

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This methodology statement is prepared as part of the Downtown neighborhood intensive level project tasks. It outlines the research sources identified, anticipated field strategies, context development approach, and decision-making structure for the project. It includes the selection criteria used to identify surveyed properties. All project tasks and products will meet the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP) criteria, methodology, and current standards for Historic Resources Survey.

The Downtown neighborhood boundaries were defined by the City of Niagara Falls Department of Community Development, Office of Planning and Environmental Services. As a result of the initial field investigation, the northern limits of the Downtown neighborhood survey area were modified from Pierce Avenue to Orchard Parkway. Pierce Avenue appears to be more of a transitional block that reflects the historic building fabric of the adjacent Suspension Bridge neighborhood. Claire Ross of the NYSOPRHP approved of this boundary shift. Pierce Avenue will serve as the southern boundary for the Suspension Bridge neighborhood in a subsequent intensive level survey.

The initial “windshield survey” examined readily observed buildings, structures, sites and objects constructed prior to 1954. Potentially significant historic resources were identified by the survey team for the intensive level survey. These findings served as the basis for the intensive level survey conducted by CBCA.¹

The CBCA project team worked in full cooperation with Tom DeSantis and Derek Waltho (Niagara Falls Office of Planning & Environmental Services), Tom Yots (Niagara Falls City Historian/Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Commission), and the NY SHPO staff member(s) to finalize the project objectives, formalize project schedules and additional meetings, clarify issues, and establish contacts.

2.1 Background Research

A search for documentary research materials with regard to the Downtown neighborhood survey area has been completed and will form the basis for the historical narrative. The project team reviewed NYSOPRHP files for existing building inventory and National Register forms. Project team members consulted staff of the Office of Strategic Planning and the Field Services Bureau of the NYOSPRHP for additional assistance with individual properties.

Research was also conducted at Niagara Falls City Hall, the Niagara Room at the City of Niagara Falls Library, and the Local History Room of the Buffalo Public Library. Sources on the overall history and development of Niagara Falls (primary and secondary sources, historic maps, city records, local histories, unpublished materials, etc.) were identified and examined. Additional information was culled from previous survey work and documentation. A working bibliography appears at the end of the report (Section 6).

2.2 Intensive Field Survey

In general, buildings that are a minimum of 50 years of age are considered historic. The current survey focused on above ground historic resources. Prehistoric and historic archaeological sites were outside the scope of this study, unless they were readily identified in the field. The

¹ The results of the “windshield survey” were not submitted in a separate reconnaissance report.

Downtown neighborhood study area base map was generated by the City of Niagara Falls Office of Planning and Environmental Services in September 2003. The CBCA survey team used the September 2003 maps provided by the city in the field to locate and record inventoried properties. The city neighborhood maps were revised in November 2004. All addresses in the current survey are based on field inspection and the November 2004 maps.

Selection criteria and guidelines were developed to guide the selection of those properties that were inventoried. The criteria were based on the historic themes and property types established in the historic and existing conditions overviews, and on the National Register Historic Places Criteria for Evaluation. The National Register Criteria are stated as follows:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and

- A. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or that represent a significant distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Information collected in the field for each inventoried property was recorded on an intensive level survey matrix form for use in the completion of revised NYSOPRHP Building Structure Inventory (a.k.a. "blue form"), which is now known as the Historic Resource Inventory Form. The type of information gathered for the intensive survey included a street address, property name, architectural style, architectural and stylistic details, approximate date of construction, past and present use, condition, and integrity. All inventoried properties were photographed with a 35-mm camera with black and white film. Each inventoried property was recorded on a project base map. All inventoried properties are presented in the report in an annotated list of properties (Section 5). Continuation sheets with updated photographs of previously inventoried properties (Appendix D) and completed Historic Resource Inventory Forms (Appendix F) are presented at the end of the report.

Christine M. Longiaru, CBCA architectural historian conducted fieldwork for the intensive level in the spring of 2004. All properties identified by Claire Ross and the CBCA project team during the "windshield survey" were inventoried. A few additional properties were included as a result of further fieldwork and research. The intensive level survey also called for the CBCA team to identify any potential historic districts and to document both contributing and non-contributing elements. Current photographs were taken of previously inventoried buildings to update the existing building forms (Appendix D).

2.3 Historical and Architectural Overview, and Bibliography

The Historical Overview (Section 3) is a context statement that provides general information about important events that had an impact on the city's development. It will be used to aid in establishing a greater understanding of the Downtown neighborhood within the larger historic

context of the City of Niagara Falls. Information gathered from the background research and fieldwork formed the basis for statements of significance for each identified property. Dr. Francis Kowsky authored the architectural overview for the Downtown neighborhood (Section 4.1-4.6). This overview includes a synopsis of the represented building types and architectural styles in the Downtown neighborhood. Historic maps, photographs and other images supplement the historical and architectural overview. The bibliography (Section 6) represents a working list of sources used in developing the historical and architectural overview, and those that were useful in documenting historical facts about the resources that were subject of the intensive survey.

2.4 Public Outreach

CBCA and the Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Commission held a public hearing for the Niagara Falls Historic Resources Survey on November 12, 2003 at the Niagara Falls Public Library Auditorium. The purpose was to obtain community input on historic buildings in Niagara Falls and to inform city residents about the project and Historic Resources Surveys. Residents were asked to bring names of their favorite building to share with others. The project was also featured in articles published by the *Niagara Gazette* (April 23, 2003) and the *Buffalo News* (August 7, 2003).

CBCA hosted a luncheon/round-table on April 1, 2004 with leading local scholars and informed community members to discuss the history of Niagara Falls. Derek Waltho and Tom Yots from the Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Commission, and Claire Ross of NYS OPRHP were in attendance. The goal of the luncheon was to fill any gaps in the research design for the historic overview. Moreover, the luncheon provided a dialogue about historic preservation issues in Niagara Falls. The luncheon was a rare opportunity to bring a diverse group of individuals together to talk about the history and future of the community's important historic resources.