

The Heritage Canada Foundation Releases Its Top 10 Most Endangered Places List!

The second annual Top 10 List of endangered places in Canada was compiled from those stories and news items that we have been following and reporting on throughout the year. This selection, presented in alphabetical order, represents only some of the conservation challenges facing hundreds of communities in Canada — be it neglect, lack of funds, not enforcing legislation or inappropriate development. Thank you to the many people who we consulted during the compilation of this list.

ALMA COLLEGE, ST. THOMAS, ONTARIO

For 129 years, the distinctive high Victorian Gothic Revival architecture of Alma College has stood proudly in St. Thomas, Ontario. Sadly, when the private boarding school for girls closed in 1994, the buildings were abandoned. In 1998, Brian Squires, president of Alma Heritage Estates, a family consortium consisting of Squires and the Zubick family of London, Ontario, purchased Alma College with the aim of redeveloping it as a retirement village. The plans had included the preservation of the heritage designated main block.



Alma College, St. Thomas, Ontario

Today, time is running out for this landmark structure. On December 23 the owners submitted an application to demolish the main building.

The MHC (Municipal Heritage Committee) has recommended that the permit request be denied. On February 13 city council directed the city management board to provide more information on Section 35.5 of the *Ontario Heritage Act* that prescribes minimum standards for the maintenance of heritage properties, no later than March 7.

Earlier plans to redevelop Alma College into 66 luxury retirement suites have fallen through. After five years of feasibility studies and discussions with city council, the developer believed he had a commitment from the city to build its own senior's complex. It turned out council did not want to take the financial risk.

An independent report concluded that despite water damage the building was structurally sound. In the meantime, Mr. Squires proceeded to remove the interior walls and many of the windows leaving parts of it open to weather and vandals.

Alma College is located on a 10 acre site of prime real estate in downtown St. Thomas. The city can still deny the application and enforce the minimum standards for maintenance. The *Ontario Municipal Act* permits municipalities to offer an owner tax relief of between 10% and 40%.

BATA SHOE HEADQUARTERS, TORONTO, ONTARIO

Last September, Toronto city council voted 36-1 to reject a special heritage designation for North York's former Bata shoe headquarters, a hallmark of modern architecture designed by prominent Toronto architect John C. Parkin.

This decision made it possible for the 40-year-old building to be demolished. It sits on the site of an Aga Khan Council of Canada proposed complex that would include an Ismaili spiritual centre, a museum of

rare Islamic art and a public park.

The Bata building has been long recognized as a fine example of 1960s-era Modern Movement architecture. Recently, the Toronto Society of Architects identified the building as one of 96 significant buildings and public spaces in Toronto built between 1953 and 2003.

Many heritage activists, architects and planners are lamenting the loss of good examples of mid-century modern design and the role it played in the original site planning for the area of Don Mills.

A motion was tabled at city council that requires the Aga Khan Council to defer demolition of the Bata building until site plans are approved and a building permit obtained.

BELL BARN, INDIAN HEAD, SASKATCHEWAN

Built by Major William Bell in 1882, the round fieldstone Bell Barn is one of Saskatchewan's oldest agricultural buildings. Located just north of Indian Head it is all that remains from Bell's attempt to establish a corporate farm in the Canadian West.

Built with evenly spaced gun ports around its circumference and a central silo that doubled as a lookout tower the 20-metre-diameter barn could store 4,000 bushels of oats, 100 tons of hay, and housed an office. Sadly, it is now in jeopardy of disappearing from the Prairie landscape. Like so many other agricultural structures from the province's past it is simply falling apart.



Grange Bell, Indian Head
(Saskatchewan)

A few local activists are trying to have the barn designated a national historic site and to obtain federal funding to restore the fieldstone building. But to date they have been unsuccessful.

Today the barn sits on a privately owned 10-acre farm. The owner is worried that the harsh Prairie winters and wind will eventually turn the field stone barn into a pile of rubble. Ravaged by harsh weather and neglect survival of the barn now depends on people's passion to preserve such buildings and the financing to make it possible.

BURRARD BRIDGE, VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Vancouver's newly elected city council wasted no time in overturning the previous council's decision which called for a 12-month trial that would reallocate cyclist and pedestrian traffic on the city's historic Burrard Bridge to curb lanes. If successful, the trial would have avoided the need to widen the bridge, saving taxpayers at least \$25 million in current estimated construction costs. Now, however, the new council has instructed city staff to prepare final plans for the construction of massive outrigger structures that would radically alter the appearance of this important Art Deco landmark.

Completed in 1932 to provide a high-level crossing to western Vancouver neighbourhoods, the bridge is considered a triumph of civic architecture and a key gateway structure. Unifying the towers and decorative elements are heavy concrete railings which were originally topped by decorative street lamps. Regrettably, the city's current decision would result in their removal to make way for new ones that would be pushed out to the edges of the new sidewalks. Heritage groups fear that without its original railings, the bridge would lose its strong edges and its defining architectural features would be isolated.

Heritage Vancouver is urging city councillors to consider viable alternatives before rushing to implement a plan that will permanently disfigure this landmark. One possible solution — a structure retrofitted underneath the bridge — previously made the city's shortlist.

LESSARD HOUSE, EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Built in 1913, the Queen Anne style house with large attic gable, distinctive round tower and wrap around verandah is one of many which once lined Victoria Avenue (now 100th). It is also noteworthy for its builder and first occupant, Prosper Edmond Lessard, who made his mark in business with such ventures as the Great Western Garment Co. Ltd. He also served in the Provincial Legislature and the federal Senate.

When the river valley frontage was rezoned high-rise as part of a larger redevelopment plan for the city some ten years ago, much of the built heritage along the street was demolished to make way for new condominiums and high-rise apartments.

Last year, WAM Development Group applied to demolish Lessard House to raise a six-storey condo project. A number of options were presented by city planning staff including incorporating the house into the new development or moving it to a new location. Because the house has only a "B" listing on Edmonton's historical resources registry, the city could not enforce preservation.

The demolition permit was issued last November — despite public outcry. As is so often the case, outdated planning decisions and zoning bylaws as well as weak legislation stack up against preservation.

To date the house remains standing and the Community Group of Oliver is looking to the province for a matching grant to help identify the important heritage resources in the area and hopefully have them designated and the area rezoned.

THE LISTER BLOCK, HAMILTON, ONTARIO

With the proposal to redevelop the Lister Block at least six months behind schedule it is feared that Hamilton's oldest surviving major retail/office complex, with a large interior arcade and impressive example of the decorative use of terra cotta, may yet be demolished.

For nearly 15 years the six-storey downtown landmark built in 1913 has been left vacant and abandoned. Today its badly deteriorated condition attests to that neglect.

Described as "an icon of everything that has gone wrong with Hamilton's downtown" the Lister tells a story of owner abuse and municipal negligence that is repeated in cities across the country.

Last May, a 15-year, \$30 million lease was approved by city council guaranteeing a tenant for the Lister. According to LIUNA (Laborers' International Union of North America),

who purchased the site in 1999, it was the lack of a "Triple A" tenant that had delayed its development plans for the site; financial institutions would not invest without that guarantee. (In 2000, a revitalization plan fell through when Ottawa chose to construct a new federal building instead of using the Lister).

According to councillor Bob Bratina, the city's leasing agreement with LIUNA was conditional on the

developer preserving the building. A LIUNA representative states that no formal lease has been signed and that at no point did it state that the building would be preserved.

It's a familiar story: The owner/developer does not maintain the building and it slowly deteriorates over time; municipal property taxes are not paid; the city does not enforce the property standards bylaw; and financing of improvements are dependent upon a guaranteed tenant. A potential asset soon becomes a liability.

OFFICERS' MESS AND QUARTERS, WORK POINT MILITARY BASE, ESQUIMALT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Built in 1888 on a short spit of land extending into the entrance of Victoria Harbour, the building has been declared surplus to military needs and a candidate for demolition or relocation. It is the last Canadian built Officers' Mess of its kind in Canada. It has federal "recognized" heritage status and a bronze heritage designation plaque by the Township of Esquimalt.

In 1982, a survey of pre-1939 military heritage buildings determined it to be the fourth most important building out of over 100 surveyed. A 2001 report for CFB Esquimalt noted that "the buildings in the area are representative of Royal Engineers design and may have historical value that must be considered in a master plan of the area."

To date, the Department of National Defence has refused to alleviate neighbourhood fears of a massive waterfront development. The City of Esquimalt has pointed out that any future use of the site should fit in with community plans.

With its commanding presence marking the entrance to Victoria Harbour and its significant connection to the history of defensive structures along the Pacific Coast, heritage and cultural groups have been working tirelessly to save this building in situ and have suggested possible uses for it — including its conversion into a visual arts complex. If moved, it will become "defrocked" of all its heritage status jeopardizing possible federal funding. An application to have it designated as a national historic site has been sent to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, but this needs the signature of the landlord, DND.

SOUTHWEST POINT LIGHTHOUSE, ANTICOSTI ISLAND, QUEBEC

Dating from 1831, this magnificent 24 m. tall stone tower with lantern and gallery originally painted white with two horizontal red bands is falling quickly into ruin. It is easily a match to scores of stone towers now preserved in the United States.

Inactive since the early 1990s, this endangered lighthouse offers a textbook example of the inadequacy of Canadian government lighthouse preservation. Only 3% of Canadian lighthouses have genuine heritage protection and only 12% have even partial protection.

Current federal policy is to sell historic lighthouses off to the highest bidder. Many that are still owned by the Canadian government are severely neglected due to the funding cuts at the Canadian Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard abandoned the Southwest Point historic lighthouse and razed its keepers houses to let it lie rotting. Action is needed now to prevent the loss of the lighthouse later.

The new federal government has the opportunity to reintroduce The *Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act* which was at Second Reading in the House of Commons before the government was dissolved in 2005.

TOWERS THREATEN CITADEL VIEWS AND HISTORIC DISTRICT, HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

United Gulf Development Ltd. has applied for a development agreement to permit the construction of two 27-storey towers on the site bounded by Hollis, Sackville and Granville Streets in downtown Halifax that, if constructed, would threaten a historic district and views to the landmark Citadel Hill.

City council recently approved in principle the designation of the city's first planned heritage district, the Barrington heritage conservation district, made up of 26 low-scale registered heritage buildings about one-eighth the height of the proposed towers that would overshadow the area (the density would be three times greater than allowed in the high density residential R-3 zone in Halifax). The proposal also contravenes policies of the Municipal Development Plan including those that protect views from Citadel Hill and stipulate that new construction should "reinforce" the proportions of adjacent heritage buildings. The heritage community has come out strongly against the plan and although the city's heritage advisory committee has recommended against the project to city council, the planning department is in favour of the development. The matter now goes before city council on February 28. Should the city support the development the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia will likely appeal the decision to the utility and review board.

YORK STREET TRAIN STATION, FREDERICTON, NEW BRUNSWICK

Once a busy transportation hub, today Fredericton's York Street railway station's windows are boarded up, its roof is in serious disrepair and the decorative brackets are rotting.

In response to such deterioration and the apparent neglect by its owners, J.D. Irving Limited, the Friends of the Fredericton Railway, a small community group of architects, engineers and developers, was established to raise community support and financial assistance to restore the 1923 Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) station — one of only two railway stations left on the Fredericton Branch Line and one of the last remaining brick stations in New Brunswick.

Working together with the Fredericton Heritage Trust and the Fredericton Trails Coalition the Friends have developed a business plan for the station that identifies a cost of \$1.5 million to bring the station back to its former condition. The plan includes the involvement of J.D. Irving Limited but despite numerous communications with them the group is no closer to achieving its goal of restoring the station. The City of Fredericton has shown some commitment by purchasing portions of the right of way leading to the station.

The Heritage Railway Station Protection Act of 1985, has done much to protect Canadian railway stations, but it cannot protect them from demolition by neglect. This station is deteriorating rapidly and needs the support of the community, the city, and most importantly its owner before it is too late.

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