

## THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF WOODSTOCK

### BY-LAW NUMBER 9801-26

**A by-law to designate the property known as Hawkins Chapel, British Methodist Episcopal Church (BMEC) and Park Row Community Chapel located at 259 – 261 Park Row, west of Mill Street as a property of cultural heritage value or interest pursuant to the provisions of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, R.S. 1990, Chapter O.18, As Amended.**

**WHEREAS** Section 29 of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.18, as amended (OHA), authorizes the Council of a municipality to enact by-laws to designate real property, including all buildings and structures thereon, to be of cultural heritage value or interest;

**AND WHEREAS** the City of Woodstock Heritage Advisory Committee (WHAC) supports the designation of the property described herein;

**AND WHEREAS** authority is granted by Council to designate the Hawkins Chapel, the British Methodist Episcopal Church (BMEC) and Park Row Community Chapel at 259 – 261 Park Row as being of cultural heritage value or interest;

**AND WHEREAS** the Council of the Corporation of the City of Woodstock, has caused to be served upon the owner of the buildings and premises of 259 – 261 Park Row Woodstock, Ontario and upon the Ontario Heritage Trust, Notice of Intention to Designate the property in accordance with the notice requirements under the *Ontario Heritage Act*;

**AND WHEREAS** a Notice of Intention to Designate has been published on the City of Woodstock municipal website;

**AND WHEREAS** the reasons for designation are set out in Schedule 1 to this By-law;

**AND WHEREAS** Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 form part of this By-law;

**NOW THEREFORE** the COUNCIL of the Corporation of the City of Woodstock hereby enacts as follow:

1. That the property subject to this By-law consists of PIN 00102-0043 (LT) described as Pt of Lot 1, N/S Park Row, PL 55 AS IN 460982; S/T A16861; Woodstock, as shown on Schedule 2 to this By-law, is hereby designated as being of cultural heritage value or interest pursuant to Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

2. That the City Clerk shall cause a copy of this By-law to be registered against the property described in Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 to this by-law in the proper Land Registry Office.
3. That the City Clerk shall cause a copy of this By-law to be served upon the owner of the property at 259 – 261 Park Row and upon the *Ontario Heritage Trust* and to cause notice of this By-law to be published on the City of Woodstock municipal website.
4. That this By-law shall take effect on the day following the last day of the appeal period.

**Read a first and second time this 19th day of February 2026.**

**Read a third time and finally passed this 19th day of February 2026.**

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**Mayor – Jerry Acchione**

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**City Clerk - Amelia Humphries**

## SCHEDULE 1 TO BY-LAW 9801-26

### STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE OR INTEREST

Address: 259 – 261 Park Row

Property Identifier Number (PIN): 00102-0043 (LT)

Legal Description: Part Lot 1, N/S Park Row, Plan 55, As In 460982 S/T A16861.

The property at 259 – 261 Park Row meets six of the nine criteria used to determine cultural heritage value according to Ontario regulation 9/06 (as amended by O. Reg 569/22) and is worthy of designation under Part IV Section 29 of the *Ontario Heritage Act* for its cultural heritage value as described in the following Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest.

### DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

The property is known by three names: the Hawkins Chapel, the British Methodist Episcopal Church (BMEC) and the Park Row Community Chapel. The property is located on the north side of Park Row, just west of Mill Street in the City of Woodstock and comprises one legal lot described as Part of Lot 1 on Plan 55. The property is improved and includes two buildings – the former church and adjacent manse.

The property was originally comprised of all of Lot 1 on Plan 55 and was known municipally as 257 Park Row. When the buildings were converted to residential dwellings the City assigned each building its own address: 259 and 261 Park Row. Schedule 2 to this By-law shows the location of the property.

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The property and the existing buildings have a direct association with the **African Episcopal Methodist Church**, often referred to as the AME church or the AME that formed in 1816 when a number of Black congregations banded together to form the first independent Black denomination under the leadership of the Right Reverend Richard Allen (1760 – 1831). Elected the first bishop, Allen focused on organizing a denomination in which free Black people could worship without racial oppression and enslaved people could find a measure of dignity.

In 1850, the *Fugitive Slave Act* was passed in the United States causing many Black congregations to be fearful of attending church conferences in the United States. In response, Reverend Benjamin Stewart of Chatham, Ontario proposed the AME churches in the United Canada's separate from the American association and form their own church.

In 1852, the Voice of the Fugitive reported that the Canada District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church had 793 members with congregations in 18 locations, including Norwich, Ontario.

In 1856, the AME church in Canada changed its name to the British Methodist Episcopal or BME church due to its members allegiance to the “British” in the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and the 1837 Rebellion. The new church was named the **British Methodist Episcopal Church (BMEC)** in appreciation of finding a safe haven from American slavery in British Upper Canada.

By 1880, the BMEC church had grown from 250 to 2,684 members including mission work outside of Canada in places such as Bermuda, West Indies and British Guiana. However, the mission work stretched the church’s funds and in 1881 the AME and the BME negotiated a reunion. Not all members were in favour of the reunion and a majority of Ontario churches and preachers, led by the **Right Reverend Walter Hawkins** of Chatham, sought to establish the BMEC as its own church. In 1886 the BMEC was re-established and the Right Reverend Hawkins elected as its general superintendent.

In 1883 a movement to build a BMEC church in Woodstock Ontario had also started, led by two men who had escaped slavery in America: **George Washington**, a porter at the O’Neill House and **Dan Anderson**, a stonemason. Together they canvassed door to door to garner support for the construction of a chapel, and by 1886, the two men purchased Lot Number 1 at 257 Park Row. Their plan was to build a 200-seat frame church to be established as a BMEC church. And, the first minister was none other than the Right Reverend Walter Hawkins, whom the chapel is named after.

During the 1880’s, the church ministered about 75 Black families and was stereotyped as one of the few Black churches in Oxford County. However, when Reverend H.H. Clarke took over as minister, he declared that “*there are no colour lines at the church; we deal with the character of the people*”. In reality, the colour barrier had been broken down from the church’s inaugural opening in 1888, as both white and black members of the community of Woodstock and vicinity were present at the **Hawkins Chapel**.

Unfortunately, attendance declined and the last recorded funeral service held at the church occurred on January 15, 1937 for Walter Smith, a 67-year-old Black man originally from Innerkip who helped support the church. Despite attempts to keep the church open, the church closed in 1972 for 6-years.

In July 1977, **Reverend George Boyce** took over the church and re-opened from 1978 - 1985 as the **Park Row Community Chapel**. Reverend Boyce was the first resident minister in over 60-years. To show the church was open to any race, he painted the building black and white to reflect the fact the congregation was always mixed. Despite these efforts, in 1986, the church that was once the centre for Blacks in Woodstock permanently closed and was sold for use as a private dwelling. No records are known to exist; it is also unknown if the church records were sent to another location. There was a British Methodist Episcopal church in Ingersoll, but it was not known if the two churches were affiliated.

In Norwich Township, as of 1991, there was still an American Methodist Episcopal building. Two members of that church were still living in the Woodstock area in 1991, John Smith who lived on Sixth Avenue in Woodstock, and his brother Fred Smith of RR#4 Woodstock.

The **Smith family** factored prominently in the BMEC church, one of the few Black families arriving in Oxford County via the **Underground Railroad** during the mid-1880's. Their family has over 150-years of history contributing to the County of Oxford.

Excerpts from a letter to the Editor of the Sentinel-Review (date unknown) written by former Woodstock resident L.J. "Sparky" Weiler

### **Old Church Buildings Deserve to be Saved**

*"Today in conversation with a childhood friend ... we discussed many things going back 50, 60 years and more. One point was that the over 100-year-old church and manse, formerly the B.M.E.C. congregation (both buildings) should be saved. Each Sunday, and other special church services, we and the whole Gore population (it seemed) were treated to the best singing music, this side of heaven.*

*Mr. Tait, a white gentleman, was the minister there for years. Some of the families that went to this church were the Smiths, Marshalls, Andersons, James, Greens, George Washington Jones, Morton's, Skidmore's, and Blairs, with possibly more, of which my memory fails me. Living next door, we got the royal treatment, for at times we cut the grass and shoveled their snow.*

*At each special event, we would be given sandwiches, ice cream, cake, berries, etc. We were as one of the parishes. We could sit on our verandah, Mother, Dad and their 10 children and enjoy the ourselves, and believe that we were hearing the famous Vienna choir.*

*Fred Smith could be heard above all others, and was our Bing Crosby of the day. In the past Dresden had their famous Uncle Tom's Cabin, a real credit to that area, would be a shame to destroy these two buildings ...".*

### **Determination of Cultural Heritage Value**

The property and buildings at 259 – 261 Park Row are worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act because it meets six of the nine prescribed criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest, according to Ontario Regulation 9/06 as amended by 569/22. The property has historical and associative value and contextual value.

## Historical/ Associative Value

The property and buildings meet Criterion 4 because of the direct connection and association with the following events, prominent people and institutions:

- the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church and the establishment of the British Methodist Episcopal (BME) church in response to the increasingly unstable political environment in the USA (American Revolution, the War of 1812, 1837 Rebellion) and the 1850 *Fugitive Slave Act*;
- the Right Reverend Walter Hawkins and the re-establishment of the British Methodist Episcopal (BME) church in Canada (1886);
- the Reverend George Boyce who took over the church and re-opened it from 1978 - 1985 as the Park Row Community Chapel; and,
- the anti-slavery movement in British United Canada including the Underground Railway and the Quaker abolitionist movement.

The property meets Criterion 5 because of its historical and associative value and contribution to the “Ward” neighbourhood and the early Black community in Woodstock and Oxford County including prominent Black families such as the Smith family, the Andersons, and George Washington Jones.

The property meets Criterion 6 as it reflects the ideology and teachings of the methodist church and reflects the work and ideas of the Black preachers and members of the congregations significant to the Black community.

## Contextual Value

The property meets Criterion 7 because it is physically, functionally and historically linked to the visual and historic character of Park Row. The street pattern and lotting fabric along Park Row remains largely unchanged from the original historic survey Plan 55 shown on Schedule 2. The church would have benefitted from its large corner location at the intersection of Park Row and Mill Street. Its proximity to the railroad directly behind the church permitted the property to function as a destination and/ or place of refuge for those travelling the rails. Between 1900 and 1925 the WTV&IER “Estelle” streetcar travelled directly past the church along Park Row on its way from Mill Street to Ingersoll Road then to Beachville and the Ingersoll Inn. Even the name **Park Row** was so named because it led past one of the oldest parks in the City. The County records identify these “park lots” also shown on Plan 55 as having been designated in 1833.

The original property purchased in 1888, comprised all of Lot 1 on Plan 55. Lot 1 was a large corner lot on Plan 55 which was laid out in 1833, and was subsequently severed into three legal lots. The church property (the middle lot) retained both the church and manse building on one legal lot.

The buildings were built in 1888 and are similar in style and construction. Both structures were constructed by descendants of former slaves and free Blacks. The buildings are 2-storey gable fronted wood structures set on a high foundation which is partially exposed at the rear. The wood structure is distinguished by its centre entry door, regularly arranged front windows, side windows (now mainly covered over), modest scale and overall simplicity.

The buildings themselves appear to be in good condition, although there have been extensive interior and exterior renovations to convert to the structures to private dwellings.

### Photographs – Past and Present



The property meets Criterion 8 because the property's two buildings maintain their original configuration and are functionally, visually and historically linked to each other, the lot and its surroundings. The buildings are well over 135-years old and both the church (259 Park Row) and the adjacent manse (261 Park Row) have maintained the same building form and footprint and remained on the same legal lot.

The property and the buildings meet Criterion 9 because of its identity as a well-known local landmark. The property and the buildings (the BMEC church and the manse) are recognized for their historic significance in the “Ward” neighbourhood and early Black community and playing a crucial role in integrating escaped or emancipated slaves into the community. The BMEC church became a landmark for social activity, racial integration and expression for almost 100-years. The property had strong socio-cultural ties through its early role as a place of refuge and community meeting place and consequently helped to establish the Black community in Woodstock. The buildings are examples of the structures which existed at the early formation of the community and which were constructed by former slaves.

The property has had at least three different names, which emphasizes the constant, but changing contribution the church had for more than a century at this location. In fact, the church is also known colloquially as the **Black Chapel**, although this name does not appear in any of the “official” history books.

### **Description of Cultural/ Heritage Attributes**

The following elements of the subject property at 259 – 261 Park Row should be considered as heritage attributes in a designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

Building form, including

- examples of early Black church/ manse construction (by former slaves);
- two buildings on a single lot which maintain their original configuration and are physically as well as functionally linked (church and manse);
- two-storey small wood frame structure;
- original building footprint – auditory-hall form – typical of early AME/BMEC churches;
- gabled roof;
- a central entry door on one gable end (street front) set between two windows;
- originally three taller spaced windows were located on each side elevation of the church; however, only one window remains and the rest have been removed/ covered. The remaining window is located on the east exterior side elevation and the opening made smaller and the window replaced with a single glass window;
- wood construction materials, wood cladding, wood trim;
- the original white horizontal cladding can be seen underneath the metal siding at the peak of the gable roof;
- stone foundation and high basement; and,
- The current owner has indicated that the original church signs may be underneath the metal siding.

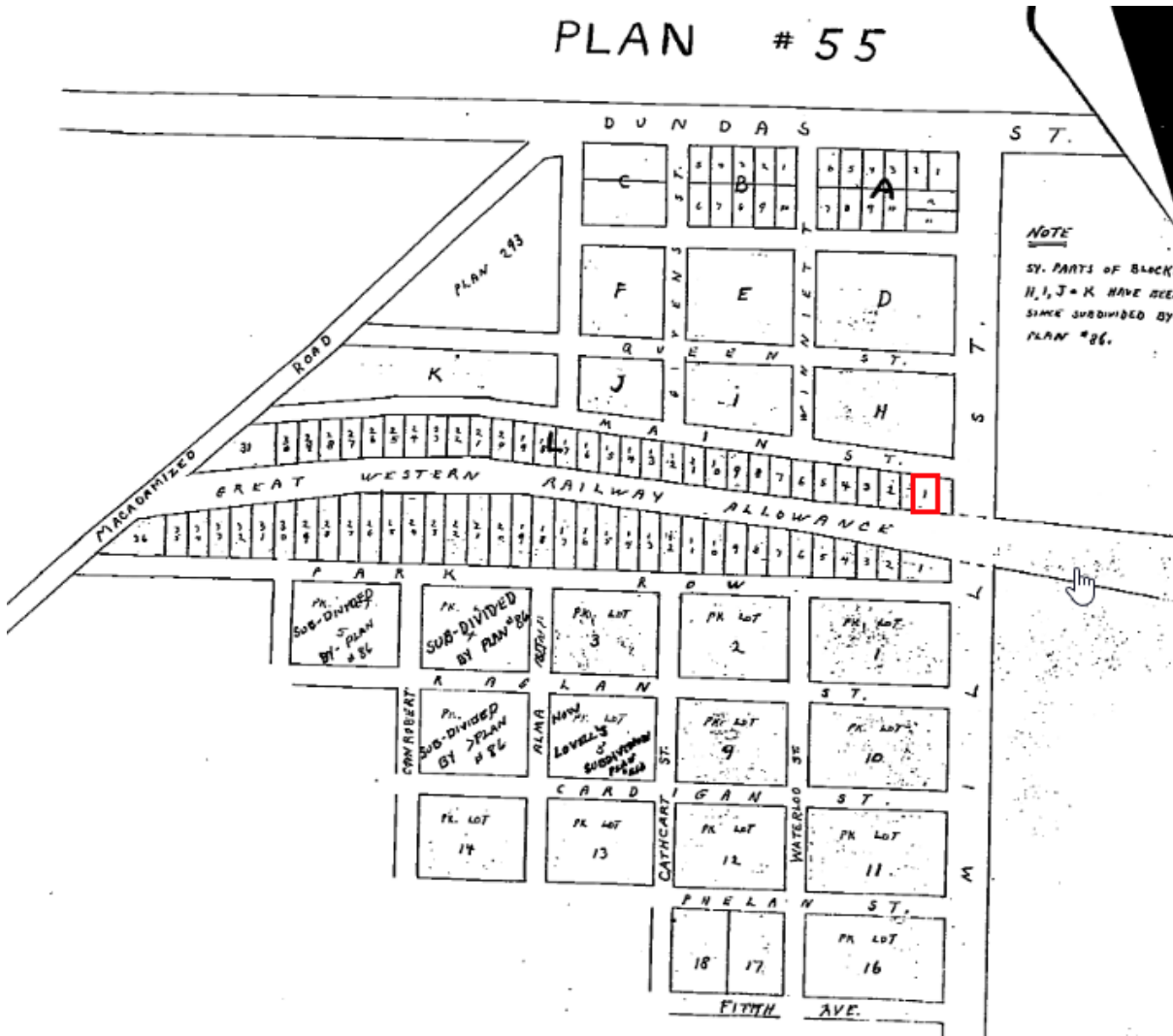
For the purposes of clarity, the current interior and exterior of the former BMEC church and the adjacent manse are not considered to be heritage attributes. It is intended that with the designation of the property, the protection of the property would prevent the demolition or removal of the structures. It is intended that non-original features may be returned to documented earlier designs or to their documented original without requiring City Council permission for an alteration of the design.

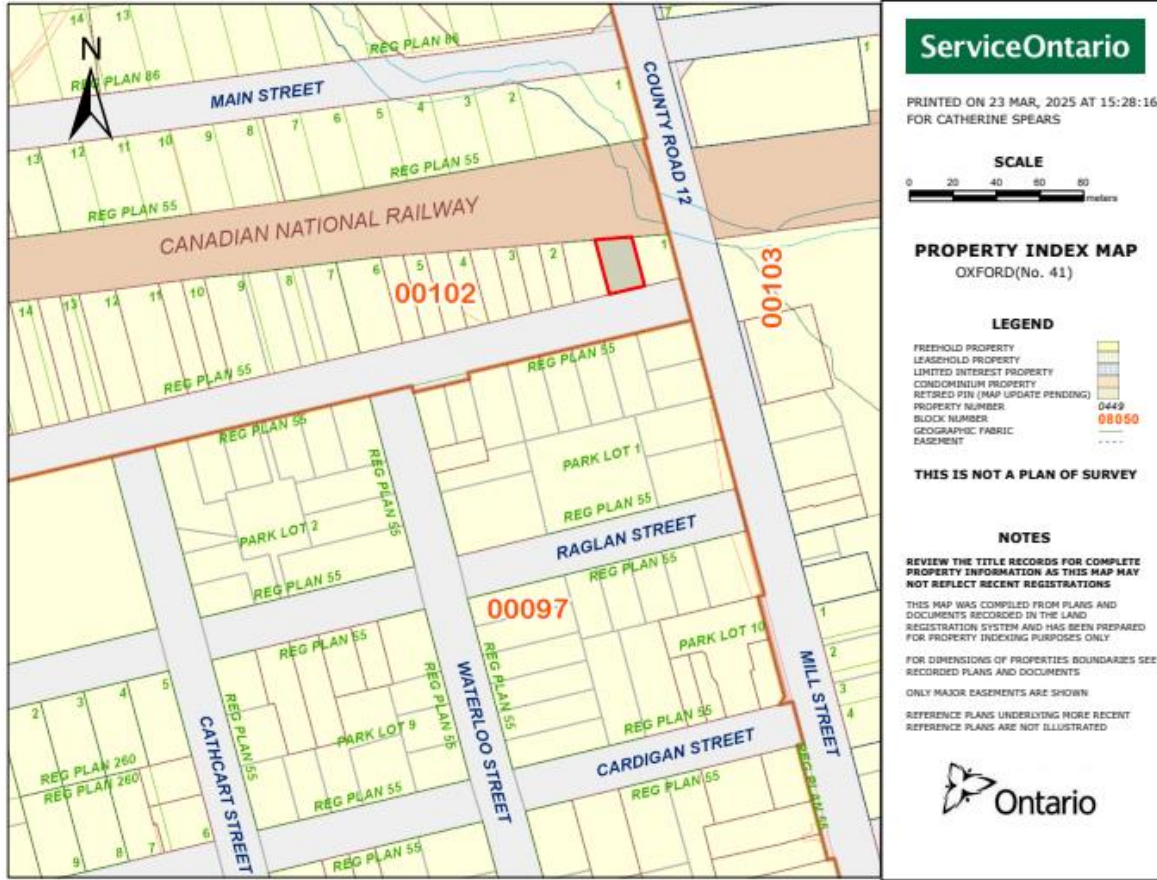
**SCHEDULE 2 TO BY-LAW 9801-26**

The property is legally described as Part of Lot 1, North of Park Row, Plan 55 As In 460982; Subject to an Easement As In A16861; City of Woodstock, County of Oxford

PIN: 00102-0043 (LT)

Municipal Address: 259 - 261 Park Row (formerly 257 Park Row).





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