

Bolton updated on plans for heritage conservation designation

By Bill Rea

Public involvement has been part of the development of a Bolton Heritage Conservation District Plan, and calls are for that to continue.

About 35 residents were out recently for an update and workshop session on the development of the plan.

Development of the plan has entered its second stage.

Edwin Rowse, principal at ERA Architects Inc., stated they were looking for opinions, as well as hear concerns about the proposal. "This whole process is driven by the community," he declared.

The process started last year, and the first phase consisted of research and analysis of the study area to determine if there's sufficient cultural heritage value to justify the designation under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Rowse said council has to approve and adopt the recommendations of the study, and that hasn't happened yet.

Once council's endorsement has been obtained, he said a plan will be developed, detailing objectives, policies, guidelines and procedures. The heritage designation will only be granted after council has passed a bylaw adopting the plan.

Rowse said the objectives of the heritage designation include identifying and preserving qualities and character of the area, while helping to guide and encourage compatible change. It's also aimed at providing direction to property owners, municipal staff and council, as well as review agencies when changes are proposed. The designation also introduces a regulatory process. That would mean making sure people have instruments they can understand and use.

It has been determined that part of the study area has sufficient cultural heritage value to justify designation. The study looked at elements in the area that make up qualities that everyone identifies with, such as natural topography, the historic relationship with the Humber River, historic streetscapes, etc.

Referring to the natural topography, Rowse referred to the village core as a "crucible," which contains a lot of its character. The village was built around the river and the mills that were developed along it. There is also the historic relationship with the Humber which a lot of people relate to. Addressing streetscapes, Rowse said streets are defined by the buildings, so the question is how to retain and protect the value that has been created.

During the study, people were asked to name the top three priorities for future enhancement of the village. Encouraging protection of historic buildings and streetscapes was at the top of the list, as was improving the commercial core. Following those was promoting the village as a visitor destination. There were also calls for promoting an appreciation for the cultural heritage value, as well as the historic relationships between Bolton and the Humber and fostering greater use and stewardship of the river.

Rowse said one result was the reduction in the size of the study area, with the areas that have been removed having other tools to protect them.

Lindsay Reid, also of ERA, explained the Ontario Heritage Act provides a framework for a designation plan. The components of the plan include objectives, a statement of cultural value, heritage attributes, guidelines and alterations.

She also addressed the components of community engagement. They include a stakeholders' advisory committee, as well as a technical advisory committee. There will also be more public consultation meetings and workshops in order to learn what's valuable to people in the community, what needs to be protected and if change should happen, what would be acceptable.

Reid also said they hope to conduct individual interviews.

Once a plan has been put together, it will be submitted to Heritage Caledon, and eventually to Town council.

Guidelines in the designation will provide direction on a number of factors, although Reid pointed out all communities are different. There would be direction on such things as building maintenance and conservation; additions and alterations, which she said sometimes comes up in commercial areas when dealing with things like store fronts and signage; and new infill, which would deal with parcels of land that have never been developed, or if a building has been lost, and matters like the range of materials and styles that could be used. Reid pointed out there are some buildings in the core that have two faces (front and rear). "There are lots of opportunities," she said.

Other matters the guidelines will offer direction on include streetscape improvements. Reid said streetscape is important to people in Bolton, adding that would include things like street furniture, trees, lighting, signage, etc. There would also be direction on natural heritage, addressing matters like waterways, open space, hedgerows, gardens, etc. And there would be provisions for demolition control.

Reaction from the people on hand for the meeting indicated there's been a good start on dealing with what needs to be addressed. One man raised the issue of bureaucracy and how to limit its impact and reduce red tape.

The need was expressed to have incentives and grants accessible, as well as to make the area more pedestrian-friendly. There was a suggestion to identify precincts in the area. One example cited was an area with a number of houses that were once associated with doctors. There are other areas where there were suggestions they could be viewed as nodes, such as the stretch where the Caledon Farmer's Market is located, or the royal Courtyards. The Farmer's Market was cited as a great example of how to draw people into the core.