

Fredericton, New Brunswick
Government of Canada Building
633 Queen Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Government of Canada Building in Fredericton was built in 1950-51 to plans prepared by the Chief Architect's Office, Department of Public Works. It was constructed to provide office accommodation for several government departments, and continues in that function. Public Works Canada is the custodian department. See FHBRO Building Report 92-80.

Reasons for Designation

The Government of Canada Building was designated Recognized for environmental and architectural reasons.

Anchoring an important intersection in the downtown core, the Government of Canada Building figures prominently in a streetscape lined with major institutions and government buildings. Dignified and restrained, it reinforces the formal and official character of the area.

Architecturally, the Government of Canada Building is a late example of stripped classicism. A solid and capable design expressed in clear, simplified forms, it is illustrative of a transition period in the architecture of Public Works during which traditional forms would eventually be superseded by the International Style.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Government of Canada Building resides in its grand presence on the street, and in the quality of its exterior and interior materials.

The building's presence is due in large part to the formal classicism of its composition. Massing is simple and symmetrical, with a set-back third storey and a projecting central entrance. Regularly spaced windows are linked vertically with aluminum elements and marble spandrel panels, and are slightly recessed from smooth masonry walls, creating the effect of a simplified peristyle of giant columns. The sense of monumentality is heightened at the main entrance, which is flanked by stylized marble columns in antis. The deliberate austerity of the composition is relieved only by the subtle dentil course at the roofline above the second storey and the cast aluminum coat of arms over the entrance.

All sides of the building are exposed to view and were designed with the same level of care. Any modification to the exterior must therefore respect the massing and

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symmetry of the structure and retain the setback profile of the third storey.

The materials of the exterior - limestone and marble, granite facing on the foundation wall and copper coping along the parapets - are of high quality and contribute to the building's formal presence. Cracking of the limestone veneer has been attributed to a build-up of corrosion product on the steel frame. Repairs to address this condition must seek to retain maximum original stone and replicate the original joint colour, profile and strength.

The interior evokes the 1950s, with its emphasis on economy, efficiency and sanitary convenience. The lobby is the most interesting space in the building, and its two-storey volume should not be altered. Original finishes should also be preserved: the walls are covered in green structural glass, trade name Vitrolite, which was used extensively in the first half of the twentieth century to create the sleek appearance associated with Art Deco and Art Moderne. Vitrolite was often paired with silvery metal fittings like the balustrade at the lobby's second storey hallway and the original glass and metal doors leading off the lobby. These features should be retained. Because Vitrolite is now an extinct material, existing spare tiles should be carefully stored and used to replace seriously damaged units.

The lobby's heavy plaster ceiling moulding should also be retained, and its paint colour based on paint analysis. Existing brass fittings in the passenger elevator are in excellent condition and merit preservation. New furniture or fixtures installed in the lobby should be contemporary, yet in keeping with the sleek, formal character of the space.

The building has undergone little alteration since its construction. Original aluminum windows and doors were replaced in the 1980s, but the configuration generally matches that shown on the 1951 drawings.

The building occupies most of its small site. The landscaping treatment is conservative, and should continue as such. The access ramp recently added to the principal facade is simple and relatively unobtrusive.

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