

March 6, 2007

City of Victoria Heritage Registry

The Issue

The City of Victoria is considering adding various post-war commercial buildings to the Heritage Registry, particularly those in the downtown core, without comprehensive consultation with affected stakeholders.

VREB Position

The VREB wrote to the City of Victoria on March 6, 2007 to raise the following points:

1. Any consideration of heritage status must carefully take into account the views of the property owners. The rights of property owners are paramount in a democratic society and should not be diminished arbitrarily by municipal regulation or administrative procedures.
2. Before any material change in those property rights is considered, there should be a fair and open public process and debate with broad participation from community stakeholders and individuals, including particularly those who own the properties in question.
3. Putting a property on a “heritage watch list” is a very important step that can significantly restrict the owner’s rights and, because of its negative perception for buyers/investors, substantially reduce the value of a property.
4. It should be recognized that the “heritage value” of a building is, by its nature, a highly subjective qualification. Buildings should not be included on a heritage list without a strong community consensus that the heritage value is so substantial that the building is worthy of retention. Such matters should not be the domain of a small group of decision makers or “experts”, rather it is critical that there is an opportunity for meaningful public discussion and community debate.
5. It should be further recognized that the burden of retaining a heritage building imposes significant potential costs and value reduction on an owner that should be offset by corresponding practical benefits whenever feasible.

Ratification

Position ratified by the VREB Directors, September 2007.