



HERITAGE TRUST OF NOVA SCOTIA

PRESERVING NOVA SCOTIA'S BUILT HERITAGE

February 20, 2023 – Heritage Day

Hon. Pat Dunn
Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage / African Nova Scotian Affairs
Province of Nova Scotia

Dear Minister Dunn,

In November 2022, Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia representatives met with you and presented “The Case for Heritage.” Based on the Province’s own stated economic, environmental and social goals for Nova Scotia, this presentation outlined why heritage matters to our province and how built heritage can directly assist the government in achieving these goals.

This letter is being shared with all our MLAs and explains how our built heritage gives Nova Scotia a significant advantage when competing with other jurisdictions. Preserving built heritage is also a demonstrably effective tool for achieving our environmental and social goals. However, it is clear that we are not doing enough to adequately protect our heritage building stock. We are losing historic buildings at a rapid pace across this province and if changes aren’t implemented quickly, we will have passed the point of no return.

Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia believes that the Province, working in tandem with municipalities, must take immediate action to strengthen the protection of Nova Scotia’s built heritage. These actions are:

1. Update and strengthen the Nova Scotia Heritage Property Act by:
 - a) removing Section 18 of the Act, which currently allows owners of municipally registered heritage buildings to demolish them after a three-year waiting period, a provision that exists nowhere else in Canada;
 - b) creating a pause provision of up to one year for specific types of development while conservation plans and bylaws are prepared for Heritage Conservation Districts or Cultural Landscape Conservation Districts;
 - c) creating a 30-day holding bylaw for potential heritage assets to protect them from demolition while applications for heritage designation are being considered;
 - d) increasing and enforcing fines for illegal demolition of designated heritage properties.
2. Enable municipalities to give preferential property tax treatment to owners of heritage buildings.
3. Enable municipalities to require residential property owners to have building permits in place before they are granted permission to demolish existing residential units.

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4. Enable municipalities to increase tax rates for vacant properties where owners have demolished existing residential units without an approved plan for development.
5. Increase financial and regulatory incentives that encourage the restoration and adaptive re-use of heritage properties.
6. Initiate a heritage tourism product development and marketing strategy.

THE CASE FOR HERITAGE

Why is it imperative that the Province improve the protection of Nova Scotia's built heritage? Because built heritage is an important tool for helping our province to reach many of its short- and long-term goals.

Economic Goals

The Province has the goal of “*doubling tourism revenues to \$4 billion by 2024.*” Tourism in Nova Scotia comprises more of the province's GDP than mining, agriculture and forestry combined. We know that heritage tourists are a key market for Nova Scotia. They are not attracted to things they can see anywhere; they seek unique experiences and want to immerse themselves in local culture. Our distinctive built heritage is authentically Nova Scotian and an important part of what attracts tourists to our province.

The Province has a goal to “*double Nova Scotia's population to two million people by 2060.*” Studies have shown that historic environments provide a sense of authenticity, beauty and distinctiveness, which in turn attracts people, businesses and investment. Therefore, in endeavouring to draw residents to the province, Nova Scotia's built heritage gives us a competitive advantage over others vying for the same people.

The Province has set a goal of ensuring “*the innovation ecosystem continues to flourish in Nova Scotia by maximizing partnerships with innovation hubs and incubators.*” Research from the UK suggests that businesses located in heritage buildings generate more income compared to comparable businesses not located in heritage buildings.

Heritage buildings also appeal to innovators and lend themselves well to being converted to creative uses and innovation hubs. Again, Nova Scotia's built heritage can be a tool for helping our province achieve its goals with respect to business success and innovation.

The Province's job creation goal is to “*find, attract and train more skilled tradespeople under the age of 30.*” Repairing, re-using and retrofitting historic buildings is a highly skilled trade requiring specialized training, and the two-year renovation and restoration carpentry program at NSCC in Lunenburg addresses this niche.

Heritage restoration is also more labour intensive than new construction. In fact, research conducted in the US and the UK suggests that every \$1 million spent on heritage restoration projects creates 20% to 30% more jobs than the equivalents spent on new construction. Therefore, investment in heritage restoration projects can lead to the creation of more skilled jobs in Nova Scotia than the same investment in new construction projects.

Environmental Goals

The greenest building is one that already exists. The Province's stated environmental goals include "*reducing solid waste disposal rates to no more than 300 kilograms per person per year by 2030*" and "*reducing greenhouse gas emission by at least 53% below 2005 levels by 2030.*" By retrofitting heritage buildings, rather than demolishing them and replacing them with new buildings, hundreds of thousands of tons of demolition material can be diverted from Nova Scotia's landfills. Retrofitting existing heritage buildings also produces far lower levels of greenhouse gas emission than new construction does.

Social Goals

The Province's housing goals include "*supporting the creation of more affordable homes*" and "*preventing the loss of affordable homes.*" Heritage buildings are intrinsic to meeting both these goals. The most affordable housing is the housing that is already built, even when it requires repair or retrofit. Heritage homes also lend themselves well to conversion to multi-unit dwellings, which is why so much affordable housing can be found in heritage buildings.

However, the current spate of demolition of historic buildings is removing these affordable units from the market and either not replacing them or replacing them with much-less-affordable units. Construction of new units can take years in the current economic climate, but the need for affordable housing is immediate. Therefore, preventing the demolition of heritage buildings means preventing the loss of affordable housing.

The Nova Scotia Cultural Action Plan includes a goal to "*promote and increase awareness of Nova Scotia's rich built heritage and its value to our province and identity.*" The Province can reach this goal by ensuring that the built heritage of all our founding cultures is preserved for current and future generations.

As Premier and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Tim Houston's mandate letter includes a goal to "*develop and ensure the implementation of policy and program initiatives that improve quality of life...in each and all functional economic regions of Nova Scotia.*" Research shows that heritage contributes to residents' quality of life and there are many examples of this right here in our province. Annapolis Royal, with its functional and charming heritage streetscapes, was voted the most liveable small town in the world by the International Awards for Liveable Communities in 2004. In 2011, the historic and popular Hydrostone district of Halifax was voted one of Canada's best neighbourhoods by the Canadian Institute of Planners.

CONCLUSION

Heritage Trust asks that you consider the value of the heritage assets in your own constituency and how our requested protections and incentives would help to ensure their preservation and that of heritage assets across the province. We respectfully urge you, as a member of the Nova Scotia Legislature, to push for implementation of these amendments before more of these precious assets are destroyed.

With thanks,



SANDRA L. BARSS
President



EMMA LANG
Executive Director