

# Heritage BC



June 12, 2020

Zachary D. May  
Director, Building Codes and Standards  
Building and Safety Standards Branch

Dear Zachary,

Original building fabric is frequently lost in British Columbia due to interpretations of the building code that do not consider heritage conservation as a valid objective. Furthermore, building code requirements can dissuade owners of heritage buildings from renovating, which can cause heritage resources to fall into disrepair and in some cases be demolished. The result is the loss of irreplaceable historic buildings and needless transfers to landfill.

The heritage conservation sector in British Columbia would like to see changes to the BCBC to overcome the notion that heritage conservation and building code compliance are incompatible. We want to take action to save historic fabric for future generations to enjoy, while maintaining an appropriate level of life safety requirements for current generations.

The Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes recently released a final report providing a summary of the developments and recommendations of the Joint Task Group on Alterations to Existing Buildings. Setting out a policy framework for the development of technical requirements, the Joint Task Group's Report on Alterations to Existing Buildings specifically indicates heritage building require a high degree of flexibility and are in need of additional consideration due to the unique nature of some of the buildings.

We recommend that the following items be included in the forthcoming BCBC:

- Align the definition of "Heritage Building" with that of the City of Vancouver to be reviewed and supported by a committee of heritage professionals chosen by the heritage sector. This definition should be high-level and avoid terminology that is not used by all Authorities Having Jurisdiction (ex. "Heritage Designated Building"). Additionally, this definition should not fix heritage with a date, which would be counter to the current understanding and practice of heritage.
- Addition of definition of "Existing Building" to differentiate existing buildings from heritage buildings. Heritage buildings, which have distinguishing values, require greater consideration when renovating, and exemptions sought for heritage buildings may not need to be considered for existing buildings.
- Distinguish between *Heritage Buildings* and *Existing Buildings* in Division A 1.1.1.1.
  - Make it clear that upgrades required for *Existing* and *Heritage Buildings* are governed in entirety by a newly created Part 11, and that Part 3 or Part 9 is for new construction only.
  - New construction within *Existing* and *Heritage Buildings* must comply with Part 3 or Part 9, excluding conservation work to preserve or repair heritage components, which would be governed by the new Part 11.
- Cite *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (Parks Canada 2010) and *Building Resilience Practical Guidelines for the Sustainable Rehabilitation of Buildings in Canada* (2016) in Division B 1.3.1.2.
- Heritage conservation must become an objective of the building code. Develop Objectives and Functional Statements to support heritage conservation in conformance with the *Standards and Guidelines*.

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Objectives and Functional Statements relating to heritage conservation should be reviewed and supported by a committee of heritage professionals chosen by the heritage sector.

- Creation of a new Part 11 that distinguishes between *Heritage Buildings* and *Existing Buildings*.
  - Add a new Part 11 to the BCBC based, in part, on existing codes which address upgrade requirements for existing buildings such as Part 11 the Vancouver Building By-law and Part 11 Ontario Building Code. Special provisions for heritage buildings as outlined in this letter should be included in the BCBC's new Part 11.
  - All requirements and exemptions made available for *Heritage Buildings* should be consolidated in Part 11, rather than being dispersed throughout the building code.
  - Inspiration can be taken from Section 3.8 of Division B, in that Part 11 can be subdivided into a general subsection for *Existing* and *Heritage Buildings*, along with a separate subsection that deals exclusively with code conformance items only applicable to *Heritage Buildings*.
  - The subsection dealing exclusively with code requirements for *Heritage Buildings* should focus on exemptions and alternative solutions rather than introducing more requirements and regulations. Give AHJs the tools they need to allow for heritage conservation to be done right and build capacity so that the BCBC will be applied to a greater range of common building issues not currently addressed by building codes.
  - Require work on *Heritage Buildings* to be in conformance with the *Standards and Guidelines* in the new Part 11.
  - The heritage conservation sector recognizes the need to protect life safety. Therefore, all requirements and exemptions for *Heritage Buildings* must provide an acceptable standard of life safety, while simultaneously allowing the retention of historic building fabric.
  - In situations where existing conditions in *Heritage Buildings* cannot be brought up to full building code compliance, consider allowing improvement instead of full compliance.
  - Strategic exemptions to structural, seismic and fire safety upgrades should enable the prevention of losses due to structural failure, collapse during an earthquake, and preventable fire damage.
- Heritage conservation is a sustainability practice.
  - *Heritage Buildings* require a case-by-case scrutiny to determine an appropriate balance between energy performance and the conservation of historic fabric.
  - Requiring pre-existing building components and systems to be replaced when they are still functional can negate the sustainable benefits of heritage conservation.
  - The building code's sustainability strategy should not focus exclusively on operational energy efficiency but should also consider embodied energy and the inherent carbon savings that come with heritage conservation.
- Conservation work, including Preservation, Restoration and Rehabilitation and repair of heritage elements (windows, stairs, etc.) should not trigger full compliance with Part 3 and Part 9. Heritage building components should be conserved per the best practices outlined in the *Standards and Guidelines*, which includes replacement and reconstruction when original fabric cannot be repaired. New construction can and must conform to Part 3 or Part 9, but conservation work should be governed by Part 11.
  - Example 1: Adding restrictors to restrict the opening of a window should not trigger the whole window to be in compliance with Part 3 or Part 9 and Part 5. Only the restrictors would need to comply with Part 3 or 9.



- Example 2: The balustrade of an existing staircase in a *Heritage Building* needs to be repaired. The balustrade is restored using a combination of original and new wood and can be built to the original design rather than to Part 3 or Part 9 requirements.

In closing, we wish to underscore the growing evidence that reveals buildings are the largest single source of energy use, waste, and emission into the atmosphere. This tells us the rehabilitation of existing buildings and the conservation of heritage buildings are significant contributors to creating a sustainable built environment and resilient communities.

Best practices for building retrofit and rehabilitation should take into account a building's contribution to the community's sense of place, and technologies, practices, and durable and healthy materials should be incorporated in ways that do not adversely affect the building's character or heritage value.

Older buildings often contain many features that provide a built-in measure of inherent sustainability. These characteristics can be ascribed largely to the avoided impact they have on the environment. This includes such holistic and long-term factors as the embodied energy and embodied carbon older buildings represent. Inherent sustainability also often refers to the sustainability of traditional building design and construction techniques, durable and/or local materials, repairable assemblies, and longer-term life planning.

Improving the performance of BC's existing building stock is singularly important in mitigating climate change and in achieving provincial, national and international goals related to energy consumption, carbon footprint, and greenhouse gas emissions.

The recommendations were prepared in consultation with architects, engineers, and heritage consultants working in BC and it is delivered on behalf of more than 40 professionals.

We thank you for your consideration and we trust our recommendations will lead to improved conditions for conservation that supports the retention of irreplaceable historic buildings and not needless transfers to landfill.

Sincerely,

Paul Gravett  
Executive Director