

Victoria High School lands on national list of endangered places

Jeff Bell / Times Colonist

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Victoria High School, opened in 1914, has made the 2018 Top 10 Endangered Places List, as compiled by the National Trust for Canada.

Photograph By BRUCE STOTESBURY, TIMES COLONIST

Victoria High School, opened in 1914, has made the 2018 Top 10 Endangered Places List, as compiled by the National Trust for Canada.

The Fernwood building made the list because demolition is one of three options put forward for its future.

Other places on the nationwide list include the Moose Jaw Natatorium — a Depression-area swimming pool — and the Muscowequan Residential School in Lestock, Sask., which First Nations groups want to save as a testament to resilience.

“The Top 10 Endangered Places List is an important tool that helps draw attention to the diversity of Canada’s historic places and the challenges they face,” said National Trust for Canada executive director Natalie Bull.

Vic High is described by the trust as “a beloved institution that has played a profound role in the community.” But the existing building is in need of repairs and upgrading to withstand earthquakes.

The latest development in the Vic High story came last week when Greater Victoria school district trustees indicated that they were leaning toward renovation rather than demolition. At a committee meeting, they asked for further details on the two options that do not involve tearing the school down.

One of those options calls for a \$60 million to \$70 million project involving seismic upgrades and repairs while the other is a plan to preserve the facade while rebuilding the interior for \$100 million to \$110 million.

The school could also be demolished and a new one built for \$50 million to \$60 million. It would house 1,000 students, while the other two plans, calling for preservation, would have room for 850.

Greater Victoria school board vice-chairman Tom Ferris said there is a “lot of public support” for preservation.

“When we did the consultation with the community and with our partner groups in the school district, there was generally that feeling — that this was something they didn’t want to lose.”

Stan Bartlett of the Grumpy Taxpayers of Greater Victoria has highlighted the multi-million dollar savings in building new versus renovating. Building new “is the most rational thing to do,” since that option would be both cheaper and would accommodate more students. To honour Vic High’s heritage, some of the existing building’s features, such as its facades, could be incorporated into a new building, Bartlett said.

The 2018 list of endangered places was sponsored by the Canadian Construction Association to help mark its 100th anniversary.

“We encourage our members and the public to check the 2018 list to see if a nearby or otherwise cherished place is on the list and see how they can help save places that matter,” said association chairwoman Zey Emir.

The top 10, from west to east:

- Victoria High School (Victoria) — Seismic upgrades threaten the oldest high school in Victoria.

- A. Minchau Blacksmith Shop (Edmonton) — Weak legislation and inadequate financial incentives place this Old Strathcona boomtown gem at risk.
- Moose Jaw Natatorium (Moose Jaw, Sask.) — Iconic Depression-era swimming facility will disappear if creative solutions for its renewal aren't found.
- Muscowequan Residential School (Lestock, Sask.) — Local Indigenous community fighting to save this crumbling residential school as a testament to resilience.
- Former Carnegie Library and City of Winnipeg Archives (Winnipeg) — Winnipeg's first public library languishes years after storm damages roof.
- St. Mary's Pulp and Paper Mill (Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.) — Monumental Pulp Tower in historic industrial complex needs investment and vision to prevent its loss.
- White House (Stratford, Ont.) — A majestic home risks losing its larger-than-life portico and its spacious grounds, key elements of its character that have made it a prominent local landmark.
- Royal Victoria Hospital (Montreal) — The future of this historically significant, yet largely-abandoned complex is in limbo.
- Covered Bridges (New Brunswick) — These structures are being lost across the province to flooding, maintenance issues and lack of expert attention.
- 1029 Tower Road (Halifax) — Located just outside a heritage conservation district, this beautiful 19th century cottage may fall prey to densification pressure.

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