

City of Owen Sound, Ontario

Located in South-western Ontario, the City of Owen Sound (population 22,000) is the largest urban community in Grey and Bruce Counties. It is situated on the Pottawatomi and Sydenham Rivers and features a large harbour on an inlet of Georgian Bay, which is nestled in a valley of Niagara Escarpment limestone. The area—first inhabited by the Ojibway people—was surveyed in 1815 and established Owen Sound in 1841. For much of its history it served as a major port with access to the upper Great Lakes and major rail lines. Farming and tourism remain integral parts of the local economy.



Billy Bishop Home and Museum, National Historic Site

For a small city, Owen Sound has made an impressive commitment to the conservation and promotion of its heritage, not just to mark its past, but to enhance the quality of life and sense of place of its residents. Points of interest include four conservation areas, a City beach and waterfront trail system, historic Harrison Park, an active Farmer's Market as well as museums and archives.

The Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee has been actively protecting the city's considerable stock of heritage buildings and landscapes since 1977. The Heritage Register, created that same year as an inventory, now contains over 150 properties, 30 of which are designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The Heritage Register was formally adopted by Council in 2006. It includes an impressive array of Second Empire, Queen Anne Revival and neo-Georgian housing stock, complemented by several stone churches and many well-preserved commercial blocks in the historic downtown as well as industrial architecture. The City has shown leadership by designating seven City-owned properties, including the Carnegie Library, the Old Courthouse, the CPR Station and the Billy Bishop Home and Museum.



Downtown Owen Sound

The City has employed a half-time Heritage Planning Coordinator since 1992 to develop and implement the Heritage Work Plan; to field heritage-related questions from staff, developers, property owners and the public; and to advise Council on urban planning applications.

Owen Sound's reputation as the "Scenic City" is upheld by the network of cultural landscapes, including the expansive 100-year-old Harrison Park, comprising more than forty hectares of streams, trails, gardens, structures, playgrounds, forest and green space in the heart of the city.

A Façade and Structural Improvement Program was established in 1999, which includes design and procedural guidelines, has provided almost \$375,000 in financial support to 60 projects. \$50,000 was allocated in 2012 for this program. Similarly, a Heritage Property Tax Relief Program was started in 2009 that provides heritage property owners with a 20% refund on the municipal and educational portion of their property taxes. Eligible property owners must also enter into a Heritage Conservation and Maintenance Agreement with the City, which details the municipal expectations for the use of the Refund.

Though it is a smaller city, Owen Sound is not immune to the pressures of development. The Official Plan stipulates policies and goals and objectives to guide the development and redevelopment of lands within the city, including those relevant to cultural heritage (creation of Heritage Conservation Districts), and specific to the conservation of property deemed of heritage value or interest, stipulating that, "Significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes within the City, which are valued by the community, shall be conserved for the benefit of present and future generations." For instance, the City has created the Harbour and Downtown Urban Design/Master Plan, which provides guidance for municipal planners, elected officials and developers in planning and approving redevelopment in the area while maintaining its heritage and unique character. Similarly, a zoning bylaw provides "alternative building design or building materials for properties designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

In terms of new construction, the City has developed Architectural Control Guidelines to ensure proposed new residential developments do not have a negative impact on heritage areas. In the case of the planned subdivision of Greenridge, located near an existing historic neighbourhood, guidelines stipulated that new housing and streetscape design must be in harmony with the existing community by including a variety of common elements, from housing with similar height and massing, rooflines and construction materials, to window design and attached front porches.

The community takes much pride in the history and heritage of the region. An interpretive plaque program, began in 1998, celebrates the rich heritage of the community. To date, 46 plaques have been positioned along urban walkways to raise public awareness about local history and heritage. Painted murals based on historic photographs

celebrating the city's past can be seen on the side of City Hall and on the façades of some local stores. Interpretive banners have also been installed downtown focusing on themes such as "Historic Owen Sound" and "Local Heroes." Much of Owen Sound and the region's history are explained through self-guided and guided walking tours, and also regional driving tours. For the past 10 years Owen Sound has been participating in Ontario's Doors Open program, providing free access to buildings and spaces within and around the city.

As seen through efforts by the Municipal Government and community, Owen Sound has a longstanding, active commitment to the conservation and promotion of the city's heritage.

View more photos with great 'Before and After' shots on our [Flickr site!](#)

The City of Owen Sound was nominated by the Owen Sound Community Planning & Heritage Advisory Committee.