



CITY OF VANCOUVER

Community Services

Planning: Current Planning

City of
VancouverSearch
Help

Heritage Conservation Program Information

What is the Heritage
Register?

How was the Heritage
Register Completed?

What do the A, B, & C
Evaluation Categories Mean?

Can "Registered" Buildings
Be Altered or Demolished?

How Are Sites Added to the
Heritage Register?

What is a Recent Landmark?

What is the difference
between "Designation" and
the Heritage Register?

View the Register [PDF]

Additional Links

Evaluation Methodology

Research Guide for
Nominations to
the Register

Vancouver
Heritage Register
Nomination Form

[Community Services](#)
[Home](#)

The Vancouver Heritage Register

What is the Vancouver Heritage Register?

The [Vancouver Heritage Register](#) [PDF] is the cornerstone of the City's Heritage program. Adopted in 1986 (then known as the Heritage Inventory), it is a policy and guideline document which includes approximately 2,150 buildings, and 131

landscapes, monuments and archaeological sites. To be included on the Register, sites must be identified as having heritage value and/or heritage character and be at least 20 years old. The Register is a planning tool which provides a valuable record of Vancouver's heritage.

How Was the Heritage Register Completed and How Are Buildings Evaluated?

A comprehensive architectural survey of the city was completed by a study team that looked at every street in the City to identify notable buildings. This work, together with additional historical research on the buildings, was used to evaluate each building according to the following criteria: (1) architectural significance; (2) historical significance; (3) the extent to which the original context of the building and its surroundings remain; and (4) the degree of alteration to the exterior of the building.

To be included on the Heritage Register, a site is evaluated as outlined above, and in so doing it must be identified as having heritage value and/or heritage character. Heritage value means historical, cultural, aesthetic, scientific or educational worth. Heritage character means the overall effect produced by traits or features which give a property or an area its distinctive quality. There can be different degrees and kinds of value and character. A rare example of a once-common building type may be of considerable value in one neighbourhood over a similar building in another area where that building type is more prevalent.

What do the "A", "B" and "C" Evaluation Categories Mean?

These categories are general classifications and are based on any combination of historic, architectural, cultural, spiritual, scientific or social values.

Vancouver Schools: Establishing Their Heritage Value

The City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board are working together to establish the community heritage values of Vancouver public schools.

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A - Primary Significance

Represents the best examples of a style or type of building; may be associated with a person or event of significance.

B - Significant

Represents good examples of a particular style or type, either individually or collectively; may have some documented historical or cultural significance in a neighbourhood.

C - Contextual or Character

Represents those buildings that contribute to the historic character of an area or streetscape, usually found in groupings of more than one building but may also be of individual importance.

While the category is a useful reference, the key is that whichever category a building is placed under, it has heritage value.

Can Registered Buildings be Altered or Demolished? Does a Building's "A", "B" or "C" Category Affect How It Is Treated?

A building which is listed on the Heritage Register can be altered on the exterior. However, when considering alterations, the way in which the exterior is treated should not depend on whether it is an "A", "B" or "C". In other words, the heritage value of each building on the Heritage Register is formally recognized and the elements that define its character should be afforded the same level of respect. If a permit is required for the alteration, it will be referred to heritage staff for comments as part of the permit process.

Council's "Heritage Polices and Guidelines" describe Council's intent with respect to heritage properties listed on the Vancouver Heritage Register (VHR). Before a permit can be issued to demolish a building on the VHR, development and building permits for the new development must first be obtained. In this period staff would explore retention options with the applicant. Often applicants do not know all the options and incentives/bonuses which are applicable if a heritage building is retained. These can include floor area bonuses and relaxations in height, setbacks, parking, etc. Heritage incentives are meant to be used to successfully find alternatives to the demolition of heritage buildings to the satisfaction of both the property owner and the city.

In addition to the process described above, Council policy specifies that if a building is listed in the "A" category on the VHR and demolition is sought by the owner, then:

"Council has instructed that, prior to consideration of a proposal for the demolition of an "A" building, a formal independent consultant's report on the physical condition and economic viability of retaining the building should be reviewed by the Director of Planning. The consultant's report is to be carried out at the expense of the applicant."

The Planning Department's practice in this regard has been to advise Council of the demolition request for an "A" listed building and seek their advice. For all other buildings on the Vancouver Heritage Register, if the development application is "outright" with respect to use and regulation, and there is no voluntary interest in keeping the building by the owner (or prospective owner) then the heritage hold would be removed and the demolition application process would proceed. The process typically takes one to three weeks.

For applications that seek a "conditional" development with respect to use or regulation, (e.g. a single family dwelling containing a secondary suite) the City is under no obligation to approve an application that seeks the demolition of a building on the VHR. Instead, Council's policy instructs staff to give special consideration through applying zoning incentives to applications that seek the retention of a resource on the Heritage Register. It can take one to six months to complete the permitting process to retain the heritage building, depending on the complexity of the site, development requested and the level of negotiation.

In addition to the procedures described above, the Vancouver Charter (sections 583 and 589) permits Council to delay the demolition approval of a building either on the Heritage Register or a building that "may be heritage property", through temporary protection for a period of 120 days. During this time, a heritage inspection may be ordered (at the owners expense) to assess the heritage value of the site.

How are Sites Added to the Vancouver Heritage Register?

When the original Heritage Register was adopted in 1986, Council supported a public nomination program whereby sites would be nominated for addition to the Register. Public nominations are reviewed by heritage staff who prepare an evaluation form for the site. The evaluation is then reviewed by the Vancouver Heritage Commission. If the person nominating the building is not the owner, then consultation with the owner must occur to determine whether or not the owner is supportive of the nomination. Sites with sufficient heritage value or character are forwarded to Council for consideration in amending the Register. If approved, the site is added to the Register.

What is a Recent Landmark?

When the Heritage Register was initially conceived it only included buildings that were constructed before 1940. However, the post-war era in Vancouver produced an important collection of buildings with local, regional and national significance noted for their innovative design, technological features and social significance. The Recent Landmarks Program was initiated to identify the most important buildings from this period. Recent Landmark buildings, that are at least 20 years old and meet the same evaluation criteria for Register properties, can be considered for inclusion in the Register. A list of 100 buildings was identified for possible inclusion in the Heritage Register. To date, 22 of these buildings have been added to the Register. Five of these are also protected through designation: the former BC Hydro building, the former Vancouver Public Library, the Gardner House in Southlands, and the Dodek House in Oakridge, and the Evergreen Building.

What is the Difference Between "Designation" and the Heritage Register?

Buildings on the Heritage Register are sometimes referred to as "designated." However, the Heritage Register and heritage designation are entirely separate classifications. Heritage designation is a legal means of heritage protection. It allows the City to regulate, by By-law, the demolition, relocation and alteration of heritage property. Interior features can also be protected by designation. Changes to a designated site require a Heritage Alteration Permit, while changes to the exterior of a building on the Heritage Register do not require such a permit.* Designations are noted on the property title; the Heritage Register is not.

* (However, if work on a building on the Heritage Register requires a permit - development/building permit, sign permit, etc. - the permit will be referred to Heritage staff for comments.)

Questions or Comments? E-mail: planning@city.vancouver.bc.ca

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