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CONSERVANCY
ONTARIO**

May 29, 2023

Proposed Provincial Planning Statement will bulldoze Ontario's heritage, ACO warns

Still reeling over Bill 23's changes to the Ontario Heritage Act, which make it almost impossible to save many Black, Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQIA heritage sites from harm, heritage advocates are appalled at the proposed new Provincial Planning Statement (PPS).

The PPS sets the policy framework for decisions about land use planning and development in the province. As drafted, the new PPS limits protection of Ontario's heritage to "protected heritage property" -- those sites already identified and designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. While shaking her head at this seeming redundancy, Architectural Conservancy Ontario Board Chair Diane Chin fears it could bring on a new era of bulldozing cultural heritage resources. These irreplaceable resources include our communities' heritage buildings, structures such as bridges, cultural heritage landscapes, and other historic places.

If "protected heritage property" is so narrowly defined, "Ontario's heritage could be decimated," said Chin. "We could be left with about one heritage property for every 500 people.¹ How can municipalities benefit from the community health and wellbeing, tourism spending and affordable housing that come with heritage buildings, if they are all allowed to be destroyed, no questions asked?"

At the very least, ACO feels properties listed on a municipality's Heritage Register -- meaning properties which are potential candidates for full designation -- should be included under "protected heritage property" in the new Provincial Planning Statement. Since many heritage places have yet to be identified, ideally there would be a mechanism, as there is now, for making last-minute additions to the list of protected heritage properties when unforeseen new development plans emerge.

ACO also wants to see the new PPS adopt clear policies promoting the retention and re-use of Ontario's existing building stock for housing and other purposes. "We understand, and fully

¹ Roughly 33,000 properties in Ontario's 444 municipalities have been designated under Part IV (for individual properties) and Part V (heritage conservation districts) of the Ontario Heritage Act

support, the need for more affordable housing in Ontario," said Chin. "What we don't understand is how bulldozing perfectly sound heritage buildings is required to achieve that. We've been trying to have this conversation with the Minister in charge of heritage, Michael Ford, for months now."

In the meantime, ACO is encouraging Ontarians to write their MPPs about their concerns, as well as Minister Michael Ford, MMAH Minister Steve Clark, and Premier Doug Ford, and to comment on the Provincial Planning Statement proposals on the Environmental Registry of Ontario before Friday June 5: <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-6813>



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