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EFFECTIVELY CONSERVING AND MANAGING Heritage Places of Worship

In the Ontario Heritage Tool Kit:

Details about the municipal process for alteration of designated properties can be found in *Designating Heritage Properties: A Guide to Municipal Designation of Individual Properties under the Ontario Heritage Act*, available at www.mtc.gov.on.ca.

The preferred use of a heritage place of worship is its original one. Not only is this the function for which it was designed, but a building in continuing use is generally better maintained and conserved. Heritage places of worship that continue to play a role in the community are often symbols of community pride.

The statement of cultural heritage value or interest and accompanying description of heritage attributes is a guide for decisions on conservation, management and ongoing use of the heritage place of worship. At the same time, those decisions will need to take into account the evolving religious needs of the faith group and other users if it is to remain viable.

Some key factors that help property owners successfully conserve heritage places of worship include:

- Understanding the property's heritage value
- Responsiveness to ongoing change
- Sound conservation principles, using the advice of a multi-disciplinary team of specialists
- A core group of dedicated volunteers
- Taking a proactive approach
- Broad base of community and public-sector support and participation
- Identification of the heritage property as a community asset.

The goal should be to conserve cultural heritage value while keeping heritage places of worship viable as active, evolving functional spaces. This section sets out some key considerations for managing heritage places of worship.

Preventive conservation and maintenance

The conservation of a heritage place of worship covers a range of activities, from ongoing maintenance to large-scale capital restoration projects. Preventive conservation involves developing and implementing a good maintenance routine to reduce deterioration and extend the heritage place of worship's working life. In the long term, it is also cost effective. Many larger municipalities have property standards for the maintenance of heritage structures with which owners and occupants must comply. For example, heritage property standards bylaws have been adopted by the cities of Burlington, Hamilton, Kingston, Kitchener, Mississauga, Toronto and Waterloo and the Town of Oakville.

A good first step is to develop a conservation plan – a practical guide for carrying out ongoing maintenance routines and repairs, as well as planning for future alterations, development or possible disposal. The Ontario environment, with its extremes of temperature, is hard on heritage buildings. A well-thought out conservation plan looks beyond cosmetic work on the appearance of the building to ensuring the short- and long-term stability of the structure. Its purpose is to help manage change in a way that minimizes impact on the heritage place of worship's cultural heritage value or interest without stopping change altogether.

The Ministry of Tourism and Culture has produced eight guiding principles for the conservation of cultural heritage properties and their surroundings (Appendix D). These guiding principles set out commonly accepted best practices for decisions concerning heritage conservation. Property owners should use them as a guide when planning for preventive conservation, alterations such as restoration or expansion, and disposal of heritage places of worship.

Periodically conducting a full assessment of the property's condition is important to both understand its physical condition and manage changes and alterations. Such an assessment typically includes a review of the following elements of the heritage place of worship:

- Structural materials and integrity (e.g., foundation, masonry and wood deterioration, interior finishes, hardware and roofing)
- Mechanical systems operation and potential issues (e.g., lighting, mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems, energy conservation)
- Accessibility, safety and security systems
- Exterior property issues (e.g., landscape, drainage, signage, parking)
- History of past repairs.



Although the interior of Notre Dame Roman Catholic Basilica in Ottawa is protected by designation under the Ontario Heritage Act, sensitive adaptations were made to fit with Vatican II liturgy. (Photo © Ontario Heritage Trust)

Decisions about the preventive maintenance of a heritage place of worship should address both the need to conserve its heritage attributes with the requirements of ongoing use. In keeping with the guiding principles, some conservation best practices include:

- Maintaining heritage attributes on an ongoing basis, with the least intervention necessary
- Repairing heritage attributes using recognized conservation methods
- Replacing missing or extensively deteriorated parts with original materials, based on surviving prototypes
- Conducting ongoing routine condition monitoring.



St. Paul's Anglican Church in Toronto has undertaken renovations that improve building access while remaining sensitive to the heritage structure. (Photo © Ontario Heritage Trust)

Many faith groups are striving to be more environmentally conscious about their property decisions by implementing “greening” programs. Often property owners assume that a building feature, such as a window, must be replaced when it merely needs to be repaired. Repairs are not only cost-effective, they also maintain original building materials, fulfilling significant heritage conservation and environmental sustainability principles. Programs such as Greening Sacred Spaces assist faith groups in taking action to create a more sustainable and energy efficient place of worship. See [Appendix F](#) for more information on greening places of worship.

See [Appendix E](#) for considerations regarding the conservation of the landscape and context.

Alterations

Over time, a heritage place of worship may require alterations, either to accommodate changes in religious use or community programs, or to comply with legislated requirements in such areas as public health, safety and accessibility. Before deciding to make changes to a heritage place of worship, it is recommended that the property owner engage a heritage consultant to conduct an assessment of the building condition and its needs (“needs assessment”), to help determine the appropriate course of action over time. This assessment should outline:

- Whether current conditions, unchanged or with minor modifications, would conserve the cultural heritage value while meeting the religious needs and/or legislated requirements
- The impact, both physical and visual, of the proposed change on the heritage attributes.
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- Whether the proposed change will improve the heritage place of worship's long-term viability
- The resources required for the proposed change and its long-term maintenance.

Conservation Review Board

An administrative tribunal that hears disputes on matters relating to the protection of properties considered to have cultural heritage value or interest to a municipality or to the Minister of Tourism and Culture, as defined by the Ontario Heritage Act. The Board, as an independent and quasi-judicial body, mediates and conducts a formal hearing process on issues such as objections to heritage designation, alterations to heritage properties, designation bylaw amendments and repeal. The Board makes recommendations to the municipal council or the Minister, based on the evidence it hears through a transparent and unbiased formal hearing process.

If the change will affect the heritage attributes of the heritage place of worship or its appearance in its context (e.g., construction of an addition), a heritage impact assessment by a heritage consultant is also recommended.

A heritage impact assessment is a study to determine if any cultural heritage resources are impacted by a specific proposed development or site alteration. This type of study can also show how the heritage place of worship could be conserved in the context of a site redevelopment or alteration (e.g., subdivision of the property).

If the property is designated or protected by an easement, sharing this

documentation, together with a description of the religious needs and mission of the place of worship, with the municipality or easement holder before making an application for alteration will allow for early dialogue in the decision-making process.

Recognizing that heritage properties may require alteration as needs and uses shift over time, the *Ontario Heritage Act* provides a statutory and procedural framework to help manage and guide change in a way that also sustains the cultural heritage value of the property.

The alteration processes set out in Parts IV and V of the *Ontario Heritage Act* help to ensure that the heritage attributes of a designated property or a property in a heritage conservation district are conserved. If the property owner wishes to make alterations to the property that affect the property's heritage attributes, the owner must obtain written consent (for an individual designation) or a permit (for a property in a heritage conservation district) from municipal council. In some municipalities, the council has delegated this authority to municipal staff. Under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, the property owner may appeal municipal decisions to the Conservation Review Board, which can make a recommendation to municipal Council. Under Part V of the Act, the property owner has the right to have municipal decisions referred to the Ontario Municipal Board, which has the power to render a decision.

General maintenance work, such as repainting exterior trim or replacement or repairs to an existing asphalt roof, and alterations and repairs to features that are not covered by the designation bylaw do not usually require approvals.

If a place of worship has been listed but not designated, the *Ontario Heritage Act* does not require municipal consent for

alterations. It is recommended, however, that owners of non-designated heritage places of worship included on a register engage with the municipality when considering an alteration.

Properties protected by a heritage conservation easement also have a specific review and approval process.

Early contact and communication between the property owner, the municipality or easement holder and the municipal heritage committee, where one exists, is important. Having discussions and identifying any issues at the beginning of the process will save time and money and help build community understanding and relationships.

The designation bylaw is a guiding document for a municipality considering an application to alter a designated heritage place of worship. Municipalities should also consider any other relevant requirements that might apply to the particular situation (e.g., Provincial Policy Statement, Ontario Building Code) when making their decision.

In addition, key considerations include:

- Reason for the alteration (e.g., liturgical purposes, public safety, accessibility)
- The appropriateness of the proposed design, character and materials proposed
- Other options considered and rationale for the preferred option
- Whether the alteration improves the property's continued use
- Alignment of the proposed alteration with the guiding principles for conservation of cultural heritage properties (e.g., reversibility)
- History of alteration to the building and property

- Visual impact of the alteration on the heritage attributes and appearance
- Visual and physical impact of the alteration on surrounding properties
- Impact of the alteration on other features of the place of worship (e.g., an alteration that allows more natural light into the interior may negatively affect light-sensitive objects such as works of art)
- If heritage attributes are to be removed, the rationale for removal and the process for documentation of pre-existing conditions (e.g., photographs, measured drawings).



Because of its designation under the Ontario Heritage Act, the Precious Blood Cathedral in Sault Ste. Marie received a local municipal heritage grant that promotes conservation and maintenance of heritage properties. (Photo courtesy of Municipality of Sault-Ste Marie)

Additional consideration for exterior alterations

Concerns for exterior alterations (restoration, additions, partial demolitions or expansions) generally focus on sensitivity to the historic appearance of the buildings, property and the context.

If the alteration is an addition, a range of design options is possible, from historic reproduction to contemporary. Key considerations include:

- Impact of the addition's form, scale, massing, and positioning on the design and context of the heritage property
- Impact on the historic appearance and functionality of the building
- How the materials and finishing fit with the heritage building.

Additional considerations for interior alterations

Interior features of a heritage place of worship can be included as heritage attributes in the designation bylaw.

Alterations to the interior may be necessary for liturgical reasons, to further the faith group's community mission, to address requirements of public safety, access or security or to restore the original appearance. In addition to the general considerations, other issues that may arise when considering alterations to the interior of a heritage place of worship include:

- Impact of the proposed alteration on the original design, appearance and functionality of the building's interior
- How any new elements, materials and finishes fit with the heritage interior and affect its use (e.g., covering or removal of floor finishes can have an impact on acoustics as well as a visual impact)

- How elements that might be removed (e.g., seating that is being updated) will be maintained or reused.

As with exterior alterations, the approach to interior alterations should be sensitive to the heritage attributes of the heritage place of worship.

Subdivision of Property

Property owners of heritage places of worship on large properties may wish to divide this large piece of land into two or more parcels and offer one or more for sale, providing funding for conservation or community programming. This is subdividing property and the provisions of the *Planning Act* come into play. Property owners should consult with the municipal planning department to determine whether subdivision is permitted and about any planning related considerations (e.g., requirement for a heritage impact assessment).

If the property owner proposes to subdivide the property for development purposes, key considerations include:

- The statement of cultural heritage value or interest may include the landscape or context of the property
- Visual impact of the proposed subdivision and development on the heritage place of worship (e.g., setbacks, size, height)
- Impact on views and sightlines to the heritage place of worship from the street and neighbouring properties
- An archaeological assessment may be required if the property has archaeological potential (e.g., cemeteries, which may also have burials outside the boundary of the property).

Appendix D: Guiding Principles for the Conservation of Built Heritage Properties

The following guiding principles are based on international charters for the conservation of cultural heritage properties and their surroundings. These principles provide the basis for all decisions concerning good practice in heritage conservation around the world.

1. Respect for documentary evidence

- Do not base restoration on conjecture.
- Conservation work should be based on historic documentation such as historic photographs, drawings and physical evidence.

2. Respect for the original location

- Do not move buildings unless there is no other means to save them.
- Site is an integral component of a building or structure. Change in site diminishes cultural heritage value considerably.

3. Respect for historic material

- Repair or conserve rather than replace building materials and finishes, except where absolutely necessary.
- Minimal intervention maintains the heritage content of the built resource.

4. Respect for original fabric

- Repair with like materials.
- Repair to return the resource to its prior condition, without altering its integrity.

5. Respect for the building's history

- Do not restore to one period at the expense of another period.
- Do not destroy later additions to a building or structure solely to restore to a single time period.

6. Reversibility

- Alterations should be able to be returned to original conditions. This conserves earlier building design and technique (e.g., when a new door opening is put into a stone wall, the original stones are numbered, removed and stored, allowing for future restoration).

7. Legibility

- New work should be distinguishable from old.
- Buildings or structures should be recognized as products of their own time, and new additions should not blur the distinction between old and new.

8. Maintenance

- With continuous care, future restoration will not be necessary.
- With regular upkeep, major conservation projects and their high costs can be avoided.