

Updating the Lowertown West Heritage Conservation District

As We Heard It Report

Pop-up Session: August 14, 2022

Online Survey: November 10- Dec 18, 2022

Over the last several months, a number of consultation events have been held, both in person and digitally. In August, staff hosted a “pop-up” booth at Bingham Park to provide an opportunity to speak with residents, visitors, and business owners about the role of the HCD in the city, and to comment on a section of the updated HCD Plan. Heritage Planning staff explained the project to those who stopped by and received feedback and answered questions.

An Online Survey was also developed to support the project. Area residents including all property owners, were mailed a post card in early November inviting them to visit the project website at Ottawa.ca/lowertownbywardhcd and to complete the survey, open from November 10 to December 18, 2022.

40 responses to the online survey were received. A selection of responses to the questions are provided below (some responses have been edited for length and/or clarity):

1. Why do you believe Lowertown West is a central part of Ottawa’s identity?

[83% of respondents strongly agreed that Lowertown West is a central part of Ottawa’s identity. 18% of respondents somewhat agreed with this statement.]

The respondents that strongly agreed generally said that Lowertown West is central to Ottawa’s identity for three reasons. First, Lowertown West is one of the city’s oldest (settler) neighbourhoods. Second, it is linked to the ByWard Market, waterways, and the Sandy Hill neighborhood. Lastly, it is associated with the lumber trade and the first Francophone, Jewish and Italian communities. A few responses to this question are as follows:

- *Lowertown is one of the oldest parts of the city, dating from early in the 'Bytown' era. It is of particular interest to francophones and Irish people who were the majority of the Lowertown population, separated from the more wealthy Brits and Scots in Uppertown. Lowertown was strongly tied to the lumber trade, the heart of Bytown's economy. The legendary Joseph Montferr has several stories tied to Lowertown as well, including the Shiners' War incidents.*
- *It is Ottawa's oldest (settler) neighbourhood. It has direct associations with the people who lived and worked through Ottawa's many different epochs of development - from canal workers to lumbermen to people working on Parliament Hill.*

- *This is where the francophone, working class, population first settled in Ottawa.*
2. Are there any buildings, features, places, spaces or views in the HCD area which you believe are important or special? Any landmarks? If yes, please tell us which ones and why?

The majority of responses to this question noted four important buildings in Lowertown West: St. Brigid's Church, Notre Dame Cathedral Basilica, Hôpital Élisabeth Bruyère, and La Salle Academy. Other buildings mentioned were the former synagogue on King Edward Avenue, the Grey Nuns Mother House, and the remaining elements of Our Lady School. People also generally spoke about the log buildings and brick houses with decorative trim in the area and identified a few homes on Guigues Avenue of particular architectural value.

There was also a commonality in responses regarding greenspaces, natural elements and streetscapes. Many respondents identified Cathcart Park and Bingham Park as important community spaces. Some of these responses are provided below:

- *The churches, other institutional buildings, and parks (especially Bingham and Cathcart parks) are important buildings, and spaces that anchor the experience of the area. The rest of the buildings, with their form and other features, provide a 'synergy' of the working-class neighbourhood this once was.*
- *The view down Guigues to the National Gallery is lovely.*
- *It is less about individual properties and the totality of the community that makes it significant.*

People also offered some personal stories about places and spaces for this question. This information is helpful in understanding their significance to the community. Staff may use the information provided to supplement historical research kept on file, where it is determined to be appropriate.

3. Are there notable or significant events, stories or histories relating to certain people or groups that are associated with Lowertown West that you feel are important? If yes, tell us about them and why they are important.

In this section, respondents spoke about the Francophone, Jewish, Italian, and Irish people who lived and worked in Lowertown West. Comments also noted the French-Canadians who worked in the timber trade and the Shiner's War as significant to the area. The First Nations were also recognized as important to the area's history. Below are a few responses we received:

- *The historic Francophone, Jewish and Italian stories merit special attention.*
- *Shiners' War. French-Canadians working in the timber trade. The Irish community. Labourers who worked on the Rideau Canal. Stoney Monday riots.*
- *Many people who went on to be very successful in all sectors had humble beginnings in Lowertown. While it has always been predominantly French-*

Canadian, there was a strong Irish minority and others (e.g. Italians, Jewish, Asian, Arab, etc) in the community over the years. The battle against Regulation 17 is probably the most significant event and took place at the Guigues School on Murray Street.

4. How would you describe the type of buildings in Lowertown West? For example, do they have a consistent size or height? What materials are they made out of? Are there other consistent characteristics or patterns that you see?

Many responses to this question spoke about the lack of consistency in built forms in the Lowertown West area. Many noted the buildings are predominantly residential, between 2 to 3 storeys, typically stone, brick, or wood construction with steeply pitched side gable roofs and ornate wooden balconies. However, most responses commented on the variety of styles, materials, and ages of buildings. These comments are showcased below:

- *Buildings have been mostly two storey construction, built of stone, wood, brick, and brick clad wood with gardens out front and balcony on the second storey. Individually different, but aggregated present a sense of pride, community, and permanence*
 - *The housing in lower town west quite mixed in style, height and even setback. It tends to be modest in size and includes infill from various points in time and of varying attractiveness.*
 - *The varied size and height of individual buildings provide a vibrant and welcoming scale to the area. Essential to protect this.*
5. Do you have any historic information about any specific building in the area that you would like to share? Please include the street name and number, if known. (i.e architect/builder, early owners/tenants, events that may have occurred there?)

People also offered some personal stories about places and spaces for this question. This information is helpful in understanding their significance to the community. Staff may use the information provided to supplement historical research kept on file, where it is determined to be appropriate.

6. How would you describe the commercial buildings on Dalhousie Street in the HCD? For example, do they have a consistent size or height? What materials are they made out of? Are there other consistent characteristics or patterns that you see?

The responses to this question were generally unanimous. Several noted that the commercial buildings on Dalhousie Street appear consistent in size and construction, typically being two storey brick, stone, and wood clad buildings. A few participants provided that the street is inconsistent in design, frontage, or height. Respondents also

commented on the mix of commercial and residential buildings along Dalhousie Street. These responses are as follows.

- *Typical early commercial main street buildings with flat roofs, cornices, brick, and residential components on top.*
 - *The commercial experience on Dalhousie was one of mixed-use between commercial residential. Many homes were converted into businesses or also served as residence, while some commercial buildings were low-rise and quite simple. Other commercial buildings were more substantial.*
- a) It is most important that a new building be designed to be clearly and obviously “new”—it’s confusing when a new building looks like a replica of an old one.
- *6% of participants strongly agreed with this statement, 8% somewhat agreed, 36% somewhat disagreed, and 50% strongly disagreed.*
- b) It is most important that a new building be designed to look very similar to a historic building—that’s the best way to ensure it fits in with the rest of the street.
- *31% of participants strongly agreed with this statement, 42% somewhat agreed, 17% somewhat disagreed, 8% strongly disagreed, and 1 person had no opinion.*
- c) It is most important for the existing historic buildings to be the focal point in the streetscape. New buildings should not detract from the historic buildings, but that could be achieved using a range of design techniques (e.g materials, window styles, entrance levels, how far the building is set back from the street etc).
- *39% of participants strongly agreed, 50% somewhat agreed, and 11% somewhat disagreed.*

Respondents provided detailed responses to question 6 a, b, and c. Some respondents did not feel strongly towards buildings looking new and distinguishable. They were more concerned about the quality of the new building. Others thought differently and felt that buildings should be reconstructed or designed to look like an older building. Several respondents provided specific suggestions for designing new buildings and how they can be compatible; concerns were also raised with respect to the existing high rises in the area.

Some of these opinions are listed below:

- *I don't have strong opinions about whether new buildings should be built in contemporary methods or mimic historic styles. I think the goal should be to have a high quality of architecture in the HCD and that can include either contemporary or historical styles when done well. It isn't 'confusing' when new buildings mimic historic styles, but often they cannot reproduce the same quality as heritage architecture.*

- *The questions about new buildings are interesting, and maybe too simplistic? I think new buildings can be interesting and fit. My main point is that it would be nice to pay more attention to having beautiful buildings whether they are old or new.*

7. Is there anything else you'd like us to know or that you'd like to share?

We received a variety of answers to this question. The responses include but were not limited to specific suggestions for the HCD plan, general comments about heritage conservation, and comments related to new development in Lowertown West. Some suggestions are as follows.

- *The best things that could be done to improve the area are get rid of surface parking lots, give more funds to owners to help with true era-preserving restoration projects, keep/plant streetscape trees, forced yard and curb clean up (by-law) and un-developed or derelict lots should be developed ASAP with attention to heritage details.*
- *I would love for the new HCD Plan to strongly consider streetscape elements. The fact that this is Ottawa's oldest neighbourhood should be reflected through better signage, street and park furniture, plantings, etc. Much of this onus is on the municipality as well.*
- *I am a strong proponent of intensification. There are numerous lots in this neighbourhood that could be redeveloped, keeping the original frontage, and adding units. There are many other buildings that should not be designated.*

A few comments raised concerns about the potential for designation and heritage policies to lead to buildings being abandoned and left to deteriorate. This idea is a misconception. On the contrary, HCDs support and encourage the continued use of buildings and guide the conservation of buildings for prolonged use.

Other comments we received were concerned that a Heritage Conservation District would hinder broader city planning goals such as affordability and density. An HCD does not restrict these objectives. Both can be achieved in tandem. An HCD does not freeze an area in time nor prevent change. Instead, it manages change appropriately while balancing heritage conservation, intensification, and broader city planning goals.

Many comments for this question addressed issues outside of the scope of a Heritage Conservation District Plan, including, for example, comments related to health and safety, traffic control, and homelessness. An HCD is used to protect and enhance areas of special cultural heritage value that have a cohesive sense of time and place by ensuring that change occurs sensitively; an HCD Plan provides the direction and guidance for how that can be achieved. However, an HCD Plan cannot regulate how people use spaces or buildings.

Staff acknowledge the importance of these issues and will be working closely with the appropriate departments and stakeholders to determine how they may be addressed through other policy work.