

Sustainable Adaptive Reuse

Regeneration is a “growth industry”



Photo : Stratford Perth Heritage Foundation

Canada suffers from a surplus of empty heritage buildings which are at risk of demolition. Adaptive reuse finds a new use for an old building, and provided the new use “works with the grain of the building” , it can also be an unusual adaption.

How can adaptive reuse be stimulated?

Policies:

The United States has a *Heritage First* policy which gives precedence to historic buildings over new constructions when faced with a lack of commercial space.

Europeans employ a *historical listing* of their buildings which renders listed buildings virtually untouchable to construction except for preservation. The buildings at the top end of the register are the ones that generally receive the expensive process of adaptive reuse.

Sense of Community:

“Canada’s historic places capture the spirit of the nation” and commemorating historic places through adaptive reuse ensures historic places are preserved and maintained for future generations.

Economic Stimulation:

Adaptive reuse provides opportunities for new, unique enterprises to develop with a “historical variation”.

Adaptive reuse also allows a building to become a contributing member of society through economic stability.

Marketing:

A new enterprise in a unique building can be a marketing scheme to attract business.

Canada has many empty heritage buildings and suffers from a surplus of heritage buildings. Many of the buildings will remain empty because of constraints imposed on adaptive reuse.

How can adaptive reuse be hindered?

Financial constraints:

A financial analysis should be the first priority. Any challenges associated with adaptive reuse will also have a cost associated.

Return on Investment is another unknown financial constraint that may cause people to choose not to adapt a heritage building. “Some claim that Return of Investment is enhanced because of the savings involved in reusing existing buildings,” but it is a big unknown.

Upgrading to modern building code requirements:

Retrofitting the plumbing, HVAC, electrical and communication systems. The building’s fire code, safety, security and handicapped accessibility need to be upgraded.

Remaining true to the historicity of a building:

Any modifications completed on heritage buildings have to be in keeping with the “grain of the building.” Any modifications done to bring the building up to code, also need to be tied in to the style of the building.

Building Restoration must retain character-defining elements:

Repairs to buildings, require skilled, specialized workers. Repairs should have a minimal interference on the original character-defining elements of the building.

Multiple owners:

When there are more than two interested parties, obtaining a consensus of what to do with the building could cause problems or extensive delays.