



Heritage Action Day at Queen's Park 2025

**ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVANCY ONTARIO**

The Past  
Our Present  
Your Future

## **KEEP | FIX | REUSE**

**The huge potential of Ontario's  
older buildings for housing and  
other uses**

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*ACO Heritage Awards Celebration 2024  
Arta Gallery, Distillery District, Toronto  
(Adaptive Reuse)*

**ACO is Ontario's leading non-governmental organization on built heritage and cultural heritage places**

Through education and advocacy, ACO encourages the conservation and reuse of structures and landscapes of architectural, historic, and cultural significance for the benefit and inspiration of Ontarians.

**Our Goal:** Keep, Fix, and Reuse Ontario's older buildings and places.

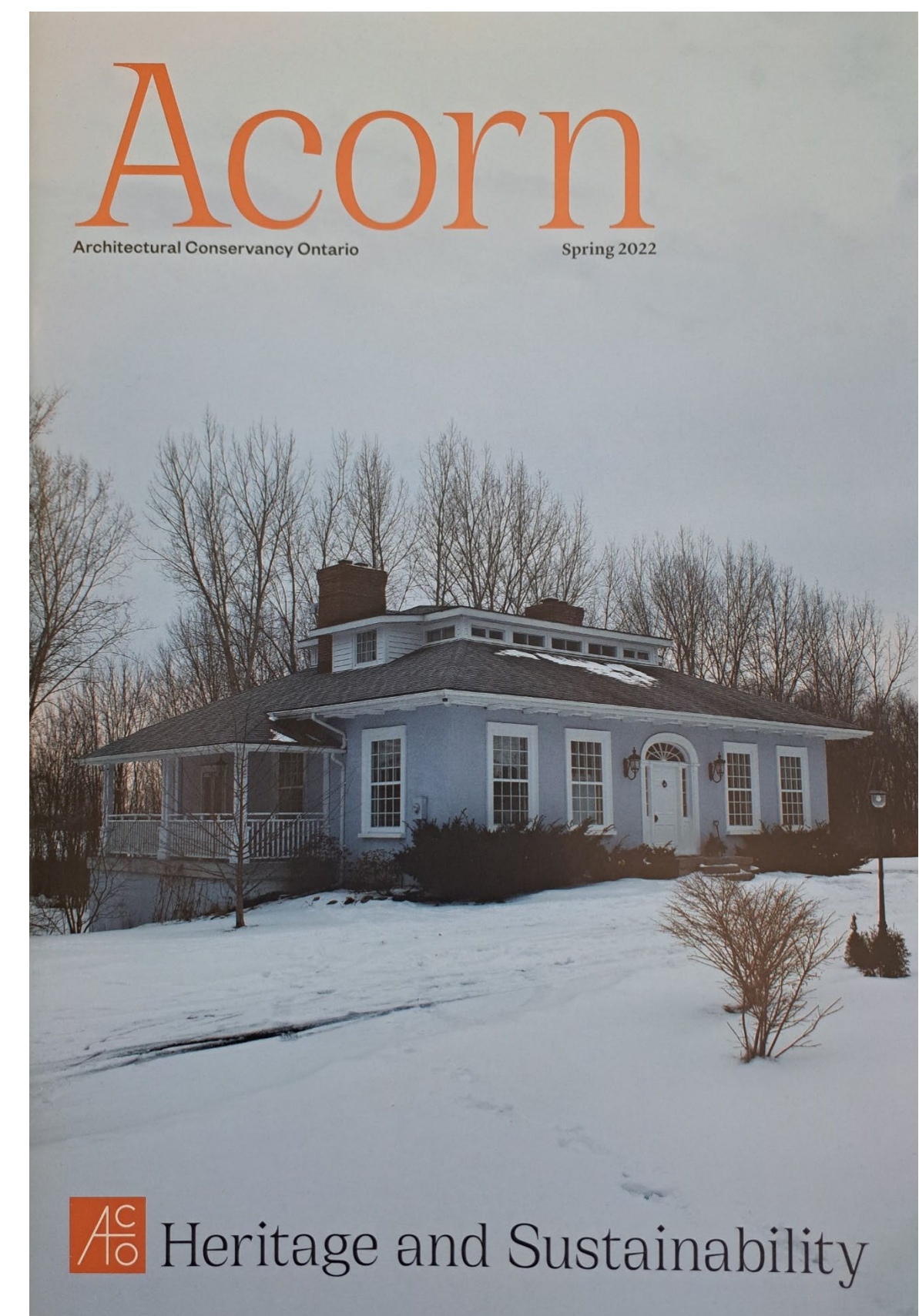


Established 92 years ago in 1933, ACO is a network of volunteers connected by 15 branches throughout Ontario with almost 1,000 members. There is a small coordinating staff in Toronto.

Together we:

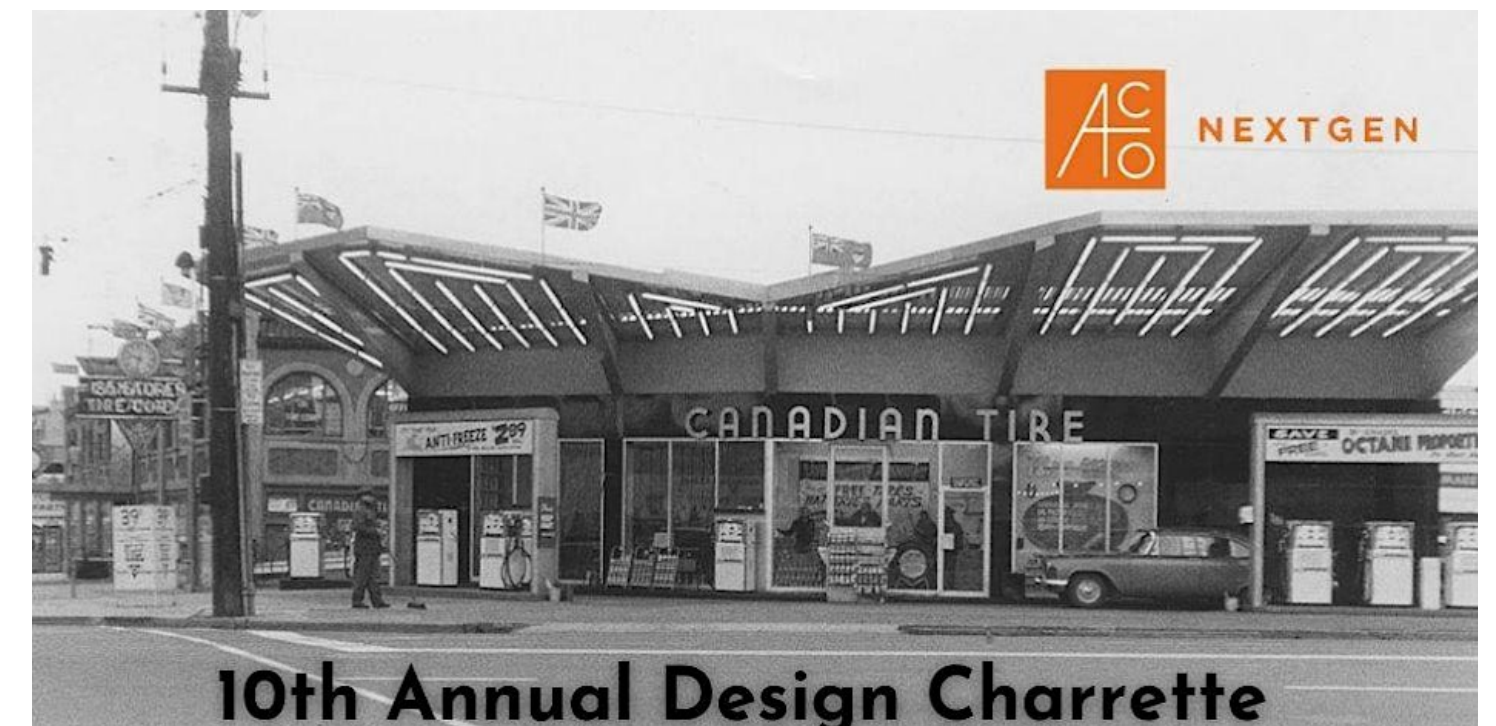
- Publish Acorn in a Nutshell e-newsletter (2,300 subscribers) and Acorn Magazine
- Educate and promote heritage conservation through heritage advocacy, tours, symposiums, books, lectures, and conferences
- Advocate for public policy advancement through analysis and comment on existing/proposed provincial policy and legislation

*cont'd*





- Collaborate with heritage professionals, communities, and youth through PreservationWorks! and NextGen
- Host the annual ACO Heritage Awards celebrating heritage projects across Ontario
- Member of the National Trust Council representing Ontario
- Engage elected officials from all levels of government to actively Keep, Fix, Reuse Ontario's heritage and existing building stock



## 2025 Priority Request

We have focussed on one key priority for 2025, one which supports the Province's housing objectives while advancing ACO's strategic goal to Keep, Fix and Reuse Ontario's heritage assets.

**Housing-focused Heritage Building Grant: A new, application-based, matching grant program of \$10M/year to create new housing.**

- The grant program, modelled on an existing Alberta program, would incentivize owners to keep, fix, and renovate/reuse heritage buildings.
- The grant would be focused on the creation of new housing units in vacant, under-utilized or surplus heritage structures.
- Developing existing buildings in already serviced areas is quicker and more cost-effective than new builds.

## Heritage in Ontario in 2025

**Since 2022, legislative and policy changes have made it harder to protect Ontario's existing building stock.**

- Legislative changes have put some 36,000 heritage properties, listed on registers in over 80 municipalities, at risk of demolition.
  - Property listed by a municipality must now be designated by bylaw **within 2 years**.
  - To be designated, properties must now meet **at least 2** of 9 criteria for heritage value (stricter than best professional practice).
  - Current listed properties had to be designated by Jan. 1, 2025 (now **Jan. 1, 2027**).
  - The extension to 2027 is welcome. However, because municipal planning staff are overloaded and underfunded, only a small fraction (less than 10%) of the 36,000 listed properties will be protected within the next 2 years.
- The new Provincial Planning Statement also reduces heritage protections.
- All these changes were made as part of larger packages intended to get more housing built faster – but **existing buildings should also be retrofitted and reused for housing**.



## Keep | Fix | Reuse Supports Ontario's Prosperity

ACO believes that Ontario benefits enormously from an approach that would Keep, Fix, and Reuse our existing building stock.

The economic, environmental and social benefits of this approach are described in the slides below.

The most important point we can make is that *strong heritage protections are compatible with addressing Ontario's housing crisis*, and we have focused our 2025 "ask" on a proposal that demonstrates this.

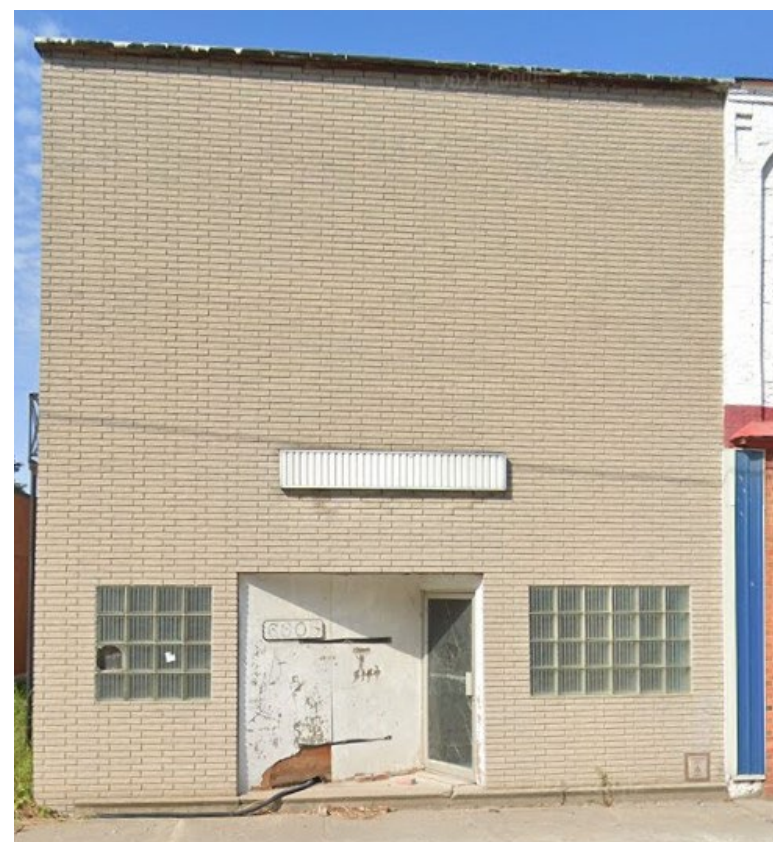


*ACO NextGen Award Recipient 2021: Celeste Lamondin for her exceptional work as an apprentice mason and her dedication to promoting heritage masonry and women in the trades.*

## Ontario's Building Stock: Our Nest Egg

Ontario's building stock is the largest collection of tangible assets owned by Ontarians. It is also a job machine:

- Renovation is a \$30 billion industry in Ontario (residential and non-residential)
- Canadians spend **27% more** on fixing up existing dwellings than building new ones
- Residential fix-up employs over 300,000 Ontarians



Before (2021)



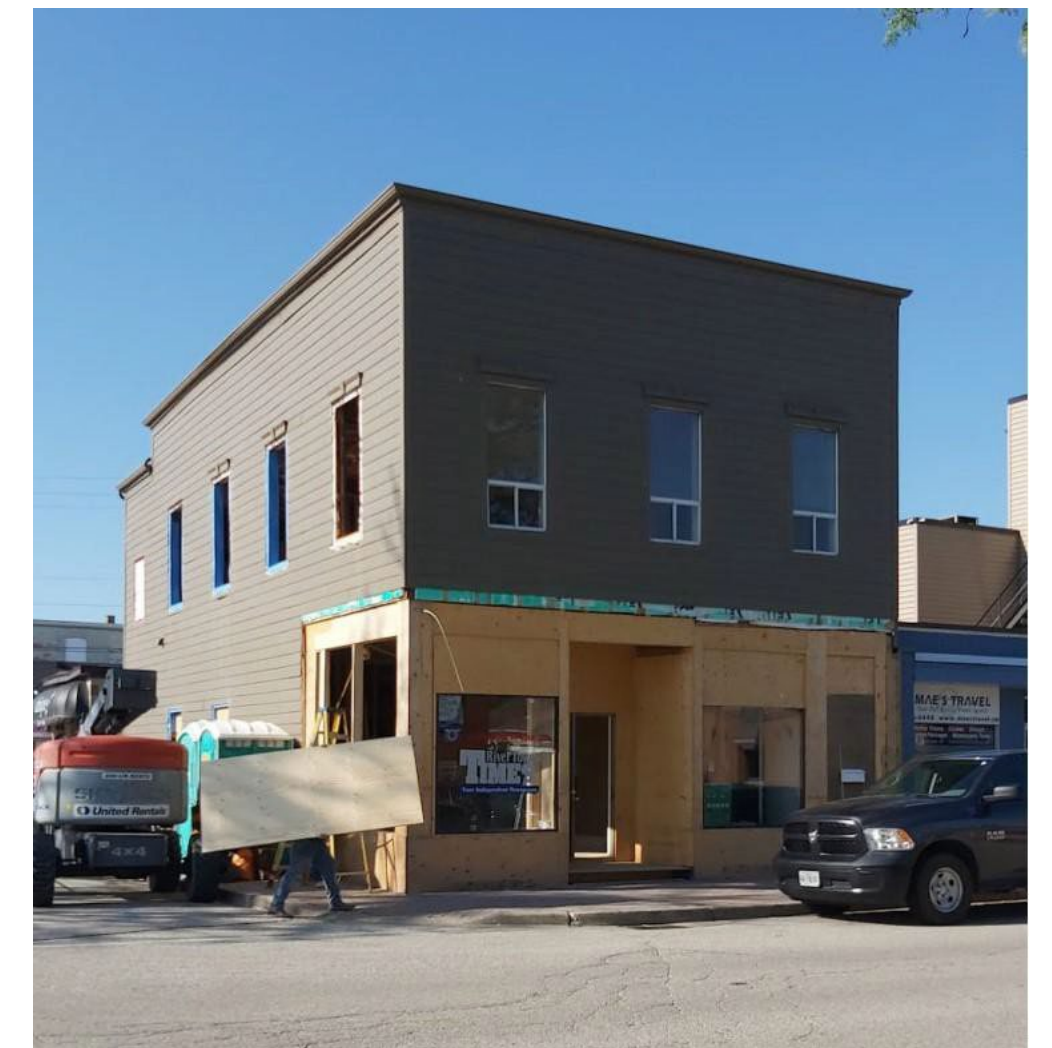
After (2023)

*The Iron Kettle Commissary in Comber,  
2024 nominee for ACO's Peter Stokes Restoration Award*



## Economic and Community Benefits

- Older buildings and historic landscapes contribute a wide array of **economic, social, and community benefits**.
- Older buildings are often the first home for small businesses and create **revitalization** opportunities in local downtowns, where they have great potential for use as **housing**.
- They draw strong **tourism** interest from within and outside the local community. For example, Ontario's Doors Open 2024 focussed on adaptive reuse of historic buildings.
- Older buildings produce a **sense of place and identity** for local communities – connecting people to their environment and unique histories.



*Amherstburg: River Bookshop Restoration, before (above) and after (below).*





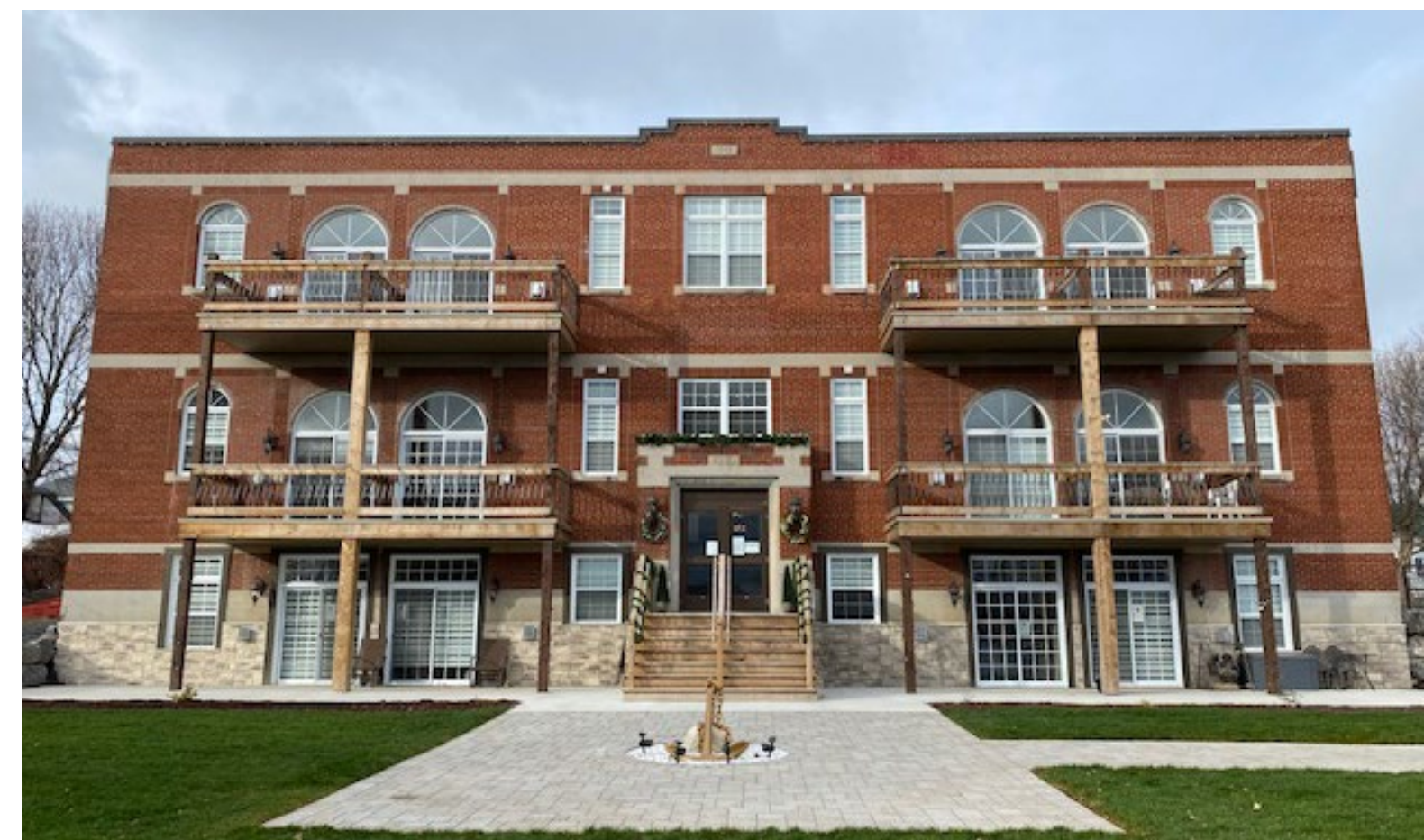
## Keep, Fix, Reuse existing buildings to create housing



*Former Grigg Hotel, now The Cornerstone, London  
30 affordable apartments + programs and employment for youth aged 16-25.*



*Bread & Roses Housing Co-op, Kitchener  
Former factory became 20 units of affordable housing.*



*Former East Front Public School, Cornwall  
Now Riverside Retirement Centre, home for 120 seniors.*



## Keep, Fix, Reuse existing buildings to create housing



**2013**  
Palmerston Main Street  
Vacant apartments, boarded up, vacant stores.



**2023**  
Palmerston Main Street  
Refurbished and fully inhabited upper stories and stores  
= customers for uptown businesses.



## Keep | Fix | Reuse Combats Climate Change



*Demolition of the Forsyth Shirt Factory,  
Kitchener*

- The greenest building is the one that already exists.
- Older buildings have inherent sustainability. Reusing building stock avoids huge carbon emissions created in manufacturing and transporting replacement materials.
- The materials' embodied energy in an existing building stays locked up if demolition is avoided.
- Demolition activity itself, including transporting the waste, takes energy and adds to carbon emissions.
- As well, we are running out of landfill space.
- Waste to Resource Ontario website counts 3260 days (less than 9 years) until Ontario's landfills are full (as of February 7, 2025).



## Invest in Repair and Reuse – Protect Ontario’s Future

### Retaining our hundreds of thousands of older buildings and investing in their repair and reuse

- **Triggers** more economic growth and jobs than new construction.
- **Creates** housing choice for Ontarians through adaptive reuse of existing buildings.
- **Helps** save the environment.
- **Grows** the green economy and spurs innovation in ways that decarbonize our built environment.
- **Strengthens** Ontario communities, enhancing identity and pride while building our tourism brand and appeal.



*Downtown Kenora streetscape in 2020 showing success of their Harbourtown Centre Community Improvement Plan*

## To Realize These Benefits, We Need Strong Policies to:

### Keep

- Discourage destruction/throw-away mindset
- Account for full environmental, economic and social values of older buildings
- Mandate recycling of building materials where a structure cannot be kept

### Fix

- Stimulate sustainable building repair, renovation and rehabilitation
- Promote energy retrofits
- Develop appropriate and competent skill-sets for renovation sector

### Reuse

- Make reuse the first option for public sector owners
- Encourage and support private owners to undertake creative repurposing



*From church to supportive housing at St. Mark's Place in Kitchener: Recipient of the ACO Paul Oberman Award for Adaptive Reuse, 2024*



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- The grant program, modelled on an existing Alberta program, would incentivize owners to keep, fix and renovate/reuse heritage buildings.
- The grant would be focussed on the creation of new housing units in vacant, under-utilized or surplus heritage structures.
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**KEEP | FIX | REUSE**

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**Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you.**

**We look forward to ongoing discussions to  
achieve common goals.**

**Contact:**

**Deb Crawford, Chair: [president@acontario.ca](mailto:president@acontario.ca)**

**Will Coukell, COO: [will@acontario.ca](mailto:will@acontario.ca)**

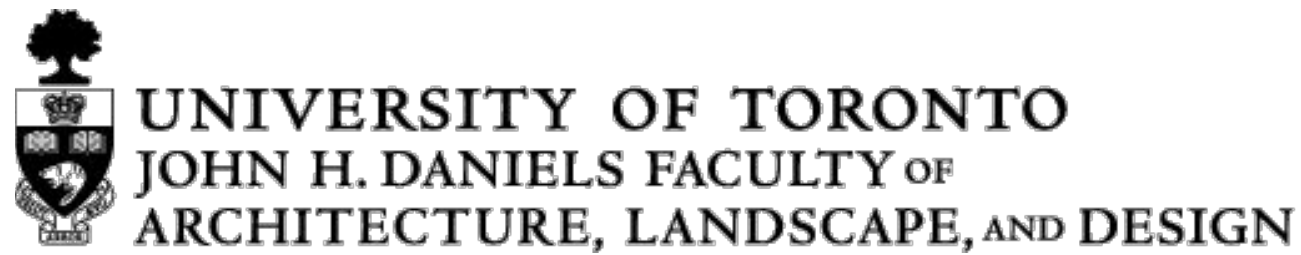




# Appendix A: About ACO

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ACO partners and allies include NGOs, professional associations, academic institutions and businesses





## Older Building Stock and the Economy

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