



# Making Heritage Community Centres Accessible for an Aging Population in Peterborough

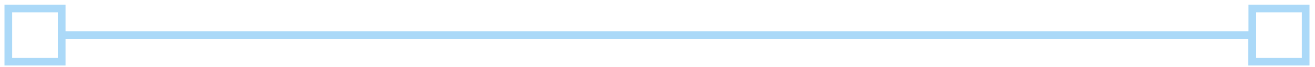
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# **Making Heritage Community Centres Accessible for an Aging Population in Peterborough**



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**Cover Images: Market Hall 1905 Postcard. Source: Jones, 2018 and Mount St. Joseph 1910 Postcard. Source: Toronto Public Library, n.d.**

# Executive Summary

Heritage and accessibility are both important elements in Ontario planning but have often been viewed as opposing forces; heritage advocating for preservation and accessibility advocating for re-development. This is an increasing issue as the world's older adult population, considered those 65 years of age and older, is predicted to double from 11% in 2006 to 22% by 2050 (Government of Canada, 2014; WHO, 2020). With a rising aging population comes a rising disabled population as over 46% of older adults around the world experience some form of disability (Agnello, 2019; United Nations, 2015).

In response, age-friendly planning has become a priority for cities but does not often consider the over 13,000 designated heritage properties in Canada (Canada's Historic Places, n.d.; Schulte, 2017). This report will focus on the opportunities and challenges experienced by heritage community centres in their attempt to become more accessible. For the purposes of this report, heritage community centre means a municipally designated heritage property which provides a service to a community and serves as a community meeting place (e.g. museum, theatre, library, etc.). Heritage community centres have been chosen as the focus as they are beholden to the regulations of the *Ontario Heritage Act* as designated properties and are in need of accessible planning as their futures in communities rely on visitors using the physical space (Foster, 1997; Hayhoe, 2019). Therefore, heritage community centres are in the paradoxical position of having to redevelop in order to be preserved, serving as a testing ground for accessible heritage planning.

This report examined the elements of heritage, accessibility, and aging within the context of Peterborough using example sites of heritage community centres that have begun to integrate accessibility. The research was guided by the following question: **how can planners support heritage community centres in becoming accessible for Peterborough's aging population?** To better answer this question, the following research objectives were identified:

1. Understand why heritage and accessibility are often presented as in conflict;
2. Explore the relationship between existing policies on heritage and policies on accessibility in Peterborough, in Ontario, in Canada, and internationally;
3. Determine the value of making heritage community centres accessible for an aging population;
4. Understand the lessons and challenges experienced by The Mount Community Centre and Market Hall Performing Arts Centre in their efforts to become accessible;
5. Identify best practices for integrating accessibility into heritage properties from research, policy analysis, and the example sites.

This report employed a comparative case study design, using qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. The study involved a literature review of heritage, accessibility, and aging sources; analyses of local, provincial, national, and international policies; direct observations of the two study sites; and key informant interviews.

Through these methods six themes emerged in relation to accessible heritage in Peterborough. These included the benefits of being accessible; the challenges of becoming accessible; a lack of clarity about heritage planning and accessibility planning; Peterborough's existing plans and resources, the need for support to make heritage accessible; and the importance of education and dialogue.

This report concludes with five recommendations that can be employed by the City of Peterborough to support accessible heritage community centres.

- 1. Complete a Heritage Master Plan**
- 2. Recognize Accessible Heritage Leaders in Peterborough**
- 3. Create an Accessible Heritage Committee**
- 4. Develop Partnerships and Events Between Heritage and Accessibility Organizations**
- 5. Create a Heritage Accessibility Audit Template**

While the recommendations are specific to the Peterborough context, they can easily be adapted to other municipalities in Ontario dealing with the confluence of an abundance of heritage sites and an aging population.