



Planning, Building and By-law Services

Prepared for: Council-in-Committee

Report: PBBS-51-2005

Meeting Date: July 7, 2025

1. Title

Heritage Property Designation – 3718 Netherby Road

2. Recommendations

That: Council approves the designation of 3718 Netherby Road as outlined in this report, for architectural, historical and contextual attributes and reasons, under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*; pursuant to the recommendation of the Museum and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee, and further

That: Council directs Staff to prepare a Designation By-law and provide Notice of Intention to Designate in accordance with the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

3. Relation to Council's Corporate Strategic Plan

Priority: Sustainable and managed growth

Initiative: Number of designated heritage properties

4. List of Stakeholders

- The Corporation of the Town of Fort Erie
- Residents of the Town of Fort Erie
- Municipal Heritage Standing Committee/ Museum and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee
- Archeological Research Associates Ltd (ARA)
- Owners of 3718 Netherby Road

5. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the Museum and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee's (MCHAC) recommendation to designate 3718 Netherby Road under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, as significant from an architectural, contextual, and historical perspective, as well as provide background associated with the recommendation.

6. Background

Background information with respect to the Municipal Heritage Standing Committee, the impacts of heritage designation, and general criteria according to Ontario Regulation 9/06 as amended

by Ontario Regulation 569/22 is attached as **Appendix 1**.

7. Analysis

The property known municipally as 3718 Netherby Road is located in Stevensville, approximately 4.8 km east of the intersection of Sodom Road and Netherby Road as shown in **Appendix 2**. The property features a one storey brick Roman Catholic church that was constructed in 1849. The property has been identified by ARA and the MHSC as having architectural, contextual, and historical value and interest.

In 2011, the property was added to the Fort Erie Municipal Register of Properties of Cultural Heritage Value and Interest, as outlined in Report CDS-53-2011, and attached as **Appendix 3**. The property owner did not appeal the listing at that time, and the report did not indicate any issues or objections.

An evaluation of the subject lands was carried out by ARA and determined that 3718 Netherby Road meets five of the criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest as outlined in O. Reg. 9/06 and therefore is worthy of designation. The evaluation performed by ARA is attached as **Appendix 4**.

On March 12, 2025, the MHSC met to consider the designation of 3718 Netherby Road and passed the following motion:

That the Museum and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee recommends the designation of 3718 Netherby Road, Fort Erie, for architectural, historical, and contextual attributes and reasons under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Staff sent a letter to the property owners informing them that the Municipal Heritage Standing Committee (MHSC) had recommended designation and outlined the next steps in the process. The letter emphasized the Town's commitment to ensuring the process remains transparent and accommodating. It also stated that the Recommendation Report would not be presented to Council until there had been an opportunity to meet with the owners to discuss the report, hear their position on designation, and address any questions they may have.

A meeting between Staff and representatives of the Diocese of St. Catharines took place on May 15, 2025, to discuss the proposed heritage designation. During this meeting, the owners' representatives expressed clear opposition to the designation and indicated their intention to formally object should Council proceed. They noted that the windows are not original and that the current configuration of buildings is not unique, pointing out that similar designs are common among Catholic churches in Fort Erie and throughout Ontario. The architecture, they stated, is not remarkable in itself; rather, the site's significance lies in its longstanding association with a worshipping community spanning 175 years.

In addition to concerns about the building's heritage value, they expressed strong reservations about the potential practical impacts of designation. They explained that heritage status could impose restrictions that may hinder the ability to expand the facility if the congregation outgrows the current space. In such a scenario, the community could be forced to relocate, severing the connection between the congregation and its long-standing place of worship. They argued that this would undermine the very historical continuity the designation seeks to preserve. They further clarified that the stained-glass windows referenced in previous documentation were

added approximately 25 years ago, during the 150th anniversary, and do not represent original features. Overall, they stressed that the proposed designation could limit necessary future changes and ultimately jeopardize the living heritage of the community.

Staff informed the owners that, although the property is ineligible for the Heritage Tax Rebate Program due to its exemption from property taxes, it would qualify for the Heritage Property Grant Program. This program offers grants of up to 50% of eligible conservation or restoration costs, to a maximum of \$10,000, for work on identified heritage attributes. Eligible work includes the conservation, reconstruction, or restoration of significant features as defined in the designating by-law. The owners acknowledged this but reiterated their opposition to the designation.

Reasons for Designation

3718 Netherby Road contains a representative example of a place of worship built in the Gothic Revival architectural style. The one-storey, rectangular-frame building features a front gable roof with return eaves, a symmetrical façade, and a two-storey bell tower topped with an octagonal spire, all characteristic elements of the Gothic Revival style as applied to ecclesiastical buildings. Additional architectural features such as the symmetrical composition, tall pointed-arch windows and door openings, and the formal front entrance with stained glass further reinforce its classification as an example of Gothic Revival ecclesiological architecture.

The property is historically associated with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Toronto and later the Diocese of St. Catharines, as the site of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, which was established in the community of Snyder in 1849. At the time, the area, then known variously as Black Creek or New Germany, was predominantly inhabited by a monolingual German-speaking population. This linguistic barrier posed a challenge to Catholic circuit priests, and ecumenical visits were rare. In 1848, construction of St. Joseph's Church began under the supervision of the Jesuits, who oversaw the parish intermittently between 1849 and 1880, after which the Carmelite Fathers assumed leadership until 1946. The church's first resident priest, Father John Marvyn, served the parish from 1957 to 1967.

A cemetery has been associated with the church since at least the mid-19th century, with many of the oldest gravestones inscribed in German. The earliest visible burial date is April 8, 1848. Although a cemetery committee was not formally organized until 1953, additional land for the cemetery was acquired during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Supporting community infrastructure developed alongside the church, including the construction of a Parish Hall in 1926, St. Joseph's Catholic School at 3650 Netherby Road in 1954, a rectory in 1958, and the recladding of the church in brick in 1969. St. Joseph's Church continues to function as an active place of worship, a role it has fulfilled in the Snyder community for 175 years.

The property contributes meaningfully to the character of the surrounding area. The streetscape includes a range of buildings from the early 19th to late 20th centuries, displaying a variety of architectural styles and finishes. Within this setting is a cohesive cluster of four contiguous properties affiliated with the Catholic church: the church itself (1849), the Parish Hall (1926), the rectory (rebuilt in 1958), and the Roman Catholic cemetery. The nearby St. Joseph's Catholic School (1954) further supports the narrative of a vibrant and continuous Catholic presence. This intact ensemble of buildings and grounds reflects the cultural and social significance of the Catholic community in Snyder, with 3718 Netherby Road playing a central role in defining the area's sense of place and identity, both through its physical presence and its ongoing use for

religious and communal activities.

The property also holds contextual value due to its direct historical relationship with the adjacent St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Cemetery. The cemetery, situated on a separate parcel of land, remains an integral part of the broader Catholic cluster of properties along Netherby Road. The earliest legible gravestone dates to 1848, aligning with the establishment and construction of the church, thereby underscoring the interconnected development of these heritage resources.

Finally, 3718 Netherby Road serves as a visual and cultural landmark in the hamlet of Snyder. Prominently located near a key local intersection, the building's distinct architectural features, including its octagonal spire, and its position as the earliest church to serve the community make it a well-known and memorable fixture in the local landscape. As the physical and spiritual heart of an active Catholic system of buildings, the property remains a recognizable and significant communal marker.

Cultural Heritage Attributes

Key elements that contribute to the heritage value of 3718 Netherby Road include:

- One-storey frame Gothic Revival place of worship
- Overall height, form, and massing
- Front gable roof with return eaves
- Symmetrical façade and side elevations
- Two-storey belltower with octagonal spire
- All pointed arch openings
- Formal front entrance with pointed arch transom and stained glass
- Situation within a cluster of Catholic community and worship-related properties

Designation Process

If Council recommends moving forward with the designation of 3718 Netherby Road, Staff will prepare the "Notice of Intent to Designate" to be published in the local newspaper and to serve to the property owner and the Ontario Heritage Trust. If no objections are received within 30 days of the notice being circulated, Staff will bring forward the designating by-law for Council's approval. Once the by-law has been passed, a Notice of Designation is published in the local newspaper and provided to the property owner and the Ontario Heritage Trust, and the property is listed on the municipal and provincial registers.

If there is an objection during the 30-day appeal period, the objection is referred to the Ontario Land Tribunal, which schedules a hearing and makes a final and binding decision on the designation.

8. Financial, Staffing and Accessibility (AODA) Implications

The MHSC has the mandate to advise Council on matters pertaining to heritage importance, particularly regarding the designation of properties under the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The Junior Community Planner is the Staff liaison for the Committee.

The property could be considered under the Town's Designated Heritage Property Grant Program, which allows a property owner to apply for a grant of up to 50% of eligible

maintenance, preservation, and conservation costs to an upset limit of \$10,000 for work performed to the identified heritage attributes of a designated property.

9. Policies Affecting Proposal

In accordance with section 11 of the Town's Official Plan, the Town will actively promote cultural heritage and conservation in all applicable municipal activities in recognition of the non-renewable nature of cultural heritage resources, as well as the contribution they make to the character, civic pride, tourism potential, economic benefits and historical appreciation of the community.

Further, Council may consult with the MHSC in matters relating to the conservation of built heritage within the Town of Fort Erie. The MHSC may identify through the ongoing inventory, or on a case-by-case basis, properties of architectural and historical interest and recommend to Council those heritage properties considered worthy of designation under Parts IV and V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

10. Comments from Departments, Community and Corporate Partners

The recommendation of the MHSC and evaluation by ARA are identified in this report.

11. Alternatives

Council can choose not to support the MHSC recommendation to designate; however, it is not recommended as the MHSC and ARA have assessed this site in accordance with the established criteria under the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

12. Communicating Results

If approved, a Notice of the Intention to Designate will be provided to the owner in accordance with Section 29(1) of the *Ontario Heritage Act* and the Ontario Heritage Trust, and placed in the Fort Erie Observer, as required under Section 29(3) of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

13. Conclusion

The Museum and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee (MCHAC) recommends the designation 3718 Netherby Road under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* because it is significant from an architectural, contextual, and historical perspective as outlined in **Appendix 5**.

14. Report Approval

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15. Attachments

Appendix 1 – Background Information

Appendix 2 – Location Map

Appendix 3 – CDS-53-2011

Appendix 4 – Archaeological Research Associates Ltd. Evaluation Report

Appendix 5 – Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest