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# Heritage and trauma: Reimagining the preservation planning process for the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children

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*Abstract*
The literature on trauma acknowledges that the mismanagement of sites associated with difficult experiences puts survivors at considerable risk of retraumatization and disempowerment. However, there are few policy tools available to heritage planners and development professionals to help them navigate heritage designation or redevelopment in sites with difficult histories linked to systemic racism. In this paper, we analyze the contentious redevelopment process and heritage designation related to the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children, the site of institutional abuse of African Nova Scotian children. We found that there are several gaps in existing heritage and development policies that prevent sites of racialized trauma from being acknowledged in a way that is consistent with the trauma literature. These include a lack of inclusion of difficult sites in designation, biases in scoring processes and a lack of transparent community engagement. From these findings, we provide recommendations for how policy can be improved to address these shortcomings.

Keywords: planning, development, African Nova Scotians, trauma

*Résumé*
La littérature sur le traumatisme reconnait que la mauvaise gestion des sites associées avec des expériences difficiles met les survivants en risque considérable, même avec la retraumatisassions et la perte de responsabilisation. Néanmoins, il y a quelques utiles politiques qui sont disponibles au planificateurs et professionnels de développement pour les aider à naviguer la désignation d'héritage ou le redéveloppement des sites avec les histoires difficiles liées au racisme systémique. Ici, on analyse le procédé de redéveloppement contentieux et la désignation d'héritage par rapport à la Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children, le site d'abus institutionnel des enfants. Nous avons trouvé qu'il y a plusieurs lacunes dans la politique de développement et d'héritage qui préviennent les sites de traumatisme racialisé d'être reconnu dans une manière qui conforme à la littérature de traumatisme. Dans ces lacunes il existe un manque d'inclusion de sites difficiles par rapport à la désignation, les préjugés dans le procédé de marquer les points, et un manque d'engagement de la communauté. Avec ces résultats-ci, nous fournissons des recommandations pour améliorer la politique et font face à ces lacunes.

Mots-clés : Traumatisme, Africain de Nouvelle-Ecosse, planification, racisme

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## Introduction

Preservation planning scholars have called for more inclusive practices, and the recognition of marginalized communities that may be connected to contentious sites with difficult histories (Sandercock 1998; Hayden 1997; Kaufman 2010; Page and Mason 2003; Marris 1975). This includes sites that may represent collective traumas for communities facing racial injustices, and as the literature on trauma suggests, the recognition of these sites as an important vehicle for healing. One such site with a difficult history of systemic racism is the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children (NSHCC) in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The Home was created in 1921 to house orphaned or destitute African Nova Scotian children who were denied state care in White orphanages because of racial segregation. Initially, the Home was celebrated as a triumph for the African Nova Scotian (ANS) community who had been denied social services of this kind (Province of Nova Scotia 2019). However, the Home became the site of psychological, physical and sexual abuse, and in the 1990s, former residents came forward to share their experiences of institutional abuse (Province of Nova Scotia 2019). The African Nova Scotian community, developers and planners are currently navigating historical narratives and opportunities for preserving the Home while acknowledging the traumatic nature of this site. Now in the midst of considering a redevelopment proposal, the Home presents challenges for the current heritage designation and development frameworks that both Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and the Province of Nova Scotia are grappling with. At this time of change for the site, a lack of heritage designation places the Home at risk of being altered without the input of survivors, which places them at risk of retraumatization according to trauma literature (Bowen and Murshid 2016).

The challenges of acknowledging trauma and legacies of systemic racism through the preservation planning process requires heritage planners to reassess priorities and designation criteria when it comes to contentious sites with difficult histories. Currently, HRM is developing a new Halifax Heritage and Cultural Priorities Plan. While they plan to include input from traditionally marginalized communities, there is little research available in heritage literature to guide policy decisions on sites of difficult heritage related to systemic racism, like the NSHCC. Further, there is little guidance from heritage legislation nationally and locally to acknowledge difficult histories, including those with traumatic pasts. This paper addresses the following questions: 1) in what ways do the current heritage designation processes acknowledge trauma and what opportunities are missed? and 2) how can heritage planning in Halifax be trauma informed? While a body of literature has explored difficult sites and the role of reconciliation through heritage designation, these discussions are focused on moments of regime change and political upheaval, rather than repeated, systemic oppression. By examining the case of the NSHCC at the intersection of systemic racism and institutional abuse, we can better understand how heritage practice can support communities that have been victims of trauma due to systemic racism and recognize the nuance and complexities of this and similar sites.

## Literature review

### Trauma and collective memory

Bowen and Murshid (2016) define trauma as, "Experiences that produce intense emotional pain, fear, or distress, often resulting in long-term physiological and psychosocial consequences" (223). Lasting health impacts from adverse childhood trauma can include substance abuse, higher mental illness and suicide rates, and higher instances of chronic illness including cancer, heart disease, and liver disease (Felitti et al. 1998). Research on trauma indicates that acknowledgement of harm is an important signal to survivors that they are safe; silence after a traumatic event by a survivor's community can further shame them or create a feeling of being silenced (Herman 1997). Similar but distinct collective trauma is defined by Hirschberger (2018) as "the psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affect an entire society" (1). Collective trauma is also separate from collective memory described by Halbwachs as the memory of a society that is passed down beyond the lifetime of one individual, helping to create a social identity which serves a group's social cohesion (Russell 2006). Collective trauma influences the nature of collective memory and can both threaten or help promote collective identity (Hirschberger 2018). For victim groups, the collective trauma is incorporated into collective memory and increases the importance of preserving the memory in order to

prevent future trauma. Perpetrator groups often find collective trauma as a threat to their social identity that can be dealt with by dismissal, revision of history or in some cases recognition and shifts to social identity. Similarly, Halbwachs argues that tolerance can only be achieved by acknowledging different memories and accounts between different groups with contrasting perspectives on past truth (Sennett 1998). It is therefore important that heritage planning and theory consider the effects of trauma on a collective and individual basis to mitigate harm and promote mutual understanding of difficult events.

## Difficult and dissonant heritage

Scholarship linking heritage with trauma is limited, particularly when such heritage is being analyzed from the standpoint of psychological impacts. However, there have been some exploration of sites of traumatic events within heritage literature using specific terminology to separate them from other heritage sites, including 'dissonant heritage' (Burström and Gelderblom 2011; Giblin 2014; Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) or 'difficult heritage' (Macdonald and Scheermeyer 2018). Dissonant heritage is defined by Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) as "a condition of discordance or lack of agreement and consistency as to the meaning of heritage" (21). Logan and Reeves (2009) describe sites of difficult heritage as "sites representing painful and/or shameful episodes in a national or local community's history" (1). There is some consensus in this literature that a lack of recognition of the site's history will result in harm or further traumatization for survivors (Rowlands 2008; Macdonald 2015). Ainslie's (2013) research shows that there is psychological damage associated with a lack of memorial or recognition at the site of a traumatic event; conversely, memory work projects have allowed an outlet that helps to relieve social tensions within a community that has faced trauma. Some go so far as to argue that a lack of commemoration for past violence potentially drives future violence by allowing the dynamics to be reproduced through a lack of accountability (Rowlands 2008). Meskall (2008), studying the case of South Africa, extends this further by arguing that heritage planning and memorializing can play an important role in healing and can be a form of therapy. Similarly, Mahoney (2015) found that participation in acknowledging and memorializing one's own heritage is important to avoid a repeat of traumatization within marginalized communities. On the other hand, Ashworth (2008) argues that preserving sites of violence serves only to perpetuate the violence through glorification or victimization of one side over another.

These issues are underpinned by biases in preservation planning that have prioritized White, bourgeois histories (Kaufman 2010; Thomas 1998). Historically, histories of women, racialized communities and working class communities (among others) have not been centered in preservation discussions, which has meant an irreversible loss of the physical artifacts that tell the histories of marginalized communities (Sandercock 1998; Marris 1975). In the absence of physical aspects of marginalized communities' histories, Hayden (1997) has called for new ways of memorializing that bring into focus the ways that such urban landscapes are steeped in the contributions and experiences of such communities. While helpful in addressing the racial, economic, and gender biases when deciding which environments are protected and which histories are celebrated, this subset of planning literature does not directly engage with the relationship between preservation and trauma.

## Transitional justice for sites of conscience

Transitional justice is a form of law that seeks to reinstate liberal norms such as democracy, and institutions of accountability in communities affected by conflict (Gready and Robins 2014). Heritage is often incorporated within transitional justice as an important aspect in the transition to a peaceful society with a stable democracy. For example, work by Schindel (2012) found that community memory work at sites of trauma allowed communities to not only overcome fear, but regain a sense of community and access to their civic spaces. Through his work in South Africa, Lixinski (2015) discovered the importance of tracing heritage to expose assumptions about groups within society that can lead to or may have been used to support harmful policies such as apartheid. Some have argued, however, that transitional justice heritage work does not provide a framework for dialogue or communication among groups in conflict; rather, it provides broader, top down approaches to transitioning away from violence (Gready and Robins 2014). The memory work organization The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience was formed in 1999, with the same goal of preserving sites of traumatic memory to prevent future violence. They recognize that places with traumatic histories have power in communities and therefore focus on creating safe places to discuss the difficult topics these sites are connected to (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience 2021). According to Pharaon (2015), these sites act as containers for "dangerous memories" and sites of conscience allow those memories to be explored

and for dialogue to be developed in a safe and supportive manner (62). This approach also aims to tie the difficult aspects of the site into larger societal and systemic issues that exist for the visitors, connecting the site to current day. Underpinning this practice is the belief that heritage sites are inherently political, and therefore the approach for heritage workers should be to provide a safe place for people to discuss and disagree with the political pasts these sites represent. They orient the question for heritage professions away from *whether* these sites' contentious histories should be explored, and towards questions of *how* to explore them safely. However, the work on sites of conscience is newly developed, and the implications of such approaches have yet to be fully explored in the literature.

The extant literature makes important contributions to expanding on current preservation practices through their acknowledgement of trauma, but these advancements have not yet been translated into policy changes. Urban planning scholarship has acknowledged that diverse and complex histories make up urban landscapes, and provides some suggestions for how preservationists can honor these histories (Sandercock 1998; Hayden 1997; Marris 1975; Klein 2008). However, this literature is undertheorized from a standpoint of trauma, and does not grapple with the ways that preservation and memorializing processes on the one hand may retraumatize survivors, and on the other hand, may serve as vehicles for healing. While the literature focusing on sites of conscience has explored the role of acknowledgement of traumatic events for survivor communities, and begins to identify the ways that trauma that is repeated and systemic, it is only just emerging. As such, it does not yet offer specific ways that heritage designation policies may retraumatize survivors, or how preservation processes may be part of other discriminatory practices deeply engrained in development.

In addition to these gaps, while these areas of heritage address the role of sites of conscience and difficult histories in justice and reconciliation, they most often focus on sites associated with acute conflict derived from regime or government changes, rather than systemic, repeated injustices within democratic societies. They provide an important ideological backdrop for exploring sites associated with trauma, but more research is needed to explore opportunities for adjusting heritage and development policy to support these practices in a way that is embedded in development processes (as opposed to ad hoc implementation, which can vary widely across cases). The case of the NSHCC provides insights as to how trauma caused by systemic racism can be explored through the heritage designation process, and which types of policy can be used to support these dialogues.

## Methods

This research was conducted through a content analysis of interviews, planning documents, legal documents, media reports, public engagement meetings (organized by planning and HRM staff) and heritage policies as well as the Restorative Inquiry (RI) published by the Province. The RI outlines the events at the Home and future avenues for healing. The heritage policies we analyzed included the Heritage Property Act, the HRM Cultural Plan, the HRM Regional Plan, HRM bylaw H-200 (that establishes the Halifax Heritage Advisory Committee and the Civic Registry of Heritage Property), and the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada. We recruited a total of nine interview participants who had an insight into the planning application and the heritage of the site, including representatives of the owner and their planning consultants, and heritage and urban planning staff (at the municipal and provincial levels). We also interviewed staff from the African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO) (at the municipal level) as well as a staff member from the provincial department of African Nova Scotian Affairs (ANSA). The number of participants from each group is as follows: one property owner, two consultants, two municipal planning staff members, two staff members from African Nova Scotian advocacy agencies, and two heritage planners (at the municipal and provincial levels) (n = 9). The purpose of these interviews was to understand the opportunities and challenges of this planning application process on a site of trauma and systemic racism from the perspective of implementing heritage and development policy. In addition, we also analyzed the transcripts of an HRM public engagement session by the planning staff on October 21, 2020 and a Public Hearing that was held by HRM council before voting on the application on May 4, 2021. The documents we analyzed were collected from Halifax Regional Municipality's website and the court documents were procured through the Nova Scotia Supreme Court Archives.

The interview transcripts, meeting transcripts and documents were analyzed using both deductive and inductive coding methods. Coding is a system of reviewing data for relevant themes or findings across a variety of sources, allowing for in-depth and focused consideration, uncovering both commonalities and nuance (Saldaña 2012). We began by deductively coding, which means that we analyzed the data according to predefined themes of interest

that were related to our research questions. These included historic details about the site, descriptions of heritage designation policies, and opportunities for improving heritage designation policies. We then did a round of inductive coding where we determined nuances within these themes and allow themes to emerge from the data, instead of approaching data with predetermined codes that may have biases. This coding was done using the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti to maintain consistency.

## The History of the home and future development plans

The late 1800s brought a greater interest and societal investment into child welfare in Nova Scotia, with philanthropic organizations developing orphanages (Province of Nova Scotia 2019). The quality of care provided by these institutions was uneven across racial groups in Halifax, as it was in many cities in North America at the time (Province of Nova Scotia 2019). The available child care institutions in Halifax often refused Black children, leaving children either homeless or sent to institutions available for homeless adults, such as the poor house or asylums (Saunders 2011; Province of Nova Scotia 2019). Through many years of advocacy and fundraising by the African Nova Scotian community in Halifax and most notably the African United Baptist Association (AUBA), the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children was created in 1921. The Home housed and raised children not just from Nova Scotia, but across North America. Interviews recognized that in light of this struggle to protect and house Black children, the Home serves as a symbol of resilience and resistance to systemic racism by the African Nova Scotian community in Halifax. As one participant explained, "the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children became a very important beacon because they did it on the strengths of yes, philanthropists, but they also built and developed what they had on the strengths of the African Nova Scotian Community, that wanted to…'take care of their own'" (interview with ANSA staff member, April 1, 2020). The Home is of social and cultural significance to Black communities across the region, and serves as a symbol of resilience and self-sufficiency in the face of segregation and oppression.

While initially a point of pride and a symbol of social advancement for the ANS community, the feelings toward the Home became significantly more complex as allegations of abuse came forth. The testimony of survivors consistently describes an abusive and unsafe environment, where caregivers regularly exploited and endangered children under their supervision (Province of Nova Scotia 2019). The Home continued to operate throughout the 20th century, with alleged abuse dating until the mid-1980s (Province of Nova Scotia 2019). In 1983, the school at the Home was repurposed into a community center. In the late 1980s, the Home (which is now known as Akoma Holdings Incorporated) started shifting its operations and mission to be more community engaged. In 1998 the Home applied to Halifax Council for Heritage status, and while the site did attain a high score under the heritage criteria, there were concerns about the state of repairs needed for the site (Province of Nova Scotia 2019). After some changes to the site were made, the heritage designation process was restarted in 1999 and a staff report from 2000 was made for three options for designation on the site to be considered by Akoma Holdings and HRM staff (communication with heritage planner, March 3, 2021). Akoma did not reengage on heritage status until 2006 when it met with an HRM heritage property planner about designation for the orphanage building (Province of Nova Scotia 2019)

Former residents came forward in the 1990s to tell of experiences of neglect, harm and abuse during their time at the Home. In 2013 the former residents took legal action as a class action lawsuit. They came to settlements with both the Home and the Province after which, in 2014, the Province issued a formal apology, stating that, "We hear your voices and we grieve for your pain. For the trauma and neglect you endured, and the lingering effects on you and your loved ones, we are truly sorry" (Province of Nova Scotia 2014). Through the apology, the Province also committed to a Restorative Inquiry (RI), which was the first of its kind to investigate and aim to understand not only how a government sponsored place of care could have failed its mandate, but how systemic and overarching societal racism and discrimination played a part. The RI was created as, "part of the Government of Nova Scotia's commitment to respond to the institutional abuse and other failures of care experienced by former residents" (Province of Nova Scotia 2019, 3). After an extended period of consultation with former residents, community members and the Government, the RI offered an account of the events at the NSHCC, and "a road map providing information, guidance, and support" (Province of Nova Scotia 2019, 9).

The current redevelopment plans being pursued by Akoma Holdings required the submission of a rezoning application that would allow the redevelopment to accommodate commercial and multi-unit residential. The goal of the redevelopment is to create programming that will allow for Akoma to serve the broader community. In this effort, they plan to "expand on its current programs, moving towards the creation of a full child, youth and family service

center…This historical landsite will host the new facility with existing Black organizations to respond to community issues from an Afrocentric perspective" (Akoma Family Centre 2020). The original application brought forward in 2018 was divided into two planning applications to expedite some aspects of the development plans. The application Case 21875 requests rezoning of the lands to allow for adaptive reuse of the building, and allows for commercial and residential housing on the site. The vision for the site includes affordable housing and community facilities in addition to commercial development. The Bauld Centre (the former school house on the site) is currently the site of the Akoma Family Centre, a short-term care facility for siblings in provincial care. The former Intendent's home still exists and is currently used for storage. Some areas of the former Home will be demolished due to the severity of their disrepair (Akoma Family Centre 2020). The plans to redevelop the Home reopens the question of how the heritage of the Home should be preserved and remembered for the community.

## Heritage policy in Nova Scotia

To understand the concerns raised by both former residents of the NSHCC, as well as the challenges to inclusive preservation planning in Halifax, we will provide an overview of the current processes to designate historic properties. There are two entities governing heritage designation in Halifax: the Halifax Regional Council advised by the Heritage Advisory Committee on the municipal level, and the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage on the provincial level. HRM administers its heritage property program through the powers of the Nova Scotia Heritage Act, which gives the municipality the power to add properties to the municipal heritage registry and adopt heritage designations, conservation districts and cultural landscapes on the recommendation of the Heritage Advisory Committee (Heritage Property Act 1989). The Act allows for heritage designation at both the provincial and municipal levels. At the municipal level, the Heritage Advisory Committee can consider a site for Heritage Registration when applications are submitted by the public or by the Committee itself. After an application is submitted, a research report and staff report will be commissioned by the Committee (Halifax Regional Municipality 1996). This report will be sent to the Committee to review, and if it scores high enough according to a predetermined set of criteria, it will be recommended for heritage designation. Once designated, the Heritage Committee uses the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada as well as municipal plans and by-laws as guides for property owners to navigate how preservation should be carried out. The Planning and Development Department at HRM is currently in the process of developing the Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan to further their goal of more inclusive preservation practices, which might speak to the complex and difficult nature of sites like the NSHCC (Halifax Regional Municipal Planning Strategy 2014).

On the provincial level, an application to register a property must be submitted to the Heritage Property Program. The application is then reviewed on the basis of the historical research done by the province and on the architectural value of the property (Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage 2020). At this phase, it is up to the discretion of the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage's Advisory Council on Heritage Property to determine, "what aspects of [the property] have provincial value, or if there is no value associated from their perspective" (Interview with heritage planner, October 7, 2020). The Council includes heritage experts, and the meetings of the Council are not normally open to the public, as they are with the Minister; the recommendation made by the Council and the discussion around it is confidential (Interview with heritage planner, October 7, 2020). According to a heritage planner at the Province, the process of determining whether the Council recommends the property for designation is intentionally, "flexible and open because again when you're talking about heritage, heritage means different things to different people. Culture has a different connotation or potentially a different definition. So again we look at the heritage values and they're so broad, that's why the criteria in my opinion should be open enough to accept those types of properties" (Interview with heritage planner, October 7, 2020). If the application is approved by the Council, it then goes to the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage for a final decision on the designation (Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage 2020).

## Challenges to inclusive preservation practices

### Lack of nuance in designating important sites

The current designation process does not allow for recognition of a site due to its difficult heritage, as in the case of the NSHCC. It is important to acknowledge that the feelings among survivors were nuanced, with some positive

memories of recreation and comradery in the midst of very challenging circumstances. A representative from Akoma Holdings, Inc. cautioned against understanding the experiences at the Home as entirely negative, as many former residents remain in contact, and optimistically engaged in the redevelopment plans. According to a consultant interviewed based on their work in the community, "there's the people who have really good memories growing up in the Home and then there's also the other legacy that's obviously very public, but it was never—it always seemed like the community wanted to move forward" (interview with consultant, January 21, 2020). In addition to complex and diverse feelings about the Home recorded both by the RI and interviews, survivors have different ideas about what should happen to the site itself based on their experiences and perspectives. According to a CBC interview of former resident Tony Smith, "We have heard a lot of things [about the Home]: people want it to be destroyed, they're ashamed of it…Other people want the building to stand, because they don't want people to forget what happened to us" (Luck 2018). These feelings, along with memories tied to specific areas of the site create challenges for trauma informed preservation practices that must contend with a variety of survivor and community wishes, with potentially high stakes when it comes to the psychological and emotional wellbeing of survivors.

According to the RI, support for survivors is complicated by concerns about further stigmatization of the ANS community. The RI explains that both the former residents and the community were reluctant to air past harms as it goes against the protective attitude existing within the African Nova Scotian community. A conflict arose around "Community 'norms'" and an expectation to not "take 'our business' outside" along with concerns that the ANS community might be further stigmatized and marginalized through the publicity of the stories of abuse (Province of Nova Scotia 2019, 277). The RI also explains the pain for community members learning of these abuses:

> How could they not have known? This is a painful question for the community to confront, especially about an institution meant to care for their children in the name of, and with the support of, the community. It was hard to believe. It was potentially harmful to the community to believe. And, it was difficult to talk about. In part, it was hard to talk about because there were very few places to have the honest and difficult conversations needed to deal with something so painful and to respond to those who are hurting (324).

In this way, questions about how to move forward are not only about supporting survivors in their healing, but also mending relationships within the community.

Adding to the complexity of the public discourse on the abuse at the Home, the RI noted that the tone taken by the Provincial Government during the class action suit was extremely harmful to former residents and efforts to build trust, and was often viewed as inadequate. According to the RI, the Province approached the revelations of abuse as a rift within the African Nova Scotian community, rather than an issue of systemic racism and neglect that the Province was accountable for. As one former resident said to the media: "We former residents feel that we're being revictimized by our current government" (Willick and David 2013).

The heritage designation processes in Nova Scotia do not easily navigate such complexity. The documents that currently are available to planners to guide heritage decisions base the importance of heritage on its cultural identity and vibrancy, and its importance to community and economic development (HRM Cultural Plan 2006). However, according to a heritage planner, this plan is often considered outdated, hence the current desire to revisit cultural priorities. Both the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy and the HRM Cultural Plan that guide Municipal decisions and priorities, emphasize the importance of culture to reflect the diversity of the community, not only for vibrancy of the community but to reduce intolerance. In its purpose the Cultural Plan states that they pursue cultural diversity because, "People are drawn to places with a vibrant cultural community that offers individuals and families the opportunity to engage in arts, heritage or leisure activities, entertainment or education. HRM's profile as an attractive community will be improved by enhancing and celebrating its cultural assets" (Halifax Regional Municipality 2006, 17)

Both the Regional Plan and Cultural Plan emphasize the importance of celebrating heritage. In fact, celebration is one of the guiding principles of the Cultural Plan (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2006, 2014). Relatedly, the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada used by both the Province and Municipality fails to mention the value of sites with dissonant or difficult histories for a community. The closest it comes is in its recognition of culturally sensitive areas under the umbrella of archaeological sites, defining them as "formally recognized places that have been given special meaning by a group or a community" (Canada's Historic Places 2010,

122). The examples provided in the policy are focused on sites with spiritual potential such as burial or grave sites, and known Indigenous spiritual elements (like medicine wheels and effigies), and not necessarily sites with dissonant histories such as the Home. There are guidelines for protecting cultural landscapes which are "culturally sensitive" (Canada's Historic Places 2010, 122), but the main focus of the guidelines is the protection of structure or place, ensuring minimal intervention, and to protect its original form rather than considering how they may be used for education or reconciliation.

## Biases in policies determining heritage value

Canada's Register of Historic Places guidelines provides a broad overview of heritage value recognizing it as the, "aesthetic, historic, scientific, cultural, social or spiritual importance or significance for past, present and future generations. The heritage value of an historic place is embodied in its character-defining materials, forms, location, spatial configurations, uses and cultural associations or meanings" (Canada's Historic Places 2010, 5). The heritage value of a site can also be evaluated through oral histories, but there are no guidelines for community engagement or how a community might tell that story. An issue related to community engagement at the provincial level is the lack of transparency of the decision making process that, according to an official at the Department at the provincial level, is largely up to the discretion of who is sitting on the Advisory Council on Heritage Property. These members bring their own perspectives and expertise that often shape the process in a particular way. However, without open public meetings, it can be difficult for the public to understand which factors have or have not been taken into account in the decision.

On the municipal level, the process of determining what should be saved is weighted towards what exists in recorded history. At the municipal level, heritage value is determined by a scoring system based on a set of criteria including its age, its architectural style, construction of the site, the architect or builder and its historic associations. In limited instances, an alternative set of criteria has been used that also includes continuity (how long a site has been used for the same historic purpose) and integrity (how well a site represents its original use) and community value (the importance of the site to the Halifax community). These criteria are based on the priorities of the Heritage Property Act (which has not changed since it passed in the 1970s) to preserve sites that were thought to be of shared historical significance to the Province. However, since the Act's adoption:

> ...the frequency of dealing with sites that have complex histories has increased over the past few years. Probably the most notable of those are sites that are connected to African Nova Scotian Heritage. Places like Africville, the former Home for Coloured Children in Dartmouth...really the legislation that we use is a very blunt instrument. So tackling those issues of the softer cultural issues pertaining to those sites is sometimes a difficult operation under the legislation that we have (Interview with heritage planner, September 17, 2020).

According to a heritage planner at HRM, the existing criteria creates biases for which types of structures are able to be protected through heritage designation, which excludes sites with traumatic or dissonant history. Under this scoring system, a Victorian mansion might receive more points than, for example, an ANS cemetery simply because the physical structure is more intact, or because it can be connected to a specific person in the historic record. This issue is exacerbated by the tendency for certain groups to be left out of the historic record. Beyond age, there is also a tendency to focus on individual property rights, rather than collective memory or significance of a site to a larger community. In other words, navigating whether a property is designated as a heritage site is done between the property owner and the municipality or province, with few opportunities to engage a broader community to understand the nuances of sites with complex histories, like the Home.

Currently in development, HRM's Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan will aim to shift the weight of heritage value so that it is centered on shared community value and preserving sites of importance for the entire community. To do this, heritage planners are considering how community consultation can be written into policy. While development of the Plan is underway, there is concern that redevelopment pressures in HRM place important sites, such as the home of civil rights activist Viola Desmond's home, at risk. The loss of these sites erases the evidence of Black resistance to systemic racism, which is important to survivors of trauma to reinforce agency and dispel ingrained feelings of helplessness.

## Weaknesses in community outreach and collaboration

While there are few formalized opportunities for members of the broader community to be consulted through the heritage designation process, there are lessons to be learned about consultation through the current redevelopment process. According to a heritage planner, through the designation process, "There is no opportunity for public input, except in very rigid circumstances, like a single public information meeting where the facts of the case are explained to a group of people in a really traditional sense and they have an opportunity to speak for five minutes from a microphone" (September 17, 2020). They went on to explain that this issue is particularly significant when it comes to sites of trauma, such as the Home, or the former sites of the Residential School Program. However, the complexities revealed through ongoing community engagement in the redevelopment process provide insights for heritage planners to consider how their processes can engage with sites with dissonant heritage.

The engagement process initiated by HRM staff was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but nevertheless shows that HRM staff made accommodations to their engagement practices specifically due to the nature of the site's difficult history. Planning staff initially consulted with "Diversity and Inclusion Advisors" from ANSAIO and ANSA to inform how planning staff could best structure engagement with the public on this application process (Salloum 2021). Based on this advice, planning staff reached out to four community groups: the Board of Akoma, Victims of Institutional Child Exploitation Society (VOICES), the African United Baptist Association (AUBA) of Nova Scotia, and African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition (ANSDPAD). Planning staff engaged with these groups, seeking advice on how to best consult with the broader community. They then met again after March 2020 for guidance on how to make a virtual meeting in adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols that was also as accessible as possible to community members with connections to the site. Before this, staff held a virtual public information session on October 21, 2020 (Public information meeting hosted by HRM Planning and Development Department staff and Akoma Holdings, Inc., October 21, 2020). The virtual meeting ended with a Q&A where the public could call in or post questions on the format of the event. In response to the feedback from community groups, planners offered mental and emotional support by providing access by phone to two mental health professionals (a social worker and mental health nurse) for what was described as "brief individual and confidential counseling" both the event and for two days after (Public information meeting hosted by HRM Planning and Development Department staff and Akoma Holdings, Inc., October 21, 2020). The video of the Information Session, as well as supplemental documents and information remained on Halifax's engagement site and was shared through social media. Public feedback was collected for five weeks after the session during which time they collected feedback via email, social media, phone calls, and a public form (Salloum, 2021). The case came before the Regional Council in May of 2021, and per planning requirements, a public hearing was held virtually before the Regional Council voted on the application (Salloum 2021).

Engagement beyond a public information meeting is not explicitly required by HRM policy (Halifax Regional Council, 1997). By consulting other agencies in formatting an engagement strategy, staff from the Planning and Development Department took further steps than required. For example they pursued community engagement as part of their research on the site; this occurred largely at the discretion of the planner or on an ad hoc basis. They did this through collaborations with the ANSA department at the provincial level, and ANSAIO at the municipal level. A staff member at ANSAIO commented on the ability for planners in Halifax to embed a consideration of trauma into their processes: "While the planning process itself (as legislated) may not have much adaptability, there are committed staff who continue to work hard and learn through [the case of the NSHCC] ways to layer cultural lens on a rather inflexibly legislated process (which continues to systemically exclude historically marginalized and underserved communities)" (interview with ANSAIO staff member, April 3, 2020). While planning policies do not require this type of collaboration or community outreach, one planner for HRM noted that, "When we receive applications with sensitive or emotional histories, we try to leverage knowledge from community members and others who have worked with or in the community. Background research is also collected through the planning process as it can include several forms of public engagement and information sharing opportunities" (interview with planner, August 16, 2019).

Part of the reason for this approach was linked directly with the dissonant nature of the site's heritage. One planner explained that, "Given the sensitive and traumatic history of the former NSHCC, the official public apology from the Province and the ongoing RI process, staff conducted more research to ensure we are respectful of the RI's goals…We will continue to collect background research on this site as we engage with the public through the planning process" (interview with planning staff member, August 16, 2019). The RI has also noted the importance

of engaging with survivors in this way, also stating that understanding the relationship of events at the Home to systemic racism is a necessary step for healing and to "[produce] actions, plans, and commitments for the future, not just pay back for the past" (Province of Nova Scotia 2019, 6). These steps can be linked directly to decisions made about how to run information sessions such as the provision of mental and emotional support and attempts to engage and inform the public based on social connections rather than just geographic area (Salloum 2021). The experiences of planners attempting to engage the ANS community and advocates at their own discretion should be lauded.

The formal process for incorporating public feedback by HRM provides opportunities for the general public to express their concerns or to endorse a proposal. However, sites with differing or disputed collective memories like the NSHCC present challenges for this format. Members of VOICES who attended the a public meeting hosted by HRM and Akoma Holdings voiced concerns about a lack of trust in the development process, also noting that the story of the Home is one that belongs to the broader ANS community that should be fully engaged (Public information meeting hosted by HRM Planning and Development Department staff and Akoma Holdings, Inc., October 21, 2020). However their perspectives were only able to be incorporated as a response through the public comment period (as is often the case in public engagement through planning processes).

In the Public Hearing before the vote on approving the rezoning application, there were several members of the public who spoke in support for the application. Concerns with the consultation process were also brought up by members of VOICES who disputed whether the meetings listed by planning staff were actually held as stated prior to the information session. They also requested more time for consultation due to concerns over the status of the land ownership. They also raised concerns both within the Public Information Session and Public Hearing of division within the Black community. One member stated:

> We feel rushed to this here, and COVID is being used as the excuse as to why the engagement didn't continue, and so, you know, here you are looking at another modern day Africville. And the only difference is the information, documentation that we have, there's people in our Black community that are selling us out, and other people that are in support that doesn't know the background and truth about the land. (Virtual Public Hearing held by Halifax Regional Council, May 4 2021).

This perspective speaks to a lack of clarity and trust developed during the consultation process and that the scope and limitations of a rezoning application were not clearly made.

While planners made changes to their engagement process based on conversations with stakeholders, the comments by VOICES indicate the need for incorporating trauma informed practices into consultation. Despite attempts to adapt the consultation process to include stakeholders with a connection to the site based on trauma, rather than geography, there are still limitations to building trust through the engagement process when municipal officials have complete control of that process. This process still leaves the decision making to municipal officials with the public and survivor community on the receiving end of the final recommendations and decisions, rather than collaborators in the decisions. As such, if the final recommendations and council decisions are disappointing, participants may feel that their concerns were ignored. These experiences offer important context for heritage planners navigating the same social and racial terrain in their efforts to reform the heritage designation process.

In addition to the engagement done by HRM, Akoma Holdings, Inc. conducted some community engagement while developing the plans for the site. Akoma has held consultations about the property plan with "members of the African Nova Scotian community and others [including] East Preston, North Preston Ratepayers Association, AUBA, Roads to Prosperity, to name a few. So over 500 people were made aware of our plans and were involved in this study" (Public information meeting hosted by HRM Planning and Development Department staff and Akoma Holdings, Inc., October 21, 2020). In the future, Akoma plans to hold more, "Community consultations, broad ones as well as by invitation. We've been…meeting with folk, telling them about our plans, gaining support for it, and then listening to what's missing" (interview with land owner, July 19, 2019). As these efforts are ongoing, it is too early to know how well this engagement will address the desires of former residents, or how they will be incorporated into the plans moving forward.

## Opportunities to Acknowledge trauma through heritage designation

To address the trauma and propose a future for sites with dissonant heritage that promotes healing and is respectful of survivors, the heritage processes of HRM and the Province will need to be able interpret and preserve complex heritage. The task of commemorating the events at the NSHCC is particularly complex given the diverse perspectives and community divisions that have arisen from survivors coming forward. The literature on post conflict heritage tells us there may be ways of valuing heritage that allows a more nuanced story to be expressed, that may help communities navigate the complexities of their history without blame, shame or dismissal. The following are suggestions for how HRM and the Province could consider adapting their heritage designation processes to adhere to a trauma informed set of practices:

*Acknowledge that heritage is nuanced.* The current frameworks that HRM uses to assess the value and support the narrative of heritage sites offers little nuance towards sites with complex emotions. For example, policies like HRM's Cultural Plan focus on the desire to celebrate diverse histories. However, limiting recognition to sites that are celebratory might provide a revisionist history of the experiences of marginalized communities. In some cases government efforts to celebrate histories or tell of the experiences of marginalized populations serve as cooptation and erasure of struggles for racial justice. This is a significant contradiction, as state actors may take actions that look to promote diversity, while at the same time continuing to reproduce systemic forms of racism in their policies. For example, the history of the Civil Rights Movement in Canada has been celebrated by placing Viola Desmond, of African Nova Scotian descent, on the ten dollar bill, yet land use and housing policies continue to racially segregate Nova Scotians and Canadians broadly (Rutland 2018). In 2010, the Halifax Council issued a formal apology to Africville residents and acknowledged its history. They issued funds to establish a museum on the site, but discussions about offering reparations for former residents remain contentious (Nelson 2008; CBC News 2010). Nearer to the NSHCC, the historically Black loyalist communities of Preston have had restrictions placed on the types of improvements that can be done to residential properties, many of which would potentially increase wealth and housing opportunities for African Nova Scotians. These communities have also been denied improvements to basic infrastructures since their establishment (Rutland 2018).

If heritage policy is to avoid such pitfalls and seize opportunities for healing trauma and promote reparative justice, discussion of difficult sites should move beyond the celebratory aspects of history. These practices must allow for an exploration of difficult and nuanced parts of history that are often linked to systemic inequality. However, this type of engagement with historical sites is not readily available due to gaps in heritage designation frameworks, including the heritage policies that are based on provincial and national frameworks. In order to tell the complete and nuanced history of sites such as the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children, these frameworks need to provide direction in telling more complex histories. The legislation and frameworks need to acknowledge the value of complex histories that cannot be celebrated but still have immense value in being remembered.

To be successful these legislative frameworks need to give some direction to heritage planners and officials to keep sites from avoiding difficult truths, or oversimplifying complex stories. In this regard, the RI provides some direction stressing the importance of avoiding "simple stories" that "blame, shame or name" but instead focus on the collective responsibility of this history (Province of Nova Scotia 2019, 279). To better ensure these stories are told, heritage designation policies should be written so that they are capable of valuing and representing harmful aspects of history. Borrowing principles by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and transitional justice, legislation could lay a framework for discussing stories in a way that moves past blame to promote dialogue and shared responsibility for history.

*Acknowledge what is at stake in mismanaging sites of community trauma.* The literature on post conflict heritage emphasizes the risk of exacerbating tensions within a community through designation or interpretive processes. In addition, the literature on trauma outlines the consequences of unmanaged healing after trauma, which is an issue that heritage planners should take very seriously when working with dissonant heritage sites. As Wolfe et al. (2003), and Ainslie (2013), find, silence (including a community's silence on abuse), is detrimental to a survivor's and the community's recovery. Similarly, a recurring theme in the final report of the RI was the importance of acknowledging the experiences at the Home as part of healing for the former residents as well as the broader community. There is no question that the history of Nova Scotia and Canada as a colonial entity includes trauma inducing and racialized violence, such as the history of slavery, the Shelburne Race Riots, serial displacement, or the Residential School program, which are all

forms of state violence that are associated with specific sites. As the future of these sites are increasingly considered in terms of their heritage value, it will be appropriate for heritage programs to consider the practices of transitional restorative justice and sites of conscience to guide them in these cases. This can be done beginning with a more transparent process on the provincial level, and a more nuanced process on the municipal level. In addition, the focus of designation processes needs to include opportunities for survivor participation guided by entities that advocate for trauma informed practices.

*Build formal networks with advocates who specialize in restorative justice and promoting dialogue through heritage.* As HRM forms its Culture and Heritage Priorities Plan, it should consider emphasizing heritage value based on a site's ability to develop dialogue within the community. This follows the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience approach which asks how heritage can allow communities to interact and discuss their history in a way that can promote healing and understanding across divisions. The tendency for the heritage designation processes to be insular, and lack transparency with few requirements for community engagement presents a significant threat to the well-being of survivors. For example, this process involves the council appointment of a committee created from a colonial government framework to listen, judge and decide the fate of applications; we argue that this is not an environment conducive to trauma informed heritage practice or healing. As the RI found, there is a strong fear of openly discussing issues within ANS communities due to concerns about perpetuating racist stereotypes. Given HRM's history of segregation and dispossession of African Nova Scotians, it is unlikely that the heritage designation process creates an environment safe for communities to explore these aspects of African Nova Scotian history in public. In order to create a space that allows for discussion in a safe environment of difficult and painful realities of racism, the Heritage Advisory Committee and others involved with heritage in HRM will need to develop relationships and build trust with survivors, as well as advocacy organizations. These partnerships will allow heritage planners to recognize and reflect on biases that are built into the heritage process, and which methods for heritage planning can be rethought. In other words, the power structure of the heritage designation process must change to one of support, allowing community members to be equal partners in heritage decisions. As one of our participants explained,

> I think there also has to be some conversations that talk about methodologies and a lot of those methodologies are coming from perhaps other ways of knowing, other ways of learning…So when somebody else comes along as says 'well no, you can maybe do it from what I use, which is an African centred approach'…You are allowing other ways of looking at a problem to be exposed (Interview with ANSA staff member, April 1, 2020).

In the future, heritage planners should formalize the partnerships with African Nova Scotian organizations such as ANSA and ANSAIO, to inform alternative methods and processes for heritage designation, and to provide help finding resources to support the interpretation plans that they develop.

*Develop inclusive procedures for heritage designation.* One of the most important tenets of trauma informed practices is providing agency and sharing decision making with survivors. In this case there are multiple groups of survivors: victims of racism within the African Nova Scotian community who want the site of the Home to be recognized for its resilience, and survivors of the abuse in the Home itself who may want their experiences remembered so abuse cannot happen again. Heritage officials should not be the ultimate decision makers in these cases. Instead, there needs to be mechanisms to bring community members with different heritage priorities together; as Halbwachs argued, differing collective memories must be made to acknowledge one another (Sennett 1998). Heritage programs need to develop a system where the heritage advisory committee can facilitate discussions with community members rather than lead them. As the consultation process demonstrated, though officials have taken their own steps to make participation more inclusive, these officials remain in control of the process. While this is the case, trust will likely be difficult to develop with survivor communities. This would utilize partnerships described earlier to develop inclusive and restorative frameworks that work for the community, incorporating Afrocentric or other community principles or 'ways of knowing' where possible. In addition, recruitment for decision making, or consultation, needs to focus on those affected by the site rather than their proximity to the site. In other words, the impacts of the Home are far reaching, and those with ties to the heritage of the Home may not live within the local community.

## Conclusion

While preservation scholars have noted the need for a more nuanced understanding of contested and difficult dissonant heritage, there are few examples of how preservation and development policies might address community trauma associated with sites of systemic racism. Currently the literature is limited to discussions of post conflict sites that struggle with commemorating trauma associated with war crimes and/or political upheaval. These are important contributions but do not shed light on how preservation, planning, or development policies might grapple with trauma embedded in sites linked to systemic racism. In our analysis of the redevelopment plans for the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children, we found that there are significant shortcomings in the current heritage planning and development policies at the municipal and provincial level. These include a lack of acknowledgement in policies of diverse perspectives towards heritage sites, that might include traumatic or dissonant histories. We also found that there are biases in the scoring processes that allow for sites to be designated as historic, with a tendency to privilege sites of colonial heritage over Black and Indigenous sites. Our data also indicated a lack of transparency and community outreach requirements in designation policies.

In response to these issues raised by our analysis, we propose several ways that trauma from systemic racism can be better addressed through heritage planning and development policies. First, policies should acknowledge that heritage is not always celebratory, and include ways that difficult sites or sites of trauma can be recognized. Secondly, heritage planners should be aware of the harm that can be caused to survivors if sites of trauma and institutional abuse are mismanaged. Thirdly, heritage planners and those involved in development decisions should partner with advocacy groups who may be able to help network with communities experiencing racialized, systemic trauma, like ANSA and ANSAIO, who may be able to assist in employing trauma informed approaches. Lastly, we propose that networks with advocacy groups be leveraged to carry out in depth community engagement, and that heritage policies be adapted to codify community engagement into law.

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