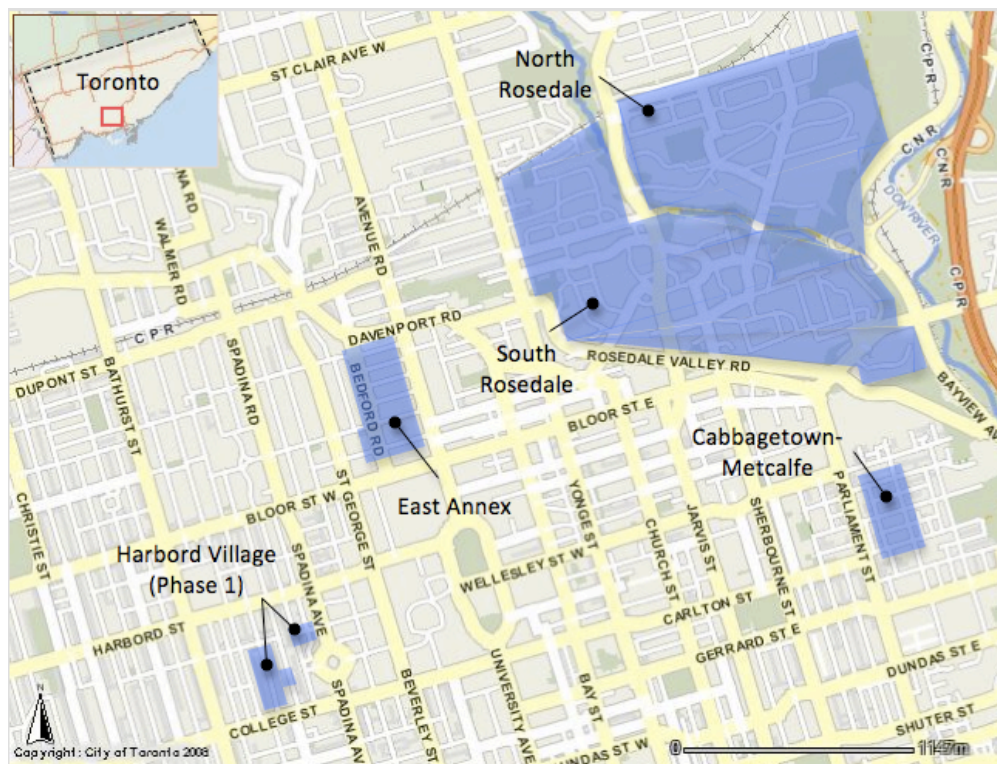


## Improving Heritage Conservation in Toronto

### A comparison of five urban residential Heritage Conservation Districts

Heritage conservation is key to remembering our past, as well as to understanding our goals, values, and interests. The Ontario Heritage Act (OHA) protects real properties of cultural heritage value through a legislative structure. In particular, Part V of the OHA seeks to protect a neighbourhood's heritage character by requiring consistent planning that is sensitive to the area. In Toronto, there are 15 Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) under this Act's protection. Of these 15, five have been selected to study the effectiveness of heritage conservation. These districts are Cabbagetown-Metcalf, East Annex, Harbord Village (Phase 1), North Rosedale, and South Rosedale (see Figure 1 for the location of these districts). These urban residential neighbourhoods were designated between 1994 and 2005, with two districts that were prepared during the major amendments in the OHA in 2005.



**Map 1:** Location of the five HCDs in Toronto

(Source: City of Toronto, 2008 [with modifications by author])

The purpose of this report is to study elements of a heritage district that were most likely protected, and what changes can be done to help improve heritage conservation in Toronto based on these five HCDs. There were two main steps in doing this. While district plans were not a requirement prior to the OHA amendments in 2005, all five HCDs studied in this report had district plans on file with the City to guide alterations and developments in the neighbourhood. These plans were then reviewed for common and not-so-common property elements, which were illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Comparison of guidelines based on property feature

HCD Framework	<i>Cabbagetown-Metcalfe</i>	<i>East Annex</i>	<i>Harbord Village</i>	<i>North Rosedale</i>	<i>South Rosedale</i>
<b><i>Building maintenance guidelines</i></b>					
Masonry/walls	✓	x	✓	✓ <sup>②</sup>	✓ <sup>②</sup>
Foundations	x	x	✓	x	x
Roofing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Windows	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Doors	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Porches	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Basement Entrances	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
Woodwork, decorative elements*	✓	x	✓	x	x
Paint*	✓	x	✓	x	x
Gutters, eavestroughs & downspouts*	✓ <sup>②</sup>	x	✓	x	x
<b><i>Landscape/Streetscape</i></b>					
Fences	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Front Gardens	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
Boulevard/sidewalk	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Trees	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
Parking	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
Paving	✓ <sup>②</sup>	✓	✓	x	x
Lighting*	x	x	✓	x	x
Mechanical services	✓	x	✓	x	x
Street entrances	✓	x	✓	✓	x

The review of the district plans yielded interesting results. One of the most interesting issues was the lack of comparability and consistency across the plans. The content of and format of the plans differed, such as some plans were heavily detailed, while others remained broad and general.

Interviews were also conducted with representatives from the HCDs, usually the HCD coordinator, as well as two of the HCD authors. These interviews helped put the guidelines into perspective, as well as provide a more in-depth understanding of what has worked in the district and what has not.

The interviews provided good insight as to how well the designation was working. While it is arguable as to the degree of conservation achieved, according to the HCD representatives, the designation did what it was intended to do: protect the heritage character of the neighbourhood by preventing jarring alterations and developments in the district. The representatives also reported that designation resulted in a greater appreciation of the neighbourhood amongst the homeowners and brought the residents closer together.



**Figure 2:** 35 Maple Avenue in South Rosedale

However, the districts had varying success with City staff and the issue of enforcement of the guidelines. Another area of contention was the ABC rating system of individual properties employed in North and South Rosedale. Some residents felt their homes deserved a greater rating, and others felt the rating negatively impacted their property's value. Also, in a similar vein, a small amount of residents opposed to the HCD designation felt that the designation affected property values in general. Upon speaking to a few individuals that were familiar with the district plans and the City, it is believed that the district plans would be grandfathered as-is once the City has reviewed them all.

Based on the comments and observations made during the interviews, and the review of the HCD plans, the following are recommendations – one for HCDs' heritage committees, and the other for the City of Toronto – that are made in this report:

**Recommendations for HCDs:**

- *Keep districts small for greater detail and knowledge on each property*
- *Keep HCD guidelines as broad as possible without diminishing heritage character but still allowing growth*
- *Provide additional direction for homeowners to better enable conservation practices*
- *Engage the public and stakeholders early in the process to address and resolve concerns, reduce future delays, and improve communication and discussion*

**Recommendations for the City:**

- *Set a periodic review process to assess the HCDs to ensure compatibility with goals, values, and guidelines*
- *Review the bottom-up approach that requires communities to fundraise for HCD research to better support those neighbourhoods that cannot afford to prepare the district plans and research, but that are important to the city's history*
- *Improve enforcement to ensure compliance to the guidelines*
- *Implement a formal heritage permit process to improve efficiency*
- *Set a standard or template on how guidelines are written for all HCDs to improve consistency across HCDs*
- *Provide additional information and education on HCDs for homeowners and potential HCDs*
- *Create an alternative solution for urban waste disposal to improve the existing situation of large containers that must be placed in front of the house*
- *Review of City of Toronto bylaw 1005-2001 to ensure heritage character is being protected now that time has passed since the bylaw was approved*
- *Promote sustainability to reduce environmental impact of the older housing stock*