

HERITAGE BC – AN UPDATE ON ONGOING CHALLENGES AND A CALL TO RENEW BC HERITAGE PROGRAMS IN 2011

As a new year begins, we enter 2011 with some formidable but not insurmountable challenges for heritage programs across British Columbia. This update is the first of regular updates from your provincial heritage organization in the province, Heritage BC. In future updates, it is my hope that the focus will be on successful conservation campaigns and programming celebrations happening in communities across the province. Instead, this update is devoted to highlighting the threat facing the very survival of heritage programming in the province.

Formed in 1981, Heritage BC is the voice of heritage advocating on behalf of community heritage organizations across the province. Heritage Vancouver is one of Heritage BC's 170 group members – and, like other groups across the province, benefits from the support and resources of this provincial organization. Unfortunately, Heritage BC and heritage conservation programming in BC is in a state of crisis.

This alarming state of affairs is a relatively recent development. Through the 1970s up until 2009, Heritage BC owed much of its success in assisting community heritage efforts to its strong collaborative relationship with the provincial Heritage Branch – which was until recently part of the Ministry of Tourism Culture and the Arts. Since 1989, the provincial government provided core funding to Heritage BC which allowed it to serve its member communities and organizations. Over the last decade, funding for heritage at the provincial level was eroded by cuts, and in 2009 Heritage BC's funding was completely eliminated. About the same time, gaming grants funding – upon which numerous community cultural organizations rely – was also terminated.

Heritage BC has been forced to respond by paring its program to save costs. But despite these measures, and as a result of further life-blows to its revenue stream, Heritage BC was forced to shut down for three months in 2009 and its staff was temporarily laid off. Heritage BC survives today only because of critical and timely financial aid provided by the Heritage Legacy Fund in 2009 and 2010. Established in 2003 to replace the BC Heritage Trust, The Heritage Legacy Fund provides community grants to worthy heritage initiatives across the province. While this life-saving infusion of funding has allowed Heritage BC to continue to operate and serve its members, it does so at the expense of community grant funding that would otherwise have been allocated by the Heritage Legacy Fund. This diversion of funds to temporarily sustain Heritage BC cannot continue.

URGENT – HERITAGE BC'S CALL TO RENEW NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

Last fall, Heritage BC produced a brochure entitled "A Call to Renew British Columbia's Heritage Program" highlighting the dire crisis currently affecting the heritage community. Since that time, efforts to bring attention to this crisis have accelerated. Heritage BC's President Larry Foster and other Board members have been stepping up efforts to bring the situation to the attention of the Premier and MLAs. Now Heritage BC is appealing to individual members and organizations to personally contact their MLAs to re-instate funding to heritage programming in the province. Meetings with municipal Councillors have

indicated that there is great interest in supporting Heritage BC's call resulting in several municipal Councils passing motions to challenge the province to restore provincial support and funding to heritage initiatives across the province.

What Can You Do?

In essence, the Call to Renew urges the Province of British Columbia to renew its commitment to heritage conservation. Please write or email the Premier Gordon Campbell, the Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid, Minister of Tourism, Trade and Investment (the new ministry with responsibility for heritage), and your local MLA and request that a commitment to heritage conservation be revived by :

- Investing a further \$10 million in the Heritage Legacy Fund
- Restoring community support for both local government and community heritage organizations such as Heritage BC
- Adopting the draft Provincial Heritage Strategy
- Restoring the budget of the Heritage Branch
- Resolving the Heritage Properties question (responsibility and funding for provincially owned sites)

More information is available through the following link: www.heritagebc.ca.

Only through a passionate and concerted appeal to municipal and provincial politicians, can we hope to draw attention to the crisis facing our built heritage. Please consider taking time to lend your voice to this appeal.

Karen Russell

Karen is a Heritage Vancouver member and a Board member at Heritage BC.