Background of the Downtown Oakville Heritage Conservation District Study

In 2010 the Town adopted the Downtown Oakville Strategic Action Plan. This document is intended set out initiatives for ongoing improvements in the downtown by building on the success of previous plans and the strengths of the area's existing features. The Strategic Action Plan addresses elements including cultural heritage, urban design and streetscape, public facilities, economics, transportation, and sustainability. The Strategic Action Plan implements the vision for the downtown established by the Livable Oakville Plan. The Strategic Action Plan includes 12 different strategic initiatives, including:

- Development of urban design guidelines
- Revitalization of Centennial Square facilities
- Accessibility and safety audit
- New tools and incentives
- Review of municipal cultural facilities and activities
- Transportation strategy and public realm improvements
- Retail strategy
- Re-evaluation of Town Square
- Youth initiatives
- Co-ordination of communications
- Study the former Post Office site at 197 Church Street
- Consideration of a heritage conservation district for downtown

In regards to the heritage conservation district for the downtown, the Strategic Action Plan stated:

“This initiative will see the development of tools to identify and maintain the heritage importance of the downtown. The downtown Oakville heritage conservation district plan will celebrate and recognize the heritage character of the area. A plan may also include provisions for infrastructure, public works and the streetscape. This initiative will link directly to the urban design guidelines strategic initiative. Implementing such a plan will provide for consistent review and coordination of building improvements and redevelopment to retain and conserve cultural heritage resources, significant buildings and façades in downtown Oakville. While a heritage conservation district plan is regulatory in nature, it can also provide incentives and can be designed in a way that does not impede economic development initiatives.”

A Request for Proposals to lead the Study was issued by the Town of Oakville in the summer of 2011 and the selected consulting team for the project was MHBC Planning together with Megan Hobson Research and George Robb Architect.

The consulting team met with staff and the Heritage Oakville Advisory Committee in the fall of 2011 to initiate the Study. The first public meeting was held on November 8, 2011. At the beginning of the Study, the study area included the entire downtown core, roughly bounded by Robinson Street to the south, Navy Street to the west, Randall
Street to the north and Allan Street to the east (see Appendix A for Study Area Map). A significant number of concerns and questions were raised at the first public meeting about the proposed heritage conservation district designation and its potential effect on the downtown area. These concerns were noted and described in the Background Issues Identification Report which was published in December 2011.

In order to allow for a more intimate discussion of the concerns and questions raised at the public meeting, staff met with smaller focus groups in January 2012. The focus groups were divided into the various interests that participated in the public meeting: business/commercial; residential; heritage, and professional.

The preliminary draft study was released on April 5, 2012 and discussed at a public meeting held on Wednesday, April 25, 2012 at St. John's Church. Staff also presented the findings of the preliminary draft heritage assessment report to the Oakville Lakeside Residents Association meeting on May 10, 2012.

The Heritage Assessment Report for the Downtown Oakville Heritage Conservation District Study was presented to the Heritage Oakville Advisory Committee meeting in May 2012. The report recommended that a portion of the study area had sufficient cultural heritage value to merit a heritage conservation district (see Appendix B for the Downtown Oakville Heritage Conservation District boundary Map). Heritage Oakville supported the recommendation to endorse the Heritage Assessment Report and the proposed boundary for a potential Heritage Conservation District. At the June 11, 2012, Planning and Development Council meeting, Oakville Town Council passed the following resolution:

1. That the proposed boundary for a potential heritage conservation district in Downtown Oakville as set out in the “Downtown Oakville Heritage Conservation District Study: Heritage Assessment Report” dated May 2012 be endorsed;

2. That staff be directed to proceed to the next phase of the process to create a District Plan and Guidelines based on the report from MHBC consultants titled “Downtown Oakville Heritage Conservation District Study: Heritage Assessment Report” dated May 2012 and bring forward a heritage district designation by-law upon completion; and

3. That staff continue to consult with the public including the business community regarding the creation of the District Plan and Guidelines.

The consultant team completed a preliminary draft of the Downtown Oakville Heritage Conservation District Plan and Guidelines, which was released to the public for comment on October 2, 2012. At this time, the draft was divided into two sections: Part A, which contained the plan and guidelines, and Part B, which contained recommendations from the consulting team regarding municipal implementation initiatives.
On October 16, 2012, a focus group meeting was held to discuss Part A of the Draft Plan and Guidelines. Feedback on Part A was generally positive, although a number of items were noted to improve the clarity of the guidelines. The items and issues have been considered in the current draft of the Plan and Guidelines (attached as Appendix C). Town staff also met with the Board of Management of the Downtown Oakville Business Improvement Association on October 23, 2012 and received generally positive feedback regarding the Draft Plan. Staff presented the highlights of the guidelines for managing change in the district and answered questions from the board.

On November 6, 2012, a second focus group meeting was held to discuss Part B of the Draft Plan and Guidelines, which focused on the initiatives proposed by the consultants. Comments received at the two focus group meetings and submitted by individuals to Town staff were considered in the revised Draft of the Plan and Guidelines that was made available to the public on November 20, 2012. The notes from the focus group meetings and submitted written comments were included in the appendices of the staff report for the statutory public meeting.