

Part One (of Three)



CULTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake | Royal George Theatre



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COVER PAGE (FIGURE 1. VIEW OF THE ROYAL GEORGE THEATRE AND ADJACENT PROPERTIES ALONG THE QUEEN STREET FRONTAGE)



The offices of mCcallumSather are situated upon the on the Traditional Territories of Indigenous peoples who have been stewards of this land since time immemorial.

In Hamilton, we recognize the Traditional Territories of the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabeg peoples, lands covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and adjacent to the Haldimand Treaty territory.

In Waterloo, we acknowledge the Haldimand Tract, which encompasses six miles on either side of the Grand River, and is the Traditional Territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples, also covered by the Upper Canada and Haldimand Treaties.

In Toronto, we acknowledge the ancestral and Traditional Territories of the Ojibway, the Anishnabe, and in particular, the Mississaugas of the Credit, whose territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties.

Today, Ontario is home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island (North America) and we recognize that we must do more to learn about the rich history of this land so that we can better understand our roles as residents, neighbours, partners and stewards of these lands and waters.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This report was prepared by mcCallumSather for the proposed redevelopment of the property municipally known as 85 Queen Street, located within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District (HCD) in the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, a designated National Historic Site (NHS). The project encompasses four (4) properties:

- 85 Queen Street (Royal George Theatre)
- 79 Queen Street (one-and-a-half-storey commercial building)
- 178 Victoria Street (two-storey residential building and small barn)
- 188 Victoria Street (two-storey commercial building).

mcCallumSather was retained by Shaw Festival Canada to prepare a Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (CHIA) report to evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed redevelopment on the Royal George Theatre, surrounding properties, and the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, including the Downtown Character Area and the National Historic Site designation.

Pre-consultation meetings were held with the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake on January 19 and November 2, 2023, where comments were provided by Heritage Planners Denise Horne and Sumra Zia. Based on this feedback, refinements to the proposed design were made, including revisions to built form, massing, materiality, and the relationship of the building to the public realm to better address the District's heritage character.

In early 2025, key project milestones and updated submission timelines were shared by the Client, which include:

- May 19, 2025 – Zoning Submission (requiring updates to supporting reports)
- July 8, 2025 – Town Council Meeting: Zoning Review
- July 9, 2025 – Proposed Heritage Review Meeting
- Late July 2025 – Site Plan Approval (SPA) Submission
- October 2025 – Demolition Permit Submission
- February 2026 – Building Permit Submission

As part of the revised design, several project updates have been confirmed to improve compatibility with the heritage context and support long-term sustainability and accessibility goals. The total project budget has been refined to not exceed \$75,000,000. The overall building area has been reduced from 66,879 ft² (October 2023) to 51,081 ft² (May 2025), representing a 24% decrease in total floor area. Setbacks have been increased along the north, west, and south property lines to enhance spatial relationships with adjacent heritage properties. The basement level has been elevated by approximately three feet to address water table conditions and ensure long-term durability. The project retains its commitment to achieving Net Zero energy performance and Rick Hansen Foundation Gold Certification, reinforcing its objectives for environmental responsibility and universal accessibility.

The objective of this updated Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment is to provide an evaluation of the proposed development within this new project context, addressing the changes to the design, site strategy, and regulatory milestones to ensure continued protection and appropriate integration with the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District and its character-defining attributes.

This updated assessment builds upon previous findings, incorporates refinements based on the Client and municipal feedback, and provides further recommendations, mitigation measures, and a conservation approach to support the successful redevelopment of the site within its historic context.

Heritage Status

A previous heritage assessment of the subject properties determined that they satisfy the criteria set out under Ontario Regulation 9/06 for designation under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act (OHA). The four properties - 85 Queen Street (Royal George Theatre), 79 Queen Street, 178 Victoria Street, and 188 Victoria Street - are designated under Part V of the OHA and are located within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District (HCD).

These properties are also classified as 'B' Buildings within the HCD, reflecting their important contextual contribution to the character of the heritage district. Additionally, the properties are situated within the Downtown Heritage Character Area and are part of the Niagara-on-the-Lake National Historic Site, designated under the Historic Sites and Monuments Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. H-4).

A detailed evaluation of the Royal George Theatre has reaffirmed that it meets the criteria of Ontario Regulation 9/06, confirming its cultural heritage value and eligibility for designation.

In this context, careful consideration should be given to how the proposed redevelopment relates to the established heritage character of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District and its broader cultural landscape. The applicable design guidelines outlined in Section 5A.6, Heritage Conservation Guidelines, under Section 5A, Building - The Queen-Picton Business Area of the HCD Plan, form part of the framework relevant to the evaluation of the proposal.

Heritage Value

The Royal George Theatre and associated properties contribute to the character of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District primarily through their contextual and associative value, rather than through outstanding architectural or historical significance. While the buildings, particularly the Royal George Theatre, have undergone numerous alterations over time - resulting in diminished architectural integrity - they continue to serve as defining elements that help structure the Queen Street streetscape and reinforce the broader cultural identity of Niagara-on-the-Lake. The Royal George Theatre, despite significant modifications, remains a recognizable landmark that embodies characteristics of built vernacular heritage. Its relationship to the surrounding historic environment strengthens its contribution to the district's character. Based on this assessment, 85 Queen Street satisfies the Ontario Regulation 9/06 criteria for cultural heritage value, particularly through its contextual significance and structuring role within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.

Proposed Development

In April 2025, the Shaw Festival announced the planned redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre site. The existing theatre, which has experienced significant functional and accessibility challenges, will close following the 2025 season. The redevelopment will involve the construction of a new, larger theatre on the current site and adjacent properties, with modern accessibility, sustainability, and performance features integrated into the design. The project is estimated at \$75 million, supported by a \$35 million investment from the Ontario government. The new facility will increase seating capacity by approximately 20% and is targeted for completion in advance of the 2029 season. The redevelopment offers an opportunity to continue the site's cultural and community role within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District while addressing contemporary operational needs.

Impacts on Heritage Value

The proposed demolition of the existing buildings and the construction of a new structure have the potential to impact the heritage value of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. As such, the conservation approach should prioritize ensuring that the new development contributes meaningfully to the established streetscape and character of the heritage district. If appropriate mitigation measures are incorporated into the design, the new structure can achieve architectural compatibility and reinforce the visual and contextual relationship between the development, the heritage district, and the broader National Historic Site.

The redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre site presents an opportunity to reinterpret the property's longstanding contribution to the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, while meeting the accessibility, operational and functional requirements. If the demolition of the existing buildings proceeds, it should be approached in a way that supports a meaningful architectural dialogue with the historic streetscape, while preserving the theatre's commercial role within the community. Reconstruction of the theatre is recommended, given its enduring importance as a defining element of Queen Street and its role as a landmark within the heritage district.

As presented, the proposed development incorporates several conservation strategies that address the character of the heritage district and the relationship to adjacent heritage resources, including:

- Designing a new structure that is sympathetic to, yet distinguishable from, the original landmark through materiality and form;
- Contributing meaningfully to the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District and reinforcing the commercial streetscape;

- Ensuring compatibility with the form and character of surrounding properties and respecting the established heritage values of the district;
- Maintaining a continuous commercial use along the Queen Street frontage;
- Reinstating the theatre's primary entrance on Queen Street;
- Preserving the presence of the theatre through contemporary architectural reinterpretation, without replicating the original building's exact form, materiality, style, or detailing;
- Incorporating commercial functions in a manner that supports circulation patterns and maintains the pedestrian character of the area;
- Aligning with provincial and municipal heritage and urban planning policies;

Should these recommendations be considered in the design of the proposed development, minimal adverse impacts to the existing adjacent fabric and landscape are expected.

Conclusion

The proposed development introduces a new construction that is sympathetic to the adjacent properties and the character of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. In addition, the design explores opportunities to continue the longstanding use of the site in support of the theatre community, while conserving the property's associative and cultural values within the evolving heritage context.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (CHIA) has been prepared by mcCallumSather on behalf of the Shaw Festival, in support of the proposed redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre site and associated properties municipally known as 85 Queen Street, 79 Queen Street, 178 Victoria Street, and 188 Victoria Street, in the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. These properties are located within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District and are identified as contributing resources under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

The purpose of this CHIA is to assess the cultural heritage value or interest of the subject properties, evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed development on the heritage attributes of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, and recommend conservation strategies and mitigation measures that support a sensitive and compatible intervention. The assessment responds to the guiding principles of heritage conservation in Ontario and is grounded in the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (2010), the Provincial Policy Statement (2020), and relevant local planning instruments including the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Official Plan and the Queen-Picton HCD Plan (1986).

1.1 Scope of Work

The Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment forms part of a values-based conservation approach, recognizing that the significance of a historic place lies not only in its physical attributes, but also in its contextual, associative, and intangible values.

Within this framework, the CHIA aims to:

- Document and evaluate the cultural heritage value of the subject properties in relation to the Queen-Picton Heritage

Conservation District and the broader setting of the Niagara-on-the-Lake National Historic Site. Particular emphasis is placed on understanding the role of the Royal George Theatre as a cultural landmark.

- Identify potential direct and indirect impacts resulting from the proposed intervention, including impacts on the character-defining attributes of the heritage district. The assessment addresses impacts to spatial relationships, visual continuity, historic streetscapes, and the intangible cultural significance of the site.
- Frame a conservation strategy that enables compatible new use while retaining and reinforcing the site's heritage values. The approach aligns with the Standards and Guidelines principle of rehabilitation, which supports the sensitive adaptation of a historic place for a continuing or compatible contemporary use.
- Provide mitigation measures and recommendations to ensure that the proposed development respects the historic evolution of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, contributes meaningfully to its cultural identity, and reflects a respectful, contemporary response grounded in the district's authentic heritage character.

The project presents an opportunity not only to address contemporary functional needs, but also to reinforce the cultural and symbolic role of the theatre within the historic fabric of Niagara-on-the-Lake. By prioritizing respectful design, alignment with established conservation policies, and the enduring significance of place, this CHIA supports a path forward that maintains the character and vitality of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District while embracing its continued evolution.

1.2 Land Use & Zoning Maps

Municipal Address:

85 and 79 Queen Street, 178 and 188 Victoria Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario

Legal Description:

Part of Lots 57 and 58, Registered Plan 86, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Lot Area:

Approximately 2,854 square metres

Location and Boundaries:

The subject properties are located northeast of the intersection of Queen Street and Victoria Street, within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Context:

The property is situated within a predominantly commercial area along Queen Street:

- To the south, east, and west are commercial buildings, including restaurants, a medical clinic, and retail establishments.
- To the north are an Airbnb and an area of green open space.
- The properties contribute to the commercial fabric and structure the Business Area within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.

Official Plan Designation:

- 85 and 79 Queen Street: Queen-Picton Commercial
- 178 Victoria Street: Established Residential
- 188 Victoria Street: Queen-Picton Commercial

Zoning Description:

- 85 and 79 Queen Street: Queen-Picton Commercial (QPC) Zone
- 178 Victoria Street: Established Residential (ER) Zone
- 188 Victoria Street: Queen-Picton Commercial (QPC) Zone



FIGURE 2. AERIAL VIEW SHOWING THE LOCATION OF THE SUBJECT PROPERTY. (SOURCE: GOOGLE EARTH, WITH ANNOTATIONS BY MCCALLUMSATHER INDICATING PROPERTY BOUNDARIES.)

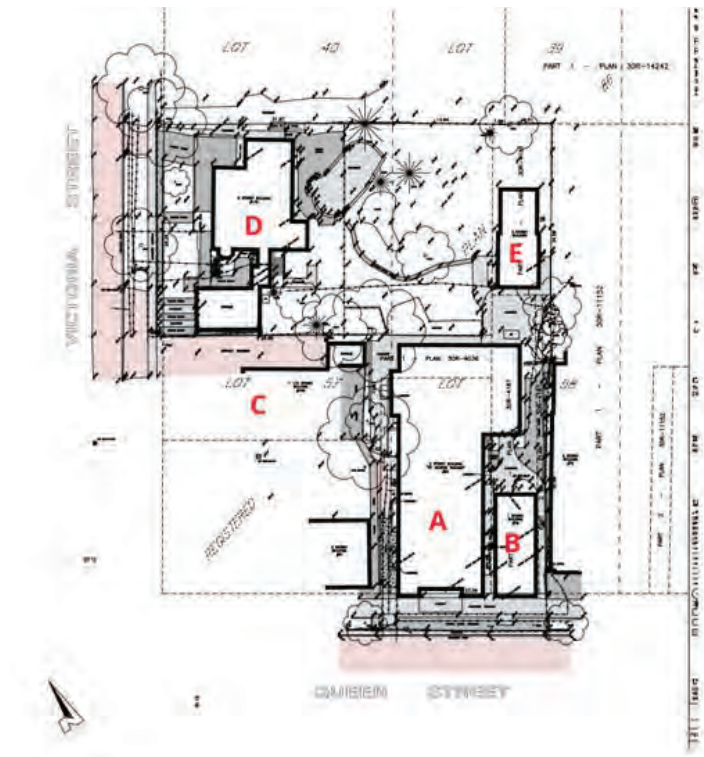


FIGURE 3. SURVEY MAP SHOWING THE EXTENT OF THE SUBJECT PROPERTY, ANNOTATED BY MCCALLUMSATHER. (SOURCE: CHAMBERS AND ASSOCIATES SURVEYING LTD., MAY 2019.)

1.3 Context

The Royal George Theatre is located at the northeast corner of Queen Street and Victoria Street in the historic core of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Along with 79 Queen Street (Tranter's House), 178 Victoria Street (residential dwelling and barn), and 188 Victoria Street (Dickens's Den), the theatre property occupies a pivotal site within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, designated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act in 1986. The District is also recognized as part of the Niagara-on-the-Lake National Historic Site.

The Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District is notable for its remarkably intact early 19th-century urban plan, with Queen Street serving as the primary commercial and cultural spine of the town. The street's alignment, lot divisions, human-scaled two- to three-storey buildings, and consistent setbacks create a cohesive streetscape that reinforces the town's historic character. The architecture along Queen Street presents a blend of Georgian, Neoclassical, Victorian, and Edwardian styles, unified by common materiality, rhythm, and modest ornamental detailing.

The Royal George Theatre anchors a visually and culturally significant section of Queen Street. Built circa 1915 as a Vaudeville house and later adapted for theatre performance, the building has maintained a continuous cultural use for over a century. Although altered, its position, scale, and function contribute substantially to the rhythm and continuity of the Queen Street frontage. It supports the strong pedestrian environment and street-oriented built form emphasized in the District Plan, while its role as part of the internationally recognized Shaw Festival enhances its associative and cultural heritage value.

Adjacent properties immediately west and south of the theatre continue the pattern of commercial development along Queen Street, with a mix of shops, cafés, and professional services in low-rise heritage buildings. To the east, Victoria Street marks a

transition to a quieter residential area, characterized by historic houses set on larger lots with mature tree cover. North of the theatre site, open green spaces and small-scale residential uses provide a softer edge to the more active Queen Street commercial corridor.

The theatre and its associated properties occupy a location at a key junction in the urban structure of Old Town. They mark a subtle shift in the character of Queen Street as it moves from the intensely commercial main blocks closer to the Clock Tower cenotaph toward a slightly more residential and transitional area to the east. This transition is essential to maintaining the historic layering of uses - a hallmark of the town's original development pattern.

From a visual point of view, the Royal George Theatre contributes to the Queen Street streetscape by reinforcing the continuous street wall, supporting pedestrian enclosure, and maintaining a human scale. The theatre's massing, setback, and alignment are consistent with neighbouring structures, preserving important view corridors along Queen and Victoria Streets.

The Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District Plan (1986) identifies several key character-defining attributes that are evident in the immediate context of the Royal George Theatre site, including:

- A urban pattern characterized by narrow lot frontages and incremental building development;
- A cohesive streetscape of low-rise, street-oriented buildings;
- Visual continuity established through consistent setbacks and modest variations in building height;
- The integration of commercial, residential, and civic uses within a compact urban form;
- A strong pedestrian-oriented public realm with sidewalks, street trees, and public amenities.

Collectively, the Royal George Theatre and associated properties reinforce these character-defining features, anchoring the east end of the Queen Street commercial core and contributing to the authenticity and sense of place that define Niagara-on-the-Lake's heritage landscape.

In its present condition, neither the Royal George Theatre nor the associated site infrastructure meets the contemporary functional, operational, or regulatory requirements expected of a modern performance venue. The theatre's base building systems have reached the end of their service life, and neither the structure nor its systems comply with current standards for accessibility, wellness, safety, or sustainability. Significant interventions would be required to modernize the aging facility to contemporary expectations.

To address these challenges, the Shaw Festival proposes the demolition of the existing theatre and adjacent structures, and the construction of a new purpose-built facility. The objectives of the redevelopment are to ensure that the new theatre maintains its critical cultural role within the community, reinforces its relationship with the triad of heritage buildings in the District, and strengthens the connection between the new facility and the Queen Street streetscape.

Access, Circulation & Site Configuration

The Royal George Theatre, located at 85 Queen Street in Niagara-on-the-Lake, occupies a prominent position within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. The site extends from Queen Street to Victoria Street, encompassing several adjacent properties integral to the Shaw Festival's operations.

Vehicular Access

Primary vehicular access to the site is via Victoria Street, where an asphalt driveway provides entry to the rear of the theatre complex. This driveway facilitates deliveries, staff access, and

limited parking for authorized vehicles. The driveway extends along the eastern boundary of the property, connecting to service areas associated with the theatre and adjacent support buildings.

Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian access is predominantly from Queen Street, where the theatre's main entrance is situated. The Queen Street frontage features a landscaped public sidewalk, enhanced with ornamental plantings and street furniture that contribute to the historic streetscape's character. Concrete walkways connect the public sidewalk to the theatre's main entrance, ensuring safe and accessible pedestrian movement.

Landscaping & Site Features

The Queen Street frontage is characterized by well-maintained landscaping, including ornamental plantings that align with the heritage aesthetic of the district. The rear of the property, accessible via the Victoria Street driveway, includes functional spaces such as service areas and ancillary structures that support the theatre's operations.

Overall, the site's configuration balances functional requirements for theatre operations with the preservation of the historic streetscape, contributing to the cultural and architectural fabric of Niagara-on-the-Lake.



FIGURE 4. VIEW OF THE ROYAL GEORGE THEATRE AND ADJACENT PROPERTIES ALONG THE QUEEN STREET FRONTAGE, ILLUSTRATING THE CONTINUOUS LOW-RISE BUILT FORM, PEDESTRIAN SCALE, AND COHESIVE STREETScape CHARACTER WITHIN THE QUEEN-PICTON HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT. (SOURCE: MCCALLUMSATHER, 2023.)



FIGURE 5. VIEW OF VICTORIA STREET, SHOWING THE SURROUNDING TWO- TO TWO-AND-A-HALF-STOREY RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS, LOOKING NORTHEAST FROM THE QUEEN AND VICTORIA STREET INTERSECTION. (SOURCE: MCCALLUMSATHER, 2023.)



FIGURE 6. VIEW OF QUEEN STREET, ILLUSTRATING THE SURROUNDING TWO- TO TWO-AND-A-HALF-STOREY COMMERCIAL AND MIXED-USE BUILDINGS, LOOKING SOUTHWEST FROM THE QUEEN AND VICTORIA STREET INTERSECTION. (SOURCE: MCCALLUMSATHER, 2023.)

1.4 Adjacent Heritage Resources

The Royal George Theatre site and its associated properties form an integral part of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, designated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. These buildings, classified as 'B' Buildings within the District, contribute to the historic streetscape, support the urban fabric, and embody the contextual values defined in the Queen & Picton Streets Heritage Conservation District Plan (1986).

The evolution of the site is well-documented in historical mapping, notably Goad's Fire Insurance Plans of 1914 and 1925, which capture changes to the built fabric over time. Although individually modest, the collective contribution of these buildings is essential to maintaining the visual cohesion, fine-grained lot pattern, and historic streetscape character that define the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.

85 Queen Street – Royal George Theatre

The Royal George Theatre occupies a prominent location along Queen Street and has evolved significantly since its original construction in the early 20th century. Initially constructed circa 1914 as a commercial building with modest architectural detailing, the structure was later transformed in the 1960s into its current Neoclassical form under the ownership of the Canadian Mime Theatre.

The façade is marked by classical references: a symmetrical temple front featuring Ionic pilasters, a pediment with a deep cornice, a Greek key frieze, and a pedimented Venetian window above the central entrance bay. Three sets of double-leaf doors, framed by reeded Doric columns and topped by a flat marquee, provide an imposing but theatrical point of entry.

Structurally, the building uses wood joists and steel beams embedded within hollow-core clay tile block walls, a typical construction technique of the era. Its more playful reimagining

of classical motifs - done by set designers rather than traditional architects - provides a whimsical counterpoint to the predominantly Neo-Colonial and Victorian architecture of Queen Street.

Following its acquisition by the Shaw Festival, the building underwent further modernization to meet the technical and accessibility needs of a contemporary theatre. Additions included a small orchestra pit, interior refurbishments, and reconfiguration of audience spaces to accommodate an expanded program.

Despite these modifications, the Royal George Theatre remains a cultural landmark within the District, contributing to the vibrancy of Queen Street and maintaining a key associative value tied to Niagara-on-the-Lake's renowned theatre heritage.

79 Queen Street – Tranter's House

Tranter's House, constructed circa 1885, offers a distinct contrast to its larger neighbours along Queen Street. Originally serving as a barber shop, the building reflects the fine-grained, mixed-use pattern of 19th-century Queen Street where small-scale commercial enterprises operated alongside residential and service uses.

Architecturally, Tranter's House is a simple, single-storey stucco-clad building with a front-gabled orientation toward Queen Street. The façade features a parapeted roofline with denticulated frieze, lending a slight decorative flourish to an otherwise modest building. Two primary openings - a doorway and a two-part window - emphasize the building's former commercial function.

The south elevation, facing an internal courtyard, reveals two additional entrances, two windows, and a small hipped dormer, suggesting incremental additions over time to meet evolving functional needs.

In its current use, Tranter's House supports the Shaw Festival's costume and wardrobe operations. While no longer a standalone commercial business, the building's contribution to the diversity, scale, and continuity of the Queen Street frontage remains important. Its smaller footprint and height reinforce the visual rhythm and historic urban character of the Heritage Conservation District.

188 Victoria Street – Dicken's Den

188 Victoria Street, constructed circa 1880, originally served as a modest residential dwelling and exemplifies the transitional architecture found along Victoria Street — blending the commercial vitality of Queen Street with the emerging residential fabric to the north.

The building's irregular gable-front-and-wing plan accommodates an eclectic arrangement of large window openings, including a tall, flat-headed 1/1 sash window that extends nearly to the roofline and a projecting bay window. The current bright yellow clapboard siding with white trim lends a cheerful, if somewhat visually assertive, presence within the streetscape.

Historically, the building transitioned from residential use to a mixed-use configuration, accommodating both retail (e.g., a pizzeria) and residential tenants. This evolution mirrors the broader adaptive patterns encouraged in the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, where flexibility in use was seen as compatible with heritage conservation.

Today, Dicken's Den serves as an example of ongoing adaptive reuse, maintaining the pedestrian-oriented scale and visual diversity essential to the historic core's character.

178 Victoria Street

178 Victoria Street is a pre-1860 vernacular residential structure, contributing significant heritage value to the District through its early date of construction and its largely intact vernacular form.

The one-and-a-half-storey building features narrow horizontal clapboard siding and a steeply pitched cross-gabled roof, typical of early Niagara-on-the-Lake residential architecture. Incremental modifications over time—such as the extension of the verandah roof to create a sheltered carport, and the addition of a connecting walkway to a detached garage—demonstrate the building's adaptive evolution without compromising its historic character.

A white picket fence enclosing the front garden enhances the property's historic residential setting, reinforcing the fine-grained streetscape texture of Victoria Street.

Currently, the property provides temporary accommodation for Shaw Festival actors, sustaining the original residential use while contributing actively to the town's cultural life. Its continued occupation and stewardship ensure that it remains a living component of the District's heritage landscape.

Small Barn at the Rear of the Royal George Theatre

The small barn located at the rear of the Royal George Theatre property predates 1914 and represents a rare surviving example of the ancillary outbuildings that once supported Queen Street's commercial operations.

Originally serving as a utilitarian storage shed, possibly for blacksmithing or trades-related functions, the barn's simple form evolved over time, as documented in multiple editions of Goad's Fire Insurance Plans. Its continued presence contributes to an understanding of the working-yard typologies typical of historic Niagara-on-the-Lake properties.

Following the Shaw Festival's acquisition of the site, the barn was sensitively adapted as part of the Royal George Theatre's decorative garden courtyard. Repurposed as an office and meeting space, the structure now plays an active role in the Festival's operations while preserving the historic layering and visual interest of the site.

The barn's adaptive reuse demonstrates an effective conservation approach: retaining historic fabric while ensuring new, sustainable functions within the heritage context.



FIGURE 7. ILLUSTRATION OF TYPICAL "B" BUILDINGS WITHIN THE QUEEN-PICTON HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT, DEMONSTRATING THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORIC STREETScape THROUGH SCALE, RHYTHM, MASSING, AND COMPLEMENTARY ARCHITECTURAL DETAILING. (SOURCE: NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE HERITAGE CONSERVATION GUIDELINES, NICHOLAS HILL, ARCHITECT PLANNER.)



FIGURE 8. VIEW OF 188 VICTORIA STREET (BUILDING C) ON THE SUBJECT SITE, PROPOSED FOR DEMOLITION, LOOKING EAST FROM VICTORIA STREET. (SOURCE: MCCALLUMSATHER, 2023.)



FIGURE 9. VIEW OF THE BUILDING NORTHEAST OF THE ROYAL GEORGE THEATRE ON THE SUBJECT SITE, PROPOSED FOR DEMOLITION, LOOKING EAST FROM VICTORIA STREET. (SOURCE: MCCALLUMSATHER, 2023.)



FIGURE 10. VIEW OF 178 VICTORIA STREET, SHOWING THE TWO-STOREY RESIDENTIAL BUILDING AND ASSOCIATED GARAGE. THE PROPERTY CONTRIBUTES TO THE MIXED RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER OF VICTORIA STREET WITHIN THE QUEEN-PICTON HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT. (SOURCE: MCCALLUMSATHER, 2023.)

2.0 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1 Indigenous History of Niagara-on-the-Lake

The area now known as Niagara-on-the-Lake holds a deep and enduring Indigenous history that long predates European settlement. Archaeological evidence and oral traditions confirm that Indigenous peoples have inhabited the Niagara region for over 13,000 years, drawn to its rich natural resources and strategic location at the mouth of the Niagara River.

Prior to European contact, the land was home to the Attawandaron, also known as the Neutral Nation. This Iroquoian-speaking confederacy occupied the territory between Lakes Ontario and Erie, establishing a network of fortified villages across the Niagara Peninsula. The Neutral Nation was known for its agricultural practices - cultivating corn, beans, and tobacco - and for its policy of remaining neutral during conflicts between other Indigenous confederacies, a trait which earned them their European name. However, the Neutral Nation's population and social structures were severely impacted in the mid-17th century by epidemic diseases introduced through European contact and conflict during the Beaver Wars, particularly incursions by the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy).

Following the decline of the Neutral Nation, the Haudenosaunee, particularly the Seneca, established a presence along the Niagara corridor. In the early 18th century, Anishinaabe peoples, notably the Mississauga, also migrated into the region, establishing new settlements and continuing to steward the land.

A pivotal moment in the area's Indigenous history came with the Treaty of Niagara in 1764. Convened at Fort Niagara, the

treaty was an important diplomatic agreement between the British Crown and over twenty Indigenous nations, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe. It affirmed principles of peace, friendship, and Indigenous sovereignty, serving as a cornerstone for future relationships between Indigenous peoples and European settlers in the region.

Today, the Niagara region continues to be home to vibrant Indigenous communities, including members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Anishinaabe Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Many Indigenous peoples in the area maintain connections to nearby communities such as Six Nations of the Grand River and the Mississauga of the Credit First Nation. Their ongoing contributions enrich the cultural, social, and economic life of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Recognition of this deep Indigenous history is increasingly integrated into public education, commemorative projects, and heritage conservation initiatives. Institutions like the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum and the Landscape of Nations Memorial work to honor and share the region's Indigenous heritage, ensuring that this foundational history continues to inform the evolving narrative of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

2.2 Historical Context of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Niagara-on-the-Lake, situated at the confluence of the Niagara River and Lake Ontario, holds a significant place in Canadian history. Its strategic location made it a focal point for military, political, and economic activities from the 17th century onward.

The area's prominence began with the establishment of Fort Niagara by the French in 1679, serving as a critical point for controlling access to the Great Lakes and the interior of North America. In 1759, during the Seven Years' War, British forces captured Fort Niagara, solidifying their control over the region.

Following the American Revolutionary War, Loyalist refugees settled on the west bank of the Niagara River in 1781, founding a community initially known as Butlersburg, later renamed Newark. In 1792, Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe designated Newark as the first capital of Upper Canada, implementing a British colonial grid plan for the town's layout. However, due to its proximity to the United States and concerns over security, the capital was relocated to York (now Toronto) in 1796. Subsequently, the town's name reverted to Niagara in 1798.

During the War of 1812, Niagara-on-the-Lake was a significant battleground. In December 1813, American forces occupied and burned the town during their retreat. The community demonstrated resilience by rebuilding in the following years, with many structures reflecting the British classical architectural tradition.

The mid-19th century saw economic shifts due to the opening of the Welland Canal in 1829, which diverted trade routes away from the town. In response, the Niagara Harbour and Dock Company was established in 1831 to revitalize the local economy through shipbuilding and related industries.

Between 1880 and 1915, Niagara-on-the-Lake emerged as a popular summer destination, leading to the construction of notable establishments such as the Prince of Wales Hotel in 1864 and the Royal George Theatre in 1915. These developments contributed to the town's reputation as a cultural and recreational hub.

In the latter half of the 20th century, efforts to preserve the town's rich heritage intensified. The introduction of *Vitis vinifera* grape cultivation in the 1950s spurred the growth of the local wine industry. Simultaneously, the establishment of the Shaw Festival in 1962 by Brian Doherty and Calvin Rand further cemented Niagara-on-the-Lake's status as a center for arts and culture.

Recognizing its historical and architectural significance, the Old Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake was designated as a National Historic Site of Canada in 2004. Today, the town boasts a well-preserved collection of 19th-century buildings, reflecting its enduring legacy and commitment to heritage conservation.

2.3 History & Evolution of the Royal George Theatre

The history of the Royal George Theatre offers a vivid narrative of Niagara-on-the-Lake's growth, shifting cultural aspirations, and enduring resilience. From its early use as a blacksmith shop to its present role as a cornerstone of the Shaw Festival, the Royal George Theatre has continually evolved to meet the community's changing needs, embodying a pattern of adaptive reuse characteristic of the town's broader heritage landscape.

Early Development (Pre-1915)

Prior to the construction of the theatre, the site was occupied by a blacksmith shop—one of many trades supporting the town's commercial and agricultural economy in the 19th century. Niagara-on-the-Lake, at the time, served as a vibrant port and service hub, balancing its historic role as a Loyalist settlement with emerging commercial enterprises.

Establishment of the Kitchener Theatre (1915)

In 1915, amidst the backdrop of the First World War and a growing demand for public entertainment, Mrs. Norris commissioned the construction of a modern vaudeville and

silent movie theatre. Named the Kitchener Theatre after Lord Kitchener, a British military figure, the building was one of the most advanced entertainment venues of its time, featuring a 420-seat capacity, a fly tower for theatrical productions, and facilities for film screenings.



FIGURE 11. THEATRE UNDER OWNERSHIP OF GEORGE REID, WHO RENAMED A QUEEN STREET VENUE THE ROYAL GEORGE.
NOTE: THIS MAY DEPICT THE EARLIER ROYAL GEORGE THEATRE, A SEPARATE STRUCTURE DEMOLISHED IN THE 1930S. SOURCE: "LOOKING BACK: NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ONTARIO" BY CLARK BERNAT AND JOY ORMSBY (2003). PHOTO COURTESY OF MRS. PATRICIA MCCARTHY, AS PUBLISHED IN THE REFERENCED WORK.

The Kitchener Theatre played an important social role, providing performances and entertainment for both local residents and soldiers stationed at nearby Camp Niagara.

Transition to the Royal George Theatre (1919–1930s)

Built in 1915 by Mrs. M. N. Norris, the building at 85 Queen Street originally operated as the Kitchener Theatre, providing vaudeville acts and silent films to entertain soldiers at Camp Niagara during World War I. Over time, it transitioned into a movie theatre and later became the home of the Canadian Mime Theatre. In 1980, the Shaw Festival acquired and restored the building, renaming it the Royal George Theatre in honor of the earlier venue of the same name that once stood on Queen Street but was demolished in the 1930s.

Renovation & Rebranding as the Brock Theatre (Late 1930s–1972)

John Allan acquired the building in the late 1930s, initiating substantial upgrades that included installing modern projection equipment, new heating systems, a new marquee, and aesthetic changes to the facade. The theatre was renamed the Brock Theatre, celebrating Canadian war hero Major-General Sir Isaac Brock.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Brock Theatre flourished as a cinema and community gathering place, hosting films, public meetings, and ceremonies. The McCourt family operated the theatre from 1946 onward, skillfully adapting it to meet changing tastes, including the introduction of widescreen film formats.

Nevertheless, the growing influence of television eroded cinema attendance, and by the early 1970s, the building was again in decline.

Acquisition by the Canadian Mime Theatre (1972–1980)

In 1972, the Canadian Mime Theatre acquired the building,

AIR-CONDITIONED

Friday Saturday Aug. 27-28	Henry Fonda, J. Wayne Shirley Temple in "FORT APACHE" Don't miss it!
Monday Tuesday Aug. 30-31	Wallace Beery in the rough and tumble comedy riot "ALIAS A GENTLEMAN" also "Speed to Spare"
Wed'sday Thursday Sept. 1-2	Fred McMurray Frank Sinatra in "MIRACLE OF THE BELLS"
Friday Saturday Sept. 3-4	Your sides will ache from laughing at Red Skelton in "THE FULLER BRUSH MAN"
Coming Sunday Midnite	Eddie Cantor, Joan Davis "IF YOU KNEW SUSIE"

1998.006.31

BROCK

THEATRE

NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

YOUR PROGRAM



FIGURE 12. 1946 – "BROCK" CINEMA – OWNERS MARJORIE AND DEWEY MCCOURT: FROM TROOP CONCERTS TO SATURDAY-NIGHT DOUBLE-FEATURES, AND NOW INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED SHAW FESTIVAL PRODUCTIONS, THE BUILDING HAS MIRRORED NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE'S EVOLVING ENTERTAINMENT TASTES FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY.

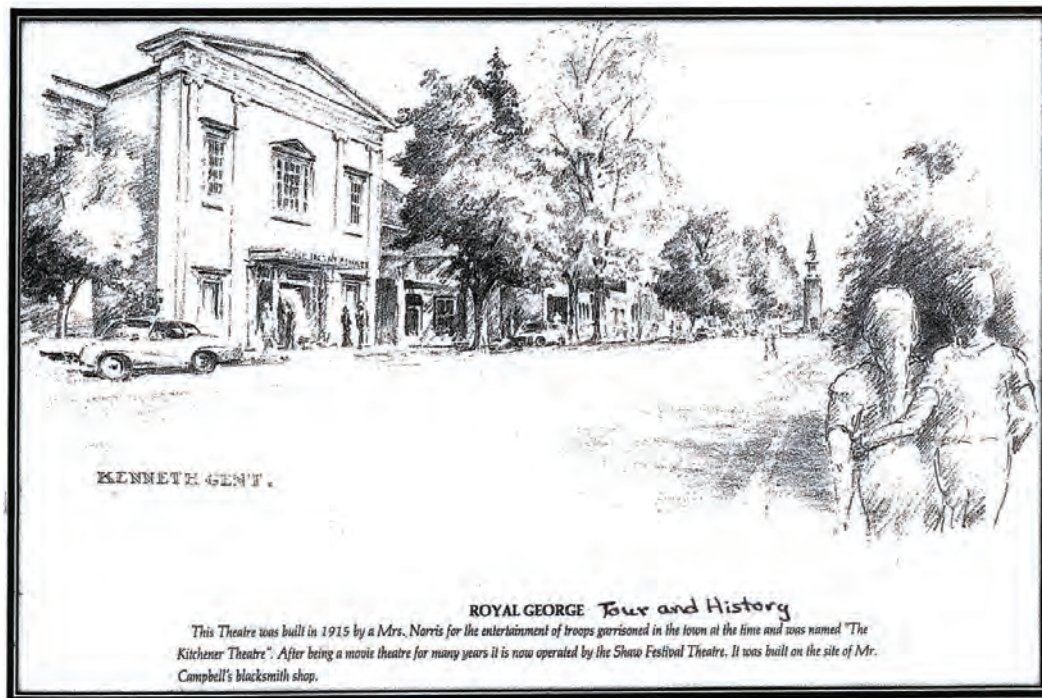


FIGURE 13. UNDATED PEN-AND-INK STREETScape OF THE ROYAL GEORGE THEATRE, QUEEN STREET, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE – ARTIST KENNETH GENT. PREPARED FOR THE THEATRE'S "TOUR AND HISTORY" BOOKLET, THE DRAWING DEPICTS THE 1915 BUILDING - FIRST OPENED AS THE KITCHENER THEATRE FOR GARRISONED WW I TROOPS - SET WITHIN ITS TREE-LINED COMMERCIAL BLOCK, LONG BEFORE ITS MODERN SHAW FESTIVAL RENOVATIONS.

initiating a transformative restoration. Architect Peter Stokes redesigned the building's facade in a Neoclassical Palladian style, removing the movie marquee and reintroducing classical elements such as Ionic pilasters and a pedimented entrance. The theatre's interior was adapted for live, non-verbal performance, emphasizing flexibility and intimacy. Although the Canadian Mime Theatre achieved artistic success, financial challenges led to their departure by the end of the decade.

Shaw Festival Stewardship & Expansion (1980–Present)

In 1980, the Shaw Festival acquired the Royal George Theatre, recognizing its value as a historic venue aligned with the Festival's expanding cultural mandate. Under the leadership of Cameron Porteous and generous community donors such as Walter Carsen, the Festival initiated major renovations:

- Restoration of seating and interior finishes,
- Addition of a permanent proscenium arch and orchestra pit,
- Extensive plaster detailing and ceiling decorations emulating an Edwardian opera house,
- Accessibility improvements and lobby enhancements.

By 1990, the theatre had been fully revitalized and seamlessly integrated into the Festival's operations.

Integration of the Victoria Street Properties

As part of the broader Royal George Theatre site, two historic residential buildings at 178 and 188 Victoria Street were incorporated into the Shaw Festival's infrastructure. Originally constructed during Niagara-on-the-Lake's late 19th-century industrial growth, these single-family homes continue to serve residential functions.

After their acquisition, the Festival adapted these properties to house actors, designers, and theatre students participating

in Shaw productions. This practical reuse has preserved the residential character of the Victoria Street streetscape while supporting the logistical needs of a thriving performance organization. Together, the Royal George Theatre and its associated buildings form a unified cultural campus:

- The main theatre provides performance space.
- Adjacent buildings support set and costume production.
- Residential properties accommodate seasonal artists and staff.

This integrated model strengthens the Festival's ability to operate year-round, preserve historic structures, and contribute to the town's economic vitality.

The Role of the Royal George Theatre Today

Over the past fifty years, the Shaw Festival has grown to become



FIGURE 14. ROYAL GEORGE THEATRE AFTER THE 1980S RENOVATION—GEORGIAN-REVIVAL FACADE WITH SMOOTH STUCCO, CORNER PILASTERS, HIGH PARAPET, AND CENTRED MULTI-PANE SASH WINDOWS REINSTATES CLASSICAL SYMMETRY ON QUEEN STREET.

one of Canada's preeminent cultural institutions. It contributes significantly to the economy of Niagara-on-the-Lake, drawing approximately 300,000 visitors annually. The Royal George Theatre remains central to this success, offering intimate productions that complement the Festival Theatre and Jackie Maxwell Studio Theatre on Queen Street.

Yet, like its predecessors, the Shaw Festival faces the perennial challenge of maintaining the Royal George Theatre's relevance. Evolving audience expectations, technological advancements, and the physical limitations of an aging building require strategic reinvestment. Without careful stewardship, historic theatres risk becoming obsolete, either abandoned, demolished, or fossilized as static museum pieces.

The Royal George Theatre, however, stands at a pivotal moment. Through sensitive adaptation and ongoing investment, it can continue to serve as a vibrant cultural landmark, embodying the living heritage of Niagara-on-the-Lake and ensuring that its layered history remains an active part of the town's future.

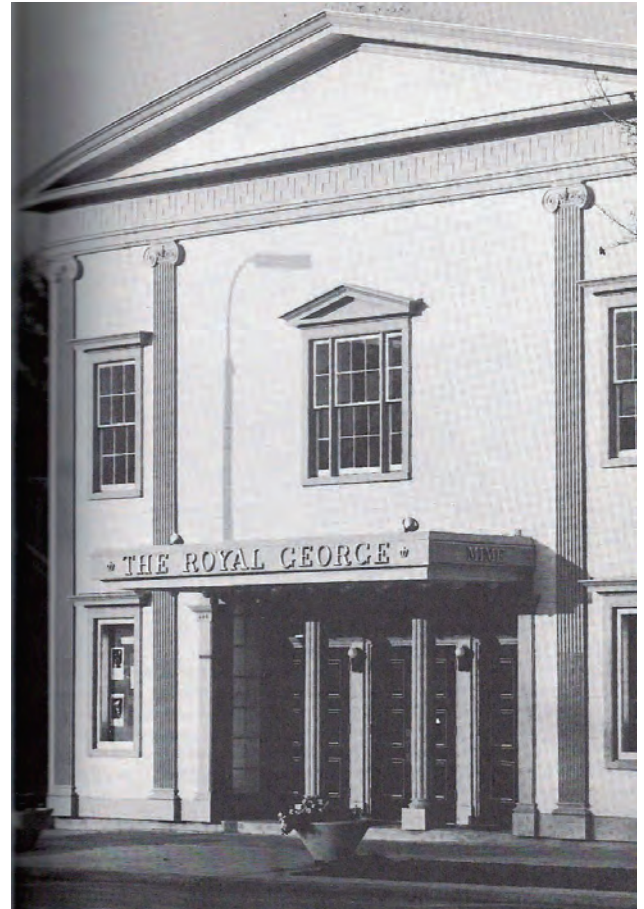


FIGURE 15. EARLY-1970S RESTORATION OF THE FORMER BROCK CINEMA AS THE CANADIAN MIME THEATRE—STUCCOED GEORGIAN FRONT WITH BOLD CORNER PILASTERS AND A CENTRAL TRIPLE-SASH WINDOW. SOURCE: WALKER & HEROD, EXPLORING NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE (1977).



FIGURE 16. 1914 FIRE INSURANCE MAP (CHAS. E. GOAD, MONTREAL), ANNOTATED BY MCCALLUMSATHER TO OUTLINE THE LOT BOUNDARY THAT EXISTED BEFORE THE ROYAL GEORGE THEATRE WAS BUILT.

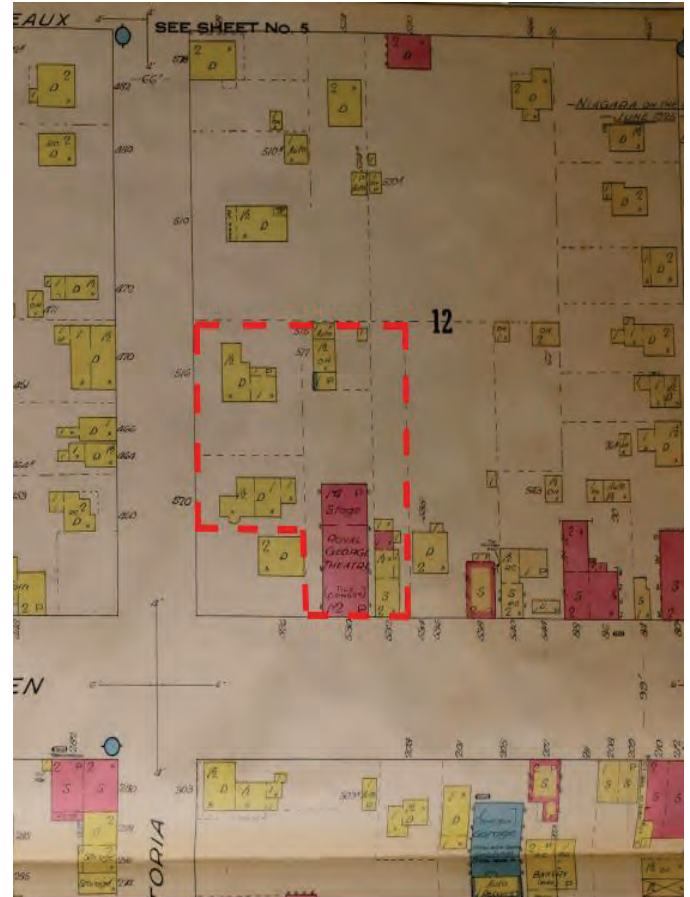


FIGURE 17. 1925 FIRE INSURANCE MAP (CHAS. E. GOAD, MONTREAL), ANNOTATED BY MCCALLUMSATHER TO OUTLINE THE ROYAL GEORGE THEATRE LOT BOUNDARY.



FIGURE 18. 1926 FIRE INSURANCE MAP (CHAS. E. GOAD, MONTREAL), ANNOTATED BY MCCALLUMSATHER TO OUTLINE THE PROPERTY'S APPROXIMATE LOT BOUNDARY.

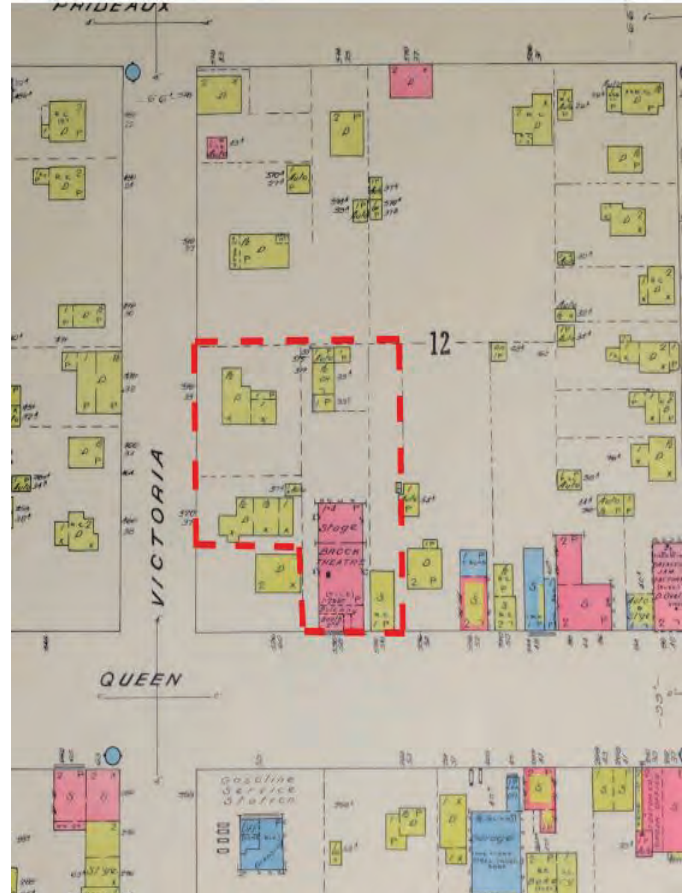


FIGURE 19. 1949 FIRE INSURANCE MAP (CHAS. E. GOAD, MONTREAL), ANNOTATED BY MCCALLUMSATHER TO INDICATE THE APPROXIMATE LOT BOUNDARY OF THE PROPERTY.

3.0 HERITAGE VALUE

Heritage value is what makes a historic place meaningful to its community - in this case, the residents and visitors of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Traditionally, historic places were valued primarily for their architectural merit or historical associations. Today, a broader understanding recognizes that places can also embody cultural, social, spiritual, and community significance. A single site may possess multiple heritage values, and different communities may attribute different meanings to it. Furthermore, these values can evolve over time as the community's needs, understanding, and identity change.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is widely recognized as a leader in heritage conservation in Canada. With a long history of protecting its historic built environment, the town has demonstrated its commitment to stewardship through numerous initiatives, culminating in the receipt of the National Trust for Canada's Prince of Wales Prize in 2020. This award recognizes outstanding municipal heritage conservation leadership and celebrates Niagara-on-the-Lake's sustained efforts to preserve its remarkable collection of 19th-century residential, commercial, and civic buildings.

The Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District (designated in 1986 under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act) encompasses a significant portion of Niagara-on-the-Lake's historic core. The district comprises approximately 160 properties, including residential, commercial, institutional, and public service buildings. It was established to recognize and protect not only individual structures of significance but also the overall historic streetscape and cohesive architectural character.

According to the Queen & Picton Streets Heritage Conservation District Plan (Nicholas Hill, 1986), buildings within the District are

categorized into "A", "B", and "C" ratings based on their individual contribution to the district's character:

- 'A' Buildings: Structures of major individual architectural or historical value.
- 'B' Buildings: Structures of contextual value that contribute significantly to the historic streetscape, even if they are not individually distinguished.
- 'C' Buildings: More recent or altered buildings that do not strongly reinforce the heritage character but are still evaluated within the overall planning framework.

The Royal George Theatre and its associated properties at 79 Queen Street (Tranter's House), 178 Victoria Street, 188 Victoria Street (Dicken's Den), and the small rear barn are all designated 'B' Buildings under this system. While not individually recognized for exceptional architectural merit, these properties collectively enhance the district's heritage character. They contribute essential qualities such as:

- Visual continuity along Queen and Victoria Streets
- Reinforcement of the district's human-scaled urban fabric
- Representation of the historic layering and evolution of Niagara-on-the-Lake over two centuries

These buildings embody the "contextual value" at the heart of the Queen-Picton Plan's objectives. Their preservation supports broader goals of maintaining a pedestrian-oriented, historically resonant streetscape that invites both residents and visitors to experience a living link to Ontario's early colonial and post-colonial periods.

Importantly, the designation also reflects an understanding that the heritage value of this ensemble lies not solely in individual buildings, but in their collective presence - their architectural rhythms, alignments, materials, and scales - which create an irreplaceable historic setting within Niagara-on-the-Lake's downtown core.

3.1 Design & Physical Value

The architectural value of the Royal George Theatre has been significantly diminished over time due to a series of alterations, adaptations, and renovations in response to evolving functional needs. Over the past century, these cumulative changes have compromised the building's original architectural integrity.

Based on our evaluation, the Royal George Theatre does not exhibit a high degree of craftsmanship, artistic merit, or technical innovation beyond what was typical for its period. The construction techniques, material choices, and spatial arrangements are representative of common early 20th-century vernacular practices. The current exterior cladding, consisting of wood siding of relatively low quality, and the replacement of windows and interior modifications have further eroded its architectural authenticity.

While some elements hint at a Neoclassical Palladian inspiration - particularly those introduced during the 1978 refurbishment when the building was adapted by the Canadian Mime Theatre - the evidence of original high-style architectural expression is limited. The current facade reflects Grecian stylistic motifs interpreted through later interventions rather than original construction.

As it stands today, 85 Queen Street is neither rare, unique, nor strongly representative of a particular style, typology, material, or construction method. Although it exhibits some superficial

Neoclassical elements, the building is best understood as a vernacular structure that has been heavily modified over time. Its architectural value lies less in the preservation of original fabric or exemplary design, and more in its contribution to the broader historic streetscape and its contextual role within the Queen-Pictou Heritage Conservation District.

3.2 Historical & Associative Value

The Royal George Theatre possesses notable historical associations through its succession of owners and its longstanding role in Niagara-on-the-Lake's entertainment and cultural life. Documentary evidence confirms the building's association with several individuals and groups of local and regional significance, including Mrs. Norris (an American entrepreneur from Bay City, Michigan), John Allan, Marjorie and Dewey McCourt, Brian Doherty, Adrian Pecknold, and ultimately, the Shaw Festival.

Each successive owner contributed to the building's physical and functional evolution, adapting it to meet the community's changing entertainment demands across the 20th century. Mrs. Norris's establishment of the Kitchener Theatre in 1915, George Reid's rebranding as the Royal George Theatre in the post-World War I period, John Allan's mid-century modernization as the Brock Theatre, and the Canadian Mime Theatre's 1970s reinterpretation of the facade all represent phases of ownership that reflect broader shifts in the town's cultural and economic landscape. The Shaw Festival's acquisition of the property in 1980 further solidified its ongoing use as a cultural venue.

While these associations document the building's continuous engagement with the entertainment industry and its role in the commercial and social development of Niagara-on-the-Lake, the property does not demonstrate outstanding historical value under the evaluative criteria typically used for designation. The

loss of significant original materials, extensive alterations to the structure, and changes to its physical context have diminished the building's ability to effectively communicate its layered historical narrative.

Although the theatre retains a direct associative value with the cultural identity of Niagara-on-the-Lake - particularly through its association with the Shaw Festival - the physical fabric no longer strongly embodies these connections. In its current form, 85 Queen Street does not appear to yield, nor is it likely to yield, information that would substantially enhance an understanding of the broader historical development of the community. The original reasons for its historical importance are now more effectively communicated through its continued function as a cultural venue rather than through the building's extant physical attributes.

3.3 Contextual Value

The Royal George Theatre holds significant contextual and landscape value within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. Although the building has been substantially altered over the past century, its form, scale, and urban presence contribute meaningfully to the defining character of Queen Street and the surrounding historic fabric of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Contextually, the Royal George Theatre aligns in height, massing, and commercial function with other heritage buildings along Queen Street, maintaining the historic pedestrian scale and urban rhythm characteristic of the district. The surrounding area displays a notable diversity of architectural styles and periods; within this variety, the Royal George Theatre stands out as one of the most recognizable and visually distinctive landmarks. The theatre's prominence is not solely due to its architectural merit but is also a result of its form, exaggerated decorative treatments, and adaptation over time. Its stylistic eclecticism

- evident in the playful Neoclassical Palladian-inspired façade introduced during the Canadian Mime Theatre's renovations in the 1970s - exemplifies characteristics associated with built vernacular heritage. As defined in the Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage (ICOMOS, 1999), vernacular heritage "occupies a central place in the affection and pride of all peoples" and represents both a "record of the history of society" and an "expression of cultural diversity." In this respect, the Royal George Theatre reflects the community's evolving cultural expressions, adapted through local needs and resources rather than adherence to a formal architectural canon.

In urban landscape studies, built vernacular structures such as theatres, hotels, and commercial halls are often noted for their distinctive façades and decorative elements, intended to capture public attention. The Royal George Theatre conforms to this pattern: it employs amplified proportions, classical allusions, and vibrant material treatments to establish a memorable street presence. Its role as a visual and cultural anchor along Queen Street is significant, reinforcing the commercial vitality and heritage identity of the district.

Previous evaluations have determined that the building does not possess outstanding individual architectural or historical value. However, its strong contextual contribution enhances the collective streetscape experience. The Royal George Theatre acts as a visual terminus and a point of reference within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, shaping the user experience and supporting the broader heritage landscape. In summary, while the Royal George Theatre's architectural integrity has been compromised by successive alterations, its contextual and associative values remain intact. The building contributes meaningfully to the continuity, character, and vibrancy of the district.

In the opinion of mcCallumSather, 85 Queen Street meets the criteria for Contextual Value as outlined under Ontario Regulation 9/06, specifically:

- It is important in defining, maintaining, and supporting the character of the area.
- It is physically, functionally, visually, and historically linked to its surroundings.

For these reasons, the relationship between the existing Royal George Theatre, its adjacent properties, and the new development is central to the successful conservation and integration of the site into the evolving heritage fabric of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Summary: Heritage Value & Significance of the Royal George Theatre Site

The Royal George Theatre site - comprising 85 Queen Street and adjacent properties - holds significant contextual and associative heritage value within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. While the architectural integrity of the Royal George Theatre has been diminished by multiple renovations over time, the site's broader contribution lies in its role as a cultural landmark and streetscape anchor in Niagara-on-the-Lake's historic core.

The buildings at 85 Queen Street, 79 Queen Street, 178 and 188 Victoria Street, and the small rear barn are all classified as "B" buildings under the 1986 Heritage Conservation District Plan, meaning they are valued for their contextual contribution rather than their individual architectural distinction. These properties collectively reinforce the town's heritage character through their scale, rhythm, alignment, and material presence along Queen and Victoria Streets.

The architectural value of the Royal George Theatre is considered modest due to significant loss of original material and stylistic alterations - particularly those introduced in the 1970s by the Canadian Mime Theatre. Despite this, its associative value remains strong, having served multiple cultural functions over a century and currently operating as a key venue within the Shaw Festival. Its evolution mirrors broader changes in the town's cultural and entertainment landscape.

Most notably, the building's contextual value is central to its heritage contribution. It retains visual prominence on Queen Street, supports a pedestrian-oriented historic environment, and acts as a visual terminus and reference point within the district. It exemplifies the vernacular adaptation of Neoclassical forms, with an expressive, community-rooted aesthetic that aligns with the Charter on Built Vernacular Heritage (ICOMOS, 1999).

Although it does not meet the threshold for architectural or historical significance under Ontario Regulation 9/06, the Royal George Theatre clearly satisfies the criteria for contextual value, as it:

- Helps define and support the character of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District;
- Remains physically, visually, and functionally integrated with its surroundings.

Therefore, any proposed redevelopment must carefully consider and sustain these values. The success of the future intervention will depend on its ability to respect and interpret the site's layered significance, supporting a meaningful continuity of place in Niagara-on-the-Lake's evolving cultural heritage landscape.

Summary of Ontario Regulation 9/06 Evaluation

An evaluation of the Royal George Theatre at 85 Queen Street was undertaken against the criteria outlined in Ontario Regulation 9/06. The property was found to possess historical/associative and contextual value, although it does not meet the threshold for design or physical value due to extensive alterations. The following table summarizes the findings:

Evaluation Category	Criteria	Evaluation	Summary of Evaluation
Design or Physical Value	Rare, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method	N	The existing building has been irreversibly altered without consideration for its original Neoclassical design. No significant interior heritage attributes were found.
Design or Physical Value	Displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit	N	No evidence showing a high degree of craftsmanship, artistic merit, or scientific achievement.
Design or Physical Value	Demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement	N	Use of siding and construction methods are typical of its time and do not demonstrate technical or scientific innovation.
Historical or Associative Value	Direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community	Y	The building has associative value related to the history of entertainment in the area and contributes to the streetscape.
Historical or Associative Value	Yields or has potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture	N	No evidence found to offer a greater understanding of the community culture.
Historical or Associative Value	Demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community	N	No evidence associating the building with a notable architect or builder.
Contextual Value	Important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area	Y	The visual relationship between the building and its role in the streetscape provides contextual value.
Contextual Value	Physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings	Y	The presence of the theatre physically and visually contributes to the surrounding heritage area.
Contextual Value	Is a landmark	Y	The theatre acts as a recognizable landmark within the heritage district.

3.4 Character-Defining Attributes of the Royal George Theatre

The character-defining attributes of the Royal George Theatre encompass its form, scale, architectural expression, relationship to its surroundings, and continued cultural function. These attributes, individually and collectively, contribute to the building's recognized heritage value within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. Despite alterations over time, the Royal George Theatre continues to anchor Queen Street's historic streetscape and maintains strong contextual and associative significance.

Architectural Form & Massing

The Royal George Theatre's built form and massing reflect its early 20th-century origins as a community performance venue. Its scale and proportion align with surrounding heritage properties, maintaining the historic human scale of Queen Street.

- **Overall Building Form:** The theatre maintains a rectangular plan with a strong horizontal emphasis, typical of its original public assembly use.
- **Scale and Proportion:** Its modest two-storey height and width-to-height ratio reinforce the pedestrian character of Queen Street.
- **Symmetrical Organization:** Despite renovations, the building preserves a clear sense of symmetry, particularly on the primary façade.

Facade & Exterior Design

The external expression of the Royal George Theatre blends vernacular and classical influences, with design interventions that reflect its evolving theatrical functions.

- **Classical Revival Expression:** The 1970s façade renovation introduced simplified Neoclassical elements, including a prominent pediment, frieze, and pilasters.

- **Entrances and Windows:** Symmetrical window and door openings, including the central Venetian window and triple-door entrance, emphasize the building's formal role.
- **Materials and Finishes:** While later in date, the painted stucco and restrained classical detailing maintain visual compatibility with Queen Street's historic texture.

Site Orientation & Urban Context

The Royal George Theatre's orientation, setbacks, and spatial relationships reinforce its integration into the historic urban framework of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

- **Consistent Street Wall:** The building maintains the continuous historic street edge that defines Queen Street's heritage streetscape.
- **Relationship to Adjacent Properties:** Its scale, massing, and materiality are compatible with adjacent historic commercial and residential structures, supporting the district's character.
- **Courtyard and Secondary Structures:** The open courtyard and surviving rear barn structure illustrate historic patterns of ancillary service spaces behind commercial buildings.

Cultural & Functional Continuity

The sustained cultural use of the Royal George Theatre is a critical aspect of its heritage value, supporting both community identity and historic continuity.

- **Longstanding Use as an Entertainment Venue:** Since its construction in 1915, the building has remained a venue for public performances, cinema, and live theatre.
- **Association with Cultural Institutions:** Its current association with the Shaw Festival, a nationally significant performing arts organization, enhances its cultural heritage significance.
- **Contribution to the Heritage Streetscape:** The theatre's function and presence help animate Queen Street's commercial and cultural core.

Landscape & Setting

The relationship of the Royal George Theatre to its immediate landscape and surrounding townscape plays a critical role in reinforcing its contextual value.

- Pedestrian Relationship: Direct access from Queen Street sidewalks supports the historic pedestrian-oriented commercial character.
- Views and Vistas: The theatre forms a key visual landmark along Queen Street, contributing to important sightlines and reinforcing the spatial organization of the district.

Summary

Section 3.4 identifies the specific physical and functional features that define the heritage value of the Royal George Theatre within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. These attributes are critical to understanding the building's ongoing cultural relevance and inform how change can be managed appropriately.

Architecturally, the theatre's modest scale, rectangular massing, and symmetrical façade reflect its origins as an early 20th-century public assembly space. While the exterior has undergone significant modifications - most notably in the 1970s Neoclassical-inspired refurbishment - key features such as the pediment, pilasters, and triple-door entrance maintain a visual continuity with the historic commercial fabric of Queen Street. The building's relationship to adjacent properties, preserved streetwall alignment, and integration with the town's historic grid enhance its compatibility with the broader heritage setting.

Functionally, the building's uninterrupted use as an entertainment venue for over a century contributes to its associative and intangible value. Its evolution from vaudeville theatre to cinema, and finally to a key venue of the Shaw Festival, reinforces its identity as a cultural anchor in Niagara-

on-the-Lake. The spatial organization- including rear courtyards and secondary service buildings - illustrates typical patterns of historic commercial lots, further grounding it within the district's vernacular traditions.

Together, these attributes -form, façade treatment, site orientation, pedestrian scale, and cultural continuity -form the basis of the theatre's contextual value. They provide a framework for evaluating the impact of new development and ensure that any intervention reinforces rather than diminishes the character of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.



FIGURE 20. 1946 'BROCK' CINEMA - OWNED BY MARJORIE AND DEWEY MCCOURT

4.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The Shaw Festival proposes the redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre site at 85 Queen Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake, to address operational, artistic, and audience needs through a comprehensive and contemporary architectural intervention. The proposed development includes the construction of a new three-storey theatre complex with a basement level and an articulated fly-tower. The building will support improved technical capabilities, performer amenities, and public accessibility, while integrating respectfully into the surrounding heritage context.

The architectural design maintains the traditional two-storey streetwall scale along Queen and Victoria Streets, consistent with the character of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. The third storey and fly tower are recessed and visually articulated to mitigate their impact on public view corridors. These massing strategies ensure compatibility with adjacent heritage properties and the historic pedestrian experience. Key refinements to the development include:

- A reduction in the total gross floor area from 66,878 ft² (Oct 2023) to 51,133 ft² (May 2025), representing a 24% reduction.
- A reconfigured site layout with increased setbacks along the north, west, and south property lines to support a more contextually sensitive transition between the new building and adjacent properties.
- The elevation of the basement level approximately three feet above the water table to improve durability and mitigate long-term environmental risks.

Key Features of the New Development:

- **Ground Floor:** A fully accessible public lobby is introduced along Queen Street, paired with commercial frontage to enhance the pedestrian realm, promote street-level activity, and improve transparency and public interface.
- **Performance Hall:** A new state-of-the-art theatre space will be constructed, meeting contemporary acoustic, staging, and accessibility standards to support diverse productions and audience experiences.
- **Back-of-House Areas:** Expanded facilities include rehearsal spaces, wardrobe production, dressing rooms, and technical support areas designed to meet the operational demands of a modern performance venue.
- **Basement:** Below-grade levels accommodate mechanical systems and performer support areas, optimizing space usage while minimizing visible building mass.
- **Second Floor:** This level houses balcony seating and related public amenities, contributing to enhanced spectator comfort and circulation.
- **Third Floor:** Strategically recessed to mitigate visual impact, this floor will accommodate administrative and technical program areas while remaining subordinate to the historic streetscape.
- **Rear Courtyard:** A landscaped outdoor space at the rear of the site creates functional connections between public zones, performance areas, and support spaces, contributing to placemaking and improving site flow.

The architectural strategy maintains the traditional two-storey streetwall character along Queen and Victoria Streets, in keeping

with the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. The third storey and fly tower are set back and visually modulated to minimize prominence from the public realm. A restrained palette of natural materials and a contemporary design language are proposed to ensure that the new structure complements the heritage setting without resorting to imitation. The design reflects a respectful and contextually responsive approach, contributing positively to the ongoing evolution of the district's built form.

Site & Area Changes

- Basement Area: Reduced from 18,921 ft² to 13,670 ft², allowing for more efficient below-grade support functions while reducing excavation requirements.
- Ground Floor: Decreased slightly from 22,611 ft² to 19,387 ft², while still maintaining a strong public interface and accommodating key programmatic elements.
- Second Floor: Reduced from 12,928 ft² to 9,727 ft², contributing to a more modest and streetscape-sensitive massing.
- Third Floor: Decreased from 10,262 ft² to 8,298 ft², further minimizing overall building height and shadow impact.
- Technical Gallery (Rehearsal Hall): This space has been removed from the revised proposal, resulting in a simplified interior layout and further reduction in total area.
- Total Gross Floor Area: Reduced from 66,879 ft² to 51,082 ft², representing a more compact and context-sensitive development approach.

These design refinements reflect increased setbacks along the north, west, and south property lines, improving adjacencies and enhancing compatibility with the surrounding built heritage context.

Sustainability & Accessibility Commitments

The building is designed to achieve Net Zero energy performance, ensuring environmental responsibility and operational efficiency. In addition, it is targeting Rick Hansen

Building Level	Revised Design (May 2025)	Previous Design (October 2023)
Basement	13,670 ft ²	18,921 ft ²
Ground Floor	19,387 ft ²	22,611 ft ²
Second Floor	9,727 ft ²	12,922 ft ²
Third Floor	8,298 ft ²	10,262 ft ²
Total Building Area	51,082 ft ²	66,879 ft ²

SOURCE: UNITY, REVISED DRAWINGS, APRIL 9, 2025

Foundation Gold Certification, supporting inclusive access for performers, staff, and visitors of all abilities.

Design Evolution & Area Reductions

The current design is the result of significant refinement from earlier concepts. The overall gross floor area has been reduced from 66,878 ft² in the October 2023 scheme to 51,081 ft² in the revised April 2025 scheme, representing a 24% reduction in total built area.

These reductions were achieved by reducing the building footprint, increasing setbacks on the north, west, and south property lines, and optimizing program distribution. While the third floor increased slightly in area, it remains recessed and visually subordinate to preserve the heritage character of Queen Street.

Key Programmatic Components

- Public Lobby & Commercial Frontage (Ground Floor): Enhances pedestrian experience along Queen Street with transparent glazing and retail integration.

- Main Performance Hall: Designed to contemporary acoustic and accessibility standards, with backstage access from all levels.
- Support Spaces: Costumes, set design, technical workshops, and rehearsal areas, ensuring that production is fully integrated on-site.
- Administrative and Technical Areas (Upper Floors): Accommodated within recessed volumes to reduce impact on heritage viewsheds.
- Landscaped Courtyard (Rear): Improves functional flow and offers outdoor amenity space, contributing to placemaking.

Demolition Scope

To accommodate the new theatre, the proposal includes the demolition of four designated and one non-designated building:

- 178 Victoria Street: Two-storey residence, garage, and barn.
- 188 Victoria Street: One-and-a-half-storey commercial building.
- 79 Queen Street (Tranter's House): Single-storey commercial structure.
- 85 Queen Street (Royal George Theatre): The existing modified theatre.
- Associated elements including hard landscaping, sheds, and vegetation.

4.1 Considered Alternatives

Alternative 1: In-Situ Conservation

Preservation of the existing theatre structure was studied in detail. However, extensive alterations over time, combined with system failures and structural degradation, have eroded the integrity of the original building. In its current form, the structure cannot support the technical, accessibility, and safety requirements of a modern theatre.

Further, the remaining heritage attributes lack sufficient cohesion to justify a preservation-based strategy under the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada. The in-situ conservation approach was deemed neither feasible nor appropriate.

Alternative 2: In-Kind Reconstruction

A full in-kind reconstruction of the Royal George Theatre was also considered. While technically possible, this approach would contravene best practices in heritage conservation, which discourage reconstruction unless fully supported by extensive documentation and warranted by exceptional circumstances. Reconstruction would also risk conveying a false sense of history and fail to deliver on the Shaw Festival's evolving needs for accessibility, energy performance, and production capability. For these reasons, this alternative was rejected.

Summary

The proposed redevelopment represents a careful balancing of contemporary theatre requirements with heritage values. The revised design reduces the building's footprint, increases setbacks, and improves compatibility with the historic fabric of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Through respectful massing, sympathetic materiality, and clear architectural intent, the new theatre aims to sustain the Royal George's cultural legacy while positioning it for future generations.



FIGURE 21. SITE PLAN - EXISTING & REMOVE AS-102, UNITY DESIGN STUDIO, MAY 2025



FIGURE 22. BUILDING ELEVATIONS A-204, UNITY DESIGN STUDIO, MAY 2025

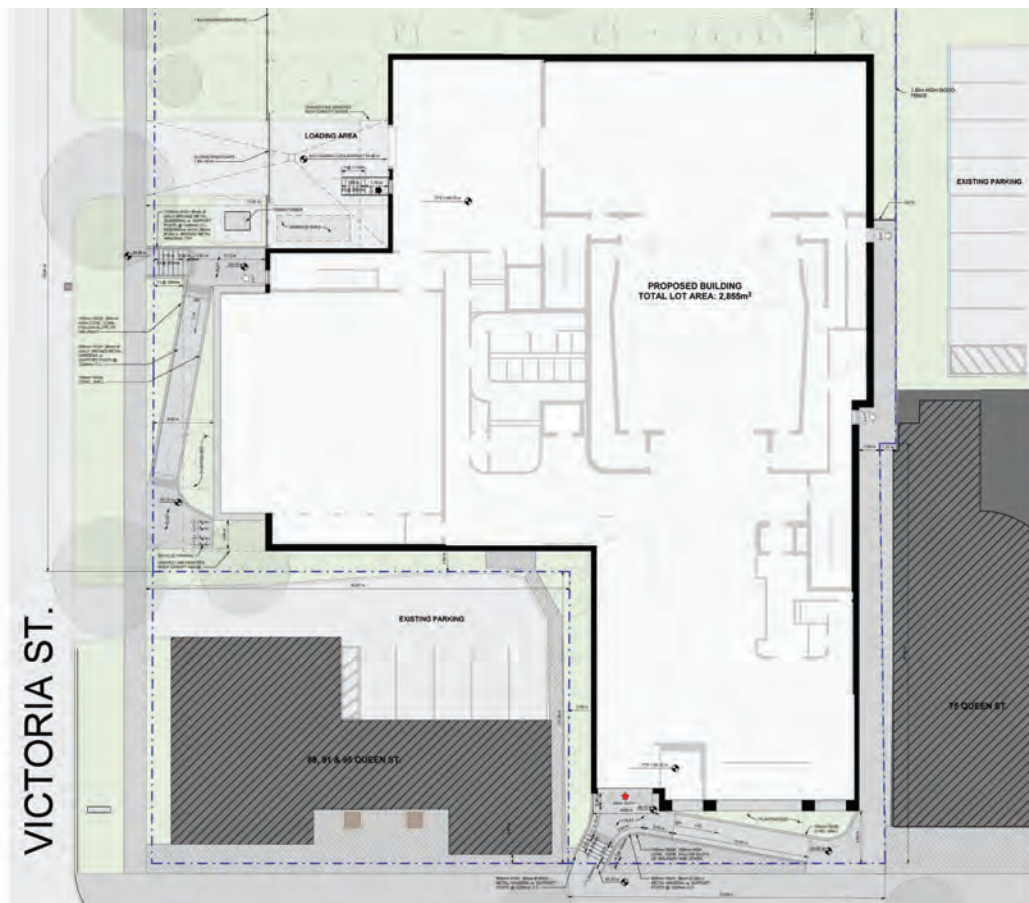


FIGURE 23. GROUND FLOOR AREA G-001, UNITY DESIGN STUDIO, MAY 2025



5.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This section assesses the potential impacts of the proposed redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre site on heritage resources, the historic urban fabric, and the broader cultural landscape. The evaluation draws upon federal, provincial, and municipal heritage policies and recognized best practices, including the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (2010), the Ontario Heritage Act, the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District Plan (1986), and relevant international charters.

The methodology adopts a values-based approach, in accordance with current best practices in heritage conservation. This approach acknowledges that the significance of a historic place is not limited to its tangible architectural features, but also includes its intangible, associative, contextual, and cultural values. Accordingly, the assessment examines how the proposed development may affect:

- The physical attributes of the Royal George Theatre property;
- Its contribution to the heritage character of Queen Street and Victoria Street;
- Its role within the broader cultural landscape of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District;
- And its symbolic and community-associated values within the Niagara-on-the-Lake National Historic Site.

The analysis considers a range of impact types, including both direct and indirect effects on heritage resources, short-term and long-term consequences, and the potential for cumulative impacts as the urban landscape of Niagara-on-the-Lake continues to evolve.

Special attention is given to the ways in which the proposed development may alter the setting, views, massing relationships, material coherence, and interpretative legibility of the heritage area.

This holistic evaluation seeks to ensure that the proposed interventions align with the principles of respectful change, minimal intervention, and reversibility, wherever possible, thereby sustaining the cultural and urban continuity that defines Niagara-on-the-Lake's historic core.

5.1 On-site Heritage Resources

The five (5) buildings proposed for demolition - including the Royal George Theatre and its adjacent properties - are designated contributing resources within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. While recognized for their contextual importance within the historic district, these buildings, and particularly the Royal George Theatre, have been subject to extensive alterations over time. These cumulative changes have resulted in a significant erosion of their architectural integrity, material authenticity, and overall physical coherence.

The Royal George Theatre, despite its strong cultural associations and its longstanding presence as a recognizable landmark within Niagara-on-the-Lake, no longer retains the degree of architectural authenticity that would typically warrant restoration treatment focused on physical conservation. Today, the site's heritage significance resides principally in its contextual and associative values - namely its enduring role within the collective

memory, cultural life, and urban structure of the community - rather than in the intrinsic value of its current built fabric.

Given the extent of material degradation, loss of historic fabric, and functional obsolescence, demolition is identified as an appropriate and acceptable conservation strategy for the site. This approach aligns with the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, which acknowledge that when the original physical integrity of a place has been severely compromised, conservation efforts should focus on maintaining broader heritage values through sensitive and appropriate new interventions.

The proposed development - through carefully considered massing, material selection, public realm interface, and sympathetic but distinguishable architectural language - is designed to commemorate the site's cultural legacy, enhance its associative significance, and strengthen its contribution to the cultural landscape, without resorting to replication or creating a false sense of historical authenticity.

5.2 Nearby Heritage Resources

The proposal is not anticipated to result in significant adverse heritage impacts on nearby designated resources or the broader cultural landscape. While the new development will alter the existing spatial organization of the site, it has been designed to respond sensitively to its context and is expected to contribute positively to the architectural diversity of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.

This diversity of styles, forms, and typologies is itself a key character-defining element of the District. The area has evolved over time through incremental infill and adaptive reuse, producing a layered historic environment in which variety is part of its heritage value. In this context, the proposed development

- through its contemporary expression, careful massing, and material articulation - will integrate into the historic fabric without disrupting the underlying heritage character. By reflecting the established rhythm, scale, and human-scaled proportions of Queen Street and Victoria Street, the new building will support the cultural identity of the District while allowing for functional and architectural renewal within a heritage setting.

5.3 Potential Impacts

The objective of this section is to provide an overview of the potential impacts associated with the proposed development and to outline conservation strategies and mitigation measures designed to address and reduce those impacts in a manner consistent with established heritage best practices.

Landscape Impact

The proposed development has been designed to respond thoughtfully to the cultural landscape of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. By reinstating key elements such as height, proportion, roofline, and material expression, the new building will reinforce established spatial patterns and support visual continuity within the district. These design strategies help mitigate the potential impacts associated with introducing a contemporary structure into a historic setting.

From a streetscape perspective, the proposal is contextually appropriate. It maintains the traditional two-storey streetwall along Queen and Victoria Streets, aligning with the scale and rhythm of adjacent heritage buildings. The stepped-back upper storey and articulated massing reduce visual dominance while accommodating the increased functional requirements of a modern theatre. In this way, the development strikes a balance between heritage compatibility and contemporary needs, contributing to the evolving character of the district while respecting its historic foundations. The design allows

for intensification toward the rear of the site, away from the principal public realm, thereby minimizing disruption to the district's cultural landscape and enhancing its long-term coherence.

Architectural Impact

The proposed redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre has been carefully designed to respond to its surrounding built heritage context. Through the strategic use of setbacks and step-backs—particularly at the third storey and fly tower—the building's massing is moderated to reduce visual prominence and maintain key view corridors along Queen and Victoria Streets.

The architectural strategy respects the established lotting pattern, setbacks, and rhythm of façades within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. The new building's scale, proportions, and alignment reflect these defining characteristics, supporting the legibility of the historic streetscape while accommodating contemporary functional needs. Material choices and detailing are designed to complement, rather than replicate, the surrounding heritage context—achieving compatibility without mimicry.

By reinforcing horizontal datums and responding to adjacent building heights, the design maintains visual coherence and reinforces the pedestrian-oriented scale of the district. The façade's articulation and storefront rhythm support continuity along Queen Street, while ensuring transparency and accessibility at grade. The siting and orientation of the new theatre remain consistent with that of the former Royal George Theatre, helping to sustain its historic presence and role as a cultural anchor within the district. Interior upgrades—including expanded backstage and performance support spaces—have been integrated without compromising the building's contribution to the streetscape.

Overall, the architectural approach reflects recognized conservation practices that encourage context-sensitive design, legibility of new interventions, and a balance between change and continuity. The proposed development is considered a compatible and respectful addition to the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.

Visual Impact

The proposed redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre introduces a low- to mid-rise building that is consistent with the scale and rhythm of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. The two-storey streetwall along Queen and Victoria Streets is maintained, with the third floor and fly tower recessed significantly from the public realm. This massing approach respects the existing view corridors and ensures that the upper levels are visually subordinate to adjacent heritage properties. The architectural design integrates horizontal datums, vertical rhythms, and facade articulation found in nearby heritage buildings, thereby supporting visual continuity across the streetscape. While distinctly contemporary in expression, the design refrains from mimicry, instead opting for a respectful contrast that clearly delineates new from old. Key features include:

- **Setbacks and Stepbacks:** Generous setbacks on the north, west, and south sides reduce the apparent mass of the building and mitigate impacts on adjacent buildings.
- **Materiality and Detailing:** The use of stone and red brick provides visual compatibility with neighbouring heritage structures, while articulation at the base reinforces the human-scale experience along the sidewalk.
- **Streetscape Harmony:** The Queen and Victoria Street elevations reinforce the historic lotting pattern and contribute to a cohesive urban composition.

The design preserves key views along Queen and Victoria Streets, supports the legibility of the historic built form, and reinforces the site's longstanding role as a visual and cultural landmark in Niagara-on-the-Lake. It embodies a sensitive response to the surrounding heritage context while supporting the Shaw Festival's continued presence as a major civic and cultural institution

Land Use Impact

The subject site is situated within a diverse urban context that includes residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments, characteristic of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. This varied land use pattern is a defining feature of the district's historic evolution and contributes to its layered cultural landscape. The proposed development has the potential to reinforce this mixed-use character by enhancing the site's functional role as a cultural and commercial anchor. The theatre's continued use - coupled with improved facilities and a stronger public interface - will support daytime and evening activity, contributing to a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented streetscape.

From an urban design perspective, the new development offers an opportunity to strengthen the transition between the quieter residential properties to the north and the more active commercial uses along Queen Street. The project enhances permeability, consolidates cultural programming, and intensifies site use in a manner that respects the heritage context. By fostering a clearer and more cohesive interface between residential and commercial zones, the proposal supports a more legible and contextually appropriate land use pattern that aligns with both heritage conservation goals and broader municipal planning objectives.

Land Disturbances Impact

The proposed redevelopment will involve construction activity and excavation, which have the potential to result in limited

and temporary impacts to the immediate surroundings. These may include ground vibration, noise, dust, and the potential for structural stress on adjacent heritage buildings. To mitigate these risks, standard best practices in construction management will be employed. These include the implementation of protective barriers, detailed construction staging plans, and continuous site monitoring. Additionally, the involvement of a qualified structural engineer will be essential to assess and ensure the stability of nearby buildings throughout the construction period.

With these mitigation strategies in place, the anticipated land disturbance impacts are expected to be manageable and reversible, with no lasting effect on adjacent heritage resources or the overall integrity of the district.

Isolation Impact

Isolation was identified as a potential concern with the introduction of a new, larger building within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. The heritage resources adjacent to the Royal George Theatre site, including several designated properties along Queen and Victoria Streets, form part of a cohesive historic streetscape and cultural landscape.

However, based on the proposed design - which maintains the established streetwall, respects traditional building alignments, and uses compatible massing and materials - it is not anticipated that the adjacent heritage properties will become visually or contextually isolated. The new development has been carefully scaled and articulated to ensure continuity between existing and new structures, preserving the collective character and rhythm of the streetscape. The Royal George Theatre's replacement will continue to support the area's functional and symbolic role as a cultural anchor, ensuring that the broader ensemble of heritage resources remains integrated and coherent within the evolving urban fabric of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Impact of Destruction

The proposed removal of the existing structures, while marking a notable physical change to the site, does not fundamentally alter the cultural narrative or heritage value of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. The physical evolution of Niagara-on-the-Lake has historically been shaped by cycles of adaptation, replacement, and renewal — a characteristic reflected in the layering of architectural styles, building typologies, and land uses across the district.

In this context, the demolition of the Royal George Theatre and associated buildings can be understood as part of the site's continuing evolution, rather than a rupture in its heritage continuum. While the loss of any heritage resource requires careful consideration, the absence of outstanding material heritage attributes and the compromised integrity of the existing structures reduce the severity of the heritage impact.

More importantly, the new development proposes to retain and enhance the intangible heritage values associated with the site: its function as a cultural gathering place, its contribution to the town's identity as a centre for the performing arts, and its symbolic role within the collective memory of Niagara-on-the-Lake. By reinforcing these intangible connections, the project seeks to ensure that the cultural significance of the site remains active, meaningful, and accessible to future generations. In this way, the proposed intervention is consistent with contemporary conservation thinking, which recognizes that the protection of heritage values can sometimes necessitate thoughtful change, especially when the physical fabric no longer effectively communicates a site's significance.

Shadow Impact

A shadow study included in the 2025 rezoning submission, prepared by Unity Design Studio, evaluates the seasonal and hourly shadow impacts of the revised Royal George Theatre

proposal. The study assessed projections on April 21, June 21, September 21, and December 21, between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., providing comprehensive visualizations of sun and shade conditions across key dates and times.

The results of the updated study confirm that the revised design - which introduces reduced gross floor area, deeper setbacks along the north, west, and south property lines, and a more recessed third storey - generates shadows that are shorter in duration and extent than those modeled in the 2023 scheme. These refinements help preserve access to sunlight and sky views, particularly along Queen Street and adjacent properties within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.

The massing strategy continues to include a two-storey streetwall, a recessed third floor, and an articulated fly tower that is modulated to reduce its visual and shadow impact. Importantly, the updated design shows no prolonged shadowing on sensitive public spaces, pedestrian corridors, or surrounding heritage buildings.

In our professional opinion, the shadow impacts associated with the proposed redevelopment are limited, contextually appropriate, and do not adversely affect the heritage character, usability, or pedestrian experience of the surrounding district. The development demonstrates a careful and responsive approach to heritage integration through architectural design and solar impact mitigation. Significantly, the revised design introduces further reductions in gross floor area and massing, along with increased setbacks along the north, west, and south property lines. These refinements are expected to lessen the project's shadow impact even more, improving sky views and solar access compared to the 2023 proposal. While an updated shadow study may be required to confirm these benefits quantitatively, the changes demonstrate a more sensitive and contextually responsive integration.

In our professional opinion, shadow impacts associated with the proposed development are minor, manageable, and not expected to adversely affect the heritage character or pedestrian experience of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.

Archaeological Impact

A Stage 1–2 Archaeological Assessment was completed in 2023 by Archaeological Services Inc. for 188 Victoria Street, which forms part of the Royal George Theatre site redevelopment project. The assessment followed the requirements of the Ontario Heritage Act and the Standards and Guidelines for Consultant Archaeologists.

The Stage 1 background research determined that while the property historically held archaeological potential - particularly due to its proximity to early Indigenous and Euro-Canadian settlements and its location within the historic town plan of Niagara-on-the-Lake - extensive previous ground disturbances (e.g., building construction, paving, landscaping) had significantly altered the site's archaeological integrity. A Stage 2 field assessment confirmed these findings: approximately 95% of the property was assessed as having been thoroughly disturbed, with no intact archaeological resources remaining. A minor undisturbed strip was subjected to test pit surveys, which further confirmed disturbance across the site. No archaeological artifacts or cultural materials were recovered during the Stage 2 assessment.

Given the results of the assessment, it was concluded that no further archaeological work is required on the property. Therefore, the proposed development is not expected to result in any adverse impacts to known or potential archaeological resources. This conclusion is aligned with best practices in archaeological resource management and with the recommendations provided in the Stage 1–2 Archaeological Assessment report.

5.4 Summary of Potential Impacts of the Proposed Redevelopment

The proposed redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre addresses the extensive loss of architectural integrity and material authenticity of the existing buildings. Demolition and replacement with a contextually sensitive new structure is considered appropriate and consistent with heritage best practices.

Key impacts include:

- On-Site Resources: Demolition is justified by the loss of original attributes; the new building commemorates the site's cultural and contextual significance.
- Nearby Resources: No significant adverse impacts are anticipated; the new development reinforces the historic character through scale, massing, and materiality.
- Landscape and Streetscape: The project maintains traditional streetscape alignments and supports the district's visual and pedestrian continuity.
- Architectural and Visual Impacts: Setbacks, massing modulation, and design articulation minimize view and light impacts while integrating harmoniously.
- Shadow and Land Use Impacts: Reduced massing in the revised design lessens shadow impacts and strengthens the site's role as a cultural anchor.
- Archaeological and Construction Impacts: No archaeological resources were found; construction impacts are manageable with standard protections.

The redevelopment offers a respectful renewal of the site's heritage values, reinforcing Niagara-on-the-Lake's evolving historic landscape.

6.0 CONSERVATION STRATEGY & APPROACH

The proposed conservation approach for the Royal George Theatre site is Rehabilitation, consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (2010) and applicable heritage conservation best practices. Rehabilitation is recognized as the most appropriate treatment, given the site's current condition, the loss of material integrity, and the ongoing need to sustain its cultural, associative, and contextual values within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District and the Niagara-on-the-Lake National Historic Site.

The strategy acknowledges that while the physical authenticity of the Royal George Theatre and adjacent properties has been compromised by successive alterations, the site's intangible heritage values - including its cultural role as a centre for the performing arts and its prominence within the streetscape - remain significant and merit careful stewardship. Accordingly, the conservation strategy includes the following key components:

- **Redevelopment through Sensitive Rehabilitation:** Demolition of the existing buildings is proposed, to be followed by the construction of a new theatre building that reinterprets the site's cultural significance in a contemporary architectural language, while maintaining the functional role of the Royal George Theatre within the district.
- **Contextually Responsive Design:** The massing, setbacks, material palette, and architectural expression of the new development have been carefully calibrated to reinforce the established rhythm, human scale,

and character of Queen Street and Victoria Street, ensuring compatibility with the surrounding historic fabric.

- **Preservation of Streetscape Relationships:** The new structure will maintain the traditional two-storey streetwall condition and align with the historic lotting patterns, while incorporating contemporary elements that distinguish it as a product of its time, avoiding false historicism.
- **Commemoration of Cultural Associations:** Interpretive elements and commemorative strategies will be incorporated into the design to reflect the site's history and continued role as a cultural landmark within Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- **Public Realm Enhancement:** Improvements to landscaping, pedestrian connectivity, and street-facing activation will support the continued vitality and accessibility of the public realm, enhancing the visitor experience within the heritage district.
- **Construction Best Practices:** Measures will be implemented to mitigate potential impacts during demolition and construction, including structural monitoring of adjacent heritage properties, protective barriers, and careful staging.

This rehabilitation approach respects the evolving nature of Niagara-on-the-Lake's heritage environment, balancing the need for contemporary functional upgrades with the conservation of the site's enduring cultural significance. By supporting the

continued use of the Royal George Theatre site as a vibrant centre for the performing arts, the project contributes to the living heritage of the district and ensures that its symbolic role remains active and meaningful for future generations.

6.1 Mitigation Measures

In support of the proposed redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre site, a series of mitigation strategies are recommended to minimize heritage impacts and ensure that the intervention remains respectful of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District and its cultural landscape. These measures are grounded in the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (2010), the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District Plan (1986), and applicable planning and heritage policies.

The proposed conservation approach – Rehabilitation – recognizes the need for change to accommodate new uses, while respecting the site’s symbolic, contextual, and associative values. The following measures are intended to support the sensitive integration of the new development:

Pre-Demolition & Construction Phase

- **Comprehensive Documentation**
Prior to demolition, this Heritage Impact Assessment provides a complete archival record of the site’s evolution, including its heritage values, condition, and a summary of alternatives considered.
- **Salvage of Heritage Materials (if applicable)**
Selective demolition and opening of wall assemblies should be undertaken to verify existing materials. Should heritage material of value be discovered, a qualified heritage professional should assess the potential for salvage, reuse, or interpretation.

- **Construction Impact Mitigation**
Potential impacts from vibration and construction activity within 60m of adjacent buildings should be addressed through:
 - o Vibration monitoring
 - o Protective measures for adjacent structures
 - o Supervision by a structural engineer

Architectural & Urban Integration

- **Respect for Urban & Heritage Context**
 - o The proposed building reinforces the existing urban pattern by maintaining the orientation of buildings and continuity of the streetscape.
 - o The building’s two-storey streetwall along Queen and Victoria Streets maintains the pedestrian scale and rhythm characteristic of the district.
 - o Height, setbacks, and massing are designed to be compatible with surrounding heritage properties, with the third storey and fly-tower stepped back to reduce visual prominence.
- **Materiality & Design Articulation**
 - o Materials and colour palette should be compatible with and visually subordinate to the surrounding context, avoiding the introduction of new materials that would detract from the character or legibility of the site’s evolution.
 - o Contemporary interpretation of the former theatre façade is encouraged. The reinstatement of the two-storey expression should avoid pastiche or historicism, while referencing the proportions and rhythm of the historic streetscape.
- **Contextual & Landscape Continuity**
 - o The new structure will be located on the same site fronting Queen Street, preserving the theatre’s relationship to the commercial core and its role as a cultural landmark.

o Landscape integration will support visual continuity and reinforce the site's legibility as part of the broader cultural landscape.

Functional & Cultural Continuity

- Preserving Cultural & Associative Values
 - o The new development will maintain the site's long-standing cultural function as a performance venue and community gathering place.
 - o The retention of commercial uses that support the theatre reinforces the site's role in the cultural life of Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- Storefront & Public Realm Activation
 - o Commercial frontage along Queen Street should be articulated to reference the character of the existing streetscape.
 - o Entrances, glazing patterns, and signage should enhance pedestrian engagement and continuity with existing retail typologies.
- Opportunity for Remediation of Past Interventions
 - o Where possible, the project may provide an opportunity to address earlier alterations that have diminished the site's heritage value or its relationship to adjacent properties. Input from a heritage professional is advised to guide any such restorative actions.

Together, these mitigation measures are intended to ensure that the proposed redevelopment supports a thoughtful balance between change and continuity, reinforcing the site's historical and cultural significance while enabling it to evolve to meet contemporary needs.

6.2 Sustainability Considerations

The proposed redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre incorporates a strong commitment to environmental

sustainability through the integration of Net Zero energy performance features. From a heritage conservation perspective, these sustainability objectives support the evolving role of the site as a cultural and architectural landmark, while reinforcing its long-term contribution to the community and the landscape of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District.

The Net Zero energy strategy reflects a forward-looking approach to building performance, in which the new structure will be designed to produce as much energy as it consumes on an annual basis through high-efficiency systems and renewable energy generation. This approach reduces the environmental impact of the building and aligns with broader policy objectives for climate resilience and sustainable urban development. From a heritage standpoint, integrating Net Zero performance does not conflict with the principles of conservation; rather, it enhances the cultural legacy of the Royal George Theatre by demonstrating responsible stewardship and adaptability in the face of contemporary challenges. Heritage places, particularly those that are continuously used and adapted, must evolve in ways that respect their context while meeting present and future needs.

By combining sustainability performance with heritage-informed design strategies, the proposed development advances the broader goals of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. It respects the historic patterns and character of the site while projecting a renewed vision for cultural and architectural leadership in the community.

In this way, sustainability is not only a technical consideration but a vital aspect of the building's symbolic and functional evolution. It contributes to the site's ongoing heritage value by reinforcing its role as a place of innovation, civic engagement, and environmental responsibility within the living fabric of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

6.3 Accessibility

In parallel with the project's sustainability objectives, the redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre places a strong emphasis on accessibility and universal design principles. Both sustainability and accessibility are central to creating a resilient, inclusive, and culturally relevant public facility that will continue to serve the evolving needs of Niagara-on-the-Lake's residents, visitors, and cultural community.

A key element of this commitment is the pursuit of Rick Hansen Foundation Gold Certification, a nationally recognized benchmark for accessible design in the built environment. This certification ensures that the new theatre will achieve high standards for physical, sensory, and cognitive accessibility, supporting an environment that is welcoming to all users.

The Rick Hansen Gold Certification framework encompasses a wide range of design considerations, including barrier-free entrances, universally accessible seating areas, adaptable backstage and support spaces, accessible washrooms, intuitive wayfinding systems, and accommodations for individuals with diverse mobility and sensory needs. These features will be seamlessly integrated into the building's design to provide a dignified, inclusive, and enriching experience for all patrons, performers, and staff.

From a heritage conservation perspective, the integration of accessibility features reinforces the cultural value of the site by ensuring its continued relevance and inclusivity. The evolution of historic places to meet the needs of contemporary society - including accessibility and universal access - is fundamental to sustaining their cultural significance. In this context, the redevelopment supports the broader heritage objectives articulated in the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, which encourage respectful interventions that sustain the ongoing use and social value of historic environments.

Moreover, by expanding participation and removing barriers to cultural engagement, the new Royal George Theatre will uphold and renew its legacy as a vibrant cultural and social anchor within the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. The project's commitment to accessibility thus extends beyond technical compliance: it embodies the values of inclusion, community identity, and cultural continuity that are integral to Niagara-on-the-Lake's historic character.

In this way, the pursuit of Rick Hansen Gold Certification not only achieves technical excellence in accessible design but also strengthens the site's role within the living heritage of the community, supporting a future that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to contemporary needs.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This Heritage Impact Assessment has evaluated the proposed redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre site at 85 Queen Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake, with careful reference to applicable federal, provincial, and municipal heritage policies, including the Ontario Heritage Act, the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District Plan (1986), and the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (2010). The assessment has also been informed by best practices in heritage conservation and relevant international charters.

The analysis presented in this report has determined that, while the Royal George Theatre and adjacent properties at 79 Queen Street, 178 and 188 Victoria Street have contributed historically to the character of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District, they have undergone substantial alterations over time. These cumulative modifications have significantly diminished their architectural integrity and material authenticity, particularly in the case of the Royal George Theatre.

Given the deteriorated condition of the buildings, the loss of character-defining elements, and the challenges associated with maintaining the functional and operational needs of a contemporary performance venue, the decision to pursue rehabilitation through redevelopment is appropriate and supportable. This approach aligns with contemporary conservation practices, which recognize that sustaining heritage value can sometimes be best achieved through sensitive, forward-looking transformation rather than strict preservation of compromised physical fabric.

The revised design, as proposed by Lett Architects, represents a thoughtful and meaningful response to the site's heritage context. The new structure demonstrates a careful

understanding of the surrounding streetscape, massing, rhythm, and materiality of Queen and Victoria Streets, and responds with a contemporary architectural expression that avoids replication, yet respects the site's history. Importantly, the design will incorporate Net Zero energy performance features and is committed to achieving Rick Hansen Gold Certification standards, ensuring that the new building contributes not only culturally but also environmentally to the future of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

As a result of this comprehensive review, mcCallumSather supports the proposed redevelopment, subject to the implementation of the mitigation strategies and further recommendations outlined below, which are intended to guide final design and construction in a way that respects the site's heritage values and strengthens its long-term contribution to the District.

Further Recommendations

- **Material Strategy:** The selection of materials for the new building should support a clear relationship to the heritage character of the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District. Rather than relying on salvaged or strictly historically appropriate materials, the strategy should prioritize contemporary materials that convey contextual continuity and reinforce the evolving cultural landscape, avoiding literal replication of the former Royal George Theatre.
- **Architectural Expression:** The design should continue to reflect the historical significance of the Royal George Theatre without mimicking its past forms or details. The new structure should symbolize the next chapter in the site's legacy, demonstrating a thoughtful evolution that supports the area's identity as a living heritage environment.
- **Urban & Streetscape Integration:** The project should maintain

the pedestrian scale, façade rhythm, and massing patterns characteristic of Queen and Victoria Streets. Commercial storefronts and public interfaces should respect the human-scaled character of the District, contributing to a vibrant and walkable streetscape.

- **Commemoration of Heritage Values:** Interpretation elements, such as plaques or integrated displays, should be incorporated to recognize the site's layered history, reinforcing public understanding of its longstanding cultural role in Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- **Construction Management:** Best practices in construction management, including vibration monitoring, adjacent property protection measures, and site-specific construction controls, should be implemented to safeguard nearby heritage properties.
- **Shadow & Sunlight Considerations:** The reduced building footprint, increased setbacks, and lowered massing of the revised proposal are expected to further minimize shadow impacts on adjacent properties and public spaces, enhancing the development's integration with the surrounding heritage context.
- **Cultural Continuity:** The redevelopment should ensure the continuation of cultural programming and performance uses associated with the Royal George Theatre, maintaining its symbolic, associative, and functional presence within the heritage district.

By reinforcing associative values, strengthening contextual integrity, promoting sustainability through Net Zero performance and accessibility through Rick Hansen Gold Certification, and anchoring the redevelopment within a respectful yet contemporary architectural vision, the proposed project offers a model for heritage district renewal. The project sustains the living cultural and architectural traditions that define Niagara-on-the-Lake, while responding thoughtfully to the evolving needs of the community and the environment.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: References

Appendix B: Site Photos

Appendix C: Archival Data

Appendix D: Policies & Regulatory Framework

Appendix E: Drawing Sets & Shadow Study (2023 & 2025)

Appendix F: Landscape Plan

Appendix G: Building Condition Assessment

Appendix H: Parking Study (2025)

Appendix I: Urban Design Brief (2025)

Appendix J: Archeological Assessment

Appendix K: Arborist Report

Appendix L: Streetscape Study

APPENDIX A: REFERENCES

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APPENDIX B: SITE PHOTOS





















