

Heritage Evaluation

Excerpts from the report on the Built Heritage Inventory of the Town of Sutton produced by the firm Patri-Arch.

A heritage evaluation is based not only on age and aesthetic criteria, but also on a more complete heritage rating scale that takes other criteria into account:

- state of conservation (age and historical interest value)
- the building or structure itself (use value and architectural value)
- state of authenticity
- quality of the setting (context value)

AGE AND HISTORICAL INTEREST VALUE

Age is one of the principal criteria in the idea of a “historic monument.” The concept of age has two aspects: real age and apparent age. The public responds to the appearance of age. From this perspective, an old building is not necessarily one that is old in years, but one whose appearance announces its age; it is a building that has been preserved in something close to its original state. Furthermore, saying that a building is typical of a period, or that it is where a famous person lived, or that it speaks to a particular time in history (industrialization, exploitation of natural resources, immigration, etc.), indicates its historical interest; such information is a guide to situating the building in time. The building may also be evaluated as representative of an important stage in the evolution or history of a community (foundational element, key markers of its evolution or role as a catalyst in the growth of a community).

USE VALUE

Use value is strongly associated with a certain rarity. In general, a building that has or had a specialized use (church, school, town hall, convent, mill, factory, bank, fire station, courthouse, post office, etc.) has greater value because it is more unusual in the urban or rural fabric than a residential building, of which there are hundreds of examples, since they form the backbone of a community. A building with outstanding use value would be one whose historical attributes have been preserved and which continues to be used today.

ARCHITECTURAL VALUE

This value establishes whether a building is “a monument of art and architecture.” Architecture reflects technical knowledge; it also represents the aesthetic concerns of a specific era. A building with original architecture, designed by a well-known architect, or that is representative of a specific architectural style, usually has a substantial architectural value. The same is true of “works” that have less standing but are still representative or significant in terms of a well-defined style. Often, to determine the architectural value of a structure, it must be compared with equivalent properties of the same era, function, social or creative trend, or the surrounding built environment.

AUTHENTICITY VALUE

Physical integrity refers to the physical composition of materials or particular building methods: that which ensures the building remains standing. Physical integrity also plays a role in the current condition of the building: it may be good, or dilapidated. The evaluation considers the condition of the building in relation to how it was when it was built: is it intact? Representative? Exceptional? When, for example, a building has a double-slope roof whose base is no longer curved, there is a loss of physical integrity and a loss of demonstrated technical building skills. This loss is necessarily accompanied by a change in the shape of the building. This means there is a loss of formal integrity in relation to the building’s original state. When coupled with its age value, formal integrity provides evidence of a building’s authenticity. For many, a building that has been over-restored, or rebuilt, no longer has the same aura of authenticity.

Also, a distinction must be made between reversible changes (different doors, windows, cladding, roof, balustrade, colours, etc.) and irreversible changes (addition, alteration in the roof or volumetry,

change in the shape and arrangement of openings, removal of a gallery or decorative elements, etc.). With respect to reversible changes, the building may have been restored or well maintained. For instance, it is likely that the windows in a 200-year-old building have been replaced several times. However, if each time or in the most recent restoration project the windows were replaced with those of the original style, the building will be considered to have excellent authenticity. So it is not so much an issue of material authenticity (since the original windows are long gone) as a formal and constructive authenticity (the windows have their original positions, materials and appearance).

Irreversible changes have a more deleterious impact on authenticity. Note also that a building may have undergone major transformations that are completely harmonious or normal in the life of a building (adding a summer kitchen or dormers, decorative elements updated in the late 19th century, etc.). It is always a good idea to check with the Town's urban and land-use planning department for advice if you are planning a change to your residence. Experts in heritage buildings can also provide guidance. This will help you maintain the quality of your home and the charm that won you over when you bought it.

To determine degree of authenticity, one must ask the right questions: Does the building still have its original components? What has been changed or added to the building during its lifetime that is still present? Are these changes reversible?

CONTEXT VALUE

While the above values primarily concern the building itself, context value attends to that which is outside the building; it may also be called setting value, position value, environmental value or landscaping value.

- a) The building, in its role as landmark, may exert influence over the surrounding area.
- b) On the other hand, the environment may highlight the building or improve the quality of a location. For example, an ordinary building located in a historical district will be enhanced by the attributes of the other buildings around it. Context value also takes into account the surrounding land and the quality of the interventions that affect the building's setting. Natural features are taken into account (topography, types and numbers of trees, plants and wildlife) with cultural features (urban development, archeology, landscaping, architecture, artworks, street furniture), all of which contribute to the aesthetic, environmental and cultural attributes of the site.

How was the heritage rating for your property determined?

Exceptional Rating

Exceptional buildings should be rated positively in all five key values: age and historical interest, use, architecture, authenticity, and context.

For this type of building, the heritage value extends well beyond the local or regional level. These are rare structures, specialized buildings that may be landmarks or have played a major historical role in community development. Buildings of exceptional value are often already recognized by the community as having heritage value, and typically have or merit classification as historic monuments.

Superior Rating

A superior building is one that stands out in about four out of the five criteria listed above and is well preserved overall. It has a strong local or regional value, above-average for the heritage buildings identified. Their heritage value is usually recognized by the community or is evident to the layperson. The structure could be an old stone building whose main features have remained intact, a richly decorated bourgeois home, a church, a rectory or a convent. Such a building might be listed as a local historic monument.

Good Rating

A building with this rating should satisfy about three of the five criteria listed above. This rating is assigned to a large number of basically average properties. They have interesting or significant attributes that indicate their age, architectural interest (such as style) and location in a given setting or an architectural whole, without necessarily standing out in any major way. They could be houses of a common style (such as vernacular or four square houses) that have retained a number of their features but may have been subject to reversible interventions (asphalt shingles on the roof, different style of window, etc.).

Fair Rating

This rating is for buildings that satisfy two of the five values. It is usually assigned to houses or buildings that have undergone a significant number of transformations that cloud the building's age, architectural interest (style) and specific siting, or which are located in an ordinary environment. However, such a building could have good potential for improving its heritage rating if appropriate work was done.

Poor Rating

A building assigned this value satisfies at most one of the five values described above. It is assigned to a recent building or one that has lost almost all its interesting components or undergone irreversible changes that have removed most of its original attributes.

<p>N.B.: The heritage rating will likely change over time depending on the nature of the changes you bring to it. A building of great heritage value could, after unfortunate decisions or a fire, lose a good deal of its value. On the other hand, a building that was altered in the past could regain heritage value after the reconstruction or reinstallation of elements that are more in keeping with the building's original aspect.</p>
