

February 2022

# Bellevue House

National Historic Site of Canada

**Draft Management Plan**  
(intended for consultation only)

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## 1.0 Introduction

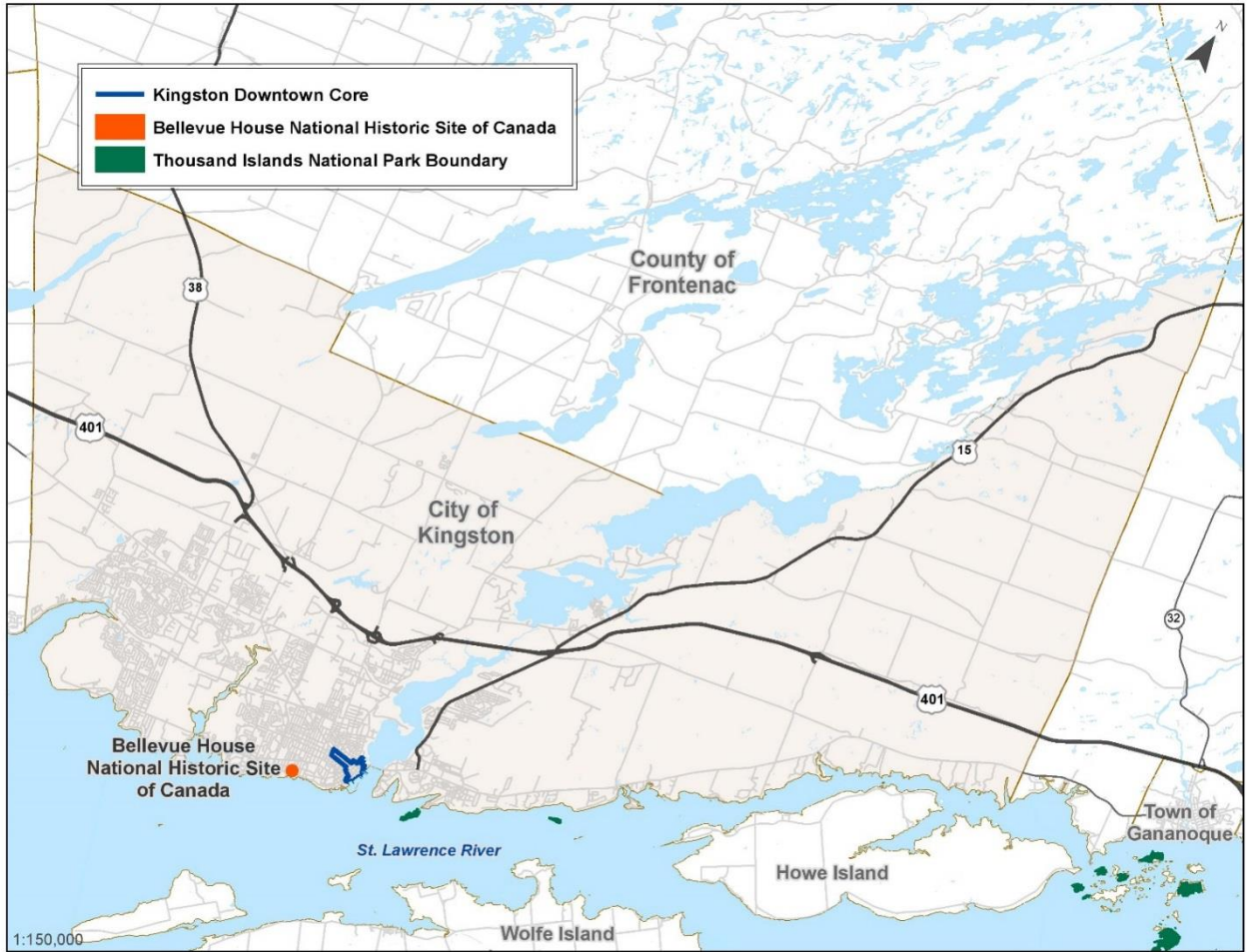
Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national park, national marine conservation area, heritage canal and those national historic sites administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

*Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.*

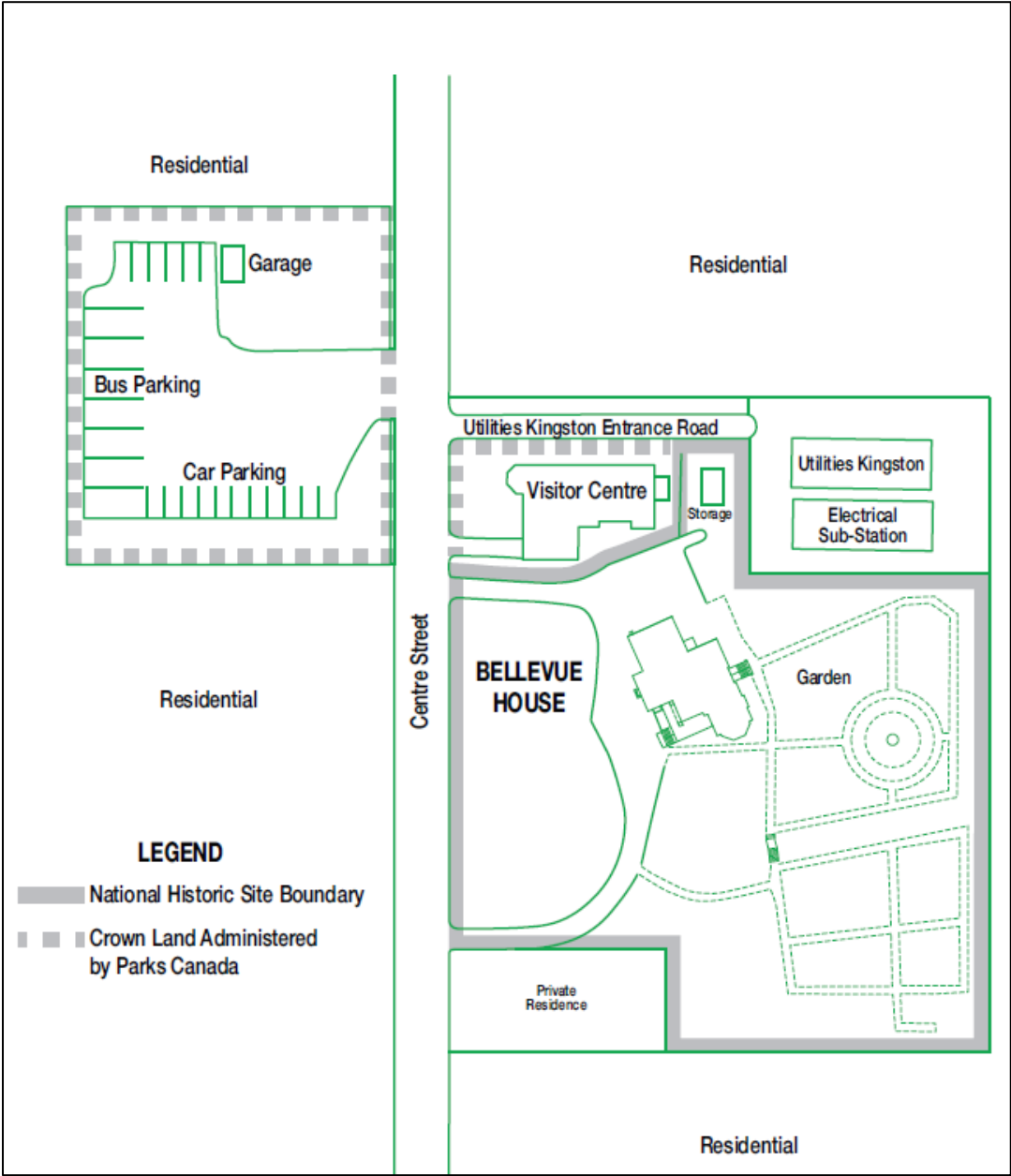
The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by the Agency. The *Bellevue House National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, will ensure Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

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Map 1: Regional Setting



Map 2: Bellevue House National Historic Site



## 2.0 Significance of Bellevue House National Historic Site

Bellevue House is located on Centre Street, in a quiet residential community in the heart of Kingston, Ontario. Designated a national historic site in 1964 and opened to the public in Canada's centennial year, 1967, Bellevue House's national significance lies in its association with Sir John A. Macdonald, a Father of Confederation and Canada's first Prime Minister, who occupied the house in 1848-49. At that time, Macdonald was a promising politician and a local corporate lawyer. Bellevue House is one of the rare places in the country where Macdonald's life and legacy is presented to the public.

Bellevue House is also recognized as an outstanding Canadian example of Italianate architecture in the Picturesque manner. The house's character is defined by its Tuscan Villa style with its irregular massing, varied materials and elaborate detailing. Built between 1838 and 1840, the house and its grounds are restored to reflect the period when Macdonald lived there. The house was reviewed by the Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office (FHBRO) in 1994 and is a *classified* building.

Visitors are welcomed to the site in a modern visitor centre with exhibits about Macdonald's legacy before being invited to visit the historic house and grounds. The one-hectare footprint of the site includes heritage gardens, an heirloom orchard and a parking lot on the opposite side of Centre Street. A number of objects which belonged to Sir John A. Macdonald are on display in the collection at Bellevue House.

## 3.0 Planning Context

Bellevue House is the only site administered by Parks Canada that commemorates Sir John A. Macdonald. Macdonald represents an influential figure in the Kingston region, where he arrived from Scotland with his parents at the age of five. He was raised and educated in Kingston and later became a lawyer and city councillor.

The site is operated from mid-May to mid-October, is part of Kingston's heritage tour accessible by the Kingston Trolley Tours, and attracts approximately 20 000 visitors a year. The majority of visitors are adults over the age of 45 and families, mainly from Ontario. Youth segments tend to be under-represented in the overall visitor base. Visitors have expressed high levels of appreciation for the site's guided tours and exhibits and enjoy the state of preservation of the house and facilities. Bellevue House has recently introduced special events, new enhanced product offers and innovative millennial-focused guided tours. After a decline between 2010 and 2013, site visitation has rebounded substantially, almost doubling between 2013 and 2016. With this rise in visitation, current facilities and programming are often at capacity and there is an increased demand for experiential-based opportunities. There is also a need to provide accessible, barrier-free experiences to a more diverse audience. A Visitor Experience Strategy (VES) was developed in 2017 which evaluated the site's market potential and proposed new types of programming.

The house is one of the best opportunities for remembering Sir John A. Macdonald and understanding the forces that shaped him and his role in Canadian history. Among other Fathers of Confederation, he remains, today, a controversial figure in regard to his involvement in Confederation, settlement of the West, and the Residential School System. An interpretation program renewal began in 2016 to provide a more inclusive story of Confederation and Macdonald's legacy. Through this renewal, the site unveiled *Many Voices of Confederation* to encourage Canadians to explore the many viewpoints, and specifically the lesser known and under-represented voices and stories related to Macdonald. The employees' training program was also improved to include Indigenous

perspectives and cultural awareness components. The site has received positive feedback for taking these steps. The City of Kingston has also launched community engagement opportunities to provide input into how it can move forward on a path of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, while addressing the legacy of Macdonald, an important and influential Kingstonian. An updated Cultural Heritage Strategy will be produced providing guidance to the city around the stories that need to be told. Parks Canada is involved in this dialogue and will consider the feedback from these consultations in presenting the stories on site and in outreach.

Bellevue House is located in the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe people and is situated approximately halfway between Akwesasne and Tyendinaga Mohawk First Nations. The site is developing relationships with both the formal councils of Akwesasne and Tyendinaga Mohawk First Nations, as well as Indigenous peoples from other groups both regionally and nationally. Through Thousand Islands National Park, Parks Canada also has a strong relationship based upon conservation values with the Mohawk of Akwesasne and will build on this positive engagement to approach controversial and challenging subject matter in a meaningful and insightful way.

The previous management plan for Bellevue House dates back to 2004. The site has made many improvements since then, the most significant being the modernization of the visitor centre including the new exhibits, gift shop and public Wi-Fi access, increased accessibility to the rooms of the historic house, guided tours and activities designed to attract new audiences and the creation of a Facebook page to promote and raise the profile of the site.

In 2018, architectural assessments identified the need for repairs to the roof, electrical panel and the original plaster ceilings at Bellevue House. The initial \$2.13 million investment included the structural replacements and repairs and has now paved the way for full restoration of the interior spaces and a complete renewal of the visitor experience; including a more accessible barrier-free access within the grounds to provide an added experience for a diverse audience. This investment in infrastructure will also support the reduction of operational greenhouse gas emissions and add resiliency in a changing climate. Regional tourism partners, stakeholders and Indigenous groups have been involved in the planning phase of this renewal project which is currently in progress at the House.

Kingston's motto is "where history and innovation thrive" and the city is rich in history, cultural attractions, vibrant arts, culinary experiences and leisure activities. With close to 8 million visitors to the South Eastern Ontario region each year, Kingston remains a tourism destination for visitors from all over the world, and is easily accessible by automobile or public transit from Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. Bellevue House is one of many heritage attractions in the city. In the eastern part of the city, Fort Henry National Historic Site continues to draw approximately 120,000 visitors a year and theatres, and music and sporting events round out the offerings. The western downtown area has seen a growth in cultural attractions and activities with the opening of a new waterfront park and trail, the world class Isabel Bader Performing Arts Centre, tours at the Kingston Penitentiary, Canada's Penitentiary Museum and the Tett Centre. Bellevue House is located on the Trolley stop near these attractions and will benefit particularly from the growth in visitation to the western end of the city. Parks Canada works cooperatively with regional partners such as the South Eastern Ontario Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO 9), Tourism Kingston, the St. Lawrence Parks Commission, Kingston Accommodation Partners (KAP) and the City, to promote the site.

## 4.0 Vision

The vision presented below expresses the future desired state of Bellevue House National Historic Site in 20 years:

*Nestled in a quiet neighbourhood, surrounded by trees and close enough to Lake Ontario to feel its fresh breeze, Bellevue House, with its Picturesque architecture, was once home to an important community member who later became Canada's first Prime Minister. Wandering through this beautiful home and garden oasis, the property provides a perfect setting for all Canadians including Kingston residents, visitors, Indigenous people, and influential leaders to reflect and share thoughts on our country's history. Bellevue House is a place to connect with Sir John A. Macdonald and discover his role and achievements in creating Canada, while coming to realize the painful legacies of many of his policies and decisions.*

*Bellevue House uses its rich 1840's decor and its well preserved historic fabric to showcase a glimpse of the personal life of Macdonald, portray the forces that shaped his paths, with his foibles and struggles, and to demonstrate how Macdonald's experiences in Kingston laid the groundwork for what he became, both personally and professionally. Visitors will be invited to consider Macdonald, in his time, with yesterday's values and understanding and today's perspectives, as we aspire to grow and reconcile our pasts.*

*Over the next 20 years, visitors and Kingston Area residents will appreciate a successful and comprehensive management approach at Bellevue House National Historic Site that is reflected in:*

- *Updated themes and messages about Macdonald's story, both personal and professional, making Bellevue House a renowned leader in presenting Macdonald's legacy in an open-minded and inclusive way.*
- *Respectful relationships with multicultural, Indigenous and local communities who help expand the narrative about the story of Confederation.*
- *Redesigned visitor infrastructure that supports growing visitation, offers barrier-free access, and is inclusive and welcoming.*
- *A variety of meaningful visitor experiences that showcase Macdonald and Canada's history through new, strong and diverse partnerships.*
- *Increased promotion efforts and collaborations which enable Bellevue House to become a key part of the John A. Macdonald experience in Kingston and an active and recognised participant in the local tourism market.*
- *A well protected historic place that is preserved to ensure the site remains open for future generations.*

## 5.0 Key Strategies

Key strategies are broad management approaches that will direct future management activities, working toward achieving the vision for Bellevue House. Three key strategies frame the management direction for Bellevue House for the next 10 years. Each strategy has corresponding objectives and targets. The targets are designed to measure the success in achieving objectives over the implementation period. Unless otherwise specified, all targets are meant to be achieved within the period of the plan.



### **Key strategy 1: An evolving understanding of Sir John A. Macdonald's legacy**

Sir John A. Macdonald is remembered and evaluated in a range of ways depending upon the experience and lens of different groups in Canada. People settling before or during Confederation would have experienced Macdonald, and those times, very differently than Indigenous groups. Decisions regarding Confederation also left women and minority groups out of the democratic process. Some elements of Macdonald's legacy are challenging to acknowledge and to present. Through this strategy, Bellevue House commits to leading an open and ongoing dialogue and presenting the many perspectives of Canada's creation and of Macdonald. By addressing the Macdonald story from multiple points of view and continuing to update themes and messages, the site will position itself to be on the forefront of these challenging discussions. The site also lends itself to partnerships and debates around the telling of history: themes of revision; who is the arbiter of 'truth' at any given time; and bringing lesser known facts to light. These make for engaging and passionate opportunities for visitors to weigh in on commemoration, to challenge relevance within today's society as the historic site connects past struggles to today's movements for human rights and hold Parks Canada accountable to play a role in progress towards a better country. To move forward in this work, Bellevue House must continue to build partnerships with Indigenous and diverse cultural groups to help expand the narrative and to contribute to Bellevue House's recognition as an inclusive place of reflection, discourse and reconciliation.

Objective 1.1: Opportunities are provided to diverse groups to be engaged in the visitor experience planning and delivery.

Targets:

- By 2022, a dialogue is initiated with local Indigenous groups through respectful, mutually beneficial engagement efforts.
- By 2023, regular meetings are occurring with Indigenous and multicultural groups with the intent of identifying meaningful and valued outcomes and developing new offers.

Objective 1.2: Bellevue House is part of the broader reflection regarding different perspectives on the Fathers of Confederation and visitors can engage in this dialogue.

Targets:

- By 2022, Bellevue House joins the network of *International Sites of Conscience*.
- Parks Canada's *Stories of Canada* informs the presentation of broader viewpoints related to Macdonald, Confederation, and the development of Canada.
- By 2022, Bellevue House presents the rights and roles of women in Macdonald's time including the women who shaped him both personally and professionally.

### **Key strategy 2: An active community partner**

Bellevue House has the potential to become a more active, effective and recognized participant in the Kingston area tourism market. This strategy aims to increase awareness and enhance the site's presence and leadership in the city's network of historic places. Increasing the site's involvement in community events and local initiatives will open up opportunities for new partnerships and stronger collaboration. Through partnerships and collaboration, efforts to promote the site and enhance its exposure will put Bellevue House on the map as the leader in presenting the story of Sir John A. Macdonald.

Objective 2.1: Awareness about the existence of the site and its national significance increases among visitors who come to Kingston.

Targets:

- By 2023, the number of followers doubles on Bellevue House social media channels.
- The number of visitors who agree with “this place is meaningful to me” meets the target of 85% in the next State of Site Assessment.

**Objective 2.2:** Partnerships are developed to help present and promote Bellevue House.

Targets:

- By 2024, three or more multi-year partnering agreements are in place and contribute to the presentation of Bellevue House’s story.
- By 2024, through promotion with regional partners, Bellevue House is recognised as a leading Kingston heritage attraction.

**Key strategy 3: A renewed heritage experience**

This third strategy seeks to raise the profile of the experiences offered at Bellevue House by renewing the finishes of the house, modernising the experiences, and developing new programming content including experiential activities to be more inclusive of all ages and target audiences. By renewing and refurbishing the house and pursuing new programming and presentation styles, the site will not only attract more people and repeat visitors, but will show increased visitor satisfaction and appreciation.

**Objective 3.1:** Visitors to Bellevue House appreciate exciting new and diverse hands-on experiences.

Targets:

- Visitor satisfaction regarding the availability and the quality of activities offered at Bellevue House remains stable or increases in the next State of Site Assessment.
- By 2023, visitors have access to new experiences on the grounds and in the historic house.
- By 2023, key pieces of the Visitor Experience Strategy (2017) are implemented including improvements to the enhanced guided tour, a renewed exhibit in the Visitor Centre and more active experiential programming.

**Objective 3.2:** Visitation increases among targeted markets (Adult leisure tourists, local Millennials, local families and school groups)

Targets:

- By 2023, a youth engagement strategy is in place and attracts an increased number of school groups and families.
- Overall visitation to the site increases by 4% annually.
- By 2023, revenue increases by 15% through enhanced programming, partnering opportunities and alternative uses at the site (e.g. site rentals).

**Objective 3.3:** The visitor centre is better connected to the house thus improving the flow between both buildings and facilitating an improved visitor experience.

Targets:

- Visitor enjoyment continues to exceed the target of ninety percent on the next State of Site Assessment.
- In the next State of Site Assessment, more than ninety percent of visitors meet the target of having ‘Learned Something’ during their visit.
- By 2025 an accessible pathway is created between the Visitor Centre and the house.

Objective 3.4: The house and facilities are in good condition, reflecting Parks Canada’s expertise in managing and protecting heritage buildings.

Targets:

- The house and associated cultural resources are in ‘good’ condition in the next State of Site Assessment.
- By 2025, a long-term maintenance plan is in place that supports the reduction of operational greenhouse gas emissions and which adds resiliency to the site in a changing climate.

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## 6.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

Parks Canada is responsible for assessing and mitigating the impacts of management actions on ecosystems and on cultural resources. The purpose of a strategic environmental assessment is to incorporate environmental considerations into the development of public policies, plans, and program proposals, to support environmentally-sound decision making. In accordance with *The Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals (2010)*, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) was conducted on the Bellevue House management plan.

The SEA was scoped to the boundaries of Bellevue House National Historic Site. Bellevue House National Historic Site is a small property in an urban area, which provides little in the way of natural habitat, though it does have some mature trees and built structures that could provide marginal wildlife habitat, including for species at risk bats. In reviewing the key strategies and objectives outlined, nothing proposed in this management plan is expected to have negative environmental effects. Individual projects that are referenced in the plan, such as the need for structural replacements and repairs to the built structures will be evaluated through a project level impact assessment under the *Impact Assessment Act*.

Operations at the site are required to mitigate impacts on climate according to Greening Government requirements in support of the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy, so planning of infrastructure investment and the long-term maintenance plan in objective 2.2 must factor in these important priorities.

Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public will be consulted on the draft management plan, including a summary of the draft strategic environmental assessment. Feedback will be considered and incorporated into the strategic environmental assessment and management plan as appropriate.