



OAKVILLE

REPORT

Planning and Development Council

Meeting Date: April 4, 2022

FROM: Planning Services Department

DATE: March 29, 2022

SUBJECT: **Bronte Cemetery Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report**

LOCATION: 32 West Street

WARD: Ward 1 Page 1

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report, attached as Appendix A to the report dated March 29, 2022 from Planning Services, be endorsed; and,
2. That Bronte Cemetery be recognized as a significant cultural heritage landscape and move into Phase Three: Implementation of Protection Measures.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The Bronte Cemetery was designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act* in 1987 by By-law 1987-294.
- Heritage Planning staff have been working on updating By-law 1987-294 including additional research analysis to ensure the property meets the requirements of Ontario Regulation 9/06, which was introduced into legislation many years after Bronte Cemetery was designated as a property of cultural heritage value or interest.
- The new research and analysis for Bronte Cemetery has revealed that the property meets the criteria for a significant cultural heritage landscape.
- Heritage Planning staff recommend that Bronte Cemetery move into Phase Three of the Cultural Heritage Landscape Strategy: Implementation of Protection Measures in order to create a new designation by-law for the property and a conservation plan for the cultural heritage landscape.

BACKGROUND:

The Livable Oakville Plan states that the town will protect and preserve cultural heritage landscapes by utilizing applicable legislation. Cultural heritage landscape provisions are included in the *Ontario Heritage Act*, the *Planning Act* and the *Provincial Policy Statement, 2020*.

In January 2014, the Town of Oakville adopted the Cultural Heritage Landscapes Strategy, which was created based on industry best practices. The purpose of the Strategy was to provide a framework for the identification and protection of cultural heritage landscapes in the Town of Oakville and direction for protecting and managing these resources for the future. Recognizing that any landscape that has been deliberately modified by humans is a cultural landscape, the Strategy expands on that definition, indicating that only those cultural landscapes that have a deep connection with the history of the community and are valued by the community can be identified as 'cultural heritage landscapes'.

In July 2015, Laurie Smith Heritage Consulting (LSHC) was retained to provide consulting services for the Phase One Inventory. LSHC's report, entitled *Cultural Heritage Landscape Strategy Implementation – Phase 1: Summary Report*, identified 63 properties. Eight were identified as high priority properties, sixteen as medium priority properties, twenty-seven as low priority properties and twelve properties for which no further action was recommended. Properties identified as being in the high and medium priority categories were deemed to be vulnerable to change (development pressures, natural forces, and neglect); to have insufficient existing protection; and/or, to have a high level of cultural heritage value or interest. Bronte Cemetery was identified as a medium priority property.

Although Bronte Cemetery is protected pursuant to By-law 1987-294, the standard at the time of its designation was such that only a very brief description of the property's historic and architectural value and interest, and a legal description of the property was required to justify designation. There was no requirement within the OHA to include a statement of cultural heritage value or interest, nor a list of heritage attributes. Consequently, in May 2021, Planning Services staff began a Phase Two assessment of the Bronte Cemetery property, in order to update the 1987 designation by-law, and to determine if the property qualified as a cultural heritage landscape.

TECHNICAL & PUBLIC COMMENTS:*Phase Two: Research and Assessment*

The Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report for Bronte Cemetery has been prepared by Heritage Planning staff.

The property has been considered as a comprehensive layered unit, including all structures and other potential cultural heritage resources on site (including known or potential archaeological resources). Background research included consultation with Town Cemeteries staff and descendants of several of the families described in the report; the Land Registry Office; the Ontario Genealogical Society; Bronte Historical Society; Oakville Historical Society; Library and Archives Canada; and, Oakville Public Library (central branch). It also included the review of primary and secondary records held by these organizations including their archival collections; Town of Oakville files; and, a review of current and historical aerial imagery and mapping.

Site visits were undertaken by Planning Services staff in June and November 2021, in order to document current conditions and features of the property and relevant surrounding properties.

Bronte Cemetery is an Organically Evolved (Relict) cultural heritage landscape that has significant religious and spiritual value to the families of those who rest there, to Bronte, and to Oakville as a whole. The Bronte Cemetery cultural heritage landscape is a vernacular rural cemetery. Although it predates the rural, or garden, cemetery movement by a few decades, the Bronte Cemetery CHL is significant as an early 19th century cemetery that, throughout its evolution, has incorporated elements associated with the movement.

To mitigate overcrowding and health concerns, rural cemeteries were typically located between one to five miles (1.6 to 8 km) outside of city limits. Bronte Cemetery was established just west of the historical limits of Bronte Village. Bronte Cemetery is an inactive cemetery; meaning that burial plots are no longer being sold and only those who can prove they have historic interment rights are being laid to rest in the cemetery. The limitation on new burials, and the cemetery's pattern of widely spaced markers and monuments, gathered in clusters with large expanses of lawn between, is indicative of the fact that the CHL is a place where an evolutionary process has substantially come to an end.

Bronte Cemetery cultural heritage landscape has design and physical value for its collection of early and representative markers and monuments which display a variety of materials and styles typical of 19th, 20th and 21st century monuments, including some that display a high degree of craftsmanship and artistic merit.

The Bronte Cemetery cultural heritage landscape also has design and physical value for its natural heritage features, including a variety of large, mature trees; its open expanses of lawn; and, the steep, treed slope overlooking the north shore of Lake Ontario. Plantings, such as large clusters of ornamental grasses and hostas adorn some headstones.

The Bronte Cemetery cultural heritage landscape has historical and associative value as one of the earliest cemeteries in Trafalgar Township. The first documented burial occurred in 1823, roughly seven years before the land was deeded to the Cemetery Trustees, and eleven years before Bronte Village was established. The CHL is significant as the burial site of many of the village's earliest settler families, including some of the area's earliest Black settlers. Many of these early settlers played significant roles in the development of the community, including the Sovereign family who provided the land upon which the cemetery was established, and who deemed that the cemetery was to be open to people of "all orders, sects, nations and parties". Other significant early settler families who rest in the cemetery include, but are not limited to, the Adams, Belyea, Dorland, Howell, and Triller families.

As a place inextricably linked to the history of the Bronte Village, the Bronte Cemetery cultural heritage landscape defines, maintains, and supports the historic character of the area. It is physically, functionally, and historically linked to its surroundings; and, it is a landmark within the community.

The Bronte Cemetery cultural heritage landscape's combination of natural heritage attributes, and its variety and placement of markers and monuments has evolved into a peaceful, bucolic setting. It is a place where families of the deceased can grieve, remember and reflect, and where the public can enjoy the outdoors amidst art and sculpture, which historically was often an opportunity only available to the wealthy.

IMPLEMENTATION:

The Bronte Cemetery Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report was reviewed and endorsed by the Heritage Oakville Advisory Committee at their meeting on March 22, 2022. If Council proceeds with protection under the *Ontario Heritage Act* for the cultural heritage landscape of Bronte Cemetery, a Cultural Heritage Landscape Conservation Plan would also be required as part of Phase Three of the Cultural Heritage Landscape Strategy Implementation.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

There is no legislated public process for the creation of Cultural Heritage Evaluation Reports; however, Heritage Planning staff have liaised with relevant community stakeholders to receive information from the public in order to ensure complete and thorough research was undertaken.

(B) FINANCIAL

The implementation of Phase Three: Protection Measures for the Bronte Cemetery will proceed when time and resources are allocated. The project is currently not funded.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

Planning staff have worked with staff in the Parks and Open Space Department on this report.

(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal(s) to:

- provide outstanding service to our residents and businesses
- enhance our cultural environment
- be the most livable town in Canada

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

A Climate Emergency was declared by Council in June 2019 for the purposes of strengthening the Oakville community commitment in reducing carbon footprints. The conservation of Bronte Cemetery as a cultural heritage landscape protects a valuable natural space that includes mature trees and vegetation and a habitat for wildlife. The protection of this significant area through the cultural heritage landscape conservation strategy therefore supports the town's climate initiatives.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Bronte Cemetery Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report

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