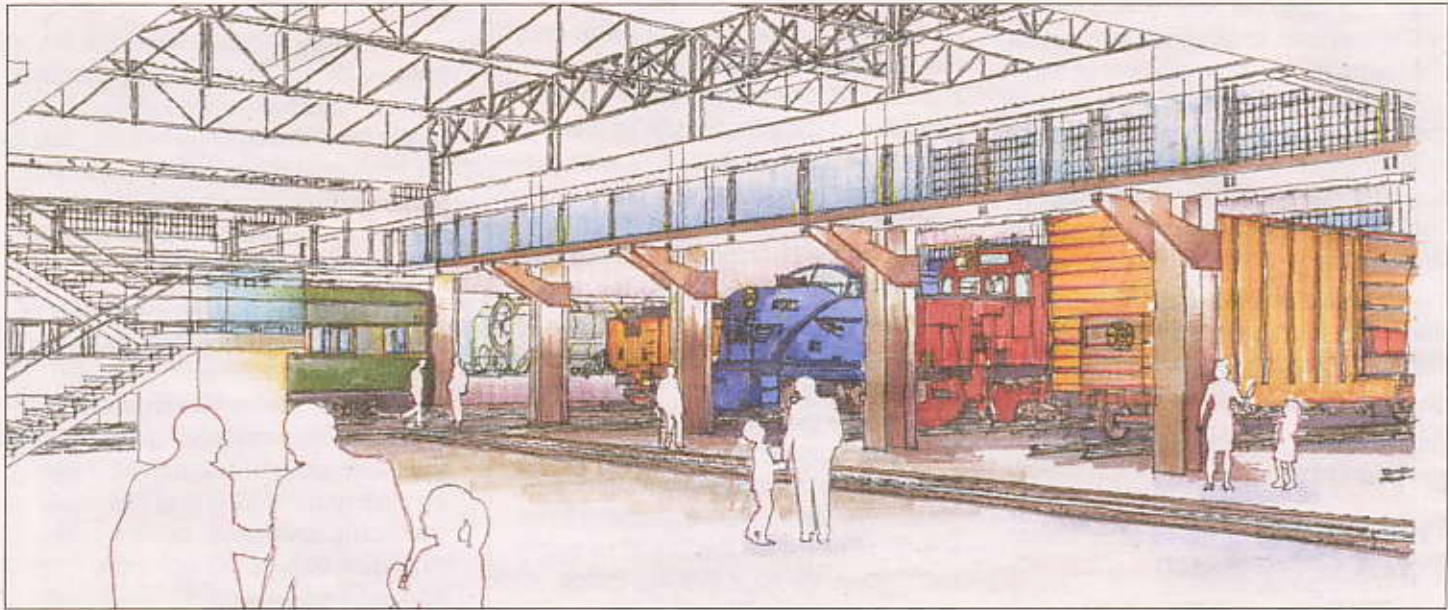


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Heritage Conservation Benefits

Ed van der Maarel

As an Architect and Heritage Consultant, I often hear of the negative connotations associated with preserving our heritage built form. As a supporter of heritage preservation and in particular architecture, I am constantly asked the questions, 'How can heritage benefit the community?' and 'Why should we spend money to preserve our buildings?' I recently presented some facts, at the local Architectural Conservancy of Ontario St. Thomas-Elgin Branch meeting at the St. Thomas CASO Station and thought this information should be shared with the general public.

There are four key areas where Municipalities can benefit from heritage strategies. Research has



gone into evaluating the benefits and economic outcomes of conserving heritage in municipalities. There are four aspects from which municipalities can benefit from heritage conservation:

Economically, heritage conservation is a direct benefit to our commu-

Above: An architectural drawing of the Elgin County Railway Museum interior

Left: the lobby of the refurbished CASO Station Talbot Street in St. Thomas.

nities based on research. Studies show that every dollar invested in heritage conservation leveraged nearly \$27 of other reinvestment in the local economies. Communities no matter of their size should take advantage of heritage tourism opportunities. Heritage tourists include multiple destinations on their trips, spend 60% more and stay 60% longer than non-heritage tourists. As well, the value of historic properties, especially within HCDs (historic conservation districts), appreciate at rates greater than the local market overall and faster than similar non-designated properties. Heritage buildings have performed much better than average in the marketplace and the price of heritage houses was less affected by cyclical downturns in property values.

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Conservation creates well-paying jobs in retraining programs to create skilled labour. Dynamic and vibrant ongoing conservation of historic places ensures jobs will be secure for years to come.

Socially, heritage fosters a strong sense of place and by conserving heritage, municipalities can foster a strong local identity based upon a sound understanding of the area's unique history. In almost all communities a unique identity can be established based on the origination and history of the community. As well, historic places bring together people of all ages and often become focal points for important community events and celebrations. Historic places and heritage planning provides opportunity for public service and volunteerism.

Culturally, the conservation of historic places enhances a municipality's local cultural life. Heritage resources help people identify with the way of life of those who created them. Protection of historic places promotes architectural diversity. Historic districts in communities, no matter the scale, are wonderful spaces for cultural groups to practice and display their heritage.

Sustainability is an approach that has gained great momentum in the last 10 years. Going Green and saving the earth's resources is one of the most prolific movements by our society's younger generation today and this energy should be embraced by our local municipalities. Heritage

conservation is an important part of municipal sustainability and a strong contributor to sustainable development strategies. Research shows that heritage conservation provides multiple economic benefits for a community, including job growth in skilled trades, increased property values, revitalized neighbourhoods and a wide array of tourism opportunities. Heritage is Green from the perspective of reduce and re-use since conservation reduces the reliance on new materials, environmentally unfriendly materials and energy used to create intensive production of new building materials. Heritage conservation encourages the re-use of existing building materials by extending the life of a building and its components, or rehabilitating damaged building materials.



Locally, all we need to do is look around us. Heritage preservation in St. Thomas and Elgin County, for example, the CASO Station projects by the North America Railway Hall of Fame and the Elgin County Railway Museum have directly benefited the municipality in all these aspects. The municipalities should view

these as success projects and consider the fact the preservation makes sense.

References: Municipal Heritage Partnership Program Web Site, Alberta

(Ed van der Maarel is a life time resident of Elgin County and is Principal Partner, Architect, and Heritage Consultant with SJMA Architecture Inc. an Architecture and Heritage Consulting firm based in London, Ontario. Ed is a Registered Architect with the Ontario Association of Architects and a Professional Member of the Canadian Association for Heritage Professionals.)

Above: The Arts & Cookery Bank restoration in West Lorne has had a big impact on the local economy.