

Power Smart preserves Victoria's heritage

Victoria is a heritage city, according to John West, a member of the Heritage Advisory Committee for the City of Victoria and Vice-Chair of the Victoria Heritage Foundation. The B.C. Hydro Power Smart Program is helping to preserve that heritage by ensuring houses are not torn down due to their economic impracticality.

"We've lost so many houses, and one of the principle reasons was the cost of heating and the lack of comfort," he said. "Many of the big mansions in Rockland were torn down for this reason."

"To preserve heritage buildings, which contribute to tourism and the economic viability of the city, the buildings must be economically viable," he said. "It is not viable to spend so much on heating."

His first project was his house at 645 Battery Street, and he is pushing for more heritage buildings to be done.

The Battery Street house was built in 1896 for the editor of the Colonist. It was a single family dwelling until 1974 when it was split into four suites because the owner could not afford to heat it. At that time, the conversion met the code, but there was no draft proofing done.

According to Mr. West, when he bought the building, there was effectively a 4' x 6' opening in one of the suites. By insulating under the floor and draft proofing the baseboards, windows, seals, fans

and outlets, the hole was reduced to 3" x 6".

"The tenants have commented on the change repeatedly," he said.

With all the upgrading done, Hydro projected a 20-30 per cent savings, but Mr. West said, "My guess is it will be more. The house is in an exposed location in James Bay where there is a high chill factor. There is no evidence of anything coming in."

When he had the idea to do something to the house, the Power Smart Program encouraged him to take the first step.

"I've been impressed at how receptive the Power Smart Program has been to the peculiarities of heritage houses and the need to protect their architectural integrity."

It is difficult to tell that anything has been done to the Battery Street house, according to Mr. West. They found contractors who specifically specialized in heritage needs; therefore, the B.C. Hydro standards were met without compromising the building's integrity.

"I did not want to see the buildings being compromised for the sake of thermal efficiency," he said. "Hydro was sympathetic and interested in our concerns. I'm recommending the Power Smart Program to anyone with heritage homes. Hydro has shown a lot of leadership, and they've really helped the heritage movement."



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