

Heritage Conservation Workshop

City of Burlington

“I really think we were much closer to being in **violent agreement than not. It’s just the way we were going about it that is the crux of the problem.”**

- Resident

“Participants were able to learn from one another in the **open discussion format, and walk away with something new to think about.”**

- Resident

How do we celebrate and enhance the cultural and heritage resources of Burlington while respecting individual and community needs and rights? This was the key question Dialogue Partners worked to answer as they supported the successful planning and implementation of a Heritage Conservation workshop. This workshop was designed to engage residents and stakeholders and get input for future decision making by the City Administration and Council.

What happened?

Partnering with the City, we hosted a Heritage Conservation workshop intended to address major controversy and outrage over heritage designation of homes. Up to this point, the City focused on providing the facts and proven research correlating property values and designation and asked for public feedback on the process for owners to have their homes removed from the Municipal Register. The conflict emerged as concerns ran much deeper and encompassed a host of other issues associated with heritage conservation in the City. Stakeholder interviews and an open public survey helped us understand the diversity of these concerns. Using an open space methodology, card-storming and small group discussions, participants identified and discussed what was most important to them - criteria for designation, property rights, home values, renovation and demolition restrictions, legislative responsibilities, incentives and support. Following the workshop, the City shared with the public a “What Was Said” report, audit of the state of heritage conservation, and recommended next steps.

Things we learned along the way.

Tread carefully with facts: Facts don’t always correlate with emotions. Instead they often ignite heated situations, rather than diffuse them. Participants wanted the City to work with them to find solutions, rather than feeling like heritage designation was being forced on them. We needed an approach that supported people to express their emotion and how they’ve been impacted before they

**78% of participants
felt expectations had
been met for sharing
issues and concerns
and identifying
possible solutions.**

would be ready and able to talk about their ideas for change – a values-based discussion.

Focus on talking instead of telling: Bringing together such a large group of people at one time is an incredible gift. This time is valuable, and it needs to be used wisely. People will always have questions, but rather than responding to them, which frequently takes us back to facts and positions, we wrote them all down. Following the workshop a Q&A report was shared publicly so that our time together was spent talking rather than telling.

Final Thoughts

Many people came to the workshop upset, bitter and shaking with rage, and left feeling like they had been heard and valued, grateful for the opportunity and that meaningful change would come as a result.