

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

FHBRO Number 98-28

DFRP Number 17566

Recognized Federal Heritage Building

NANAIMO, BC

Federal Building

60 Front Street

The Nanaimo Federal Building was designed in 1954 and completed in 1956. The plans were prepared for the federal Department of Public Works. Renovations made to the building in the 1980s included the construction of a sloped glass atrium entrance on the main facade of the building; the replacement of aluminum windows on three sides, including the facade; the installation of a new elevator and lobby; and the replacement of some flooring and ceiling panels. Public Works and Government Services Canada is the custodian. The building is currently occupied by federal government agencies and a post office.

Reasons for designation

The Federal Building has been designated “Recognized” for its historical, architectural and environmental significance:

The construction of the Nanaimo Federal Building was part of a large program initiated by the federal Department of Public Works to consolidate and improve federal government services across Canada. The decision to erect such a relatively large federal building confirmed Nanaimo’s position as an important service centre on Vancouver Island.

The Nanaimo Federal Building is a competent example of the International Style as interpreted by the federal Department of Public Works in the 1950s and ‘60s. The style is expressed through geometric shapes; the glass curtain wall on the east side; and a limited range of materials, namely, polished Nelson Island (reddish brown) granite, Haddington Island andesite, aluminum and glass. In contrast to purer examples of the style, a distinction between the facade and other faces is made through architectural language and materials. In addition, the granite portico on one end of the facade and the clock tower created by the enclosed stairwell loosely connect the building to a long tradition of federal building vocabularies.

In its scale, form and materials, the atrium addition compromises the original design’s strict use of straight horizontal and vertical elements. The simple interior layout of the building was retained during the renovations of the 1980s.

The combination of Haddington Island andesite and red granite was used on many buildings in British Columbia, including the provincial legislative buildings and 19th-century banks and public buildings.

The essential relationship between the building and its immediate landscape has been retained. The Nanaimo Federal Building is located on the waterfront at the end of a block and across the street from a small public park and cenotaph. The building is set on an L-shaped lot that slopes steeply to the rear (east). Due to its modern styling, scale and function, the Nanaimo Federal Building is an anchor within the central business district of Nanaimo. The building is also a familiar structure on the city’s waterfront.

Character-defining elements

The heritage character of the Nanaimo Federal Building resides in the following character-defining elements:

- Elements that express the International Style as interpreted by the federal Department of Public Works in the 1950s and 60s. These include the polished granite columns and portico, aluminum window frames, smooth andesite exterior walls and stylized clock tower of the facade, as well as the glass and anodized aluminum curtain wall of the rear elevation.
- The open layout of the public areas of the main floor.
- The building's location within Nanaimo's central business district.

All maintenance and repair work, as well as future interventions, should aim to respect these character-defining elements.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.