



Heritage and Municipal Elections: Heritage and the Environment

“The greenest building is the one already built.” - Architect Carl Elefante

Beyond the preservation of heritage resources as significant representations of the past for present and future generations to enjoy, why else should heritage be an issue in municipal candidates? Heritage conservation is linked to several other important issues for local governments and communities:

Heritage and the Environment:

The redevelopment of existing buildings is the best policy option to achieve Smart Growth and supports ecological health through the reduction in automobile dependency and use, and energy use. It also supports ecological health by preserving scenic vistas and farmlands from development and urban sprawl.¹

Rehabilitation of heritage buildings conserves energy and waste by diverting demolition materials from landfills and reducing energy and materials required for new construction.² Older neighbourhoods with a mixture of small, mixed-age buildings have significantly higher Walk Score and Transit Score ratings than neighbourhoods with large, new buildings.³

Studies conclude that building reuse almost always offers environmental savings over demolition and new construction. It can take between 10 and 80 years for a new, energy-efficient building to overcome, through more efficient operations, the negative climate change impacts that were created during the construction process.⁴

Heritage and Climate Change:

The Green Communities legislation, which amended the Local Government Act and Vancouver Charter, enables governments to address climate change in their communities, and requires local governments to have targets, policies and actions to reduce Green House Gas emissions in their Official Community Plans. Reuse of existing building stock can be part of an overall strategy for community greenhouse gas reduction.

The rehabilitation of heritage buildings reduces greenhouse gas emissions due to a reduced need for energy, raw materials, and waste production. Currently, demolition waste is between 20-30% of landfill while new building construction uses up to 40% of all new materials. Heritage buildings are composed of low energy-intensive building materials such as wood as compared to highly-intensive materials (with a high level of greenhouse gas emissions), such as vinyl.⁵

Reusing an existing building and upgrading it to maximum efficiency is almost always the best option regardless of building type and climate. Reusing existing buildings can offer an important means of avoiding unnecessary carbon outlays and help communities achieve their carbon reduction goals.⁶

¹ *Heritage Conservation Briefs: Smart Growth*, University of Waterloo Heritage Resource Centre

² *Heritage Conservation Briefs: Sustainable Development*, University of Waterloo Heritage Resource Centre

³ *Older, Smaller, Better: Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality*, National Trust for Heritage Preservation, May 2014

⁴ *The Greenest Building: Environmental Value of Building Reuse*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2011

⁵ *Heritage Conservation Briefs: Climate Change*, University of Waterloo Heritage Resource Centre

⁶ *The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2011