

To: Heritage Advisory Committee
From: Andrew Fisher, Manager of Planning & Strategic Initiatives
Date: March 4, 2019
Subject: **134 East Victoria – Provincial Courthouse substantial alteration - accessibility ramp**

PROPOSAL:

The Province of Nova Scotia intends to alter the Provincial Courthouse building to make it barrier-free. This will include the installation of an elevator within the existing building footprint, and an exterior accessibility ramp on the north side entrance facing Victoria Square. As a designated heritage property, the exterior ramp constitutes a substantial alteration, which under the NS Heritage Act requires review by the Heritage Advisory Committee.

BACKGROUND:

The Provincial Courthouse building is a Municipally Registered Heritage property. Given the heritage value of the building and its prominence in the downtown adjacent to Victoria Square, any alterations to the building exterior could be considered substantial. The NS Department of Justice hired an architectural firm to develop ramp construction options that maximizes its functionality while minimizes the visual impact on the building and Victoria Square. A review team that included representatives from the design team, Department of Justice, Cumberland County (the property owners), and Town Staff considered various ramp options, and the attached design was determined to be the best option.

The preferred option includes construction of the ramp off the side of the existing north entrance. The stone materials used will be chosen to match, as closely as possible, the existing building. The ramp is cantilevered out from the building main wall so as to not create a void space between the ramp and the building. While not within the mandate of the Heritage Advisory Committee, landscaping, lighting, and other features within the Square will be reinstated as part of the project.

RELEVANT POLICY AND DISCUSSION:

As noted above, the courthouse is a very prominent public building of significant heritage value that is worthy of protection. As such, any alteration to the exterior of the building warrants careful consideration that the heritage value is not diminished. The proposed accessibility ramp design will perform a critical function (ie. Barrier-free access) while respecting the heritage character, and will support the long-term use of the building for a public purpose.

It should be noted that the Province is not legally bound by municipal regulation, but has sought input on the design from stakeholders, and is looking for concurrence from the Town.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Provincial Courthouse building currently does not offer barrier-free access to the ground floor occupied by Restorative Justice, or the actual courtroom on the second floor. In order to ensure continued use of the building within the justice system and other public purposes, it must be made accessible to members of the public of all abilities. This proposal provides barrier-free access while respecting the heritage character of the building. Staff feel that this matter is an opportunity to herald the commitment being made to preserve this building.

OPTIONS:

- Option One: Recommend that Council approve the addition of an accessibility ramp as proposed.
- Option Two: Recommend to Council not approve the addition of an accessibility ramp as proposed.
- Option Three: Defer the application and instruct Staff to provide more information or negotiate changes to the proposal.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Option One.