



DIALOGUE PARTNERS  
*Bringing people together*

## CITY OF BURLINGTON A Heritage Conversation Workshop

“I really think **we are much closer to being in violent agreement** than not, it’s just the way we’re going about it that is the crux of the problem.”  
— Resident

Dialogue Partners was retained to support the successful planning and implementation of a Heritage Conservation workshop to engage interested residents and stakeholders in providing input for future decision making by City Administration and Council.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

Partnering with the City, we hosted a Heritage Conservation workshop intended to address major controversy and outrage over heritage designation of homes. Up to this point, the City focused on providing the facts and proven research correlating property values and designation and asked for public feedback on the process for owners to have their homes removed from the Municipal Register. The conflict emerged as concerns ran much deeper and encompassed a host of other issues associated with heritage conservation in the City. Key stakeholder interviews and an open public survey helped us to better understand the diversity of these concerns. Using an open space methodology, card-storming and small group discussions, participants themselves identified and discussed what was most important to them - criteria for designation, property rights and values, renovation and demolition restrictions, legislative responsibilities, incentives and support. Following the workshop a “What Was Said” report, state of heritage conservation summary, recommended next steps and response to questions raised all were shared publicly.

### THINGS WE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY:

**Tread carefully with facts:** Facts don’t respond to people’s emotions. Instead they often serve to ignite the situations further. Participants wanted the City to work with them to find solutions, rather than feeling like heritage designation was being forced on them. We needed an approach that supported people to express their emotion and how they’ve been impacted before they would be ready and able to talk about their ideas for change - a values-based discussion.

**Focus on talking instead of telling:** Bringing together such a large group of people at one time is an incredible gift. This time is valuable, and it needs to be used wisely. People will always have questions, but rather than responding to them, which frequently takes us back to facts and positions, we wrote them all down. Following the workshop a Q&A report was shared publicly so that our time together was spent talking rather than telling.

**Final thoughts:** Many people came to the workshop upset, bitter and shaking with rage, and left feeling like they had been heard and valued, grateful for the opportunity and that meaningful change would come as a result.

### KEY PROJECT QUESTION

How do we celebrate and enhance the cultural and heritage resources of Burlington while respecting and considering individual and community needs and rights?

78% of people felt their expectations were met for discussion, sharing of issues and concerns and identifying possible solutions.



“I feel participants were able to learn from one another due to the open discussion format and walk away with something different to think about.”  
—Resident