

1. Introduction

1.1 *A New Framework for Heritage Management*



Front Street shows a sensitive combination of heritage conservation and compatible new design. (Photo: H. Kalman)



The Third Avenue complex, owned by Parks Canada, contributes to the sense of decay that characterizes much of Dawson. (Photo: H. Kalman)

Dawson City is a community with an extraordinary human and built history. Best known as the centre of the Klondike Gold Rush in the 1890s, when it was reportedly the largest city north of San Francisco and west of Winnipeg, Dawson retains much of its appearance from that era. For many years before the Gold Rush, the area was the traditional hunting and fishing lands of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in. In recent decades Dawson has become a leader in developing cultural tourism. Today the community and its lands provide a model for co-operative leadership, as they are jointly managed by the City of Dawson and the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, with involvement as well by the federal government’s Parks Canada and the Yukon Government.

As Chapter 2 of this report relates, the value of Dawson’s heritage resources have been recognized nationally since the 1950s. The City has been managed since 1977 with municipal heritage regulations. The present *Zoning and Historical Control Bylaw* (1997) and its predecessors have succeeded in regulating change within Dawson. They have prevented the wholesale replacement of historic buildings with new structures that would alter the heritage character of the area.



Fire destroyed a small historic building near the Palace Grand Theatre in October 2007. (Photo: Jay Armitage)



A house from the Gold Rush era, located on 8th Avenue near Harper Street, was demolished in October 2007. (Photo: H. Kalman)

Nevertheless the present regulations are not perfect. Partly as a consequence of the absence of demolition control or until recently maintenance standards,¹ many historic buildings have deteriorated or been demolished over the years, and the toll continues. It has been estimated that about 60 per cent of the community's historic buildings have been lost in the past 25 years.² In October 2007 alone, one Gold Rush-era building was destroyed by fire and another demolished rather than repaired. Some property owners have refused to maintain their buildings.³ Important landscape features have been modified or lost. In the many situations where property owners have respected due process and applied to the Dawson City Planning Board to review designs for new buildings or alterations, both the owners and Planning Board have expressed uncertainties as to what changes are permissible. The application of the current *Design Guidelines for Historic Dawson* has caused confusion. In several cases, the community has criticized the appearance of approved designs after they have been built, even though the designs were approved in accordance with the regulations.⁴

Partly as a consequence of the confusion, the City has called for a new heritage management plan for Dawson. The plan is intended to revise the current regulations, the historical control bylaw, and the design guidelines in a manner that follows a vision that responds to community values and concerns, and which provides greater clarity in the application and development process.

The City of Dawson has contracted with Commonwealth Historic Resource Management Limited to produce the new Heritage Management Plan. Financial and technical assistance have been provided by the Cultural Services Branch of the Yukon Government. This document is the final report of that plan.

1.2 A Vision for the Management of Dawson's Heritage Resources

Heritage conservation is the management of change. The purpose of a heritage management plan is to control the change in such a manner that the heritage values of a historic place are retained and enhanced, rather than eroded and lost.

Dawson City and its region have enormous historical and natural significance. A high level of management is necessary to ensure the ongoing responsible stewardship of the land and its resources. This will be enabled by the present Heritage Management Plan. The plan maintains continuity with the best features of earlier heritage plans and proposals for Dawson, while updating them by respecting current best practices.

1 Maintenance standards were introduced in 2007; see Section 3.2.

2 *After the Goldrush: The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and City of Dawson Integrated Community Sustainability Plan*, Draft, Dawson, 2007, I, p. 17.

3 See, for example, Sheila Ascroft, 'Historic Yukon Commerce Bank on the Ropes,' *Héritage*, 10:1, Fall-Winter 2007, pp. 32-35.

4 See, for example, Dan Davidson, 'Dawson City Has Window Pains,' *Klondike Sun*, 14 February 2007, p. 2.

This plan proposes a Vision for the Management of Dawson's Heritage Resources:

The built and natural heritage features of the Klondike Valley Cultural Landscape, of which the Dawson Townsite forms an important component, will be managed so as to improve the quality of life for residents of the City and the region and to provide an enhanced destination attraction for international tourism. The heritage management program will tell the stories of the entire human history of the Klondike Valley, with particular emphasis on the Gold Rush era of 1896-1910.

This plan proposes to achieve this Vision by means of the following broad heritage management objectives (as well as more detailed management recommendations made elsewhere in this document):

- Preserve and strengthen the visual character and design intent of a nationally and internationally significant cultural landscape;
- Conserve and interpret the full history of the cultural landscape – before, during, and after the Gold Rush;
- Retain the dominant character as a Gold Rush-era cultural landscape;
- Communicate that the Gold Rush was a short but highly significant era in the long course of natural and human history, and ensure that resources remain and stories are told from the other periods of history;
- Facilitate and support an interpretation program that communicates the diverse heritage and natural values of the region;
- Protect and enhance the health of the natural ecosystems;
- Maintain a high level of heritage management for the river valleys, the gold fields, and the Dawson Townsite;
- Identify legislative tools and financial incentives to support heritage management;
- Identify distinct character areas and heritage management areas, with different management principles for the different areas;
- Balance conservation with the integration of new services and activities;
- Create a superior quality of life for Dawson's residents; and
- Capitalize on the tourist potential of the region.

1.3 Study Process

Commonwealth Historic Resource Management Limited began work on the Heritage Management Plan for Dawson in June 2007, with completion in March 2008. The plan contains a number of defined deliverables. The list indicates where in this report that product can be found.

1. Municipal Inventory of Historic Sites (Appendix 3)
2. Thematic Framework (Appendix 4)
3. Identify areas to be controlled (Chapter 3 and 4)
4. Determine what should be designated (Chapter 4)
5. Architectural guidelines manual (Chapter 6)
6. Heritage bylaw (Chapter 5 and Appendix 5)

Members of the consultant team have visited Dawson three times: in June, August, and November 2007. Each visit was devoted to meetings and interviews with the project Steering Committee, other stakeholders, and City and Territorial staff. Time was also spent on site investigation and research. Additional research was carried out from our offices.

This is the fourth report to be submitted:

- A *Preliminary Report* was submitted in August 2007. It contained the first two deliverables. It also described the work that had been done to date, particularly the extensive program of public consultation.
- The *Draft Heritage Management Plan* was submitted in November 2007. It contained Deliverables 3, 4, and 6.
- The *Draft Final Report* was submitted in early March 2008. It contained a draft of Deliverable 5, significant revisions to the last report, and additional contextual material;
- The present Final Report, which has been revised in response to comments from stakeholders.

1.4 Public Consultation and Community Values

The consultant team conducted extensive interviews among municipal elected officials and staff, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in staff, and community stakeholders in order to identify community values and determine how people believe that Dawson's heritage should be managed. In all, more than three dozen people have been interviewed. They are listed in Appendix 1. The substance of the initial round of interviews is summarized in Section 2.2 of the Preliminary Report.

Public meetings were held in June and November. Workshops were facilitated in June and August. In November, the recommendations in the Draft Plan formed the subject of meetings held with the Steering Committee, the City of Dawson, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and the general public.

The consultants asked Planning Board to express its opinions as to the broad-brush management objectives of the new Heritage Management Plan. Planning Board responded at special meetings held in September and December. The City's Community Development and Planning Officer met with the Chamber of Commerce in December to discuss the Draft Plan. The comments have all been considered, and many are included in the recommendations in Chapter 4.



A workshop was held with the Steering Committee and Planning Board in August 2007. (Photo: Doug Olynyk)

The Dawson community has expressed broad support for the new Heritage Management Plan. After a half-century of Parks Canada's presence and its ongoing conservation and interpretation work, the value of heritage conservation now seems to be taken for granted. Tourism and economic benefits remain primary motivators, as they were two generations ago. But now people recognize that heritage conservation contributes as well to the overall quality of life.

This public support has been confirmed in *After the Goldrush: Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and City of Dawson Integrated Community Sustainability Plan*, circulated in draft form in late 2007. The first community value cited in the sustainability plan is 'The historic character and heritage of the community – celebration and enhancement of the area's history and the community's heritage.' Readers are reminded that heritage buildings are a non-renewable resource. And heritage is featured front and centre in the sustainability plan's community vision:

Honouring the past, Sharing the Present, Embracing the Future

Our heritage and culture are unique and we are committed to protecting and enhancing our historic community and first nation traditions. We will strive to provide a sustainable future for the community and the environment ... We will encourage economic diversity, based on the development of heritage, arts and culture.⁵

Arts and culture – the companion values of heritage, and also central to the community vision – have received a boost in recent years with the growth of the Dawson City Arts Society and its various initiatives: the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture, the ODD Gallery, and the new School of Visual Art.⁶ These visual art institutions have also given a boost to heritage by occupying historic buildings. The literary arts are well represented on 'Writers Row' on 8th Avenue, which features the Robert Service Cabin, the Jack London House, and Berton House, with its widely admired writer-in-residence program.

⁵ *After the Goldrush*, I, pp. 12, 13, 14.

⁶ See Jen Williams, 'True North artistic hub,' *Yukon, North of Ordinary*, Summer 2007, pp. 36-40.

These values and sentiments resound throughout the community and around the world. In a radio interview last summer, for instance, RV park owner Pat Brooks said that Dawson ‘is just something that captures the imagination of the world.’⁷ The same news item noted that Dawson’s season was extended a month last autumn because of strong demand from Western Europe, a reminder of the economic benefits of strong tourism.

Tourists’ impressions are important. The consultants read the comments in the guest book at the Klondike Visitors Association, in order to learn what visitors like and don’t like. The vast majority of comments are positive, such as ‘I don’t have words to describe the beauty of this place’ (Germany) and ‘Breathtaking, one of a kind, thank you.’ (Korea). The critical comments mostly concern people not having all the amenities that they need, such as car rentals and bus service. There are also numerous comments about Parks Canada not offering enough tours and not enough French-language services. Others complain about not having a bridge. Very few, if any, comments are critical about the way the town looks. A sample of visitor comments is included as Appendix 6.

7 CBC Radio 1 News, Yukon Region, 31 August 2007.