

KEY FINDINGS IN OTHER CITIES

OVERVIEW & KEY FINDINGS

Variety of names – historic districts, heritage districts, historic areas, historic preservation districts

- not a new concept – first North American HCDs date from as early as the 1930s; in Britain, not until the mid-1960s – by the 1980s it had caught on more broadly
- early focus on buildings/structures has evolved to include the area context – relationships between buildings, between buildings and streets/sidewalks, natural features, boulevard and tree canopy

English Heritage “Valuing Places – Good Practice in Conservation Areas” excerpts:

- “a heritage conservation district is not a device for preventing change or new development”
- “every district contains places which have changed...often these changes are features of the character which we wish to protect”
- “often, further changes have to be accommodated if we are to ensure such places have a viable and beneficial future”
- “the care of our built heritage has to be carefully balanced with the economic and social imperatives of the present”
- “so...how do we reconcile the desire to protect the character of places we have inherited with the need to adapt them for current and future use?”
- looked at over 50 cities initially – mainly CDN, US cities – also British, Australian
- sought input on selections from TEC team members [Heritage Winnipeg, Provincial Heritage Branch, Parks Canada, Winnipeg heritage/plan examination/planning zoning staff]
- narrowed to 12 potential cities; then, based on feedback from TEC team, detailed investigation of 6 HCD programs: Victoria, Portland, Edmonton, Minneapolis, Toronto, Sydney

Myths

- “someone’s going to have a say on what colour I paint my front door” – unreasonable restrictions on property rights
- “I won’t be able to replace a gutter or fix a window without jumping through hoops” – process inconveniences magnified
- “thanks to all this red-tape my property values will plummet” – negative effect on property values
- all of these are legitimate concerns – introducing a HCD program means having to attend to them
- the best examples are those that are able to demonstrate value, that the benefits to individual property owners outweigh (or at least balance) any perceived detriments
- research on heritage conservation districts and their effects on property values have consistently demonstrated higher resale values when compared to comparable

properties in other areas – in buyers’ markets and sellers’ markets; in robust economic periods; and during downturns

- includes research conducted by heritage agencies, real estate interests, development industry, scholarly journals—in Canada, US, and UK

Shared Attributes

- geographically, early districts cluster near central city – ‘70s & ‘80s
- almost all cities require provincial/state authority to establish HCDs
- most have heritage resource management plans, which provide city-wide context
- most have heritage policies in their OCPs
- HCDs are not principally concerned with regulating land use – not a tool to prevent an escort service from establishing next to a daycare or provide sufficient separation between houses and meat-packing plants
- all have rigorous (in some cases stringent) designation processes to determine district significance/distinction
- all mandate community engagement throughout the process, many emphasize that without community support designation isn’t likely to occur
- once established, most introduce a combination of guidance & regulatory toothiness that goes beyond commemoration – not just plaques

Distinctions

- some HCDs are captured in stand-alone area plans or within broader city-wide policy plans – others are provided for through zoning by-laws
- some focus solely on older low-density residential neighbourhoods – others recognize mixed-use character areas and downtown – still others include natural features and college campuses and civic infrastructure and more
- at least one city requires unanimous consent of all property owners to establish – most rely on community support

Innovations

- within the district, many distinguish between contributing and non-contributing properties – the effect is that a 1950s bungalow or a 1980s split-level are not to be remodeled to look like a 100-year old Queen Anne or Neo-Georgian...discourages “fake-olde”
- some delegate development review authority to staff for the majority of minor & modest alterations, within parameters – so-called “deemed” permit; “as-of-right” development
- in at least one case funds must be raised by the community to prepare HCD studies and plans, with City staff role limited to a project support and oversight
- while only a very few provide direct financial incentives specific to HCDs, several offer development-related incentives
- and there are a few more examples where designation signals eligibility for district-wide capital improvements – do you value your boulevard tree canopy? Opportunity for enhanced maintenance schedule; jump the queue because you’re special

Lessons Learned

- with experience some cities have determined there's room for more than one approach – such as the “conservation district” alternative for cases where the district is not as cohesive; more of an emphasis on filling-in gaps in the fabric and enhancing continuity – e.g. Forks vs. Exchange District?
- need for strong integration with policy realm / regulatory framework – lock-step
- focus has broadened from 100-year old neighbourhood enclaves to warehouse districts, manufacturing areas, waterfronts, high streets, trail systems, and more
- more emphasis on community involvement; not so top-down – particularly in identifying a district's heritage values and what makes it distinct'

WINNIPEG'S READINESS FOR HCD APPROACH THE “ARMATURE” – CHALLENGE IS TO LOCK THESE TOGETHER

Legislation

- “the culprit”, what once was a stumbling block...gone [Bill 5 amendment to Charter c.2010]

Policy

- Our Winnipeg/Complete Communities; plus 1992 Heritage Support – Policy & Programs; plus 2010 draft HRMP
- all explicitly provide for and encourage district-based approach to heritage conservation

Regulations & incentives

- “implementing tools”
- overlays (PDO-1)
- grants & tax credits not typically available for restoration work on SFDs in Winnipeg; potential to expand to offer incentives to “districts”
- potential eligibility for area capital improvement projects through the capital budget process
- potential eligibility for enhanced development opportunities – such as heritage floor area exemptions, TDRs, and historic variances
- heritage relaxations aimed at encouraging conservation, but appreciating that doing so must be economically viable
- not every tool is a good fit for every district or neighbourhood

Resources

- also an “implementing tool”
- people and dollars required to create and administer HCDs
- interest exists (or we wouldn't be here tonight) but need to establish a service delivery model that can be sustained beyond occasional, ad hoc initiatives
- this is the key deliverable expected from this contract – not just a good model, but one that will work for Winnipeg now and into the future

WINNIPEG'S EXPERIENCES WITH AREA OR DISTRICT-BASED HERITAGE CONSERVATION BUT DON'T WE ALREADY HAVE HCDs IN WINNIPEG? ...SORT OF

Old Market Square

- 1978 "Historic Winnipeg Restoration Area" and later expanded across Main Street and rebranded as the Exchange District
- no "model" or "prototype" in place at the time, so in keeping with a long-standing Winnipeg tradition it was captured through special zoning regulations & design guidelines
- but no statement of what we were trying to accomplish
- if there's anything to fear about considering new HCDs, it's repeating this designation-through-regulation approach

Boulevard Provencher

- mid-1980s, same approach as Old Market Square, applies to the stretch from bridge to city hall
- replicated the reliance on a purely regulatory approach

Occasional Kerfuffles

- concerns about other "character" areas – condo towers in Old St. Boniface near the Basilica, Wildwood Park house additions, River Heights monster houses, Old Tuxedo lot splits
- so...what makes a neighbourhood (or high street or mixed-use cross-roads) a "heritage conservation district"? Are there thresholds? What are the pros-and-cons?
- we're about to find out