

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**  
***HOW DOES A HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT AFFECT YOU?***

***What is a heritage conservation district?***

A heritage conservation district is an area designated by a municipal council because of its unique architectural or historical character. The purpose of the designation is to preserve the character of the district for the benefit of the current and future generations. The legal authority is spelled out in Nova Scotia's *Heritage Property Act* (see especially s. 19A) and the regulations made under the Act.

Every heritage conservation district has a heritage plan setting standards for demolition, building, and streetscapes. The plan is approved following community consultations. The plan limits, restricts, or regulates some kinds of building, demolitions, and substantial exterior changes. The plan may also set forth a timeline and/or standards for future improvements to public spaces to be undertaken by the municipality.

***Why do heritage conservation districts tend to be very popular with their residents and property owners?***

A heritage conservation district gives an area some assurance and stability against sudden and incompatible changes. It enhances community pride by giving official recognition to rare and unique historical "treasures." It stimulates interest in local history and tends to encourage dialogue among neighbours. Because of their neighbourhood's special status, and the newly found interest in the neighbourhood's eclectic character that comes with that special status, residents of heritage districts often enthusiastically participate in walking and other forms of active transportation. This tends to make heritage conservation districts very safe and pleasant communities.

***If the neighbourhood is designated as a heritage conservation district, does that mean that my property will be expropriated?***

Certainly not. Ownership is not affected. Your property remains private property. You are definitely under no obligation to provide public access, inside or outside.

***Would a heritage conservation district prevent me from altering my property?***

The heritage conservation district plan will outline some substantial alterations that would require an application to the municipality. Examples would likely include demolition, changing an exterior from wood to stone, adding an additional storey, and building a balcony.

It is envisioned, however, that the heritage conservation district plan for Sydney's North End will give owners flexibility. The purpose is to allow compatible changes and beautification, but to restrict those developments that stand out as sharply out of character in such a way as to compromise neighbours' enjoyment of their properties and their historic neighbourhood.

***If I am within a heritage conservation district, do I need the municipality's approval to convert my property from one kind of use to another – for example, from a house to a shop or a convent to a condominium?***

Not necessarily. There may be some zoning restrictions, as there would be in any neighbourhood in order to minimize disruption to other property owners and residents. But heritage conservation districts generally encourage (not discourage) adaptive re-use. If an institutional building, for instance, is no longer needed for its current use, a heritage conservation district plan would usually make it easy to convert to another use, as long as the heritage integrity of the exterior of the building is maintained.

***Would any interior renovations or alterations be restricted?***

No.

***If my building is destroyed, would I have to rebuild it as it was?***

Again, the answer is no.

***By owning a property in a heritage conservation district, would it be more difficult for me to get insurance?***

There have been some issues in other places with insurance companies being reluctant to enter into agreements for “old” or “historic” properties. The Province of Nova Scotia’s Heritage Division recently partnered with the Halifax Regional Municipality, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, and the Nova Scotia Historic Places Initiative to produce a brochure that addresses the misconceptions surrounding this issue. It concludes that the heritage status of a property should not have any effect on insurance premiums. Here in CBRM, municipal staff organized a meeting in November 2006 with North End property owners and insurance experts. There was satisfaction that a heritage conservation district would have no impact on insurance policies, the ability to obtain insurance, or insurance premiums.

***Would a heritage conservation district lower my property value?***

Professor Robert Shipley of the University of Waterloo has studied the impact on property values of heritage designations in Ontario (*International Journal of Heritage Studies* 6:1, 2000). In the overwhelming majority of cases the impact was neutral or positive. A heritage conservation district does, to some extent, enhance the desirability of a neighbourhood. Even in a small city like Sydney, there is a market for places with “character.” And heritage properties are like “certified antiques,” attracting buyers because of their distinctiveness or rarity.