

Heritage BC



With the upcoming province wide municipal election in British Columbia on November 15, 2014 this is the opportunity to take your heritage questions and issues to the candidates and to educate candidates about why heritage is significant for your community.

Heritage conservation and planning are essentially municipal concerns. Part 27 of the local government act provides and describes all of the tools municipalities need to undertake heritage conservation in their communities.

Local governments have the authority to appoint a **Community Heritage Commission** to help manage and implement community heritage planning and activities. Only one third of local governments in BC have Community Heritage Commissions.

Local governments can also create a **Community Heritage Register**, an official listing of properties identified as having heritage character or heritage value to the community. A listing on the heritage register does not protect the property but recognizes it as a community heritage asset. Inclusion in a Community Heritage Register is often a first step to heritage protection and may be necessary to access incentives such as grants and permissive tax exemptions. Less than half of communities in BC currently have Community Heritage Registers. The local government can order a **heritage inspection** of a property to assess heritage value for inclusion in a Community Heritage Register. While just listing a property on a heritage register does not provide long term protection, a demolition permit can be withheld for a period of up to 60 days for a property legally identified as having heritage value by the local government.

Providing **Heritage Designation** to a property is also under the jurisdiction of local governments by means of bylaws, and can be used to conserve a heritage resource and prohibit demolition. The Heritage Designation bylaw means that the exterior of the building cannot be altered without an approved **heritage alteration permit**. A heritage alteration permit is used in place of a building permit, but it is not required for changes that do not normally require a building permit, such as painting, re-roofing, etc. The bylaw can also protect interior and landscape features, if those features are specified in the bylaw.

Heritage Conservation Areas can be created by local governments to protect and conserve groups of buildings or specific areas within the community which have identified heritage value. Heritage alteration permits are required to make changes to buildings within a Heritage Conservation Area. Only about 30 Heritage Conservation Areas exist in BC.

To encourage heritage conservation and assist property owners with conserving the heritage value of their properties, local governments can provide a range of tools and incentives including **monetary grants** for conservation work, **tax exemptions** on heritage properties being conserved, or non-monetary support like technical advice. Local governments should also include heritage conservation planning throughout official community plans to ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing heritage in their community. According to 2013 survey results, less than 10% of BC local governments have recently provided heritage conservation incentives in their communities.¹

¹ All statistics are from the *Heritage Branch Annual Survey: 2013 Summary Report, Building Capacity for Heritage Conservation Survey*, BC Heritage Branch