Artscape Building at 900 Queen Street West.

Consider adding references to “Queer Street West” and the LGBTQ+ community/culture that the brand represents to the Statement of Cultural Heritage Value. The Plan omits the district’s role as Queer West - a 2SLGBTQ+ district that emerged in the 1980s/1990s and was adopted as a brand by the BIA in the 2000s. This started when artists moved into the district for its (then) cheap rent and eventually developed openly queer businesses.

There is little mention of how Indigenous art or stewardship of the land is reflected in the West Queen West HCD Plan.

Missing from the Plan is an acknowledgement of the rich heritage of Eastern European immigrants to Queen West after WW2.

Add more signage. It is a creative way to own West Queen West history and share it with tourists and visitors.

What we heard about funding and incentive programs related to heritage restoration

The funding incentives and grants are insufficient for small business owners and should be more to be meaningful to property owners. A few were concerned that incentives are either too small, take too long to receive, or will be less than promised, worsening the burden on landowners. They said that heritage repairs cost significantly more and require specific materials and replacements, making them hard to upkeep. Some wanted to know if the Heritage Property Tax Rebate Program could help with the removal of power lines from buildings as they are very expensive. Others were specifically frustrated with trying to maintain and upkeep their storefronts against graffiti tagging along the main street. They want to know how the City can help with this removal process, especially if their storefronts are identified as historic.

There is a lack of information on who to contact for restoration work when property owners want to follow conservation principles. People are struggling to work through the system and get information on how to access permits, who to contact at the City, and how to insure a heritage home.

Other feedback

- Toronto needs its own Chief Architect to protect Toronto’s character and not allow for designs to be basic boxes. This person could be Toronto’s own Baron Haussmann.
- Consider acknowledging the role of Queen Street in the War of 1812.

Next Steps

The City team thanked all participants for attending the Open House and sharing feedback. This consultation will help inform the final HCD Plan that the Toronto Preservation Board and City Council will consider.