Ottawa, Ontario
National Research Council Building M-20
Montreal Road Campus

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The National Research Council Building M-20 was constructed in 1951-1 953 to the designs of J.C. Meadowcroft, of Meadowcroft and Mackay Architects, Montreal. Subsequent additions in 1956, 1960 and 1965 were by the same firm. The custodial department is the National Research Council. See FHBRO Building Report 90-245.

Reason for Designation

The National Research Council (NRC) Building M-20 was designated Recognized for its architectural design and environmental significance, and also for historical reasons.

The 24 buildings erected on the NRC campus between 1940-1 950 are examples of federal architecture of early modern design. Building M-20 is an excellent example of the International Style, with its emphasis on horizontality, stripped ornamentation, repetition of structural bays, and use of smooth modern materials and finishes such as steel, glass and stucco.

Despite building additions and modifications to the site, the building's relationship to its environs and to nearby structures is relatively unchanged. Building M-20 is a compatible element in the sprawling campus-like ensemble.

The building forms part of a complex of research facilities established in the late 1930s on a 130 acre site known as the Montreal Road Laboratories. It houses the Institute for Research in Construction, and is representative of the NRC's importance to Canadian industry in supporting technological development through research.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of Building M-20 resides in its massing, materials and details as expressions of the International Style, and in its site relationships as a component of the NRC campus.

The facility is composed of a main two-storey block with three three-storey wings. It is characterized by horizontality, which is achieved through the use of low, flat rooflines, repeated structural bays, and horizontal strip windows separated from strips of glass block by brises-soleil. Together with the use of smooth "modern" materials (steel windows and brises-soleils, glass block, white stucco, black marble veneer), these features identify the building with the International Style of architecture.

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National Research Council Building M-20 (Continued)

Any repair or alteration of the building should be grounded in an understanding of the design principles underlying this style. For example, the steel-framed glazing is essential to the character of the building, as is the horizontal arrangement of the windows. The existing windows should be retained if possible. If replacement is essential, the new units must replicate the fine scale of the mullions and muntins and the subdivision into operable or fixed units with a horizontal orientation. The location of the window surface relative to the exterior wall plane must also be maintained.

It is also essential to maintain the visual qualities of the current stucco exterior walls, with their shallow recesses and sill projections.

Building M-20 has had several additions which are sympathetic to the original building, and which do not disrupt the already irregular and varied massing. Future development should continue to respect the stylistic tenets of the original building.

The interior plan was novel for its time, with laboratories, workshops, and offices arranged around a three-storey glazed project area which is visible from the lobby space. In keeping with the International Style, the intent was to create as flexible a facility as possible. Finishes such as terrazzo, and fixtures such as steel door handles with a horizontal orientation, are typical of the style and should be protected. Development of the interior should maintain the emphasis on smooth, sleek, modern materials.

The character of the site has remained relatively unchanged, with smooth expanses of landscaped area between buildings. Site development should respect the simple character of landscaping which is appropriate for this site, and preserve the effect of a low, horizontal building on a flat site.

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