

Research and Evaluation Report



Roe Block (John Mark Rowe 2023)

Roe Block

49-57 Main Street South, Georgetown, Town of Halton Hills

December 2023

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1.0 Property Description

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 49-57 Main Street South | |
| Municipality | Georgetown, Town of Halton Hills |
| County or Region | Regional Municipality of Halton |
| Legal Description | <p>49 Main Street South: PT LT 19, CON 9 ESQ, PARTS 2, 3, 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17 & 18, 20R5856; T/W & S/T 588702; HALTON HILLS</p> <p>51 Main Street South: PT LT 19, CON 9 ESQ, PART 5, 20R5856; T/W & S/T 574083; HALTON HILLS</p> <p>53 Main Street South: PT LT 19, CON 9 ESQ, PART 6, 7, 19, 20, 20R5856; T/W & S/T 618615; HALTON HILLS</p> <p>55 Main Street South: PT LT 19, CON 9 ESQ, PART 8, 9, 21, 22, 23, 27, 20R5856; T/W & S/T 657461; HALTON HILLS</p> <p>57 Main Street South: LT 27, PL 59, EXCEPT PM172; PT LT 46, PL 59, AS IN 546995; HALTON HILLS; PT LT 1, PL 37, E OF MAIN ST OR NW OF MILL ST; PT LT 19, CON 9 ESQ, PART 10, 11, 24, 25, 26, 20R5856; T/W & S/T 657459; HALTON HILLS.</p> |
| Construction Date | c. 1888 |
| Original Use | Commercial |
| Current Use | Commercial |
| Architect/Building/Designer | Unknown |
| Architectural Style | Commercial Vernacular |
| Additions/Alterations | Alterations to storefronts; Rear alterations |
| Heritage Status | Listed on the Heritage Register |
| Recorder(s) | John Mark Rowe; Laura Loney |
| Report Date | December 2023 |

2.0 Background



Figure 1: Location Map – 49-57 Main Street South



Figure 2: Aerial Photograph – 49-57 Main Street South

This research and evaluation report describes the history, context, and physical characteristics of the property at 49-57 Main Street South in Halton Hills, Ontario, named The Roe Block, as recorded in the date stone. The report includes an evaluation of the property's cultural heritage value as prescribed by the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

2.1 Historical Background

Indigenous History Background

The enduring history of First Nation Peoples in Halton Hills can be traced back through time immemorial before contact with Europeans in the 1600s. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the Credit River was central to Indigenous ways of life, supporting settlements, fisheries, horticulture, transportation, and trade. Iroquoian-speaking peoples, ancestors of the Wendat, occupied the Credit River Valley for hundreds of years until approximately the mid-1600s, establishing semi-permanent villages. There are numerous archaeological sites in Halton Hills dating from this period, ranging from village sites to burial grounds, which reveal a rich cultural heritage.

The Wendat were displaced by the Haudenosaunee around 1649-50 amid the conflicts that arose between European colonial powers and their First Nation allies. The Mississaugas (part of the Anishinaabe Nation) arrived in southern Ontario in the 1690s, settling in two groups along the north shore of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The western group, occupying the area between Toronto and Lake

Erie, became known as the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Until the early 19th century, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation followed a seasonal cycle of movement and resource harvesting along the Credit River (Missinnihe, meaning “trusting creek”), and other rivers. In the winter months, extended family groups hunted in the Halton Hills area, travelling south towards the mouth of the river in the spring for the salmon run. The Mississaugas’ fisheries and traditional economies were diminished as a result of increased Euro-colonial settlement, leading to a state of impoverishment and dramatic population decline.

In 1818, the British Crown negotiated the purchase of 648,000 acres of land from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, including present-day Halton Hills, under the Ajetance Treaty (No. 19), named after Chief Ajetance. This left the Mississaugas with three small reserves on the Lake Ontario shoreline. The legitimacy of early land “surrenders” to the Crown is questionable when considering the Mississaugas’ traditional understanding of property ownership. Unlike the British, the Mississaugas understood land in spiritual terms, and did not share the idea that access to land and resources could be given up permanently¹.

European Settlement

This property was part of the 200 acres purchased by Morris Kennedy in 1828, identified as Lot 19, Concession 9, in Esquesing Township. However, a village was not established until the arrival of the Barber family in 1837, who dubbed the mill seat Georgetown. By 1839, the village lots had been laid out (although not registered), surveying lands belonging to George, Morris and John Kennedy, Philo Dayfoot, James Young, and the Barber brothers. The building within the property at 49 to 57 Main Street South occupies 36½ perches (.23 acres) of the West half of Lot 19, Concession 9 East of Main Street, an unnumbered lot, as well as 26½ perches (.165 acres) of Lot East of Main Street in George Kennedy’s survey.

On the January 1854 map (Figure 3), Provincial Land Surveyor Charles Kennedy plotted the existing buildings. A rectangular building (likely frame construction) is identified within the subject property. The property was purchased in February 1845 by John Sumpter, who is credited with opening the first general store in the village in 1845. Sumpter sold the property in 1859 to William McMaster.

¹ This brief overview of Pre-Treaty Indigenous Territory within the land now known as Halton Hills is taken from the Town of Halton Hills’ 2023 *Cultural Heritage Strategy*. This document includes additional recommendations relating to Truth and Reconciliation in Heritage Planning as part of the Town's commitment to advancing Truth and Reconciliation.



Figure 3: Detail from 1854 map showing the subject Property outlined in red. EHS Archives: MG12 A3 #23



Figure 4: Detail from 1877 map in Halton Atlas showing the subject property in red.

William McMaster took over Sumpter's business, specializing in groceries for the community that was growing since the first passenger train in 1856. In 1862, McMaster started the spiral of debt that would plague him thereafter, taking out short-term mortgages, approximately every two years. It all came to a head in 1872 when both properties were seized and assigned to a partnership of Thomas Ruston, a druggist and William Walker Roe, an auctioneer.

William McMaster also purchased 26½ perches in the adjoining lot, being Lot 1, East of Main Street in George Kennedy's survey, now addressed as 57 Main Street South. This lot was similarly burdened several mortgages.

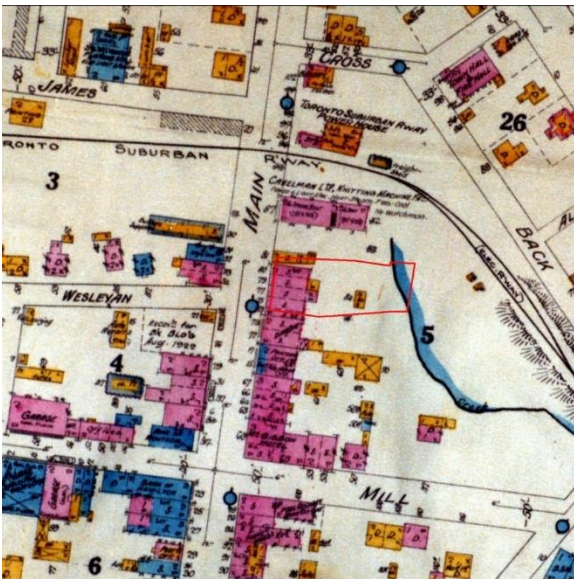


Figure 5: The Roe Block is outlined in red on this 1922 fire insurance survey. The colour red denotes buildings built of brick. Wood is yellow and blue is stone (EHS 00121)



Figure 6: The Roe Block is outlined in red in this 1960 fire insurance survey. (EHS MG12 A9 #2.04)

Thomas Ruston transferred the property to Dr. William John Roe in 1880 after the death of William Walker Roe in 1879. Unfortunately, Dr. W.J. Roe's property suffered a fire in 1887. The *Acton Free Press* reported the news in their Georgetown column in the 22 December 1887 issue:

"Last Friday morning, about four o'clock a fire broke out in Mr. Jackson's grocery, one of a wooden range of stores occupied by W.T. Jackson, grocer, Mrs. MacMaster, millinery and fancy

goods, and J. Cane, barber. The buildings were completely destroyed. They were owned by Dr. W. J. Roe and insured in the Caledonian and Norwich Union for \$600 each. The contents were insured in the Lancashire and Glasgow and London. They were mostly saved. An incendiary is believed to have inaugurated the destruction."

The limestone datestone embedded in the façade of the building reads "1888", which corresponds with the year William John Roe took out a mortgage on the property for \$7000.

It was not until May 1948 that an editorial in the *Georgetown Herald* called for street numbering, though street numbers would not start appearing in the newspaper until 1955. That 1950's street numbering on Main Street was changed with the creation of a regional government in 1974. Before 1974, the addresses would have been #25-33 Main Street North.

Early advertisements in the *Georgetown Herald* often included a unit number. Unit #1 (49 Main Street South.) has a notable list of tenants, the earliest being a dressmaking and mantle (sleeveless cloak) shop in 1891. In 1903, Lee Sing opened his laundry business in Unit #1 and operated there until he was found dead in his apartment in about 1943. By 1945, Calvin Clark had opened his electrical store and stayed until Simpson's opened their order office in 1950. Simpson's tenancy was followed by Towne Sewing Centre. Georgetown Stationery and Office Supplies moved in 1968 at which time Towne Sewing Centre had moved across the road. In 1994 Expert Shoe Repair by Victor Kovach occupied this shop and in 2022 it became Pink Nails and Beauty.



Figure 7: Advertisement for Lee Sing Laundry in Roe Block #1, now 49 Main Street South. (*Georgetown Herald* 4 March 1903)



Figure 8: Advertisement from the Foreign Fruit Store in Roe Block #3, now 53 Main Street South (*Georgetown Herald* 10 Oct. 1894)

Unit #2 (51 Main Street South) was Lillico beauty parlour for many years, as early as 1940. Bill Huffman also had a barber shop in the unit. In February 1964 it became McNamara Jewellers and was operated by Cecil McNamara until the summer of 1982. In 1994 Bob and Anne O'Neill opened a shop at this address, though they moved to Unit #5 (57 Main Street South) by 1991. Unit #2 was occupied by Jeanette's Dutch Deli in 1994 and as of 2022 it was home to Raman Noodles.



Figure 9: Santa Claus parade in 1949, shows #49 Clark Electrical, #51 Lillico Beauty Parlour and #53 Long's Restaurant (EHS 00018)



Figure 10: Detail from a Drummers' Snack parade in 1912 reveals signs for #57 Millar & Co. and #55 Wm. Scott, butcher (EHS 21578)

Unit #3 (53 Main Street South) was occupied by T.M. Graham fruits in 1894. By 1936 the large space had become Long's Confectionary. The restaurant and bus depot were carried on by Bill Long's family after his death. The unit was sold to Bob Caldwell and then sold again in 1949 to "Steamer" Emmerson who renamed it Steamer's Inn.

A glimpse upstairs was offered in November 1949 when Mr. and Mrs. Noel Reynolds took over Albert Tennant's apartment upstairs. The front room was sub-let to Albert Simson who opened a photographic studio there.

Jim Coleman took over from Emmerson in 1950 and the unit became the Rose Bar Restaurant. In April 1953 the premises were renamed by Stan Wade to The Corner Cupboard. In 1965, the unit was remodelled as Stan's Restaurant which operated until 1971. The unit became Highland Restaurant, later followed by King Wah Chinese restaurant in 1973. Three years later in 1976 it became Shangri-La Garden under Norman Lee. In February 1984 the Chou family opened the House of Buddha restaurant which still occupies the unit in 2023 albeit under new ownership.



Figure 11: Detail from a c. 1925 postcard shows Wm. Long Meals, Lunches & Confectionary (EHS 21556)



Figure 12: Georgetown Herald 22 Dec. 1948



Figure 13: Georgetown Herald 6 Feb. 1964

Unit #4 (55 Main Street South.) first appears in local papers in 1912 as William Scott's butcher shop. In 1915 W.J. Patterson opened his butcher shop in the same location. Patterson acquired Georgetown phone number 1, which was passed onto Robert Erwin and his son-in-law Harry Goldham, when they purchased the business in 1920. Erwin & Goldham operated here for years including use of the unit as Goldham's Butcher Shop. In 1965, the unit became Joe's Tuck Shop and by 1994 this unit as well as Unit #5 had become North Star Cleaners, which is still in operation in 2023.

Unit #5 (57 Main Street South) was Gibson, Millar & Co. in 1897, a clothing store for the family that also provided gentlemen's tailoring. Though they operated until 1925, John Joseph Gibbons purchased the entire Roe Block in 1919 and operated his Barber shop with Freeman Kersey in Unit #5 until he became the Town Assessor. Mervyn Cook took over operation of the barber shop through 1952. From 1966 until 1970 Wigo TV and Appliances operated in the unit.

Dorland Barranger leased space behind units 4 and 5 in 1946 to build a dry-cleaning plant. By 1991 the units' storefronts and the dry-cleaning plant had become North Star Cleaners.

In 1919 the 36½ perches (0.22 acres) that comprise the Roe Block, owned by Dr. William John Roe, were sold to John Joseph Gibbons for \$9000. The *Georgetown Herald* of 19 July 1950 includes this news item:

"Painting and decorating and remodelling is very much in evidence on Main Street: Ted Bludd has just finished doing four store fronts owned by J.J. Gibbons – Goldham's, Merv Cook's, Lillico and Rose Bar Grill, the latter two in an unusual pink trim."



Figure 14: #49 Expert Shoe Repair and #51 McNamara Jewellers about 1980. S. McNamara photo



Figure 15: The Roe Block roof is outlined in red in this 1961 aerial view of Main Street (EHS 09031)



Figure 16: Herald, 11 Oct. 1950

While this report does not include an exhaustive list of tenants and uses, the examples discussed illustrate the variety of services offered in the Roe Block during the last 136 years. The most consistent use of any of the units has been for Unit #3 (53 Main Street South) as a restaurant. The 40-year tenancy of Lee Sing, providing laundry services to the citizens of Georgetown, and the 40-year operation of the House of Buddha Restaurant providing Chinese food to an appreciative population is reflective of the local Canadian Chinese immigrant story.



Figure 17: The Roe Block in 1994 occupied by (L to R) Expert Shoe Repair, Jeanette's Dutch Deli, House of Buddha, and North Star Cleaners (EHS 10900)

Of equal significance reflecting the local history is the ownership of the building by John Joseph Gibbons. Gibbons started his career as a barber in Acton, moving to Georgetown in 1917 and operating here until 1949. His barber shop was a mayor's office before such an office was created. He became a councillor in 1931 and was Mayor from 1934 until 1944. He became the Town Assessor from 1949 until 1963 when he was re-elected Mayor. He announced his retirement in November 1968 and died of a heart attack eight days later. A street, a park, and a school are named in his honour.

2.1 Property & Architectural Description

The 1888 commercial building comprised of 49-57 Main Street South in Georgetown is located along the east side of Main Street South, north of Mill Street. The existing two-storey red brick building has running bond red clay bricks with a centre block wider than the flanking blocks. Along the front (southwest) elevation, the building has a raised parapet over the centre unit and a date stone engraved with “Roe Block 1888.”



Figure 18: Looking towards the southwest elevation of the subject property (Town of Halton Hills 2023)

The parapet on all three sections of the building has a stepped, crenellated brick cornice. A brick buttress separates the centre block from each flanking block, and each flanking block has a brick buttress separating the blocks into two distinct sections each, creating a visual demarcation of the five units.



Figure 19: Roe Block at 49-57 Main Street South (John Mark Rowe 2023)

The upper storeys on the flanking units feature brick voussoirs over each window. The centre unit features a large centre window opening on the second storey with a single voussoir over the opening. Historically, there were three windows in the opening that were, at some point after 1949, reduced to two windows separated by red brick infilling. A cut stone sill sits under each window opening. Upon close inspection, traces of scrollwork on the central window heading are still visible. The second storey of the building has a total of seven window openings with a total of eight windows. Prior to exterior alterations, there would have been nine windows; the extant windows are of varying styles and materials.



Figure 20: Detail of the upper centre block, being #53 Main Street South in 2023 (John Mark Rowe 2023)

The ground floor facades are each headed with a large wooden fascia with tenant signage. The individual storefronts feature recessed entrance doors, glass display windows, and glass side panels in varying configurations. Unit #1 at 49 Main Street South retains most of the original design; one covered bracket remains under the cornice molding. The façade also retains the wood molding transitioning from the first to second storey. The 1949 photograph (Figure 9) shows the original decorative elements.



Figure 21: Looking along the front elevation of the subject building (Town of Halton Hills 2023)

The north side of the building abuts an alley. Visible through the alley is a continuation of the running bond red brick pattern and the original stone rubble foundation. Three windows and a vent can be seen and appear to be later additions to the building based on style and material.



Figure 22: Looking along the north elevation of the existing building (Town of Halton Hills 2023)

On the back of the original building, Unit #1 has the most of its original structure visible. The unit has voussoirs above openings for doors on both the first and second storey, as well as a first storey window that has been closed with plywood. The rear of the other ground floor units are obscured by additions. The rear of Units #2 and #3 are covered by a single storey concrete block addition with vinyl siding on the north face. Units #4 and #5 have a concrete block addition, built in 1946 by Barranger as a dry-cleaning facility.



Figure 23: Rear of #55 and 57 Main Street South, showing the 1946 addition in 2023 (John Mark Rowe 2023)



Figure 24: Rear view of House of Buddha addition in 2023 (John Mark Rowe 2023)

From the ground level the original rear brickwork is mostly intact, with some former rear windows being changed into doorways. A wooden balcony spans the building, with a metal fire escape stairway on the north side and a wooden staircase at the centre of the *House of Buddha* addition.



Figure 25: North alley wall in 2023. J.M. Rowe photo

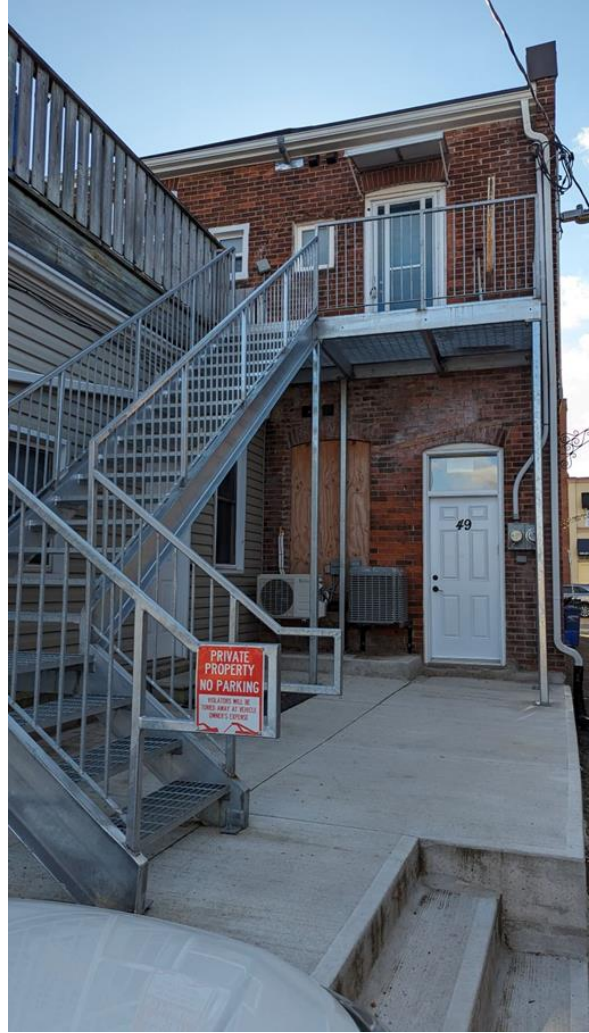


Figure 26: Rear of #49 Main Street South in 2023. J.M. Rowe photo

3.0 Description of Heritage Attributes and Evaluation Checklist

The following evaluation checklist applies to Ontario Regulation 9/06 made under the *Ontario Heritage Act*: Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest. The criteria are prescribed for municipal designation of Heritage Properties under Part IV, Section 29 of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The evaluation tables utilize an 'X' to signify applicable criteria and 'N/A' to signify criteria that is not applicable for this property.

| Design or Physical Value | |
|--|------------|
| Is rare, unique, representative, or early example of a style, type, expression, material, or construction method | X |
| Displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit | N/A |
| Demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement | N/A |

The Roe Block at 49-57 Main Street South has physical and design value as a representative 19th-century commercial structure within downtown Georgetown. The two-storey building height with a centre block, red brick exterior with stepped crenellated cornice, vertical second-storey windows with brick voussoirs and stone sills, and recessed entry doors, while reflective of typical commercial buildings constructed within Ontario during its period, incorporates several unique characteristics.

| Historical or Associative Value | |
|--|------------|
| Has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to a community | X |
| Yields, or has potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture | N/A |
| Demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer, or theorist who is significant to a community | N/A |

The Roe Block at 49-57 Main Street South has historical and associative value as it relates to Georgetown's original merchant, John Sumpter. It is directly associated with the Canadian immigrant story of Lee Sing (local laundryman) and the Chou family (local restaurateurs). It is also associated with local politician John Joseph Gibbons and his roles as barber, town councillor, town assessor, and ultimately Mayor of Georgetown.

| Contextual Value | |
|---|------------|
| Is important in defining, maintaining, or supporting the character of an area | X |
| Is physically, functionally, visually, or historically linked to its surroundings | X |
| Is a landmark | N/A |

The Roe Block at 49-57 Main Street South has contextual value as it is important in defining the built heritage character of the downtown. The existing two-storey building remains in its original location, physically and functionally linked to its surroundings as a commercial property on the Georgetown main street.

Heritage Attributes:

- The setback, placement, and orientation of the two-storey, mid-19th century commercial building within a commercial row in historic downtown Georgetown;
- The scale, form, and massing of the two-storey building with flat roof and red brick exterior, with a stepped crenellated cornice;
- The materials, including red brick exterior, brick detailing throughout, and rubble stone foundation;
- The balanced vertical window openings with voussoirs and stone sills on the second storey of the front (west) elevation;
- The date-stone, engraved with “Roe Block 1888”;
- Extant window openings along the second storey of the front elevation;
- The side (north) brick elevation; and,
- The recessed storefront configuration along the first storey of the front elevation.

The interiors and rear elevations have not been identified as heritage attributes of the subject property at this time.

4.0 Summary

Following research and evaluation according to Ontario Regulation 9/06, it has been determined that the property at 49-57 Main Street South has physical and design, historical and associative, and contextual value and therefore meets Ontario Regulation 9/06 criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest.

5.0 Sources

Primary Sources:

Land Records for Lot 19, Concession 9, West half, Esquesing Township
Land Records for Lot 1 East of Main, George Kennedy survey, Georgetown (Plan 37)
Georgetown Urban Inventory, Phase 1, Barbara Szczepanik, Heritage Halton Hills, 1994.
Various Photographs, Esquesing Historical Society Archives (individual citations in-text)
Various Photographs dated 2023 taken by John Mark Rowe
Census Records for 1881, 1891 1901, 1911, 1921 for Georgetown
Steve McNamara

Secondary Sources:

Advertisements from various issues of *The Georgetown Herald*
Small news items from various issues of *The Georgetown Herald*
“The Changing Scene,” *Georgetown Herald*, 11 Jan. 1950, page 6
“The Changing Scene,” *Georgetown Herald*, 20 Aug. 1952, page 8
“Pot Pourri,” *Georgetown Herald*, 6 April 1955, page 6
“There’s Been Changes,” *Georgetown Herald*, 12 April 1973, page 12.
“Joseph Gibbons: The Barber who Became Mayor,” John McDonald, *Halton Sketches Revisited*, Norval: 1996
“Georgetown in the 1850s,” Elaine Robinson-Bertrand, *Georgetown Independent*, 15 January 1986

Historic Mapping:

“Georgetown in Esquesing,” 1854 Esquesing Historical Society Archives MG12 A23
Historical Atlas for the County of Halton, 1877
“Georgetown, Ont.,” Fire Insurance Map #1, August 1922, Revised to 10 Feb. 1934, Underwriters’ Survey Bureau. Esquesing Historical Society Archives MG12 A3 #17.02
“Insurance Plan of the Town of Georgetown, Ont.” Fire Insurance Map #6, May 1960, Underwriters’ Survey Bureau. Esquesing Historical Society Archives MG12 A9 #2.05