The Role of Heritage Conservation Districts in Achieving Community Economic Development Goals

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by
Robert Shipley, School of Planning, University of Waterloo
&
Marcie Snyder, Department of Geography, University of Toronto

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Contact:
Robert Shipley
School of Planning, University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, CANADA
N2L 3G1
(519) 888-4567 ext. 5615
Fax (519) 725-2827
e-mail rshipley@fes.uwaterloo.ca
**Introduction**

Heritage assets and the values associated with them are the reference points from which communities can look to their past, understand the present, and plan for the future. However, it is the way in which the past is used now that underscores our values as a society and sets the tone for future development and growth. As with other societies, Canada’s built heritage may be rooted in the past but it can also be a dynamic part of present and future planning decisions and community growth. Consequently, the way in which we manage and develop these resources warrants continued attention.

There has long been a notion that heritage conservation represents not so much a cost but an investment with real returns (Rypkema, 1998; Vivian et al. 2000; Taranu, 2004). In a broad review of over 200 articles and reports on the economics of historic preservation, produced by the Brookings Institution in 2005, the overall conclusion was that heritage projects were good for the economy (Mason). The research reported on here focused on local economic development as a driver of business and community growth within historically conserved spaces.

We examined heritage conservation at the district level to provide a holistic and contextual evaluation of its contribution to community improvement and development. The analysis of change management within heritage areas merits particular attention since it can support dynamic growth in what some may perceive to be statically conserved areas (Florida, 2002; Hume 2009; Listoken et al 1998; Pollard 2004). In order to understand the relevance of investment in new and existing businesses and properties, we examine how heritage and non-heritage buildings are utilized and understood, and how the process of their physical and economic maintenance contributes to community improvement and quality of life.

**The Overall Approach: Framing the Objectives of this Research**

Previous research and commentary concerning heritage conservation districts can be seen as falling into one of five categories. While each area is broadly represented in the literature from the last two decades the following references give an idea of the work that has been done. The first category has to do with the reasons for designating historic areas (Datel & Dingemans, 1988; Tung, 2001; Cohen 1999 Miller 2004). The second type of work concerned aesthetic and design issues (Yahner & Nadenicek, 1997; Cox, 2003; Ugochukwu, 2006). The third category deals with the effect of designation on individual property values (Asabere & Huffman, 1991; Shipley, 2000; Coulson & Leichenko, 2001; Leimenstoll, 1998; Ashworth, 2002). A fourth set of studies has looked at the planning and political issues that arise around historic conservation (Reichl, 1997; Nasser, 2003; Doratli, 2005; Kovacs et al 2008; Oktyay Vehbi & Önal Hoskara, 2009). This study falls into the fifth category which considers the economic spin-offs from heritage conservation (Wojno, 1991; Pollard, 2004; Evans, 2005; Rypkema, 1998, 1995, 1997; Vivian et al, 2000; Listoken et al, 1998, 2002).
While the works cited above have looked at various aspects of economic impact the current study follows a somewhat different approach typified by works such as Shipley et al, 2004; Otsuka, Reeve, 2007 and Shipley et al 2011. It deals with the interaction between heritage conservation on one side and local community and economic development on the other side.

**Methods**

Designated historic areas are called Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) in the province of Ontario so we have investigated the concept of the HCD not only as a mechanism for promoting heritage but have attempted to determine whether the implementation of an HCD supports community improvement and in turn, local economic development.

First we draw upon key elements from the heritage conservation literature to establish the significance of heritage in planning urban spaces. In the section that follows, we introduce the case study areas, two HCDs, Markham Village and Unionville, which are both located within the Town of Markham, a fast growing exurban municipality located north and east of Toronto, Canada’s largest city. We look carefully at their characteristics.

After that we describe the sources of information that were used to understand conservation strategies as they relate to community and economic development. It has been suggested that the facts of a case study are best supported by more than one source of evidence (Yin, 2003). By triangulating or drawing on multiple data sources to study a single problem, researchers are able to address the validity and confidence of our research findings (Patton, 2002; Sadovnik, 2007).

Therefore, to address our research question - can social and economic improvements in urban districts be enhanced through careful management of built heritage resources - four methods of data collection were undertaken. These included seven key informant interviews, 124 household surveys, careful researcher observations, and secondary data from census and planning documents. The surveys and interviews were conducted in 2009.

**The Economics of Heritage**

Built heritage is a social asset set within an economic context and so it offers economic value and functions as well as cultural value and can be a contributing part of a dynamic economy (Graham, 2002; Denhez 2003). A feature of heritage conservation is that it provides a sustainable way in which to reuse existing resources that are found within the urban environment. In this way designated historic areas play an important role in providing direct economic benefit as well as development options (Oktay Vehbi & Önal Hoskara, 2009). Heritage conservation management is a development option that can provide social and economic benefits that demolition and new construction cannot. But, for a heritage property to survive, it must have a
viable, economic use. This use in turn will ensure the maintenance of the physical fabric (Fram, 2003; Denhez 2007).

Through reuse, adaptation, or improvement the built form may be re-appropriated to assume new and more meaningful functions. As function typically changes more rapidly than form, the built structure will reasonably outlive its creators as well as shifting market trends (Ashworth, 1991). As such, the function of buildings must adapt over time to accommodate the changing needs of an area’s evolving population. In this way, heritage conservation may be considered a form-function phenomenon that is guided by informed, purposeful intervention decisions.

In many cases historic areas of our communities are also the traditional centres of business. With increasing intensity over the last decades these older retail and service areas have had to compete with out-of-town and edge-of-town shopping centres. The Business Improvement Area (BIA) is one mechanism that has been developed to assist older business districts in that competition.

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Defining Terms and Understanding the Legal Framework for HCDs & BIAs

Defining Elements of Heritage and Heritage Planning
While many different forms of heritage exist, both tangible and intangible, the focus of this article is on that of the built environment and its interaction with local economies. Heritage is defined as the tangible elements of the past that are located under the canopy of the built environment. Its continued existence is largely based on a society’s, or more notably a governing society’s demands, values, and interpretations. In this way, a society’s definition of and care for its heritage is characterized by its value judgments (Jokilehto, 1998). It is a mechanism through which meanings are produced and reproduced. Understandably then, heritage has multiple interpretations as well as uses. As such, its role within the city and the planning process should be approached with caution and a comprehensive understanding (Graham, 2002).

Defining the HCD and its Role within Urban Areas
In Canada most heritage management decisions and designations are made at the municipal level to ensure that culturally meaningful parts of a city’s built environment are protected (Fulton, 1998). In this way, a municipal council is allowed to designate a defined area and in doing so, must adopt a district plan to manage conservation and guide future change. District level designation may also fulfill a symbolic function if it stands in contrast to all other built elements of the urban past that have been removed (Hamer, 2000). Most relevant in terms of this study is that HCD designation is effective for heritage conservation planning in a city that is undergoing rapid change or development. This is because it allows for a city’s original character and distinction to be retained or emerge within the changing urban landscape. As we shall see, our case studies, Markham Village and Unionville, are located in such a space. They are 19th century villages located in a vast expanse of late 20th and early 21st century urban development. HCDs
are not autonomous; rather they function as a dynamic part of a city or region. It is for this reason that they must be considered within the context of a municipality as a whole, where conservation is associated with enhancement, not restrictions (Tiesdell et al., 1996).

**The Designation Process**

In Ontario, an HCD is characterized under the Ontario Heritage Act as a concentration of heritage buildings, sites, structures, or landscapes that are linked by aesthetic, historical, or socio-cultural contexts or use. This essentially means that a district includes the built heritage which extends beyond the individual buildings to include the spaces between buildings, the surrounding landscape, roads, footpaths, fences, lighting, street furniture and other features which collectively contribute to an area's character (Province of Ontario, 2006). These districts should respect a community’s history and identity, and are defined by a sense of visual coherence that is promoted through the use of scale, mass, height, building materials, proportion, and colour that afford it distinctiveness from neighbouring areas (Ontario Heritage Act, 2005).

Although specific systems of district designation differ from country to country, all heritage areas tend to share the same basic model. This model proposes that district designation exists to regulate changes to the exterior of properties in order to conserve evidence of the past while maintaining a valued ambience (Datel & Dingemans, 1988). These districts are often a product of unique historical and planning circumstances and may be presented to particular markets as distinctive products (Ashworth, 1991). This includes the pockets of heritage resources that located within an urban area (Doratli, 2007). District designation and operation are based on similar models, but the nature of their maintenance and management may vary from district to district, sometimes even within the same jurisdiction.

HCDs need not be turned into museum pieces. While planning and conservation strategies may vary from district to district, a major incentive for district designation stems from a general concern that future development fit into the existing character of given areas. This process recognizes the considerable economic and aesthetic value that can be provided by maintaining the historic character and context of an area (Fram, 2003). Layers of history can be maintained by accommodating new development that keeps an area alive and useful while managing to retain its traditional character and appearance.

Strategies as well as historical elements can also be layered and the local Business Improvement Area (BIA) is one approach that can work in conjunction with HCDs. BIAs are created by municipalities under provincial regulations. The Ontario Business Improvement Area Association web site describes the concept as follows:

A BIA board of management is an organization set up to provide certain business promotion and improvement functions within that area. A BIA allows local business people and property owners to join together and with the support of the
municipality, to organize, finance and carry out physical improvement and promote economic development in their district. The local municipality is the body that is responsible for approving the budget of the BIA. There are now more than 230 BIAs in place across the province. They vary in size from less than 60 businesses and property owners to more than 2,000 (http://www.obiaa.com/).

The function and importance of BIAs working in conjunction with heritage conservation districts has not been widely discussed in the Canadian context.

**Selecting the Case Studies**

In order to assess the role of district conservation in stimulating community improvement, and more specifically, local community and economic development, two HCDs in the Town of Markham were selected as case studies. The selection was based on three defining criteria: age, location and land use. The two selected study areas, Markham Village and Unionville, were both established over a decade ago, are in close proximity to one another (approximately 4 km) and each possesses residential and green-space components as well as commercial main streets. Where a close distance allowed for an interesting comparison, it was also important that each district had had time to mature. This allowed the researchers to undertake a more comprehensive investigation into the dynamic role that heritage conservation and management had played in terms of community improvement. Finally, given that local economic development is at play, we felt it would be of benefit to consult with community members that represented both the residential and business populations.

**Insert Figures 1 & 2**

The Town of Markham, Ontario, is a rapidly growing community located in the Regional Municipality of York, just north of the City of Toronto. Markham’s population was 261,573 in the 2006 census which represented a 25 percent increase since 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2006). Amid this rapid growth, Markham has made a concerted effort to conserve tangible elements of the Town’s earlier development and has initiated policies and programs to promote heritage conservation. Their town motto, ‘Leading While Remembering’ reflects their agenda for conserving historic vestiges of the built environment.

**Insert Table 1**

Table 1 demonstrates that a large percentage of those living in Markham’s HCDs represent an older population of English descent, which contrasts to the Town of Markham as a whole with a younger population of mixed ethnicity. Within the HCDs there is a high level of home ownership, dwellings in good repair and signs of long-term investment in an area. There is also a higher overall education attainment, which is generally associated with a higher quality of life.
and income levels. These socio-demographic characteristics would suggest a population that has some history and influence in the area.

Insert Figure 3

While European settlement in the area began as early as the late 18th century, Unionville’s history dates back to the 1870s, when it first formed as a service centre for the adjacent rural community. Unionville was designated as an HCD in 1998 and today is considered to be a tourist attraction. Markham Village, first founded in the early 1820s, was established as a HCD in 1991 and is one of the largest HCDs in Ontario today. Both Unionville and Markham Village possess a central Main Street, the portions of which provide intact examples of 19th and early 20th century commercial and residential buildings. Both main streets run north-south through the centre of the HCDs, and serve as its focal point. Residential dwellings can be found to the east and west of the commercial areas. Outside the heritage districts there are arterial roads lined with a number of modern shopping plazas, or strip malls. While large in scale, Markham Village has experienced varied success as a commercial centre. This is largely due to the fact that Markham Main Street is a major traffic route (also known as Highway 48), making it difficult to navigate by foot. In recent years, an alternate traffic route was constructed to alleviate heavy truck and traffic flow.

Insert Figure 4

Markham Village differs from Unionville not only in terms of geographic scale, but also in that Unionville possesses a ‘ready-made’ quaint, pedestrian friendly commercial area for both local and visiting tourists. Prior to designation, a transportation bypass was built around Unionville, close to the original Main Street, and so heavy traffic flow was successfully redirected away from the historic area and Unionville has been able to maintain a narrow heritage street that only accommodates light, slow-moving traffic flow. A pleasant, safe walking environment has been of great benefit to promoting pedestrian and retail activity.

Measuring Community Improvement

To establish a means by which to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of HCD designation in supporting community improvement and small-scale economic development, data was gathered from four sources: interviews, household surveys, researcher observation and secondary sources such as census figures. The information derived from these sources was then used to understand several themes that emerged from the research. We will return these themes - revitalization in HCDs and its role in economic development, designation in revitalizing private and commercial property, vacant spaces and designation’s effect on local business – in the Findings section below.
Interviews
Seven open-ended, semi-structured interviews were carried out as an essential component of case study evidence (Yin, 2003). Key informants from both the private and public sector were interviewed. The interviewees all had some form of experience in heritage conservation, community relations, or business activity. More specifically, individuals from the Markham Village Business Improvement Association, the Unionville Villagers Association (the two BIA groups), and Heritage Markham (the municipal heritage advisory committee) were consulted. In addition, three heritage planners from the Town of Markham, an architect, and a local historian were interviewed. These interviews were approximately one hour in length and took place in person. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of motivations for heritage conservation at the district level and the guidelines or ethic that drives the need for conservation of the built environment.

Surveys
Community surveys were directed at private property owners living within the HCDs. In total 397 surveys were hand delivered, with return postage paid. We requested a time limit of one month to return the surveys. A total of 124 surveys were returned, providing a 31.2% overall response rate. More specifically, 73 of 271 surveys were returned from Markham Village (a 26.9% response rate) and 51 of 126 surveys were returned from Unionville (a 40.5% response rate). Questions asked about the experience of living in a HCD, as well as about the effect of HCD designation on community improvement, change management, property values, and local business.

Field Observation
Researcher observation in the field was based on visual survey and assessment, and was used as a means to provide a simple and efficient method of recording information. During four visits to the area over a one-year period, photographs and observation were used to provide an up-close examination of residential and commercial buildings, streetscaping, walkability, and general use of space within a dynamic setting. This method of data collection was used to gain an initial appraisal of the case studies’ condition and to assess it from a ‘real time’, firsthand perspective.

Secondary Sources: Planning Documents and Census Data
Town of Markham official planning documents and specific HCD plans that proposed future visions for streetscaping and business development within these districts were reviewed and evaluated to ascertain how goals worked to guide sympathetic change while retaining and conserving heritage. In reviewing these plans and documents, we also considered the use of guidelines related to compatible new development, how the municipality attempted to work with business owners, and how historic character is used as a basis for promoting economic development.
In order to provide an overall picture of socio-economic and demographic characteristics in the Town of Markham, as well as in the HCDs of Markham Village and Unionville, data from the 2006 Statistics Canada census were analysed at the census tract level. Data related to age, employment, education, income, and housing were measured to provide a more complete understanding and description of the case study areas under examination.

Insert Table 1

Findings: A Discussion of Themes that Emerged

Based upon the data collected, a series of themes surfaced that are addressed in this section. These themes are revitalization in HCDs and its role in economic development, designation in revitalizing private and commercial property, vacant spaces and designation’s effect on local business.

Social and Physical Revitalization in HCDs and its Role in Economic Development

Interviews and researcher observation indicate that the commercial cores of Unionville and Markham Village predominantly consist of relatively successful small-scale, local businesses. The presence of BIAs in both HCDs also suggests strong support for commercial activity. While local business activity does tend to thrive, challenges do arise.

Markham is a rapidly growing town that is often under significant pressure from developers. This can prove challenging for heritage conservationists. As one interviewee noted, it becomes difficult to justify developing at a lower density as land value become increasingly high. While heritage may provide a sustainable solution to redevelopment, it often remains that economic development and physical revitalization must be negotiated as a “balancing act” between heritage, land values, and intensification.

Assuming this balancing act is recognized and negotiated, it was generally agreed that HCD designation spurs economic development and benefits. This is because heritage is a physical resource that can be positively exploited, drawing visitors and residents to spend money within a unique or quaint environment that often caters to niche market demands. According to several interviews it was agreed that setting an area apart as a special place within the larger community allows it certain privileges that can help create a cache, while building on community improvement strategies. In examining conservation’s effect on the local economic environment, it is important to note that heritage restoration supports the local economy as it depends heavily upon the hire of local labour and expertise.

Heritage conservation can also play an important role in social formation and community development. Most distinctively, heritage designation has the potential to bring community together with the common interest of improving the physical condition of their immediate
environment as well as their quality of life. Revitalization can only be successful if the community supports it. As one interviewee suggested, revitalization occurs when people actively enhance, maintain, love, and value their properties. Local business development in commercial cores provides an economic boost, particularly in terms of day tourism, but these areas also play a key social role for HCD residents by acting as central meeting places.

The Role of HCD Designation in Revitalizing Private and Commercial Property

When asked if district designation had helped to improve or revitalize the area, over half of the survey respondents in both HCDs indicated that they believed it had (see Figure 5). This being said, varying observations and concerns arose. One participant suggested that designation had improved but not necessarily revitalized the area, where “without designation some old relics might have been replaced.” A Unionville resident stated that it was not designation that had improved the area, but rather revitalization was a result of the bypass that was built years before the designation, as well as the entrepreneurship of a select group of individuals. It could however be argued that the construction of this bypass allowed the district to remain intact, and that due to the current protection of the district, it was allowed an advantage to take the shape it has today.

Some concern arose in regard to the lack of heritage or heritage ‘sensitive’ properties that remained in certain pockets of the HCDs. More specifically, issues such as billboards, modern structures, unkempt plazas, and multi-lane roads (i.e. Highway 7) were criticized for not fitting in to the heritage character of Markham’s HCDs. While a plan had been introduced to address some of these concerns, visible action had not always been taken. Overall, participants advocated that HCD designation benefits property value, quality of living, local business, and the general aesthetics of the area and that designation contributes to long-term district improvement. Other studies involving Markham Village and Unionville confirm the health of property values (Shipley et al. 2011)

Vacant Spaces: Markham Village

In Markham Village, two sites, one heritage and one modern, are proving difficult for the district. Both buildings are located along the Main Street. One is a modern shopping plaza that does not fit with the heritage character of the area. This plaza has had difficulty in retaining tenants, and at the time of data collection had three vacant storefronts. Upon exploring the site, the researcher observed that its grounds were unkempt as compared to the other commercial sites along the Main Street, and with its dark, vacant corners, it did not provide a particularly pleasant or safe environment to traverse. The other site that has proven difficult to manage is the historic Tremont Hotel, which has sat vacant for a number of years. Perhaps as an attempt to include this vacant space in the heritage district or to beautify it, the building has been covered with a variety of paintings, as part of a community mural project. This has served to create a more pleasant physical space around which community and social development have taken place, and yet the building remains empty and without economic function.
Vacant Spaces: Unionville

Unionville has been commercially successful in recent years. The majority of both survey and interview respondents support this statement (see Table 2). At the time of data collection there were no vacant spaces along the commercial core (although four businesses were for sale). While Unionville has certainly maintained commercial success, the area near the highway has proven to be something of a sore spot for local district supporters. Suggestions for change have included façade treatment, heritage light standards, a landscaped median, banner poles, well-defined pedestrian access, and planters at building bases.

District Designation and its Effect on Local Business

Interview and survey data indicated that HCD business owners experience certain challenges and advantages. Interviewees concurred that while district designation has created, on the whole, a positive experience for local business owners, the restrictions of conservation guidelines have affected business flexibility by limiting the means of business promotion. For example, issues related to signage, square footage within heritage structures, and even conflicting visions between business owners and the municipality were said to arise. It was suggested that education and information may be used to resolve these challenges, but some suggested that this support has not always been forthcoming. As a result, existing services need to be made more readily available to business owners. In this way, local businesses may become more open to new ideas and aware of financial grants that are available for signage and façade improvements.

For example, in Markham, privately owned commercial properties receive financial support to facilitate upgrading (Commercial Façade Improvement Grant) and to encourage the replacement of inappropriate, or non-heritage signage (Commercial Signage Replacement Grant). The problem however remains that although these grants and loans do exist, one interviewee suggested they could be improved upon, and that perhaps the business community and government should come together on this. And so, it remains that while conservation certainly has the potential to contribute to boosting local economy, beyond this, a spirit of cooperation and openness are necessary for its success.

For the most part, HCD designation has benefited local business, and part of the success of business is tied to the success of the heritage area. Interviewees suggested that district designation can act as a powerful marketing tool for local business, attracting customers to the look and feel of an area. While HCD designation can be associated with restrictions, it is these iconic, historic buildings themselves that are often used as signage. This is to say that the appeal of the heritage structure itself serves to draw people to the businesses located within. Many small businesses recognize the benefit of being a destination and feel that heritage character sets commercial districts aside.
Table 3 provides a general picture of HCD designation’s effect on local business. Residents were surveyed to provide feedback regarding local commercial development, with 50 percent of total respondents agreeing that designation had had a very or somewhat positive effect on local business. A point of interest here is that while overall trends suggest a positive correlation between designation and the success of local economic development, we do see a discrepancy between Unionville, where 74.5 percent felt designation has positively affected local business, as opposed to Markham Village where only 31.9 percent reflected these sentiments. Similarly, while 55.2 percent of Markham Village residents felt that HCD designation had contributed to area revitalization, a much larger percentage (79.6) of Unionville residents supported this belief.

And so, while district conservation may provide the stimulus for revitalization, many factors remain at play. This is reflected in the differences between Markham Village and Unionville. In Markham Village, there appears to be a sense of struggle in finding an identity within the large, somewhat discontinuous district, whereas Unionville has a ‘ready-made’ intact, pedestrian-friendly environment. And so, while heritage conservation plays a significant role within the area, district cohesiveness and human scale must also be present. For example, in Markham Village, having a commercial core that accommodates automobile rather than pedestrian flow has, as one interviewee commented, resulted in a discontinuous commercial area (only one controlled pedestrian crossing is located along the length of the commercial core) that has increased business turnover and created a struggle for local business to meet surrounding needs. As such, business success depends not only on design and physical maintenance, but also importantly on the location and nature of the district within which it is situated.

These factors are important to consider on both sides of the business ‘success story.’ As another interviewee commented, businesses can often become “victims of their success.” In other words, as the district and the businesses located within it become more successful, rents tend to increase and certain types of businesses may eventually be excluded to make way for niche market demands. As heritage creates new and interesting ways in which to survive as a viable economic resource, it may also become increasingly commodified (Mitchell, 1998). As one interviewee commented, niche shops often sell “nothing you really need, but are willing to buy.” In recent years, Unionville experienced this shift in business type, starting to cater more to a niche market, day tourist crowd by replacing some of its ‘original’ businesses with high-end retail and restaurants. Markham Village on the other hand, while still catering somewhat to a niche market crowd, has also come to economically depend on its essential goods and services.
And so, heritage planners and members of the BIA recognize that economic revitalization is an important piece that plays a key role in maintaining and enhancing any HCD. Designation has contributed to promoting business activity in Markham Village by marketing the area as a place that meets the retail and service needs of both locals and tourists. Continuing to promote local business activity and economic investment will provide the impetus needed for future business development strategies.

Ideally, businesses should work together in harmony with the heritage of the district, creating an attractive destination that satisfies local consumer demand while creating a space in which both tourists and locals wish to spend their time and money. Each HCD must find its economic role within the emerging setting. As can is demonstrated in Table 4, diversification may be necessary and a variety of business types can be found in Markham Village and Unionville.

Residents were also asked to rank and comment on how HCD designation had contributed to local business development and revitalization. One of the residents in Markham Village felt that while the appearance of the Main Street had improved, a number of vacancies remained. While revitalization efforts have been suggested to promote the heritage district, the central issue remains that of the through traffic that transects the HCD’s Main Street. While many agree that designation has indeed been positive (75 percent agreed that heritage conservation is important), “traffic patterns and the town’s lack of commitment to resolving traffic flow guidelines that they set in motion but are not committed to, especially in traffic calming areas to the north of the business district” have created problems in attracting and holding businesses in the commercial area.

Insert Tables 5 & Figure 6

Figure 6 shows us how impressions of HCD designation (in terms of revitalization/improvement) influence residents’ perception of its effects on local business. What is interesting to note here is that even those residents who felt that HCD designation had not necessarily helped to improve or revitalize the area conceded that it had indeed had a positive effect on business (35.3 percent). As expected, a large percentage of those indicating HCD improvement, also believed that it has contributed positively to business. Overall, what emerges here is a generally positive trend.

Conclusion: In Summary

The results of this research indicate that physical, economic, and social improvement may be achieved through appropriate, comprehensive district management that recognizes the importance of addressing heritage values. Markham Village and Unionville are recognized for
their business opportunities, and the heritage assets of the HCD have added to the commercial success of both districts.

Analysis of these findings has confirmed that HCD designation serves as an effective mechanism for supporting and enhancing the urban fabric of these areas, in turn supporting local economic development that contributes to generating a higher level of quality of life for its residents.

Interviews, surveys, and researcher observation indicated that by and large economic revitalization has been sustained. New development and re-development are taking place and both BIA management and HCDs contribute to supporting and marketing local business. However, individual areas with both BIA and HCD structures do face varying challenges and success. This often depends on location and may be a product of a unique set of historical and planning circumstances. As a result, each district’s socio-economic climate and the built environment as a whole must be considered in order to better understand business needs and development opportunities. While HCD designation provides a foundation for community improvement, individual districts will face various situations, and as a result their specific needs may vary.

It must however be recognized that specific situations will differ slightly in nature. For example, within the Town of Markham, Unionville and Markham Village, two HCDs located only a few kilometres from one another, face different sets of strengths and challenges. And so, while general guidelines can successfully be applied, each case does require individual attention that addresses community needs, as well as the physical, economic, and social climate of the district in question.

The HCD provides a long-term strategy for achieving community improvement and heritage conservation goals. For this reason, municipalities should understand the importance of monitoring the outcomes of district plans and policies and of promoting continued dialogue with residents and business owners.

Conserving heritage at the district level can positively contribute to cities. It provides distinctiveness from neighbouring areas, respect for a city’s history and sense of place, and promotes community improvement.
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Tables & Figures

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Figure 2: Location of Heritage Conservation Districts within the Town
Figure 3: Commercial Street Unionville

Figure 4: Commercial Street Markham Village
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<th>Socio-demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Markham Village and Unionville</th>
<th>Town of Markham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population Density</strong></td>
<td>1-2,000 per square km</td>
<td>1-2,000 per square km</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Senior Population</strong></td>
<td>25-40% of total population</td>
<td>20% of total population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominant Ethnic Group</strong></td>
<td>Canadian, English, Scottish</td>
<td>Chinese, English</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Approximately 25% with diploma</td>
<td>Approximately 12% with diploma</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Home Ownership</strong></td>
<td>80-90% or greater</td>
<td>87%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dwellings in Need of Major Repair</strong></td>
<td>2-4% of total owned dwellings</td>
<td>4% of total owned dwellings</td>
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*Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of Markham Village and Unionville as compared to general population of Markham, Ontario*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How has HCD designation affected local business?</th>
<th>Markham Village</th>
<th>Unionville</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very or Somewhat Positive</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Positive or Negative</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat or Very Negative</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Resident perception of HCD effect on local business*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Type</th>
<th>Markham Village</th>
<th>Unionville</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants and Cafés</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galleries</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Needs</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Stores</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Business Distribution in Markham Village and Unionville*
Figure 5: Effect of HCD Designation on Local Business

Figure 6: Heritage Conservation and Its Contribution to the Area