



Heritage Resources Centre



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Upper Doon Village: A Retrospective Look at Kitchener's First Heritage Conservation District

Upper Doon Village in Kitchener (Figures 1 & 2) obtained heritage conservation district (HCD) designation in 1988 to help conserve the area's unique built and natural character. The objective of the research carried out by the Heritage Resources Centre at the University of Waterloo¹ was to determine whether the district had achieved the goals set out in the original heritage district plan and to find out what residents thought of the designation process and the area's designated status. In addition, we examined heritage permit records and property sales transactions to see what effect designation has had on building alterations and property values.



Figure 1. Location of Upper Doon Village

¹ While the City of Kitchener provided some of the data requested (e.g. number of applications, number and type of decisions rendered, etc.) the City did not endorse or in any way sponsor the Study; participate in conducting the survey; analyze the data; or, assist in the formation of conclusions.

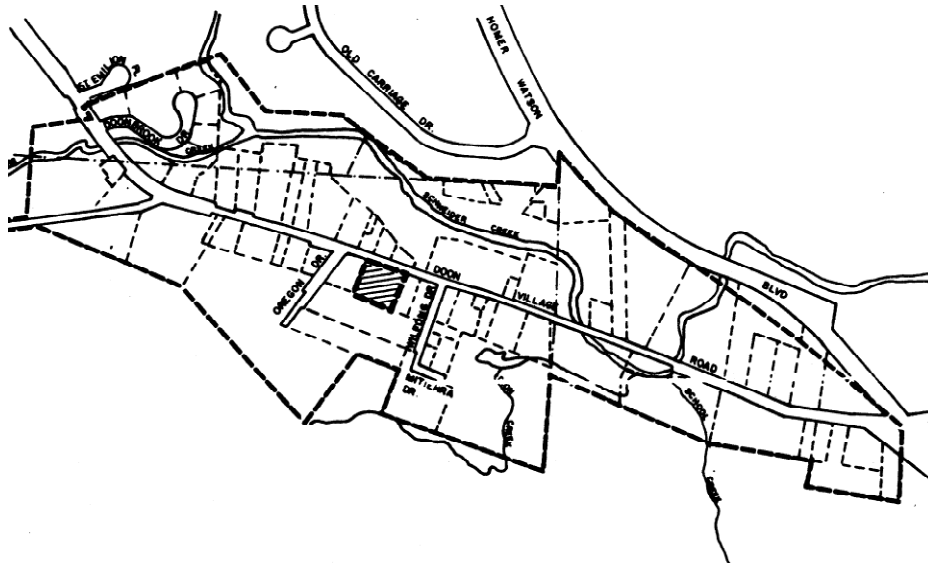


Figure 2. Upper Doon District boundaries

When conducting door-to-door surveys in April and September 2007, we promised interviewees that we would share with them the results of our study. The following set of figures is representative of our general research findings:

Resident Perceptions

Of the 43 residents surveyed, which included an almost equal number of people who had lived in the district before designation as those who had moved in afterwards, the vast majority (36) stated that they were satisfied (Figure 3). Indeed, the majority of these residents (26) indicated that they were “very satisfied.” Of the 20 residents who moved into Upper Doon after it was designated only two stated that the designation status had affected their decision to move there. However, upon further clarification it was found that one of these two residents had chosen to live in Upper Doon Village precisely because it was a conservation district and because they knew the character of the area would be protected (Figure 4).

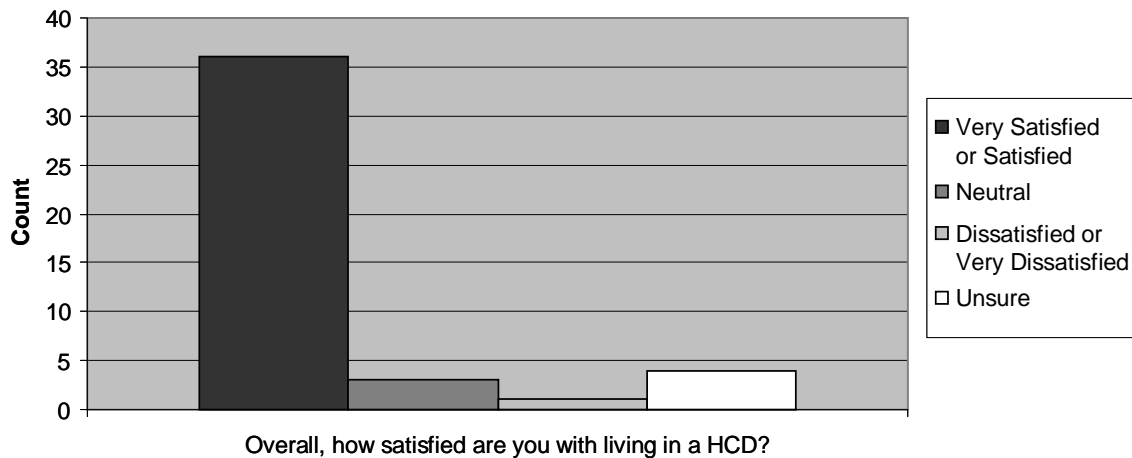


Figure 3. Resident satisfaction levels

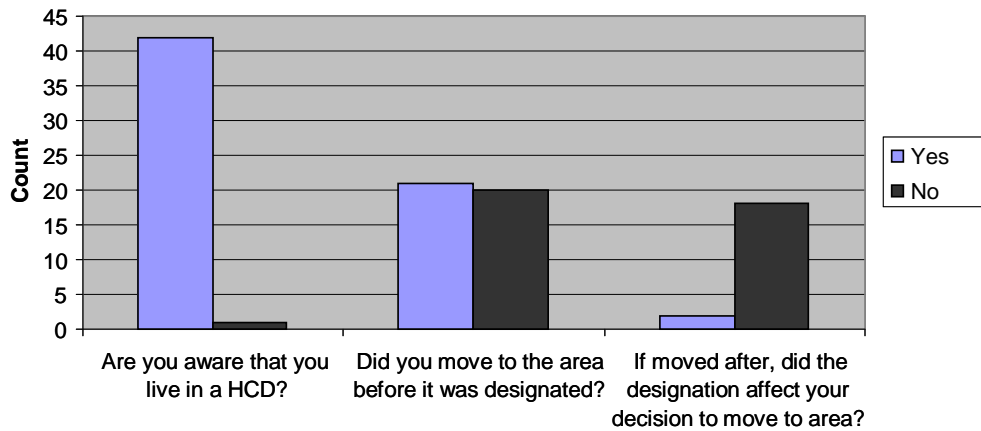


Figure 4. Designation status and decision making

Heritage Permits for Building Alterations

One of the common assumptions and concerns about HCD designation is that home owners will become overly restricted when making building alterations. Since the 1988 designation of Upper Doon, the City of Kitchener has received over forty applications for building alterations. As evident from city records, all applications were approved. This was confirmed by residents surveyed. Another assumption about building renovation applications is that they must take a great deal of time to be processed. According to city records the average length of time from application to approval for 15 fully recorded transactions was a modest 6 weeks. However, on closer inspection and ignoring an apparent anomaly (24 weeks) the majority of applications were processed within a three week period (Figure 5).

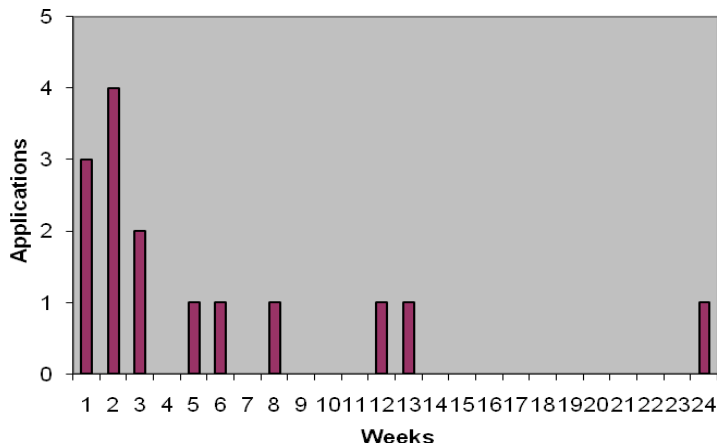


Figure 5. Approval time for building alteration requests.

Property Values

Restrictions on what can be done to a property within a HCD are often thought to lower property values. From an examination of the land registry records it was evident that comparatively few houses were bought or sold more than once within the last 30 years. In fact, only six properties had verifiable records of sales that could be used for a before and after sales history analysis. Although far too few to give conclusive results, the examined cases provide a fairly clear reading into the effect that

designation has had on property values. It was evident from a comparison of sales history trends that both newer and historic properties in the district had either performed better than the market trend or performed near to the city average (Figure 6). The somewhat higher than average trend in sales prices when compared with the city average mirrored what residents in the district expect from their community's designation. Most residents when asked whether HCD status impacted their property values said that they thought that designation had either increased it or had no impact at all.

Heritage Conservation District Property #4

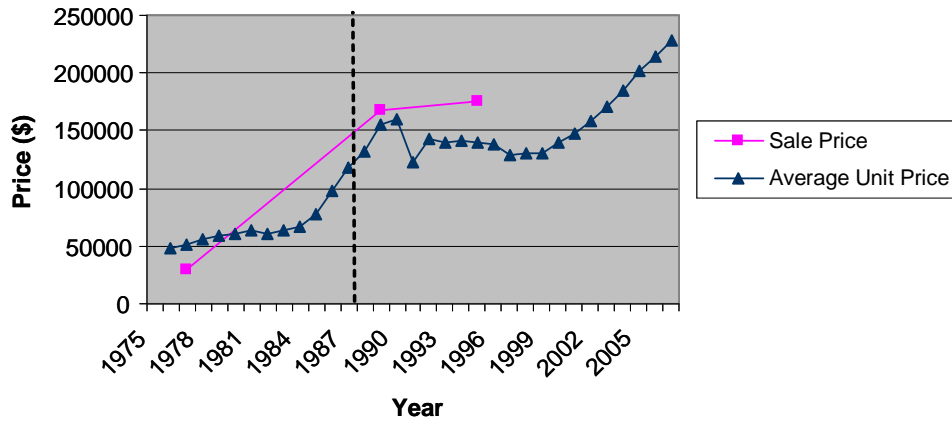


Figure 6. Property following market trend before and after designation.

Summary

In summary, our research has indicated that several of the original objectives of the original HCD plan have been achieved. Although some feel that there hasn't been sufficient development controls in and around the district the aesthetic goal of the original plan can be said to have been realized. The social goal of the plan has been even more successful. According to our survey the great majority of residents appreciate the HCD status of their community and enjoy the quality of life that the district affords. The economic goal has also been reached in that the residential character of the neighbourhood has been preserved. Upper Doon admirably demonstrates how HCDs can serve as a mechanism to ensure sensitive change and to help maintain the quality of place of an historic area.

Thank you very much for your participation in this project!

Sincerely,

Jason Kovacs, Robert Shipley, Marcie Snyder and Copeland Stupart

May 14, 2008

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