

REPORT FOR ACTION

Overview of the Adaptive Reuse of Heritage Buildings at Exhibition Place, 1966 to Present

Date: August 30, 2024

To: The Board of Governors of Exhibition Place

From: Don Boyle, Chief Executive Officer

Wards: Ward 10 – Spadina-Fort York

SUMMARY

This report provides a high-level overview of development on the Exhibition Place grounds over the past 60 years, including the implementation of the strategy of adaptive re-use of existing structures. This strategy has supported the rehabilitation and preservation of heritage properties as well as an increase in the number of events held annually at Exhibition Place.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Executive Officer recommends that:

1. The Board receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications related to receiving this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of June 9, 2022, the Board approved the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan as outlined in the report from the Chief Executive Officer, Exhibition Place on May 26, 2022. The strategic plan established guidelines that support the development and achievement of plan goals. This includes protecting and spotlighting the iconic buildings, structures and history of the grounds which, for many Torontonians and visitors to the city, define Exhibition Place.

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2022/ep/bgrd/backgroundfile-226475.pdf>

At its meeting of June 19, 1988, the Board of Governors of Exhibition Place adopted the Exhibition Place Program and Development Concept. A key planning and development objective identified was the rehabilitation and the adaptive reuse of underutilized heritage buildings should be incorporated where feasible. It also included criteria by which proposals for adaptive reuse by private interests be evaluated.

COMMENTS

Between 1966 and 1998, several studies and strategies were commissioned by the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, the City of Toronto, the Canadian National Exhibition Association, and/or Exhibition Place to holistically plan site development and optimize use of the Exhibition Place assets, including:

- *A Study of Exhibition Park, Its Present and Future Environment, Uses and Development* (1966) prepared by Dominion Consultant Associates Ltd. for the Canadian National Exhibition Association
- *Proposals for the Rehabilitation of Exhibition Park - Master Plan* (1971) prepared for the Canadian National Exhibition Association and Metropolitan Council by the Metropolitan Parks Department and Staff of the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board
- *Feasibility Study Exhibition Place* (1983) initiated by Metropolitan Council and prepared by Currie Coopers & Lybrand Ltd. with Arcorp Thom Architects and Planners
- *Future Uses of Exhibition Place* (1987) initiated by Metropolitan Council and prepared by the Executive Task Force on Future Uses of Exhibition Place
- *Exhibition Place Program and Development Concept* (May 1998) prepared by Exhibition Place in collaboration with the City of Toronto Urban Planning and Development Services and Olympia and York Properties with SMG Canada

Despite spanning a significant period, these plans evidence recurring themes:

- The increasing geographic importance of the grounds based on its large footprint, proximity to both the waterfront and downtown, and the importance of parkland in an increasingly urbanized environment.
- The imperative to preserve the municipal, provincial, and national heritage significance of the site and its assets.
- Recognition of the continued importance of the key annual events balanced with the need to animate Exhibition Place year-round as cultural and recreational destination.
- The need to establish, implement, and maintain base facility standards to attract outside interests, such as events and trade shows.
- The limitation of parking on site growth and the need to enhance public transit connections to encourage attendance.

Implementation of plan recommendations was limited, and many early exhibit buildings were considered for demolition as part of the 1971 Master Plan, including the Music Building (originally the Railways Building), Fire Station, Art Gallery, General Exhibits Building, Government Building, Ontario Government Building, Automotive Building, Transportation Building and Band Shell. By the 1980s and 1990s, several structures were in a state of disrepair.

The Music Building eventually closed to the public due to safety considerations and an application was made for demolition in 1985. Public opposition resulted in a campaign to save the building, and despite a fire in 1987, the building was fully restored with funds from the federal and municipal governments as well as public donations. The attention from this campaign also contributed to the designation of the Music Building, together with the Fire Hall/Police Station, Government Building, Horticulture Building, and Press Building) as a National Historic Site of Canada in 1988.

<https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=10470/>

In March 1987, Metro Council adopted a capital program limiting annual expenditures to \$8.0 million and directed the Board of Governors to invite and seek proposals from the private sector to restore heritage buildings, improve infrastructure and enable year-round use. The imperative to implement year-round uses for Exhibition Place assets was heightened by the move of the Toronto Blue Jays and the Toronto Argonauts to the Sky Dome (now the Rogers Centre) in 1989.

In 1993, the Board of Governors of Exhibition Place commissioned architectural and restoration assessments of key heritage buildings, which identified the following common areas for redress:

- Roofing repairs including waterproofing, drainage and flashing, particularly on buildings with domes or parapets
- Substandard finishes that had resulted from a lack of maintenance or past renovations
- Structural systems that had suffered cracking and water damage over time, as well increases to load capacities
- Improvements to electrical and mechanical systems, including the installation of heating, venting, and air conditioning
- Modernization of fire and life safety systems to meet current Ontario Fire Code standards
- Implementation of strategies to allow for barrier-free access

In 1998, the *Exhibition Place Program and Development Concept* established guidelines for site development, including the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, that lead to lease agreements with the following tenants:

- Medieval Times has been a tenant of the Arts, Crafts and Hobbies Building (formerly the Government Building and the Dominion Government Building) since 1993
- Liberty Grand has been a tenant of the Ontario Government Building since 2001
- The Toronto Events Centre (previously Muzik Clubs Inc.) has been a tenant of the Horticulture Building since 2004

These tenancies have enabled the rehabilitation and enhancement of heritage assets. They have also contributed to increased activity at Exhibition Place from approximately 100 events in 1971 and to our current 1761 events in 2023.

For further details on each of these buildings, see Appendix A - Overview of the Development of the Exhibition Place.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Don Boyle
Chief Executive Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A – Overview of the Adaptive Reuse of Heritage Buildings at Exhibition Place, 1966 to Present