

Heritage Insights

Editor's Note: *The following is an excerpt from Natalie Bull's address to delegates at the Heritage Canada Foundation's 2005 conference in Regina. Natalie became the executive director of the Foundation in October 2005.*

Let me tell you the strange dream I had recently about the old place I own in rural New Brunswick. I often have dreams — even nightmares — about this property and its future, but this one was different. In my dream, there was no longer any risk that a gas station would be built next door. Instead, my neighbour had built a new house that was wonderfully contemporary, but also respectful of the traditional setbacks and building forms that characterize the river valley. In my dream, my neighbour's architect told me she had studied rehabilitation and contextual design as a required part of her architecture degree. In my dream, my general contractor made a good living working on old buildings and had ready access to workers with traditional carpentry and masonry skills. In my dream, my project to rehabilitate the old farmhouse was supported by tax incentives, and won an award for sustainable design because I repaired and upgraded my old windows and storms instead of replacing them with vinyl windows.



But of course, this was only a dream. The reality is much different: Sprawl and big-box retail are threatening many rural landscapes and main streets. Canadian architecture and engineering students are not required to study the repair and rehabilitation of existing buildings, and many regions of this country have very limited access to trades people who specialize in repairing and upgrading traditional buildings. Tax regimes at the federal level do not encourage us to rehabilitate existing buildings, even though such incentives exist to support many other sectors and industries. And the replacement window industry has a much louder voice than the proponents of a more sustainable approach to windows and energy conservation.

The Heritage Canada Foundation plays an important role in making dreams like mine a reality, by bringing national attention to the barriers that exist in the conservation of our historic places, and by sharing the success stories of activists, advocates, and conservation practitioners in real Canadian communities. I feel privileged to join HCF as executive director, and to share your vision of a Canada where historic places are recognized as assets that contribute to a unique sense of place, a healthy economy and a sustainable future.