

REPORT

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING

MEETING DATE: JANUARY 15, 2018

FROM: Planning Services Department

DATE: December 15, 2017

SUBJECT: Residential Character Study

LOCATION: Livable Oakville Plan Area

WARD: Town wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the report entitled *Residential Character Study*, dated December 15, 2017 be received.

KEY FACTS:

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

- The Residential Character Study assessed the residential areas south of Dundas Street, within the Livable Oakville Plan area.
- The Residential Character Study was undertaken to inform the future Residential Policy Review component of the five-year Official Plan Review, as well as other implementing documents and associated planning processes.
- The Residential Character Study is a 'fact finding' exercise at the town-wide scale which sets the foundation for a more detailed analysis of specific geographic areas.
- Staff presented the terms of reference for the Residential Character Study to the Livable Oakville Council Sub-committee on June 12, 2017.
- Staff presented an update to the Livable Oakville Council Sub-committee on November 6, 2017 summarizing the public feedback received.
- This report provides an overview of the Residential Character Study, attached as Appendix A, and includes further detail on the public engagement and feedback received throughout the study process.

BACKGROUND:

The *Livable Oakville Plan* defines 'character' as "*the collective qualities and characteristics that distinguish a particular area or neighbourhood*". Maintaining, protecting and enhancing the character of existing residential areas is an objective of the residential land use policies (S.11.a).

Staff initiated the Residential Character Study in January 2017 to further examine what constitutes residential character and to better understand the collective qualities and characteristics identified in the official plan definition. Obtaining greater insight into what character means will assist staff in evaluating the existing Livable Oakville Plan policies and other implementing documents and processes.

The purpose of the Residential Character Study (Appendix A) is to:

- assess the existing character within the residential areas of the town, south of Dundas Street
- understand what elements and qualities influencing character are important to residents
- review the existing policies and procedures in the context of the character analysis and feedback received
- provide recommended direction for improvements to policy, design direction, zoning and other processes based on the findings of the study

The study process was composed of four stages and included a number of opportunities for public input and feedback.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement is a key component of the Residential Character Study. A number of community engagement opportunities have been available for residents across the town to be involved and provide staff with input related to residential character, including walking tours, open houses and an online survey. The feedback received throughout the study process has informed the recommendations of the Residential Character Study (Appendix A).

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WALKING TOURS

Four walking tours were held in August 2017 with residents' associations to introduce the study, discuss aspects of character in a residential setting, consider their opinions and share knowledge. Representatives from all associations and all Ward Councillors were invited to attend any or all of the walks via email invitation. The routes of the walks and the handout provided to participants are included as Appendix A. Overall, 15 representatives from six residents' associations and five Councillors attended the walks.

Some of the key observations heard from the groups were:

- Maintaining existing separation distance between buildings (side yard setbacks)
- Larger front yard setbacks allow higher buildings to blend in on a street
- Road profile (presence or lack of sidewalk(s), curbs, soft shoulder [swales]) contributing to the look and feel of a street because it directly influences the interface or crossing point between the public and private realms
- Importance of vegetation, landscaping and trees to the character of a street

These group walking tours were a mutual learning experience for both staff and participants, as it provided staff an opportunity to listen first hand to the associations and residents. There was dialogue about architecture, design, the planning process, and what elements within the residential environment were thought to influence and establish character.

OPEN HOUSES

Six open houses were held across the town to introduce the study, discuss findings from the background research and analysis and receive feedback from residents on what elements and qualities they felt were important and that contribute to the character of their neighbourhood.

The open houses were held at the following locations:

Oakville Public Library – Central Branch, September 13, 2017
River Oaks Community Centre, September 14, 2017
Glen Abbey Community Centre, September 18, 2017
Oakville Public Library – Clearview Branch, September 19, 2017
QEPCCC, September 21, 2017
Town Hall, September 22, 2017

In total, 25 residents attended the open houses and the material presented is included in Appendix B. Notification included:

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- The Oakville Beaver;
- Direct email invitation to all residents' associations (to distribute to membership);
- Corporate Communication's e-newsletter;
- Featured as a main "hero" on the oakville.ca webpage;
- Social media, including Twitter and Facebook; and,
- Residential Character Study project webpage.

Staff heard a mix of comments regarding residential character. Some residents had no concerns and questioned the need to study character, while others felt the town needed to have more control to ensure that changes in neighbourhoods are minimized. Several residents identified concern about replacement housing, particularly in increasing from one to two storeys, as having a negative impact on the existing character. Also noted was the importance of retaining mature trees in redevelopment as they contributed positively to the existing character.

A summary of the written comments received includes:

- Importance of green front yards (softscape) and trees contributing to the character of a street; and conversely too much pavement (hardscape) negatively affects the character
- Policy that existing neighbourhood character is maintained is very limiting, some areas of the town need to be updated
- Increased side yard setbacks for new builds of two storeys
- Importance of street trees
- Concern about the minor variance process
- New builds may or may not fit in with the existing homes, newer houses are larger and take up more space on a lot

ONLINE SURVEY

Based on the background work and input received during the walking tours, staff developed an online survey to seek further input from residents. 509 online survey responses were received throughout September 2017. Within the survey, residents were asked questions about what aspects of character they felt were important.

Three ranking questions were included and the results are summarized below:
 "How important to your neighbourhood's character is..."

	Building Type & Height	Trees & Vegetation	Road Type
Very Important	66%	88%	57%
Important	23%	10%	30%
Neutral	6%	1.6%	10%
Somewhat Important	3%	0.2%	3%
Not Important	2%	0.2%	1%

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When asked to identify other elements that contribute to their neighbourhood's character and any other concerns, 18% valued landscaped yards and trees. 17% identified setbacks and the siting of homes on a lot as important, 11% thought of massing or built form of replacement homes as an issue and 9% identified building heights as a concern. A large proportion of the responses were left blank in this section of the survey, or noted issues unrelated to the Residential Character Study. Over 6% of the respondents identified they had no concerns and were happy with their neighbourhoods. 10% of the identified concerns were related to property maintenance and 9% were concerns about the architectural style of homes.

OPEN HOUSE FOR DRAFT RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER STUDY DOCUMENT

A final open house was held on November 23, 2017 to obtain input from the public on the Draft Residential Character Study document. The document was also posted online and the public was encouraged to submit comments until December 10, 2017, which was extended to December 14, 2017.

The open house was advertised in the Oakville Beaver, on oakville.ca, and on the town's social media. Two emails were sent to all residents' associations and those who requested to be notified of study updates (approximately 340 individuals) to promote the open house and to review draft study document and encourage feedback.

Twelve residents attended the open house, six residents emailed their comments on the draft document, and two residents' associations submitted comments on the draft document. These comments are included as Appendix B.

While there was general support for the Residential Character Study, some of the comments indicate desire for a more detailed analysis with recommendations that outline specific policy, regulation or process changes, particularly zoning by-law changes. There were also comments outside the scope of planning, related to topics such as changes to street lighting.

CONCLUSION:

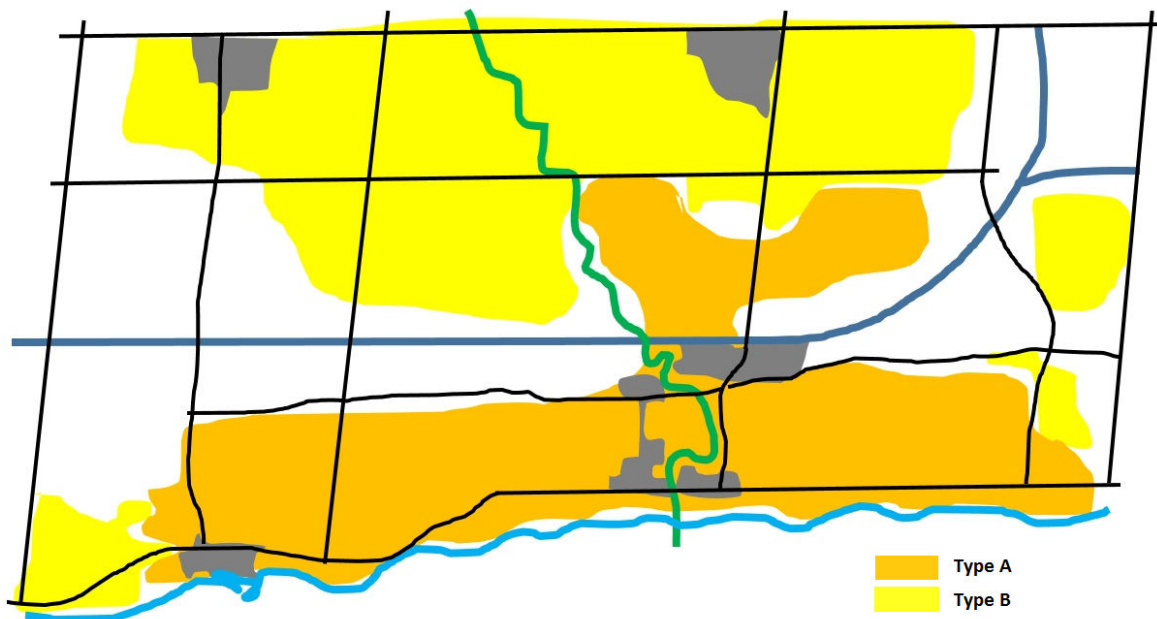
The intent of the Residential Character Study is to better understand the meaning of residential character within a town-wide Oakville context, through quantitative and qualitative background research and obtaining public feedback.

The findings that have emerged from the study are intended as input into other upcoming studies and process reviews, namely the residential policy review component of the five-year official plan review.

The Residential Character Study is a 'fact finding' exercise at the town-wide scale which sets the foundation for more detailed analysis in the upcoming residential policy review. It is at this next stage that specific changes, such as zoning by-law amendments, may be recommended to implement the clear policy direction. Staff discovered it was impractical to conduct detailed analysis town-wide and recommend this be considered in specific geographic areas in the future.

Through a better understanding of what 'character' means and which aspects of character are important to residents, staff determined that dwelling siting, massing and height, along with soft landscaping and trees, are important elements that contribute to residential character in Oakville.

Staff also identified that the town's residential areas can be conceptually divided into two broad character types – Type A and Type B. A more fulsome discussion of the findings is provided within the Residential Character Study, Appendix A.



The recommended directions from the study outline a range of options to clarify and align the direction around residential character currently contained in the Official Plan policies and the design direction in the Design Guidelines for Stable Residential Communities. In addition, the study included recommended direction to further explore opportunities for zoning modifications and to examine potential planning and development process changes.

These recommended directions include:

Official Plan

- Review the existing Residential Land Use policies in the Official Plan to ensure that building siting, massing, height, landscaping and trees are identified as important elements contributing to the existing character of the residential areas.
- Consider incorporating policy language in the official plan and design documents which clarifies that existing residential character is to be respected.

Zoning By-law

- Review the existing Residential zones within the Type A areas, to ensure that the regulations related to setbacks, height and landscaping are appropriate to align with and respect the existing character.
- Explore options, within the Type A areas, for potential design review for new construction and large additions to ensure that the residential character of the existing streetscape is addressed through the proposed development review.

Urban Design

- Review the Design Guidelines for Stable Residential Communities, in conjunction with Official Plan and Zoning By-law reviews, to ensure consistency in design direction and terminology as an implementing document.
- Explore options, within Type A areas, to undertake design-specific development review prior to building permit issuance for new construction and large additions.

Committee of Adjustment

- Review the committee of adjustment process and explore the option of additional prescribed criteria for the consideration of minor variances, as permitted by the *Planning Act*, as amended.

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CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

Consultation has been an integral part of the Residential Character Study, with opportunities for public engagement throughout Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the study process.

(B) FINANCIAL

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

There are no impacts to other department with this study, however going forward, if the recommended directions are pursued, various Town departments will be consulted and involved.

(D) CORPORATE AND/OR DEPARTMENT STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal to:

- continuously improve our programs and services
- be accountable in everything we do
- be innovative in everything we do
- be the most livable town in Canada

(E) COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

The Residential Character Study will work to support and enhance the social, economic and built environment of the community.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Residential Character Study

Appendix B – Comments received on Draft Residential Character Study

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