

Public updated on heritage conservation study for Bolton

By Bill Rea

There is enthusiasm at the Town over Bolton becoming a heritage conservation district (HCD), but that's not the case with some land owners in the village.

There are concerns the proposed designation will apply more restrictions on what can be done with their properties.

There were several comments to that effect last Tuesday as the Town hosted a public session on the proposal.

Sally Drummond, heritage resource officer for the Town, told the roughly 50 people at the meeting the desire was developed in 2008 to protect the cultural heritage. The result was the HCD?Study, which she said is wrapping up. The next stage, if there is one, will be the preparation of an HCD?Plan.

Drummond stressed the idea is not to stop development, but to level the playing field to improve the chances of protecting the heritage assets that are in place.

Sharon Hong, of E.R.A. Architects Inc., said the study area generally takes in the old village core in the valley.

The Study started in July, with a community briefing in September. At that time, a questionnaire was distributed to land owners and tenants, and that was followed by a community consultation in October.

?That really helped us form our study,? she remarked.

Hong said a draft report on the Study was presented last month to Heritage Caledon.

A report on the Study is slated to go to Town council in May, and Hong said council will decide at that time whether to go to the next stage and have a Plan developed. If it goes ahead, she said there will be more community consultation. She added it that will take about a year.

Recapping the previous consultation, Hong said the roughly 40 participants were asked how they experienced or understood the village, and almost 80 per cent said they view it as a whole, with the commercial core, Humber River, neighbourhoods and the green valley. When it came to the most valuable features in the village needing protection, she said the top two were the ambiance (character of streetscapes like Nancy and King Streets) and the Humber, with the associated topography, parks, trails and bridges. Andrew Jeanes, cultural services advisor with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, said the aim of the Heritage Act, which came into effect in 1975, has always been to empower municipal governments by providing various tools.

They include HCDs, of which there are 113 in Ontario, and Jeanes said the number is growing. There are other tools, such as government grants for heritage property owners, and heritage property tax relief, which has been around since 2001. There are 40 municipalities with programs for rebates that meet criteria. The Province contributes too. Jeanes said there was about \$3.7 million in tax relief distributed in 2011.

There are more than 18,000 properties covered by the 113 HCDs. He also offered some examples of communities that have thrived from the designation.

Edwin Rowse, of E.R.A. pointed out there are different forms of village structure within the Study area, including the crossroads of King and Queen Streets, the historic industrial and commercial core, the King Street east and west streetscapes (which serve as gateways), as well as the scapes on other streets like Nancy and Temperance.

The Study included a draft statement of significance, and one of the highlights was the special relationship between the village and the river, along with the distinct village scape, ambiance and unique geography. Heritage attributes that were cited included the green bowl and topography of the river valley, views descending north and south along Queen Street, the geography and meandering form of the river, historic 19th century street layout (including the crossroad of King and Queen), variety of architectural forms and styles, and Mill Street as one of the earliest streets, location of the first mill and origin of industrial development in the village.

The proposal didn't sit well with some of the commercial property owners in the room. Tony Viola of Allegro Fine Dine said he was not convinced this wouldn't negatively impact property values.

?It's not good news for us as owners,? added Oleg Rudnitsky, one of the owners of the Royal Courtyards.

Local resident and council candidate in this fall's municipal election Gary Cascone wondered about the likelihood of multi-storey buildings. Hong said cultural heritage will be considered. She added the River's Edge development is multi-storey, but it enhances the cultural heritage of the area. She added there are limitations on building heights.

Viola was also concerned about the restrictions the designation could place on owners.

Heather Broadbent, former heritage resource officer for the Town, recalled when the Courtyards was built, there was an effort to make sure it matched what already existed in the village. Rudnitsky countered that didn't help the original developer stay in business.

?This is a killer to us,? he declared.

‘With the restrictions that are already on, we don’t need any more restrictions,’ one woman commented, adding it had been her experience that when designations like this come in, property values go down.

Rowse replied that hasn’t been the case, citing statistics from similar designations in the United States from 2008.

‘What are the upsides of designating?’ Viola asked.

Rowse told him no building would be designated without the owner’s approval.

‘You guys are going to have a say in the kind of guidelines that happen,’ Hong added. ‘It is your values shaping how the Plan will go.’

Local resident Valerie Mackie said she owns a heritage house, and it’s been of value. ‘I cannot think of a single drawback,’ she remarked.

‘I’m all for that, that you enjoy where you’re living,’ Viola replied. ‘But this is my livelihood that you’re playing with.’

Nicholas Brooksbank, who owns the building that used to house the Bolton branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, was more enthused. He said there’s a need to encourage people to shop in local stores to make Bolton work.

He also suggested people check out the main street of Orangeville to see the impact of a HCD designation.

‘Isn’t it fabulous?’ he declared.