

Vancouver's heritage places make a significant contribution to the cultural and economic health of the city and to its environmental sustainability

Many Vancouverites recognize this and there is strong support for the conservation of heritage places, and the retention and reuse of older buildings.

Vancouver Heritage Foundation has produced this briefing document to provide information to all candidates in the 2018 municipal election. More information on heritage topics including case studies can be found at www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org.



What is heritage?

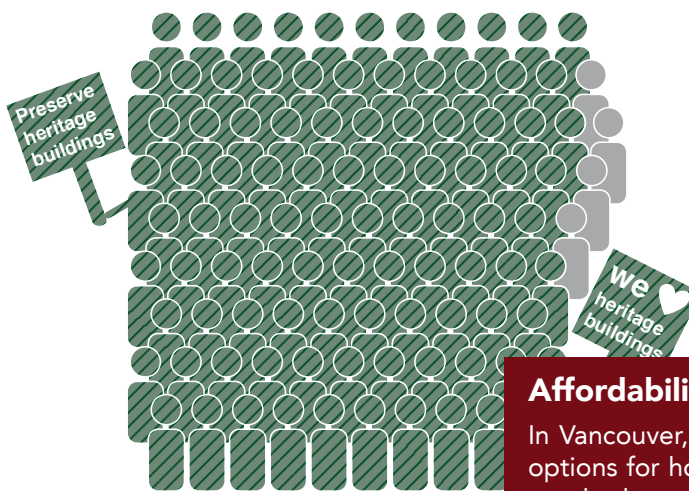
Heritage sites are defined as those that have been formally identified as having heritage value – including aesthetic, cultural, social, or historic. This can mean listing on a Heritage Register or legal protection through Heritage Designation.

Heritage is also a broad term that recognizes the buildings and places that people value. There are many older buildings and structures, parks and landscapes that have not been formally recognized but that contribute to the unique character and texture of Vancouver's streetscapes and neighbourhoods, and inspire us to learn about and understand the diverse history and cultures around us.

Historic buildings and sites are among our most treasured places for communities. Retaining heritage places does not mean creating a museum of our city, but rather finding a way to make it part of the city's future – preserving in some cases, or adapting to new uses in others.

Vancouverites support heritage

Through our public programs, VHF encounters wide-reaching interest in Vancouver's history and built heritage. Surveys have highlighted that Vancouverites want to see heritage buildings as part of the city's future and recognize their contribution to sense of place and environmental sustainability.¹



97% of respondents of all ages believe we need to preserve heritage buildings.

96% believe that heritage buildings contribute to our sense of place.

72% agree that heritage buildings contribute to an environmentally sustainable city.

Affordability

In Vancouver, many older buildings and homes provide some of the more affordable options for home and business rental space. Older buildings can often be adapted as needs change and they are prominent in some of our most vibrant neighbourhoods, providing affordable space for small businesses and start-ups, and residents of all ages.

Vancouver Heritage Foundation (VHF)

VHF is a registered charity that promotes the appreciation and conservation of historic places in Vancouver for current and future generations. VHF does this by creating opportunities and resources to learn about Vancouver's history and heritage places, and providing practical support for the successful conservation of historic buildings and sites.

VHF was established in 1992 by Mayor and Council who remain Honorary Members of the organization. Since 2013, VHF has contributed to the Heritage Action Plan process as a member of the Public Advisory Committee and by sharing information and encouraging broad public participation.

Heritage buildings and sites are valuable to Vancouver

Retaining and rehabilitating Vancouver's heritage buildings and recognizing and celebrating its heritage places supports the key pillars for a successful and sustainable city, and has the potential to deliver multiple public benefits:

Heritage supports culture and community

Heritage buildings and sites reflect the city's history and contribute to the distinct character of each neighbourhood. They create a sense of place. They showcase craftsmanship and design ideas. Rehabilitated buildings can also be a catalyst for revitalizing a neighbourhood centre, and boosting community connection and pride. This has been successful from Water Street to Mole Hill and from Strathcona to Mount Pleasant.

Heritage creates jobs and economic benefit

Rehabilitated heritage buildings are popular places to live, work and visit making them an important part of the local economy. Heritage and cultural tourism is a key tourism market segment and retaining heritage buildings is essential in attracting these visitors.² Heritage conservation projects also generate jobs in a wide variety of employment including engineers, architects, consultants, contractors and trades. Rehabilitation and maintenance are labour intensive and offer many skilled-employment opportunities compared to equivalent new construction.³

Heritage is good for the environment

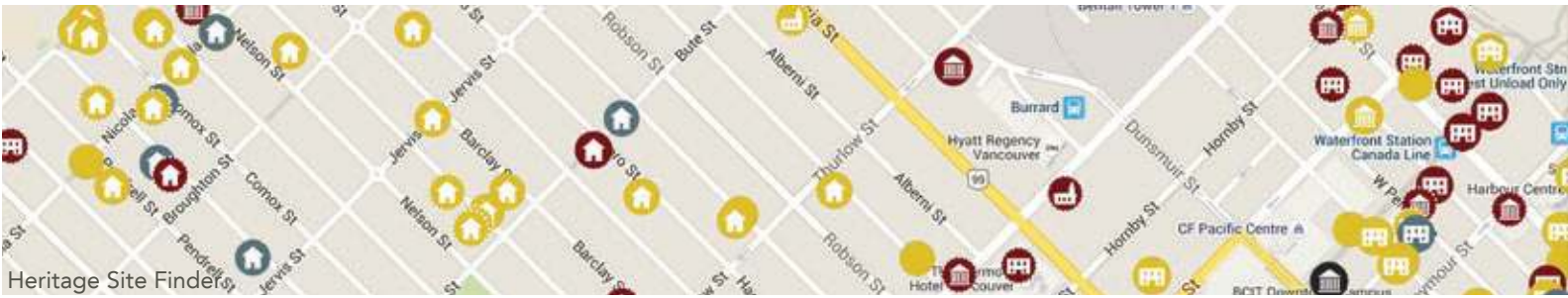
Keeping and reusing older buildings is good for the environment. Vancouver has many older buildings but rates of redevelopment are high. Demolishing a 2,500 sq. ft. house creates approximately 60 tons of waste and building new requires significant quantities of new energy-intensive materials. Studies have shown that reuse of older buildings is more sustainable than building new, more energy-efficient buildings which take decades to overcome the negative environmental impacts created during construction.⁴ The energy-efficiency of older buildings can nearly always be significantly improved. The Heritage Energy Retrofit Grant program has been assisting homeowners in improving energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions since 2015.



“The greenest building is ... one that is already built.”

-American Architect Carl Elefante FAIA

From left: Main Street shops, the Gow Block on Commercial Street, St. Georges' Junior School, Bloedel Conservatory



The City of Vancouver has a central role in safeguarding the future of historic places.

While the federal and provincial governments each have a role in recognizing historic places and supporting conservation, key opportunities sit with the municipality including protecting heritage property from demolition, and enabling and incentivizing its preservation and use.

Heritage places have a wide range of ownership from private homeowners and strata title to non-profits, commercial enterprises, and public ownership by the City, Vancouver School Board and Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation. All are stewards of significant sites and local history, and need a variety of support, encouragement and regulation to ensure a future for special places.

The City of Vancouver established its Heritage Conservation Program in 1986. This program has taken advantage of some of the key tools available to the City through provincial legislation:

Vancouver Heritage Register

The Heritage Register is an inventory of approximately 2,200 buildings, landscapes, monuments and archaeological sites across the city that have been identified to have heritage value. Lacking a comprehensive review since its completion in 1986, additions of sites in recent years have been done voluntarily by owners. A process to update the Register to reflect more fully the diversity of Vancouver’s history is underway as part of the Heritage Action Plan.

Heritage Designation

Within the Register, over 23% of sites are designated, indicating that they have been legally protected from demolition by the municipality.

The sites on the Heritage Register can be explored using the Heritage Site Finder, an online interactive map created by VHF.

Historic Areas, Heritage Conservation Areas and Zoning

Vancouver’s three Historic Areas were established by the City in the 1970s and 1980s – Gastown, Chinatown and Yaletown – providing specific regulation of the built environment. Many of the historic buildings are individually protected. Vancouver enacted its first Heritage Conservation Area in First Shaughnessy in 2015, taking the opportunity to further protect the special character and heritage value of this historic area, already carefully managed since 1982. Encouragement for retention and adaptation of historic buildings is provided in the zoning for several neighbourhoods, including Strathcona, Kitsilano Grandview and Mount Pleasant. Zoning policies can broadly impact the level of heritage conservation in a neighbourhood.

Heritage Management Tools

A review of the management tools available has been undertaken as part of the Heritage Action Plan but has not yet been brought to fruition. This includes policies, guidelines, incentives and processes. A primary tool is the Heritage Revitalization Agreement (HRA). The City can secure legal protection of a building (designation) and its conservation through negotiation of a one-time incentive package with the owner.

Other heritage management tools including grants and density transfer have been used with great effect in the past including in Gastown but are largely on hold. A renewed program could generate significant new momentum for heritage conservation city wide.

From 2004 to 2014, \$175,000 in grants leveraged over \$575,000 in private investment in conservation work by building owners.

Since 1999, Vancouver Heritage Foundation has provided support for conservation projects with a small grants program. Grants for restoration projects, repainting in historic colour schemes, conservation planning and to add a building to the Register are the only direct financial assistance available for many of the buildings and structures on the Heritage Register.



True Colours grant recipient, 2017

Current City of Vancouver initiatives for heritage

Heritage Action Plan

A process to update the City of Vancouver's Heritage Conservation Program has been underway since 2013 recognizing the unprecedented pressures now in play for redevelopment of Vancouver's built environment. Major aspects of the project include reviewing the Heritage Register, incentives and zoning.

Actions completed to date include:

- Establishing a Heritage Conservation Area for First Shaughnessy, strengthening the protection of this important historic neighbourhood, its many significant heritage homes and designed landscape.
- Completion of the Character Home Zoning Review and the introduction of zoning incentives for retention of character houses that contribute to distinctive neighbourhoods.
- Launch of the Heritage Energy Retrofit Grant program to support reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and improve comfort for older homes.

To support Vancouver's heritage places for the long term, key elements of the program still need updating including financial incentives and density transfer options as well as updating the Heritage Register. Key studies and recommendations have been developed by City staff and a consultant team.

Chinatown's Cultural Heritage

Chinatown is one of Vancouver's formally recognized Historic Areas and in 2003 the Chinatown Vision was adopted by City of Vancouver Council to guide its revitalization. The preservation of heritage buildings was identified as a key element and several programs have aimed to support their survival and continued use with the historic society buildings considered to anchor the cultural heritage of the area. In 2009, Chinatown was designated as a National Historic Site by the federal government.

In 2014, the City of Vancouver launched the Chinese Society Buildings Matching Grant program followed by the Chinese Society Legacy Program. Recognizing the great significance of historic Chinatown to Canada's story as well as its intangible heritage values for the community, the City of Vancouver is seeking to have Vancouver's Chinatown declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



First Shaughnessy



Chinatown

Key ways that the City of Vancouver can support positive outcomes for historic buildings and sites include:

- Provision of financial incentives to motivate and support private investment in more and better conservation.
- Vancouver Building By-Law accommodation of historic conditions and flexibility for conservation projects.
- Process improvements to facilitate timely and consistent support given the often-complex nature of heritage retention projects.
- Alignment with the *Standards & Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*.
- Completion of the update of the Vancouver Heritage Register.



References

Heritage Register

The Vancouver Heritage Register is the cornerstone of the City's heritage program. Adopted in 1986 (as the Heritage Inventory), it is a policy and guideline document that includes more than 2,200 buildings, landscapes, monuments and archaeological sites. To be included on the Register, sites must be identified as having heritage value and/or heritage character and be at least 20 years old.

Heritage Designation

Designation of heritage buildings as protected heritage property is a legislative tool that ensures they remain a legacy for future generations. Designation allows the City to regulate, through by-laws, the demolition, relocation and alteration of heritage property.

Built Heritage

Built heritage encompasses houses, buildings, bridges, monuments, structures and landscapes defined by their heritage value and/or heritage character.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Also referred to as "living heritage", UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage." Examples include performing arts and festivals, craft skills, language, music and food.

Heritage Value

According to the National Standards & Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, "heritage value is the aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual importance or significance for past, present, or future generations."

The Standards & Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada

A national set of principles and guidelines first launched in 2003 to guide sound conservation practice. The document has been adopted by many governments across Canada.



Rio Theatre



Lord Strathcona School



Burrard Bridge



Joy Kogawa House



Tamura House

Endnotes

- 1 Conserving Heritage Buildings in a Green & Growing City, Vancouver Heritage Foundation, 2012 and City of Vancouver (2015) "Administrative Report: Heritage Action Plan Update", p.18.
- 2 Heritage Conservation Briefs: Tourism, University of Waterloo Heritage Resource Centre, 2006.
- 3 Heritage Conservation Briefs: Job Creation, University of Waterloo Heritage Resource Centre, 2006.
- 4 The Greenest Building: Environmental Value of Building Reuse, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2011.

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Key tools to help explore Vancouver's historic places include:

- Heritage Site Finder - a map of all listed heritage properties in Vancouver
- Places That Matter - an interactive website with 125 nominated sites of cultural and community significance
- vancouverheritagefoundation.org - educational resources and events
- Heritage Vancouver Society Top 10 Endangered Sites list - annual compendium of threatened heritage sites
- City of Vancouver Heritage Conservation Program and Heritage Action Plan webpages