



Planning and Land Use Committee Report For the Meeting of April 30, 2015

To: Planning and Land Use Committee **Date:** April 16, 2015
From: Murray G. Miller, Senior Heritage Planner
Subject: **Heritage Designation Application No. 000150 for 816 Government Street/
811-813 Wharf Street (Victoria Customs House)**

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend that the Committee forward this report to Council and that Council consider the following motions:

1. "That Council consider referring the Heritage Designation Application No. 000150 for 816 Government Street/811-813 Wharf Street to the Heritage Advisory Panel and requesting specific feedback as to whether the extent of proposed change to the Heritage-Registered 1914 Customs House as depicted in the Revised Heritage Alteration Permit Application drawings, date stamped March 13, 2015, and the Heritage Building Proposed Interventions, date stamped April 7, 2015, would affect the property's eligibility for designation as a Municipal Heritage Site."
2. "That Council consider the designation of the Heritage-Registered property located at 816 Government Street/811-813 Wharf Street pursuant to Section 967 of the *Local Government Act* as a Municipal Heritage Site. This report fulfils the requirements of Section 968(5) of the Act."

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

In accordance with section 967 of the *Local Government Act*, Council may, by bylaw, on terms and conditions it considers appropriate, designate real property in whole or in part as protected if Council considers that the property has heritage value or heritage character or that the designation of the property is necessary or desirable for the conservation of a protected heritage property.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present Council with information, analysis and recommendations regarding an owner request to designate the Heritage-Registered former Victoria Customs House (Customs House) located at 816 Government Street/811-813 Wharf Street, within Development Permit Area 1 (HC): Core Historic.

The following points were considered in assessing this application:

- general consistency with the *Official Community Plan* (OCP)
- Statement of Significance.

BACKGROUND

Description of Proposal

An application to designate the Customs House located at 816 Government Street/811-813 Wharf Street as a Municipal Heritage Site was received from Stan Sipos, President, Victoria Customs House Development Inc. on March 13, 2015.

Zoning/Land Use

The proposed designation is consistent with the existing zoning and surrounding land uses.

Condition/Economic Viability

The exterior masonry requires conservation and the building requires seismic strengthening.

ANALYSIS

The following sections provide a summary of the application's consistency with the relevant City policies and guidelines.

Official Community Plan

This application is linked to a Heritage Alteration Permit Application, where certain proposed works differ from the recommendations in the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*. The Standards and Guidelines are applicable in DPA 1 (HC): Core Historic. The extent of proposed change to the Heritage-Registered 1914 Customs House should therefore be considered in this application for heritage designation.

Statement of Significance

A Statement of Significance describing the historic place, outlining its heritage value and identifying its character-defining elements is attached to this report.

Resource Impacts

The applicant has indicated an interest in conserving the exterior masonry and seismically strengthening the retained heritage façades. As a result, there may be a future request for a tax exemption to offset the cost of seismic strengthening, which would require Council's consideration. The applicant may also request a grant from the Building Incentive Program for exterior conservation of the historic fabric. Both the Tax Incentive Program and the Building Incentive Program are administered by the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust.

CONCLUSIONS

The Customs House located at 816 Government Street/811-813 Wharf Street is a significant contributor to Old Town and the Inner Harbour Districts as outlined in the Statement of Significance. The application for the designation of the three character-defining façades in conjunction with the proposed alterations can contribute to the heritage character and vibrancy

of Old Town.

The Customs House is characterized by its historic location, site configuration, scale, massing, masonry construction including massive granite foundations, design and character of its deeply inset windows, and the three facades that front onto Government, Wharf and Courtney Streets. Together, these character-defining elements make an important contribution to the character and appearance of Old Town and remain the physical evidence of the building's significance. The 1914 Customs House represents an important example of the work of David Ewart, Federal Department of Public Works. While considerable alterations to the facades are proposed, the altered Customs House will still merit heritage designation because it will still be a monumental building in the heart of downtown Victoria with a masonry exterior that will serve as a reminder of the presence and influence of the Federal Government.

Staff therefore recommend that the Committee forward this report to Council and that Council consider referring the application to the Heritage Advisory Panel.

ALTERNATE MOTION

That the Committee recommend that Council decline Heritage Designation Application No. 000150 for the property located at 816 Government Street/811-813 Wharf Street.

Respectfully submitted,



Murray G. Miller
Senior Heritage Planner
Community Planning Division



Andrea Hudson
Assistant Director, Community Planning
Sustainable Planning and Community
Development Department

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager: _____



Jason Johnson

Date: _____

April 22, 2015

MGM/ljm

S:\TEMPEST_ATTACHMENTS\PROSPERO\PL\HAP\HAP00192\HAP PLUC REPORT1.DOC

List of Attachments

- Aerial Photograph of Subject Property
- Map of Subject Property
- Statement of Significance
- Aerial Photographs Showing Extent of Façades to be Retained.



816 Government Street and
811-813 Wharf Street
Heritage Designation #000150





3. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

POST OFFICE & CUSTOM HOUSE EXTENSIONS, 811 WHARF STREET (816 GOVERNMENT STREET) (NOT REVISED)

Description of Historic Place

The Post Office & Custom House extensions consist of a massive three-storey building located across from the Inner Harbour, in downtown Victoria. The building, which fronts onto Wharf and Courtney Streets, is distinctive for its imposing masonry construction and extensive carved detailing. This portion of the building was constructed as an addition to the earlier Post Office, situated facing Government Street, which was replaced in 1955-1957 with a modern structure. These extensions now appear isolated as they lack a prominent street entry.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

A monumental building in the heart of downtown Victoria, the Post Office & Custom House extensions, built in 1914 on the foundations of the rear extensions of the 1898 Post Office, are valued as symbols of national growth. The expansion of the Post Office & Custom House also demonstrates the incredible growth of Edwardian-era Victoria and its newly found prominence within the federal hierarchy. A prominent new Post Office for Victoria was designed in 1894 by Federal Department of Public Works Chief Architect Thomas Fuller (1823-1898), at a convenient location on the Inner Harbour. Construction started in 1896 but was not completed until 1898; this included one-storey extensions to the rear of the main building for receiving goods and mail. By the turn of the twentieth century, burgeoning prosperity in the West, initiated by an abundance of industry and natural resources, attracted

the attention of the Ottawa establishment. In order to cope with the explosive growth of trade throughout the country, eight large customs examining warehouses were built during the Edwardian era in important trade centres, including this one in Victoria. It was located directly behind Fuller's original post office, and built on the foundations of an annex that included receiving areas and an enclosed carriageway.

Additionally, the Post Office & Custom House extensions are significant for their impressive architecture, which demonstrated the presence and influence of the Federal Government. This is an important example of the work of David Ewart (1841-1921) of the Federal Department of Public Works. Ewart joined the DPW in 1871 at the age of twenty-eight. When Thomas Fuller retired as Chief Architect, his assistant, Ewart, assumed the position. Ewart made significant contributions to the country's architectural maturation. In 1901, Ewart took a summer tour of Europe, and was inspired by London's significant buildings in the new Edwardian Baroque style. Despite his use of this new style for other projects, Ewart's extension of the Victoria Post Office & Custom House utilized some of the material of Fuller's Second Empire-style Post Office, and continued the same detailing.

The Post Office & Customs House Extensions are also valued as symbols of the Post Office's evolution over time and for their historic location, the site of the first post office building in 1874. This impressive Post Office was being built on the north side of the Inner Harbour at the same time that the new Parliament Buildings were rising to the south. Between 1955 and 1957, Fuller's original post office was demolished and replaced with the current modern structure, since re-clad to bring it more in harmony with its historic context. Ewart's extensions survive as a reminder of the earlier building.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Post Office & Custom House Extensions include their:

- prominent downtown corner location, on an irregular-shaped site with three street frontages, with minimal setbacks from the property lines
- institutional form, scale and massing as expressed by its three-storey plus basement height, irregular plan and flat roof
- masonry construction including massive granite foundations, and sandstone cladding blocks with tooled finish and red mortar, with the base dating from 1896-98 and upper floors from 1914
- decorative elements that matched the façade articulation of the 1898 Post Office, including: deeply inset windows with stone mullions; paired pilasters; inset rusticated panels; segmental-arched ground floor carriageways with granite carriage guards; modillions; architraves; and bracketted cornice
- original interior features such as a staircase with metal balustrades, terrazzo floors, and wooden window trim

Aerial Photographs Showing Extent of Facades to be Retained
816 Government Street/811-813 Wharf Street

