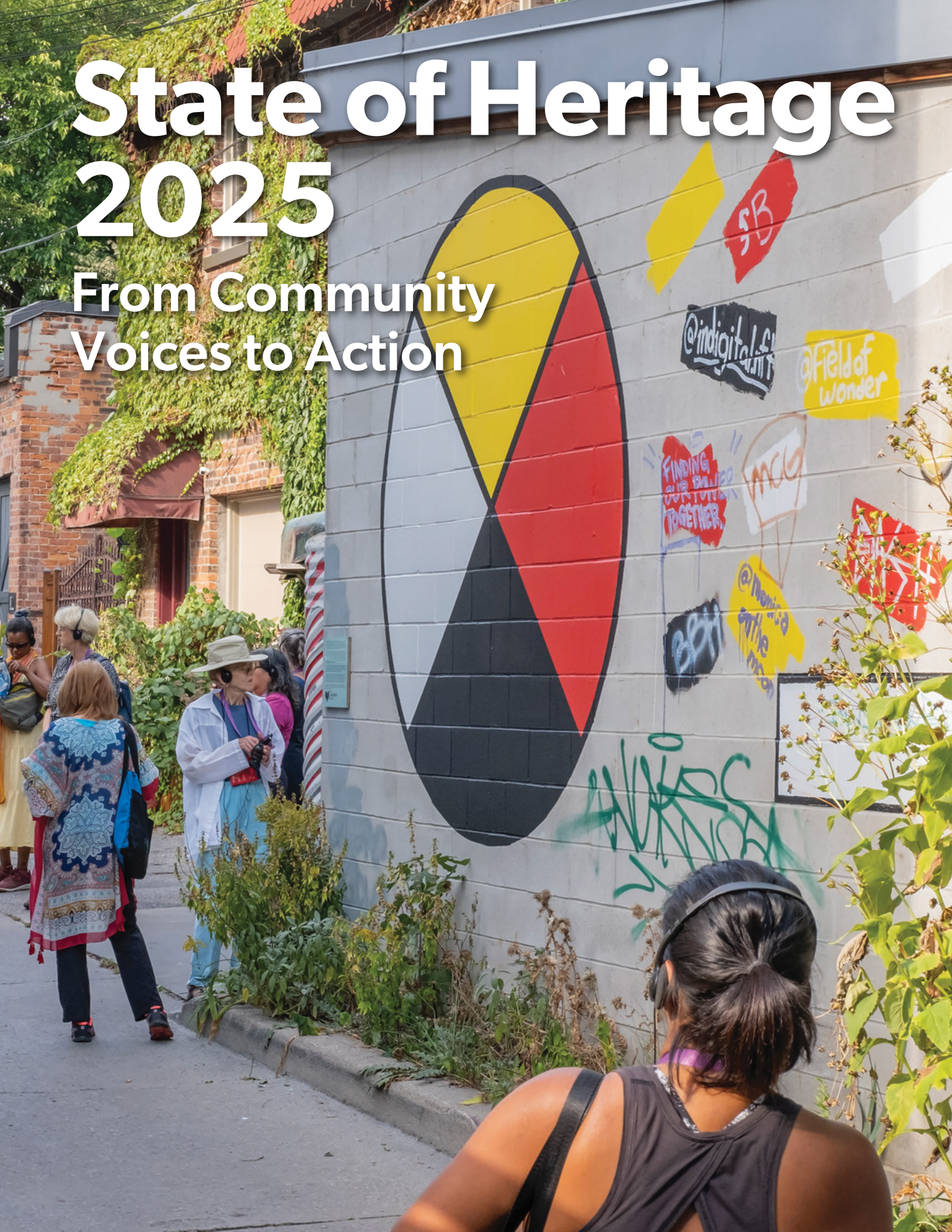


State of Heritage 2025

From Community
Voices to Action



Contents

3	Foreword
4	Understanding the report
6	Indigenous roots
10	Vibrant neighbourhoods
14	Creative expressions
16	Working together
18	Money matters
22	What's next
24	At a glance
25	Acknowledgements
26	References

Land Acknowledgement

Heritage Toronto is located on the traditional territory of the Wendat, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Anishinaabeg, including the Chippewas and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today Toronto is host to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Toronto is within the territory of the Dish with One Spoon Treaty which requires responsibility of those who use the land to share it peaceably and care for it. Heritage Toronto acknowledges this responsibility and recognizes the efforts of these nations in maintaining the land.

COVER: Tour participants, Indigenous Art & Nature, September 17, 2023. Image by Johnny Wu.



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Heritage Toronto is a charity
and arms-length agency of
the City of Toronto.

Foreword

Community voices will shape our city's heritage and its future

In recent years, Torontonians have lived through a global pandemic and challenging economic times. We believe heritage can navigate these current issues while helping us better understand one another's relationships to our past.

Our group of cross-sector community leaders—the State of Heritage Advisory Task Force—formed in 2023 to discuss the role of heritage in the city-building of the future. Gathered together by an emerging historian at Heritage Toronto to coordinate the project, it was agreed that Toronto's residents are more than just stakeholders and participants—they are experts in their own communities. Through multiple conversations, this Task Force reconsidered the heritage sector's understanding of audience engagement, and began to imagine a Toronto where communities would have the means to harness their own histories and determine their own futures.

During this project, many community voices shared their priorities and vision for the sector, recognizing that heritage can be a vital tool to

drive community development and participation in city life. We have foregrounded their firsthand input to examine pressing heritage issues, complemented with local case studies.

In this report, the Task Force offers 15 recommendations for improvement, which city residents, heritage sector professionals, Toronto City Council, and policy-makers can act upon. Real change will require a re-imagining of the scope and meaning of heritage, innovative approaches to collaboration, and new configurations of funding and resources. The sector will also need to build on its recognition that Toronto's Indigenous histories are the original foundation upon which Toronto's heritage has, and will continue to grow. It is our hope that in taking a bold leap forward together, Torontonians from every corner of the city can join in writing a new story, one in which communities propel the action.



Dilys Chan,
Chair, State of Heritage
Advisory Task Force

State of Heritage Advisory Task Force



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Ontario Federation
of Indigenous
Friendship Centres



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Museum of Canada

Understanding the report

How we got here and what to expect

Heritage Toronto is a charity and agency of the City of Toronto that builds a better city by bringing people together to explore Toronto's shared past and peoples' lived experiences. As part of this work, we produce the State of Heritage Report to inform the public of issues and trends in the heritage sector, and to advise decision-makers on opportunities for improvement.

This report represents a change in approach and shift in content, focusing on the views and interests of equity-deserving communities. To achieve this goal, we hired a project coordinator under our Equity Heritage Initiative, funded by TD Bank and the TD Ready Commitment, and struck up an Advisory Task Force composed of members of equity-deserving communities. Together, they undertook research, engaged community discussion, and developed the recommendations communicated here.

The four previous reports provided large snapshots of the sector from our distinctive architectural history to natural landscapes, and examined heritage's contribution to economic development, environmental sustainability, place-making, and social cohesion.

This issue will be the first to focus on one theme. The report builds on our 2019 assessment of heritage's capacity to promote social cohesion, while recognizing that the heritage sector has contributed to harm by over-representing narratives predicated on our colonial past, gatekeeping resources, and neglecting communities' expertise over their own histories.

Guiding the project work was the following question:

If the heritage sector were to put community perspectives first, what kind of city could Toronto be five years from now?

To delve more deeply into what communities envision for the future of Toronto's heritage sector, the Advisory Task Force engaged with:

21 Professionals through interviews

348 Torontonians at community events

134 Torontonians through a public survey

We worked with community partners at popular cultural events to ask the public for their input.¹ We also hosted our own consultation events to gather community feedback on commemorative practices and heritage-based storytelling frameworks. Based on these firsthand, local perspectives, we then undertook additional research to present a view of the current landscape of Toronto's heritage sector centered on community voices.



“Storytelling: Are We Getting It Right?” community discussion, The 519, November 30, 2023. Image by Ashley Duffus.



“Marking Place, Making History” community event, St. James Park, October 15, 2023. Image by Ashley Duffus.

“I couldn’t stand history in university. Dry facts, boring lectures... We’re a storytelling people. We live by narrative. We love stories, and that’s how we learn things.”

— Darin Wybenga, Traditional Knowledge and Land Use Coordinator, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

This report was researched and written by Claire Jansen-Faught, supported by Heritage Toronto’s Equity Heritage Initiative. The Project Coordinator and an emerging historian, Claire is a proud member of the queer community and holds a Master of Arts from the University of Victoria.

Indigenous roots

Toronto's heritage is Indigenous heritage

For 12,000 years, the land on which Toronto now sits has been a meeting place for Indigenous communities.² In recent years, organizations have launched various initiatives to help Torontonians increase their understanding of Indigenous-settler relationships.³ But for many Torontonians, Indigenous heritage is not part of our daily experiences, often only surfacing with prominent events such as the annual National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30. Over a third of respondents to a Heritage Toronto survey do not know that Torontonians and all Canadians are subject to treaties.⁴

Interventions have confronted the legacy of historic injustices against Indigenous peoples. In 2022, the institution now known as Toronto Metropolitan University was renamed. Previously, it honoured the man credited with helping to develop free public education, who was also one of the designers of Canada's residential school system. Before the university name was officially changed, students in their final year tried to replace the school's name with "X University" on their final assignments. They were advised that doing so would preclude them from graduating.⁵

Community voices are asking for a decolonized city. In 2030...

1 Indigenous communities will lead the interpretation of their own history.

repair the impact of residential schools and advance reconciliation.⁹

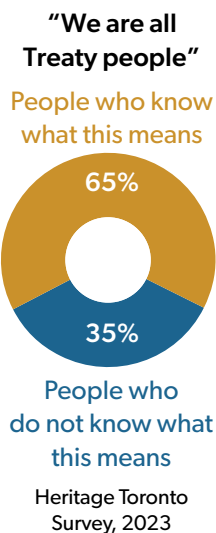
In 2021, Canada agreed to adopt the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which acknowledged the basic rights of Indigenous peoples across the globe.⁶ Institutions across Canada have been working to adhere to the Declaration, and the heritage sector is no exception.

To support Indigenous self-determination, museums have been instructed to "take the onus off of Indigenous partners" within community engagement processes.⁷ Some Indigenous spokespersons report being "consulted to death" since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)'s 94 Calls to Action in 2015.⁸ This document called upon institutions, governments at all levels, and Canadians to adopt measures to

To eliminate consultation burnout and reach actual self-determination for Indigenous peoples, many representatives are calling for more money to go directly into the hands of Indigenous nations and organizations, rather than being awarded to large granting bodies.¹⁰ Indigenous communities that have greater economic security often find they are better able to control how their heritage is protected, interpreted, and presented.

2 Land acknowledgements will include a specific commitment to action.

Over the last decade, land acknowledgements have become popular in Canada. What began as a well-meaning response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action is now seen by some as a performative gesture.¹¹





Tour participants, Indigenous Art & Nature, September 17, 2023. Image by Johnny Wu.



Toronto Metropolitan University, Indigenous Roots tour, August 8, 2021. Image by Herman Custodio.

Rather than getting rid of land acknowledgements altogether, they should be revised to make clear that in many cases, agreements over land ownership were based on different definitions of “ownership” between settlers and Indigenous peoples, often resulting in what is understood today as land theft.¹² To be more impactful, land acknowledgements should also be

more precise. Heritage Toronto’s own land acknowledgement is in the process of being revisited to sharpen ambiguous language. Every person who reads a land acknowledgement, or institution that lists one on its website, should share their exact relationship to the land and one action they have initiated to resist further colonialism.¹³

“In renaming things, we’re not trying to erase history. In fact, we can’t, because it’s embedded in our genetic memory, the different atrocities that happened to our people—we have to relive them daily.”

— Alan Jamieson, Indigenous Gardens Coordinator, PACT Urban Peace Program

3 Indigenous communities will have the space and land needed to practice their traditional ceremonies.

Across Canada, almost 30,000 places have names that derive from Indigenous languages; these names can be explored through the Government of Canada’s virtual map, “Stories from the Land.”¹⁴ Recently, in 2024, Villiers Island in the Port Lands was renamed to Ookwemin Minising, “place of the black cherry trees,” after a year-long engagement

and consultation process.¹⁵ While names are powerful affirmations of Canada’s millennia-long Indigenous presence, to do more, the City of Toronto should facilitate Indigenous communities’ access to, and sense of place on, these collective lands.

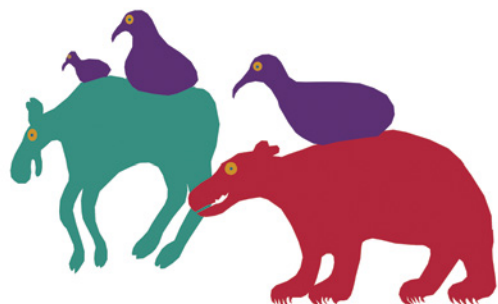
The 2019 State of Heritage Report advocated for the creation of more Indigenous spaces. Since then, the city has created designated Sacred Fire sites—outdoor areas where Indigenous groups are permitted to hold fire ceremonies—at Norwood Park, Allan Gardens, and Christie Pits Park, and implemented a process to reduce barriers for Indigenous peoples accessing Sacred Fires at non-designated sites.¹⁶ In the new neighbourhood of Canary Park, a development—dubbed the Indigenous Hub—is under way. The complex will include the Anishnawbe Community Health Centre, the Miziwe Biik Training Institute, housing, and other Indigenous-owned services.¹⁷

This is a promising step. But Indigenous community members, who live all over the city, are still seeking accessible ways to gather in locations beyond those that are



Indigenous Hub rendering, part of new mixed-use development located in Toronto’s Canary District. Image courtesy of BDP Quadrangle.

not centralized. Spaces need not be limited to multi-million dollar complexes that take years to complete; organizations could more frequently rent their existing space to Indigenous groups, and rental applications by Indigenous groups could be given priority when properties go on the market.



“How much space around organizations’ buildings is not being used? How many empty spaces are inside institutions that aren’t being occupied?”

— Ange Loft, Kanien’kehá:ka, Interdisciplinary Performing Artist



Spirit Garden at Nathan Phillips Square, January 28, 2025.

Case Study

The 2019 State of Heritage Report highlighted plans to create an Indigenous-focused public space in Nathan Phillips Square. The vision of Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, the Spirit Garden has since received \$13 million in support from the City and \$1.5 million from the Province of Ontario.¹⁸ Launched on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, 2024, the garden comprises a two-metre-tall turtle sculpture, displays the names of 18 residential schools that once existed in Ontario, and includes a teaching lodge and garden, canoe, inuksuk, wampum walkway, and healing space.¹⁹

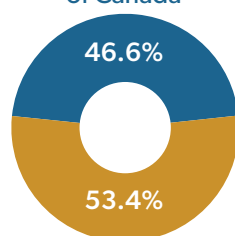
Vibrant neighbourhoods

Our city's neighbourhoods are changing

Toronto's celebrated diversity is an outcome of many waves of immigration. It's long been possible to look at maps that showcase the ethnocultural characteristics of different areas of the city, but new tools have emerged to help the public learn about the correlations between identity markers (like immigration status) and life opportunities (like home ownership).²⁰

In decades past, newcomers often settled on the outskirts of the city, and many of the areas they established are considered now to be "cultural neighbourhoods." But these neighbourhoods are changing due to gentrification and the resultant dilution of cultural specificity, affecting the area's affordability.

Toronto residents: born outside of Canada



born in Canada
Statistics Canada

The City of Toronto's newly introduced Cultural Districts Program, currently in development in Little Jamaica and soon to begin development in Church-Wellesley, intends to address these issues, although some are concerned that this framework will not provide neighbourhoods with the same kinds of protections as are guaranteed by Heritage Conservation District (HCD) designations.²¹ Both frameworks have valuable offerings: HCDs are protected against demolitions, and Cultural Districts will likely be provided with funding and infrastructure to combat displacement.²²

If done right, heritage activities have the potential to affirm to equity-deserving communities that they do belong in the city. Through improved representation and earnest community outreach, the heritage sector can increase experiences of "spatial belonging"—a person's belief that they are entitled to take up space.²³ This belief is often more common in people with privileged identities, as their comfort is often prioritized by urban design conventions and social policies.²⁴

Participation in cultural activities, especially social ones, has been linked to improved wellbeing. Controlling for socio-economic factors, people who partake in cultural programming report significantly healthier mindsets and social lives than people who don't.²⁵ Interactions with natural heritage are especially important; the more people learn about the land they live on, the more positive they feel about their place in society.²⁶

"Many people have pointed to sites and asked me, 'Is this exactly where this event took place?' I think people need a point of entry to a story—they need a connection, and a marker can be that starting point."

— Susan Fohr, Museum Coordinator,
Fort York National Historic Site



Volunteer stewardship session at Newtonbrook Creek Park, April 27, 2023. Image courtesy of Toronto Nature Stewards.

Community voices want the vibrancy of our city's cultural neighbourhoods to be protected. In 2030...

4 Heritage organizations, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), neighbourhood associations, and community groups will work together to prioritize work that builds the cultural identity of neighbourhoods.

Cultural gathering spaces like Blackhurst Cultural Centre (see case study) are just one of many neighbourhood hubs that can make an area feel like home. For example, The 519, a community centre in Church-Wellesley Village, has long been a safe space for queer and trans communities to access services, training, and social events.

Enhanced collaborations with community service hubs are one way of championing the heritage of neighbourhoods. An example of this work is plazaPOPS, a joint endeavour between BIAs, community groups, landowners, and local businesses to animate parking

lots in the suburbs and create joyful open-air environments for connection amongst residents.²⁷ The project's 2019 pilot installation occupied ten parking spots and included a modular set-up of LED displays, plants, and seating. Visitors enjoyed musical performances and urban ecology workshops.

5 Tech, like virtual reality experiences, will be integrated into creative public commemorations to share neighbourhood histories.

The heritage sector has long relied on static interpretation for public commemorations, be it plaques or monuments. Technological features can make it easier and more exciting for people to interact with city spaces. Single-user apps like Queerstory provide snippets of the history of significant queer spaces. Users have control over what they want to learn about by viewing collections of these spaces on their



Drag brunch, 2019. Image courtesy of Michael Erickson of Glad Day Bookshop.

Case Study

Blackhurst—the area around Bloor and Bathurst—has been a hub for Black Torontonians for over 70 years. Many crucial Black businesses have disappeared from the neighbourhood over time. The Blackhurst Cultural

Centre (BCC), which began in 1995 as the bookstore A Different Booklist, is determined to safeguard the community's character.



Rendering of Blackhurst, Cultural Centre, 756 Bathurst Street. Source: Ten-2-Four Architecture Inc. Rendering by Norm Li.

Its current expansion recognizes the importance of maintaining cultural vitality amidst a changing city landscape. Focused on gathering spaces for community programming, the centre will move into a larger space in 2025, which includes a drumming studio and a workspace for artists-in-residence.³⁰ The BCC has also partnered with a housing developer to guarantee affordable units for low-income Black tenants in the soon-to-be-finished Mirvish Village residential tower.³¹

devices, choosing the ones they find the most interesting, and deciding whether to visit the landmarks in real life.

To help Torontonians learn more about the history of neighbourhoods, the sector should create tech experiences that are integrated into a space. For example, in 2023, the Museum of Toronto hosted “Nuville,” a teamwork-based exploration of Allan Gardens, which included augmented reality visuals and interactive audio.²⁸ Through reflection prompts and activities, participants were able to reflect on the history and future of the area. The event encouraged participants to invent strategies for place-based human connection.

6 Parks, the heritage sector, and community partners will work together to protect our natural heritage sites and make them more accessible.

When community groups wish to run programming in city parks, they can be met with hard-to-navigate paperwork. To expand nature-related collaborations, the application

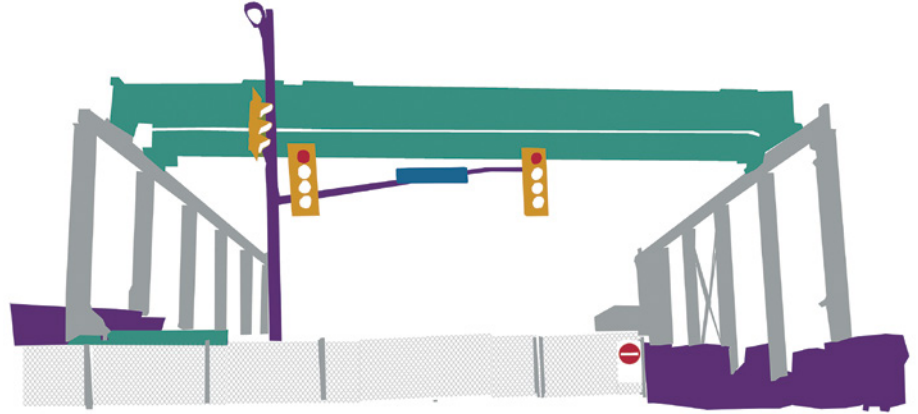
process should be more accessible and streamlined.²⁹ There are untapped opportunities for cross-organizational projects. Toronto Nature Stewards, for example, recruits volunteers to care for parks across the city, with many participants expressing a deep attachment to the sites they tend to.³³ Heritage organizations should explore options to make the natural heritage of these spaces more explicit for volunteers and park users alike; for instance, by designing experiential tours during which participants could learn about the historical significance of plant life while removing invasive species or creating personalized species labels.

7 Immersive and interactive heritage programming will encourage relationship building—between neighbours, between communities, and with city spaces.

Museums and galleries have traditionally been posed as spaces for quiet contemplation, but to make a wider impact, heritage activities could find ways to spark group discussions and social bonding.

For the last few years, the ArQuives has hosted regular queer trivia nights at Glad Day Bookshop. Contestants learn about queer

history and current events, all while laughing together, bonding over food, and appreciating the safety of the program setting.³⁴ Casual, fun-focused events like this could be more common, to offset the sometimes exclusive and stiff feel of formal gatherings, and encourage candid discussions.



“Our relationship to public spaces and natural heritage is a very embodied relationship. We’re mammals—we want to be in space with each other and be related to each other and to other species and to the land, to the air, to the sun.”

— Natalie Brown, Director of Programming, Park People



Work group, Farm Park Land Stewardship Program, 2023. Image courtesy of Black Creek Community Farm.

Case Study

In 2023, Black Creek Community Farm launched its Farm Park Land Stewardship Program. The annual initiative, which accepts 10 participants per term, is much more than a simple how-to-farm program.³² Participants learn about a variety of land-based skills and subjects, from Indigenous knowledge

systems to climate adaptation strategies. One of the key outcomes is an understanding of the connections between cultural revitalization and land stewardship practices. BIPOC applicants living in the nearby Jane-Finch area, historically stigmatised as a poor and high-crime neighbourhood, were given admittance priority.

Creative expressions

Art is heritage

From the visual motifs in Indigenous artworks to traditional quilting techniques, symbols and practices have been inherited over generations and provide a visceral way to engage with our cultural heritage.

People also connect art to heritage by visiting Toronto's museums and galleries, where they might encounter historical art objects. But most of these institutions are located in the downtown city centre; more public awareness could be cultivated of arts spaces that are more integrated into communities, and those that highlight the ways in which historical arts practices persist and flourish today.

Art can be both empowering for creators and inspiring for art consumers. RAW Taiko, a collective of East and Southeast Asian women and gender non-conforming drummers, gives performers a voice and encourages spectators to draw on their heritage to nurture their own creative expressions. The collective participates in the Arts in the Parks initiative, performing at free, accessible concerts in public parks.



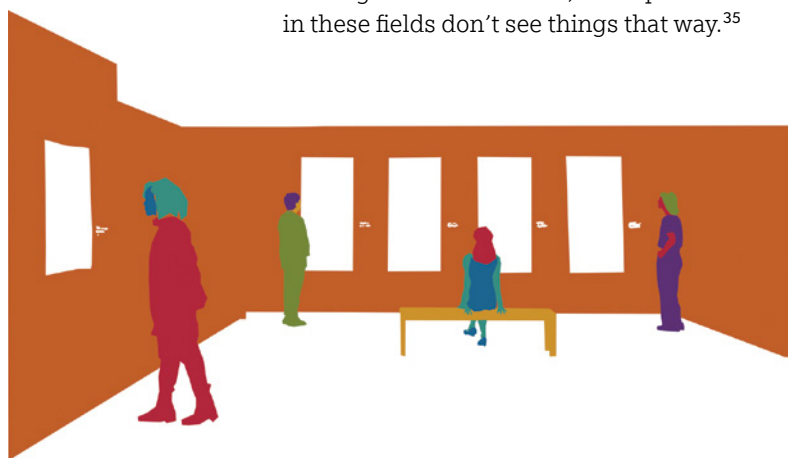
Community voices want art's full potential in the heritage sector to be realized. In 2030...

8 Cross-collaborations will lead to a better understanding and increased public value of the connections between art and heritage.

While heritage, arts, and culture are grouped into one sector by many governing and funding bodies in Canada, some professionals in these fields don't see things that way.³⁵

DISH DANCES, an Indigenous-led installation that was featured in the 2022 Toronto Biennial of Art and formed through multiple collaborations, reanimated the Credit River and examined issues of governance and sustainability.³⁶ A key component of the installation was a video displayed on the exterior wall of Fort York Visitor Centre, teaching visitors how to harness expressive movement to connect to nature and historical narratives.

Festival installations are necessarily temporary, and can be easy to miss for people who find the arts scene exclusionary or not relevant. Cross-collaborations should aim to meet people where they are at and produce outcomes that are accessible year-round, through projects like participatory murals and mobile troupes who could perform in various neighbourhoods.





Dis/Mantle exhibit, August 3, 2022. Image courtesy of Andrew Williamson.

Case Study

The 2022 exhibit *Dis/Mantle* reimagined Spadina House as the home of Louisa Pipkin, the real life Black launderer of the mansion's white inhabitants in the 1870s, and a safe haven for Black freedom seekers. The Afrofuturist-style paintings, which artist Gordon Shadrach created for the exhibit, attested to the work of historic and contemporary Black figures

to further social progress.³⁷ The artworks counteracted harmful stereotypes by depicting their subjects in lesser-seen ways. In Shadrach's portraits, the sitters appeared confident and at ease. Shadrach even lived in the museum for months to prepare for the showcase, allowing him to connect more deeply to the space's history and better convey its complexities to visitors.³⁸

9 Compensation for cultural artists will reflect the time and effort required to produce their work.

Art rooted in specific cultural histories and practices can be costly to create, especially if projects necessitate big groups of performers. In Toronto, when organizations apply for funding for projects featuring contracted dancers, some major funders' eligibility requirements do not mandate the payment of artists' fees.³⁹

Despite the existence of grants for projects, training, and studio space, as of 2021, the median personal income of Toronto artists was 32% lower than that of all Toronto workers.⁴⁰ The Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front

des artistes canadiens (CARFAC) provides guidelines for artists who exhibit visual art, and does not set a recommended minimum wage for performance-based artists; art connected to heritage often falls under this latter category. Cultural artists therefore have less leverage to advocate for fair pay.⁴¹

"I never imagined that dance would be a young person's only connection to their heritage in a circumstance where they were removed from that heritage. There are depths to the work that we do."

— Akua Delfish, Co-Founder, D'LYFE Dance Company

Working together

Community always comes first

Communities should be asked about their priorities and concerns, so that the sector can better understand the absences, inaccuracies, and biases that might affect their participation and engagement in heritage programming.

To achieve this goal, Toronto's heritage organizations know that collaboration is essential. In 2022, 97% of heritage organizations in Canada reported partnering or networking with other organizations in the previous five years.⁴² However, some communities and grassroots groups are unsatisfied with standard dynamics of collaboration.

Larger organizations can have good intentions when they bring on smaller partners, but there can be imbalances; sometimes lesser-resourced groups can be tokenized.⁴³ It's important for groups with more institutional power to work in tandem with, or in support of, other groups in collaborative projects.⁴⁴



Community voices are asking for heritage-based collaborations to better represent our city's lived experiences. In 2030...

10 Fair guidelines that advance present and future priorities of community partners will be developed and followed.

The sector could make increased efforts to be conscious of the specific sensitivities associated with the legacy of heritage. Communities may have painful memories associated with certain historical moments, such as the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁵ If projects pertain to partners' difficult histories, heritage organizations should prioritize their safety and wellbeing in sharing these stories with the

general public. Community partners may also be distrustful of the sector because of historically problematic practices, such as the obtaining and mislabelling of Indigenous artefacts.⁴⁶

Some general guidelines exist for initiating successful and ethical partnerships. However, the sector would benefit from establishing and following its own set of standards to account for sector-specific considerations.⁴⁷

11 Connections between community partners and heritage organizations will be maintained long-term, regardless of staffing changes.

The arts and culture sector relies on contract workers more than any other sector in Ontario.⁴⁸ While some workers, particularly young professionals, can appreciate the opportunity

"There are some instances where we go to partners and ask: 'What is your dream project? How can we help make that happen?'"

— Ilana Shamoon, Director of Programs, Toronto Biennial of Art

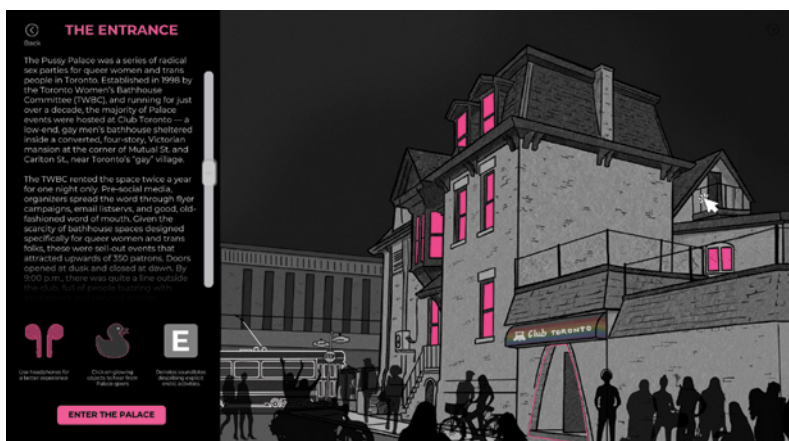
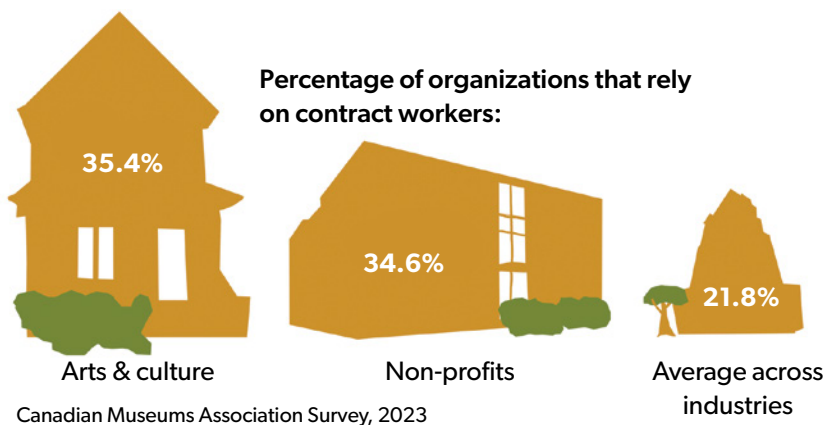
to explore a variety of workplaces in the early stages of their careers, this system can have drawbacks for community partnerships.⁴⁹

When contract workers leave, there is a risk that organizations will not keep working with the partners with whom these workers have built healthy and trusting connections.⁵⁰ Organizations should consider instituting protocols to make sure these connections are not lost, such as hosting in-depth departure meetings with staff and partners to ensure permanent employees understand the status of the relationship.

12 Organizations will be transparent about their wrongdoings and will avoid vague and insincere apologies that lack a call to action.

While many heritage organizations publish apologies in the wake of public controversies, these statements can appear disingenuous, especially when institutional wrongdoings are tied to large-scale injustices that are unfolding in real time. In 2023, the ROM made changes to the traveling exhibit “Death: Life’s Greatest Mystery”, featuring the work of Palestinian artists, to remove references to current events.⁵¹ Following protests, the ROM reversed its decision, but the apology was perceived by some as too generic.⁵²

Apologies are more effective when organizations pledge to take action in a specific way. As part of the Government of Canada’s official apology for the LGBT Purge—a period in the mid-late 20th century when 2SLGBTQI+ government employees were systematically outed and discriminated against—a national monument is being constructed by the LGBT Purge Fund. Unlike many monuments, which are seen as problematic for memorializing a single person, the monument will honour queer and trans communities’ experiences and serve as a safe and celebratory gathering space in the present and future.⁵³ Impactful reparations for wrongdoings in Toronto should similarly take into consideration the effects of apology outcomes on communities.



Rendering, Explore the Palace Entrance. Illustration by Ayo Tsalithaba; graphic design by Alisha Stranges.

Case Study

The Pussy Palace was a bathhouse venue for queer women and trans people that was raided by police in 2000. While the raid captured headlines at the time, far less attention has been paid to the Palace’s radical significance as a boldly curated, electric, and liberating space. In 2021, the LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory conducted 36 interviews with Palace patrons, organizers, and allies, documenting the evolution of the events and the importance of the venue to the communities it served.⁵⁴

The Collaboratory is currently adapting the oral history collection into a digital exhibit featuring a virtually reconstructed Palace. Visitors will be able to “enter” nine digitally illustrated rooms where clickable objects spark oral history soundbites, offering intimate reflections from those who attended and shining a spotlight on queer joy.⁵⁵ How a story is told—whether through the lens of joy or of strife—can matter more than whether it’s told or not.

“I think we’re past the monument era. We need to not ever erect another monument again because it will just inevitably be torn down by somebody who has a good reason to tear it down in the future.”

— Elio Colavito, Oral Historian,
LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory

Money matters

It takes funding to do good work

In 2022, 64% of heritage organizations in Canada identified financial stability as an urgent priority, and over half reported that finding and applying for funding is their major financial concern.⁵⁶ Most grants available to the sector are project-based, especially for small organizations who then expend time and resources to continuously research and apply for project funding.

Smaller organizations that rely heavily on donations are also feeling the effects of the reduced charitable giving habits; in 2022, the percentage of Canadians who gave to charities was the lowest it has been in 20 years.⁵⁷ The ongoing recovery from COVID and economic instabilities are impacting all not-for-profit organizations and will continue to make fundraising challenging in the coming years.

Community voices are demanding improvements to the heritage sector's funding landscape. In 2030...

13 **Operational funding for organizations led by equity-deserving groups will be prioritized, and fair criteria will exist for small organizations to access this support.**

Grassroots organizations are often the most connected to their communities and best understand the importance of compensation for community expertise. These organizations also often have small teams, and may need to rely on collaborators to bring projects to fruition.⁵⁸

"If I am working with Microsoft and paying them thousands of dollars for software, no one asks me any questions. But if I want to give an honorarium to an elder who does not have a bank account, I need to provide a ridiculous amount of papers."

— Dr. Magdalena Ugarte, Assistant Professor, Urban and Regional Planning, Toronto Metropolitan University

With more reliable funding, organizations could better compensate community members and partners, thereby benefiting from collaborative relationships and networking.

14 **Community groups will control the funding for projects that focus on their own lived experiences.**

Heritage organizations are re-evaluating program offerings and internal practices, to embed equity, diversity, and inclusion in sector work. However, funding for programming that focuses on the history of equity-deserving communities may be received by larger and established organizations and then partially redistributed, at the organizations' discretion, to community partners.

To improve upon this framework, inspiration could be drawn from the City of Toronto Social Development, Finance and Administration



Heritage Toronto volunteers pose for a photo at the Likkle Heritage Treasure Hunt on June 3, 2023. Image by Oscar Akamine.

Division's updates to its Community Service Partnerships program.⁵⁹ Some of the funds allocated through this program go directly into the hands of Black- and Indigenous-mandated community groups, bypassing the need for an intermediary.⁶⁰



There are guidelines available for heritage organizations to understand best practices for compensation. Standard funding practices should be reconceived to eliminate the need for larger organizations to act as an intermediary and distribute funds on an ad hoc basis.⁶¹

15 Members of equity-deserving groups will achieve leadership roles in the heritage sector facilitated by practices focusing on mentorship, networking, and training.

Diverse perspectives are still lacking in the heritage sector's workforce, in part because academic background requirements can be prohibitive. Limited opportunities to gain credentials, as well as an emphasis in



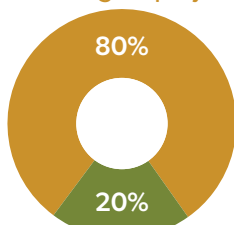
Panelists and emerging historians, "Storytelling: Are We Getting It Right?" community discussion, November 30, 2023. Image by Ashley Duffus.

hiring practices on university degrees, may prevent some young people with an interest in heritage from entering the field. To increase access to jobs in the sector, more positions should be created which focus less on formal education and cater to candidates who are well-connected to their communities and can thereby lead meaningful community engagement efforts.

Even when members of equity-deserving groups find jobs in the sector, upward mobility opportunities are limited. To address this, organizations should invest in relationship-based professional development strategies.

Museum employees who make \$80,000 or more per year:

Non-equity-deserving employees



Equity-deserving employees

Canadian Museums Association Survey, 2023

Case Study

Few funding sources are available to community archives in Ontario. Archives can apply for funding through Library and Archives Canada's new Documentary Heritage Communities Program, but this model has limitations. It is project-based; non-incorporated applicants are only eligible for up to \$24,999 in support; and only organizations that have previously received funding from governmental funding bodies are eligible for two-year support rather than one-year support.⁶² To maximize impact, funding programs should be developed for grassroots archives groups that need support the most.



“A lack of sustainable funds is at odds with organizations’ attempts to make their initiatives more accessible to the public.”

— Dr. Maggie Hutcheson, Assistant Professor, Museum Studies, University of Toronto

What's next

Heritage is complicated, but it matters

Whether they be attachments to city spaces or connections to family traditions, community understandings of heritage are diverse and nuanced. The State of Heritage 2025 Report identifies the challenges and opportunities involved in re-envisioning heritage for Toronto's evolving needs.



Event participant, "Marking Place, Making History" community event, St. James Park, October 15, 2023. Image by Ashley Duffus.



Drag artist Pam performance, Big Gay Out at Hanlan's Point, August 5, 2024. Image by Hammad Khalil.



Participants at the Full Moon Festival, October 1, 2023. Image by Oscar Akamine.



Emancipation on Bloor community event, Christie Pits, August 1, 2023.

Next, we need to develop a plan of action that:

- Maps out objectives,
- Develops policies, and
- Determines strategic directions.

The successful implementation of this plan will require the discussion and commitment of Toronto City Council, heritage organizations, members of community groups, and all residents.

If Torontonians support one another in feeling anchored in our history, we can encourage investment and active participation in how our future will unfold. A reconceptualization of

heritage that puts community viewpoints at the forefront, combined with structural change, could set Toronto on a path towards being a more liveable, vibrant, and creative city.

“Knowing Toronto’s history and heritage makes me more willing to participate in other civic activities.”

“One aspect of my heritage is the little words in my family’s vocabulary that I couldn’t spell if I tried.”

— Testimonials from participants in State of Heritage community events and respondents to the Heritage Toronto Survey, 2023

At a glance

In 2030...

Should the recommendations presented in this report be adopted...

- The heritage sector would deliver more impactful services and programming, so that...
- Torontonians would develop increased trust in their city and in each other, so that...
- The city would become a more dynamic, creative, and liveable place.



Indigenous communities will lead the interpretation of their own history.

Land acknowledgements will include a specific commitment to action.

Indigenous communities will have the space and land needed to practice their traditional ceremonies.

Heritage organizations, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), neighbourhood associations, and community groups will work together to prioritize work that builds the cultural identity of neighbourhoods.

Tech, like virtual reality experiences, will be integrated into creative public commemorations to share neighbourhood histories.

Parks, the heritage sector, and community partners will work together to protect our natural heritage sites and make them more accessible.

Immersive and interactive heritage programming will encourage relationship building—between neighbours, between communities, and with city spaces.

Cross-collaborations will lead to a better understanding and increased public value of the connections between art and heritage.

Compensation for cultural artists will reflect the time and effort required to produce their work.

Fair guidelines that advance present and future priorities of community partners will be developed and followed.

Connections between community partners and heritage organizations will be maintained long-term, regardless of staffing changes.

Organizations will be transparent about their wrongdoings and will avoid vague and insincere apologies that lack a call to action.

Operational funding for organizations led by equity-deserving groups will be prioritized, and fair criteria will exist for small organizations to access this support.

Community groups will control the funding for projects that focus on their own lived experiences.

Members of equity-deserving groups will achieve leadership roles in the heritage sector facilitated by practices focusing on mentorship, networking, and training.

Acknowledgements

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“Marking Place, Making History” community event, St. James Park, October 15, 2023. Image by Ashley Duffus.

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Event partners

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Gerrard India Bazaar Business Improvement Area
Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre
Korean Canadian Business Association
NeighbourLink North York
North York Centre
The 519
York-Eglinton Business Improvement Association

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For more community
perspectives, watch:

Community Voices on Toronto's Heritage



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