



April 24, 2023

Re: Heritage Conservation Phase II Polices

Heritage Regina would like to acknowledge the work of this Council and Administration that support the preservation of our city's historic properties and spaces. The last seven years have seen an enormous change in the community's attitudes towards our historic buildings and a greater understanding of their importance. After some very adversarial situations, and acknowledging that heritage properties need protection, council and administration set out to find the best way forward that would maintain property owner autonomy while supporting preservation.

Council and Administration listened to the experts they hired to provide advice on heritage policy. Starting with a complete revamp of how heritage properties were identified and assessed, moving into a commitment to complete heritage reviews on properties previously considered significant, to a revamp of the incentives program that provides a variety of options in support of property owners and to establish a committee of experts to assist administration. This has given us a modern heritage policy that respects property owners, respects our history, supports restoration and reuse, promotes economic viability of our downtown and helps to protect against the negative environmental impacts of demolition of buildings whose lives can be extended. We are in the final and perhaps the most significant phase of Heritage Policy development, the Maintenance Policy.

Working from the premise that buildings determined to be of historical significance to our community are a community asset as well as an asset of the owner, it is important to take proactive steps to ensure the longevity of these buildings. The maintenance policy allows for the identification of items that need attention and the incentives policy supports the owner in making those repairs. The expectations are only slightly different from those found in the Community Standards Bylaw, but very importantly focus on the heritage defining elements of the building façade and have the potential to greatly reduce situations of demolition by neglect. Supporting the owner with advice, incentives, referrals etc., makes administration a partner in the process.

It is troubling that a property owner who has been before this council after neglecting a heritage building into complete disrepair, is now suggesting a maintenance policy should not be applied to all heritage buildings. The argument that the policy should not apply to properties that are not intended to be used in their current state speaks directly to the reason why we need a maintenance policy.

Vacancy is one of the greatest threats to heritage buildings. Unused buildings can quickly deteriorate and become unsafe, contributing to crime in the area and impacting the value of surrounding properties, leading to streets, blocks and whole areas becoming derelict. The downtown section of Broad Street is an example of urban decay that starts with vacant buildings and owners waiting for the right time or right price to maximize profits from their investments.

Purchasing a designated heritage property comes with responsibilities. Leaving that property sitting unattended and at the whim of the elements while deciding on some future project is irresponsible and should no longer be a viable business decision. It might be fair to exempt some maintenance standards if immediately after purchase a demo permit is submitted along with a viable plan for redevelopment. Leaving a building to sit and deteriorate until whatever other considerations fall into place cannot be an option. The proposed heritage policy will at a minimum ensure that any vacant heritage buildings will be cared for, paving the way for future restoration, reuse or at a minimum, salvage of significant elements and features for use elsewhere. The policy does not stop a heritage building owner from seeking a demolition permit at any time, but it does stop them from creating a scenario whereby a building is willfully left to deteriorate to the point of no return.

It should be said that most of our heritage property owners are doing a good job maintaining the character defining elements of their buildings. A maintenance policy therefore would be used to help them to prioritize future repairs, support their efforts and protect the investments the city makes in heritage buildings through the incentive program. This policy will, however, help the community to identify what work is needed on the buildings that we know have been suffering at the hands of owners who either willfully neglect them or for some other reason are unable to manage the repairs. The policy will help to determine the level of support needed by those owners. The maintenance policy requires minimal financial outlay for the city and its overall reach to citizens is minimal as there are only currently only 104 designated properties in the city and administration indicates that only 9 of those properties require repairs.

Finally, Heritage Regina strongly supports the plaque program. The visual identification of a heritage property is an excellent way to demonstrate our pride of place and encourage support for heritage. Without the plaque program there is no way for the community and visitors to see that we value our heritage and want to tell the stories of our past. Without plaques, nobody knows where the heritage buildings are in the city and there is no readily available information on the history of these individual sites. It is a logical next step in sharing our heritage assets with the entire community.

We are in support of the Heritage Conservation Phase II Policies and are happy to answer any other questions you might have.

Sincerely,



Jackie Schmidt
Heritage Regina