

**FHBRO HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT
GOVERNMENT OF CANADA BUILDING
CHATHAM, ONTARIO**

FHBRO Number: **05-004**
DFRP Number: **10643**
Resource Name: **Government of Canada Building**
Address: **120 Wellington Street (formerly 10 Centre St.), Chatham, Ontario**
FHBRO Status: **“Recognized” Federal Heritage Building**
Construction: **1957**
Designer: **Joseph W. Storey Architect**
Original Function: **Post office and office space**
Current Function: **Post office and office space**
Modifications: **Addition of a wheelchair ramp to the post office entrance (date unknown)**
Custodian: **Public Works and Government Services Canada**

Description of Historic Place

The Government of Canada Building in Chatham is a modern, large, roughly square two-story building with a flat roof. Its elevations are characterized by a grid design of glass and coloured spandrel panels marking the levels and bays of its structure. The building is located on the edge of the downtown core, between the Thames River to the north and the railroad tracks to the south. The designation is confined to the footprint of the building.

Heritage Value

The Government of Canada Building in Chatham is a “Recognized” Federal Heritage Building because of its historical associations, and its architectural and environmental values.

Historical value

The Government of Canada Building in Chatham is a convenient example of the national theme related to the provision and delivery of social, service, and administrative programmes by the federal government. The building also illustrates the period when Modern architecture was first accepted as a style capable of expressing the dignity and monumentality essential in public buildings. Built in 1957 to house the Unemployment Insurance Commission and the Post Office, it was part of the post-war building campaign of the 1950s and 1960s. Its construction necessitated the demolition of a school, and as such represents a change in the local setting. The building is a very good illustration of the rapid growth that Chatham experienced after World War II, along with the construction of its high-speed transportation infrastructure, new manufacturing plants and suburban tract housing.

Architectural value

The Government of Canada Building is a very good example of an office building designed in the International Style. This is expressed by the use of a simple building form with a grid design and spare ornamentation on its elevations. Its efficient interior layout provides a good solution to the changing functional needs of its

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occupants. The building was built according to the design of architect Joseph W. Storey, who is well known in the region. It was constructed using standard materials and methods for the time, and displays very good quality craftsmanship and materials.

Environmental value:

The building is compatible with the urban character of the area, defined by a heterogeneous setting and including the Presbyterian church which is a prominent feature of the neighbourhood. The building sits on a trapezoidal city block on the edge of the downtown core. It has a narrow strip of grass separating it from the public sidewalk on the front and the sides, while a parking lot occupies the rear. The relationship between the building and its site has been retained. Due to its public nature and physical presence, the building is well known to local residents and is a familiar landmark to the community.

Character-Defining Elements

The following character-defining elements of the Government of Canada Building in Chatham should be respected:

The features that illustrate the national theme related to the provision and delivery of social, service, and administrative programmes by the federal government, notably:

- Its accessibility due to its location on the edge of the downtown core of Chatham, and;
- The use of the International Style for its architecture, which follows a trend seen in many public buildings of this era and which speaks to modernity and change.

Features that distinguish the building's good quality aesthetic design, good functional design, and very good craftsmanship and materials, as seen in:

- Its generous massing consisting of a single large, roughly square two-story volume with a flat roof, determined primarily by the functions of the building;
- The grid design marking the levels and bays of its facades as a reflection of the structure;
- The way the building engages with the public and achieves monumentality with simple means, with large expanses of glass, spare ornamentation and clean lines;
- The strong presence of its main entrance, a projecting mass canted to align with the street and anchoring the corner of the two streets, a traditional gesture of federal buildings here given a modernist expression, highlighted by a double height curtain wall in a deep recess framed by blocks of granite anchoring the corner;
- The use of a polychrome scheme consisting of bands of aquamarine enamel panels on three facades and yellow panels on the post office elevation;
- Its floor plan and versatility of individual spaces;
- The general organization for the different building occupants, with the post office occupying most of

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- the ground floor and offices placed on the upper floor with separate access;
- The u-shaped configuration of the second floor, making use of natural light and ventilation.
 - The use of a wide range of durable materials, including a concrete and steel structure, granite facing and curtain walls with coloured enamelled metal spandrel panels; and,
 - Its very good craftsmanship demonstrated in its superior details and well-maintained construction.

The manner in which the building is compatible with the heterogenous character of the area and functions as a landmark for the region, as evidenced in:

- Its high visibility and physical presence due to its location on a busy corner with three facades facing the streets.

For guidance on interventions, please refer to the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*. For further information contact FHBRO.

October 2007