



Heritage Vancouver

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March 27, 2023

Joseph Smallwood, Project Facilitator, City of Vancouver

Re: 123 East Hastings

Dear Joseph Smallwood,

Earlier in the month we learned of the City of Vancouver's plans for 123 East Hastings when the City announced it on the Shape Your City page. This submission offers a perspective which hopefully can be useful and considered by the City of Vancouver in how it regards the site and more generally heritage -in its diverse forms- in the Downtown Eastside (DTES).

123 East Hastings is a Heritage B building on the Vancouver Heritage Register (VHR). The City of Vancouver is applying to demolish the building to make a temporary site for the Downtown Eastside Market. As described in the City's procedures for development on sites with properties on the VHR, city staff attempt to find a way to retain the building in discussions with the property owner. Additionally, the Downtown Eastside Operational Plan that the Shape Your City page refers to discusses heritage (in its diverse forms) extensively and outlines policies concerning the conservation of physical heritage resources as there are a significant number of them.

The City of Vancouver itself is applying to demolish a building on the VHR despite policies and procedures that the City has in place that speak to the importance of heritage. Therefore, we had hoped that there would be information on how the City reached the decision that there was no other alternative but to apply for demolition, along with details for the public on the long-term plans for the site and why, for example, the retention of the rare facade was not worth considering.

Since the application to demolish is in the late stages of the development application process with one option largely set, there appears to have been no chance to have public discussion on what this site means to different people and whether there were alternatives. Not even the Vancouver Heritage Commission, the public advisory body, was presented with the City's application for the demolition of a building on the VHR in order to engage in discussion on the building and the context of the area for input.

Heritage in the DTES does not only mean the physical buildings that are on the register. Nor does it mean the physical buildings are prioritized over any other type of heritage or what is culturally and socially important to the different groups in the area. This is clear in the Downtown Eastside Operational Plan. The context in the DTES is complex and different groups of people derive different meanings and

memories from this part of Hastings Street. To some people, the Art Nouveau building and conservation policies for heritage buildings may mean very little. However, there are also many people who have memories and experiences of this area during a very different time in the city. To them, the building, or some reminder of it, may be very culturally important. But these are just two of the more obvious examples of how someone might think.

It is exactly because of these different ways different people think of this building and this area that knowing what the process is and how the Downtown Eastside Operational Plan was applied to arrive at the decision to demolish is important. As it stands, the building is being put at odds with the market and community economic development. There is the implication that there is no alternative but to go against conservation policies in order to demolish and create a temporary location for the market which will need to be relocated again in the future. If it is the case that there is no alternative and conservation policies will not/cannot be followed, then it is even more important that there is a process for people to understand what is happening and why.

One of the most important purposes of heritage that is very often not publicly discussed is that it gets people to engage with what has meaning to them and what has meaning to others. It is a very people-centred process that involves citizen participation, learning from others, and negotiation of meanings. This process is a part of heritage¹ and is necessary whether you demolish or conserve.

Sincerely,



Bill Yuen
Executive Director, Heritage Vancouver Society

¹ The fourth driver of change, the Historic Urban Landscape framework, under Vancouver's Heritage Program adopted by Council in 2020, rests upon this idea of public participation and citizenship.