



Heritage Vancouver

www.heritagevancouver.org
info@heritagevancouver.org
604 254 9411

309 - 268 Keefer Street
Vancouver BC V6A 1X5
Canada

November 2 2020

Mayor Stewart and Vancouver City Council
Vancouver City Hall
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver BC V5V 1V4

Dear Mayor and Council,

We are writing to express our general support for the Climate Emergency Action Plan. In this time of ongoing crisis, urgent action to address climate change and its impacts are necessary and any partisanship needs to be put aside for our common future.

While we fully support the intent of building climate-related actions in this report we observe that a critical element of low-carbon buildings with respect to historic and heritage assets is missing: *the greenest building is one that is already built.*

The carbon required to create and maintain an existing building is already spent, and as such needs to be considered when making choices about demolition, replacement and retrofitting. Ensuring that the carbon accounting mechanism will account for this is critical. It is also an open question as to if the ongoing cultural value of an existing building can be accounted for in these types of energy performance metrics particularly where it relates to equity and traditional cultural practices, relationships to neighbourhood fabric such as use value to communities and other difficult to quantify, but critical built and non-built elements. *We strongly encourage the City to implement more than just energy-based carbon accounting methods for existing and historic/heritage building retrofit policy actions.*

There is no question that a simple upgrade to a heating/cooling system or perhaps minor air sealing (as indicated in this report) can be a low-impact means to further reduce the operational carbon intensity of a building, and if done in a sensitive way does not impact the historic value of an existing building. However, if the carbon budget of a retrofit will require the wholesale re-skinning of a building and replacing windows, this may have significant impacts on the historic fabric of a street and community use value as well as possibly being a net-loss of carbon. This is because the net carbon costs of replacing elements (versus repairing or restoring them in place) may be higher. Windows are particularly interesting as numerous studies have shown that replacing, rather than restoring windows can be a significant net-carbon loss (particularly as relates to renovating older wood windows vs replacing with energy efficient vinyl units). *With all of this in mind we strongly encourage the City to engage with and consider full-cost carbon accounting (including embodied*

and future operational performance) particularly as it relates to existing and historic/heritage building retrofit requirements.

We would be pleased to engage with City staff and assist them where we can with understanding the important role existing and historic/heritage buildings can play in helping mitigate our climate crisis.

We strongly encourage members of the City Council to take a leadership role for all of our futures and take the political courage to support this important report and associated actions.

Sincerely,

Heritage Vancouver Society