

FHBRO Number 99-038

Ottawa, Ontario

**Sir Charles Tupper Building**

2720 Riverside Drive

The Sir Charles Tupper Building, designed in the International-Modern style by Ottawa architects Hazelgrove and Lithwick, was built between 1955-60 as the headquarters of the Department of Public Works. While exterior changes have been few, a number of circulation and office areas have been refitted. The building continues in its original function as office accommodation for federal government departments. Public Works and Government Services Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 99-38.

**Reasons For Designation**

The Sir Charles Tupper Building was designated "Recognized" for its historical associations, environmental significance and architectural importance.

The Tupper Building is associated with the post World War II expansion of federal government services, and with the role of the Department of Public Works in the delivery of architectural, engineering and property management services for federal government buildings across Canada during this period.

The building is one of five original facilities making up the Confederation Heights development, a new decentralized suburban node for federal government buildings established in the 1950s and 1960s in accordance with the Greber Plan. The Tupper Building is set in a low-density urban environment at a major intersection, with the building components spread out on an expansive, sloping site. Through its massing, materials and design, the building blends with and reinforces the Confederation Heights development, and site relationships are little altered since 1960.

Planned and designed as a flagship departmental headquarters in accordance with the principles of the International-Modern Movement, the Tupper Building is a very good example of the work of Hazelgrove and Lithwick. It is significant architecturally as a very good example of a 1950s federal building featuring key traits of the International Style, including an intentionally novel form and massing, clean horizontal lines, flat roofs, curtain wall construction and coloured panels. Integral to the design was the provision of a healthy work environment for staff, including offices with large operable windows for natural light and ventilation, and easy access to the surrounding park-like environment through entrances at three levels of the building.

**Character Defining Elements**

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The heritage character of the Sir Charles Tupper Building resides in its International-Modern planning and design, and in site relationships.

The massing of the Tupper Building, based on Modern Movement principles, consists of five thin, interlocking rectangular blocks, each of them four or five stories high, laid out orthogonally (at 90° angles to each other) in a stair-like arrangement on a gently sloping site. This plan layout creates open rectangular courtyard spaces along each of the east and west sides of the building. The massing, silhouette and site relationships are fundamental to the building's heritage character and should not be altered. The integrity of the building's principle east and north elevations as viewed from Heron Road and Riverside Drive are of particular importance. Any proposed modifications at the west elevation should be sympathetic with the existing building in terms of massing, siting, materials and character.

Cladding materials were deliberately chosen for their durability and their low-maintenance, permanent finishes. The facades of each of the building's five office blocks have heavy-looking brown brick-clad end walls which wrap around the corners, emphasizing their rectangular form. In contrast, the long side elevations are clad with a lighter-appearing curtain wall system with alternating horizontal bands of aluminum-framed glazing units and grey-finished porcelain-enamel spandrel panels. Spandrel panels in other colours are arranged in a regular staggered pattern at each floor level. Granite mullions divide the bands of windows into groups of three sashes, with operable vertically-sliding sashes flanking a central fixed unit. The location and dimension of meeting rails and mullions, precast concrete sills and concrete brises-soleil create the modern character of the fenestration and should be respected.

At ground floor level, the main building entrance features granite-clad single-storey high columns and walls, and a plate glass wall and revolving door. Two secondary entrances, each providing access to the grounds from different floor levels, are demarcated by flat reinforced-concrete entrance door canopies with a support column and patterned brick wall to either side. The circulation pattern of the main entrance and two secondary public entrances, each located at different floor levels and facilitating staff access to the surrounding landscape, should be maintained. In the event that any of the exterior components require repair, materials for repair or replacement should be sympathetic in terms of design, dimension, quality and finish. The original high standard of workmanship should be maintained.

Internally, the Tupper Building maintains its large, sleek, well lit, split-level 1950s-era main entrance hall which, although modified to provide universal access and a new

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reception desk with a canopy over, remains largely intact in terms of plan layout, dimensions, and original decorative finishes and elements. These include the polished stone tile floor, wood panelled walls, white plaster ceiling and silver-metal-finished balustrades with wood handrails. The layout, detailing and choice of materials are typical of the Modern Movement and should be respected.

The building's original circulation pattern was based on a series of orthogonally arranged double-loaded corridors, which largely survive complete with their terrazzo floors, stairs and balustrades. These should be respected. Public lobbies and circulation areas should be treated with a consistent palette of finishes, doors, lighting and hardware sympathetic to the early design in order to protect the unity and integrity of these spaces.

The Tupper Building is located on an expansive park-like site characterized by its gentle lawned slope featuring specimen trees and shrubs. The integrity of the c. 1960 setting is relatively intact, including the relationships with adjoining roads and bridges and with other buildings contemporary with the Confederation Heights development. Any future development or alterations to roads or to the broader site should respect existing visual interrelationships between the building's component elements. Views along the east and north side elevations from either Riverside Drive or Heron Road, and to and from adjacent federal buildings, should also be protected.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

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