

Heritage in the public realm

everything old is new

By Thomas Wicks - Article from the Ontario Heritage Trust Magazine "Heritage Matters", Volume 9 Issue 2 May/June 2011



Milton Town Hall

Ontario is growing. As municipalities across the province expand, so too does the need to revitalize existing municipal facilities to house and adapt to new services. Recent examples illustrate that through thoughtful design and proper investment, existing heritage structures can be adapted and preserved, while suiting the needs of the growing communities they serve.

Integrating a heritage structure and a modern institutional facility comes with its challenges – but also its rewards. It provides an opportunity to combine modern design and the conservation of existing structures within a single, multi-dimensional project. The Ontario Heritage Trust is able to directly participate in and inform best practice conservation when properties with heritage easement agreements are undergoing large-scale capital investment, ensuring that heritage conservation remains the focus of the revitalization.

A number of provincially significant heritage properties have recently received recapitalization funding. These projects illustrate that heritage buildings can be adapted through careful design and appropriate intervention. They also reveal the building system life cycle nature of architectural preservation that requires renewed capital investment every 20 to 30 years. The Milton Town Hall was able to integrate the existing heritage courthouse and jail yard walls within a modern municipal complex that takes its architectural cues

from the 1855 limestone structure. The result is a site with expanded services and a new structure that is both distinct from and subservient to the existing heritage building. Linked with a glass walkway, the new building's scale complements its 19th-century neighbour.

In Guelph, the city hall designed by architect William Thomas and constructed in 1856 has undergone similar recapitalization. An addition contained within the existing 19th-century walls of a heavily altered structure to the west of City Hall integrates old and new. Linked through the existing stone walls, the new building's scale takes the architectural language of the William Thomas-designed Italianate structure, and harmonizes it with a contemporary aspect. Cambridge's expanded city hall not only meets the needs of a growing city, it links old and new, while incorporating conservation work to the 1858 structure. Stepped back to create more public space around the new building and to retain the standalone presence of the heritage structure, the expanded city hall once again shows how respecting the design of the existing building in terms of scale, proportion and materiality doesn't stymie modern architectural expression. These projects demonstrate that heritage buildings not only require adaptation to

changing environments, but shows that they are up to the challenge. Through careful attention to detail as well as a holistic approach to context, capital investments are not just opportunities to build new, but also to renew local heritage assets and enhance the local sense of place.

Thomas Wicks is the Easements Program Coordinator at the Ontario Heritage Trust. - **ADAPT / REUSE**

Credits and Acknowledgements:

The successful submission for the Design-Build method of project delivery was lead by PCL Constructors Canada and included a multi-disciplinary team of designers and engineers who collaborated on preliminary design to provide the winning project. Key sub consultants include: Halsall Associates, Smith & Andersen and Aldershot Landscape Contractors. **+VG Architects** is a full-service architectural firm offering new design, expansions and heritage restorations for cultural, educational, municipal, justice, healthcare, residential and recreational facilities. Our staff of 40 operates in four offices in Ontario, in Brantford, Cambridge, London and Toronto. See www.plusvg.com for more information.