



Definition and Description

Heritage means many things to many people; it may include real property, such as buildings and landscapes, artefacts, and cultural traditions. In Canada, there is a broadly accepted term for heritage that is real property: **historic place**.

Historic places are often buildings but can be any type of private or public land use, such as ecological reserves, parks, archaeological sites, designed landscapes, bridges, and public squares. Parks Canada defines historic places as properties that “have been (or could be) recognized by an appropriate authority for their heritage value, i.e. for their aesthetic, historic, scientific, cultural, social or spiritual importance or significance for past, present and future generations.”

A full report on heritage and sustainability is available on the City of Victoria’s website for the Official Community Plan review at: www.ShapeYourFutureVictoria.ca

PHOTO: HERITAGE CONTRIBUTES TO SOCIAL AND CULTURAL WELL-BEING – ST. JOSEPH’S APARTMENTS, VICTORIA ONCE A HOSPITAL IS RENTAL HOUSING.

Why Is This Topic Important?

A sustainable city celebrates and conserves built, natural and cultural heritage that is valued in neighbourhoods and the broader community. It also ensures that historic places continue to serve useful functions in society. Sustainable heritage has environmental, economic, social value and tangible impacts. For example, heritage rehabilitation supports climate action and green building standards through the retention, re-use, and energy retrofits of existing buildings. Heritage can be a cornerstone of sustainable tourism, and contribute to social and cultural well-being in projects that create affordable housing, including rental units, without losing history.

Did You Know?

Victoria’s **Heritage Register** dates to 1982. This is an official list of Council-approved heritage properties. Each property is either “designated” or “registered”. In Victoria there are almost 1,000 properties listed on the City’s Heritage Register.

Designated properties are protected through a municipal heritage designation bylaw and cannot be demolished or altered without Council approval. A **registered property** does not have legal protection and Council approval is not required for any alterations.

Local governments can also designate **Heritage Conservation Areas (HCAs)** with the purpose of protecting heritage properties and districts. HCAs control exterior design, finishes and landscaping. There are 13 HCAs in Victoria.

The City offers **financial incentives** for heritage rehabilitation in partnership with the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust and Victoria Heritage Foundation for large projects, and houses, respectively.

The City’s Heritage **Tax Incentive Program** also forgives property taxes up to 10 years for eligible projects that either convert the upper storeys of heritage buildings in the Downtown area to residential uses or perform major upgrades.

The existing OCP states a goal to intensify residential uses in the Downtown neighbourhood. Since 2001, TIP has created **303 new homes** in Downtown: 141 rental units and 162 strata units. Another 233 total units are approved in principle.

CONTINUED 

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Issues and Trends

Environmental integrity:

- The conservation of existing buildings, including built heritage, is a goal of the green building movement. Pre-1930s construction, which pre-dates technologies like air conditioning, have features that respond to climatic conditions such as entrances that block sun, retain heat, and provide natural ventilation. Heritage buildings can also be improved to reduce energy and water consumption without damage to historic fabric. The green rehabilitation of 1005 Langley Street, in Old Town, includes an underground thermal heating system.
- Re-investment in historic neighbourhoods helps to concentrate people and activities in existing areas, contributing to compact land use patterns and sustainable cities. The City reinvests in older parts of the community that pre-date car-oriented development through funding to rehabilitation grants and property tax incentives.
- Existing and projected threats of climate change, and other environmental problems, are serious threats to built heritage requiring risk management solutions that protect heritage properties. Many older buildings in Victoria need to be seismically upgraded to earthquake standards and this is required in residential conversions. The City of Victoria is beginning a disaster mitigation plan for heritage in 2010.

Economic vitality:

- Built heritage, unique to each place, is a community asset since conservation generates employment, green jobs and local businesses. For example, Eastern Ontario is expected to need over 900 stonemasons over the next decade to maintain and repair historic buildings.
- The United Nations-led Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria Partnership has developed a framework for sustainable tourism in which heritage

is one of four pillars. Heritage can attract visitors and wealth while building connections between residents around community identity and pride. The Canadian Tourism Commission projects that 2 to 3 million Canadians and 8 to 12 million Americans will participate in heritage tourism in Canada annually by 2025.

- Heritage-led revitalization has the capacity to increase property values, to renew economic vitality in Downtown business districts, and to re-brand a place as a cultural or a creative city. A study at the University of Waterloo's Heritage Resources Centre has found that the market value of properties in heritage conservation areas has remained constant in economic downturns and has risen more consistently than property near but outside such areas.

Community well-being:

- Heritage has the power to strengthen communities where citizens associate local heritage with a shared identity, attachment to place and everyday life, including minorities and people who are disadvantaged and socially excluded. Chinatown is a familiar and well-used part of the city that has continuously retained its historical function as a Chinese commercial district.
- Historic buildings are a source of affordable housing through adaptive re-use conversions, the retention of rental stock and homes, and projects that connect heritage policy and the right to shelter in community development. The upper floors of numerous heritage buildings in the Downtown core are rental units including St. Joseph's Apartments at 840 Humboldt Street.
- The presence, value and use of historic places as community amenities contribute to cultural well-being and quality of life. The City recognizes and builds upon the irreplaceable form and character of neighbourhood

heritage districts in urban design. It also supports the re-use of heritage buildings as cultural spaces, like Alix Golden Hall, which is a former church.

The City in Action: What We Do Now

The City of Victoria supports and promotes sustainable heritage by connecting land use, heritage and design guidelines to green building standards and housing policy. City funding to the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust and the Victoria Heritage Foundation retains and physically improves existing buildings and neighbourhoods. The Heritage Tax Incentive Program is continuing to increase the number of residents in the Downtown core in support of the existing OCP goal to increase social vitality in this area. The City has a 40-year record of success in heritage-led revitalization, notably including the transformation of early 20th century workers' housing into Market Square. Also, the City of Victoria recognizes the need to protect built heritage for sustainable tourism and is initiating a disaster mitigation plan for heritage in 2010.

Share your thoughts and ideas:

Existing plans, policies and incentives leverage the environmental, economic and social value of heritage and its potential impacts but policy directions and priorities could change in the future.

- What is heritage to you? Why is it important?
- How would connect heritage to sustainability?
- Are there historic places in Victoria that you would like to protect? Where?

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- Additional topic sheets are available online at www.shapeyourfuturevictoria.ca/research-facts

