

6.3 Draft Statement of Significance

Methodology

In creating this report we hoped to provide the community with a draft Statement of Significance (SOS), incorporating the values we found important after our months of study. This draft SOS is based on the model of the Canadian Register of Historic Places, which is an inventory of formally recognized historic places. We used the Guide to Writing Statements of Significance to organize what we thought were the key descriptors, values, and character-defining elements of the site. Reference to existing Statements of Significance on the website of the Canadian Register for Historic Places, such as Market Square Heritage Conservation District in Kingston, ON, was also useful for understanding the types of descriptors and values associated with existing urban districts.

It is also important to realize that the community is already remembering and commemorating the history of the area. In 2003 a plaque was placed at the Tormey and Charlotte Street entrance into Macdonald Gardens (Fig. 1). It reads,

“Between 1845 and 1873, the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Wesleyan Methodist and Roman Catholic churches operated in the Sandy Hill cemeteries on this site. The cemeteries fell into disrepair after they ceased operating in the early 1870s. Between that time and 1909, a number of remains were moved to the new Beechwood and Notre Dame Cemeteries. In 1912, the Ottawa Improvement Commission, now the National Capital Commission, began creating a park on the site, and covered over the remaining graves.”

The plaque also features a copy of the plan of the cemeteries. Furthermore, an employee at the Ottawa Archives mentioned that there might also be small inscriptions in some of the pathways of Macdonald Gardens Park, acting as a type of memorial to those still buried there. Site visits conducted in the summer months revealed no evidence of such a memorial, and no other research for this study has referenced these markers. As is discussed in Section 3.5: Urban Park Landscape, there is no evidence that the design of the park intentionally included any memorial or reference to the site’s earlier use.

This SOS is in very early stages, having only received input from the two report editors. It would require input from community members as well as committee-based review and discussion to be useful for any type of designation discussion. Four Statements of Significance for specific Macdonald Gardens properties (8 Tormey St., 114-120 Wurtemberg St., 121 Charlotte St., and 126 Cobourg St.) were prepared by a student working for the Lowertown Community Association in the summer of 2014; these statements may also be useful for comparison. It is our hope that the community can use the following draft statement as a starting point for articulating the values inherent in this neighbourhood.

Description of Historic Place

Macdonald Gardens is an urban neighbourhood that takes its name and central focus from the rectangle-shaped urban park at its centre. This park, designed in 1914 by landscape architect Frederick Todd, was built on the site of four former cemeteries established ca. 1843. Located within Lowertown East, Ottawa, this neighbourhood takes as its approximate boundaries the Rideau River to the north and east, Rideau Street to the south, and Cobourg Street to the west.

The Cobourg Street western boundary is the most flexible. It acts as a spine for the neighbourhood, as it is a main access road to and from the neighbourhood and most smaller streets within Macdonald Gardens connect to it. Along Cobourg Street there is a mix of low-rise apartment structures, public housing and cooperatives. The blocks to the north of the park are generally low-rise, older residential housing, while to the east along Wurtemberg Street there is a shift to high-rise apartment towers and institutions. To the south of the park there is a mix of housing, towers, institutional and limited commercial use along Rideau Street.

The built structures in this neighbourhood are an evolving mix of residences and institutions with few commercial buildings. Built between the late 1800s and 2001, the built structures showcase a large range of residential styles including gable-ended, hipped and flat-roofed brick and stucco-clad houses, mostly brick-clad 3-4 storey

apartment blocks and ensembles, high-rise apartment slabs and towers, private and public housing and housing cooperatives, as well as a stone summer house in the public park. Two structures in the neighbourhood are municipally designated heritage properties: Wallis House and the Turkish Embassy.

The Macdonald Gardens park is a central element of the neighbourhood both geographically and socially. The hill on the western side of the park with the iconic stone summer house at its peak was built with a view of the Parliament buildings. A treed pathway down the central width of the park provides a walkway through the neighbourhood, with connected paths winding to each side of the park. The eastern side is mostly flat, and in the north-west corner low curved walls stand where a public wading pool once was.

Heritage Value

Macdonald Gardens as an evolving urban historic landscape shows intact physical and social layers of Ottawa's urban planning history. The series of built structures from various periods of the last two centuries shows a variety of housing that is rarely found elsewhere in such a combination. It is therefore possible to see Macdonald Gardens as a microcosm of Ottawa's housing and planning history. Relative to other neighbourhoods in Lowertown East, Macdonald Gardens had less of its built heritage destroyed by urban renewal in the 1960s and 1970s because its housing stock was in relatively good shape. Though it was still affected by the plan, this means the layers of building typologies present before 1969 are still preserved. Post-urban renewal, this neighbourhood also includes Ottawa's first and only public housing initiative run by the city.

As the site of four of Ottawa's oldest cemeteries, the Macdonald Gardens park holds high potential for archaeological value. Given the methods of removing the graves once the site was planned as a park and anecdotal evidence from the next few decades, it is likely there are still human remains underground. As the site of burial place of early Ottawa Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Wesleyan Methodist communities this site also had strong cultural and spiritual value for four different congregations.

Starting in 1851 twelve different properties on adjacent streets were occupied by a series of important Ottawa health and community institutions, including the Protestant Hospital, the Children's Hospital, and the Lady Stanley Institute for Trained Nurses.

This historic landscape also takes its value from its period as part of Ottawa's "Capital Landscape" ca. 1915-1946. Designed by renowned landscape architect Frederick G. Todd, this park is Todd's only executed design in Ottawa. The design was commissioned by the Ottawa Improvement Commission (OIC) in 1912 to add to a capital parkways system intended to serve as a picturesque driving route showcasing Ottawa's best landscapes for Ottawa's citizens and visitors. Former Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden also lived in the neighbourhood on Wurtemberg Street, across from the park, from the years 1907 to 1937. His presence, as well as the presence of prestigious institutions such as the Turkish Embassy, the Romanian Embassy, the Russian Embassy and Wallis House, influenced the neighbourhood by shaping the people who lived there. This neighbourhood was part of the early 20th-century institutional centre of the city.

The post-war urban renewal planning scheme in Ottawa left much of Lowertown East devastated, with large swaths of historic buildings destroyed and communities ripped apart. Macdonald Gardens escaped much of the damage, but the effects of this phase of Ottawa's history are still apparent. One of the major changes influenced by urban renewal was the closure of Charlotte Street ca. 1974-1976 in order to unify the two sides of the Macdonald Gardens park, providing the community with uninterrupted green space. This part of Lowertown East is therefore in the unique position of living through both the destruction and positive change that urban renewal brought. The built heritage left unaltered by this scheme also have value in showing what was left behind and what was considered valuable at this time of systematic rebuilding.

Overall, the diversity of Macdonald Gardens' housing and social demography has led to an urban historic landscape whose value lies in its evolution. Here, the alterations to the built fabric and design of the landscape are equally as important as the historic fabric that is left unaltered. The diverse urban population, coexisting with an urban green space at its centre, has led to a resilient community, able to evolve and accommodate change while maintaining a strong historic landscape.

Character-Defining Elements

Character-defining elements related to the neighbourhood's value as an evolving urban landscape include:

- Visual and architectural variety of residential housing styles, including but not limited to:
 - Gable-ended, hipped and flat-roofed
 - Low-rise 3-4 storey apartments (symmetric or asymmetric)
 - High-rise rental towers and slabs (private and subsidized)
 - Cooperative housing (low-rise and one-storey)
 - Public housing
- Sightlines from the Macdonald Gardens park summer house of the surrounding low-rise residential homes
- The stone and wrought iron fence as a remnant of Sir Robert Borden's house

Character-defining elements of the Macdonald Gardens park as an urban green space include:

- The treed path along the old route of Charlotte Street
- Remaining design features of Frederick G. Todd's 1914 design
- The stone summer house at the height of the western hill
- Markers of the Ottawa Improvement Commission's management of the park as a capital landscape ca. 1915-1946
- Expansive green space for public use

Figures



FIG 1: *Macdonald Gardens entrance plaque, corner of Tormey and Charlotte Streets. (Photo: Susan Ross, 2014)*