



Providing Archaeological &
Cultural Heritage Services

528 Bathurst Street Toronto, ONTARIO M5S 2P9
T416-966-1069 F416-966-9723 asiheritage.ca

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TO: Karen Leasa, Landscape Architect, Parks & Cemeteries, City of Kitchener

FROM: Rebecca Sciarra, Principal, Cultural Heritage
Laura Wickett, Cultural Heritage Specialist, Project Manager, ASI
Elizabeth Antczak, Building Conservation Analyst, ASI

RE: **Heritage Consultation for Victoria Park Master Plan, City of Kitchener**

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1.0 Introduction

Archaeological Services Inc. (ASI) was retained by the City of Kitchener to provide heritage consulting services for the Victoria Park Master Plan. ASI understands that the Master Plan is currently in development, and that the City is seeking heritage consulting services to advise on any conflicts between the draft Master Plan recommendations and the Victoria Park Area Heritage Conservation District Plan (VPHCDP).

The VPHCDP includes Victoria Park and the surrounding residential area. It is implemented through a municipal by-law that went into force in 1996. The VPHCDP recognizes Victoria Park as an important component of the District, describes its key features and qualities and presents a series of conservation recommendations.

This memorandum includes:

- An overview of the VPHCDP and considers appropriate interpretation today, 30 years after its original publication in 1996.
- High-level recommendations for the Victoria Park Master Plan developed to respond to the 43 draft Capital, Strategy and Policy Recommendations outlined in an Internal Memo issued by the Infrastructure Services Department (Infrastructure Services Department, City of Kitchener, 2026).
- Comments on design drafts for proposed replacement structures in Victoria Park where appropriate.

Additionally, this memorandum is written in consideration of and relies upon:

- City of Kitchener Official Plan (City of Kitchener, 2019).
- Existing conditions and park features documented in the report *Victoria Park – Inventory, Assessment and Project Prioritization* (AECOM & City of Kitchener, 2025).

1.1 Victoria Park Heritage Conservation District Plan

Victoria Park is the City of Kitchener's oldest park, laid out in 1894 and opened in 1896. The park is located in the Victoria Park Heritage Conservation District (HCD), which also includes the surrounding residential neighbourhood. Management of the District is informed by the *Victoria Park Heritage Conservation District Plan* (VPHCDP) (Hill, 1996). The VPHCDP articulates physical, social and economic goals for the HCD (Hill, 1996, p. 5). Physical goals are:

- Encouraging the retention and conservation of historic buildings and landscapes.
- Guiding the design of new work to be compatible with the historic.
- Introducing features that will enhance the character and visual appeal of the Area, including distinctive landscaping, street lighting and signage.
- Promoting heritage conservation as a positive in the development of the Area.
- Achieving a cohesive, well designed and identifiable Area.

The social goals of the VPHCDP are as follows:

- Fostering community support and understanding to conserve the historic buildings, landscapes and character of the Area.
- Enhancing community pride in, and identity with, the heritage of the Area.
- Involving the community in major issues affecting the Area.
- Implementing the Plan in a manner that is responsive to the community's needs.
- Respecting the economic and social mix of the community.

The VPHCDP further recognizes that "Victoria Park is a landscape of exceptional historical value and an actively used area with diverse contemporary needs" (Hill, 1996, p. 81). The Victoria Park Master Plan offers an opportunity to contribute to both physical and social goals of the HCD by balancing the conservation of Victoria Park's heritage character with necessary upgrades and modifications so the park can better meet the community's evolving needs.

The VPHCDP presents two relevant sections relating to maintaining and modifying the park: primarily the Victoria Park Conservation Guidelines and additionally, for major work related to built features, the Building Conservation Policies.

The VPHCDP identifies the following elements of Victoria Park as exemplifying the Romantic Landscape style (Hill, 1996, p. 70). Figure 1 presents a map of these elements:

- Naturalistic Character
- Lake
- Woods
- Sweeps of Grass
- Meandering Drives and Paths
- "Antique" Buildings and Monuments
- Vistas

The conservation and enhancement of these key landscape qualities is deemed essential to maintain the park's historic landscape ideals, as well as appropriate design of contemporary park elements.



The park is composed as a series of contrasting landscape “pictures” that visitors travel between via intentionally placed drives and paths. The VPHCDP describes how dense enclosing woods give way to open grassy sweeps or “prospects” – defined areas of expansion and openness, and defines specific vistas, especially those looking onto the lake. The Commons, Meadow, and Oval are identified as open grassy sweeps where it is important to maintain a contrasting openness to the surrounding woods. The VPHCDP emphasizes that buildings and structures should blend harmoniously with the landscape in form, colour and material and that visual clutter should be reduced to avoid distraction from the landscape (See for example Figure 2).

The VPHCDP also provides guidance on the introduction of contemporary park elements, which are useful references for guiding the updates which will occur with implementation of the new Master Plan. The VPHCDP provides guidance on the introduction of Lighting, Parking, Utility structures, Plaques and memorials, Furniture, Signage and the Playground – and includes the following reflection:

Victoria Park is a landscape of exceptional historical value and an actively used area with diverse contemporary needs. These needs demand elements whose appearance and location can, if not carefully considered, diminish the naturalistic character of the Romantic Landscape style. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that they be designed to complement and enhance the first priority - the landscape. They must be design coordinated and treated as one visual language, not independently. Prior to physical installation, drawings should be prepared, their impact assessed and mitigative measures undertaken as required. While details in a larger composition, contemporary park elements can be intrusive and must be handled with design insightfulness and attention. (Hill, 1996, p. 88)

The following sections provide recommendations for introducing contemporary elements to the park, as well as for maintaining or enhancing the park’s existing heritage features.



VICTORIA PARK MAP: BUILT FEATURES, PATHS, AND LANDSCAPE

OVERLAY ON 1996 PLAN OF THE PARK

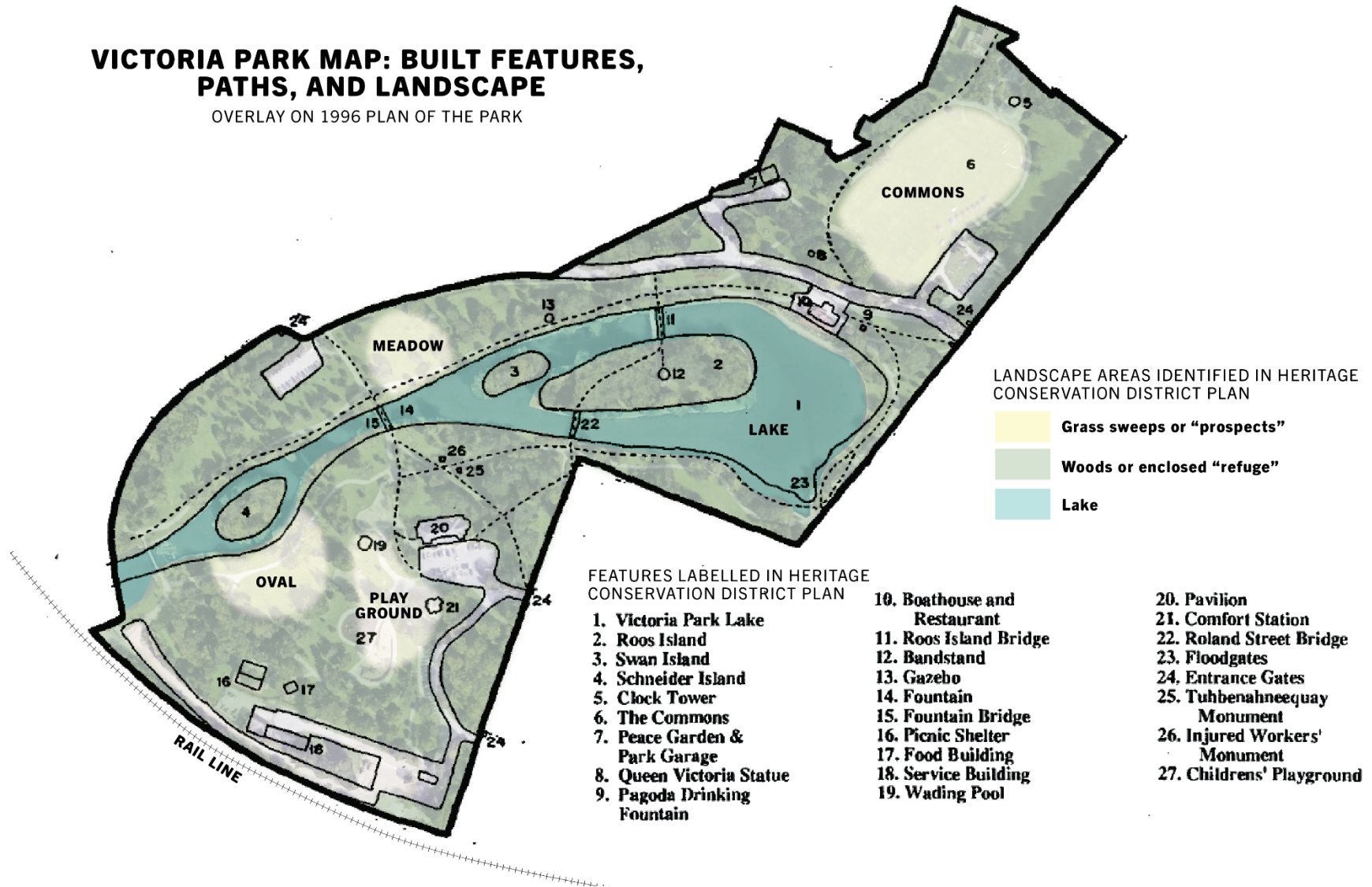


Figure 1: Victoria Park Heritage Key Map, modified from the 1996 plan to emphasize major landscape areas (Hill, 1996, modified by ASI, 2026)



Figure 2: The gazebo in Victoria park incorporates wood shingles, forest green accents and a high degree of craftsmanship (Photo by Allie Caufield, 2011 source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

2.0 Heritage Recommendations

The purpose of this memorandum is to identify those master plan recommendations that may present conflicts or inconsistencies with the Victoria Park Heritage Conservation District Plan (VPHCDP) and to provide high-level recommendations that address these identified compliance issues.

The 43 draft Capital, Strategy and Policy Recommendations have been grouped into categories of proposed modifications to the park, and their associated potential heritage concerns. In the following sections, this memorandum provides a set of heritage recommendations and considerations specific to each of the categories below:

- **Introduction of/modifications to major landscape elements**
- **Exterior modifications to existing buildings**
- **Introduction of minor landscape and utility elements**
- **Modifications to vegetation**
- **Introduction of new thematic layers not covered by the VPHCDP**

It should be noted that the proposed modifications are not necessarily or inherently in conflict with the VPHCDP. Many of the draft recommendations present opportunities for strengthening or restoring the heritage characteristics of the park, while others introduce new programmatic layers that, while not considered in the VPHCDP, have the potential to accommodate its contemporary and broad range of community activities and the Heritage Conservation District Plan's overall objectives, particularly its social goals. Therefore, alongside recommendations and considerations to avoid conflicts, we have also highlighted recommendations that present opportunities to enhance the park's cultural heritage characteristics.

2.1 Introduction of/Modifications to Major Landscape Elements

Major landscape elements contain specific programmed areas, for example the playground, or organizing features that extend throughout the whole site, like the roadways and paths. The following major landscape elements, or modifications to existing major landscape elements, are proposed in the draft recommendations:

- New trails (split cyclist/pedestrian) throughout the park
- Modifications to width and surfacing of existing trails
- New accessible parking area between the rail line and back of Service Building #18
- Facility and access improvements to Service Building #18, staging area and storage shed
- Consolidation of playground areas and modification to rubberized surface
- Replacement and relocation of existing splashpad
- Installation of new picnic shelter adjacent to splashpad and playground
- New youth-specific area with upgraded and relocated basketball court
- Facility and access improvements to Machine Shop facility (VPHCDP Service Building #18)
- Improved crosswalks at some entry points to park
- Potential land acquisition to expand Victoria Park beyond the rail line

Recommendations and considerations:

Refer to the VPHCDP's Conservation Policies for Naturalistic Character, Lake, Woods, Sweeps of Grass, Meandering Drives and Paths, Vistas (p. 79–82) and Policies and Guidelines for Contemporary Park Elements: Playground (p. 84).

In general, the additions of major new areas, elements, and structures in the park should be minimized, and intentionally placed where necessary. The VPHCDP emphasizes the detriment of visual clutter on the landscape, and discourages structures especially in the open grassy sweeps, the lake, and blocking identified vistas. Proposals adjacent to the lake should carefully consider impacts to views of the lake.

Meandering drives and paths were placed intentionally through the park, described in the VPHCDP as “artfully orchestrated” (Hill, 1996, p. 75) to lead between programmatic areas, connect to vistas, and lead visitors between the enclosed woods and open sweeps of grass. New pathways should maintain the meandering quality and be intentionally aligned. Avoid straightening or over-widening existing drives and paths. Concerning surfacing, the VPHCDP acknowledges the need for accessible finishes:

Finishes for permanent paths should be gravel. Where all-season universal accessibility is required, the finish should be poured concrete. (Hill, 1996, p. 75)

Given that all-season accessibility is a priority for the park and none of the existing pathways are currently finished in gravel, with the majority finished in light-coloured asphalt, hard surfacing such as light-coloured asphalt or poured concrete is recommended for new pathways. The colour of new paved or concrete surfaces should generally match existing to maintain visual harmony and cohesion within the park.

New roadways and parking areas should be placed discreetly, and lighting, signage, and surfacing should follow the policies and guidelines in the VPHCDP. For example, the proposed placement of an additional parking area behind Service Building #18 is appropriately concealed behind the building in a non-public area.



Consolidation of the playground and splashpad areas is acceptable from a heritage perspective. The VPHCDP acknowledges:

The playground is considered as an enclave, so a flexible design approach can be accommodated, responding to specific needs rather than to the context of the Park as a whole (Hill, 1996, p. 84).

When consolidating or selecting new playground and splashpad equipment, design strategies that support the heritage character of the park should be considered, such as muted natural colours and materials, craftsmanship, and durability.

The addition of a new picnic shelter adjacent to the splashpad and playground is acceptable from a heritage perspective. The design should follow the principles of high-quality craftsmanship and natural materials and colours laid out in the VPHCDP. Refer also to the discussion of a replacement picnic shelter in Section 2.2 of this memorandum.

The relocation of the basketball court closer to the outdoor gym does not present any concerns. Improvements to the Machine Shop area include the creation of a larger buffer to screen this utilitarian space from the rest of the park, facilitated by the proposed relocation of the existing Picnic Shelter. This would improve the visual experience of the park in this area.

The potential expansion of Victoria Park beyond the rail line does not inherently present any conflicts with the VPHCDP, however there should be a discernible delineation between the extent of the original park and the expansion area.

2.2 Exterior Modifications to Existing Structures

Structures identified in the draft recommendations as candidates for exterior modifications are listed below:

- Replacement and relocation of existing Picnic Shelter
- Potential exterior upgrades to Water St. Storage Shed (VPHCDP Park Garage #7)
- Potential relocation of the Summer Kitchen (VPHCDP Food Building #17)

Recommendations and considerations:

Refer to the VPHCDP's Conservation Policies for "Antique" buildings and monuments (p. 75)

The VPHCDP recommends three structures on the list above for removal, as they are "considered misplaced and inappropriately designed for the Romantic Landscape style of Victoria Park" (Hill, 1996, p. 79): the Front Garage (also referred to as Water St. Storage Shed and Park Garage #7), the Picnic Shelter, and the Food Building (Food Building #17/Summer Kitchen). If the structures are retained, retrofits should follow the principles of landscape and materiality laid out in the VPHCDP to improve their compatibility with the rest of the park. The proposed relocation of the Summer Kitchen to a more visible location in the park is not recommended due to its identification in the VPHCDP as being incompatible with the park. A specific proposal exists for a replacement Picnic Shelter (Figure 3 and Figure 4). This improves on the incompatibility of the existing structure by incorporating a wood shingle roof, natural stone footings, and a less utilitarian form. Recommended refinements to the design include reducing the large stone footings to only the four outer corners, and, as the design develops, to incorporate a



classic dark nineteenth-century colour scheme compatible with the VPHCDP. For example, the powder-coated steel components could be black or dark green.

The VPHCDP lists specific buildings and monuments especially deserving of conservation in the Park. While these do not include any of the structures listed above, retrofits should still follow the principles of landscape and materiality laid out in the VPHCDP.

Where new buildings, or additions to the exterior of existing buildings, are to be added, the VPHCDP does not call for the replication of nineteenth-century architectural styling, and rather emphasizes compatibility through the use of high-quality craftsmanship, natural materials and dark nineteenth-century colours that blend with the landscape.



Figure 3: Existing picnic shelter



Figure 4: Proposal for new picnic shelter structure

2.3 Introduction of New Minor Elements

Minor elements are small landscape and utilities structures and objects. While changes to a single element may be unnoticeable within the park, the cumulative effect of many uncoordinated changes can detract from the characteristics of the Romantic Landscape. When multiple minor elements are modified as a set, for example a replacement of all the park benches, a thorough design coordination process should be undertaken and which should reference the VPHCDP.

Potential new or replacement minor elements identified in the draft recommendations are listed below:

- Additional or replacement wayfinding, educational and interpretive signage
- Furnishings and benches
- In-ground waste collection receptacles
- Water bottle filling stations
- Geese deterrent structures such as low fencing
- New emergency call stations
- Installation of four additional globe light standards in dark areas
- Upgraded electrical infrastructure within the Commons to support Special Events
- Elements associated with potential refrigerated skating area (feasibility study stage)

Recommendations and considerations:

Refer to the VPHCDP's Policies and Guidelines for Contemporary Park Elements (p. 81).

New or redesigned signage presents an opportunity for cohesion and reduction of the number of signs around the park. Refer to the VPHCD plan for colour and aesthetic considerations.

The VPHCDP calls for a coordinated design approach to park furniture, including benches, tables, drinking fountains and garbage receptacles. Furniture style "should contribute to and enhance the naturalistic park character" (Hill, 1996, p. 83). In the park currently there are a wide variety of bench

styles, many in poor condition (Figure 5). The need for new benches presents an opportunity for a cohesive new set of park furniture –replacement of all park benches with a single style is recommended for visual cohesiveness throughout the park. Classic benches with wood seats and backs and cast iron or metal supports painted forest green or black are in line with the “design elegance” encouraged by the VPHCDP (Hill, 1996, p. 83). Alternate bench configurations, including curved benches, should strive to use the same design language and material palette as the design selected for the standard bench. (Hill, 1996, p. 83). Utilitarian or futuristic styles should be avoided.

Water bottle filling stations should be integrated as much as possible into existing infrastructure to minimize their visual impact.

Metal elements (for example: fences, bollards, railings, bicycle racks) should avoid galvanized and stainless finishes or bright paint colours. Black finishes are recommended to appear inconspicuous and classic within the naturalistic landscape, coordinate with existing iron and black-painted features, and avoid an industrial appearance and uncoordinated colour scheme (Figure 7 and Figure 8). Some elements in the park feature bronze finishes (Figure 6).

Minor elements such as fences and railings should prioritise an inconspicuous appearance within the landscape, high-quality craftsmanship, and appropriate colour schemes. Nineteenth-century ornamentation, for example decorative wrought iron, may be used but is not required.

The aesthetics of temporary elements such as salt storage bins should be coordinated with the colour scheme and material palette recommended by the VPHCDP (Figure 9). These elements especially present a risk for visual clutter as they might not be considered in design coordination efforts. For example, forest green is frequently recommended in the VPHCDP.

Additional light standards are proposed to match the existing globe lights in the park (Figure 10), which complies with the VPHCDP. Additional lights should be installed primarily along pathways. The VPHCDP requires all lighting design in the park to be guided by the *Victoria Park Lighting and Electrical Study* (1987).

Utility and electrical structures should be as minimally visually obtrusive as possible. Strategies to achieve this include placing them out of sight when possible, screening, and use of paint or material colours to blend them into the landscape.

The introduction of a new skating area or trail could involve the introduction of minor elements such as guard rails, benches, and/or temporary elements like storage, seating, or heaters. Designs for these elements should follow the recommendations above.





Figure 5: Variety of bench styles found within Victoria Park (AECOM & City of Kitchener, 2025, p. 16)



Figure 6: Black painted metal is cohesive with iron and black-painted elements throughout the park (AECOM & City of Kitchener, 2025, p. 26)



Figure 7: Galvanized or stainless metals and bright colours have an industrial appearance that do not fit the park's naturalistic character (AECOM & City of Kitchener, 2025, p. 11)



Figure 8: Even temporary elements like this salt storage bin have the potential to distract from, or blend in with the landscape (AECOM & City of Kitchener, 2025, p. 11)



Figure 9: Existing globe light fixtures in the park (AECOM & City of Kitchener, 2025).

2.4 Changes to Vegetation

Potential vegetation changes identified in the draft recommendations are listed below:

- Develop a strategy that balances the integration of naturalized areas, pollinator gardens, rain gardens, and habitat features while balancing heritage landscape requirements.
- Develop a long-term plan for horticultural bed areas within the park
- Develop a Tree Planting Strategy which encourages diverse native plantings, shade, prompt tree replacement and risk mitigation in alignment with Forestry initiatives.

Recommendations and considerations:

Refer to the VPHCDP's Policies and Guidelines for Naturalistic Character, Lake, Vistas, Woods and Sweeps of Grass (p. 79–82).

The Commons, Meadow, and Oval are identified as open sweeps of grass where it is important to maintain a contrasting openness to the surrounding woods. New planting plans present an opportunity to enhance the vegetation, boundaries, and future programming of these open spaces.

A new tree planting strategy should emphasize prompt tree replacement to maintain the density of the woods throughout the park. The VPHCDP guidelines identify a “continuous” tree canopy as “essential to the character of the woods” and advises that: “woods throughout the park should be conserved and augmented with more trees, with an emphasis on species that evoke grandeur and strength” (Hill, 1996, p. 74)

New vegetation strategies present opportunities for strengthening the policies and guidelines found in the VPHCDP and combining those directives with contemporary best practices in landscaping and plant species selection.

It may be appropriate to develop alternate interpretations of some planting styles recommended in the VPHCDP, for example formal Victorian style carpet bedding, that maintain historical forms and visual effects as described in the VPHCDP, while incorporating contemporary horticultural best practices and the recommendations for naturalized areas, pollinator gardens, rain gardens, and habitat features.

2.5 Introduction of New Thematic Layers Not Included in the VPHCDP

Certain thematic and programmatic layers are proposed in the draft recommendations that were not considered at the time of the VPHCDP publication. These include:

- Indigenous interpretation and Indigenous art initiative
- Rotating public art in permanent display location
- Major Events Strategy and potential related infrastructure

Recommendations and considerations:

While these themes are not contemplated in the VPHCDP, they are not at odds with the landscape principles and cultural use of the park and goals of the HCDP. The addition of Indigenous interpretation



and more intentional strategies for public art and major events present opportunities to strengthen the cultural heritage of Victoria Park.

Public art is already included in the park in various locations. The recommendation for a permanent public art display area presents an opportunity to minimize visual clutter in the park by consolidating the rotating art displays to one area. For the design of the permanent display location, refer to the VPHCDP – avoid bright lighting and large concrete pads.

Recommendations for Indigenous interpretation include new signage and an art initiative. These potential additions/modifications should be developed in line with the VPHCDP and the signage and strategies should be developed as part of the Master Plan overall. Indigenous interpretation elements could be visually distinct from, while still coordinated and cohesive with, the general park signage.

3.0 Conclusions

The majority of the Victoria Park Master Plan recommendations addressed in this memorandum are concentrated within the southern corner of the park and a large portion of the park will be unaffected by the recommendations, with the exception of park-wide improvements such as cohesive new signage or furniture. If implemented thoughtfully and with respect for the park's cultural heritage attributes, the Master Plan recommendations overall will not detract from the park's Romantic Landscape character and many have the potential to improve or enhance the park's heritage character and achieve the goals of the HCDP.

The VPHCDP outlines a design, assessment and mitigation process for the implementation of contemporary elements within the park: "[Contemporary elements] must be design coordinated and treated as one visual language, not independently. Prior to physical installation, drawings should be prepared, their impact assessed and mitigative measures undertaken as required" (Hill, 1996, p. 81). It is recommended that City staff clarify and document the process that will be used to guide introduction of contemporary elements into the park, including the scope of such a process and ideal timing for its implementation as part of expected planning, design, and construction activities.



References

- AECOM, & City of Kitchener. (2025). *Victoria Park – Inventory, Assessment and Project Prioritization Q23-115 – Report Phase 1* (Victoria Park Master Plan).
- City of Kitchener. (2019). *City of Kitchener Official Plan, Consolidated 2019*.
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