



To: COUNCIL
Meeting Date: 9/23/2025
Subject: 90 Old Mill Road - Architectural Conservancy Ontario Potential Property Donation to the City
Submitted By: Bryan Boodhoo, City Solicitor
Prepared By: Neil Lacey, Manager of Realty Services
Report No.: 25-036-OCM
File No.: C11
Wards Affected: Ward 1

RECOMMENDATION(S):

THAT Report 25-036-OCM 90 Old Mill Road - Architectural Conservancy Ontario Potential Property Donation to the City be received;

AND THAT staff be directed to acquire the property at 90 Old Mill Road in Cambridge from the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario as a donation;

AND THAT a transfer of \$135,000 towards capital project number A/01843-10 for the cost of immediate repairs funded from Capital Works Reserve Fund be approved;

AND THAT \$10,500 operating impact be added to the budget commencing with the 2026 Budget;

AND FURTHER THAT the City Solicitor be authorized to execute and register all necessary documents for the acquisition of the property at 90 Old Mill Road in Cambridge.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Purpose

The Architectural Conservancy Ontario (the “ACO”) is proposing to donate to the City the property it owns at 90 Old Mill Road, which includes the historic Sheave Tower (the “Property”). The purpose of this report is to obtain Council approval to proceed with the acceptance of this donation.

Key Findings

Historical Significance

Sheave Tower is a historical gem located in the village of Blair. It is a wooden water-powered hydroelectric generator tower that was constructed in 1876 by Allan Bowman, a local miller. The 9.5-metre (31-foot) tower harnessed waterpower via pulley and cable for the nearby gristmill. The Sheave Tower provided power to the Carlisle Mill up the creek and across the road (91 Old Mill Road). The remnant mill building is still there, although no longer functioning as a mill. Sheave Tower generated electricity until 1954 making it both one of Ontario's oldest hydroelectric sites, and one of the world's smallest hydro-generators. Although the interior machinery has since been removed, Sheave Tower remains a local landmark in the Waterloo Region for photography and painting. On behalf of the City of Cambridge, the Arts and Culture Advisory Committee commissioned Pierre Poussin to create an original public art piece as part of commemorating the 50th anniversary of the City. The artwork was installed at the Fountain Street Soccer Complex in June 2025. The Sheave Tower is on the City's Heritage Register and designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The property also lies within the Village of Blair Heritage Conservation District (HCD) and is designated under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The property's individual designation by-law was amended by Council in June 2025 to enhance heritage protections.

Located at 90 Old Mill Road, the tower sits on a 3.92-acre parcel of land set within the boundaries of a provincially significant wetland. See Image A – Aerial Map for the general location of the Property.

Key Terms

ACO proposes to donate the Property to the City at no cost. The City will take on all responsibilities of operating, maintaining, repairing, safekeeping and preserving the Property including the Sheave Tower. A summary of key business terms is provided in the Background Section under ACO Offer. Notably, some repairs are needed, and it is recommended that public access only be granted after such repairs are completed.

Financial Implications

Funding and resources are required for the ongoing operating and maintenance of the Property to keep it in a state of good repair. The cost of this work has been investigated by staff and proper due diligence undertaken to better inform Council on the financial implications associated with the transaction.

Realty Services consulted with the Building Design & Construction and with Infrastructure Services – Operations. Both departments provided input into the financial implications and the operational and capital needs associated with the acceptance of this donation.

To ensure public safety, immediate repairs (bridge and railings, signage, tree removal and road improvements) are necessary at a total estimated amount of \$122,860. The property will not be open to the public until completion of the immediate repairs (refer to Capital Expenditures – Immediate Repair Costs for a list of the works). A new Capital Project A/01843-10 for the cost of immediate repairs has been created with funding from Capital Works Reserve Fund of \$135,000 (including contingency) and a \$10,500 operating impact will be added to the budget commencing with the 2026 Budget.

An asset replacement cost of \$430,000 should be considered for future replacement of the pedestrian bridge and retaining wall based on regular condition assessments. Informal inspections completed by staff indicate that both structures are reasonably sound and, aside from routine maintenance and minor repairs, these structures would not require major capital work for at least 5 years.

Tacoma Engineering was retained to conduct a structural condition assessment of Sheave Tower. Attached as Appendix “A” is a copy of the structural condition assessment report. An estimate for regular on-going maintenance was provided by the external consultant for a five-year period. A summary table and a detailed breakdown of all costs have been provided under the Financial Impact section of this report.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT:

Strategic Action

Objective(s): PLACEMAKING - Promote and create a wide range of destinations and activities that capitalize on the beauty of the rivers and heritage buildings

Strategic Action: Enhance opportunities to enjoy built and natural heritage

OR

Core Service

Program: Not Applicable

Core Service: Not Applicable

The ACO’s offer to donate 90 Old Mill Road including the Sheave Tower is an opportunity for the City to take stewardship of a property that is of architectural and historical significance, as well as further demonstrates that the City takes a leadership role in supporting the preservation of buildings of heritage value. This is in alignment with the City’s Strategic Plan as identified above.

BACKGROUND:

90 Old Mill Road and the Sheave Tower

90 Old Mill Road is a 3.92-acre parcel of land set within the boundaries of a provincially significant wetland (refer to Image A – Aerial Map below).

The Architectural Conservancy Ontario acquired the Property on October 31, 1994. Located on the Property is the Sheave Tower which is the province's last remaining wooden water-powered hydroelectric generator tower (refer to Image B – Sheave Tower below).

Built in 1876, the Sheave Tower is a 9.5-metre (31-foot) tower that harnessed waterpower via pulley and cable for the nearby gristmill. The Sheave Tower provided power to the Carlisle Mill up the creek and across the road (91 Old Mill Road). The remnant mill building is still there, although no longer functioning as a mill.

Image A – Aerial Map (Outlining 90 Old Mill Road in Blue)



Image B – Sheave Tower



ACO Offer to Donate the Property

In 2023, ACO reached out to the City to initiate discussions regarding ACO potentially donating the Property to the City so that the Property including the Sheave Tower would be under the long-term care and maintenance of the City.

ANALYSIS:

Inspections

In the fall and winter of 2023-2024, staff have performed numerous onsite visual inspections of the Property and noted the following:

- The wooden tower structure is in good condition.
- The foundation walls are in poor condition and will need to be repaired.
- The wooden foot bridge will eventually need to be repaired or replaced.

- The path from the road to the tower should be widened and covered in stone dust to allow for improved passage.
- New signage will need to be added to align with ACO's request.
- Safety railings (in the form of wrought iron) are needed.
- The footbridge on/off ramps require immediate replacement including safety railings.
- There is currently limited parking available on a narrow shoulder of the road in front of this property.

Structural Condition Assessment

Tacoma Engineering was retained to conduct a structural condition assessment of Sheave Tower on January 24, 2024, and their report was provided on March 5, 2024, which investigated the current state of the existing infrastructure and forecast the costs of future work to keep it in a state of good repair.

ACO Negotiations

Staff have continued to meet with the ACO on an informal basis throughout 2024 and 2025.

ACO Proposed Key Business Terms

- ACO proposes to donate the Property to the City at no cost.
- The City will take on all responsibilities of operating, maintaining, repairing, safekeeping and preservation of the Property, including the Sheave Tower.
- Municipal Heritage (MHAC) consultation will occur on any works on the property.
- Signage speaking to the Sheave Tower and ACO will be installed on the site. During an on-site meeting ACO clarified that they would be seeking a grant or donations to offset the cost to the City for a new interpretative sign.
- No new on-site parking will be installed, and the streetscape will be preserved. However, the City would expand the shoulder of the road for parking.
- The property cannot be severed, subdivided or its boundaries severed which would not allow a road widening on Old Mill Road.
- The property lies within the Village of Blair Heritage Conservation District (HCD) and is designated under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The property is also

designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* and the designation by-law was amended by Council in June 2025.

EXISTING POLICY / BY-LAW(S):

By-law 74-95 sets out provisions, procedures, and guidelines with respect to authority and due diligence for property acquisitions and dispositions.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Funding and resources are required for the ongoing operating and maintenance of the Property to keep it in a state of good repair. The cost of this work has been investigated by staff and proper due diligence undertaken to better inform Council of the financial implications associated with the transaction.

Realty Services consulted with the Building Design & Construction and with Infrastructure Services – Operations. Both departments provided input into the financial implications and the operational and capital needs associated with the acceptance of this donation, which are summarized below in the following tables.

CAPITAL EXPENDITURES

Immediate Repair Costs

To ensure public safety the following list of repairs should be undertaken immediately upon possession of the property:

Pedestrian Bridge, Railings, Signage, Tree Removal and Road Improvement

- Pedestrian Bridge (ramp) \$ 10,000
- Railings (wrought iron) \$ 67,860
- Signage \$ 5,000
- Tree Removal (2-4 trees) \$ 5,000
- Road Improvements (shoulder) \$ 35,000

ESTIMATED TOTAL IMMEDIATE COSTS* \$122,860

*Excludes contingency

Asset Replacement Costs

For the items in the following table there are no identified needs for replacement within the next 5 years. There is no current timeline for replacement, but these asset replacement expenditures are being reported for both asset management and insurance purposes.

Pedestrian Bridge and Railings

- New Accessible Pedestrian Bridge

footings and new abutments	\$230,000
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- Permit Costs

(geotech, design, GRCA permit)	\$ 50,000
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- Estimating and Construction

Contingency (approx.20%)	\$ 60,000
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Pedestrian Bridge and Railings Subtotal \$340,000

Retaining Wall

- Retaining Wall (incl. water diversion) \$ 60,000
- Engineering Costs (Geotech, design) \$ 15,000
- Estimating and Construction
- Contingency (approx.20%) \$15,000

Retaining Wall Subtotal \$90,000

ESTIMATED TOTAL ASSET REPLACEMENT \$430,000

Incurred Costs to Date

Heritage Assessment report was performed by Robinson Heritage Consulting and Tacoma Engineering was retained to conduct a structural condition assessment of Sheave Tower on January 24, 2024, at a cost of **\$12,712**.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE EXPENDITURE

Tower Routine Maintenance Costs

The following items of routine maintenance and their associated costs summarized in Table 1 below were identified by consultant, Tacoma Engineering (Appendix A – Sheave Tower Structural Condition Assessment). The items have been enumerated and correlate directly to Table 1 recommended remedial action line items:

Items requiring routine maintenance:

1. Continue to monitor the property regularly and limit access to the interior. Maintenance should include the control and pruning of surrounding vegetation to ensure that the risk of damage due to falling limbs or trees is minimized.
2. Review the conditions of the roofing and flashing and ensure that roof maintenance and replacement is completed prior to a significant failure of the roof.
3. Repair the door hardware to ensure easy and reliable access to the interior for maintenance staff.
4. Remove and replace deteriorated exterior cladding prior to complete failure of the material.
5. Consider the provision of lighting and/or other security measures to mitigate the risk of vandalism and arson.
6. Carry out regular reviews of the exterior exposed concrete foundation walls, specifically at the northwest corner where the rougher exterior surface can result in accelerated freeze-thaw deterioration. These reviews can be completed at the same time as the regular monitoring of the property. Table 1 (below) includes a budget allowance for surficial concrete repairs to be completed in 2031, if required.
7. While it is expected that the conditions of the tower will be acceptable over the next 5 years, it may be advantageous to engage the services of a structural engineer experienced with heritage structures every 5 years. This review would include an investigation of the existing conditions and recommendations for remedial work that may fall outside of the items listed above. The expected cost of this assessment is included as item 7 in Table 1 below.

The cost of such items has been summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Estimated Maintenance Costs

Recommended Remedial Action	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
1	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,750	\$1,750	\$1,750
2	Nil	Nil	\$500	Nil	Nil	\$5,000
3	\$500	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
4	Nil	Nil	\$1,000	Nil	Nil	\$1,000
5	\$3,500	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
6	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	\$5,000
7	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	\$5,000
Totals Per Year	\$5,500	\$1,500	\$3,000	\$1,750	\$1,750	\$17,750
8*	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$5,000	\$6,000
Grand Total (including 8)	\$10,500	\$7,500	\$8,000	\$7,750	\$6,750	\$23,750

*In addition to the Routine Tower Maintenance above, provided by Tacoma, Infrastructure Services – Operations identified there would be Regular Inspection and Vegetation Management Costs estimated at \$5,000 per annum for the Operations Division. Plus, asset management pedestrian bridge structural inspection every 2 years and retaining wall inspection every 2 years at a cost of \$500 per inspection for each.

PUBLIC VALUE:

The City is demonstrating responsible stewardship of public assets and resources through detailed planning and due diligence in its review of taking ownership of the Property.

The City is also demonstrating its support for the preservation of buildings and structures of architectural and heritage value.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE INPUT:

Advisory Committees Consulted:

Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee (MHAC) were consulted on April 17, 2025, for support on the amended designation by-law.

Any future work on the Property or to the Tower would likely require consultation with the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will be consulted for future work to the Property, to help ensure compliance with accessibility standards.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Not applicable.

INTERNAL / EXTERNAL CONSULTATION:

The Architectural Conservancy Ontario has been consulted throughout the process.

Realty Services consulted internally with:

- Building Design & Construction
- Financial Services
- Infrastructure Services – Operations
- Community Development – Planning Services
- Legal Services

Realty Services consulted externally with:

- Tacoma Engineering

CONCLUSION:

The ACO's offer to donate 90 Old Mill Road including the Sheave Tower is an opportunity for the City to take stewardship of a property that is of architectural and historical significance, as well as further demonstrates that the City takes a leadership role in supporting the preservation of buildings of heritage value. The property will not be

open to the public until completion of the immediate repairs (refer to Capital Expenditures – Immediate Repair Costs for a list of the works).

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: **Yes**

By-law: **No**

Budget Amendment: **Yes**

Policy: **No**

APPROVALS:

This report has gone through the appropriate workflow and has been reviewed and or approved by the following as required:

Chief Financial Officer

City Solicitor

City Manager

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 25-036-OCM Appendix A – Sheave Tower Structural Condition Assessment