



7 March 2013

Union du Canada Building in the Byward Market Heritage Conservation District

The Union du Canada Building was not deemed to be a contributing resource in the Byward Market Heritage Conservation District (HCD), according to the HCD study, and as pointed out in the Cultural Heritage Impact Statement (CHIS) of December 2012. Since the HCD was created, the historic and cultural importance of the Union du Canada as an institution has been recognized, so that the building has increased associative value. While the associative value of the Union du Canada Building may be augmented, its architectural merits have remained the same, that is, it is still not a contributing resource to the HCD on the basis of its architectural qualities. The building is not designated under Part IV.

There is no proposal to demolish this building, so the association between this property and the Union du Canada will remain. The current proposal seeks to integrate the building into a new complex with new purpose. Retention of a structure valued by the community with a new purpose is a good thing.

The major impacts proposed are a surface re-cladding and increased height. With respect to re-cladding, it is not unusual for post-war, Modernist buildings to be re-clad. The re-cladding proposed for this building does not impact the rhythm of fenestration dramatically. The proposal for the street-level façade integrates this structure better into the street life of the market. Perhaps if some of the ribbed, pre-cast concrete paneling could be integrated into the new development, this would serve to bear witness to this typical Brutalist design.

As for the increased height, it should be remembered that the existing height of the Union du Canada Building was considered as a negative feature of the building at the time of the creation of the HCD. If the HCD were to be created today, it is likely that the Union du Canada Building, as well as other high rise buildings in the Byward Market HCD, would still not rank well, as they do not contribute to the character of the HCD. But further increasing the height of the Union du Canada Building compounds one fault upon another. We recommend that the height of the Union du Canada Building be maintained at its current level.

Leslie Maitland, President, Heritage Ottawa