

**BULLETIN 2014-007-BU**

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## Conservation of Heritage Buildings and Compliance with Vancouver's Building By-law

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The conservation of heritage buildings in the City of Vancouver has always been an important city objective. The intent of this Building Bulletin is to describe and explain how the Chief Building Official interprets and applies the “alternative compliance method” for heritage buildings in the Vancouver Building By-law.

Part 11 of the VBBL has an alternate compliance method for “heritage buildings”, which the Chief Building Official interprets and may apply to buildings on the Vancouver Heritage Register and to other buildings that are considered to have heritage value and/or heritage character. There is no requirement for “heritage buildings”, as interpreted in the use of VBBL Part 11, to be already listed or added to the Heritage Register to qualify for an alternative compliance method.

The alternate compliance method balances current building by-law provisions with existing conditions such as exiting, windows, doors, spatial separation, door swing, hardware, etc., in order to make it feasible to retain and to continue to use heritage buildings. The intent is to provide flexibility and to maintain a balance between VBBL requirements and conservation of historic features (i.e. building materials, elements) of heritage buildings.

Part 11 requires all new work to comply with the VBBL. However, there is flexibility in the level of upgrading required for replacing a historic feature with a new feature compatible with a heritage building, which may not meet current standards, or restoring a historic feature, which does not comply with the VBBL, including building assemblies which contain a mix of existing and new materials, such as a wall or roof.

The intent of Part 11 is to require upgrades based on changes in use, additions, and levels of work on the building while providing for the conservation (i.e. retention, repair, restoration and/or replacement) of historic features. The basic approach is that the level of safety or performance in a building cannot be decreased while new work is generally to be in conformance with the current by-law. This was meant to apply to completely new construction and not to replacement or restoration of historic features such as walls, windows, and doors. If the work does not create an unsafe condition, or reduce the level of performance of a building, or increase the non-conformity of the building, then it meets the intention of Part 11.

In 2014, the VBBL was updated and, at that time, introduced a number of provisions to further conserve heritage buildings, including:

- In consultation with the Director of Planning, the definition of “heritage building” was expanded so that the CBO can consider both buildings on the Vancouver Heritage Register and other buildings that are considered to have heritage value and/or heritage character. There are no requirements for “heritage buildings”, as interpreted in the use of VBBL Part 11, to be already listed or added to the Heritage Register to qualify for an alternative compliance method.

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- Repaired or restored windows, doors, and skylights are not required to comply with “NAFS – North American Fenestration Standard/Specification for Windows, Doors, and Skylights” provided they achieve an acceptable level of performance, contribute to the conservation of the heritage building, and are acceptable to the CBO and Director of Planning. This requires a professional to sign-off on the use of site-built window requirements for Part 3 Buildings and use of the “site-built” requirements for Part 9 buildings. This change was made because it is difficult to comply with NAFS for custom-built windows which are intended to maintain the heritage value and/or heritage character of the building.
- Energy efficiency need not be in full compliance with the current VBBL provided it achieves an “acceptable” level of performance. In some situations, upgrading the building envelope may be detrimental to the existing wall assembly.
- Refer to Section 11.5 of the VBBL for specific heritage requirements including alternate acceptable solutions in Table 11.5.1.1.
- In unique circumstances, the CBO may relax other VBBL requirements as necessary to conserve the heritage value and/or heritage character of a building provided they do not create an unsafe condition and provided there will be an acceptable level of performance.

The City of Vancouver will continue to work with owners to conserve heritage buildings while maintaining an acceptable level of safety and building performance.

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