

*“A Conservation plan is simply a document which explains why a place is significant and how you will sustain that significance in any new use, alteration, repair or management. It is based on a very simple thinking process which starts with describing what is there, why it matters, what is happening to it and the principles by which you will manage it and then sets more detailed work programmes for maintenance, management, access, use or other issues. A plan helps you care for a site by making sure you understand what matters and why BEFORE you take major decisions.”*

*~Kate Clark – English Heritage 2005*

Conservation planning differs from traditional management planning because it is specifically designed to conserve heritage value. Conservation planning identifies policies that strike a balance between use and significance and that provide a useful framework when making decisions about an historic place. A conservation planning process should always form the basis of planning for the sustainability and longevity of an historic resource.

A successful conservation plan requires consensus resolution of the heritage values of the place, including social, economic, and environmental values. If well written it should mitigate the negative effects often stemming from ambiguity in the identification and management of value. And of course, it should provide the policy framework for the sustainable use, maintenance, repair, alteration, and management of the historic place.

A conservation plan is not a schedule of repairs or a feasibility study for adaptive re-use. Neither is it a document that says this place is old, we know all about it, therefore it should be restored. It is a statement of policy that informs the direction of conservation and stewardship decisions. Ideally it should exist before such decisions are made. In practice, it is the need for decision-making for an historic place that prompts the development of a conservation plan.

## CONSERVATION PLANS

### PURPOSE

- ◆ A conservation plan is a succinct synthesis of the significance of an historic place, its contemporary context, and policy to guide the retention of heritage values through effective interventions.
- ◆ It is based on a simple thinking process that considers what is there, why it matters, what is happening to it (or is being contemplated) and the principles by which conflicts between physical change and significance (heritage values) are mitigated.
- ◆ A conservation plan facilitates sustainable stewardship decisions by requiring an understanding of what matters, and why, BEFORE major decisions are made.

Conservation plans are useful in guiding a variety of types of projects or interventions to historic places, including:

- ◆ Conservation interventions for preservation, rehabilitation, or restoration
- ◆ Adaptive re-use
- ◆ Building performance upgrades
- ◆ Stabilization

- ◆ Additions
- ◆ Urban design
- ◆ Alterations
- ◆ New structures in an historic context
- ◆ Accessibility provision

## CONSERVATION PLANNING PROCESS

The flow chart for the Conservation Planning process in BC looks like this:



Each stage involves the following actions and considerations:

### STAGE A -UNDERSTAND THE HISTORIC PLACE

Understanding the historic place subject to the Conservation Plan is critical to being able to make values-based decisions for its conservation. This first stage of the planning process is intended to allow decision makers to have a clear understanding of what the place is, what its current context is in terms of physical and planning issues, and how it has evolved over time to become what it is today. There are three components that should be addressed when endeavouring to understand the historic place. These are:

1. **Description** – This is a clear written explanation of the physical attributes that comprise the historic place. It is not a condition assessment; however, it can include information such as a listing of buildings and structures, description of physical boundaries, legal description, or geographic context. The Conservation Plan report can include current photographs of the place, maps to provide location information, and written descriptions of what is there now.

**Planning Context** – Identify the following for the historic place:

- a. *Cultural context* – what are the economic, social, political (etc.) conditions impacting the conservation of the historic place?
  - b. *Formal recognition status* – Is the place on the Community Heritage Register, or does it have National Historic Site designation or some other type of formal recognition?
  - c. *Legal protection status* – Is it legally protected through designation, covenants, heritage revitalization agreements, inclusion within a development permit area, protected for its natural values or as part of a heritage conservation area?
  - d. *Zoning status and regulations* – what is the zoning for this place? Are there other planning or building regulations or guidelines in place which may impact conservation decision making?
  - e. *Official Community Plan (OCP)* – information about the place in planning documents, neighbourhood or precinct plans, and heritage plans etc.
3. **Chronology** – Research should be done to create a record of the evolution of the place over time. The local archives or planning department may be an excellent source of information. It is important to understand the historical evolution of the community and area where the historic place exists to better understand its specific development. Record your findings in a way that relates the structural history of the place to the transforming impulses that caused the physical changes observed. Use plans, elevations, isometric sketches, room-data sheets and photographs or other methods to illustrate how a place has changed over time and why.

## **STAGE B – EVALUATE SIGNIFICANCE**

Understanding the heritage values and significance of an historic place is integral to guiding the development of policies in the conservation plan. The purpose of conservation is to retain the heritage values of an historic place while change happens, so a clear articulation of the values of the place is essential for the development of an effective and practicable plan.

The analysis undertaken in Stage B of the Conservation Planning process is synthesized in document called the Statement of Significance (SOS). Unlike the SOS normally produced for a Community Heritage Register or a designation bylaw an SOS in a conservation plan must be more detailed in order to facilitate comprehensive policy development, but must still be values-centred. The enhanced SOS may be seen as more of a significance report, including all of the necessary information to clearly articulate the values of the place to guide conservation policy development.

Stage A of the process provided the description of the place, so that piece of the Statement of Significance process does not need to be repeated in Stage B. The key focus of Stage B is on the articulation of heritage values, and the identification of character-defining elements (CDEs). The considerations for developing this part of the conservation plan are as follows:

1. **Heritage Values** - In some cases an SOS may already exist for the place. If so, it may require expanding, editing or rewriting in the light of the findings of the understanding phase (Stage A).

Similar to the typical development of an SOS, the SOS for the conservation plan should be developed through a public process which identifies community values. Speak to people with a current interest in the historic place, including the owner, the local government, other statutory bodies, local people, and interest groups whose fields intersect with aspects of the historic place. Through these conversations, develop an understanding of how the place is valued now. A review of existing published documentary research and primary historical documents must also be undertaken to form an understanding the values of the place over time.

Heritage values go beyond just the aesthetic and historic qualities of the place that may be important for the community. There are two categories of values that should be considered: 1) academic values - historic, scientific, archaeological, philosophical, architectural etc. - these are the values most often identified by 'experts'; and 2) amenity values – contribution to streetscape or neighbourhood, community, cultural association, social etc. - these are the values identified by the community. Both lenses are essential to the understanding of value.

Expect values to be contested – inevitably different interests will see the values of a place in different ways. An absence of contested values is more likely to suggest inadequate consultation than an uncontested historic place. In fact, the more effectively these contested values are gathered, the better the chances are of the conservation plan mitigating these conflicts in its policies.

2. **Character-Defining Elements** – Character-defining elements (CDEs) are the physical and sometime intangible elements of the place that must be conserved in order for values to be retained. They are the physical embodiment of the heritage values in the place.

In a typical SOS, the CDEs comprise a short, point form list outlining the elements of the place that must be conserved in order for values to be retained. In the conservation plan, the CDEs should be much more detailed. Provide clear and detailed information about what each element is, so that the policies developed for conservation can be clearly related to relevant CDEs. It is important to note that the CDEs are not a statement of the condition of each element; the CDE list in the SOS report should describe what is each element to be conserved.

The arrangement of the CDEs may be by specific area of the historic place, or by specific phases that illustrate the chronological development of the place. Use methods that are suited to the nature of the historic place. CDEs might be listed differently for a large cultural landscape than for a historic house museum for instance.

## STAGE C – ASSESS POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Conservation planning goes beyond simply considering how the physical acts of preservation, rehabilitation, or restoration of physical fabric could impact the values of an historic place. Many other regulatory factors related to planning and building regulation can have an impact on the heritage values of the place, and must be addressed in the conservation plan's policy in order to mitigate the potential negative consequences of conservation interventions. The following is a short-list of other factors beyond simple repair that can have a potential impact on heritage values:

- ◆ Accessibility upgrades
- ◆ Archaeology plans for site
- ◆ Specification for repair/replacement/restoration of character defining elements
- ◆ Code compliance upgrades
- ◆ Tenant improvements
- ◆ Interior or exterior redecoration
- ◆ Emergency stabilization plan
- ◆ Environmental control upgrades
- ◆ Fire detection and suppression upgrades
- ◆ Management plan for historic place
- ◆ Maintenance program, short, medium and long term
- ◆ Security upgrades

The key areas of consideration for assessing potential impacts on heritage values are:

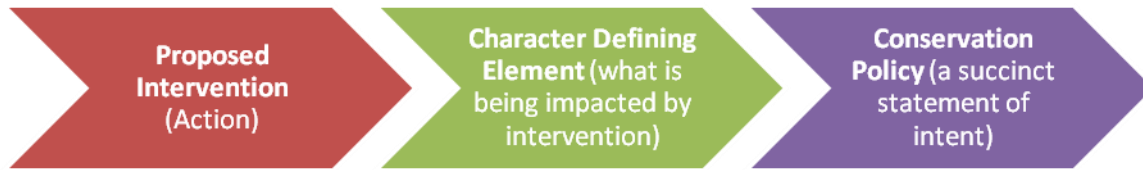
1. **Requirements for retaining significance** - how the heritage value and sustainable use of the historic place is affected by its present circumstances (circumstances may range from physical condition to legal context, from physical layout to zoning, from misunderstanding to poor past decision making).
2. **Client Requirements** – Consider the impacts of any changes that are required to allow the place to continue to serve a socially useful purpose. This includes considering how external factors such as a need for universal access, a parking requirement, or an emerging community value impact the character-defining elements of the place.
3. **Physical Condition** – undertake a proper condition survey of the historic place. Assess all of its elements, record each defect (with photography and note-taking), and describe what the issue is and how it affects and relates to other physical elements of the place. Recommend solutions or mitigation strategies for each defect, and prioritize these activities in order of urgency. Provide costing for this work by using a quantity surveyor if necessary.
4. **External Factors** - Consider the impact of addressing relevant laws and bylaws including the Building Code. Consider how responses to climate action will have an impact on the values of the historic place.

## STAGE D – DEVELOP CONSERVATION POLICIES

Write policies that guide the mitigation of the potential impacts identified. Refer to both the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*, and any specific guidelines for the character-defining element being considered. Write policies which:

- ◆ sustain significance,
- ◆ mitigate the effects of change of use or other physical intervention on the character-defining elements, and
- ◆ facilitate the beneficial, sustainable use of the historic place.

It may be useful to organize this information in a format that allows each proposed intervention, impacted character-defining element, and policy for guiding conservation work to be grouped together. The policies section should follow the following format:



An effective conservation policy is written as an imperative and states what approach will be taken to minimize the effect of an intervention on heritage value. Policy development should be guided by reference to the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada but should take that guidance and tailor it to the historic place in question.

For instance, in contemplating the addition of an external fire-escape stair, the standards and guidelines recommend:

“Upgrading character-defining elements to meet health and safety requirements in a manner that assures their conservation.”

The conservation plan policy would be specified for a particular project like this:

“New alternative means of egress shall be located in the area shown on the attached plan to evoke the form and character of the lean-to structure in this location demolished in 1972.”

Such a policy should have been guided by an evaluation of significance that places value on the evidence of the lost stair. Policies may simply be written agreements that reassure stakeholders of a predictable outcome when works are undertaken:

Party A will facilitate public access to certain areas of the historic place identified in Plan X. Party A will work with Party B to make the historic place safely accessible to guide groups, and will facilitate public access for 26 days per annum.

Once complete the plan should provide sufficient policy to enable guide the management of change at the historic place. A successful plan will develop policy that both reacts to change that is being contemplated, and that pre-empts change that may be encountered.

## NEXT STEPS

The conservation plan must then be used as a guide. Conservation plans may be provided to registered professionals to guide their design work; they may be provided to local governments for reference in a Heritage Revitalization Agreement; or they may be pulled out when a new service is being installed to see what policy advice they have to offer.

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