

St. John's Heritage Strategic Plan

2026-2036



ST. JOHN'S





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Land Acknowledgements

We respectfully acknowledge the Province of Newfoundland & Labrador, of which the City of St. John's is the capital City, as the ancestral homelands of the Beothuk. Today, these lands are home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We would also like to acknowledge with respect the diverse histories and cultures of the Mi'kmaq, Innu, Inuit, and Southern Inuit of this Province.





Introduction and Context

History of St. John's Heritage

Regulations

Following the Second World War and Confederation, St. John's experienced significant growth and the shift toward suburbanization. Residential areas, such as Churchill Park, expanded outside of the downtown core and Memorial University moved from Parade Street to its present location on Elizabeth Avenue. Some areas of the downtown were slated for demolition and redevelopment in the name of modernization.

This spurred reaction from residents and activists who argued for heritage conservation in downtown St. John's. This response from residents was not unique to St. John's. During the 1960's and 1970's, historic districts across the country were redeveloped which led toward the creation of the Heritage Canada Foundation, now known as the National Trust for Canada. Heritage Canada was launched as a national, membership-based organization and registered charity in Canada, established to save historic places and promote the care of Canada's historic environment¹.

In 1976, Heritage Canada, along with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, funded the St. John's Heritage Conservation Area Study: A report on the feasibility of establishing a Heritage Conservation Area in St. John's Newfoundland. This study set the groundwork for St. John's Heritage Areas and the creation of the St. John's Heritage By-Law in 1977. At that time, the By-Law established one of the first and largest designated heritage areas in Canada. The original Heritage Areas remain today and have been expanded over time to include much of the downtown core and surrounding neighbourhoods.



¹ "Heritage Canada Foundation". Carleton University Library. N.d. [Heritage Canada Foundation - Archives and Research Collections](#)

The Need for a Heritage Strategic Plan

While St. John's has had a long history of heritage conservation, regulating development within Heritage Areas and renovations to designated Heritage Buildings, there has not been a document that sets the vision, goals and action items for the protection, management, and promotion of St. John's heritage. Further, the Heritage By-Law regulates built heritage, but there is a desire by Council to also celebrate the natural and cultural heritage of the City, and the intangible cultural heritage. This Heritage Strategic Plan will set goals and objectives for the next 10 years.



Joint Coordinating Committee on Indigenous Rights

It is recognized in this Heritage Strategic Plan that much of the written materials about St. John's were established from a European or colonial perspective and therefore heritage policies and regulations were created from that same lens. On September 20, 2020, St. John's City Council passed a Declaration in Support of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to promote and strengthen mutually respectful relationships with the urban Indigenous community in St. John's and with all other First Peoples in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The declaration outlines the City's commitment to take many important actions to strengthen its relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

In 2024, the City of St. John's and First Voice Urban Indigenous Coalition formed a Joint Coordinating Committee on Indigenous Rights (JCCIR). The committee will develop recommendations for implementing the City of St. John's commitments and advance the urban Indigenous coalition's 2023 Community Action Plan. With respect to heritage, the City will explore Call for Change 19: Decolonize the City of St. John's Municipal Plan and all related processes, procedures, and policies, including the Heritage By-law.

Research is currently ongoing to determine the best approach to implement Call for Change 19. The Heritage Strategic Plan may be amended at a later date to incorporate applicable recommendations from the JCCIR.





Heritage Strategic Plan

Consultation

In 2023, the City initiated consultation on the Heritage Strategic Plan to guide the City in managing, maintaining, and protecting our heritage resources in the future. Engagement included:

- a project page on EngageStJohns.ca;
- online and in-person public meetings;
- consulting with the City's Advisory Committees, Working Groups and Experts Panels;
- focus group meetings with heritage organizations, development/business organizations and community organizations; and
- a meeting with designated Heritage Building property owners.

Role of the Heritage Strategic Plan

The City of St. John's has a strategic direction to be a Sustainable City, planning for land use while preserving and enhancing the natural and built environment for residents. The Heritage Strategic Plan plays a key role in advancing this direction.

The role of the Heritage Strategic Plan is to set out how to manage and protect historic resources over a 10-year period. This Plan is not a statutory policy document, but rather a strategic plan that will guide Council's decisions over the life span of the plan. The Heritage Strategic Plan will be used in conjunction with the Envision St. John's Municipal Plan and the City of St. John's Heritage By-Law. Following Council's approval, further actions and processes need to be developed and budgeted for annually to implement the actions over the plan's duration.

The plan contains estimated budget items for Council's consideration, but the specific actions or initiatives will be costed and presented to Council each year as part of the regular budget approval process.



Benefits of Heritage Planning

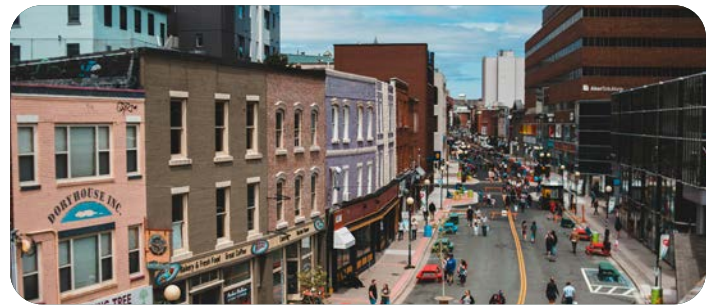
The preservation of historic buildings and celebration of cultural heritage are key elements that link the present with the past and contribute to a community's sense of place. Historic buildings and streetscapes have become landmarks that influence the collective history and memories of the community. Many benefits can be found from identifying and protecting historic places.²

Tourism and Economic Development

Heritage preservation generates economic activity in Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly in the form of tourism. The province's cultural heritage together with its natural heritage are the two pillars of our tourism economy. St. John's attracts local, national and international visitors, and continues to be the hub for conferences, business conventions and major events.

Intangible cultural heritage, including local knowledge, craft skills, and practices is a major foundation for the province's craft industry which saw sales in 2016 of \$36 million from approximately 760 craft-related businesses.³

Restoration of Heritage Buildings often requires skilled labour which contributes to the growth in employment in the restoration industry.



Sustainability

The adaptive reuse and recycling of historic structures play an important role in mitigating climate change. Preserving a Heritage Building prevents demolition and reduces the amount of waste in our landfills. Further, it also prevents the need to expend more energy to create new material. The building's embodied energy (i.e., the greenhouse gases expended to construct them) is retained and additional greenhouse gases are avoided when reusing older buildings as opposed to replacing them with new.

Urban Design

Heritage Buildings often have unique architectural elements and design that may be difficult to replicate today. Urban design, including the groupings of buildings, laneways and irregular street patterns contribute to making St. John's unique.

Social and Educational

Heritage Buildings are a tangible means to trace the City's history over time. They are visual reminders of the people and industries that played a role in establishing St. John's and making it what it is today. They help create a community's sense of place.

Celebrating cultural histories through festivals and events is a way to bring people together to learn about the past, while also celebrating where we are today.

² "Historic Preservation Pays in Newfoundland & Labrador". Heritage NL. N.d. <https://heritagenl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Heritage-Pays-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

³ Craft Strategy Working Group. "Newfoundland and Labrador Craft Industry Strategy 2023-2025". Craft and Gift, n.d. <https://www.gov.nl.ca/iet/sector-diversification-division/craft-and-gift/>

Vision

St. John's is a city that recognizes, celebrates and safeguards our past and present, to set a foundation for our future. Through the retention/ protection of built, cultural, natural, and intangible heritage, St. John's is sustainable, inclusive and fosters a sense of place and belonging for all residents.

Goals

To implement the vision, the City has created five priorities which have been categorized into goals and action items and will be implemented over the next 10 years.

- 1. Protect and Conserve Built Heritage**
- 2. Expand the Heritage Narrative**
- 3. Develop Municipal and Community Expertise**
- 4. Create Awareness and Support Heritage Education**
- 5. Collaborate with Governments and Agencies**

Each action item has an estimated time frame for implementation as follows:

- Ongoing: underway and continuing (2026-2036)
- Short Term: 1-3 years
- Medium Term: 4-6 years
- Long Term: 6-10 years



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THE INSTITUTE OF
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS
OF
NEWFOUNDLAND

Goal 1:
Protect and Conserve Built Heritage

Action		Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
1.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Adopt The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, 2010 and apply it to designated Heritage Buildings. b. Update the St. John’s Heritage By-Law Heritage Design Standards where applicable to ensure consistency with the standards and guidelines. 	Short Term	Existing staff time.	A consistent, nationwide approach to guide decision making when reviewing and approving interventions on Heritage Buildings.
1.2	Partner with Heritage NL to conduct a built heritage inventory.	Long Term	Existing staff time in collaboration with Heritage NL.	An up to date inventory of built heritage.
1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Review the designated Heritage Building list to determine if the list represents a cross-section of all cultures, time periods and styles in the City’s historic and cultural evolution. b. Promote Heritage Building designation of buildings associated with cultures, time periods or styles not yet appropriately recognized. c. Each year contact five (5) property owners of buildings that warrant consideration for heritage designation to determine if they will be willing to have their buildings designated. 	Medium Term	Existing staff time.	A more inclusive and comprehensive list of Heritage Buildings to protect for future generations.

	Action	Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
1.4	Review and update the City's heritage designation criteria to ensure it supports consideration of a diverse range of cultures and time periods.	Short Term and Ongoing	Existing staff time.	A more inclusive and comprehensive list of Heritage Buildings to protect for future generations.
1.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Further evaluate the heritage standards for the Water Street Historic District, Rennie's Mill Road Historic District and St. John's Ecclesiastical District. b. Prepare a Growth Management Plan for the St. John's Ecclesiastical District. 	Long Term	Existing staff time.	A comprehensive review of design standards in significant Historic Districts.
1.6	<p>Hire a consultant to review buildings along Water Street, Duckworth Street, and other commercially zoned side streets, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Review the designated Heritage Building list to determine if/where street blocks should be designated. b. Determine where building height can be increased and prepare associated design standards to ensure the heritage character of the area is maintained. 	Short Term	\$25,000	Increase density in the Downtown while protecting heritage resources.
1.7	Consider amending the Heritage Financial Incentives Program to include a new grant for municipally designated Heritage Buildings.	Short Term	\$70,000	Increased resources to protect Heritage Buildings.

Action		Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
1.8	Consider amending the Heritage Financial Incentives Program eligible work to include renovations on all facades of a building and the building's foundation.	Short Term	\$20,000	An enhanced grant program that is more user-friendly for applicants and recognizes that maintaining the entire historic building is essential for long-term heritage conservation.
1.9	Review the Heritage Financial Incentives Program annually to ensure eligible work is meeting the community's needs and the grant application is easy to use.	Ongoing	Existing staff time.	A responsive approach to align with the needs of the community in an ever-changing environment.
1.10	Work with the Communications Division to better promote designating Heritage Building and increase awareness on the Heritage Financial Incentives Program.	Ongoing	Existing staff time and, if applicable, cost of promotional materials.	Increased public awareness of ongoing City heritage initiatives.
1.11	Promote the revitalization and adaptive reuse of Heritage Buildings and buildings in Heritage Areas as a sustainable development option. This aligns with the City of St. John's 10 Year Affordable Housing Strategy and the Resilient St. John's Community Climate Plan: Energy Transition.	Ongoing	Existing staff time and, if applicable, cost of promotional materials. \$10,000 for a consultant to prepare carbon footprint comparison data.	Increased public awareness of the environment benefits of adaptive reuse. Implementation of pathway actions from the Resilient St. John's Community Climate Plan: Energy Transition.

	Action	Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
1.12	Evaluate and promote methods to increase energy efficiency in Heritage Buildings and buildings in Heritage Areas while protecting character defining elements.	Ongoing	Existing staff time.	A balanced approach between historic building conservation and energy conservation to facilitate the sustainable management of historic buildings.
1.13	Develop a plan for municipally owned Heritage Buildings and structures to forecast and guide maintenance and restoration work over the long-term.	Medium Term	Existing staff time.	A municipally owned Heritage Buildings management plan.
1.14	Set parameters to waive development fees for municipally designated Heritage Buildings. Further, waive building permit fees for municipally designated Heritage Buildings where the building is conserved and enhanced.	Short Term	Existing staff time. Reduced City revenues due to waiving fees.	Increased number of Heritage Buildings being conserved.



Goal 2: Expand the Heritage Narrative

	Action	Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
2.1	<p>Work toward reconciliation with Indigenous residents and history.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support and promote the implementation of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). Continue to work with First Light to implement First Voice's Calls for Change from Our Shared Vision: A Path toward Truth and Reconciliation in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2023-33; an Urban Indigenous Community Action Plan (February 2023). ISBN 978-1-7387971-1-0. Work with First Light's newly created Municipal Reconciliation Liaison to integrate reconciliation initiatives into operations and governance. 	Ongoing	<p>To be determined.</p> <p>Will depend on amount and type of research and/or consultation required.</p>	<p>A collaborative approach to ensure adequate and appropriate Indigenous representation in St. John's heritage.</p>
2.2	<p>In collaboration with appropriate representatives, identify and celebrate underrepresented groups who have previously been overlooked in St. John's heritage.</p>	Long Term	<p>To be determined; may require specific project costs and increases to departmental budgets.</p>	<p>A more inclusive account of St. John's history.</p>

Action		Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
2.3	<p>Celebrate the array of cultures in St. John's and their history:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Review street names and storyboards to ensure they are inclusive and represent the full historic context of St. John's. b. Continue to support festivals and events as opportunities to reclaim space for cultures often overlooked. 	Long Term	<p>\$2,000/ storyboard (as needed).</p> <p>\$5000 for summer student to complete a review of the storyboards.</p>	A more inclusive account of St. John's history.
2.4	<p>Recognize Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Add an ICH category to the Heritage Awards. b. Continue to maintain an ICH representative on the City's Arts and Culture Advisory Committee. c. Raise awareness of local ICH through promotion of courses offered by the City and other non-profit organizations (ex: knitting, rug hooking, accordion lessons). 	Short Term	Existing staff time.	Increased awareness of ICH and how it is part of St. John's heritage.
2.5	<p>Recognize cultural landscapes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Prepare a cultural landscape study to identify significant landscapes, and set policies and strategies to protect, manage and celebrate these resources unique to St. John's. b. Work with Heritage NL to identify and seek ways to preserve historic cemeteries. 	Long Term	\$50,000 - \$75,000	Incorporation of cultural landscapes into the planning process.

Action		Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
2.6	Recognize rural heritage. This may include designating rural Heritage Buildings or Intangible Cultural Heritage related to rural land uses.	Medium Term	To be determined; will depend on the type of recognition proposed.	Increased awareness of the history and importance of rural land uses in the St. John's context.
2.7	Celebrate major City events and anniversaries.	Long Term	To be determined; will depend on the type of celebration proposed.	Increased public awareness of significant events and history.
2.8	Formalize and publicize a commemorative list of historic buildings and structures.	Short Term	Existing staff time.	Recognition and increased awareness of important buildings, structures or sites that may not be formally designated.



Goal 3: Develop Municipal and Community Expertise

	Action	Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
3.1	<p>a. Ensure all applicable staff complete any necessary training prior to implementing the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada.</p> <p>b. Ensure new staff in the Planning, Engineering and Regulatory Services Division are trained on heritage policies and processes.</p> <p>c. Encourage the development community, members of the Built Heritage Experts Panel and Heritage Building property owners to complete the free online Introduction to the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada course, offered through the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada, in partnership with Parks Canada Agency.</p>	Short Term	<p>Existing staff time, and if applicable, cost of promotional materials.</p> <p>Costs associated with training may also be required.</p>	<p>A consistent approach to implementing heritage policies and procedures.</p> <p>Greater understanding of how the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada can be used in coordination with the St. John's Heritage By-Law.</p>



	Action	Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
3.2	Hold information sessions on the St. John's Heritage By-Law Heritage Design Standards and The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada for Heritage Building property owners, and other relevant organizations including but not limited to Architects, Developers, Contractors, Building Supply Venders and Home Builders.	Short Term	\$600	Increased public awareness of the requirements for renovations and developments in the St. John's Heritage Areas and how The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada will be applied to designated Heritage Building.
3.3	Develop and promote information packages on elements of the Heritage Design Standards (window, door, cladding styles and materials, etc.).	Medium Term	Existing staff time and cost of promotional materials.	Information packages to guide applicants in appropriate heritage styles and materials when renovating their historic building.
3.4	Ensure Secondary Plans, created under the Envision St. John's Municipal Plan, contain a heritage component, and identify heritage resources in each neighbourhood.	Long Term	Existing staff time and costs included in the Secondary Plan budget.	Expansion of research and recognition of heritage resources outside of the Downtown area. A more inclusive and comprehensive evaluation of St. John's Heritage.

	Action	Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
3.5	<p>Integrate heritage goals and initiatives with broader municipal goals, such as sustainability, climate change, economic development, arts and culture, and parks and open spaces. This could include adding heritage considerations when City plans and strategies are updated. Such plans and strategies may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable Housing Strategy 2019-2028; Healthy City Strategy; Municipal Arts Plan; Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan. Resilient St. John's Climate Plan; and Roadmap 2021. 	Ongoing	Existing staff time.	A heritage lens will be incorporated into broader City goals and initiatives.



Goal 4:

Create Awareness and Support Heritage Education

Action		Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
4.1	Promote informational materials on ways property owners can make Heritage Buildings, and buildings in Heritage Areas more physically accessible while meeting the Heritage Design Standards.	Medium Term	Existing staff time.	Increased awareness that heritage requirements do not restrict accessibility. Improved accessibility to historic buildings.
4.2	Create a Communication Plan for the overall promotion of heritage. May include, but not limited to: Heritage By-Law, Heritage Design Standards (including the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada), heritage designations, heritage grants and heritage awards.	Short Term	Existing staff time, and if applicable, cost of promotional materials.	A comprehensive plan on how the City will promote heritage. Increased public awareness of City heritage initiatives.
4.3	Review and improve the City's website to ensure all heritage information is easy to find, located in one place and uses plain language.	Short Term	Existing staff time.	An accessible, one-stop online site for St. John's heritage information.
4.4	Continue to plan and deliver an annual event for Heritage Day (third Monday in February). This may include a panel discussion, workshop, movie, or walking tour, etc.	Ongoing	\$1,000	Increased awareness of the importance of St. John's heritage provided in a variety of formats.

Action		Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
4.5	Create a Heritage Building QR Code Decal Program to provide the public with easy access to the history of a building. The QR Code will be displayed in the Heritage Building's window and will link to the building's Statement of Significance.	Short Term	\$3,000	An additional, user-friendly way for the public to learn about Heritage Buildings.
4.6	Work with community partners to develop an oral history project for designated Heritage Buildings and other historical themes.	Long Term	To be determined.	An alternative media format to learn about St. John's history. The creation of a new resource for St. John's history.
4.7	Continue to promote St. John's downtown and Heritage Areas as a tourism attraction.	Ongoing	Existing staff time.	Increased tourist visitation and associated economic activity.
4.8	Continue to promote the City's historic walking tours.	Ongoing	Existing staff time.	Increased awareness of St. John's history provided in a variety of formats.
4.9	Continue to explore ways to incorporate heritage into the public realm, including but not limited to public art, historic trails, wayfinding, plaques, utility box wraps, etc.	Ongoing	To be determined; may require specific project costs.	Increased methods to raise awareness of St. John's history in a self-guided format.
4.10	Promote the history of street and neighbourhood names.	Short Term	Existing staff time.	Additional method for residents to learn about the history of St. John's neighbourhoods.

Action		Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
4.11	<p>a. Identify and map the location of monuments and storyboards in the City.</p> <p>b. Include the locations on the City's Neighbourhood Profile website.</p>	Medium Term	Existing staff time.	Enhanced online tools to increase heritage education and awareness.
4.12	Create an inventory of publicly-owned laneways and determine if additional signage or wayfinding is required.	Medium Term	Existing staff time, budget may be required for materials.	A consolidated, public record of historic laneways.
4.13	Include the locations of provincially and federally designated buildings, sites and districts on the City's Neighbourhood Profile map.	Medium Term	Existing staff time.	A consolidated map of municipal, provincial and federal historic resources.
4.14	Promote collaborations with schools and after school programs to enhance teaching of local history.	Medium Term	Existing staff time, budget may be required for materials.	Additional ways for our younger populations to learn about St. John's history in an age-appropriate format.
4.15	Continue to promote the City of St. John's Archives as the official repository for municipal records and history, and source for archival photographs, buildings research, and maps.	Ongoing	Existing staff time.	Increased awareness of St. John's history provided in a variety of formats.



Goal 5:

Collaborate with Governments and Agencies

Action		Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
5.1	Advocate to the Provincial Government for broadened powers under the City of St. John's Act and Historic Resources Act. This may include, but not limited to, minimum property maintenance standards for Heritage Buildings, and the inclusion on municipally designated historic areas and buildings in the Historic Resources Act.	Long Term	Existing staff time.	Greater authority to protect built heritage and a more consistent approach to municipal heritage conservation throughout the province.
5.2	Advocate to the Federal and Provincial Government to use tax incentives, including at the municipal level, for the rehabilitation and reuse of Heritage Buildings and buildings in Heritage Areas.	Long Term	Existing staff time.	Increased incentives to encourage heritage conservation and preservation.
5.3	Continue to work with the Provincial Archaeology Office (PAO) and City staff to refer applications to the PAO at an early stage.	Ongoing	Existing staff time.	Improved coordination between the municipal and provincial departments to identify the need for historic resources impact assessments at an early stage.
5.4	Work with other communities in the Northeast Avalon, regional organizations such as Advantage St. John's, and Heritage NL to research and promote the history of the region.	Long Term	Existing staff time.	Greater understanding and promotion of the shared history of the region.

	Action	Time	Budget (estimated)	Outcome
5.5	Continue to explore opportunities to collaborate with Parks Canada, provincial departments, Heritage NL, Memorial University and College of the North Atlantic on heritage themes.	Medium Term	Existing staff time.	Partnerships with organizations that have shared interests.





ST. JOHN'S