

## Report to London Advisory Committee on Heritage

**To:** Chair and Members  
London Advisory Committee on Heritage  
**From:** Gregg Barrett, Director, City Planning and City Planner  
**Subject:** Nomination of Labatt Memorial Park as National Historic Site of Canada  
**Date:** May 12, 2021

### Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Director, City Planning and City Planner, with the advice of the Heritage Planner, the following actions **BE TAKEN** with respect to the potential designation of Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site of Canada:

- a) The above noted initiative **BE ENDORSED**; and
- b) The Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to undertake the application process with respect to this matter.

### Executive Summary

Labatt Memorial Park is the world's oldest baseball grounds. Located at 25 Wilson Avenue, the cultural heritage value of Labatt Memorial Park is recognized locally by the property's designation pursuant to Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* and inclusion in the Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District, designated pursuant to Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The purpose of this report is to seek Municipal Council direction to apply to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to designate Labatt Memorial Park as a National Historic Site of Canada pursuant to the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act*.

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada application process requires a resolution from a Municipal Council endorsing a municipality's nomination for designation as a National Historic Site. The intent of this report is to introduce the application process to Municipal Council and receive Municipal Council's endorsement to assist a volunteer steering committee to prepare and submit a nomination to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

### Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

This recommendation supports the following 2019-2023 Strategic Plan areas of focus:

- Strengthening Our Community:
  - Continuing to conserve London's heritage properties and archaeological resources.

### Analysis

#### 1.0 Background Information

##### 1.1 Property Location

The Labatt Memorial Park property at 25 Wilson Avenue is located on the east side of Wilson Avenue, just north of its intersection with Riverside Drive. The property is located northwest of the Forks of the Thames River (Appendix A).

##### 1.2 Description

The property at 25 Wilson Avenue, known first as Tecumseh Park was privately built in 1877 as a new home field for the London Tecumsehs of the International Associations, a "major-league" competitor to the National Association of Professional Baseball Clubs - now the National League of Major League Baseball (Barney and Nowokowski, 2019).

Prior to the construction of Tecumseh Park, the Tecumsehs played on a sports field at Victoria Park.

By 1925 Tecumseh Park had become home to London's representative of the Intercounty Baseball League. Founded in 1919, the league's first London organization was known first as the London Braves. After various name changes (mostly associated with early sponsorships), the team has been permanently named the London Majors since 1974.<sup>a</sup> Despite usage by the London Braves by the 1930s baseball was in decline in London and the park was in jeopardy of being lost. After various "booster" efforts the Labatt family purchased the property in 1936 and donated it to the City of London along with a monetary donation to facilitate improvements. Since then, the property has been known as Labatt Memorial Park. Within months, the flood of 1937 again caused considerable damage to the park necessitating reconstruction efforts. As a part of the reconstruction in 1937, a white-frame clubhouse was constructed – now known as the Roy McKay Clubhouse.

Since its renaming as Labatt Memorial Park, the park was the home of various amateur and professional baseball teams including the 1948 London Majors and the site of National Baseball Congress, Canadian-American Championship series. Professional baseball made a short return to Labatt Park between 1989 and 1993 when the London Tigers, the AA affiliate of the Detroit Tigers called the park home, winning the Eastern League championship in 1990.

In addition to baseball, Labatt Memorial Park has been used for other sports and community initiatives. Between 1895 and 1916 the park was used for bicycle racing resulting in the construction of a one third mile brick dust and cement track that circled the baseball fields. The Western Mustangs football team also briefly used the field between in the 1920s. Lastly, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the field was used annually for an "Olympiad" event as a part of a city-wide recreational program. Aside from sporting event, Labatt Park has also hosted special events, rallies, outdoor films, and civic receptions.

Currently the property at 25 Wilson Avenue, commonly known as Labatt Memorial Park consists of the baseball diamond, a grandstand and bleachers (1990s), and the Roy McKay Clubhouse (1937). Opening in 1877 as Tecumseh Park, the park has played an integral role in the growth and development of baseball in London and Canada and is the world's oldest baseball grounds. Labatt Park continues to be used as the home of the London Majors of the Intercounty Baseball League.

### **1.3 Cultural Heritage Status**

To recognize and protect its cultural heritage value the Labatt Memorial Park property was designated pursuant to Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* in 1994 by By-law, L.S.P.-3237-544 in 1994, and amended by By-law, L.S.P.-3237(a)-319 in 1996. The park is still used today by the London Majors of the Intercounty Baseball League.

As a municipally-owned heritage property, the City continues to be stewards of its history and conservators of its cultural heritage value. As a part of its long-term conservation and protection, the Roy McKay Clubhouse is assessed as a part of conservation master planning for municipally-owned heritage properties to set out short and long term maintenance plans over a 10-year horizon.

In 2015, the property was designated pursuant to Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act* as it was included within the Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District, designated by By-law No. L.S.P.-3437-179, which came into force and effect on May 15, 2015.

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<sup>a</sup> The team was briefly called the London Majors from 1944 to 1959, and again for one year in 1962 before changing names again based on team sponsorships.

Most recently, it was announced in March 2021 that Tourism London would be offering public tours of Labatt Memorial Park as a part of a “Southwestern Ontario Baseball Heritage Pass”.

In recent years, Labatt Memorial Park has been the subject of further research in baseball history. Competing with historic baseball fields in Clinton, Massachusetts and Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Labatt Park was subject to study by researchers and historians from the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) and the Centre for Canadian Baseball Research (CCBR), concluding that the park was in fact, the world’s oldest baseball grounds. Building on its successful claim as the world’s oldest baseball grounds, members the Canadian Centre for Baseball Research, the London Majors Alumni Committee, and heritage community members have requested that the City of London pursue National Historic Site designation for Labatt Memorial Park to recognize its importance in the growth and development of baseball in Canada.

## **2.0 Discussion and Considerations**

### **2.1 *Historic Sites and Monuments Act***

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) was established in 1919 and oversees the National Program of Historical Commemoration. The HSMBC is mandated through the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* (1953) and makes recommendations to designate persons, places, and events of national historic significance to the Minister responsible for Parks Canada (Parks Canada, *Framework for History and Commemoration*, 2019). Unlike, the *Ontario Heritage Act*, as federal legislation the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* does not protect or regulate property, but rather identifies and commemorates place, persons, and sites of national historic significance.

Currently, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change is responsible for designating places, persons, and events of national historic significance. Parks Canada is the agency of the Government of Canada that provides professional and administrative services to support the HSMBC including the historical and archaeological research needed for evaluation applications for National Historic Site designation. The agency is mandated to “protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada’s natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity for present and future generations” (*Framework for History and Commemoration*, 2019).

### **2.2 National Program of Historical Commemoration**

National Historic Sites are places of profound importance to Canada, each telling their own unique story, contributing a sense of time, identity, and place to our understanding of Canada as a whole. Over 2,100 places, persons, and events have been commemorated by the Government of Canada for their national historic significance. Any aspect of Canada’s human history may be considered for a national designation if it has had a nationally significant impact on, or illustrates a nationally important aspect of, Canadian history. In Canada, National Historic Sites represent a variety of historic places, encompassing sites as diverse as sacred places, battlefields, archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, ships and shipwrecks, structures, and districts. Many are still used for work, religious practices, commerce and industry, education, and leisure.

In addition to National Historic Sites, the Government of Canada recognizes National Historic Persons and National Historic Events. National Historic Persons are individuals who have made a significant and lasting contribution to Canadian history. National Historic Events are designated if they represent a defining action, episode, movement, or experience in Canada history.

#### **2.2.1 National Historic Designations in London**

Currently, there are 19 national historic designations within the City of London including, 4 National Historic Sites, 4 National Historic Events, and 11 National Historic Persons. A complete list of the national historic designations in London are included in Appendix B.

## 2.2.2 Sports-Related National Historic Designations

Any sites, events, or persons in Canada's human history can be designated for national significance. The National Program of Historical Commemoration includes the designation of various sporting facilities, sports events, and persons associated with sports. Of note, Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto, Ontario and the Montreal Forum in Montreal, Quebec are both designated as National Historic Sites for their respective roles in hockey culture in Canada. Significant teams and sporting events have also received national historic designations.

There are currently two national historic designations associated with baseball heritage in Canada. The first, the Asahi Baseball Team, a Japanese-Canadian baseball team from Vancouver, British Columbia was designated as a National Historic Event in 2008. The second is the Powell River Townsite District, designated in 1995 as a National Historic Site, as a planned, single-industry town in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A set of baseball fields is identified as a one of the site's "Character-Defining Elements" (or heritage attributes).

## 2.3 Eligibility Requirements and Application Process

### 2.3.1 Eligibility

The eligibility of a potential national historic designation is guided by criteria and guidelines set out by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Currently, the Minister is advised by the HSMBC based on the *Criteria and Guidelines for evaluating subject of potential national historic significance* (Fall 2017). The guideline document sets out the detailed criteria and guidelines followed by the HSMBC. The following summary highlights the key concepts for criteria for national historic significance.

Any aspect of Canada's human history may be considered for ministerial designation of national historic significance. To be considered for designation, a place, person or event must have had a nationally significant impact on Canadian history or must illustrate a nationally important aspect of Canadian human history.

Subjects that qualify for national historic significance will meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. A place may be designated of national historic significance by virtue of a direct association with a nationally significant aspect of Canadian history. An archaeological site, structure, building, group of buildings, district, or cultural landscape of potential national historic significance will:
  - a. Illustrate an exceptional creative achievement in concept and design, technology and/or planning, or a significant stage in the development of Canada; or,
  - b. Illustrate or symbolize in whole or in part a cultural tradition, a way of life, or ideas important in the development of Canada; or
  - c. Be most explicitly and meaningfully associated or identified with persons that are deemed of national historic importance; or
  - d. Be most explicitly and meaningfully associated or identified with events that are deemed of national historic importance.
2. A person (or persons) may be designated of national historic significance if that person individually or as the representative of a group made an outstanding and lasting contribution to Canadian history.
3. An event may be designated of national historic significance if it represents a defining action, episode, movement, or experience in Canadian history.

In general, only one designation will be made for each place, person, or event of national historic significance. Uniqueness or rarity are not, in themselves, evidence of national historic significance, but may be considered in connection with the above noted criteria. Firsts, per se, are not considered for national historic significance.

Buildings, ensembles of buildings, and sites that are 40 years of age or older<sup>b</sup> may be considered for designation of national historic significance. A place must be in a condition that respects the integrity of its design, materials, workmanship, function and/or setting to be considered for designation of national historic significance, insofar as any of these elements are essential to understand its significance.

Persons deceased for at least 25 years may be considered for designation of national historic significance, with the exception of Prime Ministers, who are eligible for commemoration immediately upon death.

Events that occurred at least 40 years ago may be considered for designation of national historic significance. Historic events that continue into the more recent past will be evaluated on the basis of what occurred at least 40 years ago.

### **2.3.2 Nomination Requirements**

Parks Canada has set out criteria for all nomination requirements submitted to the HSMBC for national historic designations. Nominations are submitted to the HSMBC Secretariat. All nominations must contain the following information:

- Identification of the Applicant – a point of contact for inquiries, clarifications, and correspondence between the Applicant and the HSMBC;
- Identification of the Subject – identification of the place, person, or event for nomination including important dates, buildings or structure, construction dates, and/or parameters of an event;
- Documentation and Suggestions for More in-depth Research – suggestions for research, including historical sources, photograph collections, documents, bibliographic reference, and contact person

Additional special requirements are necessary for nominations for National Historic Sites. This includes:

- Consent of the Property Owner(s) – written consent of the property owner (if the applicant is not the owner) is required, otherwise, the HSMBC will not consider applications for the designation. If the property falls under a municipal authority, consent may take the form of a Municipal Council resolution to endorse the nomination;
- Boundaries of the Site Proposed for Designation – description of the boundaries of the property being proposed for designation, which may include a sketch map, legal description, or survey map;
- Components of the historic property – identification of all of the major built and/or natural components of the property;
- Site Condition – description of the condition of the site, identify any existing potential threats to the integrity of the site; and,
- Additional Documentation – photographs, plans, and/or elevations of buildings if necessary.

The endorsement of Municipal Council in pursuing the nomination is a critical component of the nomination requirements.

Letters of support from organizations and individuals are encouraged to accompany the nomination in demonstrate community support for the nomination. To date, various heritage and baseball organizations have indicated they would be willing to provide letters of support for Labatt Memorial Park.

### **2.3.3. Application Process and Timelines**

The application process for national historic site designations can take several years (Appendix C). Upon receiving a nomination, the HSMBC Secretariat confirms that all required components have been submitted prior to sending the nomination to the Parks

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<sup>b</sup> Unlike national historic designations, age is not a criteria for designations pursuant to the *Ontario Heritage Act*. Individual properties designated pursuant to Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* must meet one or more criteria of Ontario Regulation 9/06, Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest.

Canada Cultural Sciences Branch. Preliminary research is conducted to ensure that the nomination meets the criteria and guidelines and that there is sufficient documentation for a report to be prepared to the satisfaction of the HSMBC. This initial step can take approximately four months for completion.

If a nomination is successful in the preliminary evaluation stage, Parks Canada historians prepare a comprehensive report for submission to the HSMBC at one of their bi-annual meetings. During the meeting, the HSMBC reviews the reports for each subject and issues recommendations or may seek clarification on aspects of an application. When clarification is requested, the subject is resubmitted at a subsequent meeting.

HSMBC recommendations are brought forward to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change for approval.

#### **2.4 Implications for Maintaining National Historic Site Designation**

Every National Historic Site has a set of reasons or an explanation for why it is significant or distinctive. The reasons why a National Historic Site are important are established by the HSMBC, and are laid out in a Statement of Commemorative Intent (*Framework for History and Commemoration*, 2019).

The *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* does not have the scope to legally protect designated sites, as the designation is commemorative in intent. As federal legislation, the federal government does not regulate privately owned property. A National Historic Site designation helps focus public attention on a particular site, but it does not affect ownership of the site or provide protection against interventions. However, before undertaking alterations to a National Historic Site, Parks Canada recommends following the guidance of the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*<sup>c</sup>. Alterations to a National Historic Site that have a profound impact on the site's "integrity" or the reasons outlined the Statement of Commemorative Intent, may result in the removal of the National Historic Site designation.

For Labatt Memorial Park, the property's "double-designation" pursuant to the *Ontario Heritage Act* provides legal protection for the property's cultural heritage value. Heritage Alteration Permit approval may still be required for alterations to the property.

A National Historic Site designation is not anticipated to result in implications to the day-to-day operations of the Labatt Memorial Park property for City staff.

### **3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations**

#### **3.1 Financial Requirements**

There are no costs to apply to the HSMBC for a national historic site designation. Likewise, there are no costs or fees to maintain status as a National Historic Site.

National Historic Sites are eligible for the National Historic Sites of Canada Cost-Sharing Program. This program supports preparatory aid projects and conservation projects, as well as the development of heritage presentation for owner and eligible lessees of national historic sites. A site owner may be reimbursed up to 50% of eligible costs incurred in the conservation and presentation of a National Historic Site. Funded projects include planning and works to conserve the heritage fabric of a site, as well as presentation projects to communicate the reasons for federal designation. The guidelines and calls for supported projects for this program are established annually.

Lastly, as a designation that is honorary in nature and commemorative in intent, National Historic Site designation increases public awareness of heritage places.

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<sup>c</sup> The *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* was prepared by Parks Canada in 2001, as a part of an initiative called the Historic Places Initiative (HPI). The primary purpose of the document was to provide consistent best practices and guidelines for heritage conservation in Canada. The *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation Historic Places in Canada* has not been adopted by the City of London.

Combined with the public attention that is anticipated from Tourism London's upcoming public tours of Labatt Memorial Park, as well as the partnership with the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum and the Beachville District Museum in a "Southwestern Ontario Baseball Heritage Pass", National Historic Site designation has the potential to increase public attention for Labatt Memorial Park.

## Conclusion

Labatt Memorial Park, located at 25 Wilson Avenue is designated pursuant to Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* and is located within the Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District. First opening in 1877 as Tecumseh Park, Labatt Memorial Park was initially the home of the London Tecumsehs. The park has played an important role in the growth and development of baseball in Canada and is recognized as the world's oldest baseball grounds.

National Historic Sites are places of profound importance to Canada, each telling their own unique story, contributing a sense of time, identity, and place to our understanding of Canada as a whole. Over 2,100 places, persons, and events have been commemorated by the Government of Canada for their national historic significance. To highlight its importance in Canadian sport history, staff recommend endorsement to assist a volunteer steering committee in the preparation of a nomination to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

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**Submitted and Recommended by:** Gregg Barrett, AICP, Director, City Planning and City Planner

**Appendix A – Property Location**

**Appendix B – National Historic Designations in London**

**Appendix C – Parks Canada National Historic Designation Flowchart**

### Sources

Barney, Bob. "For Argument's Sake: The Case for London's Labatt Park Against Its Challengers for the Distinction of Being the World's Oldest, Continuously Operated Ballpark" presented at the Canadian Baseball History Conference. 2018.

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*Ontario Heritage Act*. 2019, c.9, Sched. 11. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90o18>.

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Parks Canada. *Framework for History and Commemoration: National Historic Sites and Systems Plan*. 2019.

# Appendix A – Property Location



Figure 1: Location map, showing Labatt Memorial Park located at 25 Wilson Avenue



## National Historic Designations in London

The following list includes the search results of the Parks Canada Directory of Federal Heritage Designation for designations within London, as of April 2021. The annotated notes are included as a part of the Directory database. The Directory is public ally available: [https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/search-recherche\\_eng.aspx](https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/search-recherche_eng.aspx).

### National Historic Sites

- Middlesex County Court House National Historic Site of Canada, 399 Ridout Street North
  - Castellated Gothic Revival Court House; 1827-1831
  - Designation Date: 1955-05-10
- Banting House National Historic Site of Canada, 442 Adelaide Street North
  - Documented and recognized as the site of the defining moment of the discovery of insulin
  - Designation Date: 1998-03-12
- Ridout Street Complex National Historic Site of Canada, 435-451 Ridout Street North
  - Important group of early commercial and residential buildings
  - Designation Date: 1966-10-26
- Wolseley Barracks National Historic Site of Canada, 701 Oxford Street East
  - Important early military training and residential facility
  - Designation Date: 1963-10-28

### National Historic Events

- Noble and Wolf v Alley National Historic Event,
  - A prominent step in the legal struggle against discrimination and for human rights in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century
  - Designation Date: 2009-04-20
- Development of Cobalt-60 Beam Therapy Unit (Cobalt Bomb) National Historic Event
  - First use in 1951 marked a new era in the fight against cancer
  - 1996-11-01
- Boundary Water Treaty of 1909 National Historic Event,
  - Negotiated between the American and British governments to settle outstanding environmental issues
  - 1997-09-22
- Canada and the South African War National Historic Event
  - Represented the beginning of large-scale participation in overseas wars, contributed to the professionalization of the Canadian army
  - 2005-08-03

### National Historic Persons

- Archibald Byron Macallum, National Historic Person
  - Pioneer in scientific medicine, field of cellular microchemistry
  - Designation: 1938-05-19
- Sir George William Ross, National Historic Person
  - Premier of Ontario (1899-1905), Liberal leader in Senate (1911-1914)
  - 1937-05-20
- Sir Arthur William Currie, National Historic Person
  - Commander of the Canadian Corps, first General in the Canadian Army; World War I
  - 1934-05-28
- John Kinder Labatt, National Historic Person
  - Took over London Brewery in 1854; began financial empire
  - 1971-10-14
- Edward Blake, National Historic Person
  - Ontario Premier (1871-1872), noted Liberal leader and thinker
  - 1937-05-20
- Adam Shortt, C.M.G National Historic Person

- Historian, author, member of the first Canadian Civil Service Commission (1908-1918)
  - 1938-05-19
- Sir Adam Beck, National Historic Person
  - Regarded as the father of Ontario Hydro
  - 1938-05-19
- William Saunders, National Historic Person
  - Director of the Experimental farms branch of Department of Agriculture (1866)
  - 1952-05-27
- Paul Peel, National Historic Person
  - Prominent Canadian painter of the French Academic School
  - 1937-05-20
- Sir Charles Edwin Saunders, National Historic Person
  - Developed the famous Marquis wheat at the Central Experimental Farm
  - 1938-05-19
- Sir John Carling, National Historic Person
  - Brewer, federal Minister of Agriculture (1885-1892), established Dominion Experimental Farms
  - 1938-05-19

## Appendix C - Parks Canada National Historic Designation Flowchart

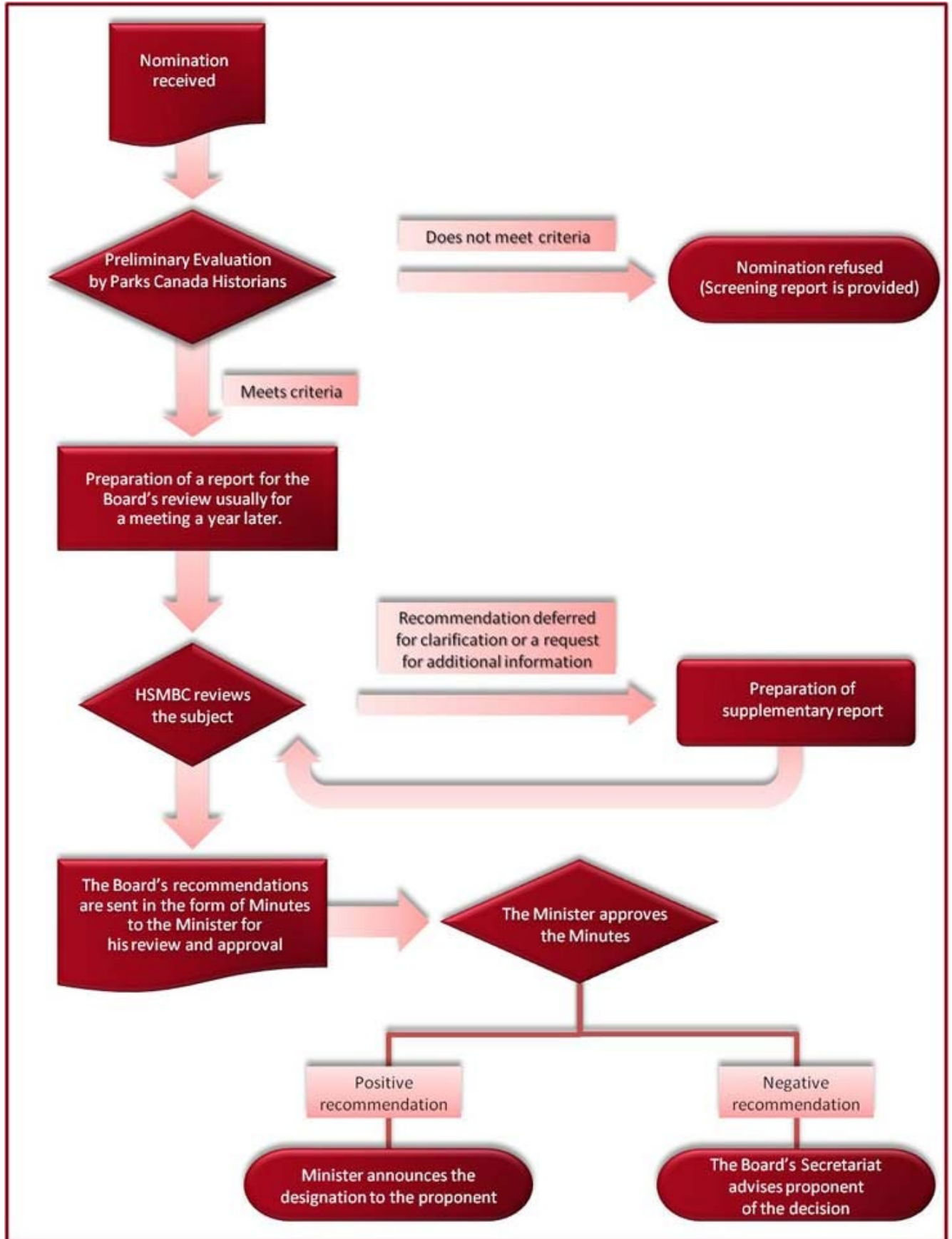


Figure 2: Flowchart provided by Parks Canada showing the nomination and designation process used when evaluating national historic designations.