



ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVANCY ONTARIO

The Past
Our
Present
Your
Future

Heritage Helping Housing Building Grant

Pre-Budget Consultations: 2026 Budget

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

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ACO is Ontario's leading non-governmental organization on built heritage and cultural heritage places.

Through education and advocacy, ACO encourages the conservation and reuse of structures and landscapes of architectural, historic, and cultural significance for the benefit and inspiration of Ontarians.

Our Goal: Keep, fix, and reuse older buildings and places.

We believe strong heritage protections are consistent and compatible with addressing Ontario's housing crisis, and we are requesting a new provincial grant that would demonstrate this.

Top of mind concerns for Ontarians

- **Housing prices/affordability**
- **Health care**

Leger Poll, November 3, 2025

Conservation of Ontario's Heritage

“Ontarians said that we must protect our environmentally sensitive areas, including the Greenbelt, cultural heritage assets and key employment and agricultural lands.”

More Homes, More Choice: Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan – May 2019

“Protected heritage property, which may contain built heritage resources or cultural heritage landscapes, shall be conserved.”

Provincial Planning Statement 2024 – 4.6.1

“Identifying and protecting places in our communities that have cultural heritage value is an important part of planning for the future, and of helping to guide change while keeping the buildings, structures, and landscapes that give each of our communities its unique identity.”

Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, Ontario Heritage Toolkit, *Introduction to Designation*

Properties of Significant Heritage Value in Ontario

- **Close to 8,000 individual properties, located all across Ontario, are designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act (OHA).**
- **Heritage Conservation Districts designated under Part V of the OHA contain over 30,000 properties.**
- **228 Ontario municipalities have enacted designation by-laws under the OHA.**

How can heritage buildings help solve our housing crisis?

- **The repair and reuse of existing buildings** offers a faster, cheaper and more sustainable path to affordable housing.
- Heritage offers a powerful solution to the housing crisis by providing choices that are **affordable, equitable, sustainable and uniquely Canadian.**



Church to supportive housing at St. Mark's Place in Kitchener: Recipient of the ACO Paul Oberman Award for Adaptive Reuse, 2024

How can heritage buildings help solve our housing crisis?

- **Delivering homes faster:** Many underutilized heritage buildings, including commercial buildings, government buildings, industrial sites, and schools can be re-purposed into housing. Adaptive reuse projects often reach occupancy faster than new builds.
- **Heritage housing is more affordable:** Adaptive re-use reduces project costs by as much as 16% by avoiding spending on demolition as well as reducing the use of new materials and streamlining permitting.
- **Repair and reuse is sustainable:** Many older buildings are built using local, renewable and durable materials like wood, stone and brick. These have a lower carbon footprint and greater longevity compared to new synthetic materials like concrete and steel. ***The greenest building is the one that already exists!***
- **Repair and reuse supports a stronger jobs market:** New construction spends typically 25-30% of its budget on labour; in adaptive reuse projects 60-75% is put toward local, skilled trades and craftspeople, reflecting many Canadians' desire for home-grown, Canada First, solutions to our housing needs.



***Former Grigg Hotel, now The Cornerstone, London
30 affordable apartments + programs and
employment for youth aged 16-25.***

From the Developer's Perspective...

Ontario developers surveyed by the National Trust for Canada in 2014 ranked a heritage revolving fund as their top incentive to encourage heritage development IF:

- The grants are simple to apply for and to administer; and**
- The fund is large enough to meet at least 33% of the demand (so applicants are likely to recover the cost of applying).**

More recently, the Ontario Real Estate Association (November 2023) asked for provincial loan guarantees for affordable housing projects and purpose-built rentals, to help lower the cost of borrowing.

ACO Proposes a New, Housing-focused “Heritage Helping Housing” Building Grant of \$10M/year

- **Simple application and administration (based on an existing program in Alberta).**
- **Encourages owners and developers to maintain and renovate heritage buildings.**
- **Pays 50% of costs (up to a cap) to building owners to renovate heritage buildings to create new housing units (e.g., on main streets above street-level retail space)**
- **50% of grant paid on approval, to address cost of borrowing.**

Note: Alberta’s 2023-24 program budget was slightly over \$1M with approximately 800 designated sites, as compared to Ontario’s 8,000 individual properties and over 30,000 properties in Heritage Conservation Districts.

Eligibility and Administration

- **Site must be designated (or in the process of being designated) under Part IV of the OHA, or be a contributing property in a Heritage Conservation District (HCD) designated under Part V of the OHA.**
- **Proposed work must create new housing units, with matching grants capped at \$100,000 per housing unit created on a designated or contributing property as noted above.**
- **Proposed work must adhere to the federal Standards & Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada.**
- **As in the Alberta program, 50% of approved funding is provided at the start of construction, remainder upon completion.**

Example 1. Kitchener: Former Mitchell Button Factory (built 1927; renovated 2025); now includes 44 supportive housing units. Designated. Photo: Kae Elgie



Example 2. St. Marys. Former two-story shop (built 1904; renovated 2015); now one-story shop with three rental units on the second floor. Part of a designated HCD. Photo: Dan Schneider



Example 3. Windsor. Former Canada Building (built c. 1930; renovated 2020); now two-bedroom condos on upper floors. Designated. Photo: Lynn Baker



To summarize: ACO believes that the proposed HHH would help to address the housing crisis in Ontario.

It would:

- **be simple to administer;**
- **address access to capital issues that small developers are facing;**
- **reuse existing buildings, shortening time to market;**
- **keep more skilled jobs in Ontario; and**
- **maintain community identity and pride in smaller towns that are experiencing development pressure.**



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**Thank you for the opportunity
to meet with you.**

Questions?

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