

Part A

District  
Overview

# 1.0 Introduction

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## 1.1 The Heritage Conservation District Concept

A heritage conservation district is a collection of buildings, streets, and open spaces that collectively are of special historical and/or architectural significance to the community. The individual elements of a district must combine in such a way as to present a sense of cohesiveness. A heritage district is a place of special character or association with an integrity of its own that distinguishes it from other areas of the community.

Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act R.S.O. 1990, O.18 provides for designation of heritage conservation districts. The parameters of this legislation enable municipalities, through study, to define the areas to be designated and to use development guidelines to assist in the regulation of various types of development within heritage conservation districts in order to ensure that the district's character and viability are maintained and/or enhanced.

It is not the purpose of heritage conservation district designation to make the district a static place where change is prohibited. Rather, the purpose is to guide change so that it contributes to the district's architectural and historic character.

## 1.2 Unity of the Documents

The Thornhill Vaughan Heritage Conservation District Plan 2007 consists of three parts, published in separate volumes:

- This Plan document,
- The District Plan Building Inventory, and
- The original 1984 Study document.

These documents are complementary, and they are to be considered as a whole in interpreting the Plan.

### **A note on the historic photographs—**

We are fortunate to be able to use images from the Weaver Collection in these documents. These include photographs taken by Alf Weaver, and historic images that he collected. Some of the Weaver Collection is in the care of the Markham Museum, and these are credited with the prefix MM-. Some are in the care of the Thornhill Archive kept by the Society for the Preservation of Historic Thornhill (SPOHT), and these are credited with the prefix ThA-. The catalogue information is that used by the respective source.



The view north on Yonge Street, circa 1900. The shop on the left is at the corner of Centre Street. MM-Weaver #291

## 1.3 Background of the District Plan

The Thornhill Vaughan Heritage Conservation District was established by By-law 306-88, culminating a process that began with By-law 198-83, by which Council declared its intent to conduct a study for future designation of a Heritage Conservation District in Thornhill. The consultant for the Heritage Conservation District Study and Plan was Phillip H. Carter, who concurrently prepared the study and plan for the Thornhill-Markham Heritage Conservation District. The two municipalities acted together in recognition of the historic unity of the village.

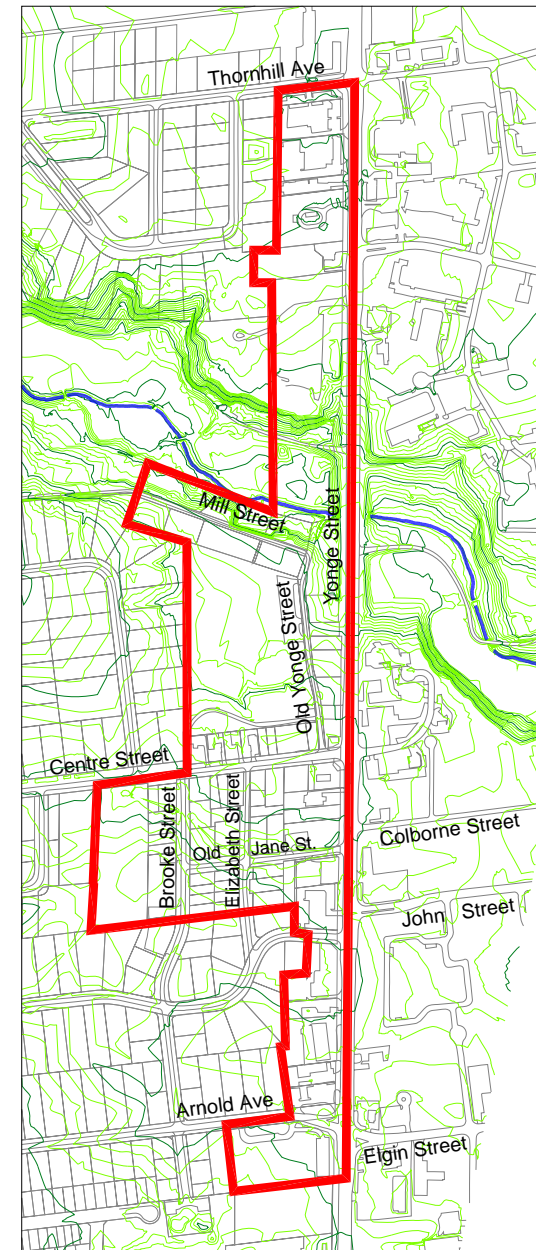
The Thornhill Heritage Conservation Districts were among the first in the province. In 1983, when the studies were begun, there were only 5 municipalities with districts in place, and the Ministry hadn't yet published its handbook *Ontario's Heritage Conservation District Guidelines*.

In the 20 years since the Thornhill Vaughan Heritage Conservation District was adopted, 60 or more districts have been created, and the standards of practice for heritage districts have evolved with experience. In particular, a more holistic approach, including landscapes, has been developed, and more user-friendly plan documents have become the norm. The *Ontario Heritage Act* has been amended several times over the years to reflect the evolving standards, and in May of 2005 Bill 60 enacted comprehensive amendments to the Heritage Act. A new *Guide to District Designation Under the Ontario Heritage Act* was published by the Ministry of Culture in the following year.

Finally, there have been changes in the District: new people, new buildings, and new changes in the Official Plan which emerged from the Yonge Street Study recently undertaken in a joint effort by Vaughan and Markham.

The City of Vaughan Council determined that after 20 years it was time to review and renew the Thornhill Vaughan Heritage Conservation District, and they again retained Phillip H. Carter as their consultant.

The boundary of the original Thornhill Vaughan Heritage Conservation District was established by By-law No. 306-88. It is shown with the heavy line on the map to the right, and it remains unchanged.



## 1.4 Purpose of the District Plan Review

The purpose of the Thornhill Vaughan Heritage Conservation District Plan Review is to undertake a comprehensive review of the existing policies and guidelines, to evaluate the performance of the Plan, to incorporate the experience of the local community through a community consultation process and to update the District Plan to modern standards of practice.

## 1.5 Parts of the District Plan Review

The first task for the consultants in the District Plan review was the examination of the existing District Plan and other documents regulating development in the area, such as Official Plans, and zoning and signage by-laws. Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 210, which was part of the original Heritage District process has had many amendments, and the new OPA 669, based on the Thornhill Yonge Street Study, applies to an important part of the Thornhill Vaughan Heritage Conservation District.

An examination of the District was also conducted, including both a general consideration of its heritage character and assets, and a new District Inventory individually describing and depicting every property in the District. This document serves as a record of the present built form in the Thornhill Vaughan Heritage Conservation District. Comparisons with the 1984 inventory show the changes of the past 20 years, and the new inventory includes older photographs (when they are available) to illustrate these changes.

The third part of the review is the establishment of a community consultation process. The experiences of residents and business people within the District, and their ideas about areas of concern that might be addressed by the District Plan Review, are an important aspect of creating a renewed Heritage Conservation District.



The Presbyterian Church, 7788 Yonge Street, Circa 1925.  
MM-Weaver #297.