

Social Benefits of Heritage Conservation

“...heritage conservation makes good sense for communities”

- **Builds Community Pride**
- **Enhances Quality of Life**
- **Strengthens Communities**
- **Promotes Social Sustainability**
- **Provides Affordable Housing**
- **Supports Healthy Lifestyles**

Heritage

Building Community Pride

Historic places are tangible links to the past. They reflect events that shaped our communities and commemorate the vision and contributions of those who came before us.

Each community's unique history is written in its buildings, streets and landscapes. As symbols of a shared past, historic places reinforce our sense of identity, build civic pride and help define the character of our cities, towns and rural districts.



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A community's buildings are a visible record of its history (Main Street, Town of Moosomin).

In a recent Saskatchewan survey, over 80 per cent of respondents said that preserving heritage is important. A similar number agreed that conserving heritage buildings increases pride and enhances community identity. More than 60 per cent had visited a historic building or site during the previous year. (Sigma Analytics 2006)

Conservation

Enhancing Quality of Life

Our buildings and other man-made surroundings are important contributors to community livability and quality of life.

Well-maintained historic neighbourhoods feel intimate and people-friendly. Their distinctive character, human scale and familiarity create a strong, appealing sense of place for residents and visitors alike.

Conserving historic buildings improves neighbourhood attractiveness and encourages people to take pride in, and care for, their communities. A multi-year heritage initiative in the United Kingdom showed that a community's appearance, self-image, economy and quality of life can all be improved by rehabilitating heritage buildings. (Townscape Heritage Research Unit 2008)

In Canada and the United States, “Main Street” projects have revitalized more than 1,500 communities by rehabilitating and promoting their historic business districts. (Heritage Canada Foundation 2009)



Government of Saskatchewan, Thomas, 2009

Mixed use and a range of housing options help create vibrant neighbourhoods.

Making Communities Stronger

Historic places create a sense of shared history and reinforce feelings of connectedness among community members. Greater social cohesion increases a community's “social capital” and its ability to solve problems and achieve common goals. (Putnam 2000; Policy Research Institute 2005)

By revitalizing older neighbourhoods, heritage conservation helps preserve long-established social ties and community networks. Because they usually offer a variety of services and housing options, historic neighbourhoods also facilitate the mixing of people of different backgrounds and the formation of more diverse and inclusive social networks.

Historic places also provide opportunities and venues for community celebrations and other public events that bring people together. In many communities, heritage buildings are an important source of affordable work space for volunteer groups, social service agencies and other community-oriented organizations.



Government of Saskatchewan, Flaman, 2006

Open House at the Claybank Brick Plant, a Provincial Heritage Property and National Historic Site.

For Further Information:

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Promoting Social Sustainability

Heritage conservation supports lifelong learning and encourages people to participate in community affairs. Enabling people to develop their skills and abilities, and to become engaged citizens, is key to building resilient, socially sustainable communities. (British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy 1993)

Historic places are educational resources that help people understand and appreciate architecture, technology, art and culture. As repositories of local history, historic places also help us understand our own communities and remind us of our responsibilities to past and future generations.

Historic places embody traditional building skills and craftsmanship. Conserving historic places provides opportunities to learn and use these skills, ensuring that they are preserved and passed on.

Heritage conservation also promotes civic engagement. Membership in heritage organizations and participation in heritage activities stimulates interest in community issues and encourages people to become involved in community decision-making processes.



Government of Saskatchewan, Thomas, 2003
First Nations people regard archaeological sites as important expressions of their heritage (Cabri Lake Human Effigy site).

Affordable Housing

Heritage buildings can be adapted to provide high- quality accommodations for low-income and special- needs tenants. Converting existing buildings also minimizes the not-in-my-backyard syndrome and stigmatization that are often associated with new social housing. (CMHC webpage; Rypkema 2002)

Many types of heritage buildings are suitable for affordable-housing use. For example, several historic hotels in British Columbia are now being used for low-income and special-needs housing. (Government of British Columbia 2009)

In Vancouver, the award-winning Mole Hill development adapted a full city block of heritage homes to create 170 affordable housing units. (Mole Hill webpage)

In Kitchener, Ontario, an electrical substation was converted into a two-storey house for low-income tenants. (CMHC webpage)

In Saskatchewan, a converted schoolhouse provides assisted-living accommodations in the Town of Ituna.



Deer Park Villa Inc., Darlene Holliday
Deer Park Villa Inc. developed four assisted-living suites in the old Ituna schoolhouse.

Healthy Lifestyles

Historic neighbourhoods were built with services and amenities within walking distance of homes, making it easier for people to incorporate exercise in their daily routine.

Research confirms that people who live in “walkable neighbourhoods” get more than average amounts of exercise and are at lower risk for such serious conditions as obesity, heart disease and diabetes. (Heart and Stroke Foundation 2007; Saelens et al 2003)

Less reliance on automobiles also improves air quality and lowers rates of cardiopulmonary disease associated with air pollution. Deaths and injuries from traffic accidents may also be reduced.

People who live in walkable neighbourhoods and spend less time driving are also more likely to know, trust and be socially engaged with their neighbours. Studies show that social ties are important for both physical and mental well-being. (Berkman 1995; Freeman 2001; Leyden 2003)

Active, pedestrian-oriented neighbourhoods also discourage crime by having more “eyes on the street.” (Wekerle 2000)



Government of Saskatchewan, Thomas, 2009
Busy sidewalks make neighbourhoods safe and welcoming.

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Conserving the Past, Enriching Today

Historic places are irreplaceable cultural resources that enrich our lives and our communities.

Sources

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