Heritage Districts Work!

Heritage Conservation District Study
MacNab-Charles - City of Hamilton
2009
Acknowledgements

This project was carried out by the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO) on behalf of the hundreds of volunteers in communities across Ontario who work hard to maintain the built culture of our province. The ACO partnered with several other volunteer groups including Heritage Ottawa and Community Heritage Ontario. The project was directed by a steering committee made up of representatives from these organizations. Particular thanks go to ACO Manager Rollo Myers, President Catherine Nasmith and ACO board member Richard Longley for their time, effort and guidance.

We would like to thank staff at the Ministry of Culture for providing information and advice about the project: Paul King, Chris Mahood and Bert Duclos. Gratitude is also owed to Paul King, President of Community Heritage Ontario for providing technical services.

The project was undertaken in support of the volunteer efforts of ACO branch presidents and members, Heritage Ottawa, members of the local Municipal Heritage Committees and interested citizens across Ontario. These dedicated volunteers surveyed residences in the Heritage Conservation Districts and provided energy and purpose to the project.

The efforts of the volunteers were assisted and coordinated through cooperation between the ACO and the Heritage Resources Centre (HRC) at the University of Waterloo. Professor Robert Shipley is the Director of the HRC. The Project Coordinator, report manager and principal volunteer facilitator was Kayla Jonas. Additional data collection and research analysis was conducted by Jason Kovacs, Beatrice Tam and Martha Fallis. Administration and help was also provided by Marg Rowell, Chelsey Tyers, Paul Dubniak and Kirsten Pries.

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We would also like to thank the following local volunteers and municipal staff for their time and effort Surveying residents, answering interview questions and helping to gather other vital information: Robert Hamilton, Sharon Vatty, Meghan House, David Cuming, Joseph Muller and Nina Chapple.

Thanks!
MacNab-Charles Executive Summary

Introduction

- This study of Heritage Conservation Districts has been funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation and is a joint effort among volunteers of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, the Heritage Resources Centre and volunteer historical societies across the province.
- The Ontario Heritage Act enables municipalities to designate Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs).
- Heritage Conservation Districts allow municipalities to guide future changes in these areas of special character.
- 32 districts designated in or before 1992 were examined.

Background of MacNab-Charles Heritage Conservation District

- Located in the City of Hamilton.
- The district consists of seven properties, two multi-unit residences, a church and manse, two residential properties and an office.
- The district was designated in 1990.
- The plan was written by the Local Planning Branch, Planning and Development Department and the Hamilton-Wentworth Region.

Study Approach

- The original designation documents were analyzed.
- Land use mapping and a streetscape evaluation were conducted.
- Sales history trends were analyzed using GeoWarehouse™.
- Key stakeholders were interviewed.
- Data on requests for alterations was collected.

Analysis of Key Findings

- The following objectives of the district plan have been met:
  - to provide long-term coordinated plan development.
  - to maintain the area’s unique character.
  - to increase revenues and improve building stock.
- The Heritage Conservation District Plan objectives intended to create neighbourhood revitalization and engage the public have been less successful.
- Based on the appearance of the district, people seem to be satisfied with living in the district.
- Eight weeks was the longest period it took for an application for change to be approved.
- Most properties (three of four) in the district had above average sales history trajectories.
- Properties in the district show resistance to downturns in the real estate market.
- Overall, the MacNab-Charles Heritage Conservation District has been a successful planning initiative.

Recommendations

- Provide an opportunity for increased public participation by property owners.
- Consider expanding the district to include the block to the southeast.
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Heritage Act and Designation

The *Ontario Heritage Act* (Subsection 41. (1)) enables municipalities to designate Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs). A Heritage Conservation District is an area with “a concentration of heritage resources with special character or historical association that distinguishes it from its surroundings”\(^1\). Districts can be areas that are residential, commercial, rural, industrial, institutional or mixed use. According to the Ministry of Culture “the significance of a HCD often extends beyond its built heritage, structures, streets, landscape and other physical and special elements to include important vistas and views between buildings and spaces within the district”\(^2\).

The designation of a Heritage Conservation District allows municipalities to protect the special character of an area by guiding future changes. The policies for guiding changes are outlined in a Heritage Conservation District Plan that can be prepared by city staff, local residents or heritage consultants. A Heritage Conservation District Plan must also include a statement of objectives and guidelines that outline how to achieve these objectives\(^3\).

1.2 Rationale for Heritage Conservation District Study

Many people 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. At least 92 HCDs are already in existence in Ontario with the earliest designations dating back to 1980. While more are being planned and proposed all the time there is also a residual resistance to HCDs from some members of the public. Typically this resistance centres on concerns about loss of control over one’s property, impact on property values and bureaucratic processes. On the other hand, the benefits of HCDs, establishing high standards of maintenance and design, allowing the development of and compliance with shared community values and the potential for increasing property values, are not as widely perceived as might be the case.

With funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, volunteers from branches of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO) and Historical Societies were assisted by the Heritage Resources Centre (HRC) at the University of Waterloo to undertake a province wide research program to answer the question: have Heritage Conservation Districts in Ontario been successful heritage planning initiatives over a period of time?

Since it takes a period of time for the impacts of district designation to manifest this study concentrated on examining districts that are well established. Applying the criterion of residential, commercial or mixed use areas designated in 1992 or before there were 32 HCDs that the study examined. These districts are found in or near the following areas: Cobourg, Hamilton, Kingston, Ottawa, St. Catharines, Huron County, Brampton, Toronto, Ottawa, the Region of Waterloo and Thunder Bay.

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\(^1\) Ontario Heritage Toolkit, Heritage Conservation Districts, Ministry of Culture (2006), Page 5
\(^2\) Ontario Heritage Toolkit, Heritage Conservation Districts, Ministry of Culture (2006), Page 5
\(^3\) Ontario Heritage Toolkit, Heritage Conservation Districts, Ministry of Culture (2006), Page 12
Figure 1 shows that the 32 districts have a wide geographic distribution and represent the various community sizes. The various types of districts which are part of the study are also evident.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical Distribution</th>
<th>Community Size</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>Small Community</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>Medium Sized</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Large City</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Western</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 5 of these districts make up the HCD known as Sandy Hill
~ 2 of these districts make up the HCD known as Goderich Square

Figure 1: Distribution of Heritage Conservation Districts under Examination

The study sought to answer the following specific questions in each of the 32 Heritage Conservation Districts:

- Have the goals or objectives set out in the District Plan been met?
- Are residents content living in the Heritage Conservation District?
- Is it difficult to make alterations to buildings in the Heritage Conservation District?
- Have property values been impacted by the designation of the district?
- What are the key issues in the district?

These questions were answered through the contributions of local volunteers from the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario branches, Historical Societies and local heritage committees as well as through communication with local municipal officials.
2.0 Background of MacNab-Charles Heritage Conservation District

2.1 Description of the District

The MacNab-Charles Heritage Conservation District is a one block area bounded by MacNab Street South, Hurst Place, Charles Street and Bold Street in the City of Hamilton. The district consists of seven properties. These properties include two multi-unit residences, a church and manse, two residential properties and offices.

2.2 Cultural Heritage Value of the District

According to a plaque (see Figure 2), the cultural heritage value of the district lies in the fact that:

The downtown block of MacNab Street South, Hurst Place, Charles Street and Bold Street contains a unique collection of stone buildings primarily dating from the 1850s.

While stone architecture was relatively rare in Ontario, Hamilton’s Mountain offered a ready supply of limestone. The local resource was used to great advantage in the hands of the newly-arrived Scottish stonemasons, establishing pre-Confederation Hamilton as a city renowned for its wealth of handsome stone architecture.

With the MacNab Street Presbyterian Church as the focal point, the Victorian stone and brick streetscape of MacNab-Charles evoke a genuine sense of history in the heart of this city.

2.3 Location of the District

Figure 3: Map of MacNab-Charles Heritage Conservation District
2.4 Designation of the District

The designation of the MacNab Charles Heritage Conservation District was initiated by the City Hamilton. The Study and Plan were conducted and written between 1986 and 1988 by the Local Planning Branch, Planning and Development Department and the Hamilton-Wentworth Region. It was carried out in consultation with a local District Steering Committee made up of owners from the area.

The MacNab-Charles Heritage Conservation District is protected by By-law 90-144 which was passed on May 9, 1990 by the City of Hamilton.

The Heritage Conservation District Plan contains sections on the purpose of the plan, policies related to the architecture of the district, urban design policies, planning policies and a section on what actions need to be taken to implement the plan.
3.0 Study Approach

3.1 Resident Surveys

Due to lack of resources it was not possible in the MacNab-Charles area to ask the series of questions posed to residents of most districts in this study.

3.2 Townscape Survey

A Townscape Survey of the MacNab-Charles district was conducted in August 2008. The purpose of this survey is to provide an objective way to evaluate streetscapes. There are two elements to the survey; land use mapping and a streetscape evaluation. Land use maps, which represent the current use of buildings in the district, were produced for MacNab-Charles (see Appendix A). The streetscape evaluation involves the use of a view assessment pro forma which generates scores between one and five for 25 factors in view. A total of 6 views were photographed and evaluated (see Appendices B and C). The summary of the scores is included as Appendix D.

3.3 Real Estate Data

Sales history trends for properties within each Heritage Conservation District under study were calculated and compared against non-designated properties in the immediate vicinity of each district. Sales records spanning an average 30 year period range were identified for individual district properties using GeoWarehouse™, an online subscription database commonly used by real estate professionals.

Properties with more than one record of sale were plotted on graphs and compared with the average sales figures for non-designated properties. A number of sales property averages were obtained for each “non-designated area” within a 1 km radius from the district. The mean selling price for these property averages, which were also obtained through GeoWarehouse™, were calculated and plotted against each district unit sales record (see Appendix F)4. It was expected that the use of average sales prices from the immediate vicinity of a district as opposed to the use of city-wide sales trends would provide a more accurate comparative record to show how the district designation status itself affects property values. Aside from the locational factor (i.e. properties located within an district), it must be recognized that this study did not take into account a variety of other issues that can also affect sales prices (e.g. architecture, lot size, etc.).

3.4 Key Stakeholder Interviews

People who had special knowledge of each district were interviewed and their experiences and opinions recorded. These stakeholders often included the local planner, the chair or a member of the Municipal Heritage Committee and members of the community association or BIA. Four people were interviewed for the Charles-MacNab Heritage Conservation District. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face and one was conducted over the phone. Those interviewed included current and past Heritage Planners for the City of Hamilton. A summary of the responses is included in Appendix F. Interviewees are not identified in accordance with the University of Waterloo policy on research ethics.

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4The method for obtaining the average sales price for non-designated areas within the 1 to 5 km radius was adjusted according to the number of properties within a Heritage Conservation District. For example, to obtain figures on non-designated areas, average sales histories within a 1 km radius from the largest districts (201-600 properties) were obtained using every fiftieth district property as a basis for calculating each area sales record. The mean average of these sales records were subsequently calculated and used as the comparative sales history trend on each graph. Every fifth, tenth, and twenty-fifth property were used to find the immediate average sales histories within a 1 km radius for smaller districts with 1-10, 11-100 and 101-200 properties respectively.
3.5 Requests for Alterations

With respect to the requests for alterations within the Heritage Conservation Districts, the study wished to answer these questions in each district:

- How many applications for building alterations have been made?
- How many applications have been approved or rejected?
- How long did the application process take for individual properties?
- What type of changes were the applications for?

For the MacNab-Charles Heritage Conservation District, the information about the number of applications for alterations and their time for approval were kept in an electronic list by the City of Hamilton. This list includes requests for alterations from 2006 until present. A summary of this information is presented in Appendix G.
4.0 Analysis of Key Findings

4.1 Have the goals or objectives been met?

The Heritage Conservation District Study for MacNab-Charles outlines the benefits of designating the area as a Heritage Conservation District. These benefits can be equated with the goals for the district.

a) Provide long-term coordinated plan development

The Heritage Conservation District Plan has now been in place for almost 20 years. It has sections covering objectives and policies for architecture, urban design and planning. According to the stakeholders this plan does not need to be updated because it is functioning well. This evidence indicates that the district documents have provided long-term coordinated efforts.

b) Maintain the area’s unique character

The goal to maintain the area’s unique character encompasses compatible new development, stability of the area as well as the conservation of historic elements. There has been no new development in the area and the land uses indicated in the district plan are identical to those recorded on the land use map. Drawing on measures from the Townscape Survey, the categories of coherence, conserved elements and facade quality received high scores. These scores indicate that the area has kept its unique character. Visually, the area is tied together by unique lamp posts. Clearly, this goal has been met.

c) Improve building stock

The third objective, to improve the building stock, has been met. The Townscape Survey indicates that there is an absence of dereliction and neglected historic elements. The categories of facade quality, maintenance and public plantings received high scores. These scores indicate a high quality of building stock. In total only four alteration requests have been processed over the past two years. The stakeholders also stated that most of these alterations were upgrades such as windows.

d) Neighbourhood revitalization

The designation has worked to maintain the area, but there is no evidence to show that is has contributed to neighbourhood revitalization. This might be a result of the small size of the district. The district could be extended, especially to incorporate the block to the south east that fronts on MacNab Street South. This block along with Whitehern Historic House and Garden would create a Heritage Corridor from downtown. This area was identified in the original study and could be an area to consider for expansion (see Figure 5). The expansion into a larger area might be a catalyst for neighbourhood revitalization on a larger scale.
e) Provide financial incentives

As indicated by the stakeholders, the City of Hamilton has made grants available to property owners. Information about how many grants are obtained by owners in this district was not accessible.

f) Public participation

During the drafting of the study and plan a local steering committee was convened. However, now there does not appear to be any involvement from this committee or other local property owners.

g) Increased revenues

The information gathered on real estate values indicates that three of the four properties with sales records had higher than average value increases. This means that the City of Hamilton has increased their property tax revenues.

4.2 Are people content?

The resident survey, which focuses on satisfaction with the district, was not conducted in MacNab-Charles due to lack of resources. However, the Townscape Survey shows evidence of local pride. The categories of private planting and cleanliness scored high, which indicates that people take pride in their individual properties as well as the neighbourhood (see Figure 6). All four of the stakeholders also indicated that the designation was well accepted.

4.3 Is it difficult to make alterations?

The records from the City of Hamilton show that over the past two years there have only been four requests for alterations processed. The shortest time for approval was less than a week; while the longest application took eight weeks (see Figure 7).

4.4 Have property values been impacted?

The data from GeoWarehouse indicated that four of seven properties have sales histories. Of these four properties three have above average sales value increases (see Figure 8). The remaining property have a below average sales history trajectory. Since three of the four properties have strong value increases it is safe to assume the district designation is not having any negative impact when compared with the surrounding neighbourhoods.
Two of the four properties show an interesting trend. They resisted the real estate market downturn of the early 2000s in the City of Hamilton. While other properties in the city were losing value, the properties in the district maintained their value.

![Graph of Hamilton - MacNab-Charles - Property 1 showing sale price and average sale price within 1 km over time with year of designation marked.]

*Figure 8: Above Average Sale History Trajectory*

4.5 What are the key issues in the district?

a) Development Pressure

One significant issue expressed by the stakeholders appears to be the development pressure on this district. The reason for this is its close proximity to downtown and the surrounding high-rise apartment buildings. One stakeholder also mentioned that the heritage staff are now part of the Economic Development Department of the City of Hamilton, thus there could be more pressure to support development.
5.0 Conclusions

5.1 Conclusions

- The following objectives of the district plan have been met:
  - to provide long-term coordinated plan development
  - to maintain the area’s unique character
  - to increase revenues and improve building stock
- The Heritage Conservation District Plan objectives intended to create neighbourhood revitalization and engage the public have been less successful
- Based on the appearance of the district people seem to be satisfied with living in the district
- Eight weeks was the longest period it took for an application for change to be approved
- Most properties (three of four) in the district had above average sales history trajectories
- Properties in the district show resistance to downturns in the real estate market

Overall, the MacNab-Charles Heritage Conservation District has been a successful planning initiative.

5.2 Recommendations

The following aspects of the district are areas for improvement:

- Provide an opportunity for increased public participation by property owners
- Consider expanding the district to include the block to the southeast
Appendix A

Land Use Maps
Appendix B

Map of Views
Appendix C

Photographs of Views
Appendix D

Townscape Evaluation Pro Forma
**Name of District:** Hamilton, Charles-McNab HCD  
**Date:** August 15, 2008

### A. Streetscape Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A1-Pedestrian friendly</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Out of 100</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Out of 5</th>
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<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>76.67</td>
<td>3.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2-Cleanliness</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>A3-Coherence</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>A4-Edgefeature Quality</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>76.67</td>
<td>3.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>A5-Floorscape Quality</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>A6-Legibility</td>
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<td>A7-Sense of Threat</td>
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<tr>
<td>A8-Personal Safety: Traffic</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>A9-Planting: Public</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>A11-Appropriate Resting Places</td>
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**SUM A**  
Score 365  | Out of 100  | 67.67  | Out of 5  | 3.4

### B. Private Space in View

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<th>B15-Advertising, In keeping</th>
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<th>%</th>
<th>Out of 5</th>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>B16-Dereliction, Absence of</td>
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<td>B17-Detailing, Maintenance</td>
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<td>B18-Facade Quality</td>
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<td>70.00</td>
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<td>B19-Planting: Private</td>
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**SUM B**  
Score 130  | Out of 100  | 72.31  | Out of 5  | 3.6

### C. Heritage in View

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<tr>
<th>C20-Conserved Elements Evident</th>
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<th>%</th>
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<td>19.5</td>
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<td>C21-Historic Reference Seen</td>
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<td>46.67</td>
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<td>C24-Quality of New Development</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<td>C25-Historic Features, Maintained</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>73.33</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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**SUM C**  
Score 160  | Out of 100  | 58.44  | Out of 5  | 2.9

**Impression Score**  
Aggregate Score 434.5  | Out of 100  | 66.34  | Out of 5  | 3.3

**Weather:** Sunny with clouds; overcast; cloudy  
**# of views:** 6
Appendix E

Real Estate Data
Appendix F

Summary of Key Stakeholder Interviews
**Heritage Conservation District Name:** MacNab-Charles Heritage Conservation District, City of Hamilton  
**Month(s) of Interviews:** December 2008, January 2009  
**Number of People Interviewed:** 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Summary of Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. How are you involved in the HCD?                                      | • Former Heritage Planner with the City of Hamilton (1)  
• Wrote MacNab-Charles HCD Plan (1)  
• Planner (3) |
| 2. How did the HCD come about?                                           | • Suggested because of obvious value – rare survivor of the 1850s (1)  
• City started but there was an emphasis on working with the local people – did not come in heavy handed (4)  
• Most people came to meetings – Minster of Church on board (1)  
• Adjusted the plan as it progressed (1)  
• One person was not supportive and they were excluded from the plan (4)  
• Identified in a report by LACAC as one of 10-12 potential HCDs (1)  
• No updated plan because it is working well (3) |
| 3. In your opinion how has the HCD designation been accepted?            | • Well accepted (4)  
• HCDs give people the assurance that nothing horrible will happen next door (1)  
• Long negotiations, especially with the church (1)  
• For such a small district it took a long time to designate, almost three years (1) |
| 4. In your experience what are the HCD management processes in place and how do they work? | • Heritage Permits (4)  
• No local committee (1)  
• City of Hamilton grants (3) |
| 5. In your experience what is the process for applications for alterations? | • Through planning department – part of the economic development section, thus there could be more pressure to support development (1)  
• Staff delegation – loss of power for the committees (1)  
• Try to approve all applications (sit with people and go through) (1)  
• Two types (3)  
  1) Delegated Approval – Planning Director approves  
  2) Staff Report  
    - for complex applications e.g. demolitions and new constructions  
    - goes to MHC sub-committee and council for approvals  
• Public works also require heritage permits (3)  
• Heritage Staff comment on larger public works plans e.g. transit plan (3)  
• Do not control painting (3)  
• Church submits the most applications (3)  
• Most applications are upgrades (e.g. windows) (3)  
• Timeline – generally three weeks (3) |
| 6. Is there a communication process set up for the HCD?                   | • Occasional mailing as needed e.g. Heritage Property Standards (4) |
| 7. In your opinion, what are the issues that are unique to the HCD and how have they been addressed? | • Development pressure due to proximity to City Hall and downtown and surrounding apartment buildings (4)  
• Only one side of the street is designated (1) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>managed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. What are similar non designated areas?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Robinson (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Carleton Avenue East Street (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Markland Street between Hess Street South and Bay Street South (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9. Other comments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Got Hydro to do lamps and wires underground when they were working in the area (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Was a recommendation in the plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Different levels of government should give more assistance such as funding and grants (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Federal Government is not a force in protecting buildings (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Requests for Alterations
# MacNab-Charles Alteration Requests

## 2006-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Submitted</th>
<th>Date Approved</th>
<th>Time Frame (Weeks)</th>
<th>Alteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 4, 2006</td>
<td>February 20, 2006</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 6, 2006</td>
<td>September 8, 2006</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 18, 2006</td>
<td>October 24, 2006</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 17, 2007</td>
<td>November 16, 2007</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Replacing windows at rear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 30, 2008</td>
<td>awaiting approval</td>
<td></td>
<td>Replacing windows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>