

## Heritage Matters in Oakville.

Oakville is synonymous with heritage...and with good reason!

Stroll the quaint back streets of the downtown corridor and you'll discover beautifully restored homes from the 19<sup>th</sup> century—proudly displaying black and white plaques from the Oakville Historical Society. Take a walk down Lakeshore (between Allan and Navy) and you'll find yourself surrounded by first class restaurants and retail establishments, many housed in buildings dating back to the same time period.

Unbeknownst to most, however, a historical plaque is not the same as a historical designation. The plaques simply show pride of ownership in a building over 100 years old. And while many of the buildings in Oakville do have Town Heritage Designation, many more do not.

Says Ward 2 Councillor Cathy Duddeck, “Heritage has always been important to the residents of Oakville but we’ve seen a renewed interest in the heritage process with the recognition of Oakville’s 150<sup>th</sup> birthday. This interest, along with changes that were made to the Ontario Heritage Act a few years back, prompted us to put forth a specific proposal—one that required an increase in heritage resources. Our plan was not only enthusiastically embraced by the Mayor but unanimously approved by Council.”

In the past, Town Heritage Designation was handled by those who also had other responsibilities within the Planning Department. As nobody was dedicated to heritage full time, the process itself was more reactive in nature. With the addition of new staff, the Planning Department is now able to approach heritage issues on a proactive basis—having recently hired a Manager of Heritage Planning, one staff person and an inspector who is solely responsible for heritage properties.

Says Duddeck, who also serves on the Oakville Heritage Committee, “We are in a position to act more quickly with regard to heritage designation. Our goal now is to catch-up on our back log and effectively communicate how the process works to the residents of Oakville.” Under the Ontario Heritage Act, designation can be made on an individual structure or part of a structure. It can also incorporate an entire district.

Contrary to popular belief, designation does not obligate an owner to restore a property to its original condition, does not restrict the use of that property and does not prohibit an owner from developing or making alterations to a property. Though, it does require approval from Town Council if changes to the designated features of the property are contemplated.

Additionally, heritage designation is not limited to “old” buildings. It can also be applied to those structures that:

- Are of a particular type, style or period;
- Are works of a famous architect or builder;
- Played a role in an important historic event;
- Are associated with the life of a prominent member of the community.

Members of the community, as well as building and property owners can put forth recommendations for heritage designation by contacting Michael Seaman, Manager of Heritage Planning at 905.845.6601. Oakville Heritage Committee meetings are also open to the public.

While all designations are officially made by Town Council, the Oakville Historical Society plays an active and important role in preserving our legacy and encouraging the conservation of local landmarks and streetscapes as tangible reminders of Oakville's past.

Old Oakville's downtown shopping district contains what is possibly Oakville's most important heritage streetscape, but it is currently unprotected—other than the heritage designations that apply to some of its historical buildings.

As OHS's passionate volunteers believe a Heritage District designation is appropriate for this area—as a means of maintaining the distinctive local character while supporting a vibrant economic environment—they have begun compiling an inventory of all of the buildings including the history of past owners and uses.

For more information, please visit [www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org).