

Statement on the Significance of Heritage in Canada Now

We, the undersigned members of the National Council of Heritage Organizations, other heritage bodies and practitioners, at our meeting in Kijipuktuk | Halifax, NS, on 23 - 25 October 2025, collectively affirm:

Heritage in Canada is a living force that strengthens communities and shapes our shared identity. It connects people across provinces, generations, and cultures – through landscapes, traditions, and buildings that ground us in a sense of belonging.

Across the country, Canadians have mobilized to protect, celebrate, and reimagine historic places, achieving meaningful benefits for communities. Working with allied sectors, the conservation of heritage places has advanced economic and environmental sustainability, community spaces, inclusion and belonging, Reconciliation and Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, and well-being.

Despite the benefits they bring to communities and individuals, many heritage places are threatened by uneven protections across the country and insufficient access to financial support. Everyone has a role to play in the preservation of our shared heritage.

As we meet in Halifax, we recall that 90% of the buildings standing in this city in 1878 have been lost. Nationally, a quarter of remaining heritage buildings are lost each generation. These valuable places are finite and, once destroyed, are gone forever.

1. **Recognizing that** heritage is a foundational pillar of Canadian identity and community resilience and that historic places – from lighthouses to grain elevators, sugar shacks to tipi rings – define local communities and reflect regional character.

We affirm that Canadians care about heritage places and their survival.

We call on those working in and leading associated industries to support local heritage in ways that align with your missions. Working together we can deliver affordable housing, better responses to climate change, and better training opportunities for skilled workers.

2. **Recognizing that** there are 1.4 million buildings in Canada built before 1945, yet only a fraction – 760 – operate as museums or historic sites. Most heritage buildings are woven into our urban and rural landscapes and are part of our everyday lives.

We affirm that many heritage places lack significant protection. The development and implementation of effective heritage legislation in all jurisdictions is a fundamental cornerstone to the conservation and use of places that matter to communities, as is a cohesive national policy that aligns with Canada's legal obligations under international law, including the recognition of Indigenous rights and acknowledgement of the heightened risk of erasure faced by heritage connected with marginalized and minoritized communities.

We call on all jurisdictions to adopt best practices for heritage protection and incentives for conservation and use, including for on-going maintenance of publicly owned buildings, and to halt immediately the erosion of existing protections to prevent the unnecessary demolition and destruction of heritage sites.

- 3. Recognizing that** heritage contributes to the Canadian economy by supporting local trades and skilled jobs and drives economic activity in the tourism, film, renovation, engineering, architecture, insurance, and environmental sectors. Heritage places are estimated to contribute over \$3 billion in GDP each year.

We affirm the need for stronger support to sustain this economic engine and the value of financial incentives to catalyze the care and upkeep of heritage properties.

We call on all governments, industry leaders, and civil society to invest in heritage places and to expand financial incentives for the stewardship of heritage properties. These may be increased tax benefits, targeted grants and financial assistance, ensuring charitable incentives or tax treatments equitable to those for ecological and cultural gifts.

- 4. Recognizing that** historic buildings are typically constructed using locally sourced, renewable, and durable materials such as wood, stone, and brick, often yielding a lower carbon footprint, greater longevity, less wasteful, and better affordability. Adaptive reuse provides a sustainable alternative to new construction, supporting climate action and preserving affordable, equitable, and healthy, livable housing opportunities to Canadians.

We affirm the value of heritage buildings as sinks of embodied carbon, essential housing resources, contributors to community health and well-being.

We call on the real estate, construction, and insurance sectors to enhance and share their understanding with those who own, live in, or develop heritage properties. This includes sharing best practices for making heritage projects economically viable, renovating in ways that preserve historic character, creating circular reuse systems for building materials, and ensuring residents of historic homes have access to appropriate protections.

5. **Recognizing that** heritage provides meaningful opportunities to advance dialogue on Reconciliation and to promote Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination over their cultural heritage.

We affirm Indigenous-led heritage initiatives not only strengthen the sector, but the cultural resurgence they support also positions Canada as a more credible and principled voice on the international stage.

We call on the Canadian government bring heritage laws in line with UNDRIP and to invest in the Indigenous led development of a National Framework for Indigenous Cultural Heritage Rights.

6. **Recognizing that** Canada's heritage sector faces a shortage of skilled professionals to safeguard cultural resources, heritage skills, and traditional knowledge.

We affirm that heritage education training programs are essential for the safeguarding of cultural resources, heritage skills, and traditional knowledge.

We call on all levels of government to uphold their responsibility as stewards of Canadian heritage by providing stable and adequate funding to support education, training and skills-development initiatives; on educational institutions to reintroduce heritage programs and training opportunities to help standardize knowledge of heritage processes and practices.

Heritage conservation is a powerful act of nurturing communities — a deliberate stand against ignorance, indifference, and erasure. Despite the clear cultural, economic, and social value that heritage places bring to communities, sites continue to be lost to intentional destruction, willful neglect and structural indifference. These threaten the ability of communities to continue to use and enjoy places that Canadians value. While we celebrate the exceptional achievements and inspired innovation of those caring for our

heritage sites, it is also the time to recommit to our shared vision for the future. We invite others to join us in taking this stand.

About the National Council

The National Council is a network that links Canadian heritage organizations in a collaborative effort to protect and celebrate Canadian heritage, while driving meaningful change within Canada's heritage sector.



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