



## Planning, Building and By-law Services

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Prepared for: Council-in-Committee

Report: PBBS-50-2025

Meeting Date: July 7, 2025

### 1. Title

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Heritage Property Designation – 2584 Ott Road

### 2. Recommendations

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**That:** Council approves the designation of 2584 Ott 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

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Priority: Sustainable and managed growth

Initiative: Number of designated heritage properties

### 4. List of Stakeholders

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- 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 2584 Ott Road

### 5. Purpose of Report

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The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the Museum and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee's (MCHAC) recommendation to designate 2584 Ott 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

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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

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The property known municipally as 2584 Ott Road is located on the east side of Ott Road in Stevensville, as shown in **Appendix 2**. The property features a one-storey brick Mennonite Meeting house built in 1872, with a cemetery located to the north of the building. 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**. Although the property owner did not appeal the listing at the time, some concerns were raised. According to the report, the Manager of Land Use Policy and a member of the Museum & Cultural Heritage Committee met with church representatives to clarify the distinction between designation and non-designated registry status. Following this discussion, the representatives expressed no objection to the property's inclusion on the Register.

An evaluation of the subject lands was carried out by ARA and determined that 2584 Ott Road meets four 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 January 15, 2025, the MHSC met to consider the designation of 2584 Ott Road and passed the following motion:

*That the Museum and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee recommends the designation of 2584 Ott 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 the owners took place on February 13, 2025. During this meeting, the owners expressed that they do not support the designation of their property. They explained that the building is intended to serve as a quiet, familiar space for worship, without attracting public attention or special recognition. They emphasized that their focus is on the spiritual use of the property, not the building's historical significance. They also noted that they have no plans to alter the structure beyond routine maintenance.

On March 12, 2025, the owners followed up with Staff via email to share additional concerns. They had recently read an article in *Ontario Farmer* highlighting potential insurance

complications associated with heritage designation. After discussing the matter with their insurance representative, who reviewed their existing policy, they were informed that continuing their current coverage would require a mandatory heritage appraisal—at their own expense. Based on the outcome of this appraisal, their policy could become significantly more costly or, in some cases, be denied altogether. This added financial burden, and uncertainty further reinforced their opposition to the designation.

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. Their primary wish is to continue using the building as a place of peaceful and quiet worship, without drawing public attention or altering its current function.

### Reasons for Designation

2584 Ott Road is a notable example of a Mennonite Meeting house in Ontario. The building features a one-storey rectangular plan with a front gable roof and overhanging eaves. Its red brick exterior and symmetrical three-bay façade contribute to its understated yet distinct character. The design also includes tall, segmentally arched window openings with stone sills, regularly spaced, which, alongside the modest construction, are characteristic features of Mennonite Meetinghouses ornamentation.

2584 Ott Road has strong historical associations with the Mennonite settlement of Bertie Township, particularly with the Reformed Mennonite congregation that has met in this area since approximately 1825. Mennonites were among the first settlers in Niagara, drawn by the promise of religious freedom and pacifist non-resistance, similar to other groups such as the Quakers and the brethren in Christ. Mennonites began settling in the Niagara region as early as 1786, with many Anabaptist groups sharing church facilities. The Reformed Mennonites were formally organized in Ontario around 1825 by John Herr, who sought to return the faith to its foundational principles of simplicity and humility.

The original church building at 2584 Ott Road was a log cabin, and its earliest congregates were members from the Beam, Neff, Stoner, Augustine, Baker, Weaver, and Morningstar families. The current brick church structure was built in 1872, and the congregation has continued to meet at this site for nearly 200 years.

2584 Ott Road is also home to a Reformed Mennonite cemetery, with the earliest legible gravestone inscriptions dating back to 1838, though the cemetery likely has been in use since the mid-1820s. The headstones feature surnames like Beam, Baker, Kraft, Morningstar, Noyes, Sherk, Tripp, and Young, representing some of the earliest and most prominent Mennonite families in Bertie Township.

2584 Ott Road holds significant potential for providing insights into the early Mennonite community in Fort Erie. The cemetery offers valuable genealogical data and serves as a tangible link to the past, shedding light on family histories and traditional practices within the Mennonite community.

The property is also a local landmark, holding great significance to the Reformed Mennonite community. The Stevensville congregation, one of the oldest continually meeting Anabaptist groups in the Niagara Peninsula, has gathered at this location for over 200 years. As such, the building is a well-known and meaningful landmark in the community.

### Cultural Heritage Attributes

Key elements that contribute to the heritage value of 2584 Ott Road include:

- One-storey Mennonite Meetinghouse
- Overall, height, form and massing
- Front gable roof
- Three-bay façade and symmetrical side elevations
- Red-brick construction
- Segmentally arched window openings with brick voussoirs and stone sills
- Centered and arched front entranceway opening
- Location at the intersection of Ott Road and Stevensville's Main Street
- Relationship of the Meetinghouse and cemetery
- The 19<sup>th</sup> century monuments and grave markers, the earliest of which date to 1838 with their variety of materials, design motifs, surviving inscriptions some of which are in German
- Orientation of the cemetery plots facing east and in a grid like pattern

### Designation Process

If Council recommends moving forward with the designation of 2584 Ott 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**

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

## **11. Alternatives**

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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**

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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**

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The Museum and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee (MCHAC) recommends the designation 2584 Ott 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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Chief Administrative Officer

## **15. Attachments**

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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