



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Cities

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/cities](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/cities)

## Viewpoint

## Assessing the success of Heritage Conservation Districts: Insights from Ontario, Canada

Jason F. Kovacs<sup>a,\*</sup>, Kayla Jonas Galvin<sup>b,1</sup>, Robert Shipley<sup>c,2</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Geography, Nipissing University, 100 College Drive, North Bay, Ontario P1B8L7, Canada<sup>b</sup> Archaeological Research Associates Ltd., 154 Otonabee Drive, Kitchener, Ontario N2C1L7, Canada<sup>c</sup> School of Planning, University of Waterloo, 200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, Ontario N2L3G1, Canada

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 21 October 2014

Accepted 2 November 2014

Available online xxxx

## Keywords:

Historic districts

Townscape surveys

Resident perceptions

Property values

Heritage planning

## ABSTRACT

Despite the success of the historic district as a heritage conservation tool, the designation of new districts is often resisted in Canadian and American municipalities due to public fears that are based on unfounded assumptions. This study addresses these concerns by examining the oldest Heritage Conservation Districts in Ontario, Canada. A total of 64 out of about 110 districts were examined in municipalities across the Province and in a range of urban settings and sizes. The overall success of the districts was assessed using a variety of research methods including townscape surveys, stakeholder interviews, residential surveys, property sales history evaluation, and plan and document analysis. The findings indicate that the districts achieved most of their original goals, the majority of district residents are satisfied, requests for alterations are approved in a timely manner, and property values typically perform better than in non-designated areas. A variety of recommendations to improve the management and character of the historic district are provided.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

In their study on historic preservation and urban revitalization, [Ijla, Ryberg, Rosentraub, and Bowen \(2011\)](#) assert that professionals and scholars have only recently begun to recognize the value of investigating the economics of historic preservation. However, they also correctly acknowledge that within the broader literature on preservation economics there has been a growing body of research over the last two decades on historic district designation and property values ([Ashworth, 2002](#); [Leichenko, Coulson, & Listokin, 2001](#); [Schaeffer & Millerick, 1991](#); [Sharpe, 2006](#); [Shipley, 2000](#)). From an extensive review of this literature [Mason \(2005\)](#) concludes that there is a positive relationship between historic district designation and increased property values. [Ryberg-Webster and Kinahan \(2014\)](#) recently note in their review of current preservation scholarship that while some studies show mixed, inconclusive and even negative effects (see for example, [Heintzelman & Altieri, 2013](#)), the “vast majority” of studies support

Mason’s conclusion. Nevertheless, some scholars are now pointing to a weakness in this area of research: many studies are confined to case examples in a single city. Moreover, with few exceptions most studies employ a strictly quantitative methodological approach, paying little if any attention to intangibles such as resident perceptions towards district designation. Perhaps most striking of all is the dearth of research attempting to define and assess the “overall success” of the historic district as a means to manage change. This multi-city study of *Heritage Conservation Districts* in the Province of Ontario, Canada, is intended to address these research gaps and limitations.

In particular, building on the researchers’ preliminary findings from the initial phase of this extensive study ([Shipley, Jonas, & Kovacs, 2011](#)), this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- (i) Have the original Heritage Conservation District plan goals been met?
- (ii) Are residents content with living in the districts?
- (iii) How has district designation affected property values?
- (iv) Is it difficult for residents to make alterations to their properties?
- (v) How do districts perform when compared to each other?
- (vi) What are the key issues in the districts?

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 (705)474 3450x4031.

E-mail addresses: [jasonk@nipissingu.ca](mailto:jasonk@nipissingu.ca) (J.F. Kovacs), [kjgalvin@arch-research.com](mailto:kjgalvin@arch-research.com) (K. Jonas Galvin), [rshipley@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:rshipley@uwaterloo.ca) (R. Shipley).<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +1 (519)804 2291x120.<sup>2</sup> Tel.: +1 (519)888 4567x35615.

These questions were addressed through a study of more than half of all historic districts in Ontario. Before outlining the research methodology, this paper will begin by making note of the *Heritage Conservation District* as a planning tool as presented in the heritage legislation of Canada's most populous province. The research scope and methods will then be discussed, followed by a presentation of the main research findings. To help city planners improve the management of the historic district, the remainder of this paper presents recommendations derived from the research findings.

### The historic district as a planning tool in Ontario

Under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act municipalities may designate *Heritage Conservation Districts* (HCDs). The Heritage Tool Kit issued by the Ministry of Culture indicates that these districts are areas with “special character or historical association that distinguishes it from its surroundings” (Government of Ontario, 2010, p. 5). HCDs can be “residential, commercial, and industrial areas, rural landscapes or entire villages or hamlets with features or land patterns that contribute to a cohesive sense of time or place” (p. 5). The Tool Kit goes on to say “The significance of a HCD often extends beyond its built heritage, structures, streets, landscape and other physical and spatial elements, to include important vistas and views between buildings and spaces within the district” (p. 5).

HCD designation enables a municipality to protect the special character of urban and rural areas by setting up a review process that helps guide future change. The policies intended to guide change are included as part of the HCD Plan. HCD Plans are an integral part of the designation and must include a statement of objectives. District plans can be prepared by city staff, local residents or heritage consultants. They became a requirement with the 2005 update of the Ontario Heritage Act.

There are a couple of shortcomings in this process in Ontario. Number one, heritage committee members are volunteers appointed by the local council. They are only advisors and not all municipalities even employ heritage planners. Number two, while HCD Plans must meet professional criteria, the designation of districts is usually consensual. Any strong opposition often curtails the effort to designate. This means that it is not necessarily the most significant historical areas of a community that are recognized and protected but the historic areas where people agree to accept controls or at the very least, acquiesce.

In spite of the above shortcomings, many civic officials now consider the *Heritage Conservation District* to be one of the most effective tools not only for historic conservation but for good urban design and sound planning. Notwithstanding the wide and successful use of historic district designation and management in many other countries significant public opposition remains in Canada and the United States. Resistance to district designation typically centres on concerns about loss of control over one's property, overly strict bureaucratic processes, and negative impacts on property values. These concerns are based more on hearsay rather than on fact. It is also clear that the benefits of HCDs, including establishing high standards for maintenance and design are not widely perceived.

### Scope and methods

Approximately 110 HCDs currently exist in the Province of Ontario. Since the impacts of district designation require time to manifest, this study focused on established HCDs in Ontario. Specifically, this multi-city study examined HCDs designated in or before 2002. In total, 64 districts were analyzed between May 2008 and September 2012. These districts are situated in a range

of urban settings and sizes (Table 1). The HCDs are located across the province, albeit largely concentrated in Southern Ontario (Fig. 1), particularly in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (Fig. 2).

Four broad research approaches were taken: Townscape Surveys, stakeholder interviews and residential surveys, real estate analysis, and reviews of district plans and municipal documents and files.

#### Townscape Surveys

The Townscape Survey is intended to provide an objective way to evaluate streetscapes (Reeve, Goodey, & Shipley, 2007). A Townscape Survey consists of two basic elements of analysis: land-use mapping and streetscape evaluation. First, current building uses are surveyed using categories including residential, industrial, office/commercial, recreational, retail, food and drink, public buildings, and services. Landscaped, underdeveloped, parking, and vacant areas are also noted. Information gathered from the survey is used to populate colour-coded land-use maps (Fig. 3). Second, researchers examine and photograph streetscape views in the district. Each view is evaluated according to 25 criteria. Criteria include quality of life elements, such as pedestrian friendliness, traffic safety, vitality, and legibility. Other criteria include edge quality, signage, cleanliness, maintenance, and public and private plantings, as well as quality of new development, quality of conservation work, evident conserved elements, and neglected historic features. For each view, criteria are rated between one and five, and the scores for the whole district are aggregated to give a general impression of each criterion and to provide an overall score for the district. Townscape surveys were conducted in 62 of the 64 districts.

#### Stakeholder interviews and residential surveys

In order to gain insights into the perceived benefits and problems associated with HCDs, stakeholder interviews were conducted in all municipalities under study. In total, 143 stakeholders with special knowledge of the districts were interviewed. The interviewees included planners and members of municipal heritage committees, community associations, and business improvement area associations. Interviewees were asked whether the original district plan goals had been met and to identify problems.

This study also sought to reveal resident perceptions towards HCDs. Door-to-door surveys were conducted in 56 of the 64 districts. In addition, according to the original plan, surveys were mailed to residents in Thunder Bay due to the distance of the municipality from the researchers' home locations. Various constraints such as inconsistent volunteer follow through prevented surveys from being recorded in the remaining districts. A total of 1538 out of 4834 potential respondents (over 30%) either answered the door-to-door surveys or returned the completed questionnaires by mail. In order to ensure a systematic sample, every third or fifth property was visited in larger conservation districts. In smaller districts, every property was visited.

**Table 1**  
Distribution of Heritage Conservation Districts under examination.

Geographical distribution		Community size		Type	
Northern	1	Small	20	Commercial	15
Eastern	18	Medium	21	Residential	38
Central	31	Large	23	Mixed	11
South Western	14				
	64		64		64

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7418565>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7418565>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)