

DATE OF MEETING April 7, 2025

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SUBJECT HERITAGE ALTERATION PERMIT – 35 FRONT STREET

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To present for Council's consideration, a heritage alteration permit application to allow minor exterior alterations of the Nanaimo Court House building at 35 Front Street.

Recommendation

That Council issue Heritage Alteration Permit No. HAP00031 to allow minor exterior alterations of the Nanaimo Court House building at 35 Front Street.

BACKGROUND

The Nanaimo Court House building at 35 Front Street falls within the Heritage Conservation Area (HCA1), thus a heritage alteration permit is required prior to issuance of a building permit for exterior changes to the building. The Downtown/Fitzwilliam Corridor conservation area is designated HCA1 in *City Plan* for the purpose of protecting Nanaimo's most significant concentration of built heritage.

Heritage Value Statement:

Built from 1895 to 1896, the Nanaimo Court House is a very striking and superior example of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture, which was favoured for major public buildings of this period. The building features the rough-dressed masonry and prominent round arched openings typical of this style. The picturesque roofline is highlighted with a slate covering and intricate copper ornamentation. A plain 1957 addition at the rear of the building does not actively infringe on the original building's character. This exceptional building marks the height of the architectural grandeur of the Late Victorian era.

The Nanaimo Court House is significant because of its association with Francis Mawson Rattenbury, British Columbia's premier institutional architect of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rattenbury also designed the Nelson Court House, the provincial Parliament Buildings, and numerous other residential and institutional buildings. This building, and the Nelson Court House, represented a continuation of Rattenbury's interest in the picturesque eclecticism of the Late Victorian era.

The Court House's location on a major street facing the waterfront and its height and substantial mass also make it a very prominent landmark. The Court House is the premier symbol of early provincial government presence in Nanaimo.

The Court House is also significant because of its siting on the lot. The mid-block location was an unusual choice, as most court houses were given a prominent corner location. To increase the formality of the design and the presence of the building, the building is set to the rear of the sloping site. This position allowed for a gracious landscaped plaza at the front.

The building's character-defining features include:

- All the elements of the original Richardsonian Romanesque style as expressed in the monumental scale, symmetrical façade, rough dressed Sandstone exterior bearing walls, granite foundation blocks, corner towers with high bell cast pyramidal roofs, large arched central entry, decorated keystones, slate roof with copper flashing, and ridge ornamentation. Elaborate leaded, stained, and painted glass windows, and a complicated and picturesque roofline.
- All the elements of the 1957 addition as expressed in the simple form and massing, and minimal ornamentation.
- The building's location, within a grouping of historic buildings, on a major street facing the waterfront.
- The spatial configuration of the building and front plaza.]

DISCUSSION

The BC Ministry of Citizens' Services has applied for a heritage alteration permit to complete a number of minor exterior alterations to the older (1895/96) and newer (1957) portions of the Court House building. These alterations are primarily focused on roof renewal, window replacement, and cornice repairs (as outlined in Attachments B – F).

Proposed alterations to the older portion of the building include the following:

- Due to its poor condition, the existing slate tile roofing will be removed and replaced with new slate tiles that match the original in colour, texture, and pattern.
- The existing stained-glass windows located on the front façade of the Court House will be refurbished to preserve their historical and artistic significance while improving their structural integrity and longevity.
- The existing aluminum-framed windows installed in the 1970s will be replaced with identical wood-framed windows that reflect the original window construction.
- Wood panels previously added to the windows in 1970 will be replaced with copper spandrel panels designed to align with the materials and architectural style of the original construction.
- The building's roof cornices will be thoroughly assessed for any structural damage or deterioration, and if issues are identified, repairs will be undertaken to restore their integrity while maintaining their historical and architectural significance.

Key alterations to the newer portion of the Court House building include the following:

- Replacement of all existing aluminum windows with fibreglass windows designed to replicate the existing windowpane pattern and style.
- Replacement of the existing aluminum doors facing onto Skinner Street with new aluminum doors designed to replicate the existing door style.

- Replacement of the existing concrete ramp and landing at the main entrance door on Skinner Street with an upgraded concrete ramp and landing.

These proposed alterations are generally supported by the City of Nanaimo's Downtown Heritage Building Design Guidelines, as well as the Federal Government's *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*.

Staff recommend that Council issue a heritage alteration permit to allow minor alterations of the Nanaimo Court House building at 35 front Street. The proposed alterations are sympathetic to the building's original architectural style and will not detract from the building's overall heritage value. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Nanaimo Court Housing building at 35 Front Street falls within the Downtown Heritage Conservation Area (HCA1), thus a heritage alteration permit is required prior to issuance of a building permit for exterior changes to the building.
- The BC Ministry of Citizens' Services has applied for a heritage alteration permit in order to complete a number of minor exterior alterations to the Nanaimo Court Housing building, primarily focused on roof renewal, window replacement, and cornice repairs.
- The proposed alterations are sympathetic to the building's original architectural style and will not detract from the building's overall heritage value, thus Staff recommend that Council support the proposed heritage alteration permit.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Subject Property Map
ATTACHMENT B: Proposed Alterations Summary
ATTACHMENT C: Cover Sheet and General Notes
ATTACHMENT D: Building Elevations
ATTACHMENT E: Window and Door Schedules
ATTACHMENT F: Heritage Window Details |

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