BUILDING
KNOWLEDGE

BC HOUSING
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This case study series highlights what worked, challenges, lessons learned, and outcomes, regarding several key components of the SRO Renewal Initiative (SRORI). Series topics include: heritage restorations, tenant relocation during renovation, hazmat issues and exploring Public Private Partnership (P3 model). This information may be used to help improve processes for those considering P3 or renovation projects.

SROs provide single-room accommodation, usually with shared bathrooms and kitchens. In partnership with non-profit operators, provincially-owned SROs offer on-site supports such as 24-hour staffing and referrals to community support services to help residents maintain their housing and, as appropriate, move along the housing continuum. Rent in provincially-owned SROs is typically the shelter allowance portion provided by income assistance.

SRO Renewal Initiative Series:
Heritage Buildings

Since 2007, the provincial government purchased or leased 24 Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and surrounding area to preserve affordable housing for low-income people at risk of home-lessness. At time of purchase, many SRO hotels were approximately 100 years old, needing substantial repairs. In 2011 BC Housing announced SRORI to begin renovation and restoration of 13 provincially-owned SRO hotels starting in 2012. All 13 buildings are municipal heritage sites and four of these are designated national historic sites.

Case Study Purpose

This case study examines the heritage components of SRORI. The case study highlights what was achieved as a result of restoring and preserving the heritage features of the buildings and captures the learnings, particularly around dealing with heritage issues when renovating 100-year old buildings housing vulnerable clients.

BEFORE   AFTER

Marble Arch (before) is now Hotel Canada (after)

SRORI Objectives

› **Support and facilitate revitalization of Vancouver's DTES through job creation, safer streets, healthy communities and improved living conditions**

› **Provide satisfactory accommodation for 900 people within the next 10 years**

› **Provide flexibility to meet future demand and to reduce the number of people at risk of homelessness in DTES**

› **Reduce BC Housing's unfunded liabilities and increase the useable life of the SROs by more than 25 years**

Methods

Research was conducted by BC Housing's Research and Corporate Planning in 2017. Data was collected through:

› Key informant interviews with BC Housing staff involved in SRORI

› Key informant interviews with external partners and contractors involved in the heritage components of the project

› SRORI document review

Benefits and Positive Outcomes

Interviewees reported that restoring and preserving the heritage features of the buildings involved in SRORI created a sense of occupant pride in homes and workspaces. Residents and staff now live and work in safe, beautiful, renovated buildings. There were many benefits and positive outcomes including:
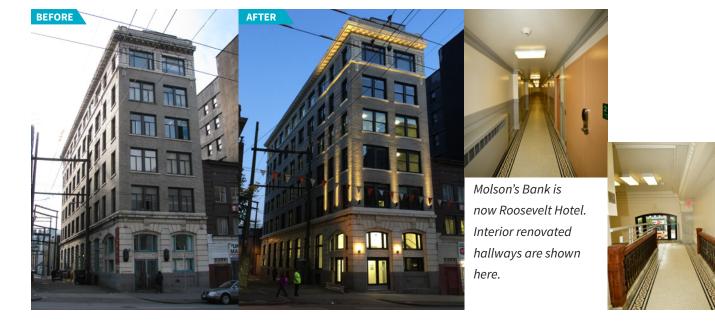
› The heritage features of the buildings are restored and preserved

› The renewed heritage buildings are part of the City's heritage fabric and add character to the neighbourhood

› The building restorations won several City of Vancouver and Province of B.C. heritage awards

› Historical names of the buildings were restored and original building signage, including some neon blade signs, were rebuilt and installed

› A sense of resident pride as the 100-year-old buildings are no longer run down

› Once they saw the renovated SRORI, other neighbourhood building owners restored their building's heritage features

› Additional heritage features were uncovered and restored once buildings were deconstructed, e.g. mosaic floors and heritage ceilings

ORIGINAL

BEFORE

AFTER

The Tamura

Factors of Success

Interviewees pointed to a number of strategies that led to the positive outcomes related to the heritage components of SRORI.

STRATEGY	DETAILS
Up-front planning	• BC Housing hired a heritage consultant early in the planning stage to work with the City on the requirements • Had a well-defined Heritage Conservation Plan (including specifications, design, looking at previous photos, historical/archive research) to help create clear expectations and accountability • BC Housing tried to identify as many potential risks as possible to help inform bids
Stakeholder engagement	• Had regular stakeholder meetings • Non-profit building operators attended site meetings during construction to ensure renovations would be functional from an operations perspective • Design-construction team did mock-ups which were reviewed step-by-step by the heritage technical team to ensure restoration work met the intent of the Heritage Conservation Plan • the City's Heritage Working group defined the scope and identified alternative solutions as needed • To ensure solutions worked for the various stakeholders, teams had open and transparent discussions to resolve issues • Team remained consistent throughout the project
Addressing emerging issues	• Heritage team was flexible to address additional issues that arose as layers of the buildings were exposed allowing the team to consider the level of restoration required when identifying requirements, ranging from "leave it as is" to full restoration • Unexpected issues were addressed quickly to keep the project on schedule

BEFORE

AFTER

Molson's Bank is now Roosevelt Hotel. Interior renovated hallways are shown here.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Interviewees discussed a number of expected and unexpected challenges related to heritage issues. They also discussed the strategies used to mitigate those challenges and what could be done differently if they were to do future similar initiatives.

CHALLENGES	IMPLICATIONS OF CHALLENGES	MITIGATION STRATEGIES (what was done)	LESSONS LEARNED (considerations for potential future projects)
Condition of some heritage features was worse than expected • Words like good/excellent were used to describe the condition of some heritage features, but upon on-site examination these features were in poor condition and not reflected accurately • Time constraints during procurement only allowed visual examinations • Heritage components can be difficult to source	• BC Housing had to cover the additional costs of inaccurately described conditions • The private-partner budget was based on descriptions of good and excellent conditions only	• Developed several protocols to guide unanticipated heritage restoration issues and how to handle them (e.g. a heritage amendment procedure) • In some cases, the heritage features were too damaged to restore and were fully replaced in a heritage-sympathetic way	• Visual confirmation to inform construction scopes may be insufficient to ensure owner is not responsible for unanticipated costs due to incorrect assessments of building conditions • Use clear language in the project agreement to ensure the owner is not left responsible for certain costs due to lack of clarity
Balancing heritage restoration with overall project costs • Kept heritage items because they were heritage, but more consideration could have been given to this cost centre on other aspects of the buildings operations and functional uses • In some cases, more durable materials may have been better	• Building operators removed and replaced wood doors with more durable and secure steel doors • If heritage was not a component of the project, perhaps more money could be put towards renovating additional buildings as part of SRORI or other features? • Small costs can add up across many projects	• As issues emerged, the team considered solutions that were the best value for the money • A scope ladder was put into the contract to prioritize issues that arose	• Have clarity on specific heritage requirements rather than just goals earlier in the project may allow for better planning in bid development • Consider whether heritage preservation can focus on the exterior of the building rather than the inside, as interiors require more durable features (although indoor heritage features made of durable materials can be considered for restoration as well) ; however, noting that retaining key internal heritage features in some cases allowed for code exceptions whereas full upgrades would have to be compliant with current code • Consider building with a heritage look but with more durable materials to balance heritage requirements with operational necessities of current user groups
Balancing heritage requirements with Building Code requirements • Sometimes heritage and Building Code requirements do not align (e.g. a heritage staircase in one building required restoration but was not up to current Building Code requirements), noting that in some cases retaining key internal heritage features allowed for code exceptions whereas full upgrades would have to be compliant with current code	• Sometimes project teams cannot achieve both objectives due to cost pressures • A lot of stakeholders had to sign off on amendments made to address these conflicts	• Life safety and seismic considerations always took priority • Have a Heritage Conservation Plan in place early in the project to help identify tensions so they can be addressed in the design phase • Restored a staircase and built a second staircase that met Building Code • Created a working group with the City to resolve heritage and Building Code conflicts	• Consider building with a heritage look but with more durable materials to balance heritage requirements with operational necessities

Hotel Maple exterior (left) and entry (above)

Conclusions

Based on the successful strategies used in SRORI, along with the strategies to mitigate challenges and lessons learned, the following heritage-related learnings could be applied to future projects:

› To ensure clear project requirements, have a heritage consultant and a working group with the City

› Set out accountability requirements with a well-defined Heritage Conservation Plan

› To manage emerging issues, hold regular stakeholder meetings with transparent discussions to ensure agreement

› As visual confirmation may be insufficient, identify potential issues with destructive testing to inform bids and avoid costly project delays and other unexpected costs

› Help ensure requirements are met with project mock-ups of heritage components

› Early in the process, include non-profit building operators to ensure functional programmatic requirements

› Consider the level of restoration required when identifying requirements, ranging from "leave it as is" to "full restoration"

› In some cases, heritage components may be too damaged to restore and more durable materials may be more appropriate. Regardless features can be reconstructed in a heritage-sympathetic way

› Address unexpected issues quickly to keep the project on schedule

› Check that the language in project agreements accurately describes building conditions to avoid leaving the building owner responsible for unexpected, additional costs

› Use a scope ladder to prioritize issues that emerge to help balance heritage conservation goals with life safety and seismic considerations as well as cost control

› As a means of balancing costs, consider focusing heritage work on the exterior of the building with limited interior heritage work using more durable materials