

What We Heard

Downtown Dartmouth Heritage Conservation District

On May 13, 2025, Halifax Regional Council initiated a process to establish a new Heritage Conservation District (HCD) in Downtown Dartmouth through the approval of the Downtown Dartmouth HCD Background Study. The public engagement process was subsequently launched in September 2025.

As part of this process, a public information meeting was held on October 2, 2025, at Alderney Landing Farmer's Market. A survey was also available through the Engage Halifax website from September 9 to October 20, 2025.



**Help shape the
future of downtown
Dartmouth**

Join the conversation about the proposed
Heritage Conservation District.

Approximately 130+ residents attended the open house and provided feedback on the background study and proposed district boundaries. Residents were advised of the session through a mail out and newspaper advertisement.

Written and verbal feedback collected at the open house is summarized below. Please note that while all input has been carefully reviewed and considered, not every comment or suggestion can be addressed or implemented through the HCD process.

1. Boundaries and Contributing Properties

Several participants suggested that staff explore potential HCD boundary changes that include properties on Wentworth Street, King Street, North Street, Edward Street, and the opposite side of Portland Street, noting cohesive streetscapes and historic building forms. Some respondents also suggested developing design guidelines for adjacent lots outside the district (heights, setbacks) to ensure compatible transitions. Additional feedback included requests to consider including more HRM parkland such as Sinnot Hill, Shore Road, and Marine Railway.

2. Heritage Conservation & Adaptive Reuse

Many residents felt that grants or financial incentives are necessary to assist property owners in using historically appropriate materials, and considerations should be made to allow alternative materials (e.g., aluminum-clad wood windows). A few participants also expressed support for the rehabilitation of non-contributing properties to improve overall district character.

It was further noted that placemaking, interpretive signage, and landscaping could serve as important public benefits for adaptive reuse projects, particularly those that enhance public access to heritage buildings. Some participants suggested that discretionary applications, such as site plan approvals, could be used to encourage the retention of multiple heritage buildings.

3. Development and Policy Considerations

Overly restrictive setbacks or setbacks were identified as potentially limiting opportunities for small-scale infill development on narrow lots. Some participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that future heritage requirements do not conflict with the Centre Plan goals for densification. Heritage protection needs to be balanced with opportunities for creative, human-scale development and mixed-use growth.

4. Cultural and Historical Narrative

Participants emphasized the importance of the plan to include diverse histories, such as Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotian, Acadian, and other equity-deserving communities. Cultural landscapes, burial grounds, and sites of historical significance (e.g., Dartmouth Cove, Starr Park, Greenvale) were identified as requiring protection; however, many of these areas extend beyond the scope and authority of the HCD. Participants noted a desire for interpretive signage and information plaques to highlight historical stories and residents.

5. Community & Implementation Considerations

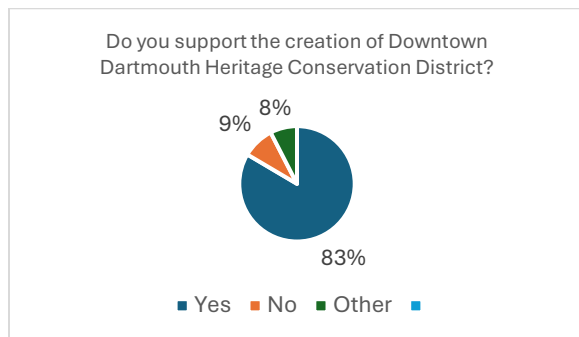
Concerns about potential 'red tape' were made with an emphasis on clear communication with property owners regarding HCD requirements. Participants support flexibility to accommodate growth, accessibility upgrades, and sensitive renovations.

Online Survey – September 9 – October 20, 2025

Between September 9 and October 20, 2025, a total of 202 people completed the online survey, and 208 visited the project website.

Most respondents do not live, work, operate a business, or own property within the proposed district boundaries. However, 94.5% indicated that preserving heritage and historical features in Downtown Dartmouth is somewhat to very important, and the

majority support the establishment of the Downtown Dartmouth Heritage Conservation District.



Most respondents support adaptive reuse of historic buildings, improved heritage signage and wayfinding, and enhanced streetscapes, viewing these initiatives as key to celebrating local history, strengthening community identity, and enhancing the district's character.

Survey respondents identified the key benefits of establishing the district as preserving historic buildings and streetscapes (80%), reducing demolitions (42%), and enhancing neighbourhood pride and identity (33%). They also highlighted the value of financial incentives for property owners, potential boosts to tourism and local business, and broad support for incorporating environmentally sustainable development practices.

Residents emphasized Dartmouth's small-town charm and strong historical connections. Key themes include:

- **Architecture and Streetscapes:** Respondents value Dartmouth's diverse architectural styles, intricate detailing, and cohesive historic

streetscapes, including pre-war homes, commercial buildings, churches, and public buildings. Features such as stained glass, ornamentation, cedar siding and other traditional materials contribute to Dartmouth's distinctive, small-town character.

- **Heritage and History:** Respondents highlighted the importance of conveying Dartmouth's founding and early settlement, including Quakers, Mi'kmaq, Irish, and African Nova Scotian communities. They emphasized the need to address sovereignty, colonial impacts, and involving Mi'kmaq elders and historians, ensuring heritage storytelling centers Mi'kmaq authority and perspective. There is continued interest in highlighting connections between waterways, trade, industry, and settlement patterns, including the historic Shubenacadie Canal. Lesser-known histories surrounding racial exclusion, industrial labour, working women, and small-scale community stories should also be featured, ensuring heritage interpretation is culturally inclusive and historically accurate.
- **Walkability and Public Realm:** The human-scaled streetscapes, pedestrian-friendly layout, green spaces, and waterfront access were repeatedly mentioned as enhancing livability and essential to preserve.
- **Community and Vibrancy:** The blend of residential, commercial, and institutional uses contributes to

Dartmouth's strong sense of community. Respondents value the "small-town" feel, local businesses, and spaces for social interaction.

- **Adaptive Reuse and Public Access:** Respondents appreciate the continued use and adaptation of historic buildings for mixed-use, restaurants, galleries, housing, and community purposes, which reinforces their cultural and social value. There is interest in ensuring heritage contributes to tourism, public engagement, and inclusive community experiences. Adaptive reuse and interpretive programming enhance public access and engagement with heritage sites.
- **Distinct Identity:** Respondents emphasized Dartmouth's unique character compared to other urban centres, highlighting its charm, scenic qualities, and waterfront connections. They supported interpretive signage, public art, and plaques to tell the stories of buildings, people, and events, including Leighton Dillman's contributions to Dartmouth Common, oral histories, family stories, the Halifax Explosion, and war years (American Revolution, Napoleonic Wars, WWI, WWII).
- **Environmental and Cultural Benefits:** Mature trees, parks, and open spaces contribute to both heritage value and quality of life. The need for protection of historic trees and parks were identified by respondents (72%).

Concerns were raised that heritage protection is long overdue and that district boundaries may need to be re-evaluated. Housing affordability, gentrification, and real estate speculation were also noted, underscoring the need to balance heritage preservation with social equity and economic sustainability. The HCD will provide guidance on heritage conservation, and we recognize that additional measures beyond its scope will be needed to address the full range of community priorities. Some members of the public suggest that effective HCD implementation may require enforceable guidelines, grants, and coordination with property owners.

Respondents support heritage preservation but want it balanced, inclusive, and well-resourced. There is a call for the Downtown Dartmouth Heritage Conservation District to protect history while remaining flexible, economically viable, and socially inclusive.