

# OCP 1-Pager Series: Built Heritage

We all value Nelson's heritage buildings and feel. History shows that taking built heritage for granted is a mistake: without protections and other initiatives, a neighbourhood's heritage can slowly be eroded as, one by one, buildings are modified without regard for their heritage value, or even demolished or left to decay. Nelsonites have fought hard to 'uncover' and protect heritage buildings after years of neglect. Municipalities have several tools at their disposal for heritage building conservation. However, protections can cost time and money for the City and property owners alike. Owners may not have the money for upkeep or restoration, or there may be strong disagreement about to conserve and how. Conservation requires a great deal of expertise, devotion, and dialogue with the community in order to establish what we mean by heritage and how far we are willing to go to protect it.

## What is Nelson already doing for heritage conservation?

- We have identified hundreds of places with heritage interest. Only a dozen have enforceable heritage designation bylaw. The railway station is the only with federal designation as well, meaning that Parks Canada and the City must approve any changes.
- City Council approved a detailed Heritage Master Plan in 2022.
- The City has a Heritage Working Group consisting of volunteer heritage experts.
- The group: advises the City on heritage matters, has completed over 70 Statements of Significance concerning heritage sites; and manages the Nelson Heritage Award.
- The Official Community Plan sets the tone for the importance of heritage conservation to the community, in addition to containing dozens of pages of detailed heritage design guidelines applicable to heritage designated buildings as well as all of Baker Street.



## What else can municipalities do to protect heritage?

- Heritage Revitalization Agreements are a form of site-specific zoning to support conservation by allowing variances outside of what could possibly be permitted within the zoning of the site.
- Grants and loans to support conservation (at the expense of the municipality)
- Heritage Conservation Areas are a blanket heritage designation for an entire area. They work best where an entire area has strong, identifiable character-defining elements that are best protected on a neighbourhood scale, rather than only looking at individual buildings. They can also include standards of maintenance regulations.
- Revitalization Tax Exemptions offer partial tax relief for up to 10 years to offset heritage rehabilitation costs that meet conservation standards.

## But it's not that easy: there are tough decisions to make

We may all agree on the importance of heritage buildings to our community, but we probably don't all agree on how to do it. When we get into the details, there are a lot of tough decisions to make. First of all, what counts as "heritage"? How do we collectively decide where the lines are between "old" and "new", and "heritage" and just an old building? What say does the property owner have in determining heritage status, or is it imposed by the community? Giving buildings and entire neighbourhoods heritage designation limits what an owner can do with their property. The more we protect heritage, the more we constraints we impose on property, renovation, and redevelopment. Heritage homes are a prized, sought-after market and depending on the type of designation granted and many other factors, heritage status can raise or reduce property values.

### Did you know...

**If demolished or destroyed, most heritage buildings couldn't be rebuilt to their current form, size, and footprint. Today's zoning, parking & building code requirements would make any reconstruction attempt completely unrecognizable, in most cases.**

Then we need to define what heritage 'should look like'. There is much disagreement about what defines heritage look, and what exactly should and should not be allowed during renovation. If designing a new building in a heritage area, what should it look like? Some argue for replication, others will say that it should 'respect' surrounding heritage buildings by emulating certain traits while stopping short of imitation. And yet others will say that a new building, regardless of context, should look new, fully embracing its era, in the hopes that one day early 21st-century buildings will also be considered heritage worthy of protection.

## Opportunities



### Heritage Defines Us and our Economy -

It's hard to imagine Nelson without its heritage feel. We all stand to benefit from taking collective action to protect protect the city's charm. Heritage helps fuel area tourism. Compromises will need to be made, and heritage advocates and heritage building owners will not always agree, but there are important conversations to be had.



### Environmentally sustainable -

The greenest building is one that already exists. Maintaining existing buildings is an effective climate strategy.

## Project Information

OCP Update: [Nelson2050.ca](http://Nelson2050.ca)

Email: [OCP@nelson.ca](mailto:OCP@nelson.ca)

## Challenges



**Costs** - Conserving and renovating heritage buildings in accordance with strict heritage guidelines can be costly. Most owners adore the heritage value of their building, but if they don't have the means to pay, the City is often asked to create incentive programs to help share the cost, at the cost of all taxpayers. Insurance can also be a challenge, although this is mostly because insurance providers overestimate the heavy handedness of the heritage designation actually in place.



**Time and Expertise** - Large cities tend to have the best heritage programs because they have the capacity to have heritage specialists on staff. Nelson is not (yet) there. While we are fortunate to have well-educated experts on our volunteer Heritage Working Group, it is extremely challenging to properly evaluate heritage alternation applications without in-house heritage experts.



### Balancing Conservation with Development Rights -

Defining how far heritage building owners can go in renovating and adapting their building to their needs is challenging. Can they build a garage or an addition to expand the home, and if so, what must it look like? And what about demolition?

## Initiatives Snapshot

### Nelson's Heritage Master Plan (2022)

Our heritage plan provides over 100 pages of information, recommendations, policy tools, and other resources to help guide our future heritage planning. The document contains expert information and best practices; its recommendations have not yet been subject to public engagement.

### Vancouver's Heritage Density Transfer Program

If a developer agrees to rehabilitate and legally protect heritage buildings on their site, the City allows them the chance to increase the density of their project, and even to transfer the 'gained' density to another site, or to sell it to another developer.