

Conserving buildings could be Canada's most overlooked housing strategy

New CAHP report examines how existing buildings support climate and housing goals

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA, May 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals (CAHP) has released a national report examining how Canada can better



This report shows that the choices about existing buildings have long term impacts. Conserving & upgrading existing buildings delivers climate and cost benefits while preserving cultural value."

Adam Hatch, CAHP President

leverage its existing buildings to support urgent climate and housing goals, while preserving community and cultural value. The full report, along with English and French versions, fact sheets, and supporting materials, is available in an online media kit here:

<https://www.oomphgroup.com/cahp-media-kit>

LESSONS FROM EXISTING BUILDINGS IN HALIFAX, MONTRÉAL, AND VANCOUVER

The study examined three real retrofit and adaptive reuse projects in Halifax, Montréal, and Vancouver, including a mid century modern office building, a former textile

factory, and a historic residence. These projects were compared with new build alternatives across three scenarios: retrofit, retrofit with an addition, and demolition and replacement, using a conservative-led approach to renovations through a life cycle assessment and cost modelling aligned with the National Building Code (NBC) and National Energy Code for Buildings (NECB).

DEMOLISH AND REPLACE, RETAIN AND RETROFIT, OR CONSERVE AND OPTIMIZE?

"This report shows that the choices we make about existing buildings have profound and long term impacts," said Adam Hatch, President of the Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals. "When we look at carbon and cost over a building's full life cycle, conserving and upgrading what we already have delivers meaningful benefits while preserving cultural values embedded in our communities."

Across the three case studies, the analysis compared outcomes related to carbon emissions and costs over time. Conservation led retrofit scenarios, which prioritize retaining existing building fabric alongside targeted performance upgrades, performed strongly across these measures when informed by qualified professionals.

The findings also reflect a shift in how building related emissions are understood. As regional energy grids continue to decarbonize, emissions associated with materials, construction, and demolition account for a growing share of total impact. Decisions that prioritize reuse over replacement therefore play an increasingly important role in reducing emissions, limiting construction waste, and managing long term costs.

Beyond environmental performance, the study found that retrofit and adaptive reuse projects are often faster to deliver and less disruptive than new construction, while supporting local trades, economic activity, and community character.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Buildings and the built environment account for roughly one third of global CO₂ emissions, from construction and operations combined, yet public discussion of climate action often overlooks the carbon embedded in building materials themselves. This is particularly significant given that an estimated 75% of today's building stock is expected to remain in use by 2050, making decisions about reuse, upgrade, or demolition central to climate outcomes.

While building codes have driven major improvements in operational performance, emissions associated with materials, manufacturing, demolition, and replacement are frequently under accounted for, with long term consequences for carbon, cost, and community resiliency.

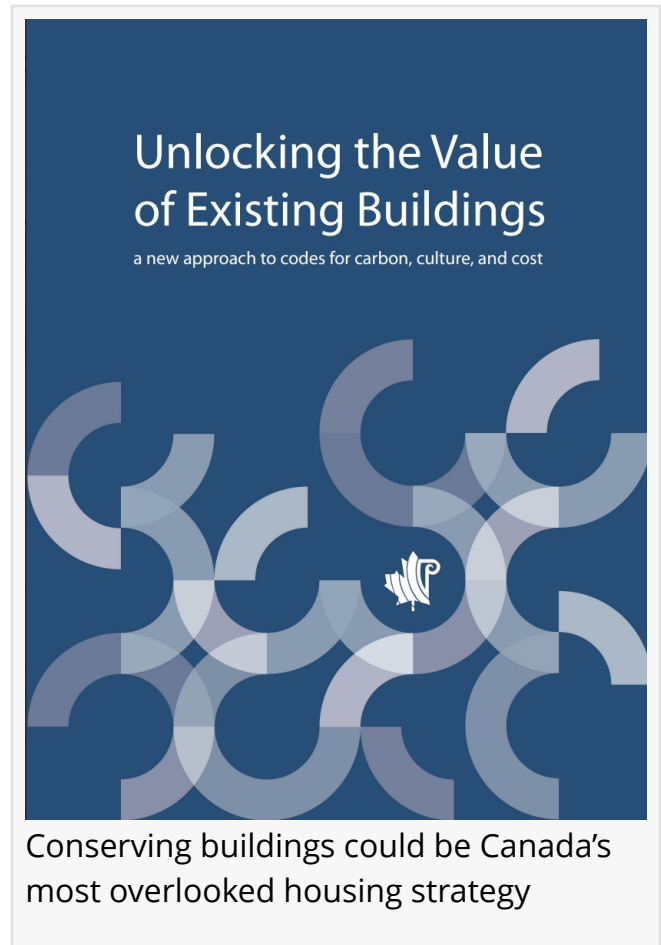
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IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

As Canada advances its climate and housing objectives, the report identifies the need for existing buildings and adaptive reuse to be treated as integral components of national strategies, rather than exceptions within systems designed primarily for new construction.

“Canada’s building codes have driven real progress in the arena of operational carbon,” Hatch said. “The next step is ensuring our codes also reflect the real-world benefits of reusing existing and heritage buildings, so retrofit and reuse can be evaluated fairly and effectively as part of our broader climate and housing efforts.”



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The report highlights the importance of applying building codes in ways that better recognize existing conditions, supporting conservation led retrofit approaches that retain building fabric and preserve embodied carbon, incorporating life cycle based carbon assessment in codes and funding approvals, and removing structural barriers in codes, zoning, and financing that disadvantage adaptive reuse.

ABOUT CAHP

The Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals (CAHP) is a national, membership based organization representing qualified heritage professionals across the public, private, and not for profit sectors. CAHP promotes standards of practice, knowledge sharing, and professional involvement in the identification, conservation, and rehabilitation of places of heritage value.

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