
CONSERVATION OF HERITAGE BUILDINGS AND COMPLIANCE WITH VANCOUVER'S BUILDING BY-LAW (VBBL)

The conservation of heritage buildings in the City of Vancouver has always been an important city objective. On December 4, 2013, Vancouver City Council endorsed the Heritage Action Plan which included a number of immediate and longer term actions to encourage and support heritage conservation in Vancouver. The report, entitled Action Plan to Update the Heritage Conservation Program, may be found at:

<http://former.vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20131204/documents/ptec8.pdf>.

Part 11 of the 2014 VBBL (previously Part 10) has an alternate compliance method for heritage buildings and buildings considered to have heritage character merit. The alternate compliance method balances current building by-law provisions with existing conditions such as exiting, windows, doors, spatial separation, door swing, hardware, etc., in order to make it feasible to retain and to continue to use heritage buildings. The intent is to provide flexibility, and to maintain a balance between VBBL requirements and the heritage and/or character elements of a building.

Part 11 as an objective requires all new work to comply with the VBBL. There has been confusion related to what level of upgrading is required when replacing an existing heritage element (materials, assemblies or details) with a new element which may not meet current standards or where a new element is proposed to be compatible with a heritage building, or replicates a heritage element, and does not comply with the VBBL, including assemblies which contain a mix of existing and new materials such as a wall or roof.

The intent of Part 11 is to require upgrades based on changes in use, additions, and levels of work on the building, while providing for the conservation (including retention, repair, replication, and/or replacement) of heritage elements. The basic approach is that the level of safety or performance in a building cannot be decreased while new work is generally to be in conformance with the current by-law. This was meant to apply to completely new construction and not to replacement or replication of heritage elements such as walls, windows and doors. If the conservation work does not create an unsafe condition, or reduce the level of performance of a building, and it is required to maintain the existing heritage character; then it meets the intent of Part 11 of the VBBL for heritage buildings.

The 2014 Edition of the VBBL, scheduled to be released January 1, 2015, will contain new provisions to further protect heritage buildings. Some specific changes will include:

- In consultation with the Director of Planning, the definition of "heritage building" has been expanded so that the CBO can consider a building as a heritage building, even though it may not be listed on the Vancouver Heritage Register, in order to conserve the building.
- Replacement, repaired or replica windows, doors and skylights will not be required to comply with "NAFS – North American Fenestration Standard/Specification for Windows, Doors, and Skylights" provided they achieve an acceptable level of performance, contribute to the conservation of the heritage building, and are acceptable to the CBO and Director of Planning. This will require a professional to sign-off on the use of site-built window

requirements for Part 3 Buildings and use of the “site built” requirements for Part 9 buildings. This change was made because it is difficult to comply with NAFS for custom-built windows which are intended to maintain the heritage character of the building.

- Energy efficiency need not be in full compliance with the current VBBL provided it achieves an “acceptable” level of performance. In some situations, upgrading the building envelope may be detrimental to the existing wall assembly.
- Refer to Section 11.5 of the VBBL for specific heritage requirements including alternate acceptable solutions in Table 11.5.1.1.
- In unique circumstances, the CBO may relax other VBBL requirements as necessary to conserve the heritage character of a building provided they do not create an unsafe condition and provided there will be an acceptable level of performance.

The City of Vancouver will continue to work with owners to conserve heritage buildings while maintaining an acceptable level of safety and building performance.

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