

Preservation Myths and Facts

Myth #1

That building is not important enough to be worth saving.

Fact:

People who assume they can recognize a building with cultural significance have done a great deal of damage. Heritage value comes in many forms. It could be a mansion or a worker's cottage, a church or a barn, a bridge or an industrial plant, a landscape or a work of public art. It could be old or contemporary, large or small, fancy or plain, an individual building or a group of buildings.

All of these are capable of carrying heritage significance, whether for design value, historical associations or contextual importance, or all three. Criteria and standards exist for establishing significance at local, provincial and federal levels. Personal opinions can be misleading. Keep an open mind.

Myth #2

This building can't be saved – it's structurally unstable.

Fact:

Buildings that are perfectly sound are frequently assessed as in dangerous condition on account of superficial deterioration. Don't believe your eyes. Engage an engineer to check before believing any assertion of structural frailty. However bad it looks, there is usually a remedy.

Myth #3

This building should be torn down because of its bad associations.

Fact:

Sometimes a building has associations that members of the community find offensive or would like to forget – a jail, an insane asylum, or the site of a tragic event. By this logic, Venice would have lost its Bridge of Sighs, and England its Tower of London, to name just two of many valuable historical structures with unfortunate pasts.

While sometimes understandable, this is an emotional appeal that denies the richness and variety of our historical experience. The buildings may be worthy of preservation as buildings, but the bad associations themselves are also a part of our heritage.

Myth #4

It's cheaper to demolish and start anew than to restore a heritage building.

Fact:

From a construction standpoint, historic preservation has several advantages over new construction. For example, structural costs on an old building usually make up 5 to 12 percent of total project costs, half the average expenditures for new construction.
(Historic Preservation in the 1990's, Philadelphia, 1993)

Fact:

The real issue is the effective recycling of built resources—a vast stock of underutilized buildings, distinguished or plain, that is increasingly seen as having more potential than new development sites.
("More than Preservation", Charles K. Hoyt, Architectural Record, February, 1994)

Fact:

Many older building have unique and desirable signature features, such as ornate windows and finishes, high ceilings, etc. that would be prohibitively expensive to create in a new building.

Fact:

It's not cheaper from an environmental point of view, given that 35% of the contents of our landfill sites is building material waste.
(Dr. Mark Gorgolewsky, School of Architectural Science, Ryerson University)

Myth #5

Designation of a building or an area results in reduced value.

Fact:

Actually, designation has been demonstrated to maintain, and even improve, market value.

During the 1990s, Dr. Robert Shipley of the University of Waterloo examined the effect of heritage designation on property values in Ontario. He investigated 2,707 properties designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in 24 communities over a 20-year period.
(The Heritage Canada Foundation)

What Dr. Shipley found:

- Some 74% of individually designated properties equalled or bettered the average property value trend in their communities.
 - The rate of sales among individually designated properties was equal to, or greater than, the general rate of sales of properties within their communities.
 - Designated properties tend to resist downturns in the ambient market
- This applies not only to individual buildings, but for districts as well.

· In every heritage district designated in Canada in the last 20 years, property values have risen, despite the fact that development potential has been reduced.
(Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office Code of Practice, Canada)

· A recent study in New York City showed that, since the establishment of the landmarks commission in 1965, property values in official historic districts are “unfailingly higher than in comparable non-designated areas of the city”.
(Anthony M. Tung, former NY Landmarks Preservation Commissioner)

On top of this, owners of designated buildings can benefit from the expert advice of Municipal Heritage Committees and municipal preservation staff, and can be eligible for financial incentives such as grants, loans and tax relief.

Myth #6

Old technology is not as efficient as modern replacements.

Fact:

Components of a building, such as historic windows and doors.... can be retrofitted to meet current standards of energy use. This can be achieved at less immediate and long-term cost than replacement units.... in fact, studies have shown that the replacement of historic wood or metal single-glazed windows with contemporary units, such as vinyl or aluminum double-glazed sash, cannot be justified on the basis of life-cycle costs.... Federal agencies have discovered that preservation of these components meets mission requirements at a lower cost to the government.
(The Benefits of Cultural Resource Conservation, U.S. Department of Defense)